

# Believer's Baptism

## Doctrines Class Extended Notes for Lesson taught on October 28, 2007

490 years ago this very week – something very significant happened – Oct. 31, 1517. Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Door in Germany, sparking the Reformation in response to RCC's unbiblical and extrabiblical teachings and abuses. He addressed true repentance as well as forgiveness and indulgences and papal authority. This Wednesday marks Reformation Day, a chance to remember the courage and contributions of these Reformers and the Reformed / Protestant heritage they left.

In the “Reformation Study Bible” James Montgomery Boice defines [Reformed Theology](#):

1. Doctrine of Scripture – sufficiency, sola scriptura (along with other sola's)
2. Sovereignty of God – high view of God and His Word
3. Doctrines of Grace – total / radical depravity, God sovereignly elects those He saves, particular / definite redemption, effectual / irresistible grace, perseverance
4. Cultural mandate – Christianity affecting our world, especially by evangelism.<sup>1</sup>

With those essential distinctives, I would be reformed, without pledging allegiance to any man or system or confession or covenant theology – I greatly appreciate the contributions the Reformers made although I would have different views on end times, infant baptism, and a few other areas. The Reformation needs to continue and I pray that we would always be reforming our church and ourselves and also *transforming* by God's truth.

When I introduced the doctrines class a number of months ago, I said in the beginning I am not ashamed to stand on Reformation soil, or call myself “reformed” with a little “r” but I want to be Biblical with a capital “B.” After all, the key Reformation motto was *sola scriptura* – scripture alone. Whatever labels or terms summarize my theology are subordinate to that and I spell them lower-case: evangelical with little “e”, calvinist with little “c”, premillennial with little “p” and even baptist with little “b” – but Biblical is with a capital “B”. The Bible is uppercase and uppermost and we need to make sure all areas of theology remain subordinate. That doesn't lessen the importance or conviction I have in those other areas, but my allegiance is not to a label or system, it's to the Bible.

I bring that up again because we all have to guard ourselves against forming our views based on traditions or trust of godly men from the past or present. Some of the greatest men in church history since the Reformation have held different views on the ordinances of communion and baptism. In fact the Reformation really splintered and split and divided along these lines among Lutherans, Reformed, and the Anabaptists. Last week Ron spoke on the RCC view of transubstantiation, and Luther taught an in-between view called consubstantiation (real presence “in, with, and under” the bread and wine) as opposed to the rest of Protestant Christianity thought Calvin (real spiritual or mystical presence) or Zwingli (symbolic / figurative only) was more biblical.

There was a famous debate between Luther and Zwingli that was also this month (October 1529), that Tom Ascol has written about in a helpful article called “Contending for the Truth in Love”:

'It was obvious that the disagreement over the presence of Christ in the supper constituted, at least in the minds of Luther and his cohorts, an insurmountable barrier to fellowship.

At Philip's insistence Luther drew up a confession consisting of fifteen articles, including statements on the Trinity, Christ's person and work, sin, justification by faith and the Holy Spirit. On all these points there was perfect agreement among the participants.

The fifteenth article deals with the Lord's Supper. On the main points even of this article, both the Reformed and Lutheran parties were agreed. At the prompting of Philip, a final paragraph was added which states,

And although at present we are not agreed on the question whether the real body and blood of Christ are corporally present in the bread and wine, yet both parties shall cherish Christian charity for one another, so far as the conscience of each will permit; and both parties will earnestly implore Almighty God to strengthen us by His Spirit in the true understanding.  
Amen.

All the participants signed the confession--including Luther and Zwingli. On Monday morning, after the conference ended, the two reformers met together for one final time. It would be their last meeting on earth. With tears in his eyes, Zwingli held out his hand toward Luther as an expression of brotherly fellowship. But Luther refused to grasp it and instead said, "Yours is a different spirit from ours."

... even though it was a commendable love of God and truth which motivated his actions, Luther cannot be completely exonerated. His refusal to allow room for disagreement on the sacrament caused him to write Zwingli off as an unbeliever. On the final day of the Colloquy he professed astonishment that the Swiss contingency considered him to be a brother. He turned to them and said, "You do not belong to the communion of the Christian Church. We cannot acknowledge you as brethren."

At this point Luther illustrates the following maxim: The greatest strength of Christians who take doctrine seriously can easily become their greatest weakness. Devotion to truth and a passion to have an accurate understanding of it can lead a believer to dismiss all those who do not agree with him at every point. Love for truth, however, is never an excuse for not loving people. And genuine love for people, especially for brothers and sisters in the faith, necessarily requires a willingness to forebear with weaknesses, including weaknesses in understanding.

... A better course is to recognize that all those who hold to the essentials of the faith are to be received as brothers and sisters in Christ, even if they hold to distinctive ideas with which we disagree. Furthermore, while we unashamedly affirm our own distinctive beliefs which we find in the Bible [including our view of baptism for professing believers only] we ... are liable to make mistakes in our understanding and are in constant need of having our thinking reformed by the Word of God.

