



BAPTISM

Baptism at Redeemer

At Redeemer, we believe baptism is **a response to the gospel, an act of obedience, and a public expression of faith**. We believe biblical baptism is undertaken by a person with a capacity for saving faith in Christ—someone who can hear, believe, and respond in obedience to the gospel.

A Response to the Gospel

At Redeemer, we love to celebrate what God has done in someone's life through the ordinance of baptism. Baptism is a wonderful, beautiful moment of celebration and often serves as a spiritual milestone in someone's faith-journey. At the same time, it must be said: we believe biblical baptism is always a *response* to the gospel. What does that mean?

The gospel is the good news of God coming to save us from our sins in the person and work of Jesus. His perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection were all accomplished so that we could be accepted and forgiven by a righteous and holy God who loves us more than we can imagine. In His great love, God sent Jesus to live and die in our place. In the gospel, we learn that Jesus lived the perfect life we should have lived, died the death we deserved to die, and freely offers us salvation if we will place our faith in His finished work in our place. In other words, the gospel is not:

- *Good Advice*: for how to live a more moral, ethical, self-disciplined life.
- *Good Insight*: into the human potential for self-fulfillment
- *Good Information*: for us to acknowledge as a historical fact.

All of these things are true, but they do not go far enough. The gospel certainly is nothing *less* than good advice, good insight, and good information, but it is so much *more* than each of these things. Fundamentally, the gospel is *Good News* — news about what God has done for us in the person and work of Jesus. In the gospel we learn that God doesn't simply want us to live moral lives, become more enlightened, and acknowledge that He exists and has done some great things in history. None of these things will save us.

Instead, the gospel tells us that Jesus has made provision for our sins by living and dying in our place. We believe this news by entrusting ourselves to Jesus as our one and only Savior. The Bible makes it clear: we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (see Ephesians 2:1-10; Titus 3:3-7).

Now, you might be thinking: what does this have to do with baptism? Great question! We're glad you asked. Once again: baptism is a response to the gospel — it is something we do *after* we have believed in Jesus, entrusted ourselves to Him, and placed our faith in His sacrificial life and death in our place. It's not something we do to earn or *achieve* our salvation. Rather, it's something we do after we've *received* salvation through faith in Christ.

An Act of Obedience

Throughout the New Testament, we also see that baptism is something expected of people who have believed in Jesus. In other words, it's an act of obedience connected to a Christian's discipleship. We see, for example, that baptism is commanded of those who repent of their sins and trust in Jesus. Jesus commanded His disciples to "make disciples of all nations and 'baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'" (Matthew 28:18-20)¹.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

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Baptism was also connected to the original preaching of the apostles throughout the book of Acts. Peter, for example, instructed the Jewish crowds “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:37). Likewise, when preaching to a Gentile (non-Jewish) audience, Peter “commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48). Each of these references make it clear that baptism is an important element of obedience for every Christian.

A Public Expression of Faith

When we say baptism is a public expression of faith, we mean baptism is an outward depiction of an inward relationship. Much like a wedding ring visibly indicates a covenant relationship between a man and woman, so baptism visibly depicts a covenant relationship between a person and Jesus. The Scriptures give us a consistent pattern of people hearing the gospel, responding through repentance and faith, and then expressing their commitment to Christ through baptism. For example:

And Peter said to them, “Repent and *be baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. — Acts 2:38

So those who received his word were *baptized*, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. — Acts 2:40

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were *baptized*, both men and women. — Acts 8:12

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were *baptized*. — Acts 18:8

See Also: Acts 8:35-38, 9:9-19, 10:43-48, 16:14-15, & 16:32-33.

What these verses tell us is that baptism was always connected to someone’s faith—not as a means of saving them, but as a means of proclaiming and declaring their faith to others.

The Meaning of Baptism

In the New Testament, the word we translate as *baptism* is the Greek word *baptizó* and literally means “to plunge, dip, [or] immerse something in water. This is the commonly recognized and standard meaning of the term in ancient Greek literature both inside and outside of the Bible.”²

You may find it interesting to know that in the ancient world, people were not the only things being “baptized.” To the contrary, the word *baptizó* was used to describe the process of *making pickles*. When a cucumber was dipped in vinegar, it was said that the cucumber was *baptized* (“dipped”) into the vinegar in order to make it a pickle.

Beyond the literal definition of the word, however, baptism is rich with spiritual meaning and significance. In numerous places (like the ones listed above), we see followers of Jesus preaching the importance of baptism alongside appeals for people to repent of their sins and believe the gospel. From this biblical data, we can draw the following conclusions:

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 967.

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- Christian baptism follows Christian *salvation*. In the New Testament, baptism never comes *before* salvation in the New Testament. Instead, the pattern we see is that people are baptized *after* they have placed their faith in Jesus.
- Christian baptism indicated who belonged to the Christian *church*. When someone received baptism, they were publicly declaring their allegiance to Jesus. This would have stood in stark contrast to the false gods of their family and culture. In this way, undergoing baptism was a way for someone to declare a change in their ultimate loyalties — from the false gods of their past to the true God revealed in Jesus.
- Christian baptism is an important element of Christian *obedience*. Jesus commanded his followers to be baptized and the early church consistently paired baptism with someone coming to faith in Christ. As such, it's an important element of obedience and discipleship to Jesus—a command, not simply a suggestion.
- Christian baptism is a *celebration*, not just a ritual. When someone comes to faith in Christ, their baptism is a beautiful way of declaring what Jesus has done in their lives. Nothing less than celebration is appropriate.

