

## What Does the Bible Say About...Baptism?

Written by Kris Brewer

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There are, throughout the religious world, many different beliefs concerning the practice of baptism. Some teach that baptism is optional, an outward sign that they have already been saved. Others believe that baptism is necessary. Some even believe that baptism is something that is not longer to be practiced for any reason. Some believe that baptism should be immersion, while others believe it can be sprinkling or pouring of water on the head of the recipient. With so many different beliefs, how can one know what they should do? The only solution is to turn to the pages of the New Testament and allow them to dictate what is required. What does the Bible say about baptism?

***Baptism is for believing individuals.*** The Bible clearly teaches that those who were baptized had the ability to consider the message presented to them, and respond to it in a rational way. For example, on the day of Pentecost, following the first gospel sermon, members in the crowd asked what they needed to do to be saved. They were able to process the message, understand their failures before God, and ask what they needed to do in response (Acts 2:37). There is no passage in the New Testament that indicates that a person can have someone else make the decision for them to be baptized. This eliminates the practice of infant baptism, which is practiced so prevalently in many denominations today.

***Baptism is an immersion in water.*** We can consider the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch to get a better understanding of the nature of baptism. In Acts 8, Philip taught the Eunuch the message of the gospel. As they travelled, they came upon a body of water, and the Eunuch asked if he could be baptized. It is noteworthy that the Bible states that there was enough water for both Philip and the Eunuch to go down into (Acts 8:38-39). Some argue that this passage does not say that Philip immersed the Eunuch. But, consider the foolishness of these men going down into the water for anything but immersion. Going down into the water is a pointless detail if Philip only sprinkled a few drops of water on the Eunuch, or poured a bit of water on his head. Why would they even need to find water? Surely the Eunuch, travelling a great distance, had enough water to sprinkle on his head! Even without reasoning through this passage, the very term used means to immerse. One word translated as

*baptized*

is defined by Strong's Dictionary as:

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βαπτίζω baptizō, bap-tid'-zo; from a der. of 911; to make overwhelmed (i.e. fully wet); used only (in the N.T.) of ceremonial ablution, espec. (tech.) of the ordinance of Chr. baptism:— baptist, baptize, wash.

How can one argue that this can be accomplished with a mere sprinkling of water, or even a pouring of water? This principle is only fulfilled through the practice of immersion in water. This is why the apostle Paul could use the figure of being “buried with Him in baptism” as he wrote to the church at Colossae (Colossians 2:11-12). This allusion would make no sense if he were speaking of sprinkling or pouring!

***Baptism is necessary for salvation.*** Many in the religious world believe that baptism is just an “outward sign of an inner grace.” Essentially, that means that a person is saved, and then they should be baptized to show everyone else that they are saved. But, is that what we can see in the pages of the New Testament? There are two passages that we can look at to answer that question. The first is the account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who would later be called the apostle Paul. In Acts 22, Paul recounts the story of his own conversion. He had been diligently persecuting the Lord’s church when Jesus Himself appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Saul was told that he must continue into the town, and there he would be told what he must do. Ananias, the messenger of the Lord, came to Saul and told him what he must do in Acts 22:16. He was told, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” While many want to try to conclude that Saul was saved on the road to Damascus, it is important to notice that Saul still had his sins, even after the appearance of Jesus on the road to Damascus, and after 3 days of praying while waiting for Ananias to come to him! Baptism was the method by which his sins could be washed away. Without it, his sins would still be present, and he would obviously still be in his lost condition. The second passage that we can look to is found in 1 Peter 3:18-22. Verse 21 especially in this context is of great importance. Peter tells us that “there is an antitype” to the flood waters of Noah’s day (which saved his family in a time of destruction), which is baptism. Baptism now saves us! If baptism

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saves us, then how can we be saved without baptism? Many will object, saying that we are saved by faith (John 3:16), or saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8). In reality, we are saved by all of these (and more). We must put all of God's word together to understand His will for us (Psalm 119:160)! These passages indicate that sins are not removed, nor is salvation granted until one submits himself to the command of God in baptism.

There are many things said and taught about baptism in the religious world. It is our responsibility to search out the word of God and discover what God has to say on the subject. It may be easy for us to dismiss the necessity of baptism, but that does not change what God has said. We must heed the instructions of God, not the doctrines of man!