For this very reason Christians who disagree on certain distinctives ought to argue their points of contention with a desire not only to be understood but to understand those with whom we disagree. It is possible to be both rigorous and humble. All who love Christ and His Word should welcome the efforts of those who strive to clarify revealed truth at any point ... We do so knowing that the river of orthodox Protestant Christianity is much broader than our Baptist stream, and we have openly acknowledged our agreement with Presbyterian and Reformed brethren on the nature of salvation and the doctrines of the gospel. We see ourselves as a part of that greater work which God is doing in recovering the gospel of God's grace to a generation of evangelicals who seem to have doctrinal amnesia. And we applaud and try to encourage all who are working for reformation and renewal--regardless of whether or not they agree with us on baptism. The essentials are more important than the distinctives [but still] those who disagree with us need to be challenged to reexamine the Word of God to see if their beliefs are properly grounded.'<sup>2</sup>

Persecution over ordinances used to be severe – Catholics or Church of England would at times put to death those who refused to view Lord's Supper or baptism as they did. Even among Protestants, the Anabaptists (re-baptizers who felt only believer's baptism was valid) were tortured and killed among fellow Protestants in the Reformed tradition.

I am thankful we live in a day where the way of dealing with different views is not by the sword or the State, but by the Scriptures. Our forefathers weren't perfect, but I appreciate their zeal for the truth, and that they were willing to die for their scriptural convictions on the ordinances. What doctrines are you willing to die for?

I am also thankful for the examples of godly men who differ strongly on the issue of baptism but who contend for the truth in love with their fellow brethren and who have a real fellowship and friendship and unity in the gospel of grace (ex: Sproul and MacArthur friendly debate,<sup>3</sup> Ligon Duncan & Dever/Mohler "Together 4 Gospel" – [www.t4g.org](http://www.t4g.org) )

Charles Spurgeon loved the Puritans but departed from their infant baptism heritage and firmly believed in conversion before baptism, yet he also could joke about it with non-Baptists. His mother wrote that she often prayed that Charles might become a Christian, but not necessarily a Baptist. He replied with wit that it was just like the Lord to not only answer prayer, but to bestow more than had been asked.<sup>4</sup>

**Definition of baptism:** <Read Matthew 3:1-8>

From Greek word *baptizo* (to immerse, dip). 'Christian baptism ... (like John's pre-Christian baptism), is a sign from God that signifies inward cleansing and remission of sins (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27), Spirit-wrought regeneration and new life (Titus 3:5), and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as God's seal testifying and guaranteeing that one will be kept safe in Christ forever (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13-14). Baptism carries these meanings because first and fundamentally it signifies union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-7; Col. 2:11-12); and this union with Christ is the source of every element in our salvation (1 John 5:11-12). Receiving the sign in faith ... commits them to live henceforth in a new way as committed disciples of Jesus. Baptism signifies a watershed point in a human life because it signifies a new-creational engrafting into Christ's risen life.' – J.I. Packer (not a Baptist)<sup>5</sup>

**Baptist** – sees baptism as an act of obedience for professing believers only

**Paedobaptist** – (or “pedobaptist” from Greek word for children, ex: pediatrician) sees baptism as valid for infants of believing parent(s) as well as for adult converts to Christianity who have never been baptized

‘Some Christians view the act as effecting regeneration; others see it as the symbol of God’s grace extended to the infant prior to personal response; others suggest that, like circumcision in the OT, infant baptism marks an infant as a member of the covenant community.’ (*Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*)

For responses to the latter evangelical view of covenant pedobaptists, see:

[http://www.monergism.com/directory/link\\_category/Baptism/Credobaptism-Believers-Baptism/](http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Baptism/Credobaptism-Believers-Baptism/)

### **Views of Baptism:**

Outside of true Christianity, Mormons believe in baptisms for dead family members and

Roman Catholicism believes infant baptism is one of seven sacraments for salvation:

If any one saith, that baptism is free, that is, not necessary unto salvation: let him be anathema - *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*. Found in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877), Decree on Justification, Chapter IV, p. 91; Canons on Baptism II, V; pp. 122-123.

Baptism, the gateway to the sacraments, is necessary for salvation, either by actual reception or at least by desire. By it people are freed from sins, are born again as children of God and, made like to Christ by an indelible character, are incorporated into the Church. It is validly conferred only by a washing in real water with the proper form of words - *The Code of Canon Law* (London: Collins, 1983, Canon 849).

Lutherans believe in a form of baptismal regeneration of infants

Churches of Christ believe in salvation upon adult immersion into their church (esp. ICC)

For articles against baptismal regeneration/salvation, see

[http://www.monergism.com/directory/link\\_category/Baptism/Baptismal-Regeneration/](http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Baptism/Baptismal-Regeneration/)

<http://www.gty.org/Resources/issues/535>

A few groups do not believe any form of baptism is for Christians - Quakers, Friends Church, Salvation Army, “hyper-dispensationalists” (who follow Bullinger)

Evangelicals in Reformed and Protestant tradition believe baptism is important and necessary, but they do not believe salvation is caused by baptism of infants or adults.

The most up-to-date books treating the various views are:

*Understanding Four Views on Baptism*, Armstrong and Engle, editors, 2007, Zondervan.

*Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright, editors, 2007, B&H Academic.

*The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, edited by Gregg Strawbridge, 2003.

