

BAPTISM

Living Hope Church, Kelowna

INTRODUCTION

It was *uncompromisingly* commanded by the Lord Jesus.

It was *universally* administered to Christians entering the early church.

It was *uniquely* connected to conversion as an *unrepeatable* expression of saving faith.

THREE VIEWS

1. The ***sacramental view*** holds that baptism is a means God uses to convey grace. The person baptised is set free from the power of sin and given a new spiritual life.
2. The ***covenantal view*** holds that baptism is not a means of spiritual rebirth, but a sign and seal of God's covenant of salvation. Baptism depicts the freeing from sin that occurs with repentance, (Acts 2:38), and serves the same covenantal purpose for Christians that circumcision does for Jews.
3. The ***symbolical view*** holds that no spiritual benefit results from baptism, itself. Rather, it is a public symbol of a spiritual rebirth that has already occurred in the person being baptised.

Living Hope Church holds to the symbolical view. However, we believe scripture also demonstrates it to be a spiritual blessing and encouragement to the one baptised (as well as the Church).

DEFINITION

Baptism is an **ordinance of the Lord** by which **those who have repented and come to faith** express their **union with Christ in His death and resurrection** (Rom 6:3-4), by being **immersed** in water **in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**. It is a **sign** of belonging to the new people of God, spiritual Israel, and an **emblem of burial and cleansing**, signifying **death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin**.

MEANING

Baptism has meaning and importance only because the death and resurrection of Jesus are infinitely important for our rescue from the wrath of God and our everlasting joy in His glorious presence. In baptism, we are mainly talking about Jesus Christ and His magnificent work of salvation in dying for our sins and rising for our justification.

You should have great thoughts about a great reality — Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified to bear the sins of many and raised to give them everlasting life in the new heavens and the new earth.

MODE

In the New Testament baptism appears always to have been by *immersion*, taken from the Greek word ‘baptizo’ (βαπτίζω) meaning to ‘plunge, dip, immerse’ something in water. This can be seen in several verses including:

- People were baptised “in the river Jordan” (Mark 1:5)
- Many were baptised in an area “because water was plentiful there” (John 3:23)
- Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch “went into the water” and “came up out of the water” (Acts 8:38-39)
- Paul points to baptism as a symbol of burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4)
- Ananias tells Paul, “wash away your sins” in baptism (Acts 22:16)

WHO?

Baptism in the early Church was practiced for all people who genuinely repented of their sins, and gave a believable profession of faith in Christ Jesus, i.e. “credobaptism”. Also often called “believers’ baptism,” we find people being baptised in response to Peter’s sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:41), Philip’s preaching in Samaria (Acts 8:12), Peter’s preaching to Gentiles (Acts 10:44-47), and in other passages, and it was often immediately upon their repentance and confession of faith.

PAEDOBAPTISM/INFANT BAPTISM

Within Evangelicalism some hold to *paedobaptist* practice, especially Lutheran, Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Reformed churches. They argue for baptism

being a sign of the New Covenant, just as circumcision was a sign of the Old Covenant in ancient Israel. They also argue that “household baptisms” implies children were also baptised when the fathers were converted. But we believe that this is not a New Testament endorsed practice.

Living Hope Church believes that baptism is only commanded for those capable of exercising conscious faith, i.e. not infants. We do not believe that it is the same as OT circumcision as an actual covenant, but is rather a symbol of the spiritual covenant between God and the person. Colossians 2 and Galatians 3 emphasise that we are raised with Christ, and are all sons of God “*through faith.*” Baptism without faith seems inconceivable to Paul.

A SYMBOL/SIGN

Our justification from sins takes place at the point of saving faith, not at the point of water baptism. It is not necessary for salvation. But it is necessary if we are to be obedient to Christ, for He commanded baptism for all who believe in Him.

Baptism expresses union with Christ in His death and resurrection. The clearest teaching on this is **Rom 6:3-4**:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised 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.

