

## WHY BAPTISTS BELIEVE WHAT BAPTISTS BELIEVE, PART 34

The Baptist Faith and Message under the heading “The Church” says, “A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ...”

*[Question 15]* Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the only two **ordinances** that Baptists observe. What is an ordinance? It is a sacred formal act or ceremony. By contrast the Catholic church has seven ordinances. Why do we Baptists only observe these two ordinances? Because they were both sanctioned by **Jesus**. He was involved in them.

### **BAPTISM**

Let’s look at Baptism first. In Matthew Chapter 3 John the Baptist is preaching in the wilderness. He proclaims, “Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.” “Get ready! He’s coming! The Messiah will soon be here!” The book of Malachi and the Old Testament left off talking about this forerunner, this Elijah-like character who will come and announce the arrival of the Messiah. Then there are four centuries of waiting. Finally, Jesus comes. But just before Jesus starts His ministry there is this Elijah figure. He is dressed up in the goat skins like the prophets of the Old Testament wore. He is this strange-looking character out there in the wilderness preaching that the Messiah is coming.

“Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him [John the Baptist], and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matthew 3:5-6).

So, a lot of people were coming out to watch this wild preacher and listen to his message. He was calling on the people to repent. They are being baptized in the Jordan River. They are confessing their sins. They are getting their hearts right in preparation of the Messiah coming. Then Jesus bursts onto the scene...

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him” (Matthew 3:13). Now John has been talking about the Messiah: “I am not even worthy to tie his sandals. He is so much bigger and better than I am.” And yet Jesus comes and says “I need to be baptized by you, John.”

“John would have prevented Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?’” (Matthew 3:14). John is taken back by it. He knows who Jesus is. He said, “Behold the Lamb of God” and points to Jesus.

“But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he consented” (Matthew 3:15). I don’t know all that that means, but when Jesus is talking about John and Him fulfilling all righteousness, that must mean that this is a good thing to do. John consented. Basically, his response is, “OK, since You say so.”

“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him and behold, a voice from Heaven said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’” (Matthew 3:16-17).

This is a familiar passage about Jesus’s baptism. So, you have a series of True - False questions that go along with it.

*[Question 16]* True or false? John the Baptist was baptizing people only after they confessed their sins. It is **True** because it says in v 6 that they “were baptized by him in the river Jordan,

confessing their sins.” Baptism came after the people confessed and repented of their sins and not before. So, they had a spiritual life-changing experience related to their own sins and failures as humans and a need for a Savior, for forgiveness. They were recognizing their need to repent.

True or false? Jesus was a young child when he was baptized and it was His parents who brought Him to John the Baptist. That is obviously **False**. Most scholars believe that at this time, in Matthew Chapter 3, Jesus is 30 years old. He is an adult and His parents are not there.

True or false? When Jesus was baptized, He was identifying Himself with John’s message of repentance and righteousness. That is a tricky question. Let me tell you why I say it’s **True**. In v 15 Jesus says, “Let it be so now (go ahead and baptize Me, John), for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” So, Jesus, even though He’s NOT a sinner, here He is identifying with the sinful people that He came to ultimately die for and to save from their sins. He is supportive of and He is identifying Himself with John’s message and sanctioning it.

This is the follow-up question to that...

True or false? The fact that Jesus was baptized proves that Jesus was a sinner who needed to be saved. **False**. This runs contrary to the scripture that tells us that Jesus was “One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). There are many other passages that talk about the sinlessness of Jesus. He was not a sinner. I wanted to point something out in the passage. Did you notice that before the people were baptized, they confessed their sins? Does Jesus ever confess His sins? No. Why not? Because He didn’t have any!

This is what the Baptist Faith and Message says under the heading “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper”: “Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father,

the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing a believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus." That is the language you will hear many Baptist preachers use in the baptistry - "Buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life."

True or false? Jesus's baptism pleased His heavenly Father. **True.** We know that because of the voice from Heaven which was God the Father's voice. He said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

I want to point something out. Baptists believe that baptism is "an act of obedience" but that baptism itself does NOT save someone. We Baptists point to two scriptures to support the view that baptism does not save a person - (1) The passage here in Matthew Chapter 3 where we see the sinless Jesus requesting to be baptized. There is something more to baptism than saving people. It has something to do with identification. (2) First Corinthians 1:17 where Paul says, "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel..." If baptism was necessary for salvation, Paul would not have said that. Those are two passages. There are others.

So then, Baptism is an act of obedience. It does not save you. What saves you? You are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism is an act of obedience once you are saved.

