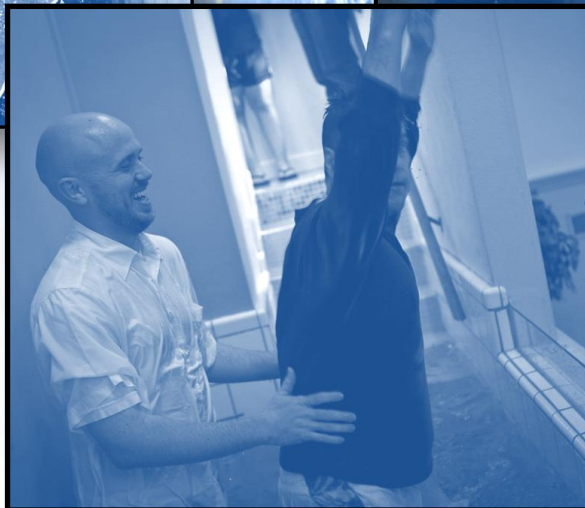


What is B



A T T E N T I O N

Prepared by the pastors of Del Rey Church

A mandatory reading for those baptized at DRC

So you're thinking about being baptized? Maybe you just spoke to a pastor at church about it, or filled out a baptism interest form. Perhaps you're just curious about what exactly baptism is and why Christians do it. Well then great, this booklet was written for that purpose, to educate those interested in baptism about baptism.

For starters, baptism is a Christian thing. Hence, this booklet assumes you understand who Christ is and His life-saving gospel. Furthermore, this booklet assumes you have given your life to Christ, because you have been graciously saved by Him. Finally, this booklet assumes you are a unifying presence within, and an active part of, a local church, because baptism is a picture of not only our salvation, but also our participation in the community of God's people. With that said, let's get into what this whole thing of baptism is about.

Baptism is an ordinance that Jesus commanded his followers to perform. The word ordinance just means that it was "ordained" or commanded by Christ. As believers in Christ, we must never take baptism for granted. It is not only a responsibility, but also an incredible privilege. Even when the Son of God became a man He was baptized. In fact, Jesus did not begin His public ministry until after His baptism. What is baptism then? It is a necessary threshold that each of us, as followers of Christ, must cross out of obedience to God.

Where does baptism come from? Well, the background of baptism can be traced to Old Testament times. As far back as the first book of the Bible, eight people were saved (i.e. their lives were spared) from the great flood of God's judgment. The Apostle Peter pointed out that the water of this flood "symbolizes baptism" (1 Pet. 3:21). Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the great king David likewise used water as an external symbol for internal cleansing (Isa. 1:16; Ezek. 36:25ff; Ps. 51:2). Although we read about John the Baptist in the New Testament, he was technically the last prophet of the Old Testament. When John baptized Jesus in the Jordan, he was ushering in the messianic fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. But what were these prophets doing when they baptized people? The answer is simple. They were using water as a symbol of cleansing. This symbol of cleansing the outside of the body, illustrated the cleansing that had already happened (or was happening) inside of the body.

It must be pointed out however that the baptism we do today is not the same as that of the Old Testament before Jesus came and fulfilled it. The major difference is seen behind the symbol of baptism between the Old and New Testaments. Behind the symbol of baptism today is the substance of baptism, which is the blood of Jesus Christ that has cleansed us from all our sins: past, present, and future. Just as water cleanses your body of dirt and sweat, so the

blood of Jesus cleanses our soul from filth of sin. In the Old Testament Christ had not yet come. That is why we read about sacrifices of animals in the Old Testament for the atonement of sins. The Bible says that blood must be shed for the forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22). But just as John noted when he saw Christ, Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). We do not sacrifice lambs or other animals today, because Jesus was our Lamb and His blood has cleansed us. Baptism is a symbol of that truth.

The baptisms done in the Old Testament era up to the baptisms done by John the Baptist (at the beginning of the New Testament) pointed to the Messiah who was to come, whereas Christian baptism today points back to the Messiah who did come. This is important, because it tells us that when someone gets baptized they are not getting baptized into a particular church group or denomination, they are getting baptized because they recognize that the Messiah has come. Today, we get baptized because we acknowledge Him and are obeying His ordinance.

