

How do we define baptism at True Life?

TLC Definition: We believe in believer's baptism by immersion as a symbolic act, which is how Christians publicly confess their faith in Jesus.

1. Baptism is for professing believers only. Why do we believe this?

A. Jesus connected it to being a disciple (Matthew 28:19- Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,,

B. The meaning of John's baptism indicates baptism is for believers (Luke 3:7-9). John was teaching that outward religious rituals, including baptism, do not save but that it is an inward work of God expressed in confession, repentance, and faith in the Messiah that results in the fruit of life change but is symbolized by baptism.

C. This is the pattern we see in Acts as the church fulfilled the Great Commission.

-The 3000 Saved on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47): Verse 41 says, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." "Received" is the Greek word, *apodechoma*, and it means "to take fully." James 1:21 says, "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." I believe, therefore, that when we compare Scripture with Scripture it becomes clear that they were saved before they were baptized because they had fully received God's Word, and that brings salvation according to James.

-People saved in Samaria (Acts 8:12)

-The Ethiopian Treasurer (Acts 8:35-38- "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. **36** Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, *here is* water. What hinders me from being baptized?" **37** Then 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."**38** So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.):

The Holy Spirit led Philip to the Ethiopian who was reading from the book of Isaiah. This man did not understand what he was reading so Philip took the

Scriptures and preached Jesus to him. Then we see what happened in the verses we read. The Ethiopian had to confess Christ and be saved before the man of God would baptize him.

-Paul's Salvation Experience (Acts 9:1-19): Paul was saved on the Damascus Road when he encountered the risen Christ and confessed Him as Lord (v. 6). Ananias baptized him over three days later.

-The Gentiles Saved in the Home of Cornelius (Acts 10): God sent Peter to begin the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter preached in the home of a man named Cornelius. Verse 44 says, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word." The Jews who were with Peter were amazed that Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit. Peter answered them by saying, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" They were baptized with water. Therefore, it is obvious that these people were saved before they were baptized.

-Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15- Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. **15** And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded *us*.)

-The Philippian Jailer and his household (Acts 16:30-34- And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" **31** So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." **32** Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. **33** And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized. **34** Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.):

Paul and Silas were in jail. God sent an earthquake that opened the doors and loosened the chains, but they did not escape. The jailer was trembling as he ran to Paul and Silas and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (v. 30-31). This is the only time that question is directly asked in the New Testament, and the answer called for faith and did not involve baptism in any way.

-Crispus and many Corinthians (Acts 18:8- Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.)

-The Believers at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-5- And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples **2** he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”**3** And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.” **4** Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” **5** When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.):

Paul encountered a group of false disciples at Ephesus. They had been baptized into John’s baptism, but they had not truly believed on Christ and received the Holy Spirit. After Paul explained the truth to them, “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v.5). Therefore, they had been baptized once, but they still needed to have believer’s baptism after their salvation.

D. The nature of salvation indicates that baptism is for believers. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone (Romans 4:3-5. 3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” **4** Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. **5** But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,).

God regenerates us internally and not through an outward ritual (Titus 3:3-7- For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. **4** But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, **5** not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, **6** whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, **7** that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.).

2. Baptism is a symbol. Why?

A. The nature of salvation. The verses we just looked at show us that baptism is not a sacrament that conveys grace but a symbol of the salvation given

by Jesus through faith. **Also, the thief on the cross was saved without being baptized.**

B. It is actually presented as a symbol in the New Testament (1 Peter 3:21- There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,).

What does baptism symbolize?

A. The cleansing of sin (Acts 22:16- And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’.” This is a symbol of the blood of Jesus that cleanses all of our sins (1 John 1:17).

B. Identification with the body of Christ through the baptism of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13- For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.).

C. Identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:3-5 “**3** Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? **4** Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. **5** For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection.”

3. Baptism is by immersion.

A. The New Testament Example – Let me share two examples of this. First, when John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17), “Jesus immediately came up from the water,” and this clearly pictures immersion. Second, when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch after his conversion (Acts 8:26-40), they “went down into the water, and he baptized him.”

