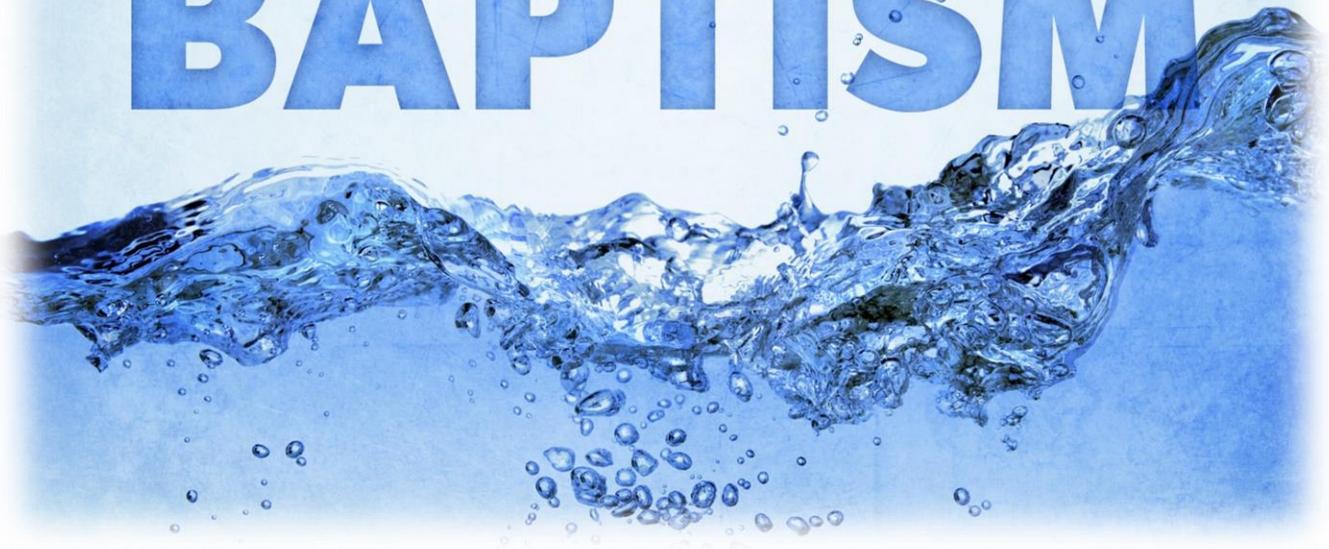


BAPTISM



What is Baptism?

A Brief Overview

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A Brief Overview of Baptism

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What is Baptism?

There are many questions people have regarding baptism. For example, should a person be baptized? When should a person be baptized? How old do they have to be? Is baptism simply a sign or a rite of passage or is it a work of God? And there are many more questions!

The purpose of this overview isn't to try to answer every single question you might have, but to look at some of the most important questions and to encourage you to start to think through the biblical understanding baptism. This overview is designed in more of Question and Answer format. And, to make things a little easier, most of the pertinent bible passages are quoted in full.

Should a Person be Baptized?

Yes, Jesus clearly said that as we make disciples, we are to baptize them. In fact, being a disciple (follower) of Jesus meant being baptized. You cannot separate one from the other. In other words, *we must never separate Baptism from Christ; it exists only because Christ commanded it.*

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (19) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

15 And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.
16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.
Mark 16:15–16

The Apostles also understood Jesus' command to baptize. A perfect example is after Peter gave his sermon at Pentecost.

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (38) And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (39) For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." Acts 2:37-39

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What is the Nature of Baptism?

Scripture describes the nature of baptism in a number of ways. Baptism is about:

Forgiveness of Sin

In the New Testament, baptism is first introduced by John-the-Baptist. A lot of people rejected John's baptism because they said he didn't have the authority to do it.

And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (24) Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. (25) The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' (26) But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." Mat 21:23-26

Yet, if we look at the prophecy concerning John's birth, we see that from the very beginning he was appointed by God to prepare the way for Jesus. Specifically, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, (77) to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, Luke 1:76-77

How did John provide forgiveness of sin? Through baptism.

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Mark 1:4

And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Luke 3:3

Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. Acts 13:24

Is the forgiveness of sin associated with baptism after John the Baptist?

Yes, the first baptism after Pentecost was a baptism for forgiveness of sin.

