

# CHURCH. SUPPLEMENT 4

## [CHURCH SACRAMENT] THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

See Manual 6, lesson 13 for the meaning of Christian baptism: A, B and C.

\* = Read this Bible passage

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### D. A SUMMARY OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

#### 1. Christian baptism is baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water.

Christian baptism is above all the invisible baptism with the Spirit.

Christian baptism with water is the visible sign and seal of the invisible baptism with the Spirit.

Only Jesus Christ baptises people with the Spirit. The new birth from above is the real thing.

Christians baptise people with water. The baptism with water is God's sign and seal that the real thing has taken place.

(1) The baptism with the Spirit means:

- being united with Jesus Christ in his death (Romans 6:3,4a,5a)
- and being united with Jesus Christ in his resurrection (Romans 6:4b,5b)

(2) The baptism with the Spirit results in:

- being circumcised in heart (Romans 2:28-29) by which the old self was crucified with Christ, so that you should no longer be a slave of sin (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:23)
- and being united with the Triune God (Matthew 28:19) by which the new self shares in the completed salvation work of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3-7; 2:5-7)

(3) The baptism with the Spirit has an effect on:

- your past: (NOW) you have been born again (regenerated) (Titus 3:4-8), you have been justified (all your sins have been forgiven) (Romans 4:6-8) and you have been saved from the guilt and the power of sin (Romans 6: 6-7) and the wrath of God (Romans 5:9-10)
- your present: you are now a citizen of God's covenant people (Galatians 3:26-29), a citizen of God's kingdom (John 3:3-8) and a member of the worldwide Body (Church) of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 2:19-22; 3:6). You want to, can and will more and more live a holy and righteous life (Romans 6:11-14,19), you will continue to grow as a disciple of Christ and help other people to become disciples of Christ (Matthew 28:19-20)
- and your future: your spirit (John 3:1-3) and your body (Philippians 3:20-21) will become completely conformed to Jesus Christ and you will live forever on the new earth in the presence of God (Revelation 21:1-5).

#### 2. When baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water are disconnected from each other.

(1) When the baptism with water is disconnected from the baptism with the Spirit.

When the baptism with water is disconnected from the baptism with the Spirit, then an unbiblical doctrine emerges, namely, that the administration of the baptism with water by human beings brings about (accomplishes) what only God can bring about (accomplish)!

For example, some people teach that the baptism with water pours God's grace into a person so that he is able to bring about his own salvation by means of his own free will and his own good works. And other people teach that the baptism with water or even the laying on of hands brings about the baptism with the Spirit (regeneration).

(2) When the baptism with the Spirit is disconnected from the baptism with water.

And when the baptism with the Spirit is disconnected from the baptism with water, then another unbiblical doctrine emerges, namely, that the baptism with the Spirit brings about something different than the regeneration by the Spirit! For example, some people teach that the baptism with the Spirit some period of time after the regeneration by the Spirit gives special power and spiritual gifts to the person who is baptised with the Spirit.

Christians must distinguish clearly between the baptism with the Spirit, which is a *once in a lifetime* event (Acts 11:14-18), and the filling of the Spirit, which is a *continual or repetitive* event (Ephesians 5:18).

### 3. The practice of baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water is not prescribed.

Although the Greek word “to baptise” (Greek: baptizó) in secular use *can* mean: to immerse, to partly dip or even to wash off, the Greek word “baptizó” in the Bible and in early Christian writings is only used in a ritual or figurative (spiritual) sense.<sup>1</sup>

The word “to baptise” is used:

- of the baptismal rites (ceremonial washings) in the Old Testament
- of being baptised with the Spirit in the New Testament that washed away all sins and clothed a person with Christ
- of being baptised with water in the New Testament that symbolises the being baptised with the Spirit
- and of the overwhelming by suffering (through persecution)

All Christians ought to have the same conviction about the biblical meaning of Christian baptism. And all Christians must instruct new Christians with the biblical meaning of baptism and not with their own traditional teaching about baptism.

Because the practical method or way of baptism with water is not taught or prescribed, commanded or prohibited in the Bible, all Christians have the freedom to choose any practical form for the baptism with water that appeals to them. But they may not enforce any particular method of baptism with water on other Christians and they may not judge other Christians who have chosen a form which is different to their own choice.

Although baptism with the Spirit is an indispensable imperative: “You must be born again” (John 3:7), the baptism with the Spirit may not be manipulated by humans. And although baptism with water is commanded: “You must baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19), a particular form of baptism with water may not be enforced on Christians. All Christians are pilgrims in various stages of growth between regeneration (the beginning of salvation) and glorification (the end of salvation). The responsibility of Christians is to sow and water, but the responsibility of God is to give growth (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

## E. THE PRACTICAL METHOD OR WAY OF BAPTISING WITH WATER

### 1. Baptising with water is a command (\*Mathew 28:19).

The word “to baptise” is bound to the Great Commission to make all the nations into disciples of Christ. Baptising with water is not an option for Christians, but a command of Christ. People who believe in Jesus Christ ought to be baptised with water by another believer in the one name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. They ought to be baptised in the context of making disciples and therefore should be taught (not forced) to obey all the commands of Jesus Christ (that is, the Bible).

When Paul was converted Ananias commanded him. “Stand *once and for all time* up (command, aorist time, active), be *once for all* baptised (command, aorist time, middle), and wash your sins *once for all* away (command, aorist time, middle), calling *once for all* (command, aorist time, middle) on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

However, while faith in Jesus Christ is a prerequisite for salvation, baptism with water not is a prerequisite for salvation (Mark 16:16). While faith and baptism with the Spirit is a prerequisite for membership in the world wide Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13), baptism with water is nowhere in the Bible taught to be a prerequisite for membership of the local church (or a particular denomination)! Formal membership of a particular church denomination is completely unknown in the Bible. Splitting up in different denominations (factions, parties) is a visible sign of spiritual immaturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)!

### 2. Baptising with water is administered by another Christian.

When a believer thinks about how he came to faith in Jesus Christ, he must conclude that God already set the first step towards him long before he made any step towards God (Ephesians 1:4-5). God used another person to share the gospel with him. Only when someone has heard the gospel, is he able to turn to Christ and believe in Christ (Romans 10:17).

When the Holy Spirit has cut someone to the heart, he must once for all time change his mind (repent) (Greek: metanoéo) (imperative, aorist) and must once for all time let himself be baptised (Greek: baptizó)(imperative, aorist, passive) with water (\*Acts 2:37-39). When a person has accepted the Word (the gospel), he is *once for all time* baptised (with water) (Greek: baptizó) and thus *once for all time* added to the existing group of people already saved (Acts 2:41,47). He *continually* devotes himself to the teaching of the apostles (the message of the Bible), the fellowship (with other Christians), the breaking of bread (the love meals including the Lord’s Supper) and prayer (Acts 2:42).

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<sup>1</sup> A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, by Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, 1957

The new believer does not baptise himself, but is baptised by another believer. In this way he gives expression to the fact that God has taken the first step to graciously give him the Holy Spirit (John 1:12-13). Remember, the most common visible sign of being baptised with the Spirit (of being born again) is growing towards a mature, functioning and persevering believer (disciple) in the worldwide Church (the coming into existence of a local church).

### 3. Baptising with water is administered in the name of Jesus Christ.

This means two things:

(1) The person baptising (baptiser) says something.

On behalf of God the baptiser gives the new believer the testimony from God. The baptiser baptises him “in the name of” (Greek: eis to onoma) the Triune God (Matthew 28:19) or “in the name of” (Greek: en tó onomati) Jesus Christ (Acts 10:48). He baptises on the authority of the command of Christ and thereby pronounces that through being baptised with the Spirit the believer has been brought into an essential relationship with the One carrying the name, that is, with the Triune God or Jesus Christ (who is the visible image of the Triune God).

(2) The person being baptised also says something.

The person being baptised also says something. He gives a testimony to God and to the people present. The person being baptised “calls on the name of Jesus Christ” or confesses his name (Greek: epi tó onomati) (\*Acts 2:38) or “calling on his name” (Greek: epikalasamenos to onoma autou) (\*Acts 22:16). This means the following: He confesses his faith in Jesus Christ:

- he acknowledges all the claims of Christ
- he submits to the teachings of Christ
- he confesses thereby his dependence on Christ
- and makes a commitment to obey and serve Christ.

Or he may pronounce a prayer to God. Or he may ask the congregation to sing a song together with him. Or he may also tell how he came to take the step of baptism with water by means of a personal testimony to the congregation.

### 4. The method of baptising with water is not prescribed in the Bible.

The Bible clearly teaches the meaning of being baptised with the Spirit, of which being baptised with water is the visible sign and seal. But the point of time that the baptising with water ought to be administered and the method of baptising with water are not taught or prescribed, commanded or even prohibited in the Bible! These are described in the historical setting. The congregation or a teacher should clearly teach and explain the meaning of Christian baptism to the new believer, distinguishing baptising with the Spirit from baptising with water. But a particular method of baptism with water is not prescribed or enforced onto the new believer.

### 5. The meaning of baptism does not teach or prescribe how one ought to baptise with water.

(1) Mark 10:38-39.

Jesus said, “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with (Greek: dunasthe ... to baptisma ho egó baptizomai baptisthénai)?” “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with.”

This baptism of Jesus and his disciples does not refer to their baptism with the Spirit or their baptism with water, but to their being overwhelmed by hardships and sufferings. Nevertheless, Jesus and his disciples were not immersed into these hardships and sufferings, but were rather *overwhelmed* by these hardships and sufferings coming over them (cf. 2 Timothy 3:12).

(2) \*1 Corinthians 12:13.

“We were all baptised by one Spirit into one body (Greek: pantes eis hen sóma ebaptisthémén) – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

Being baptised with the Spirit means: to be made to drink the same Spirit or to be imbued with the same Spirit. But this does not mean that the method of baptism with water should be by *drinking* something.

(3) \*Galatians 3:26-27.

“All of you who were baptised into Christ (Greek: eis Christon ebaptisthété) have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Being baptised with the Spirit means: to be clothed with Christ. But this does not mean that the method of baptism with water should be by *putting on a baptismal robe*. It is not forbidden to put on a baptismal robe, but it is certainly not taught, commanded or prescribed!

(4) \*Colossians 2:11-12.

“In him you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, ... having been buried with him in baptism (Greek: suntafentes autó en tó baptismó) and raised with him through your faith ...”

Being baptised with the Spirit means: being spiritually circumcised. But this does not mean that the method of baptism with water should be by *physically circumcising* a person.

(5) \*Romans 6:3.

