

## **Baptism- The Details**

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**Integration Question:** *Who are the proper subjects for baptism? What is your preferred mode? How will you handle people who come to your church who have been baptized as infants or by a mode other than your preferred one? How will you talk to them about it? What process (if any) should come between conversion and baptism?*

### Theological Statement

Only faith in Jesus can save a person. Paul is clear about this in his letter to the churches in Rome, stating “if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Baptism serves as the outward expression of faith and a confirmation of the new life found in Jesus. Any person who repents and puts their faith in Jesus should get baptized. There is not a specific age requirement for baptism. No one is too old or too young to put their faith in Jesus. For the youth, as long as they recognize and turn away from their sin, and rely solely on the atoning work of Jesus for forgiveness and new life, they are able to be baptized. Throughout the New Testament, baptism is tied to conversion (Acts 2:37-38; 16:31-34). In other words, infant baptism does not constitute as a New Testament sacrament because the act of baptism can only be done by a person who has put their entire life and faith in Jesus. As soon as a person puts their faith in Jesus and is able to express to another person the gospel, they are ready to be baptized. They should not wait days, weeks, months, or years. Rather, after confirming their faith and the meaning, symbolism, and significance of baptism, a person should immediately get baptized (Acts 8:26-40).

The Bible is silent on where someone is supposed to be baptized. I think it is appropriate to do a baptism where the collective church body regularly meets, or in a public spot where non-believers can witness the life changing events as a result of choosing Jesus. Again, the Bible is silent and holds no insights into who is to baptize another. I personally believe baptism is meant

to be done by the person with most significant spiritual influence in the life of the person being baptized. Baptism should be done by immersion, if possible. The Greek word for baptism means “to submerge or immerse”. This is important to know because the common ritual cleaning for a first century Jew was a *mikveh*. This ceremonial cleansing was always full immersion. Jesus replaced this practice with the sacrament of baptism. Although baptism still resembles, in some ways, the old Jewish practice of *mikveh*, baptism has become even more significance with a new, deeper, life altering meaning of our new life is meant to be found, lived and experienced with Him in me. Acts 8:26-40 is a key passage that helps bring all these different aspects of baptism together. While an Ethiopian Eunuch was reading Scriptures, Philip came up and began helping the Ethiopian know what He was reading. After the man heard of Jesus, he put His faith in Him and decided, right then and there, to get baptized. Then Philip immediately takes the Ethiopian man and baptizes him, through full immersion, in some water next to them on the side of the road. This story illustrates that once a person believes in Jesus, they are to be baptized. Because Philip is the one who opened the man’s eyes to see the Good News of Jesus, it would make sense that Philip baptized him. Lastly, they were near some a public water source and deemed it was good to be baptized there.

### Ministry Application

Practically, if a person joins our community and they have been baptized as an infant, I do not deem that to be a conversion baptism that the New Testament portrays. I would walk them through the biblical significance of baptism and show that baptism always proceeds faith. I would then ask them if they would be willing to be baptized (again). Similarly, if someone was baptized before they were Christian, no matter what age they are now, should be baptized as a testimony of faith. On the other hand, if someone was baptized via sprinkling water instead of

full immersion as a result of putting their faith in Jesus, I would not ask them to be baptized (by immersion) again. If they would like, I would not stop them, but I would ensure to reassure them their first baptism was done with the correct theological understanding and heart posture.

The most practical thing we do around the topic of baptism is equip the layperson how to baptize someone. As part of our churches discipleship pathway, every Sunday gathering we take time after the sermon to teach a “tool.” One of the tools we teach is how to walk someone through baptism, from the biblical meaning to its spiritual and symbolic significance in the life of a Christ follower, and to actually immerse the person in water. This has been key, specifically, in the lives of parents who typically are the ones spiritually leading and discipling their children. Instead of the parents having their pastor baptize their children because they do not know a biblical process or what to say, we encourage and equip them to do it. Likewise, teaching our congregants how to walk a new believer through baptism equips them for when they lead someone to Jesus while out at the coffee shop, gym, or classroom. Immediately, they are able to walk that new Christian through the gospel and through baptism that follows.