

Baptism

- John's Baptism: "We need to change our ways."
 - [Background information: Who was "John the Baptist"? (from Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary)]
- Jesus' Baptism: Comparison to John's baptism, and other issues.
- Jesus' Baptism: "Jesus needs to change our hearts."
- Misc. passages, including various other uses of the word(s) normally translated as "baptism."
- About differences in views and changing them.

John's Baptism:

"We need to change our ways."

A. His Identity

1. *A brief overview of his life* can be found in various Bible study books. A copy of the information found in Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary (now public domain) is available in a separate article.
2. *In Matthew/Mark/Luke*: Called "John the Baptizer" or "John, the one who baptizes"
 - Matthew 3:1; 11:11-12; 14:2, 8; 16:14; 17:13; Mark 6:14; 6:24-25; 8:28; Luke 7:20; 7:28 (KJV), 33; 9:19
 - This surname points to one of the primary features for which he is remembered. (It also distinguishes him from John the apostle.) Though, in many translations, he is called "John the Baptist," the use of the term "Baptist" was not intended to imply a connection to any modern denomination!
3. *In the gospel of John*: some unique features
 - The apostle John tells us that this John baptized people, but he does not use the surname "Baptizer" (etc.), when identifying him. (He also mentions that Jesus' disciples baptized people - a detail not mentioned in the other accounts.)
 - Every time the name "John" occurs (other than referring to the father of Simon Peter - John 1:40, 42; 21:15-17), it refers to this John who baptized. Every time the apostle John refers to *himself*, he uses the term, "the apostle whom Jesus loved." (The only time he mentions himself *by name* is in the book of Revelation.)

B. Various locations where John baptized

- John 1:28 & John 10:40 (probably the same location) - an area called Bethany, on the east side of the Jordan River (exact location now unknown)
- John 3:23 - Aenon, near Salim - on the west side of the Jordan river (south of the Sea of Galilee, approximately 1/3 of the way down to the Dead Sea)
 - Why here? Because there was plenty of water.
- Mark 1:4 - the desert region west of the Dead Sea
- Matthew 3:6 - along the Jordan River

C. The people who came to see John

1. *Those who came to be baptized*

- Matthew 3:5; Mark 1:5; John 3:23 - Many people from the surrounding areas
- Luke 3:12, 14; 7:29 - Included people who were often despised by the others, for example: Roman soldiers and tax collectors.
- [Matthew 3:13; Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21 - Jesus also came to be baptized. (Examined in greater detail, later in the outline.)]

2. *Those who refused to be baptized*

- Matthew 3:7 - Many of the religious leaders. See also Luke 7:30. [Note: John may have given the same message to the *other* people, as well - see Luke 3:7. But unlike the religious leaders, the others repented and were baptized.]

3. *The significance of one's response to John's baptism*

- Luke 7:29 - The significance of *accepting* John's baptism: they were acknowledging that God's way was right.
- Luke 7:30 - The significance of *rejecting* John's baptism: they were rejecting God's ways / the message he had for them.

D. What John preached: the need for repentance (change)

1. *He preached a "baptism of repentance"*

- Acts 19:4 (See also Matthew 3:11a.)
- What does "repentance" mean?
 - Repentance is *more than* feeling sorry about bad things in one's life (sin). It means a willingness to change - both to change the way one thinks about those bad things, as well as to change one's bad actions.
 - By changing the way one thinks, a person begins to admit the badness (sinfulness) of his actions and to hate that badness. He begins to see those things the way God sees them: he admits that they are bad / sinful.
 - By changing the way one acts, a person begins to avoid (stop doing) the bad things he used to do. He wants to *replace* those bad actions with good actions.
 - Baptism symbolized the change - showing that the person was now "dead" to his former way of living and "alive" to a new way of life.

2. ***Repentance is necessary for the forgiveness of sins***
 - Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3 - The message John preached as he baptized: repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
 - Acts 13:24 - In John's day, this message was preached to the people of Israel. [Now that Jesus has come, repentance & forgiveness are now available to people everywhere. See the rest of Acts 13.]
3. ***Confession of sin is a part of repentance.*** This means openly admitting (in the presence of others) that one's thoughts and actions are sinful; openly admitting one's own sins.
 - Matthew 3:6 The people confessed (openly admitted) their sins at the time of their baptism. Everyone present would then know that they were publicly rejecting their former way of life and turning to a new way.
4. ***A change must take place in one's life:*** The things he does (the "fruit" of his life) must be compatible with repentance. [Whatever is in a person's heart will affect what he does. Compare with Mark 7:20-23.]
 - Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7 (The verses that follow Luke 3:7 give some examples of the types of changes that must occur.)