### **MATTHEW 3**

v. 2 – Message of repentance was message of John the Baptist, central to his ministry (see 4:17 which shows this was message of Jesus as well)

v. 6 – Condition of baptism was confession of sin [see MSB note]

v. 7 – Unrepentant and self-righteous he would not baptize

v. 8 – There needs to be fruit of life to evidence true repentance (see also v. 10)

v. 9 – The kingdom John was preaching about is not based on physical descent with Abraham, it's not based on circumcision or being born in the right community anymore, those in the kingdom are those who are spiritual children of Abraham by personal faith in Jesus Christ (regardless of what race or faith your parents are). Your genealogy or what happened to you when you were a baby does not put you in the kingdom or in the covenant or in the true church of Jesus Christ. Repentant faith is the N.T. starting point.

Matthew 5:3 (NASB95)

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

... 9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The force of the Beatitudes in the original language is that these and these alone are in the kingdom and family of God. This was the opposite of what the Jews taught and believed - by being born in the right family and by having the right ceremony done as a baby, they assumed spiritual blessings and covenant membership, but the N.T. message is different:

Galatians 3:7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Galatians 3:29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

Romans 4 also makes this point clearly in contrast to circumcision and reminding us that it is inward faith God requires, none of the Old Covenant externals could truly put us “in”

Matt 3:11 – John pointed them to Christ who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire Water immersion was a picture of a spiritual reality that those with repentant faith would be in Christ's spiritual body (fire in v. 11 may be connected with judgment in v. 12; those who do not practice repentant faith who will be immersed or engulfed in God's wrath)

v. 16 – immersion clearly implied by language

John Calvin wrote: “The word ‘baptize’ means to immerse, and it is clear that the rite of immersion was observed in the ancient church.”<sup>6</sup> (although he believed other modes were acceptable, such as pouring or sprinkling)

Martin Luther wrote: “I would have those who are to be baptized completely immersed in the water, as the word says and as the mystery indicates ... This is doubtless the way in which it was instituted by Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

Apparently not only did early Lutherans practice immersion, but when early church began baptizing infants, they did so by immersion till the middle ages

Immersion best symbolizes the Romans 6 imagery (death, burial, resurrection)

I believe the mode of immersion is important, but it's not something I would die over, or say someone was not truly baptized if they didn't go all the way underwater.

There's other less essential aspects of baptism as well:

- Place – outside, inside, etc.
- Formula pronounced – name of Jesus, or Christ Jesus, or the Lord Jesus, or Father, Son, and H.S. (it being distinctly Christian is more important than exact words pronounced)
- Number of times – thrice immersion, etc.
- Who performs the baptism (pastor, elder, deacon, father, etc.)?

To me, the most important issue is salvation; 1) its relation to salvation (does not save) and 2) it is an outward depiction of an inward reality of salvation that has taken place, it's a true identification with Christ's death, burial and resurrection

v. 16-17 – Notice Trinity here – Father, Son, and H.S. just like in Great Commission  
Notice also that this is the first public act of Jesus before he began His ministry, and He is our example in every way, that those who follow Him and identify with Him should also be baptized as first act of obedience in following Christ

With this backdrop, let's look at Matthew 28:19

### **MATTHEW 28.19 NOTES**

Main verb is “make disciples”

**Disciple** – means a follower of someone and his teaching, not merely a learner, but someone attached to a teacher and following that teacher's life and doctrine

This is a much better word than “Christian” (never used in 4 gospels)  
The word “disciple” is used 239 times just in the 4 gospels alone

This word for “follower of Christ” has much more richness and meaning than how we Americans use the word “Christian” (basically for someone who goes to church sometimes or who prayed a sinner's prayer at some point)

This Great Commission is not exclusively or even primarily about overseas missions: “Go” is a participle (i.e., “going”) and you don't want to give too much force, or say this speaks only of going far away (they were to start going around Jerusalem). It is an action word, though, don't just sit around and hope someone will ask you how to be saved.

The Great Commission is not exclusively about traditional ideas of evangelism, either. “Make disciples” implies a process, as of course does teaching everything Jesus taught.

This commission Jesus gave us is not make decisions (getting people to raise their hand, sign a card, walk an aisle, sign a box, repeat a formula prayer, etc.). A large percentage of those do not ever get baptized or commit to a church or seek discipleship.

But Jesus did not say our job is done when we make decisions by whatever means or by singing through enough stanzas of the right song. The job of the church is to make *disciples*, baptizing and teaching them, discipling them to maturity, as Paul said “to present every one complete in Christ.” We cannot assume that *man’s decisions* are the same as *making disciples* – the call is to discipleship, both public and private instruction, and ultimately the goal is to make disciple-makers who will make other disciple-makers.

*How did Jesus define who was His disciple and who was not his disciple?*

John 8:31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

John 13:35 “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 15:8 “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

Luke 14:27 “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

This same passage in Luke speaks of even forsaking family to follow Christ (v. 26) and giving up everything to follow Jesus or we cannot be His disciple (v. 33)

Anyone who tries to make discipleship an easy thing, or something non-costly, that you don’t have to give up anything or change your life to follow Jesus, needs to hear this.