B. The Meaning of the Word – Baptism is the English transliteration of the Greek word, *baptizo*, which literally means “to make fully wet” (*Strong’s Comprehensive Concordance of the Bible*). According to Dr. Gerald Cowen, examples of the use of this word in secular Greek literature include sinking a ship, sinking into sleep or intoxication, a person drowning himself in wine, drawing water from a vessel by dipping a cup in it, and someone who is drowned with questions. Timothy Paul Jones says, “In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word translated “baptize” in the New Testament described

Naaman's sevenfold immersion in the Jordan River (2 Kings 5:14)." Therefore, if a person has not been made fully wet when baptized, he or she has not been baptized in the biblical sense.

C. The Symbolism of the Act – According to Romans 6:3-5, baptism is a symbol or picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and it is also a picture of the fact that the believer has died to sin and been raised to walk in the newness of life through Jesus Christ. Only the act of being taken under the water and raised up again can accurately symbolize these biblical truths.

4. Baptism is the way we publicly confess our faith in Jesus.

-The pattern of Acts

-Matthew 10:32-33- "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. **33** But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Questions And Answers:

1. Is baptism an essential part of salvation? No, Jesus told the thief on the cross that "today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43) when he expressed faith in Jesus even though he could not be baptized. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Romans 10: 9 and 13 say, "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved... For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Therefore, we are saved at the moment when we trust Jesus' death and resurrection for us, confess Him as Lord, and call on Him for salvation. We should get baptized quickly to obey Jesus and make our public profession of faith. However, baptism is not a sacramental act that conveys grace. Salvation is in Christ alone.

2. If I have been baptized as an infant did that save me or do I need to get saved and then baptized again? Or if I am not trusting in my sprinkling as a baby for my salvation but I have trusted Jesus and been born again but not baptized except as an infant, do I need to get baptized? In regard to the first question, Galatians 2:16 says, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the

works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” We are saved by Jesus alone through conscious faith in Him. A baby is not capable of that. Even John’s baptism emphasized personal confession and repentance, and he told them that their religious heritage would not save them. Sometimes people argue that the “household baptisms” in Acts justify infant baptism. However, the texts do not specify how old the people were. Furthermore, in the story of the Philippian jailer, Acts 16:34 says the jailer “rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.” Therefore, the people who were baptized were old enough to be able to believe for themselves.

As far as the second question, we would say yes to being rebaptized because of our belief in believer’s baptism by immersion as a symbolic act to publicly confess our faith in Jesus. In an infant sprinkling, none of the criteria of that definition are met. It would be outside the scope of this Q @ A to consider all the arguments related to this, but the most basic argument is usually that baptism is a sign of the covenant made by believing parents for their children with baptism replacing circumcision as the sign of the covenant. This baptism has to be confirmed by faith at when the child is old enough. However, Romans 2:28-9 says, “For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; 29 but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.” We do not believe baptism equates to or replaces circumcision in the new covenant. A big part of the message of the New Testament is to stop trusting outward rituals. Furthermore, the book of Galatians is crystal clear that salvation is in Christ alone and not Christ plus circumcision. Baptism is a symbol of saving faith. Any other view has to be read into Scripture instead of being read out of it.

3. If I was baptized as a believer but not by immersion, do I need to get baptized again? We know that different churches and denominations have different views on this, but we believe that immersion is the only acceptable form of baptism so we would say that the answer is yes. We explained the reasons we believe in immersion above, and we believe it is the only scripturally authorized and valid mode of baptism that adequately conveys the symbolic meaning of baptism. It is our conviction people have not really been baptized unless they have been immersed.

4. If my baptism was meaningful in my life even though it wasn’t a scriptural baptism, why wouldn’t that be sufficient? Ultimately, Scripture is our authority and not our feelings or experience. We are called to test all things according to God’s Word. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says, “Test all things; hold fast what is good.”

This could become a loophole to justify any unbiblical religious experience. Admittedly, this is a more extreme example than something connected to baptism, but a teenage girl told me in a Bible study several years ago that she was a Christian because she saw a vision of Jesus when she was high. She may have had that experience and it may have been very meaningful to her, but it would have been irresponsible of me to agree with her that she was saved because of that and not actually share the gospel spelled out in Scripture with her. Luke 6:46 says, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” We are to follow the Bible in our faith and practice.