E. Who John pointed to: Jesus, the one who makes this change possible

1. ***John knew that his main purpose was to point to the One who would bring salvation.***
 - John 1:31 - John understood this to be his mission, even before he knew it would be fulfilled in Jesus.
 - Acts 13:25 - (See also John 3:26-30.) - Once John had done this, his mission was completed.
2. ***John's baptism of Jesus: this was the climax of his ministry.***
 - Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21a - John baptized Jesus.
 - Matthew 3:13-14 - When Jesus came, John understood that Jesus had no need for a baptism of repentance - after all Jesus had never sinned! Since John (like everyone else) had sinned, he considered himself unworthy of such a task as baptizing Jesus.
 - Note that John seemed to know that Jesus was the one he was to point to, even though that fact had not yet been confirmed by the coming of the Holy Spirit (an event which happened *after* Jesus' baptism).
 - John 1:29 - Though Jesus did not have any sin in himself, he came representing all of us, who *do* have sin. He came in our place, as our "sacrificial lamb." [Word "baptize" is not in this verse, but in the surrounding context.]

- Matthew 3:15-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:21b-22; John 1:32-24 - At this event, Jesus was set apart as approved by God, for the mission he (Jesus) was about to accomplish. The Holy Spirit confirmed this when he came to Jesus.
3. ***We must "look to" Jesus when we repent.*** (We must trust and rely on him, for the power to make this change take place.)
- Acts 19:4 - (The word "believe" means "to trust or rely on.")

F. Other things about John's Baptism

1. ***Comparison / contrast to Jesus' baptism*** - see next section.
2. ***John's baptism / ministry was important.***
- Matthew 21:25; Mark 11:30; Luke 20:4 - It had its origin in heaven (implied by the context of these passages).
 - It prepared the people for Jesus' ministry
 - Mark 1:2-4 - He was the messenger who would prepare the way for Jesus.
 - Acts 13:24 - John preached *before* the coming of Jesus...
 - Acts 10:37 - What Jesus did occurred *after* the baptism that John preached.
 - Acts 1:22 - It was even associated with the requirements for becoming an apostle.
3. ***But by itself, it was not enough.***
- Acts 18:25-26 - Apollos knew only John's baptism, and needed a better understanding of God's way (v. 26).
 - Acts 19:1-7 - The disciples at Ephesus understood John's baptism, but needed the Holy Spirit - that is, they needed Jesus' baptism (see below).

Who was John the Baptist?

[Copied from Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary]

JOHN THE BAPTIST the "forerunner of our Lord." We have but fragmentary and imperfect accounts of him in the Gospels. He was of priestly descent. His father, Zacharias, was a priest of the course of Abia (1 Chron. 24:10), and his mother, Elisabeth, was of the daughters of Aaron (Luke 1:5). The mission of John was the subject of prophecy (Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1). His birth, which took place six months before that of Jesus, was foretold by an angel. Zacharias, deprived of the power of speech as a token of God's truth and a reproof of his own incredulity with reference to the birth of his son, had the power of speech restored to him on the occasion of his circumcision (Luke 1:64). After this no more is recorded of him for thirty years than what is mentioned in Luke 1:80. John was a Nazarite from his birth (Luke 1:15; Numbers 6:1-12). He spent his early years in the mountainous tract of Judah lying between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea (Matthew 3:1-12).

At length he came forth into public life, and great multitudes from "every quarter" were attracted to him. The sum of his preaching was the necessity of repentance. He denounced the Sadducees and Pharisees as a "generation of vipers," and warned them of the folly of trusting to external privileges (Luke 3:8). "As a preacher, John was eminently practical and discriminating. Self-love and covetousness were the prevalent sins of the people at large. On them, therefore, he enjoined charity and consideration for others. The publicans he cautioned against extortion, the soldiers against crime and plunder." His doctrine and manner of life roused the entire south of Palestine, and the people from all parts flocked to the place where he was, on the banks of the Jordan. There he baptized thousands unto repentance.

