

BAPTISM — IS IT A WORK OF GOD OR A WORK OF MAN?

For hundreds of years the Christian church continued to practice its belief that through baptism the Holy Spirit bestows a new spiritual status upon the one baptized, regardless of age. But around the 16th century some radical reformers began to place their emphasis upon what human beings can do and see, thereby denying the clear statements of Scripture regarding baptism's regenerating power. "Baptism . . . saves" (1 Peter 3:21).

DENOMINATION	BELIEFS ABOUT BAPTISM	TYPE OF BAPTISM	BELIEF IN BAPTISM OF INFANTS	BAPTISM REGENERATES, GIVES SPIRITUAL LIFE
Seventh Day Adventists	An ordinance, a symbolic ritual, not necessary to salvation. A time for person to express personal faith in Christ.	By immersion only.	No. Only those old enough to give expression of knowledge of their conversion. Children "dedicated" or "presented" to God.	
Baptists	A divine ordinance, a symbolic ritual, a sign of having already been saved, but not necessary for salvation.	By immersion only.	No. Baptism is an act of confession that is done by a converted person able to profess faith.	
Eastern Orthodox	The "Mystery" (Sacrament) is necessary because it confers forgiveness for both native sinfulness and actual transgressions.	By immersion 3 times (sprinkling accepted only in emergency).	Yes. Also receive Holy Communion and the Chrismation (anointing).	Yes.
Episcopal (Anglicans, Anglo-Catholics)	Necessary to salvation because it conveys spiritual rebirth.	By immersion or pouring.	Yes.	Yes. Anglo-Catholic, but "low" Episcopalians do not.
Lutherans	A vehicle for God's Spirit to bestow the necessary new life-giving status upon sinners (Titus 3:5).	By sprinkling, pouring, or immersing.	Yes.	Yes.
Methodists (Arminians, Wesleysans)	Baptism not necessary to salvation, since it is an outward sign of one's membership in the Christian community.	By sprinkling, pouring, or immersion.	Yes.	Yes.
Presbyterians	An ordinance, a symbolic ritual, and a seal of the adult believer's present faith.	By sprinkling, pouring, or immersing.	Yes, to indicate membership in the Covenant Community of their Christian parents.	

Unit 1: Ecumenical (Various "holiness" groups, Christian Missionary Alliance, Assemblies of God)	Water baptism is an ordinance, a symbolic ritual used to witness to having accepted Christ as personal Savior.	By immersion. Also stress the necessity of a "second" baptism of a special outpouring from the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in unintelligible language.	No. But dedicate children to God, asking His blessing on them.	
Quakers (Religious Society of Friends, and the Mennonites)	Only an external symbol that is no longer to be practiced.	Do not believe in baptism of water, but only in an inward, ongoing purification of the human spirit in a life of discipline led by the Holy Spirit.		
Roman Catholic	Necessary for the infusion of the sanctifying power called grace that starts one on the path to salvation.	Primarily by sprinkling.	Yes.	Yes.
Salvation Army	Do not baptize anyone today. Believe it was to be done only at the time of Christ.			
United Church of Christ (Evangelical and Reformed Churches, and the Congregationalist Churches)	Not necessary for salvation because it is only an outward ritual.	By sprinkling.	No. Baptism administered at the time of Confirmation. Infants are "presented" or "dedicated" to God by parents or sponsors.	
Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints (Mormons) (Anti-Trinitarian)	An ordinance essential to salvation for the removal of sins and entrance into the church.	By immersion performed by a person holding proper priesthood authority.	No. Only those 8 years old and older.	
Jehovah Witnesses (Anti-Trinitarian)	Baptism not necessary for salvation since it is only a symbol of one's attitude of being dead to sin.	By immersion, but not done in their meeting places (Kingdom Halls).	No.	

Birth is always a gift from God, and not something we do for ourselves. Christians who follow the practice of the early church, as do the Lutherans, declare that baptism is more than a human act remembering some action of God in the past, and more than a human act of obedience to a divine command. Baptism is rebirth (John 3:3-5), initiated and carried out by God. Baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21) because the Holy Spirit is enveloped in its waters to bring the baptized into a new life of salvation through connection with Jesus Christ (Titus 3:5; Romans 6:4).

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Does God do something special through baptism? Over the centuries millions of Christians have said, “Yes! God works in the waters of baptism, not only giving a sign and seal of His grace, but actually delivering to the baptized His regenerating Spirit.” Others, however, who have permitted their understanding of baptism to be guided by mere human reason and sight, declare that baptism is merely man’s response to the grace of God obtained elsewhere.

Below are some common objections to the Biblical teaching of God’s saving power in baptism. Each is followed by a Scripture-based rebuttal.