Taken together, we can see that Christian baptism is a significant and weighty reality. It's a beautiful, meaningful, and powerful way to declare that someone belongs to Jesus and wants to follow Him the remainder of their lives. In fact, God has built into baptism a type of imagery that captures each of these meaningful truths.

The Imagery of Baptism

When the apostle Paul speaks about baptism, he does so in a way that illustrates the new life someone has received in Christ. Paul says in Romans 6:3-4:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Paul says something similar to this elsewhere when he says, “you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12; cf. Galatians 3:27). The point Paul is underscoring is that baptism communicates some very distinct spiritual realities. In particular, they communicate that a believer has been united with Christ in His death and resurrection. As a result, each portion of the baptism has a deep theological significance.

In particular, when a person goes *under the water*, they are representing two things: *Jesus' death* on their behalf and *their death* to their old selves. Conversely, when a person comes *out of the water*, they are symbolizing the exact opposite realities: *Jesus' resurrection* on their behalf and *their resurrection* to follow Jesus in a new way of life. The following chart makes this is helpful:

Going <i>Under</i> the Water	Coming <i>out of</i> the Water
Jesus' Death	Jesus' Resurrection
Death to the Old Self	New Life in Christ

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The *ESV Study Bible* helpfully concludes:

Therefore, baptism pictures a person being buried with Christ (submersion under water) and being raised to new life with Christ (emergence from water). This symbolizes the person's union with, and incorporation into, Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit. Hence, they now have the power to live in newness of life.³

All of this leads us to conclude something very important about the nature of baptism. Namely, being baptized assumes someone is a follower of Jesus. Because baptism directly pictures the union with a person to the death and resurrection of Jesus, only a person who has been united to Jesus in faith should participate in baptism.

Baptism and Wedding Rings

When we put these teachings together, we can say that baptism is a lot like a wedding ring. When someone wears a wedding ring, they are symbolizing and proclaiming a covenant relationship they share with someone else. It's a visible symbol of an inward reality. In the same way, baptism is a visible symbol of a profound inward reality—the reality of salvation.

To participate in any form of baptism ceremony without having trusted in Christ is a foreign idea in the Scriptures. It would be sort of like someone wearing a wedding ring without being married. The wedding ring symbolizes the covenant relationship a person has with another, but the symbol only makes sense in light of the covenant relationship it points to.

In the same way, the symbolic nature of baptism only makes sense in light of the covenant relationship with Jesus a person already has. Without this covenant relationship, a person who participates in a baptism ceremony of any kind is not actually *being baptized* in the biblical sense of the term. Therefore, in order for baptism to *truly be* baptism, it must be preceded by a personal choice to trust and follow Jesus.

For these reasons, we do not believe baptism should be performed upon infants, because they do not have the ability to personally respond to Jesus' offer of salvation. Moreover, the biblical picture of baptism is one that *points to* salvation, but does not *result in* salvation.

Some Common Questions

In light of what you've read, it may be helpful to directly answer a few common questions related to baptism.

1. *Does Baptism Save Someone?* While this is the teaching of some churches, we believe the Scriptures make it clear that baptism does *not* save someone. Instead, salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This occurs when we repent of our sins and believe the gospel. Baptism symbolizes and proclaims our salvation, but it does not—in itself—save us (see Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:3-7).
2. *What is the Biblical Method ("Mode") of Baptism?* We believe the proper mode of baptism is full immersion for two reasons. The first reason is because this is how Jesus himself was baptized (Matthew 3:13-18). Even though Jesus was not a sinner in need of salvation, His baptism set an example for all of His followers to imitate and obey. The second reason is because the imagery of dying and rising with Christ is central to the act of baptism (see Acts 8:36-38).

³ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway: 2008), notes on Romans 6:4

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3. *Who can be baptized?* The Scriptures are clear that baptism is something for Christians to practice and to celebrate. This means that only individuals who have made a credible profession of faith in Christ should be baptized. At Redeemer we do not practice any form of infant baptism.⁴

The Most Important Question

In light of this information, we think it's important to ask yourself the following question:

Am I a Christian? Have you repented of your sins and trusted in Christ *alone* for your salvation? If not, then this is the first step you must take before being baptized. If you're unsure, we encourage to read and pray over passages like Luke 9:23-25; Ephesians 2:1-10; and Romans 10:9-10. Before you get baptized, this is the most important question to answer for yourself.

If you don't believe you are a Christian, we would love to talk with you about this! We are happy to answer your questions and walk with you as you consider what it means to place your faith in Jesus. If, however, you believe you are a Christian, then baptism is a great next step for you to consider and we would love to talk with you about what's next.

Conclusion

This understanding of baptism is known as *Believers Baptism*, because it is a baptism ceremony reserved specifically for believers in Jesus. At Redeemer we love to walk with people as they consider this important step in their spiritual journey. If you have any questions, please talk to one of the pastors on staff and we will be glad to discuss with you.

⁴ Some people are familiar with the household baptisms in the book of Acts (Acts 16:13-15, 28-34, 18:8). Many have used these occasions of household baptism to argue for the practice of baptizing infants. However, none of these passages indicate that infants were included in the household baptisms. One of the accounts specifically says that Paul only shared the gospel to those who could hear and believe it for themselves (Acts 16:30-34). A better interpretation is that the members of the household who were baptized were of accountable age to hear, receive, and respond to the gospel through water baptism. For more on this see Gavin Ortlund, "I Corinthians 7:14 And Household Baptisms," *Truth Unites* (website), January 15, 2014.