

Acts 18:1-11 — “The Meaning of Christian Baptism”*Introduction*

- It was uncompromisingly commanded by the Lord Jesus (a final instruction; Matt 28)
- It was universally administered to Christians entering the early church (Acts!)
- It was uniquely connected to conversion as an unrepeatable expression of saving faith (Col 2)
- It was undeniably designed to picture the believer’s saving union with Jesus Christ (Rom 6)

WHY BE BAPTIZED?

1. to **follow** the example of Christ
2. to **obey** the command of Christ
3. to **unite** with the body of Christ

A Brief Study Through Acts 18:1-11

I. Paul’s PREACHING (1-7)

II. Paul’s PATTERN (8)A. Note Crispus believed *with all his household*

1. “household” baptisms -- Acts 16:34 show that all in the household are ‘believing’

B. many corinthians...

1. **when they heard**
2. **they were believing**
3. **they were baptized**

III. Paul’s PROMISE (9-10)

IV. Paul’s PERSEVERANCE (11)

Zooming in on verse 8: The Pattern (hearing...believing, being baptized)

Why do we make such a big deal out of baptism of the believer’s only?

From our own *what we teach statement*:

“Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:1-11).”

Conclusion

- BASIS for baptism - Matt 28:18-20
- CALL for baptism - John 14:15
- PURPOSE of baptism - Acts 2:38
- PICTURE/MEANING of baptism - Rom 6:3-5
- MODE of baptism - Acts 8:38-39
- CANDIDATE of baptism - Acts 2:41; Acts 8:12; Acts 8:36-38; Acts 9:18; 16:30-34;
- JOY of baptism - Acts 8:39 - went on his way rejoicing

A PORTION OF THE CFBC CATECHISM WITH PROOFS & COMMENTARY

Q. 112. What is a church?

A. A church is an assembly of baptized believers joined by a covenant of discipline and witness who meet together regularly under the preaching of the Word of God (Mt 18:20; Acts 2:42).¹

Q. 113. What two ordinances did Christ give to his Church?

A. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:24-26).²

Q. 114. Why Did Christ give these ordinances?

A. To show that his disciples belong to him, and to remind them of what he has done for them (Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:24-26)³

Q. 115. Who appointed these ordinances?

A. The Lord Jesus Christ. (Matt 28:18-20; Luke 22:19)⁴

¹ The “Church” is literally an ‘assembly’. It’s a ‘gathering.’ It’s a ‘meeting’ of people who are likeminded, bought with the blood of Christ, gathering to study His Word, exalt Christ, edify one another, and evangelize the lost. A church is *NOT* a building, a place, a committee, a group, a thing. A church is a living, vibrant, growing *organism* that is created by God, established in Christ, knit together by the Spirit of God (Eph 4:4-6) which is comprised of *blood bought saints* who are righteous thru faith in Christ. Jesus PROMISES to build His church. He will handle the growth. We are called to be faithful to the commands that He’s given to us: to preach (2 Tim 4:2), to pray (Acts 2:42), to sing and worship Him (Col 3:16-17), to edify one another (Eph 4:12-16), and to evangelize the lost (1 Pet 2:9-10; 2 Cor 5:20). To really have a biblical “church”, one must have 3 key items in place: (1) godly, qualified leadership and a shepherd who preaches the Word faithfully (1 Pet 5:1-5; 2 Tim 4:1-5; 1 Tim 3:1-7), (2) a faithful, intentional passion for the preservation of the purity of the church & the practice of church discipline (Matt 18:15-18), and (3) the regular practice of the ordinances that Christ gave to His Church -- baptism & the Lord’s Supper (Matt 28:18-20; 1 Cor 11:23-32). A local church is the *assembly of saints*. It’s not just a club, or a place, or an attempt to get people in. The church’s primary purpose is to **edify** and **build up** the saints (Eph 4:12) so that we all go out and evangelize sinners (Matt 4:19). A local church must have regenerate people, who have genuinely repented, who hunger for righteousness, who long for sinners to come to Christ, who are committed to the Word, to the Headship of Christ over His church, and holiness of life & in the church.

² An “ordinance” refers to a commandment, a stipulation, a command that Jesus Christ gave to His people that will serve the church in *remembering* the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ on the cross for His people. The church recognizes only TWO ordinances (sometimes called “sacraments” -- holy practices; but we prefer “ordinance” -- commands of Christ): (1) baptism and (2) Lord’s Supper. Some traditions recognize “foot washing” as a third ordinance (the brethren movement; from John 13) but this is a *picture* of service and not an ordinance that specifically pictures the *cross-work of Jesus Christ* as the substitute bearing God’s wrath for sinners. Thus, the Bible affirms there are 2 ordinances that should be regularly, frequently, and deliberately practiced in every local church so that God’s people will *remember* Christ, and *remember* His work on their behalf.