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?” (Greek: Hosoi ebaptisthémén eis Christon Iésoun, eis ton thanaton autou abaptisthémén).

Being baptised with the Spirit means being crucified with Christ. But this does not mean that the method of baptism with water should be by *crucifying* a person.

(6) \*Romans 6:5.

“If you have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection” (Greek: ei gar sumfotoi gegonamen tó homoíómati tou thanatou autou, alla té s anastaseós esometha).

Being baptised with the Spirit means: growing (as a plant) together with what is like the death of Christ. But this does not mean that the method of baptism with water should be by *literally expressing* the death of a plant.

(7) \*Romans 6:4.

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death (Greek: sunetafémén oun autó dia tou baptismatos eis ton thanaton) in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Being baptised with the Spirit means: dying and being buried with Christ and being resurrected with him. But also in this case this does not mean that the method of baptism with water should be by *burying a person under* a pack of soil or *immersing* him in water.

Conclusion. The method of baptising with water is not taught, commanded or prescribed in the Bible!

## 6. Baptising with water in the Bible is connected to the symbolic baptism of God’s Old Testament people.

(1) \*1 Peter 3:20-21.

What happened? The water of the flood *destroyed* the sinful world at that time, but also *saved* Noah and his family. The water is thus at the same time a symbol of *destruction* and a symbol of *salvation* (cf. the death and resurrection of the believer)! The water of the flood washed all the sin of the world with its guilt and corruption away (cf. Genesis 6:5-7), but at the same time saved eight people (cf. Hebrews 11:7). The water of the flood did not even touch Noah or his family, but they were nevertheless saved from destruction by the same water of the flood. Their symbolic baptism was *not through immersion* in the water, but through floating on the water of the flood while rainwater was *poured out of the heavens above upon and over them* (Genesis 7:11-12).

What is the meaning? The flood in the Old Testament became a symbol (literally: an antitype or counterpart)(verse 21) for baptism in the New Testament. The flood was *the type or the image* and Christian baptism *the antitype or contrasting image* (that which represents the type or is the contrasting reality of the image). The baptising with the Spirit unifies believers with the death and resurrection of Christ and saves them from the dirt, power and consequences of sin. The baptising with water, that symbolises the baptising with the Spirit, symbolises not only the *destruction* of the old nature and the *salvation* of the new nature, but is also a “request” (a prayer) (Greek: ep-erótéma) made by the believer to God for requiring a good conscience. Or it is “a promise or vow (a testimony)” made by the believer to God that issues forth from a good conscience.

(2) \*1 Corinthians 10:1-2.

What happened? God’s Old Testament people were all under the cloud, but the water did not fall out of the cloud onto them. They all passed through the Red Sea, but the water stood as high walls on both sides without crashing on them, while the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground (Exodus 14:22). The water in the cloud and the water in the sea did not touch the Israelites at all. It hung as it were above and over them! Their symbolic baptism was *not through immersion* in the cloud or in the sea, but with *water that hung above and over them*. Thus they were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea (verse 2).

What is the meaning? This figurative baptism with water, in which the water hung above and over them, was a visible sign and seal that the Israelites had been *brought into an essential relationship with Moses*, whereby they became participants in the Mosaic Law and the Mosaic Community, also called “the Church” (Greek: ekklésia) (Judges 20:2; Psalm 107:32). Compare this with “baptising in the name of the Triune God” in Matthew 28:19, whereby Christians are brought into an essential relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit and his New Testament Community, which is also called “the Church” (Greek: ekklésia) (1 Corinthians 12:13).

## 7. Baptising with water in the Bible is connected to the purification rites of the Old Testament.

The purification rites or washings in the Old Testament were called “baptism rites” or “ritual washings” (Greek: baptismoi) (Hebrews 6:2; Hebrews 9:10). These visible purification rites symbolised the cleansing of things and people and pointed forward to the requirement of purification (of not only the contamination, but also of the punishment) of sin.

The baptising with water (Greek: baptizó) by John the Baptist and by Jesus and his disciples were connected to these purification rites (Greek: katharismos) of the Old Testament (John 3:22-26). Both symbolise “the cleansing from sin”: the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38) or the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16).

(1) \*Leviticus 4:1 – 5:13.

A part of the ritual or ceremonial law of the Old Testament was the sin offerings that were brought to make atonement for sin. The sin was symbolically cleansed by *sprinkling* (Greek: prosrano) the blood of the sin offering seven times before the curtain, by *putting* (Greek: epitithémi) some blood on the horns of the incense altar and by *pouring out* (Greek: ekcheó) the rest of the blood at the base of the sacrificial altar.

(2) \*Leviticus 14:1-9.

In the Old Testament ceremonial Law the ritual purification or cleansing of an infectious skin disease was to *sprinkle* water mixed with blood (Greek: perirainó) and to *wash down by pouring water from above on or over* (Greek: luomai). The word “bathe” (Greek: luomai) means to wash down by pouring water from above on or over himself. The words “bathe his body with water” (Greek: louomai en hudati) in Leviticus 14:9 in the ritual law of the Old Testament has the same construction as the words “baptise with water” (Greek: baptizó en hudati) in Mark 1:8a in the New Testament. The person stood in the water and the baptiser poured water on and over his body in order to wash away (Greek: apolouomai) (Acts 22:16) the impurity of his sickness or sin.

(3) \*Leviticus 15:11.

In the Old Testament Law the ritual purification of a person who has been touched by a ritually unclean person was “to rinse/wash off his hands” (Greek: niptó hudati) and “to bathe/wash down with water” his body (Greek: luomai sóma hudati) *by pouring water from above on or over his hands and his body*. Compare these words with the words “*pour out* water on the hands” (Greek: ep-cheó epi) (2 Kings 3:11) and “after bathing/washing down” the body (Greek: luomai) only “wash down” his feet (Greek: podas niptó) (John 13:10).

The outward ritual purification which the Law of Moses required in Leviticus and Deuteronomy was “a shadow” (Hebrews 10:1) that pointed forward to “the reality” of the inner spiritual purification of the heart about which the Psalms and the Prophets wrote.

(4) 2 Kings 5:10,14.

The prophet Elisha said that Naaman had to *bathe himself, wash down or wash away* (Hebrew: rachats, Greek: luomai) seven times in the River Jordan. This was the commission. Naaman seems to do something else: he went down (into the river) and *dipped (plunged)* himself (Hebrew: tibel, Greek: baptizó) seven times in the Jordan. This was the description (cf. Joshua 3:15 where their feet was immersed in water at the water’s edge). This was a baptismal or purification rite for the cleansing of a skin disease. This was a physical purification.

Compare this with the Old Testament people confessing their sin and then being baptised with water by John the Baptist in the Jordan signifying “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4,5,8). This baptism with water was a symbolic spiritual purification preparing people for the coming of the Messiah (Mark 1:1-3). The Messiah would do the real thing by spiritually purify them with the baptism with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8).

(5) \*Psalm 51:1,2,7.

The method of purifying sin during the Old Testament period was to *purge (sprinkle)* with hyssop and to *wash* (like clothes). David pleaded with God to wipe away (blot out, erase, obliterate)(Hebrew: machah; Greek: exaleiphó) (verse 1) his transgressions, to wash (Hebrew: kibbes; Greek: plunó) (verse 2) all his iniquity and to cleanse (purify) (Hebrew: tíher; Greek: katharizó) (verse 2) him from his sin. He asked God to purge/purify (Hebrew: chitte<) or *sprinkle* (Greek: rantizó) him with hyssop and to *wash* (Hebrew: kibbes; Greek: plunó) him so that he would become whiter than snow (verse 7).

Compare this with the method of cleansing things by *sprinkling* (Greek: rantizó) blood on them (Hebrews 9:19-22). Compare this also with the method of gaining a clean conscience by *sprinkling* (Greek: rantizó) the heart and (a clean) body by *washing down* (Greek: luomai) with clean water (Hebrews 10:22).

(6) \*Ezekiel 36:25-27.

The method of purifying sin during the Old Testament period was to *sprinkle* (Hebrew: zaraq; Greek: ranó) clean water over them, by giving them a new heart and by putting a new spirit in them, and by giving his Spirit to live in them. Compare this with the meaning of baptising with water in the New Testament (Acts 2:38-39 and Acts 10:43-45).

(7) \*Mark 7:2-3 (Greek text).

The method of ritually purifying hands was to wash down. The Pharisees noticed that some of the disciples of Jesus ate with ritually unclean or unwashed hands. Jews do not eat unless they have washed their hands. The ritual washing down (Greek: niptó) of the hands was done by turning one fist in the palm of the other hand (Greek: pugmé nipsóntai tas cheiras) while *water was poured out from above on or over* (Greek: epicheó epi) the hands (\*2 Kings 3:11).

(8) \*Mark 7:4 (Greek text).

“When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing (baptism)” (Greek: baptizó). The ritual purification of hands in the New Testament was called “a baptism” (Greek: baptizó)! And

the purification rites or ritual washings of the Old Testament were called “baptism rituals” (Greek: baptismoi) in the New Testament.

The ritual “baptising” (Greek: baptizó) (of the hands) with water (Mark 7:4a) after Jews returned from the marketplace was associated with the baptism rituals (Greek: baptismoi) (Mark 7:4b) of cups, pitchers and kettles. The method of the ritual “baptising” or washing of the hands are shown in Mark 7:3 and 2 Kings 3:11.

(9) \*Luke 11:38 (Greek text).

“But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash (baptize) (Greek: baptizó) before the meal, was surprised.”

The ritual purification of hands in the New Testament was called “a baptism”! Thus while Matthew 15:2 and Mark 7:2-3 use the word “to wash down” (Greek: niptó) the hands, Luke uses the word “to baptise” (Greek: baptizó) the hands. The *baptism* (washing) of hands was done by pouring water from above on or over the hands, while turning one fist in the palm of the other hand (Mark 7:3)!

(10) \*Luke 11:39 (Greek text).

The method of ritually purifying objects with water only touched the outside and not the inside of the objects. The ritual purifying (literally: baptising) (Greek: baptizó) of the hands (Luke 11:38) was associated with the ritual purification (Greek: katharizó) of a cup or dish. Only the outside of the cup or dish touched the water when it was ritually purified. This baptism ritual therefore does *not refer to an immersion in water* of the hands, cups or dishes, but rather to washing them down with water that is *poured from above on or over* the hands, cups or dishes (2 Kings 3:11).

(11) John 3:3,5,7.

