

Dear Pastor \_\_\_\_\_,

There are many, many views on Baptism, even within Protestant Churches. Some people argue we don't need to be baptized to be a Christian, while others believe we cannot be saved unless we've been baptized.

However, the Bible is fairly clear on the details of what Baptism actually is.

Some of the confusion comes from definitions – others from simply ignoring Scripture. Before we get much further, let's make sure we're defining things correctly.

The original word for Baptism in Greek, "Baptisma", means "to immerse" or "to submerge". This would contradict many churches that practice "sprinkling" Baptism, where water is splashed on people.

According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon, there are three broad definitions of Baptism, which we have paraphrased and clarified below:

**1. It is used to speak of calamities and afflictions that overwhelm (submerge, immerse) someone.**

This meaning of the word is not used much, and it is not the one we use to describe water Baptism in the Church. However, Jesus often spoke of this sort of Baptism to describe the unimaginable suffering and death he was about to endure, and the martyrdom the Apostles would face for believing in Him.

Some Scripture on Baptism as affliction:

"But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the Baptism with which I am baptized?' 39 They said to Him, 'We are able.' And Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the Baptism with which I am baptized'" (Mark 10:38-39).

"But I have a Baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50)

**2. It is used to speak of John the Baptist's Baptism – the ritual purification of men by immersing themselves in the River Jordan while confessing their sins.**

It symbolized the cleansing of their former lives, dedicating themselves to a new life of repentance from sin, preparing their hearts for the benefits of the Messiah's kingdom soon to be set up. This is similar to the water Baptism of the Church, but it is missing Jesus, because it was done in anticipation of His arrival. Today, Jesus has come, so John's Baptism is no longer practiced.

Some Scripture on John the Baptist's Baptism:

"John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4).

“Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins” (Matthew 3:5-6).

Baptism was an important step towards people recognizing Jesus, as their repentance from sin and looking for the Messiah would help them see Him for Who He was. John said of Jesus, “This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’ 31 I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water” (John 1:30-31).

### **3. And finally, it is used to speak of Christian Baptism in the Church. Let’s look more at this.**

#### CHRISTIAN BAPTISM IN THE CHURCH

Immediately, we have a challenge. There are also different types of Baptisms related to the Church.

- A. Baptism by the Holy Spirit.
- B. Baptism by fire
- C. Water Baptism

#### BAPTISM BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit sometimes gets confused with Water Baptism, which is perhaps why some people think you must undergo Water Baptism before you can be saved. It is Baptism by the Holy Spirit that is necessary for salvation, not our immersion in water. What is Baptism by the Holy Spirit? It literally refers to the immersion or the submersion of a Believer in the Holy Spirit. It speaks to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a new Believer.

As Jesus promised us: “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know **Him because He abides with you and will be in you**” (John 14:16-18).

This is exactly what John the Baptist said Jesus would do when he came:

“I baptized you with water; but He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8).

Perhaps the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is sometimes confused with Water Baptism, because in the early Church, Water Baptism was practiced immediately after someone came to faith in Jesus (there was no delaying it, as some Christians do today), so the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (which comes immediately to anyone who genuinely puts their faith in Jesus from the heart) became synonymous with Water Baptism, which happened at the same time. Today, someone may come to faith in Jesus (and be baptized by the Spirit), but they may not get baptized by water until years later. The important thing is that they were Baptized by the Spirit – this is what salvation is.

The Holy Spirit was what made the clear distinction between John the Baptist’s Water Baptism and the Baptism of Christ:

“It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you

believed?’ And they said to him, ‘No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.’ 3 And he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ And they said, ‘Into John’s Baptism.’ 4 Paul said, ‘John baptized with the Baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’ 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying” (Acts 19:1-6).

This verse is important, because it shows that even though these people were Water Baptized in the name of Jesus, they didn’t receive the Holy Spirit until Paul laid his hands on them afterwards. So, not everyone who claims to have put their faith in Jesus and has been baptized by water may actually have been Baptized by the Holy Spirit – there are many false Believers in the church. Only God knows the heart of each person.

Some Scripture on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit:

“Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4-5).

“Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38).

“Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:14-17).

Peter explained that Gentiles who had been baptized by the Spirit (Salvation) should publicly be baptized with water: “For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 47 ‘Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?’ 48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days” (Acts 10:46-48).

Concerning how Gentiles received the Spirit, Peter said, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:15-17)

#### BAPTISM BY FIRE

Okay, so what about Baptism by fire? This is most likely the trials of Christians – the suffering and persecutions that come upon Believers in the world, which test us and cause us to focus our attention on eternity, not this present world.

Peter helps clarify this connection between trials and testing by fire: “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though **tested by fire**, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have

not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:6-8).

John the Baptist said, "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11).

## WATER BAPTISM

Christian Water Baptism is similar to John the Baptist's Baptism, but it has the full picture of Jesus' death and resurrection. The most important thing to know about Water Baptism is that it DOES NOT save us. However, Water Baptism is an important public and symbolic act of declaration that you are repenting of your former sins and setting yourself apart from the world for Christ. You symbolically "die" to the world – submersion beneath the water – and rise to a new life in Christ as you have been born again – rising again above the water.

