

# Philosophy of Baptism

By Geoffrey R. Kirkland

## Christ Fellowship Bible Church

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

### I. What Does Baptism Symbolize?

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

### II. Who Should Be Baptized?

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

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

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

### IV. What Is the Proper Mode of Baptism?

The Scriptures provide the following information concerning baptism. In John 3:23, John baptized at Aenon because there as much water there. Then, Mark 1:10 says: "When John baptized Jesus they came up out of the

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

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

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

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

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

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