You could be baptized multiple times, confirmed, Christianized, Calvinized, catechized, whatever – if there is merely intellectual assent or professed faith without:

- forsaking all else
- willingness to lay everything down in exchange for Christ and strive to put King Jesus far ahead of family and possessions
- supposed faith that doesn’t require and produce some change of life and fruit and biblical agape love for each other
- if someone has not died to self and taken up his cross
- if someone is not striving to follow Christ
- if someone does not continue in God’s Word

According to Jesus, you cannot be His disciple. That’s His Word, not my opinion.

It’s NOT that you have to do a bunch of things and then you’re saved, it’s that if you are saved you are willing to do all Christ calls you to because you now love Him because He first loved you, by His grace you have begun to be His disciple, continually learning. Jesus has transformed your desires so now you want to pursue what He calls you to, you are now a follower of Him, not perfectly, but there is a change of life and direction and desires – regeneration.

*What's the relation of disciples and baptism?*

Besides Matthew 28:19, I'm aware of only one other passage that mentions both of those words together in the same verse:

*John 4:1 Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John*

\*Notice that both John and Jesus baptized **disciples**

It appears in the earlier chapter that Jesus baptized His disciples and then at some point He was no longer baptizing but they were, as 4:2 says, but clearly Jesus did baptize, too

*John 3:22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing.*

So when Jesus tells His disciples in the Great Commission to make disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them – this was the background. Essentially, He was telling them to practice what He preached; what He had done with them, they were now to do. No disciples were scratching their heads, what does he mean by make disciples and baptize them – He had shown them and modeled it for them. So I don't assume a radical discontinuity or difference in Christian baptism from the baptisms Jesus or John performed in the gospels, the main difference is "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" and of course after Pentecost, Christ would baptize with the Spirit as well. All disciples or believers are spiritually baptized into Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13) of which the physical baptism is a symbol and picture of the spiritual reality (Rom. 6).

*John 3:25 Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification.*

*26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him."  
27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.*

John was quick to clarify that the water does not purify anyone, whether John or Jesus baptized (Jews also had purification through ceremonial washings). The regeneration and repentance John and Jesus both called for was not a human work or act or decision, it ultimately can only be given by God from heaven. God-given regeneration causes repentance, but baptism doesn't cause your forgiveness. Baptism is a visible public demonstration that you are forgiven and committed to be a disciple, a follower of Christ. It's an outward symbol of the inward reality that has taken place in believers or disciples.

The important thing is that both Jesus and John baptized disciples, as John 4:1 says, and this pattern continues when Jesus tells his disciples to "make disciples, baptizing them" The "them" refers logically to the disciples (you can't baptize a nation, obviously this is individuals within the nations). You make disciples, and the disciples must be baptized and they must be taught everything Jesus commanded His original disciples.

The text clearly says both John and Jesus baptized disciples. Repentance was the first message and words we have of both as first duty. At this point I cannot fully subscribe to the theology that sees the old and new covenants as “essentially identical” (ex: Berkhof). The Old Covenant community was marked by and entered by rituals and ceremonies. But as I read the N.T., God’s New Covenant Community is marked by and entered by regeneration and saving faith. The mark has changed from the physical and outward to the spiritual and inward. In the Old Testament, there were countless thousands who were circumcised yet not saved, but in the New Testament, there are thousands who are saved and then baptized as a result (and no clear example of giving the ceremony to an unbeliever).

I am not aware of any theologian of any view who argues from the text that John the Baptist or Jesus or His disciples in the gospels baptized disciples *and babies of disciples*. But many good and godly men believe that the baptism Jesus later commanded in Matthew 28 for Christians to perform in the book of Acts was not to resemble the baptism in the gospels so much as it was to resemble O.T. circumcision, which was done to infants, at least the males. In other words, many see sharp discontinuity with baptism in the gospels, but strong continuity with the O.T. ceremony of circumcision. But they have to argue that from inferences, I don’t know how anyone looking at the original context and original language words and grammar of the Great Commission can say that the disciples who originally heard these words would NOT think the baptism of John and Jesus in the gospels was to be their pattern, just as Christ’s pattern while on earth of making disciples and teaching them was to be their pattern for the rest of the commission. Christ, not Abraham, is their pattern now, but the Pharisees who came to John had it backwards in wrongly thinking Old Covenant ways still. Jesus taught in John 3 it’s not about anything that happens when you’re born anymore, you must be born again.

For our brethren who practice infant baptism, the inference is that since circumcision was the sign of the Old Covenant and was given to 8-day old baby boys, every Jewish convert to Christianity would automatically assume that baptism in the New Covenant is the equivalent sign that should be given to babies, but it could be at a different age, and now girls can be included as well. The fact that the N.T. doesn’t clearly say that isn’t a problem for them, because they don’t think it needs to. The paedobaptist writers I’ve read generally admit there is no command to baptize infants and no explicit examples of an infant being baptized, but they consider this inference to be good and necessary. For something as important as an ordinance, though, my conscience cannot go with assumptions or inferences (esp. those I don’t think are good or necessary). What does the N.T. actually teach?

Another assumption is that baptism alone is the “sign and seal of the New Covenant.” If we are to use actual N.T. phraseology, the word “seal” is used for the Holy Spirit who seals us when we believe (Eph. 1:12-14). The word “sign” is never used of baptism in the N.T., but the physical or visible ordinance that actually has language tying it to the New Covenant is the Lord’s Supper, who Jesus Himself seems to describe in such terms.

