

My Take on Baptism

I will never forget the day I was baptized. I wish, however, that I could remember more about what I learned in the process. I studied it for a few weeks, but I can't remember if I studied back then any of the things I have learned today. Baptism, like everything in the Bible, has multiple aspects or meanings to it. Lack of in-depth study and of open mindedness has led to conflicting ideas about water baptism.

Every idea about baptism hinges on the definition of it. Everyone who practices any version of water baptism has one sure thing in common: it's an important part of their doctrine. This can be seen in the Bible as well, for John began baptizing, then Jesus himself was baptized, then more people began baptizing others. It was clearly important enough in the Bible for Jesus himself to be baptized. Therefore, we can assume it is indeed essential or important in some way. However, different denominations believe different things about baptism--and some even practice it differently from each other.

I was raised to believe that baptism was a public representation of your sins having been washed away and of your new commitment to Christ. Today I've learned that there are many possible meanings to baptism. For instance, perhaps it is either a literal or symbolic entrance into the spiritual realm. It is also thought that baptism completes your salvation, and/or that it is necessary to enter heaven. Colossians 1 compares water baptism to the death and resurrection of Christ as the death to our sins and our resurrection in Christ. Baptism is also treated as an initiation into the church body [not the individual church]. Which of these is true? Or are all of them true? To find out, we would need to take the passages of scripture that each idea is based on and study their context and exegete them. But we know that the Bible never truly contradicts itself, so there must be an answer for every one of these ideas, and the answers will line up with each other.

As noted above, water baptism is important in every denomination that practices it. However, some denominations practice it differently than the majority of the others. Catholics

are the most popular example of a denomination that practices infant baptism as their sole water baptism practice. There is much controversy about infant baptism in and of itself. Many people protest the idea of infant baptism because they believe it is a personal choice, and/or something that should signify salvation. Todd Stepp says that part of the reason Wesleyans and Anglicans practice infant baptism is because they see a connection between it and circumcision, and that if an infant can enter into one covenant, why not water baptism as well (Stepp)? To this I would say that these are two different types of covenants at the least and the matter requires further study. In Matthew 19 and Luke 18, Jesus states that the kingdom of God belongs to people like the infant children. Stepp says that we should enter that kingdom with the mark of water baptism (Stepp). It could also mean that baptism marks innocence, and therefore we should all be marked when we are born. According to Catholics and Wesleyans and such, we would not need be baptized again as adults. However, one of my classmates said to me that they were baptized as an infant, but lived a life away from God until well into their adult years. She has been pondering her salvation as if it hinges on baptism, and wonders if her infant baptism “covers it” or if she needs to be baptized again. Lastly, it would seem that infant baptism is similar to the practice of baby dedication in other denominations. One wonders, then, if water baptism was combined with dedication at some point for the Catholic church and Wesleyans, Anglicans, etc. while staying separate for the rest of the denominations.

Whatever the full meaning of baptism, no one should begin any form of this practice without having fully scrutinized and exegeted the topic in the Bible. We should never subject ourselves to blind practice. Whatever I may have learned as a child about baptism, I am positive it would’ve paled in comparison to the ideas I have discovered since then. While I am still in search of the full meaning and intention of water baptism, I feel no need to be baptized again—only to better understand my baptism.

For those interested, here is what a baptism in my Assemblies of God church might look like:

1. The pastor introduces the baptism candidates and explains the class they have taken to learn about the practice of water baptism. He sometimes may ask each candidate to share their salvation testimony or their reason for wanting to be baptized (Malphurs, 330).
2. The pastor dismisses the candidates to the baptism room and begins the praise and worship.
3. During worship, the baptisms are filmed in the “tub” and projected onto a large screen in the sanctuary for those worshipping to look on.
4. Before each candidate is baptized, the baptizing pastor prays unintelligibly with the candidate, ending the prayer with, “I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”
5. Each candidate is baptized and the audience cheers (Malphurs, 330).

Works Cited

Malphurs, Aubrey; Willhite, Keith. *A Contemporary Handbook for Weddings and Funerals and Other Occasions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications. 2006.

Stepp, Todd. “Infant Baptism: The Beginning of a Topic”. *Wesleyan/Anglican*. 22 Jan 2015.

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