Jesus taught that “being born from above (or: anew) by the Spirit is a *divine must* (a command)! These are references to baptism with the Spirit. “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit”. The key is: Only Jesus Christ baptises with the Spirit, but Christians must baptise with water” (Mark 1:8; John 1:33). The thing signified (the baptism of the Spirit, the cleansing work of the Spirit) must be accompanied with the sign (the baptism with water)! That is why Jesus Christ also taught that “baptism with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” is also a *divine must* (a command): dependent on the main verb “you *must* make disciples” (Matthew 28:19)! John 3:5 is a reference to baptism with water that is the visible sign of the invisible baptism with the Spirit (regeneration).

(12) \*John 3:22-26.

The baptising with water is connected to the Jewish purification rites or baptism rituals. The disciples of Jesus (John 4:1-2) and John the Baptist baptised people with water. There arose a dispute between the disciples of John and a Jew about the Jewish purification rites. This ritual was called the proselyte baptism. When a non-Jew desired to join Judaism, he took a bath (by pouring water over himself), he was circumcised and promised to keep the law (cf. Hebrews 6:2). The argument was probably that the disciples of John the Baptist accorded the baptism of their teacher, John the Baptist, greater purification significance than the proselyte baptism of the Jews and the baptism the disciples of Jesus performed. They could therefore not understand why more people went to Jesus to be baptised. The baptising with water (Greek: baptizó) (John 3:23,26) of John the Baptist and of Jesus was here connected to the Jewish purification ritual (Greek: katharismos) (John 3:25).

(13) \*John 13:5,9-10.

The method of ritually purifying the feet was washing down. In the East the practice was that a person took a bath *by pouring water on and over his body* (Greek: louomai) before he went out to a diner. After arrival at the place where the dinner was held, he only needed to *wash down* (Greek: niptomai) his dusty feet. In John 10 the feet of the disciples were hanging over the edge of the couches on which they reclined. Jesus washed their feet down *by pouring water from above on or over their feet* (John 13:5). The words of Jesus here have spiritual significance: a person is born-again once. Thereafter he only needs the continuing sanctification or cleansing of sin (1 John 1:9). After his conversion and rebirth a new believer only needs to keep on turning away from sin every day. After the once for all baptism with the Spirit symbolised by the once for all baptism with water, only a continual confession of sin was needed (1 John 1:9).

(14) Acts 22:16.

The ritual purification rites of the Old Testament with the meaning of washing off or washing away sins becomes the reference to New Testament baptism with water. “Stand up and you *must once for all* be or get yourself baptised (Greek: baptizó) (imperative, aorist, middle) and (or: that is) you *must once for all* wash off or wash away (Greek: apoluomai) (imperative, aorist, middle) your sins, having called on his name (participle, perfect tense, middle)” (Acts 22:16). This is a reference to the baptism with water of Paul (after he was baptised with the Spirit and filled with Spirit and could see again) (Acts 9:17-18) in the house of Judas on Strait Street in Damascus.

(15) Hebrews 10:19-22 (Greek text).

“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled (Greek: rantizó) (perfect, passive) to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed (Greek: luó) (perfect passive) with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22).

The ritual purification rites of the Old Testament foreshadow being baptised with the Spirit and being baptised with water in the New Testament. In the New Testament Jesus Christ is our High Priest who through his own death on the cross (his own blood) cleanses and sanctifies us (Hebrews 9:14). The *sprinkling* (Greek: rantizó) of our heart cleanses

us from a guilty conscience (Hebrews 10:22a) and is a reference to our inner spiritual cleansing, the washing away of our sins (justification) and to being baptised with the Spirit (regeneration) (cf. Ezekiel 36:25-27; Acts 2:3-4a). The *washing* (Greek: louomai) of the body (by pouring water from above on or over the body) (cleaning us from dirt before we approach God in Most Holy Place) (Leviticus 16:4) is a reference to our outward symbolic cleansing in the baptism with water. The baptism with water is the visible sign and seal of the baptism with the Spirit.

Conclusion. The ritual baptising of people occurred either by *sprinkling* them with water or by *pouring water from above on and over* their hands, feet or whole body (Hebrew: jatsaq al; Greek: ekcheó epi) (cf. 2 Kings 3:11). The ritual baptising of utensils also occurred either by *sprinkling* them with water or by washing them, that is, by *pouring water from above on or over* these utensils, whereby only the outside and not the inside was ritually cleansed. In the New Testament it is important that also the inside of people is spiritually cleansed (Luke 11:38-39).

#### 8. Baptising with water in the New Testament by pouring water from above on or over a person.

The baptism of water which Christ instituted (Matthew 28:19) is the visible sign and seal of the baptism with the Spirit (Acts 10:44-47; Acts 11:15-17).

And the baptism with the Spirit is depicted in only one way in the Bible:

- The Spirit was *poured out* (Greek: ekcheó) *from above on or over* people (Joel 2:28; \*Acts 2:17,33; Acts 10:45)
- The Spirit *came from above on or literally fell upon* (Greek: epiptó) the people (Acts 8:16; 10:44; \*Acts 11:15-16)
- The gift consisting of the Holy Spirit was *received* (Greek: lambanomai) from God (above) (Acts 2:38-39; 5:32; 8:15-17; 11:17; 15:8; 19:2; \*Galatians 3:2)

Conclusion. Because the baptising with water is the visible sign and seal of being baptised with the Spirit, the baptising with water is best expressed (symbolically illustrated) by pouring water from above on or over the new believer. This was clearly the method by which the apostle Paul was baptised in the New Testament (Acts 22:16)!

#### 9. Baptising with water in a river or in a house.

(1) John the Baptist baptised people *with water in* the river Jordan.

John the Baptist came, baptising *in* (the place: in, at, close to) the desert region. There he baptised people *in* (the place: in, at, close to) the Jordan river *with* water (the means with which he baptises)(\*Mark 1:4-5,8). In both cases the word “in” does not refer to immersion in the sand of the desert or in the water of the Jordan, but rather to the place where baptism takes place.

The Bible gives no detailed description of the method of baptism with water. People who were standing on the bank of the river probably stepped into the water so that at least their feet were covered with water. While they remained standing in the water, John baptised them with water by pouring water from above on or over them.

Also Jesus was baptised with water *in* the Jordan River. After his baptism he “came up *out* of the water” (\*Mark 1:9-10). This is an indication of the place where Jesus was baptised, not of the method by which he was baptised. He did not come up from below the surface of the water, but stepped out of the river on to bank of the river. He was not baptised with water by immersion in water just as he was also not immersed in the Spirit, but the Holy Spirit descended visibly as a dove from above onto him (Mark 1:10).

(2) The evangelist Philip baptised the eunuch *with water* at a place where there was some water.

The Greek original indicates that there was a place with *some* water (Greek: epi ti hudór) (verse 36). Just as above, *both* the evangelist Philip and the eunuch stepped from the bank of the water *into* the water and then Philip baptised him *with* water. Also this baptism was not by immersion, because that would mean that Philip had to descend together with the eunuch below the surface of the water, baptise him below the surface of the water and then together immerse from below the surface of the water! The words in the text cannot be understood in that way! They did not go under the water, but stood in the water when Philip baptised the eunuch with water. How he baptised (by sprinkling or by pouring) is not specified. After the baptism they *both* stepped *out* of the water onto the bank (\*Acts 8:38-39).

(3) The apostles baptised about three thousand people with water in Jerusalem.

In just one day about three thousand new believers were baptised with water in Jerusalem (\*Acts 2:41)! But was there enough water in Jerusalem to baptise all of them by immersion? Maybe this was possible at the pool of Bethesda or Siloam. Nevertheless, there is not a single indication that the apostles deviated from the standard Old Testament practice of purification by *sprinkling or pouring water from above on or over* the people!

(4) The disciple Ananias baptised Paul with water while he was standing in a house.

The baptism of the apostle Paul took place *in a house*. Paul was certainly not baptised by immersion under water somewhere in the house, because he *stood*. The water was sprinkled on or poured from above over Paul. His baptism signified that all his sins were *washed away* (Greek: apolouomai), that is, that he was completely justified in the eyes of God (\*Acts 9:10-11,17-18; 22:16).

(5) Baptism with water depicted on wall paintings in Rome (archaeological evidence).

Paintings on walls in the catacombs of Rome (100-200 A.D.) shows two men standing with their feet in water while the one pours water from above on or over the other.

#### 10. Conclusion with regard to the method of baptising with water.

In the Old Testament God depicted the washing away of sins by having one person sprinkle or pour water from above on or over the other person. Therefore Christians may also depict the symbolic washing away of sins by having one person sprinkle or pour water from above on or over the other person.

In the New Testament Christ baptised new believers with the Spirit by pouring (Greek: ekcheó) the Spirit from above on or over them, or by letting the Spirit fall from above on them, or by giving the gift consisting of the Spirit from heaven above to them. They are “born from God” (Greek: ek theou) (John 1:13; “born from above (anew)” (Greek: anóthen) (John 3:3,7) or “born of the Spirit” (Greek: ek pneumatos) (John 3:5,8). John the Baptist and Ananias and probably other Christians in the New Testament depicted the symbolic baptism (outpouring) of the Spirit by pouring water from above on or over new believers!

Christians ought to teach the meaning of baptising with the Spirit by Christ and baptising with water by Christians to new believers. But because a particular method or manner (method) of baptism with water is not taught or prescribed, commanded or prohibited in the Bible, Christians are free to choose a method for baptising with water by which they want to illustrate that they have been baptised with the Spirit and that their sins have been washed away.

The meaning of baptising with water is clearly taught in the Bible and is therefore important. But a particular method of baptising with water is not taught, prescribed, commanded or forbidden in the Bible and is therefore not essential.

- Some new Christians choose that they are baptised by sprinkling water from above on or over them (cf. Ezekiel 36:25; Hebrews 9:13,21; 10:22a)(cf. Acts 2:3).
- Other new Christians choose that they are baptised by pouring water from above on or over them (cf. Mark 1:4-8; Acts 22:16; Hebrews 10:22b)(cf. Acts 2:17,33).
- Although the classical Greek word “to baptise” (Greek: baptizó) can also mean “to dip (plunge, immerse) himself” in the ritual cleansing from leprosy (2 Kings 5:14), the method or manner of baptising a new believer by immersion into water cannot be derived from this, because the word “baptizó” in New Testament Greek is always used in a ritual or figurative sense.<sup>2</sup> Baptising a new believer by immersion in water is not taught, prescribed or commanded in the Bible. It is not even depicted in the Bible!