Perhaps both ordinances could be described as symbols or “signs” of the N.C., but I don’t think you can deny communion the same status, when the explicit statement of our Lord connects it to N.C.

With all due respect to the godly Presbyterian and Paedobaptist heroes I have on my shelf (and the vast majority of writers I benefit from are not Baptists), I don’t think it’s consistent to require repentance before communion and not before baptism.

There were two occasions where Jews were insisting on circumcision and O.C. ways for Christians that would have been perfect occasions for N.T. writers to explain that circumcision isn’t necessary because baptism replaces it (Acts 15 and Galatians) but instead those passages argue that saving faith alone defines God’s people now.

Jesus does not say in the Great Commission “make disciples, baptizing them and their babies, and teaching the disciples what Jesus commanded as well as teaching these baptized babies once they grow older and are able to understand more”

I listened to an excellent debate last week with James White (Baptist covenant theologian) and Bill Shisko (PCA)<sup>8</sup> who represents the paedobaptist view well. Even Bill did seem to admit in cross-examination that in the Greek language, the verbs “baptizing them and teaching them” refer to the same individuals and are parallel grammatically, and that baptism is the initiatory or one-time act and teaching is concurrent but continual. But the question he couldn’t adequately answer is: how can you teach newborns everything that Jesus commanded? And it doesn’t do justice to the language to say you baptize them right after they’re born, and then years later you begin teaching them and hope they become true Christians.

Jesus said the disciples of all nations are to be baptized and taught. A disciple by definition is a true follower of Christ, a learner, one committed to His master, which obviously requires a certain level of mental and spiritual development. Throughout the book of Acts, the most common term for the church is disciples – the N.T. concept of the local church is a community of disciples, regenerate or saved individuals.

There will always be people who attend or who even are members of a church who are not truly saved disciples, but they are not truly part of the church by biblical definition. Christ’s Church is not a building, it’s not necessarily the people who show up at the building on Sunday, kids of believers aren’t automatically a part of Christ’s true spiritual church. The biblical and true concept of the church is the redeemed and regenerated body of Christ, real disciples who have embraced the gospel and who trust Jesus as Lord.

Some brethren say repentant faith is not a requirement to get into the covenant, you’re in as a baptized baby and can get out later when you sin and break covenant – that sounds to me like a New Covenant that can be broken, a Covenant that doesn’t actually promise eternal life to those in the covenant or truly forgive sins, and rather than being a true unconditional covenant that depends on God’s faithfulness, this teaches people can fall out of by their sin when they get older and become “covenant-breakers.”

I personally do not know of any scriptures that speak of the N.C. that way (breakable or merely potential blessing). If all you need is to have one believing parent when you're born and you're baptized then you're "in," you basically now have a mixed church, with mostly unsaved kids who grow up and are members who you consider in the covenant and church because of their parents, rather than the personal faith of individual believers.

For me, the decisive text is the N.T. chapter that contrasts the Old and New Covenants is:

Hebrews 8 (NASB95)

6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a **better covenant**, which has been enacted on **better promises**.

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.

8 For finding fault with them, He says, "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, When I will effect a **new covenant** With the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;

9 Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers On the day when I took them by the hand To lead them out of the land of Egypt; For **they did not continue in My covenant**, And I did not care for them, says the Lord.

The Old Covenant was conditional and dependent on Israel's response, but the New Covenant is described as "better" with "better promises" – it is not essentially identical

10 "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel After those days, says the Lord: **I will** put My laws into their minds, And **I will** write them on their hearts. And **I will** be their God, And they shall be My people.

Notice the divine initiative and pledge that this is something God will do unilaterally and unconditionally for His people, and the inward focus is on "their hearts" now. This promise is not limited to the Jews in the future (ex: Rom. 11:26) but is for "spiritual Israel" (Rom. 9:6-8), those who have faith. The spiritual blessings of the New Covenant mentioned in this passage are for Gentiles as well, as 2 Corinthians 4 makes clear the N.T. ministry is a New Covenant ministry. Our Lord inaugurated this Covenant with His blood on the Passover when he died, and Hebrews 8:11-13 describe its benefits.

11 "And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, And everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' For **all will know Me**, From the least to the greatest of them.  
12 "For I will be merciful to their iniquities, And **I will remember their sins no more.**"

There is continuity in God's workings in the O.T. and N.T. in redeeming man by grace alone through faith alone, but there is discontinuity in the covenants. In the O.T., those in the Covenant certainly did not "all ... know me" (the vast majority did not know the Lord savingly), but the "better covenant [has] better promises" (Heb. 8:6) because our Lord says in the New Covenant "all will know me" and all will have their sins forgiven (unlike the massive numbers of Old Covenant members who were marked by a ceremony but never experienced forgiveness of sins or saving knowledge of God). The New Covenant members are not initiated and placed in by ceremonies, it's by sovereign saving grace.