38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you 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.

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Being Born Again

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (5) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. John 3:4-6

Being Regenerated and Renewed by the Power of the Holy Spirit

4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:3-7

Salvation

21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a 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

Washing Away of Sin

16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.' Acts 22:16

Being Dead to Sin to Alive in Christ.

3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. Ro 6:3-4

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Ga 3:27

Sanctification

26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, Eph 5:26



Question: Who has the ability to truly forgive sin, to bring new life, regeneration, salvation and sanctification?

Answer: God alone.

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Is Baptism a Work of Man or a Work of God?

The heart of the baptismal question is this: Is baptism simply a thing that I do to show my acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior, or is baptism something that God does? In essence, is baptism a work of man or a work of God?

One reason we discount the importance of baptism and what God does through baptism is that we don't believe that we are truly dead in our sin. Rather, we think that we might have made mistakes and though we might be drowning, we can still somehow reach up and grab ahold of God's promises. But Scripture says something totally different. We're not bobbing in the water gasping for our last breath. We're at the bottom of lake. We are totally dead in our sin.

as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; (11) no one understands; no one seeks for God. (12) All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (13) "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." (14) "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." (15) "Their feet are swift to shed blood; (16) in their paths are ruin and misery, (17) and the way of peace they have not known." (18) "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 3:10-18

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Ephesians 2:1-3



Question: What can a dead person do?

Answer: Nothing. (Absolutely nothing)

Question: Then who does the work (forgive sin, to bring new life, regeneration, salvation and sanctification) in baptism?

Answer: God alone.

How Does Baptism Work?

As seen above, the promises associated with baptism are that He will regenerate His people, liberate them from the moral bondage of original sin, cleanse their souls from guilt and purify them so they can enter into a saving relationship with Him. *This is the same message of the Gospel. Therefore, baptism confers all divine spiritual blessings just as the Gospel because it is water connected with the Gospel promises of grace and salvation.*

Why Do We Use Water?

If baptism is the same as the Gospel message, why use water? Water is important for baptism because God declared it important. But the water in baptism is just that - water. There is nothing special about the water itself

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but it is graciously given to use to help us understand what God's word promises. *Baptismal water is the visible means by which we see God's word made manifest.* It is a visible means of His grace given to us.

When the water is combined with the Word, the power of God is made manifest. The dead are brought back to life. This is the Gospel message. What the Holy Spirit does through the Gospel, working and strengthening faith, He does also through Baptism.

4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:3–7

Finally, baptism “is not simply plain water, but water placed in the setting of God's Word and commandment and made holy by them. It is nothing else than God's water, not that the water itself is nobler than other water but that God's Word and commandment are added to it.”¹

Must I Be Immersed in Water?

It should be noted the bible is clear that water must be used baptism. The question then asked is, how much water makes for a valid baptism. Or, put another way, “Must I be immersed in water for it to be a valid baptism?”

The short answer is no. Baptism can mean immersion, but it can also mean a washing of part of one's body. For example, in Mark 7, we are told that the Pharisees would not eat unless they had washed in this ceremonial way, especially after coming from the marketplace (vv. 3b–4). It is interesting that the word translated as “wash” in verse 4 is baptizo, and it clearly does not imply full-body immersion. Likewise, in Luke 11:38, we read of a Pharisee who was astonished that Jesus did not “wash” before dinner. Again, the word baptizo is used here, and again it clearly does not mean total immersion in water. Sometimes baptizo is used in classical Greek simply to mean “to bathe or wash,” and we see examples of that usage in these passages.

But didn't John-the-Baptist immerse everyone? In fact, Scripture never says that people were immersed when they went down into the river, merely that they were baptized there. Also, we have ancient Christian art that depicts people being baptized in a river, but they are standing almost waist-deep in the water and the one who is doing the baptizing is scooping up water from the river and pouring it on the heads of the recipients. It appears the recipients went into the water not to be immersed but so that it would be a simple matter to pour water over their heads.