Ananias told Paul, when he was blinded after seeing Jesus: "For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:15-16).

This verse could be misconstrued to say that water Baptism is what washes away our sins. But Peter tells clarifies for us:

"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, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him" (1 Peter 3:21b-22).

**Water Baptism does not wash away our sins, but it is the public, symbolic declaration of what does save us – namely our repentance, faith in Jesus, and Baptism by the Holy Spirit, which DOES wash away our sins.**

## WE ARE COMMANDED TO BAPTIZE NEW BELIEVERS

Water Baptism is a command given to the Church:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned'" (Mark 16:15-16).

## THE INCORRECT VIEW OF INFANT BAPTISM

Many churches practice infant Water Baptism (Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutherans, Anglicans, etc.) followed up by a test when the baptized children are old enough to understand the Gospel. This test is to make sure they understand the Gospel, and it "confirms" them as Believers.

But is this Biblical? Nowhere in Scripture do we read of an infant being baptized. Why would that be? Because Baptism is a sign of one's repentance from sin and dedicating one's own life to Jesus. Babies

and small children can't understand these things - the Gospel, repentance, and faith in Jesus. And they are not capable of making decisions.

Baptism is always done to adults or people old enough to understand what they are doing, because Baptism is a symbolic, public expression of dying to your old self – a symbolic death (submersion) and re-birth (rising again out of the waters), symbolizing being born-again to new life and to the resurrection of the dead:

“Therefore we have been buried with Him through Baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

Baptism is a decision each person has to make between themselves and God in good conscience. No one can do it for you. This rules out young children who are not of age yet to understand the Gospel, sin, repentance, etc. Some churches try to get around this by making infant Baptism more of a consecration or dedication of the child into the Church, which is contingent on a follow-up examination once they are older to “confirm” that they are actually Christians. This is a confusion of water Baptism and infant dedication.

#### INFANT BAPTISM VERSUS INFANT DEDICATION

The practice of water baptizing infants into the faith is unbiblical and does not make sense in light of the Gospel. My take on infant Baptism is that the churches that practice it have combined, or confused, water Baptism and infant dedication into one thing. While water Baptism and infant dedication are very good things, they cannot be combined. It is a good practice for a church to dedicate babies and young children to the Lord. This is nothing more than the child's parents and church body praying over the child and dedicating themselves to raise it in the truth of God's Word, asking God to look after and guide the child into salvation. But a child's dedication does not save the child – it cannot. Salvation is between each person and God.

#### INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD DEATH

It is possible that the church combined the idea of Water Baptism with Infant Dedication to get around the question of whether infants go to Heaven when they die. Rather than approach this Biblically, they decided to teach that if parents just had their infants baptized, they would be safe if they died.

Part of the struggle here is that the Bible doesn't speak much on this issue of whether or not babies and young children go to be with the Lord when they die. We do know God's character from Scripture, and He loves children, so it is impossible that they should perish. We have one important passage to support this idea in 2 Samuel, where David and Bathsheba's child from their adultery died. At the child's death, David astonished his servants by rising and eating from his fasting:

“Then his servants said to him, ‘What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.’ 22 He said, ‘While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, “Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.” 23 But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me” (2 Samuel 12:21-23).

Here, David takes comfort that he will see his child again when he goes to him, but he understands the child cannot return to him in this life. This is a strong Biblical case for infants and young children going to be with the Lord if they die.

Elsewhere, David also says to God, “Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother’s breasts. Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother’s womb” (Psalm 22:9-10). This would also seem to suggest that God takes care of infants and young children, for God looked after David from the time he was in his mother’s womb.

Surely this is a more Biblical approach than teaching that infants and young children can be baptized into the Church of Christ.

No group of people can make someone part of Christ’s Church without that person’s knowledge or consent.

#### BAPTISM RELATED TO JEWISH MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

One of the best illustrations of Baptism actually comes from Jewish marriage practice of the Biblical times. Jews practiced betrothal, where a man and a woman would become legally married, united in spirit, but not yet physically united until the wedding day.

When a woman became betrothed to her husband, part of the ritual of betrothal involved her submerging herself in a Mikvah (a traditional Jewish ritual pool or bath), set aside for Jewish purification and sanctification, which required the complete immersion of the body in the water. This immersion symbolized her transition from being single to being married. She was cleansing herself of her old desires, habits, and life.

When she rose from the water, clean, she was symbolizing that she was dedicating herself to her husband, focusing completely on preparing herself for her marriage to her husband. She rose sanctified in a new life, leaving her childhood interests, passions, and goals behind. Betrothals were public and celebrated, not done in secret.

This is a perfect illustration for the Church, because the Church has been betrothed to Jesus as His bride. And new Believers – new members of Christ’s Body are baptized in water publicly to symbolize their betrothal with Christ.

Paul illustrates this: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

When we are saved and baptized by the Spirit and baptized by water, we are joining ourselves to Jesus publicly as His betrothed. Just like in Jewish betrothal custom, where the man and woman were considered spiritually one person, “the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (1 Corinthians 6:17).

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).