***How do you make disciples as the Great Commission commands?***

Acts 14:21 (NASB95)

21 After they had **preached the gospel** to that city **and had made many disciples**, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,

The N.T. pattern is first preaching the gospel, which Christ uses to make His disciples as they repent and believe the gospel

Acts 2:38 (NASB95)

38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized ...

v. 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Acts 8:12 (NASB95)

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

13 Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

Acts 8:36-38 (NASB95)

36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?”

37 [And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”]

38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Acts 16:14-15 (NASB95)

14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

15 And when she and her household had been baptized ...

Acts 16:30-34 (NASB95)

30 and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

31 They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.

33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.

34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

Acts 18:8 (NASB95)

8 Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

Acts 19:4-5 (NASB95)

4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Application: If you have not been baptized since repenting and believing in Christ personally as your Lord, you need to do that. Talk to me or any of the elders, so we can discuss your testimony and repentance and set up a time to baptize you so that you don't need to delay your disobedience any longer.

Does baptism save? No.

Can different Christians have different views on it and be saved? Yes.

If you're trusting in the baptism waters to save you are you saved? No.

Is baptism important? Yes.

### ***Water Baptism Itself Does Not Save***

Acts 2:38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

One writer notes: In Acts 2:38 the main verb is ... aorist direct imperative (a command) ... This refers to that initial repentance of the sinner unto salvation. The verb translated "be baptized" is in the indirect passive imperative (a command to receive; hence, passive voice in Greek) of *baptizo*, which does not give it the same direct command implied in "repent." The preposition "for" in the phrase "for the remission of sins" in Greek is "*eis*," unto or into, and it is in the accusative case (direct object). It can mean "for the purpose of identifying you with the remission of sins." It is the same preposition we find in 1 Cor. 10:2 in the phrase "and were baptized unto Moses." Note that both contexts are dealing with baptism and identification. In 1 Cor. 10:2 the people were baptized or spiritually identifying themselves with the purposes and vision of Moses.

Repentance, therefore, is presented as identifying an individual with the remission of his sins, even as baptism following repentance provides an external identification visible by others. Repentance is something that concerns an individual and God while baptism involves others. That is why *baptistheto* (let be immersed) is in the passive voice indicating that one does not baptize himself, but is baptized by another usually in the presence of others. Repentance, however, is an act taking place within a person's heart as the Holy Spirit moves in the sinner.

But, all this Greek stuff may be confusing. Let me break it down. All people are commanded to repent for their sins. This is what believers have already done by becoming Christians. Baptism, then, is the outward identification with being a Christian for those who have already repented. Also, as the Israelites were "baptized into Moses" (1 Cor. 10:2), so too, Christians are baptized into Jesus. That is, they are identifying themselves, publicly, with Christ. Likewise, in Rom. 6:1-5 where baptism is related to death, burial, and resurrection, it is again an identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. That is why it is said of Christians that we have died to sin (Rom. 6:2, 11; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:20; Col. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:24).

This verse is not demonstrating that baptism is essential for salvation, but that baptism is the thing which we receive, in order to publicly identify ourselves completely and totally with Christ as a manifestation of the inward work God has done within us.<sup>9</sup>

MacArthur writes: In Acts 2:38, Peter appears to link forgiveness of sins to baptism. But there are several plausible interpretations of this verse that do not connect forgiveness of sin with baptism. It is possible to translate the Greek preposition *eis*--"because of," or "on the basis of," instead of "for." It is used in that sense in Matt 3:11; 12:41; and Luke 11:32.

It is also possible to take the clause "and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" as parenthetical. Support for that interpretation comes from that fact that "repent" and "your" are plural, while "be baptized" is singular, thus setting it off from the rest of the sentence. If that interpretation is correct, the verse would read "Repent (and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ) for the forgiveness of your sins."

Forgiveness is thus connected with repentance, not baptism, in keeping with the consistent teaching of the New Testament (cf. Luke 24:47; John 3:18; Acts 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18; Ephesians 5:26). A third possibility exists, as Daniel Wallace explains in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*:

It is possible that to a first-century Jewish audience (as well as to Peter), the idea of baptism might incorporate both the spiritual reality and the physical symbol. In other words, when one spoke of baptism, he usually meant both ideas--the reality and the ritual. Peter is shown to make the strong connection between these two in chapters 10 and 11. In 11:15-16 he recounts the conversion of Cornelius and friends, pointing out that at the point of their conversion they were baptized by the Holy Spirit. After he had seen this, he declared, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit..." (10:47).

The point seems to be that if they have had the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit via spiritual baptism, there ought to be a public testimony/acknowledgment via water baptism as well. This may not only explain Acts 2:38 (viz., that Peter spoke of both reality and picture, though only the reality removes sins), but also why the NT speaks of only baptized believers (as far as we can tell): Water baptism is not a cause of salvation, but a picture; and as such it serves both as a public acknowledgment (by those present) and a public confession (by the convert) that one has been Spirit-baptized.<sup>10</sup>

Peter himself clearly understood elsewhere that it's not any ritual that causes forgiveness, it's repentance.

Acts 3:19 "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;

Acts 5:31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 8:22 "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.

Acts 10:43 “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

It’s not the water itself, it’s the work of God alone (monergism) that causes salvation

Acts 2:39 “For the promise [forgiveness through repentance] is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

1 Peter 3:21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

When the Philippian jailer asked “what must I do to be saved?” the answer was not “baptism” it was “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” And we he and his household believed in Christ, they were baptized because of their conversion, not in order to cause their conversion.

