



From Words to Water

Introduction

A typical baptism.

The congregation shuffles in their seats as they sit down after the music stops and the welcome time is over.

Everyone gazes at the baptistery as the pastor slips into the water and beckons the candidate to come and join him. The student is introduced and perhaps family members or friends are encouraged by the pastor to stand and support

the person as they are baptized. The pastor says, "In obedience to the command of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and upon your public profession of Him, I baptize you my brother, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." He then submerges the student under the water. He continues, "Buried with Christ in baptism, raised to walk in a new way of life." Streams rush off the student as the pastor raises him from the water. "Amen" break out, family and friends are seated, and with a nod to the minister of worship, the pastor and student exit the baptistery and the service continues.

Although this is probably a familiar picture of what takes place in our churches regarding a baptism, is this the best we can do to celebrate this critical step of obedience, commitment and consecration? Is it possible that we have contributed to a growing spiritual apathy toward baptism by making assumptions about what people know regarding this ordinance and by the sheer routine of its function?

What do students know about baptism?

- They know it is public and it seems a little weird.
- They have heard baptism isn't necessary for salvation, but they aren't sure why.
- They can comprehend the idea that it is an outward picture of what has taken place in their heart, however, promoting baptism as a nonessential component for salvation leaves them wondering why it is important for others to observe what they themselves already know.
- They know Jesus was baptized, but He was a minister and God's Son.

Students are in desperate need of understanding the Biblical call to baptism. Though, theologically we can explain why baptism is not a necessity for salvation, many have swung the pendulum too far, and have deemphasized its importance. Most pastors and veteran youth ministers will tell you that students who fail to follow up their conversion experience with baptism struggle continually with doubt concerning their salvation, and/or end up walking away from the faith.

In an effort to help students understand baptism as an essential step of obedience, this Biblical overview and celebration guide has been developed for youth leaders by the BGCO Student Ministry Team. ***From Words to Water, Part One*** will communicate the Biblical foundation for and the importance of baptism. It serves as a youth leader's handbook on the subject and will provide information critical to answering student's questions regarding baptism. It is not a Bible study for students, but rather an information tool for leaders. ***Part Two*** provides leaders with creative ideas for celebrating baptism in a variety of meaningful and memorable ways.



From Words to Water

Part One: From confession to baptism; encouragement for the initial step of obedience.

Confession is a proclamation of faith. The scripture indicates that you enter into a relationship with God through confession and repentance.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. With the heart one believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in salvation.”

Romans 10:9-10, HCSB

“‘Repent,’ Peter said to them, ‘and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Acts 2:38, HCSB

Generally speaking, these verses and others like them, including Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13, are the basis for our acknowledgement of something called a “sinner’s prayer.” The sinner’s prayer is a prayer offered to God by a person seeking God’s forgiveness and salvation.

In regard to salvation, most Southern Baptist churches would recognize that a person must acknowledge to God:

- His or her own sinfulness.
- His or her desire to seek God’s provision of forgiveness for that sin through the sacrificial shedding of Jesus’ blood on the cross.
- A commitment to walk away from that sin (repentance) through trust in Christ’s resurrection and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Churches would further acknowledge that there is no magic power in certain words or in any particular prayer, but rather, confession is a matter of the heart, and God alone judges the hearts of men as to sincerity and/or motive. Therefore, it is not a spoken prayer that saves you, but rather a sincere commitment of your heart in trusting Jesus for your salvation.

As you profess Christ as your Savior, you are accepting the responsibility of following Christ in complete obedience. You then have the obligation and privilege to make this inward act an outward declaration of your allegiance. Baptism is that declaration; the first step of obedience.

Baptism is a proclamation of relationship.

One of the first steps in **forming** any deep relationship is *admitting to ourselves* that we love that person. The same is true in our relationship with God; we admit to ourselves that we love and need Him. (Pre-confession)

The next step in **developing** the relationship is to *admit to the person* that we love him or her. The same is true with God. When you trusted Christ as Savior you admitted your love and need for Him. You were communicating something like this, “I love you. I am yours and you are mine.” (Confession)

What really **seals the commitment** of our love for another is *admitting to the world* that we really love him or her. Perhaps one of the most obvious examples of this is the wedding ceremony. Within the context of this ceremony, public vows are exchanged that allows love to deepen and to grow. Without these vows the commitment of love between two people is called into question. It is during the wedding ceremony that they commit to one another for life, closing the door behind them, so to speak. Without these public vows the door remains open; there is room for escape. What might be a cause for break up during the dating process or even during the engagement period becomes a challenge to work through and resolve in marriage.

