

The Relation Of Faith And Baptism

Larry Smetak

In the relation of faith and baptism, at least three views are possible; baptism begins faith, baptism plus faith, baptism symbolizes faith. The first of these is that baptism initiates a person into a covenant relationship with God. Luther wrote concerning the question, "What does baptism confer?" His answer was: "It worketh forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and confers everlasting salvation on all who believe." Later he wrote, "Baptism is called a 'washing of regeneration' because through baptism (we) receive a new life in Christ." The order is baptism, teaching, then faith.

Next is that view that baptism plus faith must be included before one can properly be saved. The formula is stated as follows: "(a) Faith, (b) repentance, (c) confession, (d) baptism. Baptism is connected with the remission of sins, salvation, and the act of putting on Christ." All four of these steps are considered necessary to enter the Kingdom of God.

Finally is that view that baptism comes after salvation, and is only symbolic in its meaning. One of the Bible distinctives of the Baptists states: "Only believers are to be baptized, which excludes not only unbelievers who are adults but infants who neither believe or disbelieve. Baptism is not a step in receiving Christ but a testimony that one has already received Christ." The formula to be noted here is faith plus

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nothing brings salvation. Baptism follows only as the believer is obedient to Christ His Lord and Savior.

What is the evidence of the Bible regarding the relation between faith and baptism? This study will concentrate on the Book of Acts, noting the practice of the early church. The proofs will be sought from three areas: Bible implications, Bible practice, and Bible commands.

Bible Implications

Implications are not as strong as direct assertions of practice or commands, yet they cannot be overlooked.

Logical steps of salvation. If one were to logically set down the steps of salvation, an order will show up no matter which procedure one would follow. As seen in the introduction; the first group, would establish an order of baptism, confirmation, and faith. Group two would establish this as faith plus baptism equals salvation. The third group would suggest the order of faith alone for salvation, with baptism following in personal obedience to Christ.

One cannot be saved without baptism in the first two groupings. In the third, baptism is not included in salvation. This distinction is important, and will be considered in greater detail at a later point.

Membership as well, requires many things. In the first group one might be a member, even though unsaved. Also such a one would truly have had no choice in the matter if the choice was made for him at his infant baptism. But the other two groups require faith and baptism before membership. Thus, there is a great variety and there are combinations of possibilities of the requirements for membership. Note the order followed by some where there is no evidence of salvation or faith before they are accepted into the church.

Symbolism. Romans 6:3–5 tells of the intended symbolism of baptism. The verse reads, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death." The picture is that of burial in water showing death to the sinful life which was previously lived. The words "like as" and "likeness" are normal words showing symbolism. As Christ was baptized in the river Jordan, so our baptism should be immersion (see Matt. 3:13–17). An

important thing to notice is that Christ had not sinned, and baptism was not likely to give Him salvation, thus to the sinner it can be of no similar benefit.

By viewing other positions, burial is hardly pictured in the sprinkling of a baby, nor can a baby be an obedient follower of Christ. The order appears reversed when infants are considered; they can neither choose God, nor follow in obedience. Symbols are only pictures, and the emphasis

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of this picture is the faith already real to the believer, that obedience in following Christ follows from the heart.

Historical testimony. Many leaders of the past centuries have left a word of testimony regarding the mode of baptism in the early centuries.

A Roman Catholic Encyclopedia admits: "The most ancient form usually employed was unquestionably immersion. This is not only evident from the writings of the Fathers and the early rituals of both the Latin and Oriental churches, but it can also be gathered from the Epistles of St. Paul, who speaks of baptism as a bath (Eph. 5:26; Rom. 6:4; Tit. 3:5). In the Latin church, immersion seems to have prevailed until the twelfth century."

Alexander Stordza of the Greek Orthodox Church concludes: "The Church of the West, then, departed from the example of Jesus Christ; she has obliterated the whole sublimity of the exterior sign. Baptism and immersion are identical."

Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran Church, said: "Baptism is called in the Greek language *baptismos*, in Latin *meriso*, which means to plunge something entirely into water, so that the water closes over it."