The fame of John reached the ears of Jesus in Nazareth (Matthew 3:5), and he came from Galilee to Jordan to be baptized of John, on the special ground that it became him to "fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). John's special office ceased with the baptism of Jesus, who must now "increase" as the King come to his kingdom. He continued, however, for a while to bear testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus. He pointed him out to his disciples, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God." His public ministry was suddenly (after about six months probably) brought to a close by his being cast into prison by Herod, whom he had reproofed for the sin of having taken to himself the wife of his brother Philip (Luke 3:19). He was shut up in the castle of Machaerus (q.v.), a fortress on the southern extremity of Peraea, 9 miles east of the Dead Sea, and here he was beheaded. His disciples, having consigned the headless body to the grave, went and told Jesus all that had occurred (Matthew 14:3-12). John's death occurred apparently just before the third Passover of our Lord's ministry. Our Lord himself testified regarding him that he was a "burning and a shining light" (John 5:35).

Jesus' Baptism: Comparison to John's Baptism, and Other Issues

A. The comparison of John's baptism and Jesus' baptism

1. *A question asked of John*

- John 1:25 - "Why do you baptize?"
- Note: John does not give a direct answer to this question until a day later (see John 1:31). Instead, he redirects their attention *away* from himself and *toward* the one who was to come. The humble attitude he would later express (in John 3:30) was present throughout his ministry.

2. *A description of John's baptism*

- Matthew 3:11a; Mark 1:8a; Luke 3:16a; John 1:26; Acts 1:5a; 11:16a - I baptize in/with water.

3. *A description Jesus' baptism*

- Matthew 3:11b; Mark 1:8b; Luke 3:16b; Acts 1:5; 11:16b - He will baptize in/with the Holy Spirit.
- Note: Matthew and Luke also add the phrase: "and with fire." The meaning of the word "fire" is defined in the context. (See Matthew 3:10, 12b and Luke 3:9, 17b.) It is the *opposite* of baptism "by the Spirit," and is something that will happen to those who do *not* turn to God and obey him. *It is not a reference to Acts 2:3.*

B. Some preliminary comments about Jesus' baptism and the water-baptism practiced by his followers (as described in the Bible)

- Many of the passages in the section about Jesus' baptism (below) describe *not* the spiritual reality (the Spirit-baptism, which Jesus does), but the physical symbol Jesus associated with it (water-baptism, which his followers did). Some passages, however, look at both aspects together, as *a single, two-part event*. This is because both events (the spiritual and the physical) were intended to occur at essentially the same time.
- *Logically*, the spiritual reality has to occur first: a change has to occur before a person can symbolically - and *truthfully* - proclaim to the world that the change has taken place! An utterly dead person must be given life, before he will be able

to breathe. What God does in a heart comes *before* the response the person makes. But Scripture looks at it as two *interrelated* events. If God *does* make a change in a person's heart (changing him from a dead person to a living person - Ephesians 2), the now-alive person *will want to* express that life (which is Christ's life - Galatians 2:20). And he will want to express it by *living*, not by acting dead!

- *Chronologically*, as far as what we humans can see, much of what God does is *secret*. Often, we see the *consequences* or effects of his workings, rather than the works themselves. We can see the changes that occur in a person's lifestyle, when God begins to change his heart, but it may be difficult to pinpoint the exact moment that those heart-changes began to take place.
- It should also be noted that, just as Scripture doesn't separate these two aspects, tearing apart the spiritual reality from the physical symbol, so also it does not confuse the distinction between the two. The physical symbol does not *cause* the salvation. A person who has *not* experienced a spiritual change is still capable of getting wet, in water-baptism, even though it does him no good, spiritually. And though it would have been normal (and the expected practice) for a Spirit-baptized person to *want* to be water-baptized as soon as the spiritual change occurred, there could be unusual circumstances, in which it was *not* possible - even though the Spirit-change itself *did* occur. (One such example could be a conversion just prior to death - such as happened to the thief on the cross, Luke 23:42-43.)

Jesus' Baptism:

"Jesus needs to change our hearts."

