



Dovercourt Baptist Church

Topical Studies

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” Col. 3:16

Understanding Baptism

The word “baptize” comes from a Greek word (bap-tid’-zo) and is derived from a root word (bap’-to) which means “to cover wholly with a fluid” or “to dip.” This root word (bap’-to) is used three times in the New Testament (**Luke 16:24, John 13:26, and Revelation 19:13**), and was also used outside the Bible to describe the process by which a garment was immersed, first into bleach and then into dye, for the purpose of cleansing it and then changing its colour.

Most of us are familiar with the word “baptize” in the context of dipping something or someone into water, but there are a variety of elements into which something/someone can be baptized. For example, in **Matthew 3:11** John the Baptist states, “*I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*” Here we see that a person can be baptized, not just with water, but with the Holy Spirit. And for those who reject the message of salvation, Jesus will perform another type of baptism: an immersion of judgment into fire. The word is used in yet another way in **Mark 10:36-40** where Jesus compares the painful ordeal He would eventually have to endure at the time of His crucifixion as a kind of “baptism into suffering.”

In **Luke 11:38** the word is used in the context of washing or cleaning: “*The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner.*” (**See also Mark 7:1-5.**) The word “wash” is the same word translated elsewhere as “baptize.” This tradition had nothing to do with personal hygiene. In the context, the reference was to a ritual washing in which the hands were dipped into water for the purpose of making one ceremonially clean before eating.

Another way the Bible speaks of baptism is described in **Galatians 3:27** and **1 Corinthians 12:13**, in which, at the point of conversion, when a person trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation, he or she is then placed (immersed) into the body of Christ. From that point on the person is considered a “member” of Christ’s body, and is thus called upon to perform their God-appointed function as a part of His body here on earth.

In **1 Corinthians 10:2** we read of yet another type of baptism in which the children of Israel who experienced the exodus from Egypt were “baptized into Moses.” In this context it clearly refers to the fact that they were *associated with* or *identified with* Moses.

Thus far, we have seen that baptism symbolizes several things. It represents cleansing, purification, transformation, judgment, being added to something, being placed into something, and being associated with or identified with something. When John the Baptist came baptizing people in the Jordan River, his baptism was one of repentance in which the people came confessing their sins in preparation for the arrival of the Messiah. They were preparing themselves to be identified with Him as their king when he arrived (**Matthew 3:1-8; Mark 1:1-5; Acts 19:4**). The water baptism we practice today is very similar to John’s baptism because it too is a baptism which follows repentance from sin, and identifies us with someone (Jesus Christ). The difference is that it is associated with our conversion (salvation) and is performed in the name of Jesus Christ (**Acts 2:38; Acts 10:48; Acts 19:5**).

Here are some commonly asked questions about baptism:

1. How long after becoming a Christian should I wait before being baptized?

The answer to this question is very clear in Scripture. Every example of believer’s baptism in the Bible demonstrates that baptism should occur as soon as possible after a person trusts in Jesus for their salvation. Here are several examples: **Acts 2:40-41; 8:12-13; 8:35-38; 9:17-18; 16:28-34; 18:8**. Any person who has repented and placed their faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins should not delay in being baptized. Some Christians wrongly delay this act of obedience because they believe they must first reach a certain level of maturity in their Christian lives. This view is not Scriptural. Baptism is a public declaration of our identification with Jesus Christ. It has nothing to do

with our level of maturity. Unless a person has doubts regarding whether or not they really are a Christian, there is no Biblical reason for delay. One possible exception may be if one accepts Christ at a very young age. In such cases, it may be a good idea to wait until the child is considered old enough to fully comprehend the meaning of baptism before they proceed. But even this is not taught in the Bible, and there are several examples in Scripture where entire households believed the message of the gospel and were then baptized immediately afterward. These families no doubt included some children.

