

A Study on Baptism: Clothing Our Lives with Christ



CICERO CHRISTIAN CHURCH
1715 Stringtown Pike / Cicero, Indiana 46034 / 317.984.4653
reachteachserve.org

A stylized logo consisting of three human figures. The top two figures are standing side-by-side, with their arms raised in a gesture of praise or joy. The bottom figure is standing below them, also with arms raised. The figures are rendered in a simple, minimalist style with grey outlines and solid grey bodies.

*Sermon Resource from May 17, 2009
sermon notes and this booklet are available online*

Baptism: The Great Debate

There has been a long debate that has taken place over many years dealing with the issue of **Baptism**. There are many views on the role that baptism plays in the Christian life. Some people believe that baptism is not necessary at all, some believe that it is just an outward sign of an inner change, some believe that sprinkling is the same as immersion, and there are those that believe that baptism is absolutely necessary.

Who is right and who is wrong?

This question cannot be answered by our own human knowledge or the presuppositions that we bring to the table. If we truly want to put the debate to rest, then we must find the answer to this question by looking objectively at the Bible. It is from Scripture alone that we will find the answer to this debate.

Views From Religious Leaders of the Past

We begin this booklet by first examining several statements from founding fathers of different denominations with regard to the subject of baptism. All of these founding fathers agree as to the Biblical definition of the word used for baptism in the New Testament.

“The word ‘baptize’ signifies to immerse. It is certain that immersion was the practice of the primitive church.”

John Calvin (Presbyterian)

“Baptism is a Greek word translated as ‘immerse.’ I would have those who are to be baptized to be altogether dipped.”

Martin Luther (Lutheran)

“Buried with him by baptism – alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion.”

John Wesley (Methodist)

“The verb ‘baptize’ has only one meaning. It signifies to plunge. Baptism and immersion are identical. To say baptism by sprinkling is as if one would say immersion by sprinkling.”

Stoudza (A Native Greek)

Questions to Consider

What is your personal view on baptism? Explain.

What Scriptures back up your view?

The Biblical Definition of Baptism

The New Testament was originally written in the common Greek language. If we truly want to understand the Biblical definition of baptism then we must take the time to examine the original Greek terminology. The Greek word for baptism is *baptizo*. The word *baptizo* literally means “to dip,” “immerse,” “submerge,” “sink,” or “plunge.”

Questions to Consider

What does this definition say about the word baptism?

Why is it important for us to understand how the original authors of a text would have used a word? What about this specific case?

Immersion: Sink or Swim

The Greek terminology helps us draw the clear understanding that complete immersion is the meaning of the translation of baptism. Many people have different views on the mode of baptism, yet Scripture shows us that this is the only true mode that is seen throughout the New Testament. This specific term, *baptizo*, is used in every reference to salvation as we observe in the New Testament. Consider the following examples.

Mark 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Acts 2:38-39 Peter replied, “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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Romans 6:4 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his

death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

1 Peter 3:17-22 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Galatians 3:27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”

Colossians 2:12 Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Questions to Consider

How is baptism described in these passages?

Do these passages contradict each other in any way?

What do these passages state about baptism?

These passages paint a picture for every Christian that baptism is more than an outward sign of an inner faith. Baptism is more than an optional task that can be done if we get around to it. The Bible paints an accurate, consistent picture that baptism by immersion is needed in order to clothe ourselves with Christ and enter into the kingdom of God.

Upon examining these Scriptures we can conclude that baptism is the uniting with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The meaning is lost if it is in any other form other than immersion.

Are There Other Modes of Baptism?

The question that lays upon the minds of many is: *Are there other viable modes of baptism in Scripture, or is immersion the only one seen among Christians?*

Question to Consider

What makes something a Biblical command?

As Christians, we understand that the entire Bible is the inspired Word of God and is without error. This means that for something to be a legitimate Biblical command, then it must come from the Word of God. It is not to be taken out of context nor is it to be manipulated by manmade tradition (thus changing the original meaning). Having stated this point, let us proceed with this question regarding other modes of baptism in the Bible.