Another New Testament narrative that is cited to support immersion is Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, recorded in Acts 8. Luke writes that Philip and the eunuch “went down into the water” (Acts 8:38), and there Philip baptized (*baptizo*) the man. Again, however, the text does not specifically say that the eunuch was immersed. It does say that “they came up out of the water” (v. 39), but clearly this phrase does not mean that

¹ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (p. 458). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

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both Philip and the eunuch went under the water before coming up again. It simply means that they climbed the bank of the river, just as they had descended it. Here again, the mode of the baptism is not specifically revealed.²

From the Diadache, an early church “manual” from the late first century or early 2nd century (between 70 – 150 AD), we find the following:

But concerning baptism, thus shall ye baptize Having first recited all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living (running) water. But if thou hast not living water, then baptize in other water; and if thou art not able in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, then pour water on the head thrice in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let him that baptizeth and him that is baptized fast, and any others also who are able; and thou shalt order him that is baptized to fast a day or two before. (Chapter 7, translation by J. B. Lightfoot)

The writer of the Diadache was strict about the use of the Trinitarian formula in baptism, but was flexible as to the mode that was employed. **So, from the earliest days, Christians used a variety of modes to baptize.**³

Why Do We Have to Baptise in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

Baptism is a sanctifying and cleansing water by virtue of the word (Gospel) connected with it, in which Christ freely offers to all men the merits which He secured when “He gave Himself” into death for the sins of the whole world. *Every true baptism consequently is always in relation to Christ and because of this also in relation to the Holy Trinity.*⁴

Notice also that we are to be baptized into the full name of God.

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

To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by human beings but by the fullness of God himself. Although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God’s own act.⁵

² Sproul, R. C. (2011). *What Is Baptism?* (First edition, Vol. 11, pp. 51–52). Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust.

³ Ibid

⁴ Mueller, J. T. (1999). *Christian dogmatics* (electronic ed., p. 490). St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

⁵ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (p. 457). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

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What About Infant Baptism?

Out of all of the questions about baptism, this one is, perhaps, the most contentious. Should infants be baptized? When we look through the New Testament, it seems like all of the examples of baptism in the New Testament are of adults. Does this mean that infants were not baptized? No. To say that infants cannot be baptized is an argument from silence (i.e. the Bible is “silent” and doesn’t give examples of infant baptism so we must conclude that you can’t baptize them). However, it would just as easy to say infants *were* baptized because it was so taken as granted as to not worth mentioning. But that is also an argument from silence. No matter if you argue for or against infant baptism, you must make what is called an accumulative argument. In other words, you need to look at a variety of scripture to make your case.

Does the Bible Command or Prohibit Infant Baptism?

Let’s start off with the most important question: Does the Bible command or prohibit infant baptism? In other words, *does God say you must or you cannot baptize infants?* The simple answer is that the Bible has neither a specific command to baptize infants nor does it say you cannot baptize infants. As an added point, the Bible never states how young or how old a person must be to be baptized.

But if the Bible’s example of baptism are only of adults, doesn’t that suggest that only adults can be baptized?

The answer of adults only isn’t as clear cut as you may think. Of the accounts of baptisms in the book of Acts and following, three of those accounts report the baptism not only of a particular adult but of his or her household, which may have included infants. Some New Testament scholars, such as Oscar Cullman of Switzerland, argue that the Greek word *oikos*, which is translated as “household” in the New Testament, not only may include infant children but has specific reference to infants.

15 And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” Acts 16:15

32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Acts 16:32–33

(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 1 Corinthians 1:16

Also, unlike the society of Jesus’ day, Jesus saw children as ones to be loved and to be brought to him. In fact, he desired infants to come to him and said that to them belongs the kingdom of God.

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. (14) But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Mark 10:13-14

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15 *Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them.* And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 17 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” Luke 18:15–17

Doesn't an Infant Need to Have Faith to be Baptized?

In instances of adult baptism in the New Testament, we see that there is pattern of repentance and faith. Therefore, we affirm that for adults the sequence of repentance and faith is right and proper. Yet, if that sequence is necessary for adults, how could we baptize an infant if they cannot repent or (seemingly) have faith?

There are two lines of reasoning. 1) Baptism as Covenant 2) God's sovereignty

Baptism Corresponds to the Covenant of Circumcision

While we refer the Bible as the Old Testament and New Testament, in reality, the word testament is a Latin translation for the word covenant. So, you could say that we have the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. A covenant is solemn agreement made between two parties. When you look closely through the Bible, you'll see that covenants are how God relates to mankind. A covenant is how God the Father has chosen to communicate to us, to redeem us, and to guarantee us eternal life in Jesus.⁶ If you wish to further understand God's covenants, you can read through the book of Hebrews.