5. I have rededicated my life to the Lord, and I want to get baptized again because of that. Will you baptize me? No. Ephesians 4:5 tells us that there is “one Lord, one faith, **one baptism.**” This means that we only get baptized once as long as it is done scripturally. We only repeat baptism when it does not qualify as a biblical baptism (see Acts 19:1-5). Baptism is only a symbol of salvation and not of sanctification (which is biblical terminology for rededication). A symbol only has meaning when it is picturing a genuine reality. Baptism is picturing our identification with Christ and His Body; His death, burial, and resurrection; and us dying to the old man and being raised up to live a new life in union with Jesus (Romans 6:3-6). In addition, we may rededicate ourselves to God many times. In fact, we are called to dedicate ourselves to the Lord daily. Which “rededication” should we get baptized for? Each time? A special one that we pick? There is no biblical warrant for this, and we are called to follow Scripture.

6. Can I baptize my children or my friend that I led to the Lord or should a pastor do it? We believe this is a gray area and a secondary matter, but we are happy to share our approach to this question for the sake of clarity. Can you baptize someone? We think the answer is yes. We do not believe that Bible prevents any Christian from being able to baptize a convert. The better question is, “Should you?” If it is a situation like Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) and there is not a church around that the person can be baptized in, you should baptize that believer. If there is a church, we believe you should direct the convert to the church and its leadership. Let us explain why and how we handle this at True Life. We believe that generally baptism should happen in the gathered worship of the church because it is an ordinance of the church. It is an ordinance of the church because Jesus ordained that the church practice believer’s baptism until He returns. As an ordinance, the administration of it falls under the authority

of the church so the validity of it does not depend on the administrator of it. Also, 1 Corinthians 14:40 says, "Let all things be done decently and in order." Our practice is for our pastors, staff, or other ordained person to do the baptisms after meeting with the person who wants to be baptized to ascertain his understanding of the gospel, whether or not his profession of faith seems credible, and to explain the meaning and details of baptism. We believe this process needs to be followed carefully by trained people to do what we can to insure a regenerate church membership. We believe it is our pastoral duty that we will answer to God for to provide oversight to the process and to try to make sure the Bible is followed as closely as possible when people are baptized. We do not believe that people baptizing others, apart from very unique circumstances, outside of the gathered church body and without following this process is the best way to insure that Scripture is followed properly.

7. Should baptism be in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit or in the name of Jesus? People ask this question because Jesus said to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19), but there are places in Acts (2:38 for example) where it says people were "baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." So, which way should it be? We baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to follow the command of Jesus. However, what about Acts? Is this a contradiction in the Bible? No. As New Testament scholar Craig Keener says, "This phrase simply means that the person being baptized confesses Christ." This is why we ask people questions and have them confess their faith before baptizing them so we baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit after they publicly confess Jesus. While this is our practice, we would not ask a person who was baptized in the name of Jesus to be rebaptized if his conversion and baptism are genuine and meet the other biblical criteria.

8. Why do I need to get baptized again if I was baptized before salvation but I am genuinely saved now? I have a relationship with God through Jesus so what does it really matter? It is a matter of getting your baptism on the right side of your salvation. It is a matter of honoring Jesus and submitting to His Lordship in all things, which is what we are called to do as believers.

9. Why do I have to be immersed in order to be a member at True Life? Some other churches baptize in a variety of ways or at least accept other types of baptisms even if they only immerse people in their church. Simply, we believe it is the only biblically valid mode of baptism so we do not believe someone has been biblically baptized without being immersed. We require biblical baptism for membership because it fits the pattern of the book of Acts, it is how

someone makes a public profession of faith in Christ (which is a necessity for church membership), and it expresses the symbolism of a person being baptized into the universal body of Christ by the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion.

10. Why do Baptists make baptism such a big deal and put such an emphasis on immersion? Really, the emphasis is on being biblical because we believe the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and sufficient Word of God; and we believe this is what the Bible teaches. Our spiritual forefathers were the Anabaptists. The word means rebaptizers, and they were named such by their opponents, who were the Catholics and Protestants. Both groups despised them because they practiced believer's baptism instead of infant baptism. However, we believe they were carrying the Reformation teaching regarding salvation out to its biblical and logical conclusion in regard to baptism so we happily stand on their broad shoulders that endured terrible persecution for this doctrine.

11. Baptism is just a symbol so why does it matter so much exactly how it is done? Isn't the intent of confessing Christ what is really important? Of course, confessing Christ is essential. However, we believe that all four criteria of biblical baptism need to be met, including the accuracy of the symbolism. A symbol only has meaning if it accurately conveys the reality behind it. For example, wearing a wedding ring would not really mean anything if a person was not married. This is a God-given and God-defined symbol so we do not believe we have the freedom to tinker with it.