2. Why did Jesus get baptized?

This is a very good question. When Jesus came to be baptized by John the Baptist, even John himself thought it inappropriate. This is because John knew that his baptism was a baptism of repentance (**Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3**), and that Jesus had no sin requiring repentance (**Matthew 3:13-14; John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21**). But Jesus insisted on it, not because of sin he needed to confess, but so he might perform completely all the requirements of the Law and show Himself to be our perfect model or example. In **Matthew 3:15** we read, *But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."* Jesus is to be our example in all things, whether in prayer (**Matthew 26:40-41**), service (**John 13:13-15**), suffering (**1 Peter 2:21**), patience (**1 Timothy 1:16**), humility (**Philippians 2:5-8**), love (**John 15:12**), and yes, even in baptism. Since getting baptized was obviously a priority for the sinless Son of God, should it not also be considered an item of importance for repentant sinners such as ourselves?

3. Is getting baptized an option for Christians?

No, it is a command. (**Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; Acts 10:48**). Baptism is not required to be a Christian, but it is certainly required to be an *obedient* Christian.

4. Is there any Biblical authority for infant baptism (Christening)?

No. Believer's baptism is for those who have recognized their sinful condition and have made a conscious decision to trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Babies are too young to understand this or make such a decision.

5. What is the Biblically acceptable method of baptism?

There are several different methods of baptism being practiced in churches today. Some sprinkle, some pour, and some dunk. As Baptists, we believe that a person should be completely immersed under water in order to be properly baptized. We hold this view for several reasons: First, the word “bap-tid’-zo” actually means to completely immerse. If the Holy Spirit had wanted us to understand baptism in any other way, He would have caused the writers of Scripture to use words such as “hran-tid’-zo” (sprinkle) or “kheh’-o” (pour). Secondly, the examples of water baptism in Scripture all demonstrate immersion. For example, **John 3:23** tells us that “*John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there...*” Sprinkling or pouring water on someone does not require this much water. And in passages like **Mark 1:10** and **Acts 8:39**, the person is clearly described as “coming up out of the water” after being baptized. Thirdly, since we believe that baptism symbolizes death, burial, and resurrection (**Romans 6:3-5**), the symbolism would make no sense unless the person being baptized were placed completely under the water. Just as sprinkling some dirt on a dead body does not constitute a proper burial, so also sprinkling or pouring water on a person does not constitute a proper baptism.

6. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs at the time of conversion, and is the process by which the Holy Spirit places a new believer into the body of Christ, and by which the Holy Spirit Himself takes up residence in the life of that believer. **1 Corinthians 12:13** describes this process: *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit.* Some churches teach that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience different from salvation. They see it as a second experience that gives them much greater spiritual power and boldness, and the ability to live a more victorious Christian life. Some even teach that this baptism should be accompanied by signs such as speaking in tongues.

During the birth of the Church it is true that some Christians were given visible manifestations of the Spirit (**Acts 2:3**) or had experiences in which the Spirit gave them the ability to speak languages they never learned (**Acts 2:4-12**), but these were unique to the early years of the Church, and were given as a sign to Jews (**1 Corinthians 1:22; 14:21-22**). During these transitional years God provided visible signs to show when a person received the Holy Spirit because it was important for the Jewish Christians to have

proof that the Spirit was being given to the Gentiles who responded to the gospel just as He was being given to the Jewish converts (**Acts 10:45; Acts 11:1-18**). This is also why the baptism of the Spirit was sometimes delayed after the conversion of certain Gentile believers, because it was important for Jewish Christians to be there to witness it. But these experiences were unique to the birth of the Church. If the baptism of the Holy Spirit were something only some Christians receive, then it would contradict the point Paul is making in **1 Corinthians 12:11-13**, where he explains that even though different gifts are given, *all* Christians are still part of *one* body and *all* have received the Spirit's baptism.