Jesus participated in a ceremony that parallels marriage in this way and set for us an example to do the same. **This ceremony is baptism.** A person is baptized as an outward expression of what has taken place in the heart. Those who have not followed through obedience in this area inevitably find themselves doubting their own salvation. Feelings will waver; they look back on their salvation experience questioning the very prompting of God that led them to Him in the first place. Without baptism there is no tangible point of reference to go back to when a believer is faced with hardships in the Christian life. Unfortunately many today see baptism as an option. They may think, “Baptism isn’t what saves me anyway; I can do without it.” Yet without baptism, you and others will question the genuineness of your salvation.

Read Acts 8:26-38. What was the Ethiopian’s attitude in regard to baptism? (vs. 36-37)
ANSWER: He was enthusiastic and immediately desired to follow through with this sign of commitment to Christ.

How might this attitude compare with a couple in love and the anticipation of their wedding ceremony? (see graphic)



Salvation without baptism is like a marriage with no wedding.

Baptism is a proclamation of redemption.

The act of believer's baptism is not a magical, mystical ceremony. It does not convey any special grace on the participant. It does not "save" a person or wash away their sins. Salvation and forgiveness occur *prior* to baptism when a person, by repentance and faith, commits their life to Christ.

Baptism is a **symbolic act**. It is a *public expression* of a person's faith. It is a *visible testimony* of an inner commitment.

Baptism is a declaration of the believer's identification with and faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:4-5, Colossians 2:12, Galatians 2:20).

SYMBOLISM OF BAPTISM

The believer's identification is symbolized by:

- DEATH** **going down into the water**
- BURIAL** **down under or submerged in the water**
- RESURRECTION** **coming up out of the water**

Baptism is a symbol of our spiritual death (to sin), burial (of our old life), and resurrection (by the power of the Holy Spirit) to walk in a new way of life (Romans 6:4-6, Colossians 2:12, 3:1-3).

Baptism is a profession of the believer's faith in the coming resurrection of the dead (Romans 6:6, I Corinthians 15:1-58).

So then, baptism is a picture of what transpired when you placed your faith and trust in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to save you from your sins (Romans 6:3-5). It does not atone for sin. Only the blood of Christ cleanses us from sin (1 John 1:7; Colossians 1:14).

It is obvious then, that *scriptural* baptism is *believer's* baptism.

- In Acts 2:41 we observe that they received the word, *then* they were baptized.
- In Acts 8:12, 36-37 we find that they believed, *then* they were baptized.
- In Acts 10:43, 44, 47, it is plain to see that those who believed received the Holy Spirit, and *then* they were baptized (Lost people do not receive the Holy Spirit).
- When the Philippian jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...." (Acts 16:30-34, HCSB). Paul did not tell him to be baptized to be saved. His baptism came *after* his believing, which sets the scriptural standard.

Who then should be baptized? According to the established Biblical pattern, only those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior are to be baptized. Baptism then, is *not* salvation, but obedience to a command by God concerning discipleship.

Baptism is a proclamation of purpose.

Often the question arises: When is the believer to be baptized? The Bible teaches that baptism follows shortly after spiritual birth. Notice the example of Paul (Acts 9:18), Cornelius (Acts 10:43-48), and the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:33). You were placed into the body of Christ by "spiritual baptism" at the moment you were saved (Galatians 3:26-27). Now you follow the miracle of spiritual baptism with physical immersion into water, according to Acts 8:38; 10:47; 16:33.

Romans 6:3-5 teaches us that baptism is literally a picture of your death, burial and resurrection with Christ. It is your first act of obedience to God after salvation.