Whenever someone asks, “Why should I be baptized?” We first ask them, “Do you love Jesus?” If you have put your faith in Christ to be the Savior of your soul then you should be baptized because you love Him. Jesus said, “if you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Baptism is a command from our Lord Himself. He commanded the disciples to follow up their teaching with baptism (Matthew 28: 19-20) and we see in Scripture that they followed it. For instance, Peter commanded believers to be baptized (Acts 2:38), Philip baptized (Acts 8) and Paul taught about baptism (Acts 19:3-5). And we too must be committed to this ordinance just as these early followers of Christ were. It doesn’t matter what denomination you belong to, what church you attended as a child, your favorite flavor of ice cream, etc... The only thing that matters is your desire to follow God and thus obey His command to be baptized.

Whenever someone asks me, “Why should I be baptized?” I first ask them, “Do you love Jesus?” If you have put your faith in Christ to be the Savior of your soul than you should be baptized because you love Him.

Baptism is about commitment to God. It is the commitment to follow what He has commanded us to do. We do not steal because God has commanded us not to. We love our neighbor because God has commanded us to. We get baptized because God commanded it.

And like all of God’s commandments, when we follow them we should expect to experience His blessings for our obedience. Charles Spurgeon, often referred to as the Prince of Preachers, said that up until the time he was baptized, he was afraid to confess Christ. Thereafter, he lost all fear of man and never again hesitated to boldly profess his faith. He likened his baptism to “Crossing the Rubicon or burning the boats. No retreat was possible after that, nor have I ever

wanted to go back to the world from which I then came out.”¹ Some of you reading this may feel like Spurgeon did. Perhaps you are fearful to share your faith, but as you follow God’s commands you will see that He will give you the boldness you need to be fully committed.



Baptism is not for the socialite Christian who basically sees Christianity as a superficial creed for those who want to have some abstract encounter with the “man upstairs” or “mother nature.” We use these terms sarcastically because the Triune God² of the Bible is much more than anything our world can fathom. He is the living Lord who has the power to change our dying world. Thus, we must clearly understand that baptism is not for those whose lives have not been changed by the power of Christ and His gospel.

¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon at His Best*, comp. Tom Carter (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 20.

² The words “Triune God” are used here to emphasize the doctrine of the Trinity, something all Christians affirm and hence it is something that everyone baptized must believe. The doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to the Christian faith. It is crucial for properly understanding who and God is, how He relates to us, and how we should relate to Him. The doctrine of the Trinity means that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct Persons--the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Stated differently, God is one in essence and three in person. These definitions express three crucial truths: (1) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, (2) each Person is fully God, (3) there is only one God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons. The Bible speaks of the Father as God (Phil. 1:2), Jesus as God (Titus 2:13), and the Holy Spirit as God (Acts 5:3-4). These are NOT just three different ways of looking at God, or simply ways of referring to three different roles that God plays. The Bible indicates that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons. For example, since the Father sent the Son into the world (John 3:16), He cannot be the same person as the Son. Likewise, after the Son returned to the Father (John 16:10), the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit into the world (John 14:26; Acts 2:33). Therefore, the Holy Spirit must be distinct from the Father and the Son. In the baptism of Jesus, we see the Father speaking from heaven and the Spirit descending from heaven in the form of a dove as Jesus comes out of the water (Mark 1:10-11). In John 1:1 it is affirmed that Jesus is God and, at the same time, that He was “with God”-thereby indicating that Jesus is a distinct Person from God the Father (cf. also 1:18). And in John 16:13-15 we see that although there is a close unity between them all, the Holy Spirit is also distinct from the Father and the Son. The fact that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons means, in other words, that the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. Jesus is God, but He is not the Father or the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God, but He is not the Son or the Father. They are different Persons, not three different ways of looking at God. The personhood of each member of the Trinity means that each Person has a distinct center of consciousness. Thus, they relate to each other personally--the Father regards Himself as “I,” while He regards the Son and Holy Spirit as “You.” Likewise the Son regards Himself as “I,” but the Father and the Holy Spirit as “You.” It is necessary here to note that there is a difference between the terms “being” and “person.” It would be a contradiction, obviously, to say that there are three beings within one being, or three persons within one person. The doctrine of the trinity does not teach this, so it is not a contradiction as any rational listener can see. The doctrine of the Trinity clearly recognizes the difference between being and person, hence the Trinity is not a contradiction because God is not three in the same way that He is one. This doctrine of the Trinity is important because God is important. To understand more fully what God is like is a way of honoring God. Further, we should allow the fact that God is triune to deepen our worship. We exist to worship God. And God seeks people to worship Him in “spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Therefore we must always endeavor to deepen our worship of God in truth as well as in our hearts. Just the fact that it is true, and that it is based squarely on God’s self-revelation in Scripture, would be enough to make it important. The only alternatives are heresies. But the doctrine of the Trinity is also important for a reason that evangelicals care about with more immediacy and urgency. That reason is that the Trinity is directly connected to the gospel. The good news is that God so loved the world that he gave his Son (John 3:16) to make us into children of God (John 1:12), and sent forth the Spirit of his Son to enable us to call him “Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:4-6). So the gospel is itself Trinitarian, and the Trinity is the gospel. Baptism is for those who have embraced the gospel and hence it is important that all who are baptized acknowledge the reality of the Triune God.