While there is much more that could be said about covenants, understanding covenant theology in regards to baptism is important for several reasons:

- We learn that God deals with man covenantally.
- Since a covenant is an agreement, it is a promise made by God.
- Because we can rely on God's word for eternity, we can take great comfort in His covenant promising us eternal life in His Son.⁷

In a simple manner, we can say that while man continually fails to keep his covenant with God, God never fails to keep His covenant with man.

In the Old Testament, one of the covenants that God gave to the Israelites is the covenant of circumcision.

10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 *He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised.* Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, 13 both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Genesis 17:10–13

⁶ Pastor Tom Parrish, Baptism workshop

⁷ Ibid

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At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time." (3) So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. (4) And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt. (5) Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. (6) For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD; the LORD swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. (7) So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way. (8) When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. (9) And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. Joshua 5:2-9

In both instances, circumcision meant a new identity. Whoever was circumcised was now part of God's family. They were part of God's family because of God's will and word. This included infants (eight days old).

In the Old Testament, the covenant of circumcision was given to infants because:

1) Their parents had professed faith and therefore the parents' faith was standing in place for the infants. For example, Abraham believed as an adult and then received the sign of the covenant, but his son Isaac received the sign of the covenant before he believed. If the infant would have had to be old enough to declare his/her faith before becoming circumcised, it would be in contradiction to God's very word. At the same time, we do not baptize children without the knowledge or consent of the parent, nor do we baptize against the will of the parents (baptism in secret). We baptize only such children as are offered for baptism by those who have parental authority over them.⁸

2) The understanding that the parents' faith stands in place for the infants is very important, because *the most common argument against infant baptism is that it signifies things that flow from faith* (i.e. from my faith comes my baptism). Since infants are not capable of expressing or embracing faith, they should not receive the sign. But if that argument were correct, it would nullify the legitimacy of circumcision in the Old Testament. *If we reject infant baptism on the basis of the principle that a sign that involves faith must never be given until after faith is present, we also negate the legitimacy of circumcision in the Old Testament.*

But how does this apply to baptism? The New Testament clearly sees the connection of the Old Testament covenant of circumcision to baptism.

⁸ Mueller, J. T. (1999). Christian dogmatics (electronic ed., p. 497). St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

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11 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, 12 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.
Colossians 2:11–12

The New Testament also sees that the new covenant made complete and sure by Jesus is better than the old covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6), partly because it is more inclusive rather than less inclusive. If infants couldn't be given baptism as part of the new covenant that would mean that the new covenant is less inclusive than the old covenant. Thus, we see households being given the sign of the covenant in the New Testament ⁹

Here's a summation of the argument: In the Old Testament, because of the Lord's covenantal word and not because of what infants have done (or know or believe), infants were brought into a new identity and entrusted to the Lord through circumcision. In a like manner, because of the Lord's covenantal word and not because of what infants have done (or know or believe), they are brought into a new identity and entrusted to the Lord through baptism.

From the Augsburg Confession: Concerning baptism it is taught that it is necessary, that grace is offered through it, *and that one should also baptize children, who through such baptism are entrusted to God and become pleasing to him.*¹⁰

God's Sovereignty in Baptism

The second line of reasoning for infant baptism is based on baptism being an act of God, not an act of man. Remember that we are all dead in our sin. This also includes infants, as wonderful and adorable as they are, they are born in sin. The only one who can forgive sin is God. Therefore, because baptism is a work of God and does not depend on us (See previous notes), the line of reasoning is:

1. Infants are flesh born of flesh and as such are lost in sin.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Psalm 51:5

(5) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. John 3:4-6

2. It is God's will that also infants should be regenerated and saved, by their being brought to Christ.

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. (14) But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Mark 10:13-14 (see also Luke 18:15-17)

⁹ Sproul, R. C. (2011). *What Is Baptism?* (First edition, Vol. 11, pp. 62–65). Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust.

¹⁰ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (p. 42). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

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3. The means by which infants are brought to Christ is baptism.

4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:3–7

21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a 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

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, (12) 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. Colossians 2:11-12

4. Hence infants are to be baptized.¹¹

Is Infant Baptism a “Magic Pill?”

