



IBC's Statement on Baptism

Introduction

As we come to the topic of baptism, it is important for us to come to a solid, biblical conviction. The aim of this study and Statement on Baptism is to help believers not only understand baptism for themselves, but also to help them be able to explain the topic to others. We pray that the Lord, who gave us the ordinance of baptism, will be pleased with the content of these pages. This study is centered around the four following questions, the last of which being the most significant for our purposes:

- Why be baptized?
- Who should be baptized?
- How should one be baptized?
- And finally, what does baptism mean?

For those who are interested in studying this topic further, there are many resources that address baptism. We suggest Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). Much of what follows in this Statement has been adapted from his presentation of the doctrine (found on pages 966-987). Grudem's book will be a simple, helpful place to continue your study of baptism. If you are looking for more information, please [reach out to our Pastors](#). You will find further resources mentioned at the end of Grudem's chapter. For more in-depth study, check out the book *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), Edited by Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright.

Why Be Baptized?

Jesus Commanded it

When looking at the New Testament, we see that there are several reasons why someone should be baptized. (Some of these reasons may be seen below, in the section dealing with what it means to be baptized.) But here, we want to begin our study with a very simple explanation:

- In the great commission ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)), we see Jesus commanding his disciples how they should carry their mission of "making disciples of all nations." In verse 19, we

see that Jesus commands his disciples to baptize new disciples. Notice the two things he emphasizes: “Baptizing them... and teaching them.”

- Thus, we might say that *baptism is an essential part of being a disciple of Jesus*, just as being taught his ways is essential.
- One might ask, how important was this command to the early church?
- In [Acts 2:38](#), we see that when people responded to the preaching of the Gospel, Peter instructed them to “Repent and be baptized.” And this response to the Gospel, baptism, is not an isolated occurrence in the book of Acts – in fact, we may argue that it was the pattern to be followed.

In summary, then, we may say that someone should be baptized because it was commanded by Jesus and it was practiced by the early church in obedience to that command.

Who Should Be Baptized?

Believers

Having seen why someone should be baptized, let us now determine who should be baptized. We have already seen hints at this in both of the texts we already looked at. Acts 2, it was the people who were responding to the preaching of the Gospel that were baptized. In Matthew 28, it is those who have been “made disciples” that are baptized and taught (and these disciples are to be from all nations, there is no restriction based on nationality).

The following should be true of those who are to be baptized:

- *They have heard and believed the Gospel.* In each of the following examples in the book of Acts, each time it may be established the people had heard and believed the Gospel:
 - [Acts 2:41](#) – “So those who received his word were baptized”
 - [Acts 8:12](#) – “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 16:14-15](#) – “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized...”
 - [Acts 16:32-33](#) – “And they spoke the word of the Lord to him ... and he was baptized at once...”
- *They have begun the Christian life.* For the sake of space, let us consider only a few examples:
 - One area of having begun the Christian life is that there must be *something of the work of the Holy Spirit*.
 - We see in [John 16:8](#) that one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to convict people of their sin. Surely this is something that those who heard Peter’s sermon recorded in Acts 2 experienced (see verse 37).
 - Additionally, in [Acts 10:44-48](#), we see that for those who have received the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, baptism is indeed appropriate.

- The working of the Holy Spirit will produce obedience to the teachings of Jesus (consider alongside [Matthew 28:20](#)).
- A second area of having begun the Christian life is that they must have manifested *some measure of repentance*.
 - We see in [Acts 2:38](#) that repentance comes before baptism.
 - In Matthew 3, although this is in reference to the baptism being done by John the Baptist, we see people coming to him, confessing their sins, and being baptized (3:6). And specifically to the Pharisees, John instructs them to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (3:8).

In summary then, we may say that those who are believers—having heard and believed the Gospel, responding in repentance and obedience—should be baptized.

How Should One Be Baptized?

Immersion

Having seen that it is believers who should be baptized, let us now determine how someone should be baptized. Baptism in the New Testament involved immersing the individual under the water and bringing them back up again. Why should we believe this?