³ Very simply, the reason Jesus gave these ordinances is the same reason why Jesus gave the annual Festivals in the Old Testament Jewish history (like Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, Pentecost, etc.): to *remember God*. We are such a forgetful people and we must remember our God (Deut 8:11-20)! Jesus wants His church to *constantly, deliberately, regularly, and joyfully* feast upon Him by remembering His crosswork, His gospel, His grace, His atonement, His propitiation, and His call to holiness!

⁴ It must be clearly understood that the Lord Jesus Christ -- the Lord of glory and the very God-Man -- gave these “ordinances” (=commands) to His church. These are *not* optional. These aren’t preferences. Every local assembly is to regularly participate in these ordinances. In fact, in Matthew 28:18 Jesus begins by stating his authority: “ALL authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him.” Therefore, GO and make disciples of all nations and then baptize them (Matt 28:19). Paul said: “for what I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you...” (1 Cor 11:23). These are given by Christ Himself, the God of heaven and earth, the Head over His Church, the ultimate authority over us and over His people. Let us joyfully obey Him!

Acts 18:1-11 — “The Meaning of Christian Baptism”

Q. 116. What does baptism represent?

A. The believer's burial with Christ in His death & his resurrection to new life in Christ. (Jn 3:23; Acts 2:41; 8:12, 35-38; Col 2:12; Rom 6:4-6*).⁵

Q. 117. What does this mean for us?

A. That we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4)⁶

Q. 118. In whose name are we baptized?

A. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. (Matt 28:18-19)⁷

Q. 119. Who should be baptized?

A. Only professing believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 2:37-41; Acts 8:12; 18:8; 19:4, 5).⁸

Q. 120. Should babies be baptized?

A. No; because the Bible neither commands it, nor gives any example of it.⁹

⁵ Baptism by its very meaning means: “to immerse something fully under water.” Ancient Greeks used the word to refer to dipping a garment in a dye to change the color. It means to take something and fully submerge it underwater. Baptism represents a full immersion *into* Christ. Paul states it like this in Romans 6: we are “baptized into His death” (v.3b). That means that when Christ died, we died. His death is our death -- to our old, sinful, unregenerate self. But as we were buried with Christ into his death, so we too were raised from the dead with Christ (v.4-6). All this points to the reality that when Jesus died, we died. When he was buried, we were buried. When He rose up from the dead, so we were raised also to newness of life. Thus, we are *united to Christ*. All of our hope is totally found *in Christ and in His death, burial, and resurrection!*

⁶ The ordinances of “baptism” is a glorious *picture* of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It demonstrates visibly the death of Christ, the burial of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ to new life again. And, because of the believer's union *in Christ*, all of the benefits of Christ belong to the believing Christian. Thus, baptism is a symbolic demonstration -- that is, it's an **outward picture** -- of what has inwardly happened in the heart. Baptism never saves. But baptism shows the gospel. It proves that the work of God has already taken place in the sinner's heart. When the believer is immersed, dunked, fully under water, it is symbolic of the believer's death with Jesus Christ when He died. But after three days, Christ was raised victoriously from the dead and showed himself visibly and undeniably in newness of life. So too, when the believer comes up *out of the water*, it shows that having died with Christ and having been buried with Him, *we are raised up with him* to newness of life -- thus we are called to walk in a way that is pleasing to Him (Romans 6). Baptism is to be a fairly quick step of obedience in the newly converted person. Once he has believed, he is to demonstrate -- prove -- that demonstration by public profession of Christ before the saints (Acts 2:41; Acts 8:38; Acts 9:18; Acts 10:48; Acts 18:8; Acts 19:1-5).

⁷ When a believer is baptized, he is baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This is the case, first of all, because it is how Christ commanded it to be done (Matt 28:18-19). This is not just a “ritual formula”. Rather it presents and shows the wonderful, close, mysterious and spiritual *union* every believer has with the Godhead -- the Father, Son & Spirit. Note that baptism presents the believer's union with the Father, with the Son & with the Spirit. Note all three members of this One Godhead are all present with equal authority. To be baptized in the name of the Godhead, it means that the believer is identified with *everything* that God is, has done, possesses, and represents. It's like saying that we are *united to Him* by faith and we *fully belong* to Him, and we believe in *who He is and what He has done* and all that He's done for me. Note it's not baptized into the “names” (plural), but rather “Name” (singular) because there is One God. So every believer is united with this one God!

⁸ The Bible is unspeakably clear that only true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, those who have individually and personally repented of sin and trusted in Jesus Christ alone, are those who must be baptized. All of the instances of baptism in Acts and the Epistles refers to those who have *already* believed on Christ for eternal life. This would remove the argument that babies should be baptized (or, infants, small children). Only those who have “heard the good news and who have believed (Acts 8:12; 8:37). It is those who have repented and believed who must be baptized (Acts 2:38).

