



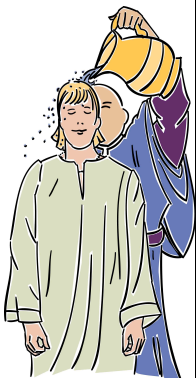
## Christian Baptism

To really “hear out” an issue—especially one with such emotion as baptism—it is wise to present arguments from both sides. We think believer’s baptism has stronger support, but we present both views here.

	Infant	Believer’s
<b>Adherents</b> Who does it?	Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Reformed, Anglican, Methodist, some Evangelical Free Church	Baptist, Bible, Brethren, Mennonite, Pentecostal, some Evangelical Free Church, most independent churches
<b>Purpose</b> Why do they do it?	Three Views: 1. <u>Catholic</u> : Means of saving grace <i>apart</i> from the faith of the baptized (baptismal regeneration) 2. <u>Lutheran</u> : Means of saving grace <i>assuming</i> faith by those baptized (baptismal regeneration) 3. <u>Others</u> : <i>Not</i> a means of saving grace but Reformed churches see it as a seal and sign of the covenant while the Methodists see it as a form of membership in the church family	Unified View:  Baptism is a symbol of salvation: an outward sign of the inward reality of justification received in Christ with no external efficacy (A. Oepke, “bapto, baptizo...” <i>TDNT</i> abr., 93).
Supports for Above Stated Purpose:	Baptismal regeneration is taught in many verses (Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21).  (Baptismal regeneration is refuted by Ronald K. Y. Fung, <i>The Epistle to the Galatians</i> , NICNT, 173-74)	Baptism and salvation are indeed linked, but not directly so that baptism <i>causes</i> salvation. This would contradict the clear NT teaching of salvation by faith alone (John 3:16; Rom. 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8-9). In NT times, baptism often occurred on the day of one’s conversion. This close association between salvation and baptism was viewed as a single event, yet baptism was not always commanded with conversion (Acts 3:19; 16:31).
	Baptism is the sign of the covenant (Col. 2:12).  It thus signifies the recipient’s initiation into the community of God.	The sign of the new covenant is not baptism but the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:25).  Colossians 2:11-12 associates baptism not with physical circumcision but with “spiritual” circumcision, or salvation.  Also, Scripture never connects water baptism with an OT covenant such as the Abrahamic Covenant. The argument at the left is an argument from silence, as Colossians mentions no covenant relating to baptism.
	Baptism is the seal of the covenant (Acts 15:1; 21:21; Gal. 2:3-5).	The verses at the left prove only that circumcision is not required in the present age; they say nothing about baptism.  The seal of the new covenant is not baptism but the Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14).

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Purpose (continued)	The central idea associated with baptism is purification from sin (Col. 2:11-12).	Baptism signifies forgiveness of sin but also identification with Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-7).
	Assigning to baptism only a symbolic purpose shows a low view of baptism in light of the many NT references.	This outward sign of an inward reality is supported in that all NT baptisms were performed on believers. To the contrary, to perform it only on Christians is to show a <i>high</i> view of baptism—especially since it is so often associated with salvation. The statement at the left assumes that a symbol cannot be important, but this is exactly what we have in the Lord's Supper.
	The thief on the cross lacked a chance to be baptized so he is not a good example of requisites for salvation. Christ may have made an exception in his case.	Concerning Catholic and Lutheran views requiring baptism for salvation, Christ promised the repentant thief on the cross salvation without baptism (Luke 23:40-43).
<b>Subjects</b> Who can be baptized? Support for Above Stated Subjects	Infants who have no personal faith in Christ can be baptized.	Believers alone should be baptized, which excludes infants and the unsaved.
	Baptism is parallel to circumcision, and circumcision was done to infants. Therefore, baptism should be performed on infants as well.	The logic at the left is faulty in its first premise—that baptism and circumcision are parallel (see above under Col. 2:12). Also, only boys can be circumcised.
	Infant baptism more powerfully illustrates the grace of God. Children were included in the old covenant. Since the new covenant supersedes the old, the new covenant should surely include children. Even animals are included in God's covenant of redemption (Gen. 9:10), let alone children, who are definitely more precious to Him.	How is God's grace towards a baby who has never consciously sinned <i>greater</i> than His grace towards one who has repeatedly rebelled against Him? Grace towards adults is the greater marvel. Children under the old covenant were not saved by circumcision but by faith (Gen. 15:5). Likewise, under the new covenant we are accepted by faith—not by baptism (Rom. 4:1-25). Besides, how is denying baptism for infants a sign of the priority of animals over humans? Since animals are not baptized, the comparison cannot be made.
	Entire households were baptized in the NT, which almost certainly included infants (Acts 10:47-48; 16:15; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16).	Each of the household texts declare that the households <i>believed</i> before baptism; that infants were baptized is an assumption that is counter to the stated fact that people believed before baptism.
	Infant baptism has been practiced throughout the history of the church from earliest times.	The earliest non-scriptural baptism instructions (early second century) requires fasting of 1-2 days prior to baptism, thus implying only adult baptism ( <i>Didache</i> 7:4 in J. B. Lightfoot, <i>Apostolic Fathers</i> , 153)