But because the method of immersion is also not forbidden in the Bible, Christians may choose to be baptised by immersion. Some new Christians choose for baptism by immersion into water, because for them this form depicts the death of their old nature and the resurrection of their new nature. However, while baptism by “immersion” emphasises what happens to man (the person being baptised) (he symbolically dies and is resurrected with Christ), baptism by “outpouring” and by “falling down” emphasises what God does (God, the Holy Spirit, comes from above from God, overwhelms the believer and fills the believer!)

Nevertheless, Romans chapter 6 does NOT teach the method of baptising with water, but teaches the meaning of baptising with the Spirit! The notion of baptising by immersion is not discussed by Paul at all in Romans 6.

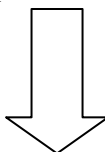
***One possibility is to instruct the new believer in the meaning of baptising with the Spirit and baptising with water and then to let him choose which visible form of baptising with water is most meaningful to him.***

***Christians should not and may not quarrel about Christian baptism, but should rather maintain the unity of the Spirit, which includes believe in “one baptism” (Ephesians 4:3-6).***

#### F. PICTURES OF BAPTISM IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Ancient catacombs and ruins associated with early Christians often contain art. Subjects include John the Baptist pouring water over Jesus in baptism. According to a guide to ancient symbols, “John is often depicted baptizing Christ with water poured from a scallop shell. The shell has become a common symbol of baptism.” If baptism takes place in a river, the person being baptised always stands in the water while water is poured from a cup or shell on and over his head.

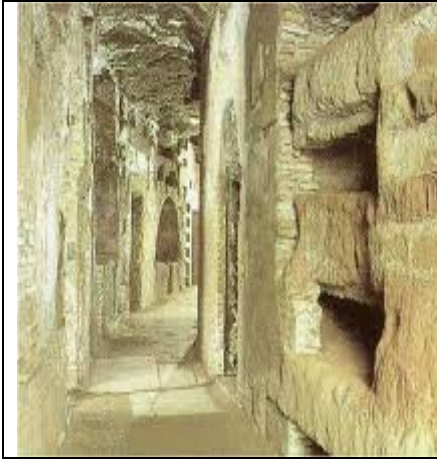
Much of the earliest Christian artwork: tile mosaics in ancient churches, paintings in the catacombs, designs on ordinary household objects like cups and spoons, engravings on marble, is always baptism by pouring water from a cup or shell from above on and over the person being baptised. Baptistries in early cemeteries are clear witnesses to baptisms by infusion.



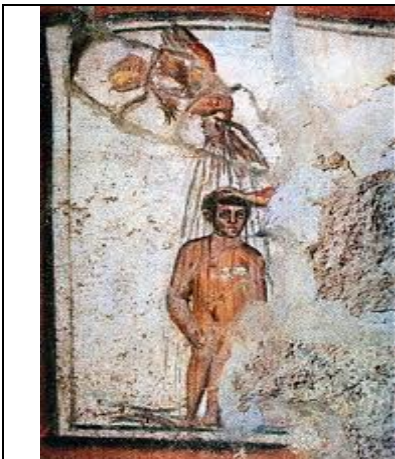
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<sup>2</sup> A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature, Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, page 131.





PICTURES OF BAPTISM  
FROM THE CATACOMBS  
AND CHURCHES





## G. WHO MAY BAPTISE WITH WATER

Christians may not go beyond what is written in the Bible (\*1 Corinthians 4:6).

### 1. Biblical prophecy (Mark 1:8).

John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus Christ would baptise people with the Spirit (cf. Acts 11:16). The ground for baptising with the Spirit is never something in man himself, but is always God's sovereign and undeserved grace. Being baptised with the Spirit means that God through his Spirit has taken the initiative to save a person. It means that this person has been genuinely saved.

Therefore a new believer never baptises himself with water, but he is baptised by another believer! The baptism with water by another believer signifies that the baptism with the Spirit is a sovereign act of grace from God!

### 2. Biblical history (\*John 3:22,26; John 4:1-2).

John the Baptist baptised people with water in the Jordan River. Jesus by means of his disciples baptised people somewhere in the Judean countryside. Jesus himself did not baptise people with water.

The Bible does not relate who baptised the about three thousand new believers on the very first day of the Christian Community (the Church). The Bible also does not relate the place where they were baptised or the method how they were baptised (Acts 2:38-41). If the method of baptism with water were really important, then Luke would not have neglected to record it! When the number of disciples grew to about five thousand, baptising with water is no longer mentioned (Acts 4:4) even though it must have taken place (Matthew 28:19)! Also when the number of disciples increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith, baptising with water is not mentioned at all (Acts 6:7).

When the evangelist (and former deacon) Philip proclaimed the gospel to Samaritans and they became believers, it is also not said who baptised them with water, where or how (Acts 8:12-13). Later Philip baptised the Ethiopian eunuch with water in a place where there was some water (Acts 8:36-39).

Ananias was an ordinary disciple in Damascus. He probably baptised Saul (later the apostle Paul) with water in the house of Judas (Acts 9:10-11; Acts 22:12-16). The baptism with water of Paul is not even mentioned in Acts 26:19-23!

When the non-Jew (Gentile) Cornelius and his family members and friends had heard the gospel and were baptised with the Spirit in his house, the apostle Peter ordered them to be baptised with water in the name of Jesus Christ. But also here it is not related who baptised them, where or how (Acts 10:47-48).

We know that the business woman Lydia and the members of her household were baptised with water. But we do not know who baptised them, where or how (Acts 16:13-15).

The jailor in Philippi was baptised with water together with the members of his household after they had come to faith. But it is not said who baptised them, where or how. They were probably baptised outside his home (Acts 16:31-34).

When Paul founded the congregation in Corinth he baptised only two men and one household. Christ had not sent him to baptise with water, but to proclaim the gospel (\*1 Corinthians 1:13-17).

When the people that gathered in the house of Titius Justus became believers, they were baptised with water. But also here we are not told who baptised them, where or how (Acts 18:7-8).

A Jew from Alexandria, Apollos, was only acquainted with *the baptism with water of John the Baptist*. Priscilla and Aquila explained the way of God more clearly to him. He was probably born again by the Spirit when he received this instruction. Nevertheless he was not required to be baptised with water again (that is, with the Christian baptism with water) (Acts 18:24-26).

The apostle Paul met about twelve disciples of John the Baptist who were also only acquainted with *the baptism of John with water*. This was *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins* (Mark 1:4; Acts 19:4). They did not know about the existence of the Holy Spirit and were not born-again (not baptised with the Spirit). After Paul had instructed them about the gospel and the Holy Spirit, they were baptised with the Spirit (they were born-again). They were baptised a second time with water, but this time in the name of Jesus Christ. Also here we do not know who baptised them, where or how (Acts 19:1-7).

### 3. Biblical command (\*Matthew 28:19).

Jesus commanded his own disciples to go and make disciples in all the nations, to baptise them with water and to teach them to obey all his commandments. They obeyed. In their turn they instructed their disciples to make disciples in all the nations, to baptise them and to teach them to obey all the commandments of Jesus. Thus, all disciples of Jesus Christ were commanded to baptise the new disciples with water. In certain church traditions only ordained bishops or pastors were allowed to baptise with water! But there is no biblical warrant to limit the administering of Christian baptism to certain Church offices.

During the first century A.D. there was no fixed doctrine in the Early Church with regard to Christian baptism with water. People were baptised with water in the name of Jesus Christ or in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Their baptism with water meant the forgiveness of their sins and being baptised with the Spirit (the reception of the Holy Spirit).

### 4. May women baptise?

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus gives to all those who are made disciples by the apostles, both men and women, the Great Commission to go and make disciples in all the nations, to baptise them and to teach them to obey all the commandments of Jesus.

However, on the basis of the following facts some congregations have chosen not to allow women to baptise others:

- There is not a single historical case in the Bible in which a woman baptised another person with water.
- Baptism with water is regarded as one of the official or public meetings of the Church. And the Bible teaches that women should not take a leading role in any official or public meetings of the Church (1 Corinthians 14:33-28; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 2 Timothy 3:2,4-5).
- Baptism with water is a sensitive issue with many Christians. The method of baptism with water should not give offence to weaker brothers and sisters (Romans 14:1 to 15:7).

The Bible gives no further teaching, command or prohibition with regard to who may baptise.

## H. BAPTISM AND INFANT BAPTISM IN CHURCH TRADITION

Read what Jesus Christ says about religious traditions (church and theological traditions) in Mark 7:1-13.

### 1. The tradition of the Church during the second century A.D.

During the second century A.D. under influence of the eastern mystery religions a particular meaning was ascribed to the baptising with water. People began to believe that there existed a *magical* relationship between the administering of baptism with water, the water itself and the words spoken during baptism.

However, the Bible teaches that the baptism with water, like physical circumcision, is *a sign and seal* of his justification by faith (Romans 4:11; Colossians 2:11-12).

## 2. The tradition of the Church during the third century A.D.

During the third century A.D. Christian baptism with water became an external religious ritual with a magical character and it also gained a fixed form. Before his baptism with water, the candidate promised to renounce the devil and the world (Latin: *abrenunciatio*) and he made his confession of faith (Latin: *redditio symboli*). Then he was *baptised three times by immersion* in flowing water (of a river) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This washed away the filth of the world and forgave his sins. After his baptism he received (symbolically) the Holy Spirit or the spiritual renewal by means of *the laying on of hands*.

From the time of bishop Cyprian of Carthage (245-258 A.D.) the laying on of hands became the exclusive right of bishops alone. This exclusive right made the bishop the spiritual father of all the new believers and all the Christians in the world came under the power of the bishops!

However, the Bible teaches that no one less than God Himself is the spiritual Father of all new believers (Matthew 23:9; John 1:12-13; Ephesians 3:14).

During the ritual of baptism with water all kinds of symbolic actions took place: the exorcism of the devil; blowing on the face of the new believer; *making the sign of the cross*; and *giving him a new name*. The new believer was given milk mixed with honey to drink as food for his new life; *new white clothes were put onto him*; he was led into the congregation and they prayed for him; he received the brotherly kiss; and finally he received his first “holy communion” (which is the Roman Catholic view of the Lord’s Supper). Compare these things with the Jewish proselyte baptism.

However, the Bible warns against adding things to the teachings of the Bible, because they easily become human traditions that nullify the Word of God (Revelation 22:18-19; Mark 7:1-13).

## 3. Infant baptism.

(1) Infant circumcision and baptism in the Bible.

In the Old Testament revelation God commanded Abraham to physically circumcise male infants eight days old as a *sign* of God’s covenant with his people (Genesis 17:7-14). In the New Testament revelation the gift of the Holy Spirit is promised to the children of believers (Acts 2:38-39) and salvation is promised to the households (Greek: *oikos*) of believers (Acts 11:14; Acts 16:31). The apostles of Jesus Christ also baptised whole households (including family and servants) (Greek: *oikos*) of new believers with water (Acts 16:15; Acts 16:31-34; Acts 18:7-8; 1 Corinthians 1:16; cf. 16:15).