Consider the following:

- Scriptural baptism pleases the Lord. When Jesus was baptized, God the Father said, "This is my beloved Son. I take delight in Him!" (Matthew 3:17, HCSB). When we follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ we certainly please the Father.
- Scriptural baptism is a testimony to the world. Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who will acknowledge Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:32, HCSB). Baptism is one way we give a public testimony of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is significant in terms of identifying ourselves with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

Conclusion

Understand and believe that baptism is not a "sacrament" that imparts saving grace, but an *ordinance*. We are not saved by baptism, but by faith in Jesus Christ and His shed blood. Baptism is the outward symbol of what has already transpired in the heart of the one who has trusted in Jesus Christ for full salvation.

We need to ask our students: "Have you taken this first step in your walk with the Lord? Have you been obedient to the word of God concerning this matter of believer's baptism? In Acts 2:41 we read, "Then they that *gladly* received His word were baptized" (KJV, emphasis added). What is your response?"



Extras

Definition: Baptism

According to the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message:

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 the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior. It also symbolizes the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in

Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection from the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is a prerequisite to the privilege of church membership.

Immersion

Greek is the original language of the New Testament. To accurately interpret scripture we must accept the Greek meaning of a word as primary. The Greek word for "baptize" is *baptidzo*. It means to immerse, submerge, or dip. It is the term used when Jesus 'dipped' the bread into the wine. It was used in classical Greek for the dipping of animals, the dipping into dye so as to dye fabric, or of the sinking of a ship. Scholars are universally agreed that the primary meaning of *baptidzo* is the **complete submersion** of an object in water.

Through the centuries, a major point of division between Christian denominations has been the meaning of the word *baptize*.

How did this difference evolve? Our English word *baptize* is not a **translation** of the word *baptidzo*, but a **transliteration**. This means the word was brought over from the Greek into the English language with no spelling change. By doing this, priests could supply their own definition (sprinkling, pouring) to the anglicized word. The reason for this transliteration was that between the 2nd or 3rd century and the 14th century, the Roman Catholic Church changed the **mode of baptism**. Therefore, when the Bible was translated into English (King James version, 1611), if the translators had literally translated the word *baptidzo* with the word "immerse" (which is the proper translation), the Roman Catholic Church would have been shown to be incorrect in the mode of baptism they practiced. By bringing in a completely foreign word - the transliteration, *baptize* - the priests could supply their own definition. This is part of the reason why different churches today sprinkle or pour instead of practicing immersion which is the correct biblical mode of baptism.

Are sprinkling and pouring accepted in Southern Baptist churches?

Southern Baptists practice baptism by immersion because it is the clear meaning of the word *baptidzo* in the New Testament. It was the mode used by Christ and the early church. Though many Christian traditions use alternate means, we do not feel that they best express the biblical model. We respect the traditions of our Christian brothers and value the meaning these practices have for them; however, we feel baptism by immersion is a more complete and biblical model to follow.

What about infant baptism?

Many traditions practice infant baptism as the dedication of a child to Christ or the initiation of a child into a covenant relationship with Christ and the church. Again, Southern Baptists do not feel that this meets the biblical requirements for believer's baptism (see previous text for a clear definition of believer's baptism). Infant baptism does not satisfy the requirements of believer's baptism in at least three ways:

1. An infant cannot express the repentance, faith and commitment necessary for salvation.
2. It is not immersion.
3. An infant does not have the intellectual understanding to comprehend what he/she is doing.

Dedication of a child is to be commended. However, it must be clearly understood that this action in no way takes the place of believer's baptism after the child has become a Christian.

Is there ever a time when re-baptism is necessary?

Yes, if...

- The first baptism preceded a true salvation experience. Any ceremony experienced in an unconverted state is lifeless and meaningless. The Biblical pattern is clear - repent and be baptized. Valid New Testament baptism can only *follow* a true Christian commitment.
- The baptism was performed on the basis of an improper theological interpretation (example: baptism as a means of salvation).
- The original baptism was entered into from the wrong motive (example: to please one's parents or because other friends were being baptized). This is often an issue when someone was baptized as a child and did not receive careful guidance and counseling.

Who is qualified to perform a baptism?

According to scripture, any disciple of Jesus Christ can baptize another believer. However, Christ's Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) was given to His disciples, who later began what we know as the local church. Any baptism ought to be administered in accordance with the framework of and in cooperation with a local body of believers.