- First, the English word “baptize” comes from Greek word “*baptizo*.” This word means, “to immerse; to plunge or dip” something into water. While there are other ways this word was used in Greek, this is the primary meaning in the New Testament.
- Second, there are several passages where this definition seems to be the only possible meaning.
 - In [Mark 1:10](#) we read that Jesus “came up out of the water.” This kind of language would not be used unless he had “gone down into the water.” Read verses 9 and 10 without the verse division illustrates this clearly: “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water...”
 - In [John 3:23](#) we read that “John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, *because water was plentiful there*, and people were coming and being baptized.” This would only be necessary if the people being baptized were being immersed.
 - This is presumably the same reason why we read in [Mark 1:5](#) that the people were going to John the Baptist to be baptized in the Jordan River. The river would provide enough water for such an immersion as described of Jesus in 1:10.
 - In [Acts 8:36-39](#) we see the Ethiopian eunuch excited to find a body of water large enough to be immersed. Once again, we read the language of going “down into the water” and coming “up out of the water.”
- Third, the imagery of being united with Christ in burial and resurrection used by Paul in [Romans 6:1-5](#) and [Colossians 2:11-13](#) seems to demand immersion.
 - We will learn more about this below. However, it is necessary to make a brief comment concerning Romans 6. While these verses do reference baptism, their

primary focus is not the ceremony with water – but rather, the focus is the implications of baptism.

In summary, then, we may say that when a person is baptized, they should be immersed and raised again from the water.

What Does Baptism Mean?

The sign which signifies the *washing of sins, being included in God's people, and being united with Christ in His death and resurrection*. Having seen who should be baptized and how they should be baptized, let us now determine what baptized means. As we briefly mentioned above, in Romans 6 and Colossians 2, Paul uses the imagery of immersion to depict someone being symbolically united with Christ in burial and resurrection. Let us consider some of the images which the NT writers use to describe baptism and their meanings.

Three Pictures

Washing Away Sins

The waters of baptism do symbolize a washing or cleaning from sin. This is specifically seen in [Acts 22:16](#) where we read “Rise and *be baptized and wash away your sins*, calling on his name.” The context of this verse is Paul’s conversion account (see 22:12-16).

- It is important to emphasize that this is a picture. The water itself does not wash away sin, it is not a matter of “removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” ([1 Peter 3:21](#)). (More on this will be mentioned below.)
- Although these next verses do not have a specific mention of baptism – and may not actually deal with baptism – they do help us to understand the concept of “washing” as it relates to conversion. And thus, as we consider the “washing away of sins” as a picture of baptism – we may consider these verses as we approach baptism.
 - In [1 Corinthians 6:11](#) we read, “*you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*” In the context of this verse, Paul had just listed the qualities of those who “will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (see 6:9-11). And these qualities were true of the Corinthians – but they were converted. Part of this conversion included a “washing.”
 - In [Titus 3:5](#) we read, “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, *by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.*” We see that the “washing” is really accomplished *by God* in our regeneration (a word meaning coming from death to life).

We would be right to say, then, that baptism is a sign of this washing – an outward sign of the inward reality.

Being Set Apart / Included in God's People

In the Old Testament, circumcision was the outward sign of being a part of God's covenant people. Baptism, while not the same, is similar to this. There are a few major differences between the Old Testament circumcision and the New Testament baptisms:

- First, circumcision was administered to infants (or people who wanted to become a part of Israel). Baptism was administered to those who have exercised faith in Christ
- Second, circumcision was administered to males only. Baptism was administered to both men and women.
- Third, circumcision meant inclusion into a theocratic national entity. Baptism meant inclusion into a kingdom "not of this world" that surpassed national identities.

Nonetheless, we see that Scripture draws a connection between the two in [Colossians 2:11-12](#).

- Here we read, "In him also you were *circumcised with a circumcision made without hands*, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the *circumcision of Christ*, having been *buried with him in baptism*, in which you were also *raised with him through faith* in the powerful working of God."
 - It is clear that Paul is drawing a connection between circumcision and baptism.
 - Significantly, both the mention of "circumcision" and "baptism" are tied to Christ! As above, we see these verses closely correspond with the language of conversion.

Thus, we would be right to say that baptism is a sign of being included in God's *New Covenant* people – the church, those who have experience "the washing" (see above) and have been "united with Christ" (see below).