Baptism is a means of showing our faith. We *say* this faith and *signify* this faith and *symbolize* this faith with the act of baptism. Faith unites us to Christ; baptism symbolizes the union. It’s like a wedding ring that signifies the vows/covenant, rather than creating the covenant.

We must be careful not to overemphasise baptism. Since baptism is a work, it does not and cannot save a person. Instead, a person is saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). So as important as baptism is, we should never suggest it’s necessary for salvation. Baptism is a matter of obedience, but it does not save the person.

1 Pet 3:18 clearly explains baptism as a symbolic expression of the heart's "appeal to God" by faith alone.

“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you - ***not the removal of dirt from the flesh***, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...” (emphasis added).

Baptism is a public expression of our previous appeal to God for a good conscience. It is a response to God from a clean conscience, which was cleansed by faith. It is a way of saying to God physically, "I trust that you have taken me into Christ like Noah was taken into the ark. Lord, I am entering the ark of Christ! You have saved me from the waters of death." Water baptism cannot save, and Peter immediately qualifies his statement, "baptism now saves you" by adding, "not the removal of dirt from the flesh ...". Salvation is nothing to do with the actual water.

AN EXPRESSION OF FAITH:

Col 2:11–12 says:

In him [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ...

Circumcision today has meaning for the Christian, not as a physical act, but as a spiritual act of Christ in which He cuts away the old sinful body and makes us new. It is virtually synonymous with the new birth, and was promised by God in **Deut 30:6**:

... the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Then he speaks of baptism —

“... having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him **through faith** in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead” (emphasis added).

So the image of spiritual circumcision is closely connected with the image of baptism: “You were circumcised . . . having been baptised . . .” Both are spiritual realities, not natural ones. The old “body of flesh” was cut away in conversion; you died and rose again in baptism. So, baptism gets its meaning from the faith that it expresses. We believe that baptism has replaced circumcision as an outward symbol of being part of the people of God, but now we are talking about spiritual, not physical, realities. In the Old Testament, men were circumcised to signify membership in the old-covenant people of God, and in the New Testament men *and women* are baptised to signify membership by faith in the new-covenant people of God.

The change happened in redemptive history at the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant and from circumcision to baptism, and thus, there was a change from an ethnic focus on Israel (with only males being given the sign of membership in God’s people), to a spiritual focus on the Church from all nations (with both male and female being given the symbol of membership in God’s people). Membership in the new-covenant people of God is not by physical birth, but by spiritual birth.

The meaning of baptism is woven together with membership in the people of God. And since the local church is an expression of that people, baptism is closely connected to identifying as a committed, accountable part of a local church. In the New Testament, being a Christian, being baptised, belonging to the new-covenant people of God, and being a member of a local gathering of Christians were linked together.

THE EFFECT & NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

When a person chooses baptism, they are publically saying, “I am part of God’s family.” That person comes into a family of love, mutual commitment and relationship to other Christians at new birth, and witnesses to this fact in public baptism. When baptised, the believer is publically identified with everything that God is, has, and represents. The person baptised is

symbolically introduced 'into the name of Christ,' (i.e. became His disciple,) that is, entered into a state of allegiance to Him and fellowship with Him.

Baptism is a means of grace in the Church. It is a blessing to the person being baptised, an encouragement to the Church, and a testimony to the world that another person has turned to the Lord. Every Christian should be baptised because Jesus commanded it:

Matt 28:19-20 - "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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."

We should really rejoice at the baptism of a true believer because it is more evidence that God's kingdom is 'coming on earth,' souls are being plucked from the burning, and the works of Satan are being destroyed.

CONCLUSION:

In summary, the Lord commanded His disciples to go and make more disciples and to baptise them, so if He said it, we're going to go do it. If through faith you have truly died with Christ and been raised to a new life in Him, but haven't yet been baptised, then go and do what the Lord commanded. It won't change your standing before God or make you anymore acceptable to Him, but the symbolic physical act is of great spiritual encouragement for the person being baptised and for those who witness the baptism.

If you have more questions about baptism don't hesitate to ask us.