It is a fact that we see words in the New Testament such as sprinkling, cleansing, and washing. We must understand that these words are never used in reference to any form of salvation throughout Scripture.

Cleansing

The Greek word *louo* means to wash the body for a spiritual cleansing in order to become pure.

John 13:10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."

Washing

The Greek word *nipto* means to wash or rinse members of the body such as taking a bath.

John 13:5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

Sprinkling

The Greek word *rhaino* means to sprinkle.

Hebrews 10:22 Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

The practice of sprinkling came about in 753 A.D. when Pope Stephen II allowed some to sprinkle. In that year, the monks of Cressy in Brittany consulted with him about whether or not, in the case of necessity, would it be lawful to pour water on the head of an infant, and Stephen said it would be lawful. Sprinkling as an act of baptism was only permitted in the case of necessity until 1311 A.D.

In 1311 A.D. the Roman Catholic Church held the Council of Revena and it was here that they legalized “sprinkling” as a substitution for immersion. (See the *Edinburg Encyclopedia*.)

Questions to Consider

What do these passages say about baptism?

What does this mean when you compare these words (sprinkling, washing, or rinsing) to the word baptism? Explain.

The authors of the New Testament clearly use the word **Baptism** in every relationship to the issue of salvation. We see this from the Word of God, not from the traditions of men.

Objections to Immersion

Let us now take a look at some of the objections that come forth from the issue of baptism as immersion. These objections have been brought about over several hundreds of years yet the objections still have not changed God’s original meaning.

Baptism is Just a Work

One of the most common objections seen in the debate of immersion is the issue of **WORK**. When a Christian looks at Scripture and views baptism as an essential part of salvation, some people claim that this negates the **GRACE** of God. The people that take this stance are incorrectly viewing the role of

baptism in the salvation process. It is important to note that baptism would be considered less of a work than a confession of faith through prayer. Baptism is not the giver of life any more than birth gives life. But in baptism, one is taken from one kingdom to another by the work of God, not man.

It is important for us to also understand that every authentic Christian will agree that we are saved by grace, not by works, as seen in Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

This passage clearly points out that we are saved by the grace of God but the verse goes on and clarifies that “grace” is found only through faith (in Jesus Christ). The root word for “faith” in this text is the same word that is used by Jesus for “believe” in Mark 16:16 and John 3:16. The word literally means to place your faith and trust into the person of Jesus Christ. We understand from Scripture that a Biblical belief is more than just an acknowledgment of words that Jesus is the Christ; for even the demons believe in Jesus as seen James 2:19. A Biblical belief requires the person to surrender their life to Christ in faithfulness and obedience to His commands. Otherwise, belief is accompanied by action.

The Bible is very clear about the fact that there is a **direct connection** between baptism and salvation. Understand that believing that baptism is essential to clothe ourselves with Christ does not mean that a person believes that baptism itself will save them. Baptism without belief is merely a bath. Jesus Christ alone and our faith through Him saves us (Acts 4:12). We can easily conclude that baptism is not the work of the person being baptized; rather, it is the work of God as he cleanses that person. It is an appeal to God for his Grace through Faith.

Galatians 3:26-27 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Infant Baptism

Cicero Christian Church has a tradition that a few times throughout the year we will bring some of the newborn babies before the congregation and dedicate them to the Lord. This is a public dedication in which the parents state that they will raise their child in a Christian household. It is also an invitation for the congregation to help raise the child in a Christian community. But this is different from baptism.

Do infants need to be baptized?

The question that many have on their mind is straight forward: *Do infants need to be baptized to go to heaven?* We must always respond from a Scriptural standpoint (not just our manmade traditions) with regard to any question. Therefore let us reflect on what scripture has tells us about this subject. It is important to examine what we see as a precedence in Scripture as well as, in this case, what we do not see.

What We Do Not See

- We do not see any examples in scripture of infant baptism.
- We do not see a command for infant baptism.
- We do not see Jesus or any of his disciples baptize infants.

What We Do See

- We see an important quote in **Mark 16:16**: Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.
- We see in **Acts 16:14** that Lydia was able to respond to Paul's message.
- We see in **Acts 16:31-34** that the Philippian jailor and his whole household were baptized after he was given the message.
- We see in **Acts 18:8** that when Paul spoke many of the Corinthians were baptized.