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Subjects (continued)	Christ blessed little children—probably even infants (Mark 10:13-16); this indicates His approval to baptize them.	Blessing children and baptizing them are wholly different. The argument at the left is valid only if the NT shows Christ baptizing children, which it does not.
	Infant baptism is not prohibited in the NT and therefore is allowed.	Silence does not necessarily argue for approval (e.g., we cannot argue for baptism of the dead simply because the NT does not prohibit it). NT support for believer's baptism automatically prohibits infant baptism since infants cannot believe.
		The order in the Great Commission is first to make disciples, <i>then</i> to baptize them (Matt. 28:19-20). Thus only believers are to be baptized, which excludes infants.
		Baptism points <i>back</i> to the believer's becoming united with Christ in His death (Rom. 6:1-11); this cannot be said of infants who have yet to believe.
		All subjects of baptism in the NT are clearly believers; one must have very good reason to deviate from this norm (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47; 16:14-15, 33; 18:8; 19:5). These texts show that repentance preceded baptism in a sequence of "hearing...believing...being baptized."
<b>Mode</b>	Scripture does not specify any particular mode of baptism, thus allowing both sprinkling and pouring. It is not <i>method</i> that counts, but the <i>sincerity</i> of the one baptized.	The only scriptural mode is immersion, so how can we say mode is unimportant? While it is true that mode is less important than heart attitude, this does not then imply that mode is irrelevant.
Support for the Above Stated Mode	Baptism by pouring has been practiced throughout the history of the church from earliest times.	Pouring is first stated in the early second century—and only as an exception when immersion in running water or cold water should/could not be used ( <i>Didache</i> 7:1-3 in J. B. Lightfoot, <i>Apostolic Fathers</i> , 153).
	Baptism by <i>pouring</i> is mentioned often in the NT (1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 9:10; 10:22; Tit. 3:5).	None of these verses refer to baptism and none refer to pouring. They refer in each case to <i>spiritual</i> cleansing from sin by faith in Christ ("washing") or to <i>Jewish</i> ceremonial washings that were performed numerous times on the same persons (cf. Heb. 9:10). Hebrews 10:22 refers not to baptism but to "having our <i>hearts sprinkled</i> to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."