From Words to Water

Part 2

Baptism should be one of the most special and significant moments in a person's life. This public expression of a believer's faith ought to reflect both the solemnity and the exuberance of such a commitment. Don't be afraid to dream with the leaders of the congregation about ways to make baptism more significant

and special to the person being baptized. It is a major event, it should be more than a one minute interruption to a worship service; baptism should be a celebration.

Before the Baptism

- **Invitations** -- Special invitations can be created for students to be used to send to their family and friends, especially those who were involved in their spiritual journey or those who are not followers of Christ. Some people will attend a baptism because it is a major life event. When they come, make sure you take time to explain the meaning of the baptism to everyone present. You might even consider an email version of the invitation, so the information can be delivered more rapidly. This might be helpful when the baptism occurs no more than a week after the student makes his or her decision for Christ.
- **Prayer Walk** – Set up a two to three station prayer walk in your church building just before the baptism service. Walk with the student to the first station and have the person who led him to Christ pray with him there. Move on to the second station where the youth group is gathered to pray for him. A third station may be set up where his family could pray for him. From there he is led to the baptistery to await the baptism.
- **Walk Through** -- Once a student commits to baptism, set up a time to show the student the baptistery and walk him through what will happen. This takes a while, so five minutes before it occurs is not enough time. Help the parents know what is happening and get them involved, if they will. Allow them to be a part of the baptism by being in the water, or helping in the dressing area, standing in the congregation during the baptism, or a part of the previously mentioned prayer walk. They should also have a place of honor for the baptism. (Note: If a student misses his time to be baptized, don't give up. Commit to follow up with him. He is a new Christian, he might be scared of doing Christian things.)

During the Baptism

Most baptisms move rapidly along and consist of an introduction of the candidate, a quick inquiry seeking confirmation of his decision, and a swift dunk with a simultaneous paraphrase from Romans 6:4. If we desire to communicate the special importance of this ordinance, then consider the following ideas:

- **Testimony** -- Allow the person being baptized to share their faith by making a video of their testimony and playing it for the congregation just before they are

- baptized. You can also allow the person being baptized to share their testimony live, if they are confident enough in front of a crowd.
- **Keepsake** -- Consider video taping the service and giving it to the person being baptized.
 - **Salt & Light** – On the ledge of the baptistery place a glass bowl of sea salt, a large candle (pre-lit), and a smaller candle (un-lit). Before the student is baptized, talk about Christ’s description of us as “salt” (Matthew 5:13). Challenge the student to be “salt” as you scoop your hand in the bowl. Let the salt flow through your fingers as you lift your hand and the salt drops back in the bowl. After baptizing the student, take the smaller candle and light it using the large candle. Hand it to the student and encourage him to be a light in the world (Matthew 5:14-16) as he exits the baptistery.
 - **Contrasts** – Based on the picture of 2 Corinthians 5:17, consider making a list of the traits of the “old life” and of the “new life.” Put them on a PowerPoint presentation (one trait per slide) and run the “old life” slides while the student is being positioned for baptism and until the student goes under the water. At the point of immersion, the slides of the “new life” begin and continue through the student’s exit and a prayer.
 - **Parent/Mentor/Witness** – Consider having the student’s parents, a designated mentor, or the person who led him to Christ in the baptistery. After the immersion, have the person(s) read Colossians 2:6-7 and present the student with a copy of *In His Steps*, *Mere Christianity*, or some other Christian classic. Have them pray for the student and make a personal commitment to assist him in his daily walk.

After the Baptism

- **Party** -- Consider hosting a post baptism party for the student being baptized and all his or her guests. That reception would give you a unique time to develop relationships and provide an opportunity for presenting Christ to the guests.
- **Affirmation Journal** – Purchase a journal and have the members of the youth group write words of affirmation for the student throughout the journal. Also include special verses, quotes, etc to make the journal a significant memento of the occasion. Present the journal to the student following the baptism.

Other

Consider suggesting to church leadership such ideas as alternate locations for baptisms (river, lake, pond, other), services designated for baptism versus just a time slot in the regular services, certain Sundays specified as Baptism Sundays, and seeking permission for parents to baptize their children.