Questions to Consider

If it is crucial for infants to be baptized for salvation what would we see in Scripture?

What do we see in these Scriptures about baptism?

What does this help us conclude from these Scriptures?

There are two very important facts about baptism that can be seen upon examining these Scriptures. These facts come from the Word of God, not from man.

Fact #1

Every Christian must make a **conscious choice** to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. You cannot accept Jesus Christ for another person. In every Biblical example of salvation we see that baptism accompanies that conscious choice of profession.

Fact #2

Every Christian must be able to **understand** why they need Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This is what Christians refer to as the *age of accountability*. It basically means that every one grows in their understanding of Jesus Christ at a different pace, but eventually people are faced with the realization that they need Jesus Christ as their Savior to get into heaven. Some will accept and some will deny.

Question to Consider

What do these two facts help us understand about salvation?

Throughout Scripture we observe that sin is defined as the breaking of God's law (1 John 3:4) and that, as humans, we inherit a sinful nature (Romans 5:12-21). We also know that the sin nature will ultimately lead us to death both spiritually and physically if it is not voided by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

It is important that we tie this understanding with the words of Jesus as he reminds us that, until a child is able to seek the forgiveness that Jesus died for, they are considered sinless and the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as them.

Mark 10:13-16 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

What about John's Baptism?

Some people have the question about John's baptism versus the baptism into Christ Jesus. The question that is asked by many is: *Is there really a difference, or are they both the same?*

John's baptism was not a Christian baptism, nor was it that which was practiced by the disciples previous to our Lord's crucifixion. We examine in Scripture that John's baptism bound its subjects to repentance and not to faith in Jesus Christ. It was not administered in the name of the Trinity and those whom John baptized were re-baptized by Paul (Acts 18:24; 19:7).

Acts 19:4-6 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

We must understand that Christian baptism is where we are baptized into faith in Jesus Christ. We are then united with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection; literally clothing ourselves with Christ.

Galatians 3:27 – For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

What About the Thief on the Cross?

Some people also raise the question about the thief on the cross. If baptism is necessary, then why did Jesus tell the thief on the cross that he would be with him that day in paradise.

Question to Consider

How would you respond to this question?

We understand as Christians that Jesus Christ came to this earth not to abolish, but to fulfill the Old Testament Law (Matthew 5:17). The question is: *When did this fulfillment take place?* Was it the moment Christ was born, lived, died, resurrected, or ascended into heaven? This is not such an easy question to answer for some people, but it is apparent that we see this fulfillment fully take

place upon his ascension into heaven. How can we be sure of this? Reflect on the Holy Spirit.

Question to Consider

When was the Holy Spirit unleashed upon the entire church, every immersed believer?

Acts 2:1-4 – When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

John 16:12-14 – I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

We know that the New Covenant was instituted on this very day and that from that moment on it was in effect.

Questions to Consider

When did the thief on the cross have his conversation with Christ, before or after the ascension of Christ?

What does this logically lead us to believe?

The thief on the cross was still under that Old Covenant and he had experienced the grace of God himself on that cross. Jesus recognized the thief before his heavenly Father; therefore, the Father would recognize the thief in heaven.

The Teaching of Jesus on Immersion

We will draw our final conclusions by looking at the words of our Lord and Savior as he discusses the topic at hand. The words of Jesus help us understand the need to be baptized as well as the definition. Jesus Christ gives us several reasons to be baptized, as we see from scripture.

Jesus Commands Baptism

There are two examples where we see Jesus Christ command believers to be baptized. The first verse that we examine follows.

Mark 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Jesus points out in this verse that those who want to receive eternal life must not only **believe** but also must be **baptized**. He states that these two things must occur **FIRST**, then salvation occurs. Put it in terms of the following equation:

$$\text{BELIEF} + \text{BAPTISM} = \text{SALVATION}$$

It is easy to see that if you only have one part of the equation then you cannot come to the same conclusion that Jesus gives us in Mark 16:16. If you have only baptism but no belief then you do not have salvation.

$$? + \text{BAPTISM} \neq \text{SALVATION}$$

If we follow the equation given to us by the words of the Savior, it is apparent that if you have belief but do not have baptism then you do not have salvation.

$$\text{BELIEF} + ? \neq \text{SALVATION}$$

No one ever said that this would be a popular view, nor would it be a universally accepted view. But these are the words of Jesus, and it is his command that we are to follow, not the personal view of our fellow man.