A. Jesus commanded his followers to baptize people (new converts/disciples).

1. *During Jesus' ministry on earth, his disciples baptized people.*
 - o John 3:22, 26; 4:1-2 - Jesus' followers (the disciples) performed the act of baptizing others. But since it was under his (Jesus') command, it can also be said that Jesus baptized them. [It seems that the apostle Paul also followed this practice, to some degree. Compare with 1 Corinthians 1:13-17a.]
2. *After the resurrection, the practice continued: new disciples were to be baptized.*
 - o Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16 [in some translations]; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 22:16 - It was commanded or stated as necessary.
 - o Acts 2:41; 8:12-13, 16, 36, 38; 9:18; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5 - The command was obeyed.
 - o In many ways, this practice of baptizing people, in obedience to Jesus' command, in Matthew 28:19, is no different than what was done previously, when the original 12 apostles were baptizing people, under the Jesus' command.

B. In (or into) whose name are we to be baptized?

1. *"NO" - Who NOT to be baptized into:*
 - o 1 Cor. 1:13-17a - Not in/into the name of some church leader (such as Paul).
2. *"YES" - Who to be baptized into:*
 - o Matthew 28:19 - In (or into) the name of the Father/Son/Holy Spirit.
 - o Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5 - In (or into) the name of Jesus [Jesus Christ / the Lord Jesus].
 - o The focus isn't on a specific word-order, but on who we are being baptized into. To say "Father/Son/Holy Spirit" makes a general statement that all three are involved in our salvation. To say "Jesus Christ" (or a similar statement) emphasizes the specific work that Jesus had in our salvation. Both ways seem to have been considered acceptable.

3. *What does this mean?*

- A person's name represents the person. [In the days of the Bible, the *meaning* of a name or title could also have a special significance. A study of the names and titles of Jesus would illustrate this.]
 - Being baptized "in/into Jesus' name" symbolizes being united with (or joined to) Christ Jesus. We are "in" him (and he "in" us). Some of the significance this has for us will be mentioned later in this study. But, among other things, it shows a very close relationship between Jesus and his disciples. He is our leader; we want to follow him and learn from him. He has first place in our lives.
 - We are *not* to become followers of some religious leader - whether from the past or alive today - even if that leader is held in high regard by most Christians.
 - We can also say that we are "one" with God (Father/Son/Holy Spirit as mentioned in Matthew 28:19). But this is true only because of our union with Christ.
 - Many things are now true for us, because of our new relationship with Christ. Some of these things - the ones related to baptism - will be mentioned in a section, below.
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C. The context: What is this baptism associated with?

1. ***Preliminary Comments:*** Two issues are involved here: 1) What God does in salvation (including baptism by the Holy Spirit), and 2) what the person does in salvation (including the obedience of baptism in water). Most of these passages focus on the people's responsibility, rather than what God does. This should not be wrongly interpreted as a denial of what God does. God will do what he needs to do; our duty is to do what he tells *us* to do... and to let *him* take care of the rest. Since our response will be an expression of him living within us, we will give him, not ourselves, the credit for our salvation.
2. ***Accepting the good news*** (also called the "gospel") about Jesus and what he has done for us.
 - **Note:** John's baptism and Jesus' *water*-baptism have many points in common. Some of the main differences are as follows:
 - John's baptism focuses attention on *our need to change (repent)*, and points to the end results: the "fruit" of such a change. The individual accepting John's baptism is indicating his acceptance of John's message, and is expressing his intention to change his ways.
 - In contrast, Jesus' *water*-baptism focuses attention on *what Jesus does to make this change possible* (the Spirit-baptism). It points to the starting point: the Spirit's work in the heart. The individual