Many people unfortunately see baptism and especially infant baptism as some sort of magic pill that once done means there is nothing else left to do. People use their baptism as way to excuse sin or ignore their faith. They simply shrug their shoulders and say, “Well, I’m covered because I was baptized as a baby.” When we have that attitude, we cheapen God’s grace. In a like manner, some people will also say, “Once saved always saved.” Yet, what does the Bible say? The Bible teaches that one must continue in one’s faith unto the end. Enduring faith is a frequent theme in the New Testament. For example, we must heed Jesus’ warning:

And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. (11) And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. (23) Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. (24) For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Matthew 24:10-11, 23-24

And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. Luke 8:13

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. *Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.* Revelation 2:10

And the Apostles also wrote about enduring faith.

¹¹ Mueller, J. T. (1999). *Christian dogmatics* (electronic ed., p. 497). St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

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if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; 2 Timothy 2:12

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, *leading you to fall away from the living God.* (13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Hebrews 3:12-14

What if an Infant is Baptized but Later in Life Leaves the Faith?

If an infant is baptized but then grows up and leaves the faith, doesn't that prove that the baptism didn't work? The answer is no. This question assumes that God's power is only as good as our ability to receive it. God's power is not limited by our ability. But rather than think of baptism in terms of God's power (which it is!), consider it also as God's gift. While you can never earn this gift of God's grace through baptism, you can end up rejecting it. However, your rejection does not mean the gift is invalid.

If anyone (infant or adult) is baptized with water and in the full name of God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), the baptism is valid. God's grace is given because baptism is based on His word, not ours. Remember, the gift of baptism is a work of God, not man. This is also why we believe there is only one baptism necessary in one's life. Even if you fall away, you are still welcomed back into God's loving embrace! You don't need to be re-baptized! Remember the parable of the prodigal son:

And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' (22) But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. (23) And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. (24) For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. Luke 15:21-24

At the same time, *please* heed the warning that God's grace does not force you to maintain your faith.

Luther's words might be helpful:

"There are both true and false Israelites, those of whom to be sure are descendants from the patriarch Israel but not all retain the promise of Abraham. In the same way we have two classes of Christians today, all of whom are baptized and reborn through baptism are indeed called Christians but do not always remain true to this covenant of baptism. Many desert Jesus and become false Christians just as conversive with Scripture as are the true Christians. Both they and we possess the divine word but they are only outward and nominal Christians, they do not believe.



Given everything that has been covered, how would you answer the question: What is baptism?

What is Baptism?

Early Church Fathers on Infant Baptism

Irenaeus

“He [Jesus] came to save all through himself; all, I say, who through him are reborn in God: infants, and children, and youths, and old men. Therefore he passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, sanctifying infants; a child for children, sanctifying those who are of that age . . . [so that] he might be the perfect teacher in all things, perfect not only in respect to the setting forth of truth, perfect also in respect to relative age” (*Against Heresies* 2:22:4 [A.D. 189]).

“‘And [Naaman] dipped himself . . . seven times in the Jordan’ [2 Kgs. 5:14]. It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized, but [this served] as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions, being spiritually regenerated as newborn babes, even as the Lord has declared: ‘Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven’ [John 3:5]” (*Fragment* 34 [A.D. 190]).

Hippolytus

“Baptize first the children, and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them” (*The Apostolic Tradition* 21:16 [A.D. 215]).

Origen

“Every soul that is born into flesh is soiled by the filth of wickedness and sin. . . . In the Church, baptism is given for the remission of sins, and, according to the usage of the Church, baptism is given even to infants. If there were nothing in infants which required the remission of sins and nothing in them pertinent to forgiveness, the grace of baptism would seem superfluous” (*Homilies on Leviticus* 8:3 [A.D. 248]).

“The Church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants. The apostles, to whom were committed the secrets of the divine sacraments, knew there are in everyone innate strains of [original] sin, which must be washed away through water and the Spirit” (*Commentaries on Romans* 5:9 [A.D. 248]).

Cyprian of Carthage

“As to what pertains to the case of infants: You [Fidus] said that they ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, that the old law of circumcision must be taken into consideration, and that you did not think that one should be baptized and sanctified within the eighth day after his birth. In our council it seemed to us far otherwise. No one agreed to the course which you thought should be taken. Rather, we all judge that the mercy and grace of God ought to be denied to no man born” (*Letters* 64:2 [A.D. 253]).