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Mode (continued)	Pouring best represents the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon believers (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5; 2:3).	While <i>implied</i> similarities exist between baptism by pouring and the outpouring of the Spirit, the <i>explicit</i> symbolism in the NT is that baptism represents the believer's dying to his old life and rising to a new one (Rom. 6:1ff.). Thus immersion is the explicit mode in the NT and pouring can be argued only by implication.
	Baptism by <i>sprinkling</i> is mentioned often in the Bible (Exod. 24:6-8; Num. 8:7; Ezek. 36:24-26; Heb. 9:13-14; 10:22).	None of these texts note baptism. They refer to purifying priests with sprinkled water (Num. 8:7), sprinkling vessels with blood (Exod. 24:6-8; Heb. 9:13-14), or the Spirit's saving work (Ezek. 36:24-26; Heb. 10:22).
	Practically speaking, Peter could not have immersed 3000 in a single day on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). This baptism must have been by sprinkling or by pouring.	One wonders if he could have sprinkled or poured upon that many either, but the text does not say Peter did the baptizing. If one could immerse 100 people per hour (a distinct possibility), the 120 disciples there (Acts 1:15) could have immersed 12,000 in a single hour! Even if only the 12 baptized it would take less than three hours to baptize the 3000 (12 x 100 = 1200/hour).
	The Philippian jailer would not have left his post for immersion, but could have momentarily for pouring or sprinkling (Acts 16:33b).	The text says he took time to listen to Paul's preaching (v. 32) and to wash Paul and Silas' wounds (v. 33a), which may have taken just as long. He obviously left his post to invite Paul and Silas to his home for a midnight meal (v. 34). Baptism takes less time than eating a full meal. The argument at the left also assumes that he guarded the jail alone and could not have delegated his responsibilities to others.
	Lexical meanings are not sufficient to establish theology.	The lexical meaning of the only word used for NT baptism (βαπτίζω) means "dip, immerse...wash, plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm...soak" (BAGD 131c). Besides baptism, other literal uses include "to dip" (Luke 16:24; cf. LXX Judg. 2:14; Josh. 3:15; Lev. 4:6; 11:32) and "to dye" (Rev. 19:13). Also, baptism is likened to the Flood (1 Pet. 3:21). From the lexical data even Luther and Calvin both believed immersion to be the biblical mode.
	Since sprinkling was practiced in the OT, John the Baptist probably sprinkled as well—especially since he was a Levite (Luke 1:5).	John the Baptist performed his baptisms in the Jordan River. Would sprinkling have required people to walk into the water with John? Besides, the type of baptism immediately preceding John's historically was Jewish proselyte immersion (see next box below).

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Mode (continued)	Baptisms preceding Christianity do not absolutely establish that Christian baptism followed the same pattern.	βαπτίζω (to dip) is used not only of NT baptism, but also of Jewish ritual washings (Mark 7:4; Luke 11:38), which were by immersion. Both pagan religious washings and Jewish proselyte baptism preceded Christian baptism, the later being by self-immersion (A. Oepke, "bapto, baptizo..." <i>TDNT</i> abr., 92-93).
	Sprinkling and pouring also have OT and NT parallels (see above).	Immersion best signifies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identification with Christ's death and resurrection by going under the water and out again (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12)</li> <li>• subjection to Christ's authority (Matt. 28:18-19; Acts 19:3-5; 22:16)</li> <li>• obedience and a good conscience before God (1 Pet. 3:21).</li> </ul>
	Baptism preceded the writing of Romans, so the immersion portrayed in Romans 6 could have been new. (No evidence prior to Romans indicates that baptism signified Christ's death and resurrection.)	Only six NT books were written before Romans, so Romans was among the first NT books to be written (AD 56-57). It is quite problematic to argue an early and later form of Christian baptism given that there exists "one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).
	The passages at the right argue only that baptism took place in water, but this still could have been by pouring or sprinkling while standing in the water.	All NT examples of baptism best allow for immersion: "plenty of water" (John 3:23), "coming up out of the water" (Mark 1:10), "went down into the water" (Acts 8:38). This last case concerns the Ethiopian eunuch who could have easily been baptized by pouring or sprinkling anywhere along the journey by using water in the caravan.



Please Note: Various persons holding to the infant baptism position above have proofread this column so that this study will accurately present this perspective. However, as with any view, there exists a spectrum of views on this topic.

## Questions About Baptism

1. Should baptism be required of those who take the Lord's Supper?

Response: Since 1 Corinthians 11:28 warns each believer to *evaluate himself* prior to taking the Lord's Supper, our church does not act as judge for each participant. However, we do encourage people in our congregation to obey Christ in all ways, including baptism. If a person is informed about baptism but resists being baptized, one could ask if he can take the Lord's Supper in a "worthy manner" (1 Cor. 11:27-32). Baptism was required of those partaking the Lord's Supper as early as the second century (*Didache* 9:5 in J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 154), yet we see this as an individual decision.

2. Should those sprinkled *as infants* be baptized later after a confession of salvation?

Response: The difference between infant sprinkling and adult baptism relates to more than simply the *time* of baptism. The whole *purpose* of baptism differs significantly in these two ceremonies. Infant sprinkling signifies the parents' desire for their infant to be accepted into the community of God (Presbyterian view) and even serves as a means of saving grace in the Catholic and Lutheran views. However, as Scripture relates to baptism a symbolic purpose of looking back at one's salvation, it would seem that one who has been saved would welcome the opportunity to testify to his or her salvation through baptism after salvation.

*Approved by the elders of Crossroads International Church on 2 March 2009*