

The Bible's Case for Baptism

By Coach Theo

FMU Gym-Church Leader and Coach

Summary: Baptism immersion in and out of the water is more significant than we think. It seems clear from God's Word that it's an identification (to Christ and the Body), a requisite (there was no separation between faith and baptism), and a command (Jesus was baptized and he commissioned us to).

Disclaimer: I did not take time to edit. Please excuse any grammatical or punctuation errors. My friends will let me know, and then I'll edit. Maybe.

I want you to think about drinking water. A lot of people know the importance of drinking water. Yet many still neglect to do it. But when they discover why it's so important and necessary for their body, it changes the game.

In the church there seems to be some division about the topic of baptizing people in water, yet I

think most Christians would agree that baptism is important. However, many neglect to do it. But when they discover why it's so important and necessary for the church body, I think it will also change the game.

Like it did for me.

Thankfully, the first church I became involved in as a new Christian gave us the opportunity to be baptized in Lake Erie. The notion was sort of, "You're a Christian now, so therefore it's time to get baptized." I liked that approach. It seemed like this was just the typical part of being a Jesus Follower.

Over the years of being a Christian, eventually moving in and out of a few different churches, and to my fault, not growing into the fullness of Christ like a true disciple is supposed to, I didn't put much thought into the significance of baptism anymore. I thought it was just a symbol and therefore, just a choice. If you want to do it, go for it. But if you don't want to do it, then don't worry. After all, we don't want to be legalistic, right?

Then I started studying scripture. I discovered that baptism is about identification with Christ, it is a requisite for any believer almost simultaneously as they are putting their faith in Christ, and it is a command from our Lord and Savior himself.

#1: IDENTIFICATION

Did you know one of the main reasons it was so significant that the apostle Peter challenged the crowd at Pentecost to “repent and be baptized,” is because it sorted out the professing-believers from the truly converted-believers? To publicly get baptized in front of other people shows your identification with Christ, and during that time, becoming a follower of the Way was not pleasant.

In fact, in his pamphlet called, “Water Baptism,” M.R. DeHaan puts it this way: *“In the early days of the church...baptism was a declaration that the believer was definitely identifying himself with that group of people who were called Christians and were despised and hated. To be a Christian meant something. To identify yourself with those who were called Christians meant persecution,*

maybe death; it meant being ostracized from your family, shunned by friends. And the one act which was the final declaration of this identification was BAPTISM. As long as a man gathered with Christians, he was tolerated, but when once he submitted to baptism, he declared to all the world, I BELONG TO THIS DESPISED GROUP, and immediately he was persecuted, hated, and despised. In baptism, therefore, the believer entered into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. A person might be a believer and keep it strictly a secret and thus avoid unpleasantness and suffering, but once he submitted to public baptism he had burned his bridges behind him..." (Page 27)

Identification is one reason we get baptized as Christians. We tell people it's a public declaration of your faith. We're not going to face the despised treatment and ostracization those early believers faced, at least not in this country, and at least not right now. But if you think about it, even some of your friends and family may think it's awkward and weird that you're getting dunked into a pool by an ordinary guy, in a church service full of other people who are cheering you on when you do it! You can see how it is an act

of personal obedience to the Lord when you separate yourself from non-believers by participating in this public declaration. One of the physical symbols is that you are identifying yourself with this truly “converted” group, showing that you’re proud to side with the Lord, regardless of the crowd’s opinions.

#2: REQUISITE

IT'S JUST WHAT THEY DID

In the book *Evangelical, Sacramental, & Pentecostal: Why The Church Should Be All Three*, the author Gordon T. Smith says, *“Baptism is the rite of Christian initiation. The witness of the New Testament suggests that for the early church there was no such thing as an unbaptized Christian.”* (page 85)

We see this regarding baptism in the Book of Acts:

1. Acts 2:38, 41: “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ’...those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three

thousand were added to their number that day.”

2. Acts 8:12-13: “But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized...”
3. Acts 8:36-38: “As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.”
4. Acts 9:18: “Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.”
5. Acts 10:47-48: “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”

6. Acts 16:14-15: Referring to the conversion of Lydia, we read, "...The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home..."