It’s not the H2O that regenerates, it’s the Holy Spirit, and this prior work of God results in faith. Peter knew of many during Jesus’ ministry who were pronounced forgiven of their sins or saved on the spot without and before baptism. The penitent woman (Luke 7:37-50), the paralytic man (Matthew 9:2), the publican (Luke 18:13-14), and the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43) all experienced forgiveness of sins apart from baptism.

But Peter experienced this first-hand in a dramatic way in Acts 10

Acts 10:43-49 (NASB95)

43 “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.

45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,

47 “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?”

48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

Acts 11:13-18 (NASB95)

13 “And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here;

14 and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’

15 “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning.

16 “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with

water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

17 "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

Acts 15:5-11 (NASB95)

5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.

8 "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

10 "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

11 "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul states that "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel," thus clearly differentiating the gospel from baptism. He says there he was glad he had hardly baptized anyone in Corinth, which doesn't make sense if he believed baptism saved.

The principle of analogy of scripture is important here, because it's been estimated there are nearly 200 verses that speak of salvation by grace through faith, so any unclear or more difficult single passage you come across must not ignore the rest of scripture

## **QUESTIONS OF AGE TO BAPTISM**

Mark Dever estimates 4 out of every 5 baptized people no longer attend church

Also, trends in SBC over last generation have shown radical decrease in number and percent of people baptized aged 12-17 and even radical decrease in baptisms age 9-11. The biggest change is high percentage of baptisms age 6-8. From 1977 to 1997, one researcher found that kids 5 years old or younger being baptized increased by 250 percent. At the same time, there is a massive rate of rebaptisms.

Tom Ascol writes: When given multiple choices with which to answer, only 40.5% of those surveyed said that they had been baptized because they had been converted. "Rededication" was the answer selected by 40.4%. According to BP reporter, Sarah Zimmerman, "If the survey results represent the 150,000 adults baptized in 1993, then only 60,000 baptisms represented conversions of the lost to Christ." What a commentary!

These figures become even more alarming when two other facts are taken into consideration. First, the question was asked only of *adults* who had been baptized. It is safe to assume that they would be in a better position to understand the point and purpose of baptism than are the young people and children who were baptized that year (including more than 3000 who were 5 years old or younger).

Secondly, the 840 churches who participated in the survey admitted that they had lost complete contact with more than one-third of those whom they had baptized the previous year. These people were baptized into oblivion. They have been relegated to the denominational black hole known of inactive and non-resident church membership.

This is not quite as bad as the Colorado Springs (Independent) Baptist Church who "accidentally" baptized a Jewish boy last February. The mother, Audrey Ausgotharp, gave specific instructions to the bus ministry workers that her children were not to be baptized while visiting the church. Two women who accompanied the children home that Sunday told her that her seven year old son had been baptized "by mistake."

This is the latest chapter in what appears to be a pattern. The church is being sued by three other families whose children were mistakenly baptized in 1993. If "serial dunking" were a crime, this church would have been closed down a long time ago.

These "drive-by-baptisms" not only cheapen the ordinance from which Baptists take their name, they also leave widespread spiritual carnage in their wake. Think how confused and disillusioned those must be who have been mistakenly baptized! At the very least their case reveals a frightening disjunction between faith and practice. It is much more likely that this simply illustrates a lack of biblical instruction in many areas.

Believer's baptism dramatically portrays the gospel of Jesus Christ. Three ingredients are absolutely essential for this to be true: 1) Right mode--dipping beneath the water; 2) Right candidate--a previously unbaptized believer in Jesus Christ; 3) Right meaning--it is a testimony of faith, symbolizing the believer's participation in Christ's death, burial and resurrection.

Baptists throughout history have been severely persecuted--even to the point of death--for their distinctive convictions on baptism. How ironic that modern Baptists seem to be giving up through shoddy theology that which our forefathers would not relinquish despite the threat of the sword! (<http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/FJ22/editorial.html>)

Mark Dever writes: 'the practice of baptizing pre-teenage children is of recent development (largely early 20<sup>th</sup> century) and of limited geography (largely limited to the United States, and places where American evangelicals have exercised great influence). Baptists in the past were known for waiting to baptize until the believers were adults. Baptist Christians around the world are still much more cautious than modern American Christians, often waiting in Europe, Africa, and Asia to baptize until children are grown and in their 20's ...'