However, it cannot be proved or denied whether there were infants in these households (cf. Jeremiah 1:5). And it can also not be proved or denied whether these children were old enough to understand the gospel when it was preached to them (see Acts 2:39-41; Acts 16:32; 2 Timothy 3:15).

(2) Infant baptism in early Church History.

Church History after the New Testament period relates the existence of infant baptism. **Justin Martyr** (100-165 A.D.) was a disciple of the apostles and he was acquainted with the practice of infant baptism (Apologia I, 15). Infant baptism was practised in general during the period of the church fathers **Irenaeus** of Lyon (170-200 A.D.) and Tertullian of Carthage. **Tertullian** of Carthage (190-216 A.D.) was acquainted with infant baptism, but fought against the practice, because he regarded the baptism with water as the removal of all sins previously committed. Thus, the baptism with water was delayed as long as possible! **Origen** (185-254 A.D.) wrote that the Church baptised infants during the time of the apostles. However the source of his knowledge cannot be verified. **Ambrose**, bishop of Milan, (374-397 A.D.) delayed his baptism with water until shortly before he became bishop, because he was afraid to lose the grace which God gave in baptism.

There were witnesses present during the baptism with water in the Early Church. They had to testify about the good behaviour of the candidate (thus the candidate was not a minor child). Later they could also testify that the candidate had indeed been baptised with water.

The Early Church did not teach that God’s covenant of grace was the ground for infant baptism. Instead, infant baptism became the means whereby the grace of God was received! Children were regarded as guilty and unclean and had no right to be baptised with water. Children had no personal faith and could not make any confession of faith. Therefore the faith of the parents, the faith of the witnesses (who were later called “godfather” and “godmother”) and the faith of the Church took the place of the faith of the child. The Church, represented by the witnesses, brought the child to be baptised with water, believed in the place of the child and made confession of faith in the place of the child. These witnesses promised to later instruct the child in the Christian faith.

However, this practice cannot be derived from the Bible!

(3) Infant baptism and Augustine (354-430 A.D.).

He delayed his baptism with water. He had great influence on the development of the doctrine of baptism with water. He taught the following: Initially Augustine believed, as the Church did, that sins committed in life before baptism with water were forgiven. But later he connected the baptism with water, not with *the actual sins previously committed*, but with *original sin*. (Infant) baptism with water took away the guilt of sin, but the inherited stain or contamination of sin (the sinful desires) would only gradually diminish and finally stop at death.

Augustine believed that baptism with water had an indelible character:

- The person baptised with water by the Church *belonged by right to the Church*
- *The Church had the right to exercise force to bring the strayed baptised person back into the Church!*
- Baptism with water outside the (Roman Catholic) Church had no saving effect.
- Baptism with water was the objective requirement for salvation and faith was only the subjective requirement for salvation.
- Personal faith might be a reality *before or after* the baptism with water.
- Infant baptism with water only had an effect when the baptised person later converted and personally believed. When that happened, the person had no need to be baptised with water a second time.

Here ends Augustine's teaching.

However, the Bible teaches that through baptism with the Spirit a person is baptised into the Body of Christ and not into the Roman Catholic Church or any other denomination (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Consequently Christians belong only to Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14)! A church or its leaders are forbidden to lord it over the people that are entrusted to them (1 Peter 5:3)! The Bible also does not teach that the baptism with water is a requirement for salvation (Mark 16:16)!

(4) Infant baptism since the Council of Mainz (813 A.D.).

There it was decided that parents may no longer bring their children to be baptised with water, because they were responsible that their child was conceived and born in sin! Only the witnesses (the godfather and godmother) may bring a child to be baptised with water. The spiritual education of the children by the Church through the means of godparents has since then been completely separated from their ordinary education by their parents.

However, the Bible commands all parents to have God's words upon their hearts, to impress (engrave) God's words in the minds of their children, to talk about God's words at all times in their homes and to allow God's words to determine their lives and homes (Deuteronomy 6:4-8). The Bible commands all fathers to bring their children up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). And the Bible urges people to continue in what they have learned from their parents, the Bible and their teachers since infancy and have become convinced of (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-17).

(5) Infant baptism in scholasticism of the Middle Ages (6<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century).

In the universities of the Middle Ages (from about Gregory the Great, 590 A.D. to the Reformation, 1517 A.D.) the secular philosophy of Aristotle was combined with the theology of the Roman Catholic Church. The subjective requirement of faith and conversion for salvation were shifted to the background and the objective requirement of the baptism ritual by the Church was regarded as sufficient for salvation. The Roman Catholic Church taught that (infant) baptism with water would now pour the supernatural grace of God into the child and thereby grant him the following: righteousness and regeneration, forgive all original sin and all sins committed before his baptism with water, remit all temporary and eternal punishments, and give all supernatural virtues as faith, hope, love and holiness. (Infant) baptism with water became the door through which a person entered the Roman Catholic Church and thereby received eternal life. For the Roman Catholic Church (infant) baptism with water thus became absolutely essential for salvation. Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274) taught that whatever a child lacked he would receive through the faith of the Roman Catholic Church.

However, not the Church, but only Jesus Christ is the Mediator of salvation and all the other graces (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 1:3)!

(6) Infant baptism since the Reformation (16<sup>th</sup> century).

The Church of the Reformation (16-17<sup>th</sup> century) rejected the doctrine of the infusion of grace through the administering of the outward baptism ritual by the Roman Catholic Church. They taught that God gives his grace on the basis of his sovereign will and not on the basis of human works or religious administration (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-8).

The Church of the Reformation also rejected the doctrine that grace could be lost again, because God will certainly glorify the people he justified by grace through faith (Romans 3:24; Romans 8:28-30; Philippians 1:6).

The Church of the Reformation also rejected the fact that the doctrine of baptism with water had become completely detached from the Bible! Christians may not go beyond what is taught in the Bible (John 17:17; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)!

## I. THE POINT OF TIME FOR THE BAPTISM WITH WATER

The Bible speaks of people that are baptised with water *after* they heard the gospel and believed in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:37-39).

But the Bible also relates how whole households including the servants heard the gospel, believed and were baptised with water (Acts 16:14-15,30-34; 1 Corinthians 1:16). Some Christians believe that there must have been infants belonging to these households and that they were thus baptised before they had any personal faith.

### 1. The point of time for baptising with water is dependent on how Christians regard the word "conversion".

Some Christians draw up certain prerequisites for new believers before these new believers may be baptised with water. They believe that the word "conversion" means "a visibly change of life". Only after the new believer has changed his life in certain previously postulated points, he may be baptised with water. If he does not change his life in these areas, he may not be baptised with water.

Other Christians point out that in Bible history new believers were immediately baptised with water after they had been baptised with the Spirit (Acts 10:47-48) or after they had repented and believed (Acts 2:38). Their being baptised with water is a visible sign and seal of what Jesus Christ had done for them and not of what they had first done for Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ had baptised them with his Spirit (that is, had caused them to be born again). He had caused them to hear the truth which changed their thinking and convictions. The word "repentance" (Greek: metanoia) means "to change your thinking" with respect to who God or Jesus Christ and with respect to what he has done for you! Thus, when a person confesses that he believes in Jesus Christ, he may be baptised with water.

In biblical history repentance and faith follow directly the hearing of the gospel (Romans 10:17; Acts 2:37-38). Jesus proclaimed: "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent (change your mind about the truth) and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). The disciples changed their thinking about who Jesus was and began to follow him (Mark 1:18) even though they still had to learn everything written in the Gospel of Mark and although there was still very much in their convictions and behaviour that needed to change.

Peter proclaimed the gospel in Acts chapter 2 and the people were cut to the heart. The visible fact that God was at work in their heart was that they asked the apostles: "What must we do?" Then Peter proclaimed: "Repent (*once for all* change your mind) and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38). The visible evidence that the about three thousand people changed their mind about Jesus Christ was the fact that they accepted the gospel message and were baptised with water (Acts 2:37-41). The apostles had not demanded any other requirements. Thus, the visible proof for repentance or conversion is to hear, understand and accept the gospel message, that is, to believe in Jesus Christ with their heart and confess him with their mouth (Luke 23:40-43; John 1:12; Romans 10:9-10)!

After a person has come to believe in Jesus Christ and has been baptised with water, he continues to repent, that is, he continues to change his thinking about the truths in the Bible (through the preaching, teaching in Bible study and discipleship training). And he will also begin to produce fruit in keeping with repentance (Luke 3:8).

In the Bible the baptism with water is never associated with becoming a member of a particular denomination! The only requirement for membership in the world wide Body of Christ is the baptism with the Spirit (regeneration) (John 3:7; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). And membership of the Body of Christ includes participating in the activities and ministries of the worldwide Church (1 Corinthians 12:1-31). The baptism with water is for the believer the visible sign and seal of his invisible baptism with the Spirit.

Obedience to the command of Jesus Christ to be baptised with water (Matthew 28:19) should be taught, but never enforced or made the prerequisite for participating in the activities or ministries of the Church. Think of countries where baptism with water of converts is followed by execution! It would be better if congregations would not connect registered membership of a particular denomination to the baptism with water, because it creates confusion between the baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water. Believers who are genuinely born again members of the Body of Christ may not be excluded *from active membership of a local congregation*, which, after all, is a pure human and historic institution!

### 2. The point of time for baptising with water is dependent on how a congregation views God's dealings with people.

Christians who put the emphasis on God's dealing with his covenant people (the Christian Community or Church) tend to baptise infants with water. And Christians who put the emphasis on God's dealing with individual believers (converts) tend to baptise only (adult) believers with water.

(1) God deals with each person as a part of a community.

God regards every person as a part of a natural family (Exodus 20:5-6; Acts 2:39; 16:31; 1 Corinthians 7:13-14), a part of a secular nation (Jeremiah 18:6-10) and a part of the whole human race (Acts 17:26; Romans 5:12,18a).

God regards every individual believer:

- as a member of a Christian family (if applicable)
- as a member of a local the congregation (church) (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13)
- as a member of God's covenant people (the worldwide Church)(2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:9-10)
- as a member of God's kingdom on earth (Mark 10:13-16).

Every believer has been baptised with the Spirit into the one Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). The baptism with water is therefore inextricably connected to the fact that a believer belongs to the worldwide Christian Church!

(2) God also deals with each person as an individual.