⁹ Many in the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, and Lutheran traditions baptize babies and they have various viewpoints and reasons for doing this. However, the Bible is absolutely silent about any child or newborn being baptized. In fact, *all* of the instances of people being baptized in the Scripture is always and only referring to those who have heard, have responded to, and have trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior and identified with Him. Luke says in Acts 18:8 that Crispus “believed in the Lord *with all his household* (=note: the household believed) and many of the Corinthians when they (1) heard, were (2) believing, and (3) were being baptized. Thus, this is the pattern: one must *hear* the Word, *believe* the Word, and respond in obedience by being *baptized*. The entire New Testament is silent about and gives no example of an infant being baptized. Thus, no babies should be baptized.

Acts 18:1-11 — “The Meaning of Christian Baptism”

Q. 121. Does Christ care for little children?

A. Yes; for he says, "Permit the children to come to me; do not hinder them. For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16).¹⁰

Q. 122. What does your baptism demonstrate you?

A. To be identified as a follower of Christ. (Acts 22:16; Col 2:11-14).¹¹

Why Should You Be Baptized As A Believer?

Geoffrey R. Kirkland | Christ Fellowship Bible Church

Much confusion exists today regarding baptism in the local Church. I want to clarify a few points and further explicate on why baptism is biblically reserved for the disciples alone. That is to say, the biblical ordinance of baptism is to be administered only upon those who provide a believable and credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to provide for you a number of biblical reasons *why you should be baptized as a believer*.

1. It follows the preaching pattern of Jesus and His disciples.

John the Baptist entered the scene at the outset of the NT and preached “repent for the kingdom of heaven is near” and then he proceeded to baptize those who repented. Then Jesus began to preach the same message of repentance and then those who repented were baptized by Him. In the book of Acts, the Apostles preached and then those who believed were baptized.

2. It follows the pattern of the early Church as revealed in the book of Acts.

The book of Acts provides ample accounts of sinners who heard the gospel preached, then they believed, and then they were baptized (Acts 2, 8, 18, etc.). There is no clear account in the NT of any person being baptized who had not heard the gospel and personally repented of faith & believed in Christ. To put it positively, only those who individually repented and believed in Jesus Christ were baptized.

3. It alone accurately symbolizes one’s death, burial, and resurrection to newness of life because of being united to Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ Even though babies and small children should not be baptized, the question one may ask is: “well, then, does Jesus even *care* about small children?” Of course! The Word of God is FULL of references to God using children for His purposes (=Joseph, Daniel, Jeremiah, Joash, Josiah, etc.) and also even Christ Jesus Himself as a 12-year old was totally about His Father’s business (Luke 2:49). When parents brought their children to Jesus, it was the disciples who were indignant and rebuked them, but Jesus permitted the children to come to Him & Jesus even said the kingdom of God belongs to such as these (Luke 18:16). In fact, in Mark, Jesus even “blesses the little children” (Mark 10:14). Christ does have a deep love for precious, little, helpless, and growing children. He wants them to learn the truth about God, about themselves, about their need for Christ, and their need to repent & believe and follow Him wholeheartedly. His great love for children would invite them to come while they are young, to waste no more time, and to trust in Him and live sold-out for His glory!

¹¹ Baptism is an ordinance that demonstrates/shows/pictures one’s *union* with Jesus Christ. Baptism does **not** save, nor does it make one have a better “standing” or “position” with God. It doesn’t make one more sanctified or more holier. Rather, it is an act of obedience that a newly converted person chooses to do to honor Christ, to identify with Him, and to identify with Christ’s people. So baptism is when a person goes into the water as a picture of being buried with Christ and then that person is raised up as a picture of being raised up to new life in Christ (Col 2:12). This gospel-grace comes *through faith* (Col 2:12b). Thus, baptism is a most glorious picture of the believer’s intimate, abiding union with the risen Lord and the believer’s identification with the people of God. Baptism says to the church family: “I am one of you and I belong to Christ -- let’s grow together as the people of God!” It identifies with God’s people, with Christ, and obeys the command of Christ to take a stand and confess Him before men.

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Colossians 2 and Romans 6 both clearly picture a believer's union with Christ as one who has died to his old life of sin, he has been buried with Christ, and he has been raised to newness of life. Just as Christ died, was buried, and was raised from the dead to life again, so it is with the believing sinner. He has died to his old life of rebellion, sin, and evil. He has been buried with Christ (by being united with Him — *in Christ*). And he has been raised to newness of life because of a sovereign act of God that gave him a new heart and new affections that now are able to live, serve, follow, worship, and please God. Only a believer can experience this.