“If, in the case of the worst sinners and those who formerly sinned much against God, when afterwards they believe, the remission of their sins is granted and no one is held back from baptism and grace, how much more, then, should an infant not be held back, who, having but recently been born, has done no sin, except that, born of the flesh according to Adam, he has contracted the contagion of that old death from his first being born. For this very reason does he [an infant] approach more easily to receive the remission of sins: because the sins forgiven him are not his own but those of another” (*ibid.*, 64:5).

What is Baptism?

Gregory of Nazianz

“Do you have an infant child? Allow sin no opportunity; rather, let the infant be sanctified from childhood. From his most tender age let him be consecrated by the Spirit. Do you fear the seal [of baptism] because of the weakness of nature? Oh, what a pusillanimous mother and of how little faith!” (*Oration on Holy Baptism* 40:7 [A.D. 388]).

“‘Well enough,’ some will say, ‘for those who ask for baptism, but what do you have to say about those who are still children, and aware neither of loss nor of grace? Shall we baptize them too?’ Certainly [I respond], if there is any pressing danger. Better that they be sanctified unaware, than that they depart unsealed and uninitiated” (ibid., 40:28).

John Chrysostom

“You see how many are the benefits of baptism, and some think its heavenly grace consists only in the remission of sins, but we have enumerated ten honors [it bestows]! For this reason we baptize even infants, though they are not defiled by [personal] sins, so that there may be given to them holiness, righteousness, adoption, inheritance, brotherhood with Christ, and that they may be his [Christ’s] members” (*Baptismal Catecheses in Augustine, Against Julian* 1:6:21 [A.D. 388]).

Augustine

“What the universal Church holds, not as instituted [invented] by councils but as something always held, is most correctly believed to have been handed down by apostolic authority. Since others respond for children, so that the celebration of the sacrament may be complete for them, it is certainly availing to them for their consecration, because they themselves are not able to respond” (*On Baptism, Against the Donatists* 4:24:31 [A.D. 400]).

“The custom of Mother Church in baptizing infants is certainly not to be scorned, nor is it to be regarded in any way as superfluous, nor is it to be believed that its tradition is anything except apostolic” (*The Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 10:23:39 [A.D. 408]).

“Cyprian was not issuing a new decree but was keeping to the most solid belief of the Church in order to correct some who thought that infants ought not be baptized before the eighth day after their birth. . . . He agreed with certain of his fellow bishops that a child is able to be duly baptized as soon as he is born” (*Letters* 166:8:23 [A.D. 412]).

“By this grace baptized infants too are ingrafted into his [Christ’s] body, infants who certainly are not yet able to imitate anyone. Christ, in whom all are made alive . . . gives also the most hidden grace of his Spirit to believers, grace which he secretly infuses even into infants. . . . It is an excellent thing that the Punic [North African] Christians call baptism salvation and the sacrament of Christ’s Body nothing else than life. Whence does this derive, except from an ancient and, as I suppose, apostolic tradition, by which the churches of Christ hold inherently that without baptism and participation at the table of the Lord it is impossible for any man to attain either to the kingdom of God or to salvation and life eternal? This is the witness of Scripture, too. . . . If anyone wonders why children born of the baptized should themselves be baptized, let him attend briefly to this. . . . The sacrament of baptism is most assuredly the sacrament of regeneration” (*Forgiveness and the Just Deserts of Sin, and the Baptism of Infants* 1:9:10; 1:24:34; 2:27:43 [A.D. 412]).

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Council of Carthage V

“Item: It seemed good that whenever there were not found reliable witnesses who could testify that without any doubt they [abandoned children] were baptized and when the children themselves were not, on account of their tender age, able to answer concerning the giving of the sacraments to them, all such children should be baptized without scruple, lest a hesitation should deprive them of the cleansing of the sacraments. This was urged by the [North African] legates, our brethren, since they redeem many such [abandoned children] from the barbarians” (Canon 7 [A.D. 401]).