The second command of baptism that we see Jesus give His followers comes to as we examine the last words that Jesus told His disciples before He ascends into heaven.

Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We notice in this verse that Jesus literally commands His followers to *go out* into the world and make disciples. How are we to make disciples? Jesus clarifies this statement by saying that we need to do two important things: baptize people, and teach people to obey God.

Jesus declares baptism to be part of becoming a disciple. Actually, He states that we need to baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Why does He ask us to do this?** The answer is that it is needed to be Christ-like. Remember that the Scriptures declare that in order for us to clothe ourselves with Christ, then we must first be baptized. We see that Jesus does not divorce this teaching from the Gospel message. He has always proclaimed this as something that was essential: clothe yourself with righteousness.

Galatians 3:27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

We also notice in this passage that Jesus shows us under whose authority we are to baptize. Baptism is not a man-made tradition that man requires of a person to become a Christian. The source of authority is seen in this text. We baptize in the name of “the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” The expression, “in the name of” literally means “by the authority of” therefore we see that we are commanded to baptize from our Father in Heaven. This does not make it a work of man, but a response in obedience to God. Man is not the one doing the work in baptism, it is God alone.

Baptism Signifies That We Are Born Again

Jesus tells us in John 3 verses 3 and 5 that we must be born again if we want to enter the kingdom of God. This text comes to us as we focus on the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

It is important for us to examine these words found in John 3:3, “born again.” The two words *born again* can be broken down in this manner: the actual word used for *born* in the Greek is *gennao* which means “of God making men his sons through faith in Christ’s work.” The actual word for *again* in the Greek is *anōthen* which means “from above, from a higher place or of things which come from heaven or God.”

These two words help us see that Jesus is literally talking about being born of God from heaven and clothing yourself with righteousness (Matthew 3:3): being given the clothing that only God can give. He states clearly that in order for this to be

accomplished you must be born of the water and Spirit and believe in (place faith into) the Son of God as the Savior of your life.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."

In this passage Jesus declares that "*no one can*" enter into the Kingdom of Heaven unless he is born of the water and Spirit. The phrase used here for "no one can" in the Greek literally means that "no one has the ability on their own" to enter into the Kingdom of God even if they follow the Law completely. Jesus clarifies and states that you must be born of the water and the Spirit.

Some people would like to declare that this phrase is just symbolic of a mother's womb and being born in this manner; but this is completely out of context and would contradict the other teachings of Jesus. The actual term for water is not a reference to the amniotic sac but rather it is the term *hudor*, which means "of water in rivers, in fountains, in pools." It literally refers to actual water. The term being used here for Spirit is *pneuma* and it means "the third person of the triune God, the Holy Spirit, coequal, coeternal with the Father and the Son."

We see from this teaching that Jesus is literally talking about the very fact that to enter into heaven then someone must be born of the Water and the Spirit. He must also believe as recorded in John.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The common thing for most people to do is quote John 3:16, but leave out John 3:5. Jesus did not do this. He actually teaches Nicodemus a more complete description of entering into the Kingdom of God. He clarifies (Mark 16:16) in more detail for us and for Nicodemus.

Ultimately three things will testify as to who we are as a child of God. According to Scriptures these three things are: ***the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood of Christ.***

1 John 5:7-8 For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

Conclusion

Each one of us is challenged by the Word of God on a daily basis but, sadly, not everyone will yield to God's Word. In every doctrine that we hold dear in our lives we must be certain that it is validated by Scripture. If it is not validated then it is merely the opinion of man, and our opinions are not what gets us into heaven: it is Jesus Christ.

Search the Scriptures and become convinced of the Truth about immersion as presented in God's Word!

All Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version (unless otherwise noted). Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