Being United with Christ (Rom 8; Col 2)

The most significant picture of baptism is this – the believer's union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Not only does baptism vividly illustrate this doctrinal truth, but by doing so, it also provides a picture of the Gospel. As we will see, this image not only reflects Christ's work, but also how we should live now as Christians.

Death (Buried)

- Death of judgment – being united with Christ – entering His death
 - Remember times when God has used water as means of his judgment on disobedience. Here are 3 examples:
 - The flood ([Gen. 7:6–24](#)); The drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea ([Ex. 14:26–29](#)); and Jonah being thrown into the deep ([Jonah 1:7–16](#))
 - We can consider then, that when those who go into the waters for baptism, they are going into the waters of judgment. They, being united with Christ, are going to their justly deserved death.ⁱ
- But the death of judgment is not the only death which baptism symbolizes. In baptism we may also see the death to self & sin & the world. While many of these passage do not mention baptism, the language of death and union with Christ appropriately brings our attention the symbol of baptism.

- *To self* – In [Galatians 2:20](#) we read, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live.” Paul closely relates “the self” with “sin.” We read “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.”
- *To sin* – In [Galatians 5:24](#) we read, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Additionally, in a passage that directly mentions baptism, we read in [Romans 6:2-3](#), “How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”
- *To the World* – By seeing the two previous truths, we may conclude with this third. We read in [Galatians 6:14](#), “ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” In [1 John 2:15](#) and following, we see that love for the world is in opposition to the truth proclaimed in the former two points. See also [James 4:4](#); [Matthew 6:24](#).

Resurrection (New Life)

- Being united in Resurrection – Entering His life
 - In the same way that entering the waters symbolized entering our deserved death and judgment, so too raising from the waters symbolizes our raising with Christ. We pass through the judgment only on the basis of our being united with Christ. His perfect life, His righteousness, then, is our only boast!
 - Consider [Romans 4:25](#), “[Jesus our Lord] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”
 - See also [Ephesians 2:5-9](#); [Philippians 3:9](#); [Colossians 2:12](#)
- Just as Baptism symbolizes more than the death of judgment, so too baptism symbolizes more than the passing through of that judgment on the merits of Christ. In baptism we may also see that we are given new life, the life of Christ. While many of these passage do not mention baptism, the language of union with Christ appropriately brings our attention the symbol of baptism.
 - We read in [Romans 6:4](#), “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*.”
 - In [2 Corinthians 5:15-17](#) we see that part of being “a new creation” is recognizing that the new life has replaced the old and that we should “no longer live for [ourselves] but for him who for [our] sake died and was raised.”
 - We earlier quoted the first part of [Galatians 2:20](#), here is the second part: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
 - Finally, in [Colossians 3:1-17](#) we see many of the implications of this new life. Paul instructs the believers of certain things they should “put off & put on.” But it is all in the context of 3:1-3...

- “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

In summary, then, we may say that in baptism believers are receiving the sign which signifies the washing of sins, being included in God’s people, and being united with Christ in His death and resurrection.

- Another way of summarizing what happens in baptism is this: “Baptism pictures (i) Christ’s redemptive work, (ii) my response in faith (as I come to be baptized), and (iii) God application of the benefits of redemption to my life.”ⁱⁱ

Summary & Conclusion

Wayne Grudem concludes the major section of his discussion of the doctrine by saying something that is worth repeating here: “Certainly the Lord gave us baptism to strengthen and encourage our faith—and it should do so for everyone who is baptized and for every believer who witnesses a baptism.”ⁱⁱⁱ

It is our genuine prayer that you have learned something from this brief exploration of the topic of baptism. We hope that the church – especially this church – will be unified in their understanding of this important doctrine. We especially hope that those desiring to be baptized will now have a clearer grasp on the meaning of the event. We return to our summary of baptism which was stated at first:

The ceremony where believers—those who have heard and believed the Gospel—respond in repentance and obedience to the command of Jesus and in conformity to the practice of the church. In this ceremony, the believer is immersed and raised again from the water as sign signifying the washing of sins, being included in God’s people, and being united with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Are you wanting to be baptized? Would you like more information or want to talk to someone? We would love to hear from you! Call or email us using the contact information at the bottom of the page.

ⁱ See Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 968, footnote 7.

ⁱⁱ Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 980.

ⁱⁱⁱ Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 981.