[*Question 17*] Baptists practice baptism by **immersion**. Here's why we do -- The word translated "baptize" or "baptized" in the passage we just read is the Greek verb, *baptizo*, which literally means "to dip." The only times the Greek verb *rhantizo*, meaning "to sprinkle" or its counterpart noun appear in the New Testament is in Hebrews 9 to 12 and in 1 Peter 1 where they are associated with the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood by the priest.

So, we Baptists differ with those other denominations out there who practice baptism by sprinkling. We practice baptism by immersion because of the meaning of the Greek word itself, meaning “to dip.”

I want to point out something else to you that I learned when we traveled to Israel. Our guide was a Russian-born Jew who had been converted to Christianity. He was an interesting guy. He knew a lot about Israel and their history. He also had a lot of insight into Christianity and Judaism and the connections that they have. We were at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and he pointed out this “Mikvah.” It is a Jewish ritual purification bath that you will see outside the homes of wealthy people, outside the Temple Mount and at the synagogues around the country. As you know Christianity had its roots in Judaism. This is one of the reasons we study the Old Testament because of the many connections there. In the books of Leviticus and Numbers you will read things like, “bathe yourself and wash your clothes so that you will be clean.” They would use these Mikvahs, these baths to do that. Our guide demonstrated how this was done. He went into this Mikvah and showed us what they would do. He made the connection to New Testament baptism and how similar it is to what the Old Testament worshipper would do when they went to become ceremonially cleansed. He showed how that the person would dip themselves down below the water surface to clean their whole body. Our guide pointed out to us the similarity between this Jewish act of becoming ritually clean in these Mikvahs and the Christian practice of baptism. When you read Matthew Chapter 3 and John the Baptist’s message of being spiritually cleansed, you can see this connection can’t you? So, it is not just the word “*baptizo*” itself. There are other things that are significant to this act of being immersed versus being sprinkled.

“We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

*[Question 18]* Paul here is talking about this act of baptism being a picture of Jesus’ **Death** (being immersed), **Burial** (submersed deeper into the water) and **Resurrection** (coming up out of the water). Don’t you agree that the act of immersion is a better picture of Christ’s (and our) death, burial and resurrection than sprinkling somebody?

I love this paraphrase of Colossians 2:12: “For in baptism you see how your old, evil nature died with Him [Jesus] and was buried with Him; and then you came out of death with Him into a new life because you trusted the Word of the mighty God who raised Christ from the dead” (Colossians 2:12 Living Letters).

*[Question 19]* Other than John the Baptist, which of the following individuals does the Bible record baptizing someone? Your choices are Paul, Peter, Philip, Ananias, and Jesus’s disciples.

Paul baptized many individuals including Lydia, one of his first converts in Europe, and her family (Acts 16).

Peter baptized many Jewish converts at Pentecost (Acts 2) and later he baptized Cornelius and his family (Acts 10).

Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8).

Ananias baptized the newly converted Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9).

Jesus’s disciples baptized early in Jesus’ earthly ministry (John 4). They also baptized later when they obeyed Jesus’s Great Commission.

So, ALL those listed baptized someone. **Check them all.**

This is the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

*[Question 20]* According to the Great Commission, who is it that Jesus says should be baptized? **Disciples.** What is a disciple? A follower of Jesus. Those who repent and confess their sins and profess their faith in Jesus Christ. If you are a believer in Jesus, then you are a disciple of His.

So then, what is meant by “make disciples”? We present the Good News about how Jesus came to save them from their sins, what He did on the cross for them. If they believe, repent of their sins and then follow Jesus, they become His disciples. Once a person makes the decision to follow Jesus they are to be baptized as a public expression of their faith in Christ. As the Baptist Faith and Message said, the whole reason for baptism is an “act of obedience.”

Some might say, “Well, I’m a believer in Jesus, but I was baptized as an infant. What about me? Do I need to be baptized?” To answer this question let me give you a real-life experience that my wife had. She was raised Lutheran and they practice infant baptism. When she was a teenager in high school she got saved. Later, as an adult, she started attending a Baptist church. At some point in her life the Holy Spirit convicted her that she needed to be baptized as a disciple of Jesus, as a believer in Him and publicly profess her faith in Christ. This was her own personal conviction. And so, one Sunday she went forward during the invitation and professed her faith in Christ to the Pastor. She presented herself as a candidate for baptism and was baptized soon afterward.

In closing, hear me out. Baptism does NOT save you. It is NOT necessary to be baptized in order to go to heaven. If you are a believer in Jesus and you have not been baptized since the day

you were saved, you need to be baptized, not to be saved, but as an act of obedience!