Rather than teaching that there are two classes of Christians (those who have the baptism of the Spirit and those who don't), Scripture teaches the exact opposite: that every Christian possesses the Holy Spirit (**Romans 8:9,14**), and that all Christians have everything necessary for living a God-pleasing, Spirit-filled life (**2 Peter 1:3**). What hinders this is when we live with unconfessed sin, and allow the selfish desires of the flesh to impede the Spirit's work. That's why we're commanded to confess our sins (**1 John 1:5-9**) and crucify the flesh (**Romans 8:5,13**) so as not to grieve or quench the Spirit (**1 Thessalonians 5:19; Ephesians 4:30**), and to walk in the Spirit (**Galatians 5:16-25**) and be filled (controlled) by the Spirit (**Ephesians 5:18**), who is already indwelling every believer (**1 Corinthians 6:19**).

7. What is the meaning of the “baptism for the dead” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:29?

Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? This verse is one of the hardest verses in the Bible to understand. Many commentators have struggled to understand its meaning and have been unable to come to any dogmatic conclusions after studying it. Based on this verse, some Mormons teach that one can actually be baptized vicariously for a person who has already died so that the dead person might be saved. We can certainly eliminate this interpretation since we know from other Scripture passages that no person can be saved by works (**Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 2:16**), and that there is no second chance to be saved after a person dies (**Luke 16:26; Hebrews 9:27**). So, since the clear teaching of Scripture is that no one can perform a deed or deeds (including baptism) to secure *their own* salvation, it would make even less sense to conclude that a living person could perform some act (such as being baptized) in order to secure the salvation of *another*

person, especially a *dead* one. Although the passage is admittedly difficult to interpret, here are a couple possible explanations:

It would appear that some in the Corinthian church were teaching or believing that there is no resurrection from the dead (**1 Corinthians 15:12**). One possible explanation, therefore, is that Paul is using a form of logic to argue a point about the resurrection. The Corinthian Christians were probably familiar with the pagan ritual known as “baptism in the sea” which was practiced in the city of Eleusis (just north-east of Corinth). This religion is actually referred to in one of the writings of Homer (Hymn to the Demeter, lines 478-479). And since many of the pagan practices around them ended up influencing the Corinthian believers, there may have been some in the church who were holding to these beliefs. So Paul may have been making the point that it would be illogical for them on the one hand to deny the resurrection, while on the other hand to believe in this pagan ritual which obviously included a belief in some form of resurrection from the dead.

Another possible explanation is that Paul may simply be referring to believer’s baptism, and is making the point that since baptism is symbolic of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, why then would they have allowed themselves to be baptized in Jesus’ name (on his behalf) when he was never actually raised from the dead? The best part of the symbolism of baptism is the resurrection, which they were apparently denying. Paul’s point of logic may be that if there is no resurrection, then that includes Jesus’ resurrection. And if Jesus was not raised, then that would mean they were all baptized (symbolizing resurrection) in the name of a dead man, and would consequently be denying themselves any hope of a future resurrection and life with Christ.

8. Is it ever necessary for a Christian to be baptized more than once?

Baptism is only necessary once in a Christian’s life (**Ephesians 4:5**). But since believer’s baptism is only for those who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, and should occur in response to salvation, there may be situations in which a Christian may wish to be baptized more than once:

1. If they were baptized as a baby (see Question 4)
2. If they were baptized as part of a cult or heretical church
3. If they were once baptized, but have since realized that their conversion was not genuine at the time

9. Is water baptism necessary for salvation?

Some Bible passages appear to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation or that getting baptized is what saves us (**Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21**). As we have already mentioned, other passages of Scripture teach us that salvation is a free gift obtained by faith, and cannot be earned through works (**Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 3:9**). So if certain verses seem to be teaching the opposite, then we need to analyze and address each of them separately.

Mark 16:16

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. Here it sounds like Jesus is saying there are two requirements for being saved: one is belief and the other is baptism. But notice that the rest of the verse does not say, “but whoever is not baptized and does not believe will be condemned.” In other words, Jesus is obviously emphasizing that belief is the critical component for salvation, not baptism. A preacher might say something like, “he who believes and walks down the aisle will be saved.” But he would not necessarily be implying that salvation is impossible for those people who choose to believe, yet remain in their seats. The same logic applies to this passage. (It is also worth noting that **Mark 16:9-20** may not even belong in the Bible since some of the oldest manuscripts do not contain it. But this may not be the case, and the subject matter covered in these verses still seems to fit with the rest of Scripture.)