Every person, whether righteous (believer) or unrighteous (unbeliever), *will be judged* according to what he has done (Ezekiel 33:12-16; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 2:6).

Every believer *will be saved* due to his own faith and every unbeliever will be judged due to his own unbelief (John 3:16-18,36; John 9:35-39).

Every believer ought to be *baptised with water* as a visible sign that all his sins have been forgiven and have been washed away (Acts 22:16). The baptism with water is thus also inextricably connected to the fact that a person is justified on the basis of his personal faith!

### 3. The point of time for baptising with water is dependent on how a church views God's covenant.

God formulates his covenant as follows: "I will be your God and you will be my people" (Genesis 1:7; Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 21:3,7). Christians who put the emphasis on God's covenant in the Old Testament tend to baptise infants. Christians who put the emphasis on God's covenant in the New Testament tend to baptise people only when they have come to faith.

(1) God's covenant of the law in the Old Testament was the shadow of the reality that was coming and was thus temporary.

God's covenant of grace was established with Abraham: God promised to be the God of Abraham and his descendants; and they would be God's people (Genesis 17:7). This covenant of grace is continued in the New Testament, but on a higher plane (Hebrews 8:6-13).

God's covenant of the law was established with Moses many years later<sup>3</sup>: it affirmed God's covenant of grace with Abraham (Exodus 6:2-8), but added God's law to this covenant of grace (Galatians 3:15-19). Gods covenant of grace is an eternal covenant (Genesis 17:7), but God's covenant of the law was a temporary covenant (Galatians 3:23-25).

The covenant of the law had the following characteristics: the moral and ritual law was written visibly on stone tables and later in a book. People knew God only through the preaching of the prophets. They experienced little of the forgiveness of sins, because they continued to offer ritual animal sacrifices for the atonement of their sins (Hebrews 10:1-4). And they underwent physical circumcision, no longer as the sign of the covenant of grace (Genesis 17:10-11), but rather as the sign of obedience to the law (John 7:22; Galatians 5:3-4).

But these regulations in the ritual law (including physical circumcision) were only valid *temporarily*, until the first coming of Christ, when these shadows became realities (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 7:12,18-19; 8:6,13; 9:8-10; 10:1-4)!

(2) God's covenant in the New Testament fulfilled the law of the Old Testament and thereby cancelled and abrogated the law!

At his first coming, Jesus Christ *fulfilled* the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament revelation)(Matthew 5:17) and thereby *cancelled* (Colossians 2:14) *and abrogated* (Ephesians 2:14-15) and *changed* into realities (Hebrews 8:13) all the regulations of the ritual law (the shadows). The regulation with respect to physical circumcision of infants and of adults was also cancelled, abrogated (Galatians 5:1-6; Galatians 6:12-16) and changed into spiritual circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:28-29; Colossians 2:11)!

God's covenant in the New Testament differs from God's covenant in the Old Testament in the following ways: the regulations of God's moral law are now written in the hearts of believers and no longer outwardly in a book. People know God personally and no longer from hearsay. They experience the forgiveness of their sins and no longer make any outward atonement rituals (Hebrews 8:6-13; 9:8-10; 10:1-4). And they have really been spiritually circumcised (regenerated) through the work of the Spirit (Romans 2:28-29; Colossians 2:11).

Thus the ceremonial law with regard to the physical circumcision of minor children has been fulfilled, cancelled, abrogate and changed into spiritual circumcision of the heart (rebirth) of believers!

<sup>3</sup> God's covenant with Abraham (about 645 years from Genesis 12:1-4 and about 620 years from Genesis 17:1-7. Genesis 12:4 (0), Genesis 21:5 (100-75=25), Genesis 25:26 (+60), Genesis 47:9 (+130) = 215 years in Canaan + 430 years in Egypt (Exodus 12:40) = 645 years in total. Galatians 3:17 refers only to Exodus 12:40).

4. The point of time for baptising with water is dependent on how a congregation views the relationship between circumcision and baptism.

Christians who put the emphasis on physical circumcision of infants in the Old Testament tend to baptise infants. Christians who put the emphasis on spiritual circumcision in the New Testament tend to baptise people who have come to faith.

*Colossians 2:11-13* says: “<sup>11</sup> In him you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. <sup>13</sup> When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.” The words: “circumcision” and “baptism” here refer both to baptism with the Spirit.

***The question is: “When is a person circumcised by Christ?”***

(1) Circumcision was the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham: he would be the God of Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:7) and they would be God’s people (Leviticus 26:12). Abraham received the physical circumcision as the sign and the seal of the righteousness that comes by faith when he was still uncircumcised (Romans 4:11-12).

But God did not deal with Abraham exclusively as an individual. God dealt with the whole family or household (Greek: oikos) of Abraham! Every male member had to be circumcised (Genesis 17). Thus, during the covenant of the Old Testament, physical circumcision was the sign and seal of this covenant. Abraham’s personal faith in God and God’s promise (Genesis 15:5-6) was the reason that God included his whole family and household, including the infants, in his covenant people (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:14)!

(2) God’s covenant in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

God’s covenant in the Old Testament means that the living God is their God and that they are God’s people (Leviticus 26:12). This covenant remained the same in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Nevertheless, there are significant differences between the old covenant and the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-13).

- In the old covenant *the law that was added* (Galatians 3:17-19) was written outwardly in a book. In the new covenant the law is written inwardly in the hearts of believers (Jeremiah 31:33).
- In the old covenant the knowledge of God was only knowledge of the mind, taught by the prophets to the people (cf. Isaiah 1:3). In the new covenant the knowledge of God is personal and intimate (Jeremiah 31:34a).
- In the old covenant a clean conscience could never be gained by performing ritual acts (Hebrews 9:8-10, 10:1-4). In the new covenant Christians really experience the forgiveness of sins (Jeremiah 31:34b; Hebrews 9:14).
- In the old covenant circumcision was an outward and physical event. In the new covenant circumcision is an inward and spiritual event (Colossians 2:11-13). In the old covenant the physical circumcision of only the male gender was a ritual act that pointed forward to the necessity of a spiritual circumcision (the regeneration) of men as well as women (cf. Romans 2:28-29).
- In the old covenant the truth is depicted only as a shadow of the future truth (Colossians 2:17). In the new covenant that truth has become a reality. The old covenant proclaimed the necessity of regeneration and justification. The new covenant really brought regeneration and justification! The new covenant really set people free from their sins (Hebrews 9:15). The new covenant includes regeneration (the baptism with the Spirit)(Ezekiel 36:25-28), perfect justification (complete forgiveness) and sanctification (cleansing, the washing away of all sins)! The new covenant (Hebrews 12:24) is a better covenant (Hebrews 7:22; 8:6), because it really makes happen what the old covenant only depicted symbolically.

(3) Circumcision and baptism in the New Testament.

In the New Testament there is a connection between circumcision and baptism. Colossians 2:11-13 teaches that the holy and faithful brothers in Christ (Colossians 1:2) were circumcised in Christ (Colossians 2:11) when they were buried with Christ in the baptism with the Spirit (Colossians 2:12a) (Note: not in the baptism with water!). It also teaches that they were resurrected with Christ through their faith in the power of God (Colossians 2:12b).

***But the circumcision in the New Testament is not physical anymore. It is spiritual!***

On the one hand, the spiritual circumcision of believers means that they have put off their unregenerate nature (the sinful nature or literally: “the flesh”) (Colossians 2:11). It means that their unregenerate nature died and was buried with Christ when they were baptised with the Spirit (Colossians 2:12a; cf. Romans 6:2).

On the other hand, the spiritual circumcision of believers means that their regenerated nature has been raised with Christ when they put their faith in Christ (Colossians 2:12b; cf. Romans 6:3). Their heart was “circumcised by the Spirit” (Romans 2:28-29), that is, they were “born again by the Spirit” (cf. John 3:3-8).



Both aspects (something dies and something is raised) are brought in connection with the baptism with the Spirit and with the faith in the power of God and are visibly expressed in the baptism with water (Colossians 2:12a).

- (4) Some Christians take as their point of departure the physical circumcision of infants in the Old Testament. Their death with Christ (at their infant baptism) and their resurrection with Christ (at their confession of faith) are separated by many years. Their baptism with water is then the visible sign and seal of their invisible baptism with the Spirit which must still take place in the future.

Abraham first believed, was declared righteous (was saved) because he believed, and thereafter received the sign and seal of the Old Testament covenant: the physical circumcision (Romans 4:6-11). But his children (the second generation of God's people) were first circumcised (on the eighth day) (Genesis 17:7-14) and came to faith much later (Hebrews 11:20-21) or did not come to faith at all (Hebrews 3:19).

Christians that put the emphasis on the fact that infants in the Old Testament covenant were circumcised conclude that therefore also the infants in the New Testament covenant should be baptised with water. They believe that Colossians 2:11 speaks about a spiritual circumcision that takes place at the moment the infant is baptised with water *in connection with the faith of his parents or the faith of the Church*. Then the unregenerate nature of the infant dies and is buried with Christ. The visible baptising of an infant with water is then the sign and seal of at least the invisible death of his unregenerate nature. Consequently, these Christians believe that infants of believers that are baptised with water ought to be considered as born-again (Colossians 2:12a).

They believe that *years later*, when these infants have become teenagers or young adults and begin to personally believe in Jesus Christ, they are raised up with Christ to live a new life (Colossians 2:12b). These Christians thus allow *a long period of time between* the time that the infant dies and is buried with Christ (when baptised as an infant) (Colossians 2:12a) and the time that this teenager or young adult is raised with Christ (when making a confession of his faith in Jesus Christ) (Colossians 2:12b). These Christians regard their death with Christ as separated by many years from their resurrection with Christ.

They too are convinced that faith is absolutely necessary during infant baptism with water, but it may be the faith of the parents, of the godparents or the Church. But later when the baptised child personally comes to faith and makes public confession of his faith as a teenager or young adult, he takes personal responsibility for his baptism as an infant.

The intention of physical circumcision in the Old Testament was also to be an outward sign of an inner spiritual circumcision of the heart (the regeneration) (cf. Leviticus 26:41; Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; 30:6; Romans 2:28-29; Philippians 3:2-3), even when this spiritual reality followed much later in the life of the person circumcised as an infant! Thus, physical circumcision of infants was only a sign (a shadow) of the spiritual circumcision or regeneration (the reality) that had to follow later in the life of the person circumcised as an infant. Likewise, these Christians believe that the baptism with water of infants must be regarded as a sign (a shadow) of the baptism with the Spirit (the reality) that has to follow later in the life of the person baptised with water as an infant.

