

Baptism

A Biblical Examination

Part 4- Biblical Baptism

The Covenant of Peace elder confession of faith says:

“We believe and teach that Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ alone publicly express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection by being fully immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel, and is a physical and tangible and visible representation of the spiritual reality of the burial of the life of sin and spiritual cleansing signifying death to the old life of unbelief and purification from the pollution of sin brought about through the glorious new birth in Jesus Christ which occurs prior to Water Baptism.”

There are six elements in this confession that we should examine carefully to see its biblical basis:

1. Biblical Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord
2. Biblical Baptism expresses union with Jesus Christ
3. Biblical Baptism is through full immersion in water
4. Biblical Baptism is in the trinitarian name
5. Biblical Baptism is a public; visible representation of the reality of salvation
6. Biblical Baptism is for believers only

So, let's take the various parts of that confession and look at the Biblical basis for them.

1. Biblical Baptism is an Ordinance of the Lord

“We believe and teach that Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord...”

What we mean by this is that the Lord Jesus personally *commanded* Baptism- He *ordained* it- in such a way that Baptism would from that time forward be an ongoing practice of the Christian Church. We find this most explicitly in **Matthew 28:19&20**,

- 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,**
20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even

to the end of the age.

The phrase, “make disciples” in verse 19 is the main verb and now that we have obeyed Jesus and “have gone” into those other nations, we are told to “make disciples “of” or “from” all nations.” The defining participles which define just how we are to “make disciples” are

- ✓ Baptizing them
- ✓ Teaching them

So, the Church is commanded to do this for *all* disciples. So, “making disciples of all nations” includes baptizing them. So, it is very clear in the scriptures that genuine believers are commanded by the Lord of the church “to baptize” and “to *be* baptized.”

And the time frame as to how long Baptism is to be carried out is defined by the promise of Christ’s help in verse 20,

... lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

So, since the promise of divine help is for as long as “the age” lasts, the command that Jesus promises to help us with, is also as long as “the age” lasts. So, Baptism is a divine command, and ordinance, of the Lord Jesus to be performed in making disciples until Christ bodily returns at the end of the age.

2. Biblical Baptism Expresses Union with Christ

Secondly, all the Leaders of The Covenant of Peace Church confess that they believe and teach that,

“Water Baptism publicly expresses union with Christ in His Death and Resurrection.”

The clearest teaching on this is found in **Romans 6:3&4** which says:

Romans 6:3&4

³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Now in the wider context of **Romans**, it would be a terrible mistake to think or say that Water Baptism is the “means” of us being united to Jesus Christ. In **Romans**, it is crystal clear that the apostle Paul taught that faith is the “means” by which we are united to Christ and justified. But as true as that is, it is also true that we *show* this faith, we *prove* this faith, we *signify* this faith, and we *symbolize*

this faith with the act of Water Baptism. So, faith unites us to Christ and Water Baptism *symbolizes* that already accomplished Union.

An analogy would be in marriage when either the bride or the groom says, “*With this ring I thee wed.*” When we say that, we don’t mean that the ring itself or even the putting on of the ring onto the finger is what actually makes us united in holy matrimony.

No, the ring simply “shows” or “symbolizes” the marriage covenant while the covenant-making vows actually make the marriage. So, it is with faith and Water Baptism.

So, Paul is simply saying,

“With this Water Baptism, you are united to Christ.”

And the point we are focusing on here is that we are united to Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection.

... we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

So, the imagery of Baptism is death, burial, and resurrection. Christ was buried and raised to new life.

In Baptism, by faith, we are united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. So, Baptism dramatically portrays what previously happened spiritually when we believed the Gospel, repented of our sins, and trusted in Christ’s finished work.

Your old self of unbelief and rebellion and idolatry died, and a new you of faith and submission and treasuring Christ came into being. That’s what you confess to the world and to heaven when you are baptized.

And this act is public- not private. Like marriage, Baptism is not closed to unbelievers but is best expressed openly before the world as a testimony of our great salvation. It is good for lost sinners to witness the beauty and dignity of both marriage and Baptism.

3. Biblical Baptism Is Immersion in Water

“We believe and teach that Baptism is an Ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to Salvation by Grace through Faith in the finished Work of Christ alone publicly express their union with Christ in His Death and Resurrection by being fully immersed in water...”

Again, the clearest evidence for this are the words of **Romans 6:3&4** which describe the act of Baptism as a “burial” and a “rising from the dead”.

Romans 6:3&4

3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been

baptized into His death?

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

This is most naturally understood to mean that you are *buried* under water and then come *out of* from the water to signify rising from the grave.

As we have already studied, the word *baptism* itself in the Greek means “*to immerse*”. And most scholars agree that this is the way the early Church practiced Baptism. Only much later does the practice of “sprinkling” or “pouring” emerge, as far as we can tell from the historical record.

There are a few other pointers to full immersion besides the meaning of the word and the imagery of death and burial. In **The Acts 8**, the Ethiopian eunuch comes to faith while riding with Philip in his chariot and says,

The Acts 8:36b

... Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

Philip agrees and then it says,

The Acts 8:38b&39

38 ... he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.

