



The Act of Baptism

Because man, for a variety of imperfect reasons, has chosen to alter the biblical precedent for baptism, there is often a lot of confusion on this subject. What we need is to go back to Scripture and see what *Scripture* – rather than man-made tradition – teaches. **Scripture is our rule of faith and practice.** It is the ultimate authority for what we do, so let's see what Scripture, rather than man, says about this subject...

What baptism is...

- Baptism is *immersion* in water in submission to the authority of Jesus Christ. It's an act of obedience, by someone old enough to understand the concept of obedience, committing to a life of obedience.
- Baptism is a command to be obeyed – Matthew 28:18-20.
- Baptism symbolizes the cleansing from sin, a washing away of the old – Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16
- Baptism symbolizes the new birth by which one becomes a new creature in Christ. It symbolizes the beginning of the new life – John 3:1-4; 1 Peter 2:21; 2 Corinthians 12:13
- Baptism is the act which initiates the Christian into fellowship – Acts 2:36-41; Corinthians 12:13
- Baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and also the Christian, the new convert – Romans 6:3; Colossians 2:12

What baptism/immersion is not...

- It's not a guarantee of Heaven. If there is no faith and repentance, a baptism is invalid – Ephesians 2:8-9
- It's not proof to a congregation of the genuineness of a convert's faith. It is proof only to God who knows the heart and motives of the person.

Why should a person be baptized by immersion?

- He is commanded to by His Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:38
- It is an appeal to God for a clean conscience – 1 Peter 3:21
- To demonstrate openly his obedience and willingness to come under the Lordship of Christ – Matthew 3:15; John 2:4
- To follow the example of Jesus who was Himself immersed to *fulfill all righteousness*.

Matthew 3:13-17 (NIV) – Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

If Jesus Himself – who was dedicated in the Temple by His parents when He was just a few days old – chose to be immersed as an adult (the only sinless adult in all of history!) to “**fulfill all righteousness**” can we as believers refuse to follow His own personal example? Can someone who claims to be a Christ-follower refuse to “fulfill all righteousness”? Biblically, as believers, we have no grounds on which to claim exemption from a divine requirement to be immersed.

Obedience resulting from love is our main motive!

How is baptism performed?

- Biblical baptism is by immersion – the Greek word literally meaning “total submersion in water” – and the practice of the early Christians – Matthew 3:16; Act 8:26-39; John 3:23
- Jesus was immersed – Matthew 3:13-16

Even scholars from churches which accept other models of immersion will concede that immersion was the original command and that sprinkling (or pouring) were the concessions of man, and were never approved by, never authorized by, and never practiced by the Apostles of Christ, nor permitted by Scripture.

Nearly every denomination – Protestant and Catholic – will accept immersion as valid baptism.

According to historical records, other forms of baptism did not come into practice until at least two centuries later. No biblical statement can be cited to grant any person or church the right to alter apostolic/biblical practice with regard to immersion. (The English word “baptism” was actually created – rather than translated – and redefined to allow modes other than

immersion.” The true meaning of baptism cannot be visualized or portrayed in any form other than immersion.

Who is a proper candidate for baptism/immersion?

- Those who *hear* the Gospel – Acts 18:8
- Those who *believe* in Christ – Mark 16:15
- Those who *repent* of sin – Acts 2:38
- Those who *confess* Christ with their mouth – Acts 8:37

All of these parts *must* be present.

Therefore, infants are not proper candidates for baptism... it is a personal decision each must make for themselves when old enough to understand and speak for themselves from the heart. *There is no biblical precedent otherwise.*

Some key questions and answers about baptism/immersion...

Do we believe in “baptismal regeneration”?

No. “Baptismal regeneration” means that one is saved by the act of baptism itself. While God’s Word commands baptism, it clearly teaches us that we are saved by grace through faith, not baptism. Baptism *is* a physical act, yet it is “*not the removal of dirt from the body, but an appeal to God for a clear conscience*” (1 Peter 3:21).

Isn’t baptism a “work”?

No. One cannot baptize one’s self. In baptism, you are worked upon.

Can a person be a Christian and not be baptized?

To say *yes* is to say more than Scripture says. To say *no* is to presume to be God. Once a person has said *yes* to Jesus as Lord and Savior, he has forfeited all rights to say *no* to any of the Lord’s commands for us. **Baptism is one of those commands.** To refuse it is rebellion against one of Christ’s clear directives.

Many Christians seek the exception to God’s rule. For example, they may ask, “But what about those who cannot be immersed?” or “What about those who died before they could be immersed?” There are certain things God has commanded us to do. We are to do them. God is wise, righteous, just, and merciful. He deals with each of us in His sovereign wisdom. As for us, *we do know* what we have been commanded, and for *us* to do anything else is rebellion. The Christian life is a life of obedience to a command.

Others may suggest there are Scriptures, which talk about giving your life to Christ – being saved – without mentioning the importance of baptism. That’s true on the surface, but one must consider the context of those Scriptures. The Bible was written to people who had already believed and obeyed. The people who received the New Testament were already believers and certain things (like baptism) could be safely assumed to be understood – especially with the frequency of their mention elsewhere!

Why does Woodland Hills require a person to be an immersed believer in order to hold certain positions or to be a member at Woodland Hills?

Because in all biblical examples we have, this was the pattern of the Christians of the New Testament. We don't believe we'd be following the Scriptures if we allowed less than that.

How soon should a person be immersed once he has asked Christ to be his Lord and Savior, repented of his sins, and has confessed his belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God?

The pattern in the New Testament was *immediately*. In fact, in Acts 22:16, Ananias said to Saul of Tarsus (Paul), "*And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized, and have your sins washed away. Calling on the name of the Lord.*"

If you're a believer who hasn't yet been obedient in baptism by immersion, we'd love to assist you in your obedience! You can participate in one of our regular public baptismal services, or we can schedule a private baptism at any time! Just talk to Jason, Doug, or one of the elders to make plans.