7. Acts 16:31-33: "They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized."

8. Acts 18:8: "Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized."

9. Acts 19:4-5: "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."

10. Acts 22:16: “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized...”

Just in case you're wondering what types of baptisms these were, it seems clear that they were full immersions in water. The word used almost 80 times in the new testament is the Greek verb “baptizo.” According to contemporary lexicons, the primary meaning is “to dip, plunge, or immerse.” The secondary meaning is to “bring under the influence.” The root means “to totally overwhelm.” Interestingly, while there were Greek words for sprinkling or pouring that were available to the authors of Scripture, they consistently chose the word baptizo, or immersion, to describe the mode of baptism.

The New Testament links baptism and faith in an important manner.

In Galatians, for example, Paul explains, *“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.” Galatians 3:26, 27, NIV.* Paul connects “faith in Christ Jesus” with “baptized into Christ” and “clothed yourselves with Christ.” In another place Paul

through the HS says, *“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.”* Colossians 2:12, NIV.

Baptism and faith interweave. Baptism without faith serves no purpose (just getting wet). Rightly understood, genuine faith includes baptism as a part of its expression. This understanding helps reconcile passages such as 1 Peter 3:21, which speaks of “the baptism that now saves you”; and Ephesians 2:8, “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith.” The writers of the NT just assumed that if you were a believer, you were also baptized. The salvation process includes baptism and faith intertwined. NT writers had one with the other. Faith is not a preparatory step that precedes baptism, nor does faith come as a result of baptism. Instead, genuine faith includes baptism. (-Davon Huss, Baptism in the Church)

John MacArthur observes: *“We have a largely unbaptized church which includes some of you...it’s amazing how many people who proclaim Christ and confess Christ have never been baptized...there’s been a sort of*

indifference to this very, very important matter...May I be so bold as to suggest that a failure to be obedient in the matter of baptism...is at the root of some of the immense problems in people's lives and in the church in general because it allows the church to fill up with people who are unfaithful to the simplest commands of the Lord and of His Word and that's serious."

#3: COMMANDMENT-THE GREAT COMMISSION

Have you ever read a scripture in a totally different way, even though you've read the scripture 100 times before!? That's what happened one day when I read the Great Commission again.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

The Great Commission is some of Jesus' last words before He ascends into heaven. Look

where the command of baptizing falls, right after the call to go out and make disciples.

We tend to “get” that teaching and evangelizing are commands, but look at the first action mentioned for how we make disciples. It’s not just figuratively speaking about bringing people into the body of Christ. It’s the literal meaning of baptize them in and out of water! Therefore, if we consider making disciples a command, why would we not consider baptizing believers a command?!

Did you know that even Jesus was baptized?

Let’s begin by looking at **Mark 1:4**: *“And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”*

Ceremonial purification and washing with water was common among the Jews. Drop down to verses 7-8: *“After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* We see here that John the Baptist was calling people to repentance from the way they had been living. God used John to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus, who would

baptize believers with the Holy Spirit when they put their faith and trust in Him for salvation.

In Mark 1:9, we see that baptism is important because Jesus Himself was baptized: *“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”* The Unger’s Bible Dictionary points out that the Levitical law required all priests to be consecrated when they were around 30 years of age (Numbers 4:3) through a twofold process of washing and then anointing (Exodus 29:4-7). When Jesus was “washed,” or baptized in the Jordan, the heavens were opened and He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. We see this in Mark 1:10: *“As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.”*

One commentator suggests that Jesus walked about 60 miles just so John could baptize Him in the Jordan River. We also learn that the disciples were baptized and in John 4:2, they in turn baptized others.

And then look at what Jesus says to his disciples about what will happen to him in *Luke 12:50*, *“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!”* He uses this analogy to describe his earthly sufferings, death, and resurrection. Is this why

Paul also says, “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.”
Romans 6:4

Something physically and spiritually is actually happening. Your old self is going under, and your new self is raising with Christ.