Acts 2:38

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. Peter’s message here is directed primarily toward Jewish people. That’s why they respond in verse 37, “brothers, what shall we do.” Peter is highlighting the fact that the Jews have crucified their Messiah, and that they all need to repent of this great sin. And to show that their repentance is genuine, they also need to be baptized. In the phrase “for the forgiveness of your sins,” the word “for” can mean several things. For example, if the doctor tells you to take two Aspirin *for* your headache, he is not necessarily saying that you should take them *to get* a headache. Neither does this passage require us to conclude that baptism is required *to get* forgiveness. The Greek word here translated as “for” could also be translated as “to” or “into” or “unto,” just as in **1 Corinthians 10:2** where “all were baptized into/unto Moses.” This sentence could just as easily be translated, “Repent and be baptized ... for the purpose of identifying yourselves with the forgiveness of sins.”

Acts 22:16

And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name. In this context, Saul (Paul) has just encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and is told to go and meet a man named Ananias. When he meets Ananias, Saul's sight is restored and he receives the Holy Spirit. Ananias then gives Saul further instructions regarding how to proceed with being a witness for Jesus (see verse 15). Ananias is not saying here that being baptized is necessary for Saul's salvation because we know from other passages that Saul had already been converted during his Damascus Road experience (**Acts 9:15-17; Galatians 1:11-12**). So this passage is not meant to give step-by-step instructions on how to be saved, but rather to instruct Saul on how to proceed next. A more literal translation of this command would be: "Arising, be baptized, and wash away your sins, since you have already called upon his name." It is clear from the grammar of the text that the command to "wash away your sins" is directed at Paul. This tells us once again that Ananias is not referring to Paul's conversion since only the blood of Jesus Christ can wash away our sins (**Matthew 26:28; Colossians 1:13-14; Revelation 1:5**). Since Paul has already been spiritually cleansed at this point, the command to "wash away your sins" must be referring to the cleansing symbolized in water baptism.

1 Peter 3:21

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the context, Peter is drawing a comparison between a water experience in the Old Testament (Noah's flood) and how people were saved through that experience, and another water experience in the New Testament (baptism), through which people were also being saved. But Peter is not saying that the symbolic act of baptism is what saves a person. In fact, to avoid any confusion, he actually clarifies that the physical cleansing with water (water baptism) is *not* what saves, but rather an act of faith (a good conscience toward God). And this faith must be placed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which results in a *spiritual* washing of the heart (**see Titus 3:5**). Water baptism is a physical washing that symbolizes the spiritual washing that has already occurred by trusting in Christ. In other words, Peter is referring to the reality behind the symbolism of baptism, not the symbol itself.

10. If I decide to be baptized at DBC, what will I need to do and what should I expect?

If you would like to be baptized at Dovercourt Baptist Church, we would be pleased to assist you in this process. Here are several things we will be asking you to do:

1. Attend a baptismal information session. These are usually scheduled several times throughout the year.
2. Write out your personal testimony describing how you came to receive Jesus as your Saviour through repentance and faith. This testimony will be shared at your baptism either personally or on video.
3. Schedule a date to be baptized. Baptisms usually occur during a Sunday morning service.
4. If your testimony will be videotaped for playback during your baptism, please schedule a date for us to record your video.
5. On the day of your baptism, a black, opaque robe will be provided by DBC for you to wear. Be sure to bring a bathing suit or other suitable undergarment to wear beneath this black robe.
6. Once you know the date of your baptism, invite friends and family to attend. It is important to realize that this will be an excellent opportunity to publicly declare your faith to others, especially to those who do not know Jesus as Saviour. Be sure to take advantage of this opportunity.

Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible. We encourage everyone reading these DBC Topical Studies not to take our word for it, but to look up the Bible references and study these passages for themselves, just as the Bereans did in Acts 17:10-11.

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