

I Was Baptised as a Baby, Why Do I Need to Be Baptised by Full Immersion?

A Bible study that answers an honest and sincere question, with grace

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Acts 2:38, Romans 6, Colossians 2:12

KEY SCRIPTURES

Introduction

Roman 6:4 *“Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life.”*

The question is an important one and it requires an open and considered response. There are many, including myself, who came to a living faith in Jesus, in adult life. Being brought up in strict Catholicism, I was brought as an infant to the font to be sprinkled with water. There have been many people in my

ministry, who have sat in other places and heard the same message - You must be baptised by full immersion. For some this is a shock and confusing. Even in a few cases it is offensive to them. Legitimate questions are raised in their mind. Was my infant baptism meaningless then? Did my parents do something wrong? Surely this is not really necessary?

Of course, it is reasonable and honest to question this call to adult baptism. Any study must respect these questions. A reasonable, careful, respectful answer is rightly due. This study will not treat infant baptism with disregard for what honest parents did. Nor will it dismiss it as an important part of a person's life journey. It will not consider those godly, Bible-believing Christians who have arrived at a different view, un-Christian. It has been the case, that in the history of the Church, it has been a hotly debated matter. What the study will do is to set out a Biblical case from the Scriptures, to allow them to speak into the question. This will show why I hold that adult baptism is a necessary part of the journey for the Christian. I am convinced that baptism is, in its name and in its pattern, grounded in Scripture.

With all grace, it must be made clear that many infants were brought to the font in all sincerity by the parents. Many ministers who carried out the baptism, did so with sincere belief in what they were doing was right. What the study does

do is ask a question: is a personal confessed faith necessary before baptism? The study is offered as a positive answer to that question.

What Is Baptism? A study of the word

The English word “baptism” comes directly from the Greek βαπτίζω (baptizo), which means to dip, plunge, or immerse. Every teacher who has dealt with baptism confirms that it was used in everyday Greek for the dyeing of cloth (dipped into the dye). It was also used for the sinking of ships and the washing of vessels by plunging them underneath water. The word cannot be used to sprinkle or to pour. Our opening verse from Romans is clear, we are buried with Him. Sprinkling or pouring does not reflect a burial.

When John the Baptist baptised people, it was in the Jordan River, he was immersing them under the water. Even when Jesus was baptised, it says:

Mark 1:10 “And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him.”

The language only makes sense if Jesus was under the water and came up out of it. Then we have Philip, who baptised the Ethiopian eunuch. We read:

Acts 8:38-39 “And he commanded the chariot to stand still. And they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch. And he baptised him. And when they had come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more. And he went on his way rejoicing.”

We cannot avoid the clear meaning of the text. Philip did not simply sprinkle or pour water over the eunuch. They both went into the water and came up out of the water. If it were a case of pouring or sprinkling there was no need to go down into the water. The consistent New Testament picture is full immersion in water. Let us be clear again. The Greek word is certain. Thayer defines it as such:

1a.of Christian baptism; a rite of immersion in water as commanded by Christ, by which one after confessing his sins and professing his faith in Christ, having been born again by the Holy Spirit unto a new life, identifies publicly with the fellowship of Christ and the church.

Notice the order confession – professing faith – born again – public confession of faith – then baptism. The Greek lexicon, as noted already, defines *baptizo* as: to dip, plunge, immerse. Looking at the early church history. We find Tertullian and Origen describe baptism as immersion. The Didache, one of the earliest Christian documents outside the New Testament, often seen as a guide to practice, permits pouring only as an emergency alternative, acknowledging immersion as the normal step after conversion.

What Symbolism in Baptism

The study turns to look at Romans 6:3-4 to expand the explanation of what baptism means as a symbol of a deeply spiritual step on the Disciple's journey. This Scripture is very important Theologically for the doctrine of baptism.

Romans 6:3-4 "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? 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."

The text again is very clear in Paul's use of language. It explicitly speaks of burial and resurrection. The act of baptism is about being plunged into the water. It demonstrates that there is a death and burial, followed by a resurrection. The old self, the old life of sin, is buried and is to remain in the 'grave'. The believer is to leave their flesh life behind – dead and buried. Coming up out of the water is the picture of our resurrection. We rise and are now to walk in the newness of life that Christ's resurrection secured by His death on the cross.

As already indicated and confirmed here, the picture Paul paints. only works with immersion. A person is not 'buried' by sprinkling or pouring a little water on their head. The picture is of going under the water and coming up out of the water. It is being submerged and raised. It brings home dramatically the very Gospel that is truly preached.