**This means that physical circumcision in the Old Testament does not necessarily imply regeneration!**

**These Christians speak of the relationship rebirth by the Holy Spirit and faith of a believer as an intangible mystery (John 3:3-8). Rebirth can already take place in an infant (Jeremiah 1:5), but can also take place much later in life. That is why these Christians maintain that the baptism with water of infants has come in the place of the circumcision of infants in the Old Testament.**

Although infants of believers do not yet personally believe in Jesus Christ, they nevertheless belong to God's New Testament covenant people or the Christian Church. The children of one believing parent are "holy", that is, set apart for God (1 Corinthians 7:14). That is why these Christians insist that the infants of believers ought to be baptised with water as a sign of the New Testament covenant. These Christians emphasize the fact that not only their alleged rebirth at infant baptism, but also their personal faith in Jesus Christ later is an undeserved gift of God (cf. Acts 13:48; 16:14; 18:27; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; 2:12-13; 2 Peter 1:1; 2 Timothy 3:15; 2 Peter 1:1).

- (5) Other Christians take as their point of departure the spiritual circumcision of believers in the New Testament. Their death with Christ and their resurrection with Christ are simultaneously, that is when they are baptised with the Spirit or believe in Jesus Christ. Their baptism with water is then the visible sign and seal of their invisible baptism with the Spirit which has already taken place.

The spiritual circumcision in the New Testament clearly means spiritual regeneration. Christians that put the emphasis on the fact that people in the New Testament were spiritually circumcised when they came to personal faith in Jesus Christ conclude that people should only be baptised with water after they have come to personal faith in Jesus Christ.

These people were dead in their sins and in the uncircumcision of their sinful nature (Colossians 2:13). But when they come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ all their sins are really forgiven (Colossians 2:14) and they are really set free from all evil powers (Colossians 2:15)! Nevertheless, living out the realisation of this truth may take some time.

Also they believe that Colossians 2:11 speaks about a spiritual circumcision that takes place at the moment they are baptised with the Spirit *in connection with their personal faith*. Then their unregenerate nature dies and is buried with Christ. *The baptism with water is then the visible sign and seal of their invisible baptism with the Spirit which has already taken place before this*. These Christians believe that only people who personally believe in Jesus Christ ought to be considered as born-again Christians (Colossians 2:12a).

They teach that people die, are buried and are raised with Christ *at the moment they are baptised with the Spirit* (born again), that is, when they personally begin to believe. The visible sign of this event is the baptism with water. These Christians believe that the putting off of their unregenerate nature (their sinful nature or literally: the flesh) (in connection with the death and burial of Christ when they are baptised with the Spirit)(Colossians 2:12a) takes place at the same time as the reception of their new regenerated nature (in connection with the resurrection of Christ when they come to faith in Jesus Christ) (Colossians 2:12b). These Christians do not view their death with Christ and their resurrection with Christ as being separated by many years, but as a simultaneous event, that is, when they come to personal faith in Jesus Christ.

They are also convinced that faith is absolutely necessary during baptising with water, but then it must be *their own personal faith*. After they have made a public confession of their faith, they are baptised with water.

There is a clear difference between the physical circumcision in the Old Testament covenant and the spiritual circumcision in the New Testament covenant. The circumcision of people during the New Testament period was certainly not a physical circumcision of infants, but rather a spiritual circumcision of the heart through the Holy Spirit when they came to faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 2:28-29)! It consists of the putting off or cutting away of the old unregenerate nature (literally: the flesh) (Colossians 2:11; Romans 6:6-7) and of the reception of the new regenerate nature together with the indwelling Holy Spirit (Romans 2:28-29).

**This means that spiritual circumcision in the New Testament always implies regeneration!**

**These Christians emphasize the close relationship between rebirth (the baptism with the Spirit) and faith. Although the time and manner of rebirth through the Holy Spirit remains intangible (a mystery) for Christians (John 3:8), rebirth (the baptism with the Spirit) in the Bible is usually connected to the moment a person comes to personal faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12-13; 7:37-39; Acts 11:14-18; Acts 15:7-11; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Titus 1:1; 3:3-7). Therefore these Christians maintain that the baptism with water in the New Testament has not just come in the place of physical circumcision in the Old Testament.**

Because infants do not yet personally believe in Jesus Christ and thus do not give evidence of their regeneration (baptism with the Spirit), they should not be baptised with water. That is why these Christians insist that people should only be baptised with water when they personally believe in Jesus Christ and thereby give evidence of their regeneration and justification. Also these Christians believe that faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) and regeneration (John 1:12-13) are gracious gifts of God.

**5. The point of time for baptising with water of the first generation of believers is based on the missionary context of the New Testament.**

The first generation of believers were baptised with water in *the missionary context of the New Testament period*. All these new believers came from a *non-Christian background*, whether Jewish or Gentile background.

All Christians in the world agree that the first generation of believers should only be baptised with water *when they have come to faith in Jesus Christ*.

(1) Baptising individuals.

The gospel was proclaimed to *individuals* (Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles). When they believed, they were baptised with water (John 4:1; Acts 2:37-39; 41; 8:36-38; 10:34-36,42-48).

(2) Baptising whole families.

The gospel was proclaimed to *whole households* and their dependants. When they believed, they were baptised with water (Acts 16:14-15,30-34; 18:7-8; 1 Corinthians 1:16). But it cannot be proven or denied that there were infants in these households and whether they were baptised with water.

**6. The point of time for baptising with water of the second generation is based on how Christians view the essence of the Christian Church in the Bible.**

The second generation of believers were baptised with water in the context of the growing Christian Church after the beginning of the New Testament period. All these new believers came from a Christian background. They were born when their parents were already Christians.

Christians in the world do not agree with one another about when the second generation ought to be baptised.

**Being baptised with the Spirit has two aspects: it means belonging to God's covenant people or Christ's Body (the communal aspect)(1 Corinthians 12:13) and it means being born-again or justified (forgiven) (the individual aspect) (Acts 2:38).**

**Because being baptised with the Spirit has both meanings, different Christians in the world have found different practical ways to give expression to both the communal aspect as well as the individual aspect of being baptised with the Spirit and its visible sign, being baptised with water.**

(1) Some Christians choose a strict communal approach.

For these Christians the Church is above all the Body of Christ (an organism)(1 Corinthians 12:12-27) and the Community of God’s New Testament covenant people (1 Peter 2:9).

In the first place a person belongs to the Body of Christ and only in the second place is he one of the many individual parts of that Body that comes to a personal faith in Jesus Christ! The Body is more than just the eye or the hand. Likewise, the Church is more than just an individual believer. Being baptised with water is therefore especially the sign and seal that a person belongs to the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13), to God’s covenant people (Galatians 3:27-29), that is, to the worldwide Church.

These Christians hold that the example of God’s Old Testament covenant people or Church (Greek: ekklésia)(Judges 20:2; 2 Chronicles 29:28; Psalm 107:32) to include infants in the community of God’s covenant people in the past (Genesis 17:7,12) ought to be followed by God’s New Testament covenant people or church (Greek: ekklésia)(Matthew 16:18) in the future.

These Christians are divided about the question whether these baptised infants ought to be regarded as saved (justified, born-again) and whether such a categorical statement is possible or not. Most of these Christians regard these baptised infants as belonging to the Church except when the opposite becomes clear (cf. 1 Samuel 1:11,22; 2:26; 2 Samuel 12:22-23; Luke 2:41-52; 2 Timothy 3:14-15).

The Bible regards the children and even the husband or wife of one believer in a family as “holy”, that is, “separated for God and dedicated to God” (1 Corinthians 7:14). The Church of Corinth are called “the sanctified in Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:2; cf. 6:11). However, this does not mean that the Bible regards these children or the unbelieving parent as “born again” or “morally clean”. The Bible regards them rather as “ritually clean”, that is, as separated by the church from the evil world and its bad influence. These children are dedicated to the world of believers and stand under the good influence of the believing parent and the other believers in the congregation. The children and the unbelieving parent are outwardly regarded as belonging to the congregation or as standing within the sphere of influence of the congregation.

**But these Christians also believe in the importance of the individual. Therefore they add a new Christian practice or church ceremony that is not taught or prescribed in the Bible: their baptised children must later as teenagers or young adults make a personal confession of their faith in public (Romans 10:9-10) as a visible sign that they are born again or justified.**

(2) Other Christians choose a strict individual approach.

For these Christians the Church is above all an organised community (an organisation) of individual believers.

In the first place a person comes to a personal faith in Jesus Christ as an individual and only in the second place does he join the community of God’s people, the church (Acts 2:41-42). In the missionary context in the New Testament (Acts) children of believers are not mentioned. Some time later believing children are mentioned (Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20-21; 1 Timothy 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:14-15). The New Testament does teach that the baptism with water is the visible sign and seal that a believer has been born again and justified (Acts 9:17-18; 22:16; Titus 3:4-8).

**But also these Christians believe in the importance of the Christian Community (the Church). Therefore they also add a new Christian practice or church ceremony that is not taught or prescribed in the Bible: their immature children are “dedicated to Christ” (cf. 1 Samuel 1:11,28) or better: are “blessed by Christ” (Mark 10:13-16) as a visible sign that they belong to the Body of Christ (the Church) or to God’s covenant people (1 Corinthians 7:14).**

Nothing is implied about these infants being saved (justified, born again). But both the Old Testament (2 Samuel 12:23) and the New Testament (Mark 10:10-13; 1 Corinthians 7:14) regard them as belonging to God and his covenant people.

Summary.

<u>The communal approach to baptism</u>	<u>The individual approach to baptism</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The immature child is <u>baptised</u> with water as a sign that he belongs to the Church</li> <li>• Later he hopefully comes to a personal faith in Jesus Christ and then makes a public <u>confession</u> of his faith as a sign that he is born again or justified</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The immature child is <u>dedicated</u> to Christ or blessed by Christ as a sign that he belongs to the Church</li> <li>• Later he hopefully comes to a personal faith in Jesus Christ and then makes a public confession of his faith and is <u>baptised</u> with water as a sign that he is born again or justified</li> </ul>

## J. THE QUESTION WHETHER A PERSON MAY BE BAPTISED WITH WATER A SECOND TIME

### 1. Two different points of view.

This section is limited to people who have been baptised as children.

Churches do not agree with one another about the question whether a person, who had been baptised as a child, may be baptised a second time when he comes to personal faith in Jesus Christ.

(1) The Christians who are against a second baptism with water.

Christians that put the emphasis on the communal aspect of baptism with the Spirit are generally opposed to the practice of baptising a person that has been baptised with water a second time with water. They regard this second baptism with water (baptism with water as a believer) as *a rejection* of the first baptism with water (infant baptism). They regard the baptism with water as the sign and seal of a once in a lifetime spiritual event: joining God's covenant people, the Church.