When you are baptized you're declaring that you've burned your bridges to bondage. As you stand in the water waiting to be baptized, you symbolize Jesus dying on the cross. As you are lowered into the water, you're providing a visual demonstration that Jesus was buried in the tomb. As you shoot out of the water, you're picturing Jesus rising from the dead. John Piper catches the significance well: “Baptism gets its meaning and its importance from the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died in our place and for our sins, and from his triumph over death in the resurrection that guarantees our new and everlasting life.” (Taking the Plunge 2.0, Rev. Brian Bill, 10/25/09)

When you get baptized, you are also saying, “I died with Jesus Christ, I was buried with Him and now I am raised with Christ to brand-new life, and it's my intent to live my life under His leadership and for His glory from this point on.” In essence,

believer's baptism is a funeral. It's an act of faith in which we testify, both to God and to the watching world, that the person we used to be is dead and buried, and that we've been raised to new life as **2 Corinthians 5:17 states: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"**

THE GRACE OF GOD FALLS

In baptism comes: Forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38), Washing away of sin (Acts 22:16), Release from the power of sin (Colossians 2:11-15), Death to sin (Romans 6:11), Life in Christ (Romans 6:11), Union with Christ (Galatians 3:27), Union with Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5), Reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), Entrance into the kingdom (John 3:5), Connection with the church (1 Corinthians 12:13), Reception of salvation (1 Peter 3:21)).

*Correct, baptism, by itself, does not save. Jesus saves by the grace of the cross. In baptism, as a part of faith and repentance, we respond to Jesus' gift. Though by itself baptism does not save, it does hold a major place in the conversion process.

Some compare baptism to a wedding. The day you put that ring on her finger and say “I do,” everything changes right? There was a process before, and a process after. Much commitment and growth is required before and will be required after. That wedding is a benchmark moment. *“The ceremony cements the relationship: two become one. God gave baptism as a ceremony through which we are united with Him. A great deal precedes baptism, a lifetime of growth will occur afterward, but the baptism provides the foundation of a cemented relationship.”* (-Davon Huss, Baptism in the Church)

When I was baptized in Lake Erie, something happened. I came out of the water with a new excitement. Just like new believers who used to yell, “Jesus is Lord!” There was a surge of something that made me want to be different (now I know it was the Holy Spirit); there was a desire to do better; there was a new consciousness of walking away from my old life.

The last time we did baptisms at our gym-church, I felt it too. After talking with some of the participants they felt it also throughout the following days. More self control. More love and peace. A different stride and walk in their steps

with the Spirit. God is always working on us when we cultivate the soil (our hearts) to allow him to prune us. His Grace will keep falling on us as we follow him in simple acts of obedience.

I'm not saying, "if you do this (baptism), then this will happen." Or that you should seek baptism to seek an experience. We can't will or force things. We must seek the presence of God, Jesus, and His Holy Spirit above all else.

I also wouldn't get too caught up in all the understandings of why. You don't have to know all of this to get baptized.

I also understand the pride feelings of not wanting to do it in front of others. I think that's part of the humbling posture he wants us to take to show He's more important. In fact, one of the girls last time spontaneously walked up to the pool to be baptized. She was struggling with nerves, and all I said was, "This is part of the sanctification process. He wants you to overcome that and prove that He's more important than your fear." She said that little act of faith was one of the biggest steps in her walk.

CONCLUSION

"Yes, but..."

Even after reading all of this, I know someone may still say this. But this is one of those situations where Scripture overrides our feelings. I'm just a common man and I don't know much, but I do know that sometimes you just gotta do it because God said so.

I'll be honest, I don't feel equipped to baptize people. I don't necessarily feel confident either. I tell myself to do it as an act of obedience. I'm not trying to create an experience. I'm not trying to force or will something to happen. I just know I'm supposed to show up as a leader, do my part, and follow the commands Jesus gave me in the Great Commission.

To people who feel the conviction to get baptized, don't hold back. Join me in this act of obedience.

To the people sharing in this moment to applaud and celebrate, join us in this act of obedience.

Even though I don't like to use these words because I don't find them in scripture, Baptism is one of two "ordinances" or "sacraments" (along

with communion), that Jesus gives us to participate in as his One Body.

“Thus to despise the sacraments is to despise Christ, for they re-present Christ and have been instituted by Christ to communicate his saving grace.” (page 81, Gordon T. Smith)

As always, never take my word for it. Peter says that baptism is the answer of a good conscience (1 Pet. 3:21). Let it weigh on yours, brew on it, and take it up with the Lord, His Word, and His Spirit as you pray for his guidance, wisdom, and clarity.

Just take yourself out of the equation because usually the only thing that stops you, is you.

-Coach Theo