Colossians 2:12 “..having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

This is an important statement from Paul. It specifically states, that it is through faith, that God worked to raise those who

have been buried in baptism. Therefore, it requires a personal act of faith, of which, an infant is not capable. As a believer. In my going under the water of baptism, I died with Christ. I was placed into Him. In my burial, my old life was put into the grave. When I was raised up out of the water: I rose with Christ. In Him, I now live a new life. Full immersion brings home the great drama of the gospel in physical form.

***Believe, Then Be Baptised is, the New Testament
Pattern***

Of all the arguments, the clearest for believer's baptism. is simply the consistent order laid out in the New Testament. After Pentecost, Peter preaches the Gospel. He lays out the pattern when asked how his hearers are to respond:

Acts 2:38 *“And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

Link this with:

Acts 2:41 *“So those who received his word were*

baptised, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

And we see the Gospel being received and accepted followed by repentance and then baptism.

The pattern is not isolated to these verses; the following are further confirmation of the pattern. Jesus Himself said:

Mark 16:16 *“Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*

Here again faith, with the understanding that repentance implied, must be baptised. The act not possible for an infant.

Acts 19:4-5 *“And Paul said, “John baptised with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

This is another clear indication that the pattern is consistent:

Faith - Repentance - Baptism

When we turn to Philip in bringing the Gospel to the Samaritans, we find:

Acts 8:12 “But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women.”

The pattern: they believed, they were baptised. Faith is the necessary prerequisite for a Disciple. It is not added at a later date.

The question asked of Peter at Pentecost, is also found in Paul’s ministry. In Philippi, Paul is in jail and miraculously he is freed. The jailer fearing for his life, asks that question:

Acts 16:30-33 “Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptised at once, he and all his family.”

Again, we have the pattern – faith – implied repentance (Paul would have ensured this) – baptism.

A similar household salvation is also found with Crispus:

Acts 18:8 *"Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptised."*

Here again, faith came by hearing, and upon repentance, were baptised. The pattern repeats itself. (Paul in discussing baptism, also mentions the baptism of the household of Stephanas) This is also seen in Paul Himself. He has his encounter with the risen Jesus, and is convicted of his unbelief in his Messiah. When he meets up with other followers, the faith that came and his repentance leads to baptism.

Acts 22:16 *"And now, what are you going to do? Arise and be baptised, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."*

Remember Paul was a Jew and he would have gone through many ritual baths. These were no longer one of the steps to salvation. Faith, repentance and baptism were evident in Paul's response.

By now it must be clear that the New Testament is consistent. Believe – repent – baptised. There is not one single account in the Scriptures of an infant being baptised. The first records on infant baptism, did not appear until the 2nd and 3rd centuries. These arose because there was concern about infant deaths and their eternal future. The response was not Biblical but a man-made idea of a half-way house, that would lead to the idea of 'limbo'. The place where infants went on death. In recent days that word is being dropped but the idea still persists in some denominations.

Jesus and the pattern of the Great Commission

Jesus' own commission to the church establishes the sequence with unmistakable clarity:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” — Matthew

The central command is make disciples. Baptising and teaching are the means by which disciples are made and formed. But note: you cannot baptise a nation — you baptise individuals who have been discipled. The grammatical structure in Greek makes the disciple-making primary and baptism the first formal act of the one who has responded.

An infant cannot be a disciple in this sense. A disciple is someone who has heard, who follows, who has made a conscious commitment to the person and teaching of Jesus. Baptism is the act by which that commitment is publicly declared and sealed.

Were Infants Included in Household Faith Baptisms?

In the Jewish faith, infants are not baptised and are deemed to be part of the religion from birth. However, there is the *tevilah* which is the immersion in water but it is only for Gentile children. It is a simple ritual of cleansing. As the child grows there are different local customs that sometimes there may be ritual cleansing as a *mikvah*. Furthermore, they do not believe in the fall of Adam and the entry of sin into the world.

They believe that the sinlessness of Adam and Eve persisted after they left Eden. Therefore, infants are born in a state of purity. It was only the Tree of Life that they were excluded from.

Therefore, people may sin they can make an offering of atonement and there is a special day each when there are ten days to consider the previous year and failings to be atoned for on Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement. With this in mind, when households were saved, infant washing would not be carried out for Gentile infants, as they were no longer under Law. Jewish infants would not be baptised, as they were still part of the Jewish community but the parents had now accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore, in household salvation there would be no baptising of infants. Scripture has no record of any infant being baptised. Furthermore, Paul teaches this truth about children:

1 Corinthians 7:14 “For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”

The issue of the husband is a matter best dealt with in another study. Here dealing with infants, clearly shows the children

are 'holy'. That is separated unto God. This will only exist until they reach an age of reason, when they can make their own personal decision as to acceptance of salvation and baptism. It is important to see that the only household that matters in this study is the household of faith spoken of by Peter (1 Peter 4:17 also Paul Ephesians 2:19).

What Infant Baptism Cannot Accomplish

What we are doing in this study, is not dismissing infant baptism with ridicule or contempt. It is acknowledged that there are sincere, Spirit-filled Christians who were baptised as infants. They have continued in true fruitful faith. We would not doubt that God can do His work in a person's life despite misunderstandings of faithful people. His grace abounds and He can. No, the question that must be answered, is whether infant baptism fulfils what the New Testament clearly shows, as the pattern of salvation.

This becomes evident in Romans 6:1-5ff. Such an understanding and coming to personal faith cannot be achieved by an infant. This is confirmed by Paul in another letter:

Colossians 2:12 “..having been buried together with Him in baptism, in which also you were raised together

through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

‘Through faith’ is a clear statement that faith is needed in baptism. Something, that has been stressed here, is not possible for an infant. Neither can the infant, express repentance or make a conscious commitment to Jesus. Infant baptism therefore cannot fulfil the New Testament’s requirement that baptism be the individual’s own declaration of death to sin and new life in Christ.

The New Testament demonstrates, that there is a public declaration of an open identification with Christ to those in and outside the assembled church. An infant, by fact, cannot make any such profession of their faith. Whatever infant baptism is for, it cannot be for this.

The going-down-and-coming-up drama of immersion — burial with Christ, resurrection with Christ — requires a conscious participant who understands what is being enacted. The symbol is emptied of its content if the one being baptised has no awareness of it. Let it be clear, this is not an argument that infant baptism in any way harms the infant or that the infant is outside the grace of God. The truth is that infants who have not reached the age of reason are in God’s care and are taken straight to him if they unfortunately were to die. This is

seen in the case of David's son born from Bathsheba. We are told when David was asked about the infant's death:

2 Samuel 12:23 "But now he [the infant] is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

David was a man of God who went to eternal life. If he was going where the infant was, then the infant was in eternal life, in the hands of God. No form of baptism was needed for the child.

Infant Baptism and Believer's Baptism – a Comparison

As a means of reflection let us construct a comparison of the two baptisms under discussion. This is not offered in a spirit of hostility but in an attempt to make an honest comparison. The position of this study is from an evangelical viewpoint. It expresses a belief that the New Testament's evidence is consistent and clearly supports believer's baptism by full immersion.

Infant baptism is practiced by: Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Reformed churches.

It is received by: Infants of believing families, on behalf of the covenant community (Sometime adults will receive this form of baptism).

It signifies: Entry into the covenant community; sign of God's grace and promise.

It is based on these passages: Household baptisms (Acts 16:33); covenant theology (Col. 2:11–12); continuity with circumcision.

How it is performed: Typically sprinkling or pouring.

Does it give salvation?: Some traditions: yes (sacramental).
Most: it is a sign, not the means of salvation.

Adult baptism is practiced by: Baptist, Pentecostal, Evangelical, most nondenominational churches.

It is received by: Only those who have personally professed repentance and faith in Christ.

It signifies: Personal death to sin and resurrection with Christ; public declaration of faith.

It is based on these passages: Repent and be baptised (Acts 2:38); believe then be baptised (Acts 8:36–38); Rom. 6:3–4

How it is performed: Full immersion (?????? — *baptizo* — means ‘to dip/immerse’).

Does it give salvation?: No — baptism follows and confirms salvation; it does not cause it

One thing to note is that there is a difference in understanding infant baptism within the paedobaptist tradition, Roman Catholics and some Lutherans take a sacramental view that baptism is a means of grace. Reformed and Presbyterian traditions on the other hand take a different view. For them it is a sign of covenant, marking membership of the community. This does point to a disagreement of the practice. It also raises questions on the Scriptural claims and does not show a unified position.

“Does That Mean I Am Not Already Baptised?”

A heartfelt question which needs a sensitive response. It therefore needs grace and a clear answer. As with all questions on Biblical matters, must be answered by the Scriptures. From what has been already shared in the study, a baptism that does not follow a personal faith, with a personal repentance is not baptism as patterned in the New Testament. The name of the ceremony can only share a

name but they are both very different in content and meaning. For example, if a man and woman present themselves for marriage but another couple make the vows on their behalf, the couple have not married. The pair must make their own statement of the vows and their acceptance. It is the same for baptism: well-meaning parents, who in love, do what they think best for their infant. There is certainly no condemnation for their actions. However, the individual arriving at a point in life, having reached the age of reason must make their own act of faith and repentance, which Scripturally is followed by full immersion in baptism. The infant having water sprinkled or poured on their head must mature into a believer with their own personal faith. Read Romans 6 in its fullness and there is what needs to be grasped and understood.

Is This Re-Baptism?

The idea of “re-baptism” for many believers from infant-baptism traditions is often a challenge, Their feeling is it negates their original ceremony, honestly entered into by loving parents. Evangelical churches such as my own, would not classify this as a re-baptism at all. The truth is you were not baptised in the New Testament pattern as an infant; therefore, this is your first true baptism following the command of Jesus for Disciples. The church is not undoing something your parents did - it is bringing to completion

something that you could not have done without your own personal faith and commitment.

As an historic note, when the Anabaptists in 1525 in Zurich were baptising adult believers, their Catholic and Reformed opponents called it Anabaptism: that is “re-baptism”. The Anabaptists response is enlightening: “we cannot re-baptise anyone who was never truly baptised in the first place.” Their point was not an act of rebellion against any other organisation. It was faithfulness to the New Testament pattern. Unfortunately, many were martyred for this conviction.

Baptism is Joyful Obedience

Please do not see this study as an argument to be fought over and won. We should be careful in this matter and not simply study baptism as an opportunity for a theological argument that must be won. First and foremost, see baptism as an act of joyful obedience to the Lord and Saviour who commanded it. Let Jesus be your example. What was His state that was recognised by John the Baptist?

Hebrews 4:15 “For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but

was in all points tempted just as we are, yet without sin.”

Matthew 3:14-15 “But John restrained Him, saying, I have need to be baptised by You, and do You come to me? And answering Jesus said to him, Allow it now, for it is becoming to us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he allowed Him.”

John recognised that Jesus was the only one who lived who had no need of baptism. Yet Jesus humbled Himself and was immersed in the water to fulfil all righteousness. Returning to Peter and the great salvation at Pentecost, we read:

***Act 2:41** “Then those who accepted with joy, what Peter said, were baptised. On that day about 3000 people were added to the group of believers.”*

Note here, there was an acceptance of Peters instruction of the pattern, faith – repentance – baptism. These were Jewish people used to ritual washings. The response was also with joy. It was not an unpleasant thing to hear and obey. There was no delay – their baptisms were immediate. Such was their eagerness to follow the Scriptural call. It is the entrance

into the Christ – the Door. It is the step of inclusion into His body – the visible Church. You become a member of His body not a church. The church as a local expression, is what you commit to and join.

I, as one who was baptised as an infant, can confirm that my immersion as a Christian was one of the most profound and moving experience of my life. I only know that rising out of that water, I felt the whole weight of my sinful past, was washed away. My joy was overwhelming. Forty-four years later I have no regrets. I am sure my parents with their religious views were doing the ‘right thing’. However, I knew that the Gospel was clear and I followed in obedience to the Word.

1 Peter 3:21 which speaks of the flood compares it to baptism. It is not a putting away of *the* filth of *the* flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, by *the* resurrection of Jesus Christ;

1 Peter 3:21 “Which [the flood] is an image of full immersion, not the body getting rid of filth, but as an appeal towards God to obtain a clean conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus the Christ..”

Baptism is not a bath to wash the natural body. It is the

looking to God, who seeing your faith and repentance, raises you in the Christ, to a fresh spiritual existence, in which He will not remember your past sins. This is all because of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. The steps you take in baptism by immersion.

For those who go through the waters of baptism, they can truly say, "I belong to you Lord. I am now buried with the Christ. I am now raised with the Christ. And I am not ashamed of the Gospel."

A final word from a pastoral heart:

I wish that everyone knew what I have discovered a living gracious God who wants righteousness to be in every soul. His love provided a means to achieve it. He sent His only Beloved Son into the world that we might be saved. Can I first invite you to do what has been laid out - hear and open your heart to faith in God through the work of the Holy Spirit, repent (Turn away from your past sin and failures), be baptised and receive the Holy Spirit to lead you through a new life.

Perhaps you are a believer already but have not yet taken that step of Scriptural baptism. I would not want to put pressure on you but I would simply offer you a warm

encouragement to consider what you have studied here. Accept the wonderful, joyous gift of baptism. It is not a burdensome thing it is an obedient step of faith.

I understand that there may be a background to your life that would raise questions, doubts or you are wrestling with an infant baptism, do not stay alone in this position. Reach out to a trusted Pastor. Or you can email our fellowship, based near Wisbech, on admin@fenlandschurch.co.uk.

This is a conversation you will not regret - gently, carefully, and in community.

Acts 2:38 *“And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