- accepting Jesus' water-baptism is indicating his acceptance of the good news about Jesus, and is claiming that this heart-change (the Holy Spirit baptism) has occurred. [Of course, if this heart change has actually occurred, the other elements which are a part of *John's* baptism (repentance, confession of sin, etc.) will also be present.]
- "Believing the good news": When people believed the good news about Jesus, their immediate response was to want to be baptized.
 - Mark 16:16 [in some translations] - Everyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. [Note the focus on *our responsibility*. As mentioned in the preliminary comments, at the beginning of this section, this focus on *our responsibility* does *not* imply a denial of *God's* part in our salvation.]
 - Acts 8:12 - Many people believed [the good news / Jesus] and they were baptized. [See the ADDITIONAL NOTES for this passage, at the end of this section about things associated with baptism.]
 - Acts 8:13 - Simon, the magician, believed and was baptized. [Note: The context that follows shows that Simon's heart was *still not right*. Even though he "believed" - at least in some sense - he was still a slave to sin (v. 23). There is a strong probability that, even after this confrontation with Peter, he was never truly saved (in other words, never Spirit-baptized). If this is so, then his water-baptism really didn't mean anything. History does mention someone with the *same name*, who became a leading opponent of Christianity, and who developed his own false religion. And though we cannot be completely certain, it is very possible that this is the same person.]
 - Acts 18:8 - Many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized.
 - "Accepting the message" (about Jesus)
 - Acts 2:41 - The people who accepted the message [= what Peter preached; see also v. 38] were baptized.
 - "Calling on the name of Jesus" (the "Righteous One")
 - Acts 22:16 - Get up and be baptized! Wash your sins away, calling on his name! [*"Calling on him"* means about the same as "trusting" him. And *"his name"* represents who he is and what he can do.] Note that the physical symbol (water-baptism) *parallels* the spiritual reality of "washing your sins away by calling on his name" (Spirit-baptism).

3. *Repentance*

- Acts 2:38 - Repent and be baptized. Results? Receive forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - The apostle did not say that the baptizing (something done by people) would *cause* the forgiveness (something done by God). He looked at the whole process as *one event* - the whole process beginning with *repentance* (v. 38), followed by *trust/believing* (acceptance of his message - v. 41), and culminating with *baptism*

(v. 41). His focus was on answering the people's question about what *they* needed to do; he was not discussing what *God* needed to do, nor the relationship between the two.

- In the next section ("Receiving the Holy Spirit"), we will see a passage in which the relationship between the two *is* mentioned. And the reception of the Holy Spirit is described as coming *first* - Acts 10:47-48 (see also 11:16-17, which is connected with this event).
- Note that in every instance in which repentance and believing are mentioned together, the word "repentance" comes first: "repent and believe." This can be seen in: Matthew 21:32; Mark 1:4; and Acts 20:21. (Two additional passages have this word order, but those verses are not necessarily intended to indicate the relationship of the two concepts: Acts 19:4 and Hebrews 6:1.)
- Note also that, in every instance in which repentance *or* believing are mentioned, along with baptism, the repentance and/or believing come first, and the baptism comes last. The change must occur *before* the public confession of that change can be made. (See the verses listed in the above two sections, "Accepting the Good News" and "Repentance.")

4. ***Receiving the Holy Spirit (Spirit-baptism)***

- Acts 10:47-48 - These people received the Holy Spirit, just as we did! Can anyone refuse to let them be water-baptized? (No!)
 - Compare also to 11:16-17 (which includes a quote of Jesus' description of his Spirit-baptism). Peter understood that the reception of the Holy Spirit was the Spirit-baptism that Jesus referred to (= coinciding with the person's salvation). He also understood that this was to be followed by water-baptism.

5. ***ADDITIONAL NOTES ABOUT UNIQUE EVENTS IN THE BOOK OF ACTS***

(From the section about "Believing the Good News," above)

- In the book of Acts, when the church was born, two major issues needed resolved, concerning the gospel (or "good news") about Jesus: 1) the *nature* of the gospel ("What is its relationship to the Law of Moses?"), and 2) the *extent* of the gospel ("Who were the intended recipients of the good news?"). The answers to these questions had to be determined by the *apostles* - those originally chosen, instructed, and commissioned by Jesus, to spread the good news.
- The question regarding the *nature* of the gospel was resolved in Acts 15, when the apostles and other leaders met to deal with an issue brought-up by some converted Jewish religious leaders. The apostles reached their conclusions - not by impulse or whim, but by examining the issues, and observing the way the Holy Spirit was *even then working* among the Gentiles. They agreed with the Holy Spirit (15:8-9, 28) and with the words of the prophets (15:16-18), that the gospel (good news) was *not* an

"extension" of the Law of Moses. The Gentiles did *not* have to perform the ceremonial rituals commanded in the Law.

