

# SESSION 3

## THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

### Session #3 Teaching on The Meaning of Baptism

The name Baptist derived from the emphasis the denomination placed on baptism. Early Baptists called themselves “Churches of Christ,” “those who followed the baptized way,” and “God’s free people,” among other names. But the term “Baptist” remained, and it was incumbent upon Baptists to understand fully their position.

Purcellville Baptist Church believes that baptism is a rich symbol, meaning that baptism in itself does not convey salvation or transformation, but it is a sign of what has happened in a spiritual sense to a new believer. The water used in baptism is not sacred but is a vehicle to enhance the symbolism of spiritual washing or regeneration. As a symbol, baptism conveys several levels of meaning for a Christian believer. In a most profound sense, it pictures in vivid form the gospel of Christ itself. As the apostle wrote in Romans 6:3-4, a believer is said to be buried into Christ’s death, buried with Christ, and raised to new life in Christ. Theologically, as salvation is a gift of God, not through human achievement, and faith itself is a gift, baptism is God’s gift to the Church to allow the faithful a means of expressing their faith and gratitude for God’s redemptive work. By choosing a public baptism, the believer affirms personal commitment to God in Christ and the expressed faith of the congregation. And, by being immersed, the candidate professes an adoption of the gospel in personal life. Typically, adults, youth, or older children who understand the commitment of faith to Christ and wish to respond to God’s call are acceptable candidates for baptism.

Believer’s baptism has also been understood among Baptists as a sign of obedience to Christ. As Jesus was baptized by John in the River Jordan (Matt. 3:13-17), similarly each follower of the Lord should be baptized. Jesus also said in his “Great Commission” (Matt. 28:19, 20) that disciples should go forth teaching and baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Baptism is a seal on important promises. In being baptized a believer is assured that sins are forgiven (though not in the act of baptism itself), and that we are participants in God’s kingdom. Further, by identifying with the death and burial of Christ, baptism assures us that we shall likewise see the resurrection and eternal life (Titus 3:5-7). Finally, because Jesus

commanded that baptism should be conducted to the end of the age, baptism becomes a seal of the promise that Christ will return to claim his people (Matt. 28:20).

The relationship of water baptism to the Holy Spirit has also received attention among Baptists over the centuries. Fundamentally, early Baptists believed that upon believer's baptism, each believer received the Holy Spirit, as in Acts 10:47. This meant that the Holy Spirit indwelt believers. Some symbolically laid hands on the baptized believers to signify the coming of the Spirit into that person's life (Acts 8:17). Generally speaking, Baptists did not connect the New Testament passages about the baptism of the Holy Spirit that manifested itself with extraordinary gifts of the Spirit with water baptism. However, in recent years under the influence of the charismatic movement, significant minorities of Baptists do claim to have been baptized with water and then, as a separate act, with the Holy Spirit. This has produced manifestations like prophesying and speaking in spiritual languages (Acts 19:2-6).

Finally, at PBC, we feel there is an important connection between baptism and relationship with our local congregation. In the New Testament church, baptism led to fellowship and communion with other believers (Acts 16:15), as well as being part of "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:26-29, ESV).

Believer's baptism is always a voluntary act of the individual, in response to God's grace. Baptism is related to religious liberty and soul freedom as an entirely voluntary act that allows a person to profess personal faith. Baptism is inextricably tied to mission as it vividly portrays the gospel and fulfills Jesus' Great Commission for all true disciples. Most importantly, baptism cannot be separated from one's doctrine of Christ, since Christ himself was baptized and his redemptive work is depicted in baptism by immersion as a new relationship in Christ which all believers enjoy.

## **Discuss or Ponder and Review Scripture Before Baptism:**

- **Please read through the following information AGAIN to understand God's plan for water baptism and to prepare for your water baptism:**

1.It was instituted by God, for born again believers in Jesus Christ, to identify them as obedient followers of Jesus Christ. (Matt 28:19, Acts 2:38,41, Col 2:9-12)

2.Baptism is complementary (not supplementary) of the salvation experience. Salvation is a totally free gift of God and depends on no action on the part of the seeker, other than to express faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sin, cleansing from its penalty, and the gift of eternal life. (Eph 2:8-9, Gal 3:26-27)

3.Just as being saved/born again is an act that occurs once, believer's baptism is meant to be celebrated once and does not need to be repeated. All born again believers in Jesus Christ are encouraged (expected) to participate in this once in a lifetime act of obedience. (Acts 2:36-41, Rom 6:1-11)

4.Baptism is celebrated in the work of the Trinity as shown in the Bible: in the "name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit". (Matt 28:19-20)

5.Only a person who has placed their trust in Jesus Christ is to be baptized. Baptism involves a conscious decision by the believer to be obedient to God's command. (Acts 8:26-38, Acts 2:41)

6.Baptism is done by completely immersing the body into water. (Col 2:11-12)

7. Read the following Bible verses in preparation for baptism:

- **Mark 1: 1-11**
- **Matthew 3: 11**
- **Luke 12: 59-53**
- **Romans 5: 1-3**
- **Romans 6: 1-14**
- **Galatians 3: 26-27**
- **Colossians 2:9 - 3:17**
- **1 Peter 3: 18-22**