[Mark Dever's church statement I found generally helpful]:

'the age at which a believer is to be baptized is not directly addressed in Scripture ... We believe that the normal age of baptism should be when the credibility of one's conversion becomes naturally evident to the church community. This would normally be when the child has matured, and is beginning to live more self-consciously as an individual, making their own choices, having left the God-given, intended child-like dependence on their parents for the God-given, intended mature wisdom which marks one who has felt the tug of the world, the flesh and the devil, but has decided, despite these allurements, to follow Christ. While it is difficult to set a certain number of years which are required for baptism, it is appropriate to consider the candidate's maturity ... As they assume adult responsibilities (sometime in late high school with driving, employment, non-Christian friends, voting, legality of marriage), then part of this, we would think, would be to declare publicly their allegiance to Christ by baptism ... [as for younger ones, if they themselves initiate and express] desire to pursue baptism and membership in the normal course set out by the church, we will examine them on a case-by-case basis, with the involvement of the parents.'<sup>11</sup>

My former pastors at Grace Community Church wrote a perspective I found helpful:

The Bible does not put an age requirement on baptism. But it *does* describe water baptism as a *post*-conversion act of identification with Christ. In Acts 2:38, Peter emphasized repentance as a corollary to baptism. In verse 41 of that same chapter, Luke records that it was "those who had received his word" that were baptized. Acts 16:34 indicates that the Philippian Jailer's household *believed* before they were baptized. Colossians 2:11-12, 1 Peter 3:18-21, and other passages associate baptism with saving faith; and even the order of the Great Commission puts "making disciples" before "baptizing them" (Matt. 28:19).

Thus, without putting an age-requirement on baptism, the Bible indicates that a person must understand the gospel, repent of his or her sin, and savingly trust in Christ *before* being baptized. If water baptism is an external sign of genuine conversion, then genuine conversion must take place first.

At what point, then, is a child capable of understanding the gospel, repenting from sin, and savingly trusting in Christ? Again, Scripture gives no specific age limit. In our experience, however, we have found that most children do not really begin to objectively evaluate their own thoughts until they reach junior high. Before then, they usually feel little concern over the contradictory values to which they cling. Seldom during elementary years do they conscientiously think about and spiritually evaluate life's demands independently of their parents.

This does not mean that all young children are incapable of committing the rest of their lives to Christ and being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. However, prior to adolescence, few children truly appreciate the significance of their separation from God, and few have sufficient mental sophistication to project far enough into the future to commit "the rest of their lives" to anything.

Although we do baptize eleven or twelve year olds from time to time at Grace Church, our children's pastor spends enough time in conversation with them beforehand to settle any doubts he may have in two areas: (1) has the child actually rejected a worldly set of values in making his commitment to Christ? (2) can he project far enough into the future to make a lifelong commitment?

If these issues are resolved, we proceed to evaluate whether or not the child has an understanding of salvation by grace apart from works, and we seek verification from others that he or she demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit in everyday life. We believe a child who can meet these qualifications is ready to identify with Christ and His church through believer's baptism.

The temptation for many parents is to rush their child's baptism. Our elders here at Grace Church believe it is better to wait, and be absolutely convinced of a child's conversion, than to baptize the child prematurely — and thereby potentially give an unsaved child a false sense of assurance.<sup>12</sup>

A recommended resource for further study is *Your Child's Profession of Faith*, by Dennis Gunderson. Below is a historic position shortly after the Reformation by those holding to believer's baptism.

## The Schleithem Confession of 1527

### First: Baptism

Observe concerning baptism: Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with Him in death, so that they may be resurrected with Him, and to all those who with this significance request baptism of us and demand it for themselves.

I close with the prayer that the Reformer Ulrich Zwingli prayed before entering the conference with the Lutherans at Marburg:

Fill us, O Lord and Father of us all, we beseech Thee, with thy gentle Spirit, and dispel on both sides all the clouds of misunderstanding and passion. Make an end to the strife of blind fury. Arise, O Christ, Thou Sun of righteousness, and shine upon us. Alas! while we contend, we only too often forget to strive after holiness which Thou requirest from us all. Guard us against abusing our powers, and enable us to employ them with all earnest for the promotion of holiness.

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<sup>1</sup> This article by Boice is available online at <http://www.reformedreader.org/t.u.l.i.p.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Tom Ascol, "Contending for the Truth in Love" <http://www.gracesermons.com/robbeeee/contending.html>

<sup>3</sup> Audio available from Ligonier Ministries at

<https://store.ligonier.org/product.asp?idDept=A&idCategory=TH&idProduct=SPR03AC>

<sup>4</sup> Carlile, *Charles Spurgeon*, 36.

<sup>5</sup> From *Concise Theology*, [http://www.monergism.com/directory/link\\_category/Baptism/](http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Baptism/)

<sup>6</sup> *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (John McNeill, ed., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2:1320.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, *Three Treatises: The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 191.

<sup>8</sup> Baptism debate with James White and Bill Shisko available to download for free at

<http://www.opcli.org/display.php?id=15>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.carm.org/doctrine/acts\\_2\\_38.htm](http://www.carm.org/doctrine/acts_2_38.htm)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.gty.org/Resources/issues/535>

<sup>11</sup> Mark Dever in *Believers' Baptism*, edited by Tom Schreiner and Shaun Wright, p. 348-49. To hear Dever's audio teaching on this, go to <http://www.chbcaudio.org/2002/04/21/at-what-age-should-believers-be-baptized/> (you can download his notes there as well, which are helpful). The views of my former church represent a more mainstream yet cautious view <http://www.sfpulpit.com/2007/04/11/how-young-is-too-young-children-and-baptism/>. I have heard that John Piper and other noted Baptists generally begin considering candidates around age 12, but have not seen documentation or much further discussion on this issue.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.sfpulpit.com/2007/04/11/how-young-is-too-young-children-and-baptism/>