- As far as the *extent* of the gospel, it needed to be shown that the good news was for *all* people: Jews, Samaritans (half-Jews) and Gentiles (non-Jews). This would be affirmed by the presence of the apostles (along with a demonstration of the Spirit's power), at the time the *first* people from each of these groups was converted.
 - In Acts 2, the apostles introduced the good news to the Jews. They confirmed that the gospel was given to the Jews - not only to those present, but also to their offspring and to those living elsewhere (Acts 2:39).
 - The account in Acts 8 describes the *first time* the good news had been taken to a large group of people who were not "full-Jews." This would raise serious questions, in the minds of many who had believed that only Jews could be saved. Many of the Samaritans accepted the good news and were baptized. When the apostles heard about it, they sent Peter and John (representing the entire group) to investigate (see 8:14). *Only after the apostles arrived, to confirm that the good news was also for Samaritans, did the Holy Spirit come upon the people.* (Even Philip, who had the ability to perform miracles, could not qualify for doing what the apostles needed to do, because he was not an apostle.) This is the *only* instance in which water baptism is mentioned as happening a significant period of time *before* the people received the Holy Spirit. [Most likely, the Holy Spirit had begun working in the hearts of the people (except perhaps Simon the magician), when they first expressed trust in Jesus. But the Spirit's work was not finished until after the apostles had arrived.]
 - In Acts 10, God directed the apostle Peter to take the good news to the Gentiles. As Peter observed the Holy Spirit working among them, he confirmed that the good news was for people of *every* nation (10:34-35).

D. The meaning: What does baptism mean?

1. **Note:** Since the New Testament doesn't divide Spirit-baptism and water-baptism into two separate, only distantly-related events, some of these passages do not specifically point to one or the other. The specific passage and its context will indicate whether it is focused on the reality, the symbol, or the entire baptism "event."

2. **"Baptism into Jesus' name"** - This *general statement* was mentioned in a previous section. Some of the *specific details* about this union with Christ are explained below.

3. **Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection now apply to us.** Water-baptism illustrates this spiritual reality. Salvation is a reality for we who are in Christ, because *what happened to him also happened to us: It is a reality that affects our lives even now.*
 - Romans 6:3-4 - We who were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death... and buried with him... so that, just like he was raised from the dead, ... so we also may live a new life.
 - In other words, if we have been united with Christ, what he did on the cross has application to us. It is just as if we were there on the cross. When he died the death we deserve, it can be said that we also died. And when he arose from the dead, it can be said that we also arose from the dead. (This rising from the dead applies to our *spirits* right now - Ephesians 2:1-10. The full application of it to our *bodies* will occur later - at the resurrection.)
 - Colossians 1:12 - In baptism, you were buried with him [Jesus] and raised with him (*through your faith in the power of God*, the one who raised him from the dead). [Note the place of faith in this. It wasn't the baptism that did it, but the trust (faith) in God - the one who has the power to do it!]

4. **Unity and oneness with Christ's "body"** (the total group of all people who are united in/with him).
 - 1 Corinthians 12:13 - We were all baptized by/in one Spirit into one body... [This focuses on the Spirit-baptism, which was the means by which we became part of this body, and would apply even in those rare instances in which a person hadn't been able to be water-baptized.]
 - Galatians 3:27 - All who have been baptized into Christ have been "clothed" with Christ. [There are no "class distinctions," such as Jew vs. Gentile, etc.]

5. **"One Baptism" - as one dimension of the great "oneness" of the Spirit**
 - Ephesians 4:5 - There is ... one baptism... [This is just one of the many aspects of *oneness* we share, as members of his one body. Several other aspects are also mentioned in this passage.]
 - This theme does *not* deny the diversity also mentioned in Scripture. [Example: Later in Ephesians 4, the apostle focuses on some of the differences we have - different gifts and abilities - because we are different parts of this one body.]

Misc. Passages, Including Various Other Uses of the Word(s) Normally Translated as "Baptism."