The individual aspect of being baptised with the Spirit (regeneration, justification, the washing away of all sins) is generally not coupled to the baptism with water, but to the public confession of faith. The various meanings of being baptised with the Spirit are acknowledged, but are separated from one another by a period of time between their baptism with water as a child and their public confession of faith as a mature believer.

(2) The Christians who are not against a second baptism with water.

Christians that put the emphasis on the individual aspect of baptism with the Spirit are in general not opposed to the practice of baptising a person (that has been baptised with water as an infant) a second time with water as a (mature) believer. They regard their first baptism with water as an infant as *the sign and seal of their joining God's covenant people* (the Church). Their baptism with water as an infant was an act of faith of their parents and the congregation. They regard their second baptism with water as a believer as *the sign and seal of their baptism with the Spirit* (regeneration, conversion, faith, justification, washing away of all their sins). Their baptism with water as a believer is an act of personal faith.

When they are being baptised a second time with water they regard this second baptism with water *not as a rejection* of their first baptism with water. They do not reject the fact that as infants they were incorporated into God's covenant people, the Church. But their second baptism with water is above all a sign and seal of the other meanings of being baptised with the Spirit (regeneration, the unity with Christ and sharing in Christ's completed work of salvation that effects their salvation in the past, the present and the future, including justification or the washing away of sins or the forgiveness of all sins).

### 2. The only example in the Bible where people have been baptised twice with water.

The only biblical example where people have been baptised twice with water is in Acts 19:1-7. Paul found some disciples at Ephesus who had not received the Spirit (that is, had not been baptised with the Spirit). They were not disciples of Jesus Christ, but *disciples of John the Baptist*. They were not Christians and had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit. They had probably become disciples of John the Baptist during one of their three compulsory Jewish pilgrim's festivals to Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:16) in the period that John the Baptist preached and baptised at the Jordan River. They were baptized with water in the baptism of John by John the Baptist as a sign of their preparation to receive the expected Messiah (Mark 1:4-8).

The first disciples of Jesus Christ (John 1:33; Acts 1:13-15) were not only baptised with the baptism of John or with Christian baptism (John 3:22), but were also taught by Jesus Christ. They did not need to be baptised with water a second time, because both the baptism of John (Mark 1:4) and Christian baptism (Acts 2:38) symbolise the forgiveness of sins. However, after Jesus Christ had completed his work of salvation, they were baptised with the Spirit (Acts 1:5; Acts 2:1-4).

But these remnant disciples of John the Baptist had only been baptised with the baptism of John, they had not been taught by Jesus Christ (about his death and resurrection) and had not been baptised with the Spirit. Their baptism with water did not signify the baptism with the Spirit. Therefore their first baptism with water was incomplete and they needed to be baptised with water a second time.

Paul proclaimed the gospel about Jesus Christ to them and said that they needed to believe in Jesus Christ (and in his completed work of salvation). He told them that Jesus Christ baptised people who believe in him with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8; cf. Romans 10:9-10). He said exactly what Jesus had said: namely, that people must be born again (anew) or from above with the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-8).

These disciples of John began to believe in Jesus Christ and were baptised with water *into the name* (as in Matthew 28:19) of Jesus Christ. As an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul also carried the keys to the kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19; 18:19). He placed his hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit (that is, they were baptized with the Spirit).

The Bible does not say who suggested that they ought to be baptised a second time with water. Acts 19 remains *a description of an historical event without any theological explanation*. Therefore this passage in the Bible may not be used as a doctrine about a second baptism with water. What is clear is that these disciples had not been baptised with the Spirit and that the apostle baptised them a second time with water as the visible sign and seal that they had been baptised with the Spirit. This was thus a missionary situation in which the first generation came to faith in Jesus Christ.

In accordance with the first Jews that believed in Christ (Acts 2:37-41) and the first non-Jews (Gentiles) that believed in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:13), also these former disciples of John the Baptist were baptised with the Spirit when they came to faith in Jesus Christ!

### 3. Christians today arrive at different conclusions.

It is very clear that this second baptism with water of the disciples of John is not the same as *the modern disputable second baptism with water* in which Christians who were baptised with water as infants

- are baptised a second time with water when they come to personal faith in Jesus Christ
- or are baptised a second time by immersion in water when they disagree with another method of baptism (e.g. infant baptism by sprinkling)

The disciples of John did not belong to Christ or his Church and were therefore baptised a second time with water as a sign and seal that they had been born again and now belonged to Christ and his Church. But the disciples of Christ (whether formerly Jews or non-Jews) did belong to Christ and his Church and were not required to be baptised a second time with water!

The questions are now:

- “Do infants of Christian parents belong to Christ and his Church?”
- “Should people, who have been baptised with water as an infant, be required to be baptised with water a second time when they come to a personal faith in Christ?”

(1) The Christian who is opposed to a second baptism with water.

He puts the emphasis on the communal aspect of the Church (being joined to God’s covenant people by the faith of his parents and the faith of the congregation). He is convinced that when he later came to a personal faith in Jesus Christ his baptism with water as an infant was and still is the sign that he belongs to God’s covenant people, the Church. He is also convinced that the other meanings of the baptism with the Spirit (regeneration, justification) have now become a reality in his life. He does not allow himself to be baptised a second time with water, because he already belongs to God’s covenant people, the Church. He does not regard Acts 19:1-7 as a justification for the practice to baptise people a second time with water, because in contrast to the disciples of John, he already belongs to the Church.

The advantage of this point of view is that his baptism as an infant means so much to his congregation. **Infant baptism is the symbol for the whole believing congregation that the immature children of believers belong completely to God’s covenant people, the Church.** A person is only once in his lifetime joined to God’s covenant people! The emphasis is completely on the communal aspect of being the Church. The acceptance of his infant baptism results in strengthening the faith of the whole congregation that the whole congregation including its infants and children belong to God’s covenant people. This point of view also expresses love towards the other members of the congregation, because it gives no offence to those who strongly believe in infant baptism.

(2) The Christian who allows himself to be baptised a second time with water.

He puts the emphasis on the individual aspect of being the Church: namely, that he is bound to Christ and his Church by his personal faith. He is convinced that when he later came to a personal faith in Christ he had to allow himself to be baptised a second time with water primarily as a sign of being baptised with the Spirit (that he has as been born again, he has been justified and all his sins have been washed away, that he is completely forgiven). He is not opposed to the meaning of baptism with the Spirit as belonging to God’s covenant people, but believes that being baptised with the Spirit means more than merely being joined to God’s Church. He regards Acts 19:1-7 as a justification for the practice to baptise people a second time with water, because just as the disciples of John, he is convinced that he was not born again before he came to a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

The advantage of this point of view is that his second baptism with water after he has come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ means so much to himself. **Believer’s baptism is the symbol for believing individuals that they have been born again through the Holy Spirit** (he has been baptised with the Spirit) and is completely forgiven (that God has justified him completely and has washed away all his sins). A person comes to a personal faith in Jesus Christ and is born again (baptised with the Spirit) only once in his lifetime! The emphasis is on the individual aspect of being a Christian. His second baptism with water results in strengthening his personal faith that he has been born again (that is, that he has been baptised with the Spirit). And because he gives public testimony about God’s work in his life whereby he came to faith, the faith of the congregation is also strengthened. It stimulates the congregation to pray in faith and to do evangelism.

## K. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRISTIANS WITH REGARD TO BAPTISM

### 1. Both groups of Christians ought to put the emphasis on the spiritual unity in Christ.

“And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:14).

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (\*Ephesians 4:3-5).

Both groups of Christians ought to put the emphasis on the communal aspect of being one Body in Christ (one Church) and on the individual aspect of being baptised with the Spirit (that is, being born again). “We were all baptised with one Spirit into one Body” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

No commands. The point of time of baptism with water (as children of a household) and the method of baptism with water (sprinkling, pouring or immersion) belong to *the disputable matters, because they are not taught or prescribed, commanded or prohibited in the Bible.*

Commands. Both groups of Christians ought to accept one another amidst their differences with respect to the disputable matters. “Accept one another just as Christ accepted you ... without passing judgement on disputable matters ... so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 14:1 to 15:6-7). And both groups of Christians ought to love one another as Christ loves them with self-sacrificial love (John 13:34-35).

### 2. Both groups of Christians ought to put the emphasis on the biblical commands and not on the disputable matters.

Often Christians put the emphasis on matters that are not taught, prescribed, commanded or prohibited in the Bible, but only belong to the tradition of their particular denomination. Jesus warns against Christians who set God’s Word aside in order to uphold their tradition: their traditional formulation of faith or traditional statutes or church orders. Such people worship God in vain, because their teachings are but rules taught by men. “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men” (Mark 7:7-8; Matthew 15:1-20)!

The apostle Paul says: “Do not go beyond what is written (in the Bible)” (\*1 Corinthians 4:6)!

And Jesus warns that if someone adds anything to the words of the Bible, God would add to him all the plagues described in the Bible. And if someone takes words away from the Bible, God would take away from him his share in the things promised in the Bible (cf. Revelation 22:18-19)!

Nowhere in the Bible are churches expressly commanded when the second generation (the children of believers) should be baptised with water or in what manner they should baptise people with water. These remain disputable matters. The “one baptism” (Ephesians 4:4-6) does not refer to the point of time of baptism with water: as infant or as mature believer. And it does not refer to the method of baptism with water: by sprinkling or pouring water on and over or immersing in water)! The “one baptism” refers to the reality and meaning of the baptism with the Spirit!

Christians and their congregations may never set the following BIBLICAL COMMANDS and TEACHINGS aside:

- Teaching. There is but one baptism – the baptism with the Spirit (Ephesians 4:4-6).
- Command. Accept one another’s convictions with regard to matters not taught in the Bible. Never look down on those who refrain from doing these things. And never judge those who are doing these things (Romans 14:1-5,13-23; Romans 15:7).
- Command. Love one another as Christ loves (John 13:34-35). Love binds all virtues together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:14). Without love “I am nothing” and “I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)!
- Command. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one Body and one Spirit, ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Ephesians 4:3-5).

All Christians and all Christian congregations ought to ask themselves:

- “What would promote love and peace inside my own congregation?”
- “What would promote love and peace in relationship to the other Christian congregations?”

### 3. Both groups of Christians ought to put the emphasis on the three principles for unity between Christians:

- Unity in essential matters (the fundamental teachings and commands in the Bible)
- Acceptance in other matters (about which the Bible gives no teaching and Christians disagree with one another)
- Love in everything.