OBJECTION	REBUTTAL
Isn't joining the church an act of a person who decides to believe in Jesus, and not based on a mere ritual like baptism?	The Church is not like a club, made up of individuals who on their own decide to join (1 Cor. 2:12-14), but is a family established by its head Jesus Christ (Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5), a new community resulting from His Spirit's call (Jn. 3:5; 15:16; 1 Cor. 12:3). God's action always precedes the existence of faith in any individual, regardless of age.
Baptism in the Spirit is the only regenerating baptism. Water baptism accomplishes nothing special.	The distinction is artificial. Christian baptism is baptism in the Spirit. What God has joined together we are not to put asunder. The Spirit comes to us enveloped in baptism's waters (Jn. 3:5; Titus 3:5). Peter states clearly that through baptism the gift of the Spirit is given (Acts 2:33).
If infants should be baptized, why doesn't the Bible say so?	What is assumed need not always be expressed. The Bible always includes infants and families in its understanding of “nations” (Ex. 11:5; Josh. 8:35; Isa. 13:16; Ezek. 9:6). Jesus did not condemn Judaism for circumcising 8-day-old children, or baptizing the infants of those who converted to Judaism.
Since adults are first taught, then baptized, doesn't the same rule apply to infants and children?	Jesus's command to disciple all nations coordinates teaching and baptism, but does not specify sequence. The order makes sense with adults but cannot be used as the reason against baptizing infants. To assume this is to hold the error that a person contributes to his salvation through offering some type of rational thought. Infants are baptized with the purpose that they enter into Christ's church for a life-long learning of His Word (2 Pet. 3:18).
Isn't the baptizing of infants a denial of the necessity of faith?	The Holy Spirit desires to create faith in all. He can come even to a child in the womb (Jer. 1:5; Lk. 1:15). He also comes in baptism's water to bestow faith in infants and children (Ps. 22:9-10; Matt. 21:15-16).
A child is not worthy to be baptized because he/she has not made a conscious and firm declaration of faith.	Saving faith is never self-centered or self-originated. No one, regardless of age, infants or adults, is worthy of God's gracious activity, nor is able to accept God or create his/her own faith (1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:7; 9:16). But what is impossible for all people, including infants, children, and adults, is possible with God (Matt. 19:26).

OBJECTION	REBUTTAL
Baptism should be limited to those who have reached the "age of accountability."	There is no Biblical statement for waiting until such an age. Accountability before God begins at conception (Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Jn. 3:6). Baptism is like the Old Testament rite of circumcision, and Jewish children were circumcised when just eight days old.
Isn't it enough that infants and children are simply "presented" or "dedicated to God," asking for His blessing upon them?	Jesus did not command us to do just these, but to baptize "all nations." Infant "dedication" or "presentation" does not carry with it the divine promise of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness, as does baptism (Acts 2:38).
Aren't infants and children of believing parents already sanctified (1 Cor. 7:14) and therefore not in need of baptism?	While Jewish boys were born "in holiness," they still had to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. Christ says that infants are an example of how to receive God's kingdom (Mk. 10:15). Only by bringing them to baptism can we be sure that infants have been given Christ's kingdom (Rom. 6:3), and are under the influence of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies through water and Word (Jn. 3:5).
If baptism is so powerful, then why do so many who were baptized as infants no longer live an active Christian life?	Human unfaithfulness (for example, the children of Israel during the forty years in the wilderness) does not negate God's faithfulness (Rom. 3:1-4). Scripture teaches that believers can and do at times wander away from the faith (Matt. 13:5-7, 19-22).
Since the thief on the cross was saved without baptism, baptism is not necessary to salvation.	We cannot assume that the thief wasn't baptized, since John the Baptizer baptized a great number of Jews in and around Jerusalem (Jn. 3:23; Matt. 3:5). Only unbelief damns; not the lack of baptism. If not being baptized is symptomatic of a person's rejecting the promises of God's Word, then that person is in spiritual danger (Lk. 7:30).
Isn't baptizing infants giving the wrong impression of believing in "magical" water?	Only if we believe that baptism is mere water, rather than the water and the Word specifically connected to Christ's command and promises (Eph. 5:26; Matt. 28:19-20).

CONCLUSION: Baptism is not a mere ritual of remembrance. It is an active carrier of divine rescue; thus, baptism is an objective fact that is the foundation of Christian joy and comfort. Baptism brings the Holy Spirit, who connects the newly baptized to the new life (Jn. 3:5; Titus 3:5-7) resident in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 22:16). This new birth is given to all sinners, regardless of age (Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:25-28; Col. 2:13, 14). Baptism now saves you (1 Pet. 3:21).