A. Baptism was considered to be one of the basic, foundational truths of Christianity.

- Hebrews 6:1 - ...the elementary/basic teachings about Christ: [including:] "instruction about baptisms..." (The focus of this passage: Let us stop dwelling on these "basics" and move on to maturity. It's time to "grow-up"!)
- The word "baptisms" is plural. This could be a reference to *both* New Testament concepts of baptism, treated as separate entities: the reality (Spirit-baptism) and the symbol (water-baptism).
 - Treating them as separate entities would be quite natural for the book of Hebrews. Throughout the book, there is a constant focus on the contrast between the "reality" and that which is but a picture or "shadow" (symbol) of the reality. (See Hebrews 8:5 and 10:1, for two examples. The primary focus in the book of Hebrews is on the *Old Testament* "pictures," contrasted with the realities.)
 - Treating them as separate entities would contrast with other passages which view them as two parts of *one* event. These two perspectives would complement each other.
- Note: Some interpret this verse as a reference to some of the Jewish ceremonial rituals that involved the washing of various things. They support this, in part, by noting that the word "baptism" is used this way, in Hebrews 9:10 (see below), and that the book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians. According to this view, the plural use of the word ("baptisms") makes reference to the numerous ceremonial washings that were practiced. This interpretation would claim that these washings can be considered part of the basic teachings *given to the Jews*, to teach them about Christ, because the washings taught (symbolically) various spiritual principles about salvation.

B. Symbolic washing or cleaning of something.

1. *The washing of hands, eating utensils/containers, before a meal.*
 - Mark 7:4, 8 (KJV); Luke 11:38 - These were *man-made traditions*, rather than Scriptural commands. Jesus condemned the religious leaders for focusing on these ceremonial rituals (which their ancestors invented) and ignoring the more important Biblical commands.
2. *Ceremonial washing as part of the Jewish sacrificial system* (given by God, in the O.T.).
 - Hebrews 9:10 - The O.T. sacrificial system (including the ceremonial washings) was given by God to be a "picture" that taught about spiritual realities & about what Jesus would do as both our high priest and our sacrifice.

C. Being overwhelmed by calamity, trials, death, etc.: Described as a "baptism."

- Luke 12:50 - Jesus' suffering and death on the cross
- Mark 10:38-39; Matthew 20:22-23 (KJV) - The apostles, like their master (Jesus), would also be overwhelmed by trials and suffering, and (except for John) would be put to death because of their loyalty to Jesus. (John was the only apostle to die a natural death.)

D. Two O.T. "pictures" which can be used to illustrate N.T. truths about baptism and salvation

1. *Events associated with Israel's departure from slavery in Egypt*
 - Background: The experiences of the Israelites, as they left Egypt and journeyed through the desert, are like a picture, to teach us various spiritual principles. Their *physical* deliverance ("salvation") teaches us lessons about our *spiritual* deliverance (salvation). See v. 6a.
 - 1 Cor. 10:2 - As regarding their "oneness," they were all "baptized" into Moses - which parallels our baptism into Christ.
2. *Events associated with Noah's Flood*
 - 1 Peter 3:21 - The flood waters (in Noah's day) are a picture of our baptism. Eight people were "saved" through water (the flood) *by the ark*. This is a picture of us being saved through water (baptism) *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*.

- Note that Peter emphatically states that his focus is *not* on the washing of a person's body (water-baptism), but on something that is the result of Spirit-baptism: the cleaning of one's conscience. Peter tells us that all this it is possible only because of Jesus' resurrection. [One additional comment about our conscience: now that it has become "good," it is our duty to keep it that way - see v. 16.]

E. One ambiguous passage (difficult to interpret) - "baptism for the dead"

- 1 Corinthians 15:29 - Paul alludes to people (not necessarily the Corinthians) who did this. One issue is whether this phrase is being used literally (and in reference to water-baptism) or figuratively (in the sense of being overwhelmed by calamity, trials, etc.). The Corinthians understood what Paul meant; we don't. But we *do* know that nothing in this *one* verse is intended to contradict the message of the rest of the Bible. This means that any interpretation that introduces ideas that contradict the rest of Scripture *cannot* be correct.
- Maybe there were people somewhere (not necessarily the Corinthians), who were symbolically expressing the faith of *others* who had trusted Jesus but were not able to be baptized. (This could occur if the person turned to Jesus just prior to his death.) In this case, Paul's argument would be this: If there is no resurrection from the dead, then it's rather silly to be baptized in the place of others who are now dead! [Note that *nowhere* does Scripture *command* such a practice.]
- In the immediately following verses, Paul uses the idea of being "dead" figuratively. He mentions his being persecuted, and describes it as "dying daily." If the idea of "being baptized for the dead" is intended figuratively, similar to the verse that follows it, then the passage would have this idea: If there is no resurrection from the dead, why make a commitment to Christ [baptism], since it could endanger your "well-being" - you could suffer persecution for it! If there is no resurrection, why be miserable... why not rather just have fun and enjoy life? (V. 34)

About differences in views & changing them

How should we respond to people who hold to a different view?