Council of Mileum II

“[W]hoever says that infants fresh from their mothers’ wombs ought not to be baptized, or say that they are indeed baptized unto the remission of sins, but that they draw nothing of the original sin of Adam, which is expiated in the bath of regeneration . . . let him be anathema [excommunicated]. Since what the apostle [Paul] says, ‘Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so passed to all men, in whom all have sinned’ [Rom. 5:12], must not be understood otherwise than the Catholic Church spread everywhere has always understood it. For on account of this rule of faith even infants, who in themselves thus far have not been able to commit any sin, are therefore truly baptized unto the remission of sins, so that that which they have contracted from generation may be cleansed in them by regeneration” (Canon 3 [A.D. 416]).

What is Baptism?

Luther's Small Catechism on Baptism

First

What is baptism? Answer:

Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead it is water enclosed in God's command and connected with God's Word.

What then is this Word of God? Answer:

Where our LORD Christ says in Matthew 28[:19*], "Go into all the world, teach all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Second

What gifts or benefits does baptism grant? Answer:

It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare.

What are these words and promise of God? Answer:

Where our Lord Christ says in Mark 16[:16*], "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be damned."

Third

How can water do such great things? Answer:

Clearly the water does not do it, but the Word of God, which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a "bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit," as St. Paul says to Titus in chapter 3[:5–8*], "through the bath of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he richly poured out over us through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that through that very grace we may be righteous and heirs in hope of eternal life. This is surely most certainly true."

Fourth

What then is the significance of such a baptism with water? Answer:

It signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written? Answer:

St. Paul says in Romans 6[:4*], "We were buried with Christ through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we, too, are to walk in a new life."¹²

¹² Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (pp. 359–362). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

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Grammatical Considerations

The New Testament was written in Greek and grammar (word order, verb tenses, etc.) is critical to a proper understanding of what was written. Also, because we believe that the Bible is God's word, not just man's we also believe that grammar is important to God as well! Although many English translations do a wonderful job when it comes to translating the Greek of the New Testament, there are some things that aren't as clear in English as they are in Greek. Therefore, it's important to study the words in the original language. For those who are interested, below are two key passages regarding baptism in which the grammar of the texts are examined.

John 3:5-8

3:5-8 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (8) The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

3:5–8 Jesus responded to Nicodemus's twofold frustrated question by providing in 3:5 a more precise statement concerning this birth. He began once again with a double *amēn* statement. Then he identified this birth from above (3:4, 7) as a birth of water and Spirit. This linkage of the motifs of water and Spirit was not unknown in Israel (e.g., Ezek 36:25–27; *T. Jud.* 24:3; *Jub.* 1:23; 1Qs 3:6–9). Although both "water" and "Spirit" here are anarthrous (without the Greek definite article), they must not be treated as indefinite nor prefixed with an indefinite article "a." These two words also should not be bifurcated as in some inadequate folk interpretations of the text where water is equated with the water of natural birth (either that of the sack in which the baby floats or the male fluid of the sex act). Water appears with Spirit conjunctively in 3:5, and flesh is contrasted with Spirit disjunctively in 3:6. Accordingly, water and flesh should not be equated. In this Johannine context the combination of water and Spirit represents birth from above, a picture of life (cf. 7:38–39) that involves a direct contrast to Nicodemus's perspective on life as involving physical existence. As indicated earlier, the linkage between water and Spirit would have been familiar to the Jews since both are related to the theme of life. For a people like the Jews, who lived on the edge of the desert, water was an indispensable requirement of life (e.g., Exod 15:22–27; Pss 23:2; 42:1; 63:1), and even Christians viewed heaven as having a life-endued stream flowing from the throne of God (Rev 22:1). Concerning the life-giving Spirit, one only needs to be reminded that the breath of God brought life to Adam (Gen 2:7), and the Spirit/wind/breath of God brought life to dry bones (Ezek 37:1–14).¹³

The most plausible interpretation of 'born of water and the Spirit' turns on three factors. First, the expression is parallel to 'from above' (*anōthen*, v. 3), and so only one birth is in view. Second, the preposition 'of' governs both 'water' and 'spirit'. The most natural way of taking this construction is to see the phrase as a conceptual unity: there is a water-spirit source (cf. Murray J. Harris, *NIDNTT* 3. 1178) that stands as the origin of this regeneration. Third, Jesus berates Nicodemus for not understanding these things in his role as 'Israel's teacher' (v. 10), a senior

¹³ Borchert, G. L. (1996). *John 1–11* (Vol. 25A, pp. 173–174). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

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‘professor’ of the Scriptures, and this in turn suggests we must turn to what Christians call the Old Testament to begin to discern what Jesus had in mind.