That both of them “**went down into the water**” and “**came up out of the water**” makes most sense if Philip was going down to *immerse* the eunuch, *not* to sprinkle him. Similarly, it says in **John 3:23**,

John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized —

The reason why John went to Aenon was because “**there was much water there**”. But that fact wouldn’t have been an issue if he baptized by sprinkling. This fact of “**much water**” is only an issue if John baptized by full immersion.

So, there is really very little dispute that this was the way the early Church baptized. They did it by fully immersing the new believer in water to signify his burial and resurrection with Jesus.

4. Biblical Baptism Is in the Trinitarian Name

[We believe and teach] that Baptism is... in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit..."

This is what Jesus said in **Matthew 28:19&20**:

**19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

This means that not just *any* immersing is genuine Baptism. There is a holy appeal to God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to be present in this Act and make it true and real in what it says about their work in redemption. There is no salvation without the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When we call on Their name, we depend upon Them and honor Them and say that this act is because of Them and by Them and for Them.

5. Biblical Baptism Is a Public, Visible Representation of the Reality of Salvation

“We believe and teach that Baptism is... a physical and tangible and visible representation of the spiritual reality of the burial of the life of sin and spiritual cleansing- signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin brought about through the glorious New Birth in Jesus Christ which occurs prior to Water Baptism.”

What we see happen in true Baptism is an outward reflection of a spiritual reality. Water does not redeem anyone. The act of baptizing someone does not have the power to forgive a single sin or birth anyone into the kingdom of God. What Baptism is, is a visible manifestation of the mystery of eternal salvation and of the forgiveness of sin through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ (His death, burial, and resurrection) which has been made effective to that individual believer by faith alone.

It is completely counterproductive to everything that the New Covenant teaches for babies or people who have not heard the Gospel, understood the Gospel, believed the Gospel, repented of all sin, and trusted in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation to be baptized. Baptism must always come *after* full justification. Without the reality of genuine salvation already having taken place, the symbolic representation of that reality is meaningless and confusing.

6. Biblical Baptism is for Believers Only

“We believe and teach that Baptism is an Ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to Salvation by Grace through Faith in the finished Work of Christ alone publicly express their union with Christ in His Death and Resurrection by being fully immersed in water in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Since Baptism is an expression of genuine faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work, it is therefore only for true believers. One of the most important aspects of Biblical Baptism is that unrepentant or non-believing people *cannot* and *should not* be baptized. Our understanding of the New Testament is that the meaning of Baptism includes the fact that it is an expression of the genuine faith of the one being Baptized. That is *not* something that an unbeliever *can* do. It is not something that an infant or someone who is mentally impaired *can* do. That is why we don't baptize those individuals. They *do not* and *cannot* believe.

Colossians 2:9-11

9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

Here Paul speaks of circumcision in “**made-without-hands**” terms. Circumcision today has meaning for the Christian- not as a *physical* act- but as a *spiritual* act of Christ in which he cuts away the old sinful body and makes us new. It is virtually synonymous with the new birth. Then he speaks of baptism:

Colossians 2:12-15

12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

So, the image of spiritual circumcision is closely connected with the image of baptism: “**You were circumcised . . . having been baptized . . .**” The old “**body of flesh**” was cut away in conversion. You died and rose again in Baptism.

Galatians 3:26&27

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

The Apostle Paul teaches in verse 26 that we become sons of God “**through faith**” and no other way. And then he begins verse 27 with the word, “**for**”, connecting this *way* of becoming sons of God with Baptism,

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

That explanation with the word “*for*” only makes sense if Baptism is understood as “an acting out” of faith. When you read Paul’s first statement,

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus

... in connection to his second statement:

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

... it makes sense *only* if you reverse the statements to say,

Since you were baptized into Christ, therefore we know that in Christ you are all sons of God through faith.

Why is this true? Because that is exactly what Baptism means:

You were baptized into Christ by faith.

So, from that we can rightly conclude that Baptism without faith was inconceivable to the Apostle Paul.

Membership in the Local Church

So, we can see how the meaning of Baptism is woven together with membership in the people of God. And since the local church is an expression of that people, Baptism is closely connected to membership in the local church. In the New Testament, being a Christian, being baptized, belonging to the New Covenant people of God, and being a member of a local church were all connected.

If you tried to pull one of those out (not a Christian, or not baptized, or not in the New Covenant people, or not a member of local church), it would have made no sense. They all belonged together. So, based on all of this we conclude that:

- ✓ Baptism was *uncompromisingly* commanded by the Lord Jesus
- ✓ Baptism was *universally* administered to Christians entering the early Church
- ✓ Baptism was *uniquely* connected to conversion as an *unrepeatable* expression of saving faith

May God Be Pleased

There is nothing in this study on Baptism that should be used as ammunition for self-righteous attacks against those who hold to a differing view. This study represents our best and honest understanding of what the Holy Scriptures teach concerning this important subject. I have tried to conduct contextual exegesis with

the verses and use logic consistent with the clear meaning of the verses and passages to formulate my statements and conclusions and trust that I have presented this information in a way that will edify believers and glorify my precious King.

If, in the future, I can be shown conclusive scriptural proof that any of the statements or conclusions in this study are in contradiction to the clear teachings of scripture, I will be happy to repent and correct them. Until then, this study remains as it is- to God's Glory.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. I love you all.

To the Board of Elders

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December, AD 2011