Today, there are many views and positions about baptism - what it means, how it is to be done, when it is to be done, etc. Many of the views and practices are based, not on direct statements from Scripture, but on conclusions reached from already-held theological perspectives and interpolations coming from elsewhere. Some may be influenced by traditions and customs from the past, or even by personal preference or convictions. Seeing that we are surrounded by a wide variety of perspectives, how should we respond to those who do things in a different way?

First of all, some customs and practices are not necessarily wrong. There are many details about which Scripture is silent. And on such issues, we should be gracious, not argumentative, toward those who would do things differently.

Second, the Holy Spirit can baptize (Spirit-baptism) even people who *don't* understand the Bible's perspective on water-baptism. Salvation depends on God changing the heart and giving life to what was previously dead, *not* on a technique of water-baptism. So even if you *must* disagree as to the significance and technique of baptism, your disagreement on this one issue is *not*, by itself, proof that you *are* part of Christ's body and that they *aren't*.

Finally, your obligation toward them doesn't change, just because they baptize differently (or wrongly). Your obligation is to love them. You are not to compromise truth, nor say that doctrine doesn't matter, but you must love them - the same way Jesus loves you when you are wrong about something. And the way he loved you in the past, *even when you were his enemy*.

You may, after studying this concept, find yourself in a position in which your views do not match those of your church. What are you to do? *Not* compromise your beliefs, nor lie about them. *Not* use the truth as a weapon to attack and destroy others. You need to keep *both* truth and love, *with integrity*. Some may find themselves in a situation in which they can, with a clear conscience, work side-by-side with others who have differing views (especially when the disagreement involves something Scripture is silent about). Others may find themselves in a situation in which this issue (and perhaps many other issues) result in irreconcilable differences and conflict. Make sure that any conflicts that may exist are not caused by sinful reactions on your part. Even if you have to leave a group (worst-case scenario), you still need to do so in a manner that exhibits love, and if necessary, forgiveness. Your conduct must be guided by 1 Corinthians 13, even in the worst of circumstances.

Can the way a group practices baptism be changed?

Before you attempt to change the way a group practices baptism, there are some things you must do: 1) Make sure that the desired changes involve issues that are serious enough to warrant a change. 2) Make sure you are qualified to make such an attempt. God gives different people different gifts, different abilities and different opportunities. 3) *Do nothing until you have taken sufficient time to think seriously about what 1 Corinthians 13 has to say to you.*

You should be aware that making such changes will not necessarily be an easy task. Though it may seem like a simple change in "technique," it is not so simple. People's views on issues become so interrelated that a sudden change in one area may leave them feeling threatened in many other areas. (Don't forget that groups sometimes split over the most insignificant issues. And baptism is *not* an insignificant issue!)

It may require lots of time to bring about a "peaceful" return to the ways practiced in the Bible. Don't expect immediate results. After all, it took *hundreds of years* for things to get the way they are today! And besides, God may want to teach *you* some things (including patience!) before he begins to teach them anything about baptism.

Baptism is important. But, being a symbol, it is *not* as important as the reality it is intended to represent. Merely changing the symbol won't solve deeper-rooted problems that may also exist. One possible way to *indirectly* deal with the issue of baptism would be to focus on helping the group develop a clear and concise understanding of the *realities* - not only about salvation (the Holy Spirit baptism), but about other biblical issues, as well. Then it may be easier (and more spontaneous) for the group to develop a better understanding of the *symbols* that represent those realities.

Finally, as already stated, your *first* and *most enduring* obligation toward them is summed-up by the word "love." Their views about baptism may be wrong, but don't let their wrongs be an excuse for you to sin against them! Without love, your words will be nothing more than irritating noise (1 Corinthians 13:1).