Because baptism involves a commitment and a certain level of understanding, it is not appropriate for unbelievers, which would include babies. There are many Christians who baptize their babies, even though the Bible nowhere teaches such a thing. Baptizing a baby ruins the symbol of the ordinance Christ gave us. It is reminiscent of arraigned marriages, where one has no choice in having a relationship with the other because it has been chosen by their parents. One would personally want to know that my spouse chose me and not that her father twisted her arm to marry me. If one were in an arraigned marriage, that person would hope that at some point their spouse would choose to express their love to them. Therefore we always recommend those who have been baptized as infants to make their own decision to do so and be baptized officially as a consenting adult. It is sort of like renewing your vows to the Lord. Baptism should be a result of one's own decision and never an arraigned affair.

The most important thing to keep in mind if one chooses to baptize their baby is that baptism itself was never intended by God to save anyone from sin. Many people baptize their babies, as to secure a ticket for them to heaven in case their child dies before they receive Christ. This completely misses and ruins the gospel. We are not saved just because we are baptized or because we are good people who obey God. We are saved by faith alone. Affirmation of this essential fact is fundamental to Christianity. The Bible says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Eph 2:8-9).

The reason why we must be saved is because all men have committed acts of sin against God (Rom. 3:23). The punishment of sin is eternal separation from God in a place called hell. The Bible says that those who are thrown into hell it is because of their deeds against God (Rev. 20:12-13). Babies are not pictured at this judgment day of God because they have not committed sinful deeds against God. Those who baptize their babies as a ticket to heaven not only misunderstand that baptism doesn't save you but they also misunderstand that the Bible nowhere teaches that babies are sent to hell. In fact the opposite is seen in the Bible. King David acknowledged in 2 Samuel 12:23 that his infant child who had died would be reunited with him in the afterlife. The Bible is otherwise silent on this point, and so we must leave the matter in the hands of God and trust Him to be both merciful and just in all things, granting His grace to those who have transgressed against Him.

In light of all of this, it is my belief that baptism should have nothing to do with babies. Biblically, it is only for believers, because they have already been saved from their sins by the work of Jesus Christ at the cross of Calvary. If one is not a believer first, then baptism is of no significance. It has the same benefit as a morning shower - it just cleans your body. An infant is not yet a believer for they have not the mental faculties to grasp the gospel, that doesn't mean that God is sending them to hell because they have no deeds against God.



Comprehending the work of Christ involves abstract thinking and a child's ability to understand abstract thought begins developmentally at about 11 years of age. It is important for parents to raise their children in the ways of God, however, because their child will surely one day become a sinner and then they will need to trust in Christ to save them for the penalty of their sins. In our church, we have baby dedications³ as an alternative so that parents can dedicate their child to God publicly before the congregation with a pastor present to pray that their child will live a life unto God. We hope that one day all of the children

in our church will choose to be baptized, but we know that it is not a requirement for salvation.