Although the full construction ‘born of water and of the Spirit’ is not found in the Old Testament, the ingredients are there. At a minor level, the idea that Israel, the covenant community, was properly called ‘God’s son’ (Ex. 4:22; Dt. 32:6; Ho. 11:1) provides at least a little potential background for the notion of God ‘begetting’ people, enough, Brown thinks, that it should have enabled Nicodemus ‘to understand that Jesus was proclaiming the arrival of the eschatological times when men would be God’s children’ (1. 139). Far more important is the Old Testament background to ‘water’ and ‘spirit’. The ‘spirit’ is constantly God’s principle of life, even in creation (e.g. Gn. 2:7; 6:3; Jb. 34:14); but many Old Testament writers look forward to a time when God’s ‘spirit’ will be poured out on humankind (Joel 2:28) with the result that there will be blessing and righteousness (Is. 32:15–20; 44:3; Ezk. 39:29), and inner renewal which cleanses God’s covenant people from their idolatry and disobedience (Ezk. 11:19–20; 36:26–27). When water is used figuratively in the Old Testament, it habitually refers to renewal or cleansing, especially when it is found in conjunction with ‘spirit’. This conjunction may be explicit, or may hide behind language depicting the ‘pouring out’ of the spirit (cf. Nu. 19:17–19; Ps. 51:9–10; Is. 32:15; 44:3–5; 55:1–3; Je. 2:13; 17:13; Ezk. 47:9; Joel 2:28–29; Zc. 14:8). Most important of all is Ezekiel 36:25–27, where water and spirit come together so forcefully, the first to signify cleansing from impurity, and the second to depict the transformation of heart that will enable people to follow God wholly. And it is no accident that the account of the valley of dry bones, where Ezekiel preaches and the Spirit brings life to dry bones, follows hard after Ezekiel’s water/spirit passage (cf. Ezk. 37; and notes on 3:8, below). The language is reminiscent of the ‘new heart’ expressions that revolve around the promise of the new covenant (Je. 31:29ff.). Similar themes were sometimes picked up in later Judaism (e.g. *Jubilees* 1:23–25).¹⁴

Titus 3:5-7

5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Tt 3:5–7

The grammatical question centers on the omission of the preposition “through” (*dia*) before the second phrase, “renewal by the Holy Spirit.” This omission clearly indicates that the phrase “through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” refers to a single event rather than referring to two distinct events. If “through” (*dia*) were used before “renewal,” thus rendering “through the washing of rebirth and *through* renewal of the Holy Spirit,” it would describe two events instead of one. Simply stated, the text indicates that “washing” is an activity of the Holy Spirit and that this washing involves “rebirth” (*palingenias*) and “renewal” (*anakainoseos*). The Greek term for “rebirth” denotes “a new creation” (cf. Matt 19:28), and Paul used this analogy with reference to salvation (2 Cor 5:17). The Greek term for “renewal” refers to an internal change, which in this context may suggest a process begun within the believer from the moment of conversion.¹⁵

¹⁴ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (pp. 194–195). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

¹⁵ Lea, T. D., & Griffin, H. P. (1992). *1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Vol. 34, p. 323). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

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It seems to make little difference whether these genitives are regarded as possessive: “bath belonging to regeneration”; or qualitative: “regenerating bath”; or objective: “bath effecting regeneration.” Any one of these genitives retains the main point, namely that this bath and this regeneration plus the renewing are inseparably connected: where the bath is, there the regeneration and the renewing are. And this bath is the means (διὰ) which God used when he saved us. This interpretation is, of course, troublesome to the Baptist Robertson (and to all others who deny baptismal regeneration) in his *W. P.*, who offers the exegesis: “Man submits to the baptism *after* the new birth to picture it forth to men.” He regards this bath as being only a picture that men are to see, a mere symbol for the eye. Paul excludes this idea in a double way: God *saved* us by means of the bath, etc.,—this is the “bath of regeneration.” How can anyone think Paul would say: “God saved us by means of (διὰ) a *picture* of regeneration”? Compare Jesus’ own words to Nicodemus in John 3:3, 5.¹⁶

¹⁶ Lenski, R. C. H. (1937). *The interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (pp. 933–934). Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern.