

## Matthew 28:18–20, Acts 2:37–41, Romans 6:1–5, and Baptism

### Prayer

### Introductory Questions

- What is baptism?
- How would you determine if someone was ready to be baptized?

### Introduction

The words *baptize* and *baptism* directly correspond to words in the Greek New Testament that mean *immerse* and *immersion*.<sup>1</sup> First, baptism can refer to immersion in water. Second, baptism can be used as a figure of speech, such as being “immersed” into a new reality.

1. At the most basic level, baptism is the act by which a believer in Jesus is *immersed in water* in the name of the triune God of the Bible (see point #1 below). An example of immersion in water is found in Acts 8: “So he [the eunuch] ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch *went down into the water*, and he baptized him” (v. 38).
2. *Figuratively, baptism can point beyond the physical reality* of being immersed in water. Baptism can refer to truths like these: (1) conversion (turning from sin and trusting in Jesus) (Gal. 3:27), (2) immersion with (or in) the Spirit (Acts 1:5), and (3) participation in Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–4).

1 Peter 3:20–21 contains a clear example of the figurative use of baptism: “20...God patiently waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water. 21 *Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you* (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Merely getting immersed in water (apart from trusting in Jesus) cannot save a person. In this passage baptism is a figure of speech that corresponds to the waters of judgment in Noah’s day. *We* were saved from the terrible waters of God’s judgment at the moment we turned from sin and trusted in Jesus, a salvation grounded in Jesus’s death and resurrection. Baptism is a shorthand expression to refer to those realities.

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<sup>1</sup> In Greek *baptizo* means *immerse*, and *baptisma* and *baptismos* often mean *immersion*. Naselli, *Romans*, 83, who cites Schnabel’s chapter, “The Language of Baptism: The Meaning of Βαπτίζω in the New Testament,” in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century; Essays in Honor of D. A. Carson at the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*.

In this lesson, we study truths like these by focusing on three passages from Scripture: Matthew 28:18–20, Acts 2:37–41, and Romans 6:1–5. We conclude this lesson by summarizing what the Bible teaches about baptism.

## 1. Baptism is a Christian’s immersion in water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

18 Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 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 everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18–20)

As we stated in the lesson “Jesus’s Vision for His Church,” Jesus’s mission flows from the supreme, universal authority he received from his Father (Matt. 28:18). The heart of the Great Commission is to “make disciples of all nations” (v. 19). To *make* a disciple of Jesus in this context surely includes both evangelism (leading people to God through Jesus) and discipleship (helping people grow into the likeness of Jesus). As necessary parts of making disciples, we must go into the world (as opposed to waiting passively) (v. 19), baptize those who turn from their sins and trust in Jesus (v. 19), and teach them to obey all that Jesus commanded (v. 20). This all-encompassing mission is possible only because Jesus is with us to guide and empower us, to the end of the age (v. 20).

In verse 19, Jesus is, in part, referring to *baptism in water*. But Christians are not merely immersed in water, they are immersed in (or into) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In the ancient world, a person’s *name* represented his or her entire person. Christians are baptized in the one name (singular, not plural) of the triune God of the Bible. Being baptized *in* or *into* his name suggests coming into relationship or fellowship with God, which certainly includes coming under his lordship (see Carson, *Matthew & Mark*, 668).

- What does it mean *to make disciples of all nations*? *Go*, *baptize*, and *teach*—why is each one of those critically important to making disciples of all nations?
- What are practical differences between (a) *merely knowing about* God (Rom. 1:21) and (b) *being baptized (or immersed) into* a relationship with God (Matt. 28:19)?

## 2. Baptism in water is a post-conversion act of obedience: *first* a person turns from sin and trusts in Jesus, and *only then* should he or she get baptized.

37 When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” 38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each 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, as many as the Lord our God will call.” 40 With many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, “Be saved from this corrupt generation!” 41 So those who

accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them. (Acts 2:37–41)

Peter preached his sermon on Pentecost about the coming of Holy Spirit and Jesus’s death, resurrection, and exaltation (Acts 2:14–36). The Jews in Jerusalem “were pierced to the heart”: they recognized and regretted their sins. Therefore, they asked Peter and the rest of the apostles what to do (v. 37). Peter responded: “Repent and *be baptized*, each of you, *in the name of Jesus Christ* for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38). Repentance is both a change of mind and a resolution of the will to turn away from our sins. Here repentance and baptism are viewed *as one act*, which results in the forgiveness of sins. To be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” means being immersed into a personal, reconciled relationship with Jesus as one’s Lord (2:21, 36). Immersion in water signified cleansing from sin, particularly the sin of rejecting Jesus as the Messiah (22:16). And this cleansing occurred when they repented and trusted in Jesus (2:38, 44; Schnabel, *Acts*, 161, 164).

The promise of the Spirit and forgiveness of sins was for the Jewish listeners and their children, for all who would repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus (vv. 33, 38–39). But the promise was also for those who were “far off”—including Jews and God-fearers *outside Jerusalem*, which soon expanded to people *throughout the world*, everyone whom the Lord calls to himself (v. 39; Isa. 57:19; Bock, *Acts*, 144–145). Peter called them to be saved from their corrupt generation, which is precisely what people need to do in every sinful generation (v. 40). Those who accepted his message through repentance and trust in Jesus were baptized (v. 41; cf. 20:21).

- Have you *turned from your sins* as opposed to merely feeling sorrowful? Explain.
- Have you *trusted in Jesus* as opposed to trusting in your good works? Explain.

### 3. Baptism is a participation with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection.

1 What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply?  
 2 Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection. (Rom. 6:1–5)

Christians should never sin intentionally to multiply God’s grace in their lives; those who have “died to sin” (been set free from sin’s power) cannot still live in it (Rom. 6:1–2; cf. 5:20–21; Naselli, *Romans*, 82). All who were baptized (or immersed) into Christ Jesus have been baptized (or immersed) into his death (v. 3). Again, *baptism* is a shorthand expression for conversion: turning from sin and trusting in Jesus. At that moment of our conversion, we were buried with him into death (v. 4). So baptism here is not primarily a symbol of *our death* and *our burial* in isolation: we were plunged *into Jesus’s death and burial*—and swept *into his resurrection* (Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12). Having received the saving, liberating benefits of Jesus’s death on our behalf, we

now walk in the newness of life, “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father” (v. 4; cf. 1 Pet. 3:21). Because “if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection” (v. 5).

At the moment of their conversion, Christians (1) died with Christ, (2) were buried with Christ, and (3) were raised with Christ. Explain each of those in your own words.

### Sound Doctrine: Baptism

What does the Bible teach about baptism?

1. Baptism is a Christian’s immersion in water (Acts 8:38–39). But merely getting immersed under water cannot save anyone—for we are saved by grace through faith, not any good work (Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5).
2. Baptism points to our initiation into the Christian faith, which occurred at our conversion—when we turned from sin and trusted in Jesus (Acts. 2:38, 44). For all who were “baptized” before turning from sin and trusting in Jesus, they merely got wet. The figurative meanings of baptism all point to it as *a post-conversion act of obedience*.
3. As we stated earlier, in the days of Noah God *judged* the world through the waters of the flood, and yet God *saved* Noah and his family through those same waters (Gen. 6:9–9:17). Those waters of judgment AND salvation pointed to and prefigured Christian baptism (1 Pet. 3:20–21). *At our conversion, we were plunged into the waters of Jesus’s judgment by God, where Jesus suffered God’s judgment on our behalf* (Rom. 3:24–26; 6:3–4; 1 John 2:2).
4. We were immersed into Jesus’s death and burial, and God raised us up with him (Rom. 6:3–4; Eph. 2:4–6; Col. 2:12–13).
5. At that time, we were also baptized in the name of the triune God of the Bible—immersed into a relationship with him (Matt. 28:19).
6. Baptism also represents our incorporation into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).
7. Baptism is one of many truths that bind us together: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—one Lord, one faith, *one baptism*, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4–6).

Were you baptized *after* you both (1) turned from your sins and (2) trusted in Jesus for salvation (as opposed to trusting in your works)? *If so*, share your story of becoming a Christian (including both repentance and trust in Jesus) and your *subsequent* baptism. *If not*, do you believe you need to be baptized (for the first time)? Explain.

### Prayer