The most saddening mistake that we see people make in regard to baptism is that it is necessary for salvation. The Apostle Paul explained in the book of Galatians that if anyone says anything other than faith is what saves us, they have "nullified the grace of God" for if salvation came by works like baptism then "Christ died needlessly" (Gal.2:21). Several aberrant or cultic movements, such as the International Churches of Christ (a.k.a. "L.A. Church of Christ," or "Boston Movement"), the True Jesus Church or Oneness Pentecostals teach that faith alone is not sufficient for salvation. They say in order to go to heaven you have to be baptized in water. This is utterly in contradiction to what the entire Bible teaches about God's grace and His plan of salvation. It just goes to say that simply because one says they are a Christian it does not mean they necessarily are one. Likewise, going to the movies doesn't make you a Hollywood actor.

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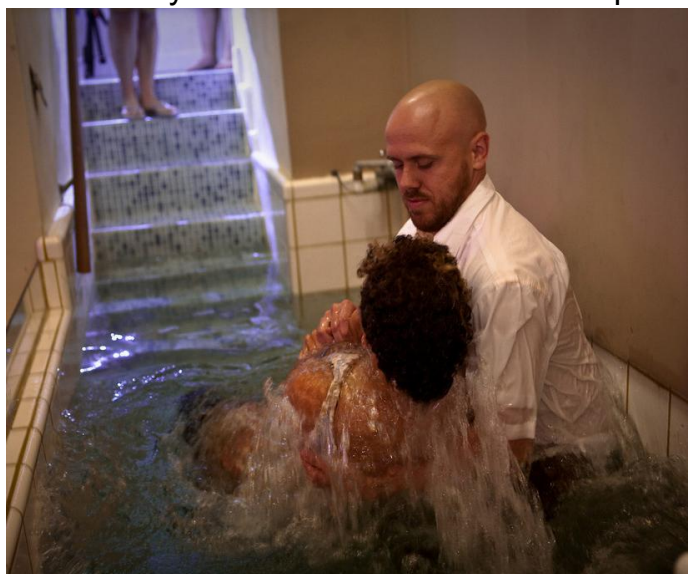
To be a Christian means that you have the Holy Spirit of God living in you because you have recognized that only the Triune God can save you by faith alone in the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone. Typically, you

³ Infant baptism is a practice ultimately developed by bad theology. When paedobaptists (those who baptize babies) attempt to use the Bible to support their view, they almost always pull from verses where it states, "households were baptized" (e.g. Acts 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16). "Household" does not necessarily imply that infants were counted among the members. Many households do not have children and since these passages do not mention children, it is more logical to conclude they did not have any kids in them. In the verses mentioned regarding households being baptized, those who were baptized are specifically said to have heard the word of the gospel (Acts 10:44) and believed (Acts 16:31, 34). Thus, it is very clear that baptism is for believers only. Nowhere does the Scripture teach that infants are to be baptized. At the same time, we do acknowledge the importance of involving our little ones in ceremony as a church. We believe and practice the ceremony of child dedication, which looks forward in hope that child will one day grow up and choose Christ and be baptized. The Scriptures have examples of parents bringing their children to God in such a ceremony of dedication, so this is the practice we employ for our kids as a community to dedicate them to God.

can spot a cult group because they will either deny the Trinity or try to add something to faith in order to be saved, such as baptism (or other religious activities and moral deeds, which in themselves are good, but when made prerequisites to salvation – they are horrible evils). Cults will distort passages in the Bible such as Acts 2:38 to defend their warped view that baptism (and/or other religious rites) added to faith is what saves you. But let's take a look at that verse so you can see for yourself. **This booklet is about educating you on baptism after all.**

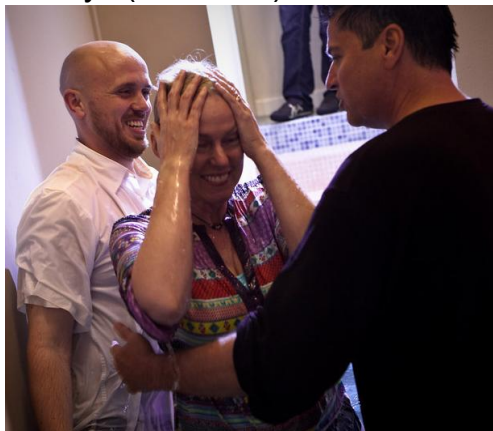
If you have a Bible at hand, turn to this passage and read it for yourself. Acts 2:38 takes place on the day of Pentecost, when God started the church. This verse climaxes at the Apostle Peter's powerful proclamation of the gospel. Those listening to his message cried out in belief, "What shall we do?" Peter replied to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Cults have mistaken Peter's words "Repent and be baptized" as evidence that faith plus baptism results in salvation. A single word in this passage gives us the truth of this verse. That word is "for," which any Greek Bible scholar will tell you is the Greek word *eis*. This word is a preposition that indicates causality ("in order to attain") or a result ("because of"). An example of using "for" in a resultant sense is the sentence, "I'm taking aspirin for my headache." Obviously this means the person is taking an aspirin as a result of their headache. The person isn't taking an aspirin in order to obtain a headache. An example of using "for" in a casual sense is the sentence, "I'm going to the office for my paycheck." Obviously this means going to the office in order to obtain a paycheck.

In Acts 2:38 the word "for" is apparently used in a resultant sense. The verse might be paraphrased, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ because of (or as a result of) the forgiveness of your sins." The verse is not saying, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ in order to attain forgiveness of your sins." Besides this simple lesson in language, if this were not correct than this verse would be incompatible with hundreds of New Testament verses that say salvation comes by faith alone (for example John 3:16-17; 5:24; 7:38; 20:29; Acts 16:31). Thus in Acts 2:38, Peter was not telling them that they could not be saved without baptism. He was telling them that their genuine repentance, which by the grace of God accompanies salvation, would be evidenced by their obedience to be baptized.



Along with this, Scripture always teaches that baptism comes after salvation. Acts 10:47, for example, describes believers who were indwelt by the Holy Spirit and therefore saved (see Rom. 8:9) prior to being baptized. Furthermore, the Bible is so clear on the fact that we are not saved by doing things; biblically speaking - we are not saved by works (Eph. 2:8-9). As the Apostle Paul pointed out in Romans, our righteous standing before God is “by faith first to last” (Rom. 1:17). When the jailor asked the Apostle Paul, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul responded, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:30-31). It is very clear that baptism never contributed to anyone’s salvation, rather it was a fruit of it. Just as married people wear rings, so too Christians get baptized. A married person who does not wear their ring does not make their marriage dissolve. On the contrary it just means something is wrong (perhaps they lost the ring or worse perhaps there is infidelity being covered). Likewise, a non-baptized Christian is a sign of something wrong. Perhaps it is pride, because the person was baptized as an infant or has prolonged their decision to be baptized so long that they don’t want others to look down on them. It may be fear of what family or friends may say if they take the step to get baptized. It could be a list of things. In any case, the act of baptism is a seal on a decision that has already been made. It is the ring of the Christian who is married to Christ.

The book of Titus provides additional compelling evidence against baptism being a condition for salvation. Paul made it clear that “rebirth and renewal” are not the result of “righteous things we had done,” but rather “because of his mercy” (Titus 3:5). The “washing of rebirth” is not literal water baptism, but the



cleansing of the Holy Spirit that “washes” away our sins by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7; Rev. 1:5). Christ’s words in Mark 16:16 clearly indicate that belief or faith, not baptism, is the condition for salvation. Here Christ said, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” It is clear from the first part of His statement that baptism should follow belief. It is equally clear from the second part; however, that belief alone, not baptism, is required for salvation. Christ did not say, “Whoever believes and is not baptized will be condemned.” Rather Christ makes non-belief (with or without baptism) the only condition for condemnation.

So what happens to a believer when he dies if he has not been baptized? Simply put, the same thing that happens to a baptized-believer, they both go to heaven. The Apostle makes it clear that baptism is not relevant to salvation in his letter to the Corinthians. Paul claims to have been their spiritual father (1 Co. 4:15) and in the same letter he says that did not baptize any of them (1:14). This

does not mean that we shouldn't be baptized; it just means that Paul's concern was about their faith in Christ because that is what saves a person.

When Jesus died on the cross it was unmistakably clear that only faith gets us to heaven. Historically, we know that when Jesus was crucified along with two thieves. One of the thieves became a Christian that day, when he put his faith in Christ. Jesus told this thief, "today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). In his case there was neither the necessity nor the opportunity for baptism. Jesus did not say, "You waited too late to believe. You can't go to paradise with me – because you haven't been baptized." No, Jesus said "today," which proves that salvation is based on faith alone.

Not only do cults twist the Scriptures to say that baptism is necessary to get to heaven, they also say that it has to be done in a particular pattern for the baptism to be correct. For instance, the Boston Church of Christ or L.A. Church of Christ movement says that one must be baptized by their group, which is the "true church" in order to be saved. Even those who were previously elders in other Churches of Christ are told they must be re-baptized in order to be saved. The United Pentecostal movement teaches that unless you are baptized using their correct formula you are not saved. In their case the magic formula is "in the name of Jesus." If you don't say those five words in that exact order, they say your baptism does not count (which seems to make God rather petty, that is, He will send you to hell if you don't say five words in a row exactly right). Furthermore, in their theology, those who are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not truly going to heaven. (Of course, they hold this view because they deny the Christian doctrine of the Trinity). It should go without saying that this is completely absurd and foreign to what the Bible teaches. It turns baptism into hocus pocus at best and worse pagan sorcery. This false cultic doctrine turns God into an arbitrary and petty magician. If only the cults would actually read the Bible with accurate interpretation and common sense. The Bible does not point people to a prescribed formula or magic mantra to recite at the baptismal pool. Instead, the Bible points us to the person of Christ – He alone saves and He doesn't need water to do it, because He did it with His precious blood on the cross of Calvary.



It is worth pointing out and explaining what this biblical phrase "in the name of" really means. To baptize people "in the name" of Christ or "in the name" of

the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to baptize them into the authority of God. When Peter urged those who believed the gospel to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38), he was not prescribing faith in a formula, but rather faith in the authority vested in the name of Jesus Christ. Similarly, when a police officer commands someone to “stop in the name of the law,” the power is not in the phrase, but in the authority it signifies. An Old Testament example is when David’s servants gave Nabal a message “in David’s name” (1 Sam. 25:9). They were not trusting in this phrase for protection, but rather in the power of the person it represented. When a physician provides someone who is sick with a prescription, their trust is not in the paper on which it is penned, but rather in the person who issued it. So it is with baptism. The power is not in a prescribed formula, but in the heavenly physician.

The Bible records an account in Acts 8:35-39 that makes the meaning of baptism very clear. Turn your Bible to this passage and let’s study it. In this narrative, Philip shares his faith to an Ethiopian man and then baptizes him. Read the account:

And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 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." 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. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away...

Notice from this account that the Ethiopian man first believed in Jesus and then he was baptized. He asks Philip essentially, “What do I have to do to get baptized?” This was the practice of the day. When someone believed he was immediately baptized even the newly converted man understood this. Somehow we have strayed from that today. Many churches make you take special classes and do a list of other things in order to get baptized. That is not the way it happened in the Bible. When someone wanted to be baptized they were told what Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” As long as you are a believer in Christ alone as your personal Savior and you understand what baptism is then you are ready for it!

This passage in Acts not only explains the truth of baptism to us, but it also shows the way that it was carried out. The way to baptize someone has for some reason become hotly contested throughout the history of the church. In this passage, as well as all other passages in the Bible concerning baptism, the way that Philip baptized was by immersion. This is clear because it says “when they came up out of the water” (Acts 8:39). Some churches do not baptize by

immersion, instead they sprinkle people with water. Let's be clear that we do not think that God minds which way we do it: immersion, pouring or sprinkling, however the biblical model is immersion and thus our church is more comfortable with it that way. This passage is clearly modeling to us immersion, for one doesn't come out of water when he has been sprinkled. Remember, John the Baptist, it is clear from the Bible that he baptized by immersion also. The Bible says, "John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there" (Jn. 3:23). If sprinkling was used by John then such a statement would be meaningless. The Spirit of God, who inspired the Scripture, put it there for a purpose; baptism demands enough water for immersion and John the Baptist chose a place where he would find it.

Historically we know that the disciples' disciples also baptized by immersion. The oldest Christian documents outside the New Testament all refer to baptism in terms of immersion. *The Shepherd of Hermas* (100 AD) says, "So they go down into the water dead, and they come alive." The writings of Justin Martyr (115 AD) refer to baptism as "the water-bath." *The Letter of Barnabas* (130 AD) says, "This means that we go down into the water full of sins and pollution, and we come up bringing forth fear in our hearts and with hope in Jesus in our spirit." The first exception to immersion is found in the *Didache* or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (150 AD), which says that if there is not enough water for immersion you pour the water. Such pouring is found in Christian art that may date as early as the second century. But we know for sure that sprinkling came on the scene historically as late as the middle of the third century. However, it did not gain general use until the 13th century.



Above is a picture of the 4th-century baptistery in Milan where Augustine was likely baptized. Notice that there are steps, showing ancient Christians practiced baptism by immersion. (This picture is one of many ancient cites that show baptism was by immersion).

Along with this biblical and historical evidence, we have a clue from the word "baptism" itself. The word baptism is not an English word at all, but a word transliterated (that is, carried over letter by letter) from the Greek language. In fact, there is only one letter different in both the noun and the verb form so the word. This tells us that the English Bible translators did not actually translate the word. They merely copied it as if it was in the original. This tells us that in order to get to the meaning of the



word we cannot look to the English language but to the Greek.

The Greek verb used in the New Testament is *baptizo*, which in classical usage means, “to immerse.”⁴ Almost all standard lexicons of the Greek language (most of which were incidentally written by non-immersionists who should know better, which shows there is no bias in their scholarly work) admit that the basic meaning of *baptizo* is to immerse. *Baptizo* is used all throughout Greek literature and it never has any other meaning other than this in all of ancient documents we have. The word is used to describe soldiers passing through water immersed up to their chests, animals that have drowned in water, ships that have sunk, etc. If the Bible wanted to model sprinkling to us for the way of doing baptism that it could have used such terminology. The Greek language has a perfectly good word for pouring (*ekcheo*) and one for sprinkling as well (*rhantizo*). But since neither pouring nor sprinkling is ever used in the Bible or in early Christian literature, we think that it best that we stick with the way it is modeled in the word of God. And as for those believers who do it by sprinkling or pouring, that is fine too. We must not argue over things that are secondary issues and divide the body of Christ over nonessentials. As long as baptism is recognized as an act of obedience and not a sacrament for salvation then we are in agreement. What matters most is not whether we immerse or sprinkle, but is that Jesus Christ is our only Savior and out of our love to Him we follow His command to be baptized.

In all this talk about cults and the Greek language make sure that you don't miss the simple truth of baptism. It is an outward expression of an inward reality. Another way of putting is that baptism is to faith what words are to ideas. One may have an idea without putting it into words, but it conveys no external reality for anyone else. One may also have faith without baptism, but this has no significance outside oneself. Sometimes when a pastor is preaching, they will give an “altar call” for people to come to the front of the church if they have been moved by the sermon to truly repent in their hearts and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Preachers do this for those repentant as a public statement of their internal belief. In the early church, this is how baptism was done. People who responded to the message would immediately be baptized as a public statement of that faith. Preachers have somewhat used the altar call like Christian baptism, because water is not always available for baptisms. If someone comes forward to repent, or someone tells me they have become a believer the next step is always to ask them if they would like to be baptized as a public declaration.

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In the Bible repentance and faith in Christ were proclaimed, but without baptism there was no divinely recognized first

⁴ *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), page 118.

Christian act. Baptism was the public initiation act that a person did, in order to show that they had made received the private initiation act by God in their heart, cleansing them of sin. The washing of the waters, illustrated the washing of their sins that had already taken place. To the early Christian there simply was no alternative to baptism and there was no such thing as an un-baptized Christian. To reject baptism was to reject Christ and initiation into His church. So too today, a believer should never reject baptism. While our culture may be a bit more lackadaisical about baptism, we desperately need to shake it and embrace the command of Jesus to not only be baptized, but also to go and baptize.

Let's now put all of this talk about baptism into perspective for you personally right now as we wrap up this article. Baptism is a necessary initiation rite for Christians today as much as it was in the first



century. Hence, we are so excited you are reading this article and are thinking about baptism. We wholeheartedly encourage you to embrace the waters of baptism as a pivotal and matchless expression of your life as a Christian. The Bible never says that baptism will lose its importance over time. Therefore we must consider it as the next step after faith for every believer. The water itself does nothing for you. Jesus alone is the one

who saves. When you are baptized it should be motivated out of your love for Him. It should be to show your love for Him. The idea of baptism is very metaphorical in its picture through immersion into water.

The whole metaphor of baptism is about you and Jesus. Furthermore, the metaphor is about you belonging to and being welcomed into His church. You see, anything that is immersed in another substance is overwhelmed by that substance, engulfed in it, and sometimes identified with it. As a piece of white cloth would be identified with the dye in which it is dipped. And the freshly dipped cloth is no longer white and no longer alone, for it belongs to a community of dye cloth. You see, Christ is building His church and we are the cloths that have been dipped in His grace and together we display His glory to the world.

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If you take the step of baptism, the day will come when you will enter the water to be immersed. Just think of that day and the picture of being immersed in water to show your love for Christ. You know, we speak today of being immersed in problems or engulfed in thought. So also, the word baptism was used by the

ancient Greek philosopher Plato to express being overwhelmed by questions. Baptism is the believer being immersed and overwhelmed in the most positive sense by the Lord and His church. When we go into the water it is a picture of what happened to us the moment we believed in Christ. It is a picture of being brought into a new sphere of life, the sphere of Christ. Being submerged under the water represents being buried with Christ. In this sense, baptism is a death certificate administered in the name of the Lord. It basically is a public statement that the Christian's past deeds are dead and buried in the name of the Lord. When we come up out of the water it represents being resurrected as a new creation in Christ. The Bible says, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor 5:17). Baptism is a celebration of this new life – that is all that it is. Think of it as a holy party, observing the day that changed your life forever – the day you received Christ as your Lord and Savior.



In conclusion, if you are a believer and you have not been baptized – what are you waiting for? If you are tired of waiting just contact the church or speak to a pastor directly and let him know. As you prepare your heart to be baptized, please know that this is not just a ceremony for the spiritually aristocratic. This is a declaration of independence. It is a public statement to everyone there that you have turned to God from the sins of your past. It literally means that your old self, the old person that you used to know is dead, and that you will see him or her no more. Use baptism to celebrate the fact that your past is just that. It is your past. You need now, as never before, to reckon your past to be dead. The word, "reckon," means to account it as if it were dead. When you come out of the water, we pray that your mind would totally be set on things that are above and not things below. Give us a call and we'll pray together if you would like. And here's a prayer that you might say to God to prepare yourself for baptism:

Heavenly Father, as I prepare to be baptized, I thank You for sending Your Son to become a man, in order to reveal Your love and truth and to pay for the sins of your people. Lord Jesus, thank you for dying for me and for giving the meaning to this ceremony of baptism. You died to free me from the punishment of my sins and You have given me new life. Be with me as I make this step to acknowledge You publicly. Use my baptism to be a testimony for Your glory. I pray that the Holy Spirit, whom You sent, will comfort me in this ceremony and reveal more deeply to me Your love, my need for You Jesus - the only Savior who has set me free from all the pain and trauma of my past. Thank you almighty God - Father, Son and Spirit, for saving me. Be with me as I prepare for baptism. In the name of the only true Savior, my Lord Jesus, I pray, Amen.

BAPTISM INTEREST FORM

If you are interested in baptism, fill out our interest form and let us know.

Name: _____

Home address: _____

Email: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Are you a Christian? Yes No (If not, please do not continue with this interest form, because baptism is for believers only).

If so, when did you become one? _____

Is Jesus the only way to God, salvation and heaven? Yes No

Can nice moral people who reject Jesus still go to heaven? Yes No

Is there only one true God, who exists in three equal persons: Father, Son and Spirit? Yes No

Where are you in your Christian life?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Little or no Christian background | <input type="checkbox"/> Recommitted Christian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual seeker | <input type="checkbox"/> Stable Christian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Backsliding Christian | <input type="checkbox"/> Growing Christian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Christian | <input type="checkbox"/> Mature Christian |

How does one become a Christian?

How did you become a Christian?

Why do you want to be baptized?

How long have you attended Del Rey Church? _____

Once we receive your interest form we will follow up with you about having you join the next scheduled group of baptisms.

Please hand in completed form to an usher or pastor during the church service or mail in to drc office: 8505 Saran Drive, Playa del Rey, CA 90293.