As well John Calvin, the great reformer, notices: "The word baptize signifies to immerse; and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the early church."

Though this list is short, the emphasis from leaders of the various churches is that the mode of baptism was originally immersion, but was changed to be more easily administered, and that babies might be early participants. With this change, the truth of the symbolism, of faith in Christ and death to sin, was done away.

Greek terms. Several words are used in the New Testament to provide the English translation of baptize or baptism. The following list is from Hiscox, as the possible Greek words are listed: "(1) *Baptizo* is found eighty times in the New Testament, and is a derivative from *bapto*. *Baptisma*, a baptism, an immersion, is found twenty two times, and *baptismos*, the act of baptizing, or immersing, four times, both formed from *baptizo*. Scholars have abundantly proven that this word means to dip, plunge, or immerse. (2) *Bapto* is found three times in the New Testament, and also means to dip, but is never used to describe baptism. (3) *Louo* is found six times, and means to wash. (4) *Nipto* is found seventeen times, and means also to wash. (5) *Breko* is found seven times, and means to wet, to moisten. (6) *Rantizo* is found four times, and means to sprinkle. (7) *Keo* is found many times in its various combinations, and means to pour. (8) *Katharizo* is found thirty times and means to purify."

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With such a great variety of possibilities, God did not have to be confused as He directed the writers of Scripture. If baptism is a sprinkling of water, the term *rantizo* will be found in every case. If pouring is intended, the word *keo* will be used. If the meaning is immersion, *baptizo* will be the term used. If it really does not matter, the terms will probably be interchanged from passage to passage. Of course God's intentions are clear. In every context where baptism is mentioned, the only word found is *baptizo*. God intended baptism to be by immersion only.

From these simple observations, the implications are obvious. The Scripture presents a definite order between faith and baptism. The symbol of baptism is burial to the old life, raised to new life. From men in the past it has been seen that the Scriptural pattern has been set aside for convenience. Finally, the variety

of Greek words present several possible modes of baptism, except God chose the one that means immersion, and by-passed the others in any context on baptism. These proofs are strengthened by direct statements of the Bible.

Bible Practice

Order is given. Here are a list of references from the book of Acts noting the order between faith and baptism: Simon “believed also, and when he was baptized” (8:13); Eunuch was saved (8:37), and baptized (8:38–39); Paul believed (9:5–6), was baptized (9:18) and served in the church (9:19–22); Cornelius believed (10:44–45) and was baptized (10:47).

Also groups of people are noted in Acts 8:12, “Many people, when they believed Philip ... they were baptized,” 16:32–33, To the jailor, “he spake the Word ... and was baptized,” 18:8 says, “They believed and were baptized;” 19:4–5 they believed, “and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” In no case is this order reversed, so the Biblical conclusion must be that faith preceded their immersion.

Is it a part of salvation? There are many examples of people who believed but never were baptized. This would include the Greeks at Antioch (Acts 11:21), the Roman Deputy Sergius Paulus (13:12), some in Antioch in Pamphylia (13:48), and some in Iconium (14:1). The best example would be the thief on the cross (Lk. 23:43), who believed, and Christ told him, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

The emphasis is not that baptism has no part in the believer’s life, but it would appear to have been left out of Scripture to avoid an error that it is to be included in salvation. The Scriptural order is faith, obedience in baptism, and then church membership. Acts 2:38–47 uses the terms, “repent” (v. 38), “baptized” (v. 41), and added unto them

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(vv. 41, 47). That many if not all of those who believed on Paul’s first missionary journey were baptized can only be speculative, but verses like Acts 15:41 and 16:5 mention that these believers had formed local churches, which Paul returned to, in order to teach them.

Household baptism. The inference of this argument by some is that if the whole family was baptized, there must have been a baby that was included. Several Scriptures are given which seem to be interpreted in this way.

Acts 16:14–15 says Lydia was one “whose heart the Lord opened ... and when she was baptized, and her household,” she invited Paul to stay with her family. It might be argued that the verse can apply only to Lydia as the one who had faith. This would appear to be true, except for the footnote God gives in verse 40 at the end of the chapter: they “entered into the house of Lydia, and when they had seen the brethren,” they departed. The term brethren in New Testament usage is a term for Christian believers. They were baptized upon their testimony of faith.

Also Acts 16:31–33 says that Paul told to the jailer “the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.” The jailer “was baptized, he and .all his, straightway.” The Bible says faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). The result was faith on the part of each member of the family, who then obeyed and followed His example by being baptized. Finally, I Corinthians 1:13–17 gives Paul’s testimony regarding those he had baptized: “I thank God that I baptized hone of you, but Crispus and Gaius ... And I baptized also the household of Stephanas ... For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach this gospel.” From this it must be inferred that since Paul baptized so few, he would be even less likely to baptize one who had not believed in Christ. From Acts 18:8 it is learned that Crispus “believed on the Lord with all his house.” It must be considered by any who would stress infant baptism, that Paul would have caused many to fail to gain salvation by his stubborn practice of never being involved in baptism, unless baptism was not a part of it. Rather than show the weakness of believer’s baptism, this verse tears at the heart of infant baptism by Paul’s example.

The words of Christ are often quoted as He blessed the children and says “of such is the kingdom of God.” This cannot support infant sprinkling on any ground. Note the context; neither salvation by faith, nor baptism are mentioned. Christ is only taking note of their childlike trust, and noting that they are the object of divine affection. Christ also never got involved with baptizing (see John 4:1–2), and whenever He saw people saved. His words were usually “Thy faith hath saved thee,” as in Luke 7:50. One of His few references to baptism is Mark 16:16. The weight of His words is upon believing: “He that believeth not shall be damned.”

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Method of baptism is immersion. As the context of some of the verses on baptism are studied, the mode intended by Christ comes into open view. Verses of importance are: “Baptized into His death. Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead” (Rom. 6:3–5); “Buried with Him in baptism, ... raised” (Col. 2:12); “And Jesus when He was baptized went up straightway out of the water” (Matt. 3:16); “They went down into the water ... And when they were come up out of the water” (Acts 8:38–39); “There was much water there, and they came and were baptized” (John 3:23). The many synonyms used here speak of death, being raised up, went down, came up, out of the water, and much water. The Bible only speaks of baptism by the form of immersion in much water.

The question still remains, has this mode been changed in the Word of God? The answer would have to be no, once again. The Greek word, as noted previously is a variation of *baptizo* in every case. The only translation of this word is immersion. But more important is it that this, does not change to *keo* (pour) or *rantizo* (sprinkle) later in, Acts or in the Epistles. The form never changes from the time of Christ, the early church, nor the Gentile church., Therefore God intended that it remain immersion only; the changing has been by the whim of human beings.

Several principles ought to be noticed from a study of this section: (1) the Scriptural order is always faith then baptism; (2) there are examples of some who were not baptized, which must imply that it has no part of salvation, even though they truly believed; (3) in all examples of household baptisms, faith always precedes that baptism, and therefore it was believer’s baptism; (4) neither Paul nor Christ placed an emphasis on baptism, realizing that men would claim it was a part of their salvation; (5) from the portrayal in Scripture, baptism is always an immersion in water completely. The practice in the Bible is far more weighty than the opinions of men, who have been known to change if the situation would warrant it, at least to them.

Bible Commands

Is baptism for the Jews only? Some noting that the book of Acts is a transition from Judaism to Christianity like to ask: “Were not Jews the only ones baptized in the New Testament?” An outline of the Book of Acts would note this transition to the Church age: The Church in Jerusalem (1–7); The Church in Samaria and Antioch (8–12); The Church in World Outreach (13–28). Therefore from chapter 13 on the program is mainly to the Gentiles.

Within this third division there are many examples of baptism of Paul’s converts. These include Lydia of Thyatira (Acts 16:15), Philippian

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jailer and family (16:33), Cornelius (10:1), and Crispus (18:8). Other indications that this has not ceased would include the words of Christ in the Great Commission to preach, baptize, and teach “to the end of the world” (Matt. 28:18–20). Paul included in his epistles teaching about baptism in such Gentile churches as Rome (Rom. 6:3–5), Corinth (I Cor. 1:11–17), Galatia (Gal. 3:27), Ephesus (Eph. 4:5), and Colosse (Col. 2:12). Baptism for this day is not only taught, but emphasized.

Circumcision and baptism. The teaching of some groups to give additional proof for infant baptism, is that babies in the Old Testament were circumcised, and since this is done away in the New Testament, it has been replaced by baptism among the Gentiles.

A study of Acts 15 and the decision of the Church at Jerusalem ought to be considered at this point. Much of the discussion was about the problems of placing the law known to the Jews, upon the new Gentile believers. The decision notes that circumcision was not to be commanded unto the Gentiles (v. 24), nor was it in the list of necessary things stated by James (v. 20). If baptism was to replace circumcision, here if anywhere that notation ought to have been made. The decision was completely in favor of salvation by faith, and apart from any work of righteousness that man might do.

Command to be baptized. Are there found in the Scriptures definite commands that a believer ought to be baptized? To begin with, it is noted on several occasions that it was the desire of the new convert to be baptized immediately: “When they believed ... they were baptized” (Acts 8:12); “What doth hinder me to be baptized?” (8:36); “He received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized” (9:18); “He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized” (16:33).

Peter in his sermons preached for decisions that would result in the baptism of the hearers. His message was a command to be baptized. “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38); “And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (10:48).

Christ also commanded all who would believe to be baptized. His words of instruction to His followers are recorded in Matthew 28:19–20: “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” The formula is to preach, baptize, and teach. The command is to reach all nations, and to baptize all believers. The commission will end at the return of Christ for His bride the Church at the rapture. The command is given as the Scriptural method of reaching and teaching new followers. Obedience in all three areas is commanded

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both to that one who carries the message, and also those who believe and need to grow in the knowledge of Christ and the Bible.

Several additional principles are noted in this section. Baptism is first of all an ordinance given to the church; it had its beginnings with John the Baptist, and its use by Gentile churches has been noted. This is not to be related to circumcision, nor salvation, for faith must precede it, as it did in every Biblical reference. Finally, it is a command of obedience from its symbolism, and the testimony of Peter and Christ.

The intent of this study has been to examine three general views regarding faith and baptism, and to set forth the Scriptural teaching on these two doctrines. From the entire study many Biblical principles stand out and make a fitting conclusion to this study.

Biblical implications are valid only as they fit the complete teaching of the Bible. Implications noted include: what is the logical relationship between faith, baptism, and church membership. By reversing that order an unregenerate church membership would result. Next, it is only symbolic and therefore an ordinance, not a sacrament. Again, by noting the testimony of religious leaders, they speak of baptism as immersion and must admit that they have changed from the Bible method. Finally, the Greek term *baptizo* itself means immerse. The other possible terms which could have been used were avoided and left out by God so that the intended meaning might remain clear.

Apart from these Biblical implications there are many Bible commands and practices that must be considered. The Scripture follow, a definite order of faith then baptism. It has also been noted that baptism has no part in the salvation of people today; the best Biblical example would be the thief on the cross, who never had the opportunity to be baptized, but who Christ said would be with Him in paradise. Next, the teaching of Scripture concerning household baptisms would favor the view that each one in the family personally had faith in Christ first. Again, the Scriptural method would be in favor of immersion in “much water” as noted in John 3:23. Other notations would make this an ordinance of the church, not a Jewish rite.

Neither would baptism replace circumcision, simply because the Scriptures never mention such an important change as this. Finally, the Bible commands baptism as an act of obedience; it is a picture of death to sin, and a new life in Christ.

Bible principles have stood the test of time. Any deviations have only added to the confusion of religions in the world, with the resulting turning of men from the true gospel. Therefore, these principles ought to be followed.

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