4. It is the only baptism pattern that permits the one being baptized an opportunity to share his testimony as to how God saved him.

Only one who individually repents of his sinful past and places his saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can testify to this and thus be qualified for baptism. An infant cannot proclaim his faith in Christ nor can he repent of sin. Therefore, an infant should not be baptized any more than an infant should take communion in memory of Christ's substitutionary death in his place.

5. It obeys the clear command of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The closing words of Matthew's gospel contain the final words of our Lord on earth before He ascended to His Father. Here he said to His followers to go into all the world and make disciples. The following supporting phrases further define how one is to make disciples. First, His followers are to baptize new disciples in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And second, His followers are to teach the new disciples who have been baptized all that Christ has commanded. This clearly answers the question that many in our world have today of *why the baptism issue really matters*. It matters because it is an obedience issue. Christ clearly commanded new disciples (believers, followers) to be baptized and to be taught to obey Him. Thus, it is an obedience issue that publicly demonstrates what has inwardly taken place in the sinner's heart.

Philosophy of Baptism

By Geoffrey R. Kirkland

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The purpose of this brief paper is to present the case that baptism is appropriately administered only to those who give a believable profession of faith in Jesus Christ. This paper will ask a few questions and then seek to provide thoughtful and biblical answers to support the case for believer's baptism.

I. What Does Baptism Symbolize?

The word baptize is used a number of places where the ordinance of baptism is not in context. In Romans 6:4ff, we have been buried with him (Christ) in baptism into death so that we might walk in newness of life just as Christ was raised from the dead. The point is that because of our union with Christ (being 'in Christ' or 'with Christ'), we are no longer living in sin because our old nature is gone. Thus, Christian baptism represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

II. Who Should Be Baptized?

Acts 18:1-11 — “The Meaning of Christian Baptism”

Consider the following Scriptures. In Matthew 3:2, John the Baptist preached: “Repent for the kingdom is near” ... then they were baptized (v.6). In Acts 2:38, Peter declared: “Repent and each of you be baptized....” Further, Acts 2:41 reveals that “those who had received his word were baptized.” Acts 8:12 notes that “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” (cf. v.13). Then in Acts 9:18, Saul/Paul believed and then was baptized. Acts 10:47 contains the words of Peter when he speaks concerning the conversion of Cornelius: “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” And, in Acts 8:36-39 we find that only those who hear the word and believe thus making a profession of faith should be baptized. If the ordinance of baptism is to reflect the theological picture of union with Christ, how can one walk in newness of life if he has not been saved/professed Christ? Indeed, it can be said that when one closely scrutinizes the texts of Scripture, one can conclude that the only people whom the NT specifically identifies by name as having been baptized were adults at the time of their baptism who had heard, repented & believed the gospel.

III. What Is the Pattern of Baptism in the Early Church?

It seems that in Acts 2:38-41; 8:13, 36-39; 18:8; and 19:1-5 that the pattern for the early church was one’s personal faith in Jesus Christ and then the immediate response of baptism.

IV. What Is the Proper Mode of Baptism?

The Scriptures provide the following information concerning baptism. In John 3:23, John baptized at Aenon because there as much water there. Then, Mark 1:10 says: “When John baptized Jesus they came up out of the water” which indicates that they both were in the water and then they both ascended out from the water. Acts 8:38-39 reveals that Philip and the Eunuch both went down into the water, Philip baptized him, and then they both came up out of the water. Another interesting and, perhaps, technical note should be mentioned. In the NT, the use of baptize as immersion by dipping is quite clearer. The passive forms of baptize (... was baptized) are always used. That is, the subject of the verb is baptized (and it is people who are baptized). Nowhere is there even one NT instance where water is baptized/poured/sprinkled on someone (in the active verbal form). This corresponds beautifully with the meaning of the theological concept of the believer who is baptized into Christ.

V. But Really, Is This Discussion on Baptism Really All That Important?

The immediate and clear answer must be an emphatic yes. This issue of baptism of believers only is eminently important because it is a direct command from our Lord Jesus. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus commands his followers to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. Then they are to baptize them and teach them all that Jesus commanded. So then, according to Christ’s command, we are obligated to baptize every disciple—follower of Christ (who has made profession of faith).

For those who have never been baptized (by immersion) since conversion, the Word of God reveals that, on the authority of our Lord’s command, you should be baptized as an initial and important step of obedience in your walk with Christ. What a beautiful picture of the believer’s union with Christ – His death, burial, and resurrection – awaits you as you follow our Lord’s command and show the gospel in a visible way to the local congregation of Christ’s Church.

In conclusion, the CFBC doctrinal statement words it this way:

Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:1-11).