
Baptism: Experiential Faith

INTRODUCTION

Humans are creatures made up of both body and soul, physical and spiritual. Although both physical and spiritual are an integral part of humanity, it is easier for us grasp the physical than the spiritual. God knows this and has given us many pictures in the Bible which are physical in nature, in order to help us understand and experience spiritual truths. These pictures are called signs. In the Bible, signs took on multiple significance and represented many different pictures. Signs were sometimes miraculous events that increased the faith of God's followers. In 2 Kings 20, God told the king Hezekiah that he would soon die. Hezekiah begged God to change His mind, so God told him He would add another 15 years to his life. Hezekiah then asked God to please give him a physical sign to confirm the promise. God made the shadow of the steps of the palace go backwards 10 steps as a confirmation for him. Signs were sometimes miraculous events that confirmed the message or authority of someone. We see a clear example of this in the life of Jesus, who did many signs and miracles to authenticate who He was (John 2:11; John 2:18-19). Another example of these signs was the physical symbols that represented suzerain-vassal (God-man) contracts called covenants that God made with individuals or people groups. The sign was the visible reminder that a covenant had taken place, and if there were stipulations on either side they were to be followed. Sometimes the sign was given directly by God. Other times it was given by God as an act to be performed by man. The Tree of Life was the visible sign of the covenant God made with Adam, before Adam broke the covenant (Gen. 2:9; 3:17; Hos. 6:7). The rainbow was the visible sign of God's covenant with Noah that He would never again destroy the earth by a flood (Gen. 9:9). Circumcision was the visible sign of God's covenant with Abraham, that he would be the father of a uniquely blessed group of people (Gen. 17:10ff). Those who are true believers take part in a contract that the Bible calls the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31; Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:8-13). When someone trusts in God for their salvation and decides to follow Jesus, they are entering into an eternal contract with God. Man's responsibility in the contract is repentance and belief. As benefits of that belief, we receive: forgiveness from, and cleansing of sin (Acts 2:38; 22:16), release from sin's power and guilt, union with Christ in bodily resurrection (Rom. 6:1-11), new life in the Spirit, regeneration (Titus 3:5, John 3:5), power to live according to the will of God (Rom. 6:1ff, Col. 3:1ff), deliverance from the evil powers that rule this world (Col. 1:13), the inheritance of the Kingdom of God (John 3:5), and salvation from the destruction to come (I Pet. 3:18-22; I Cor. 10:1-6). Christianity has two signs or rituals that we perform as experiential symbols representing the covenant we have with God. The two signs that Seed Church performs as an act of obedience to Christ are baptism and communion. These signs are sometimes called sacraments or ordinances. Baptism is the sign that God asks us to perform, signifying that we believe and want to follow Christ. It is the outward sign or picture of our inward belief. The purpose of this document is to focus primarily on the sign of baptism and what we believe concerning this act.

WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN RITUAL OF BAPTISM?

Baptism is the rite of immersing someone in water, and is the sign of entrance into the New Covenant community. The word baptism traces its roots to the Greek word baptizo, found in the New Testament. This word has two different meanings. The first meaning is "to dip", or "to immerse." Although the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, there is a Greek version available to us called the Septuagint. It was translated by 70 Rabbis and was accepted by the Jews of ancient days as authoritative and authentic. In II Kings a commander of the Aramian army named Naaman found out he had leprosy, so he went to the Hebrew prophet Elisha to be healed. Elisha told him to go to the Jordan River and immerse himself seven times in the water to be healed of his disease. "So he went down and dipped himself 7 times . . . and was clean." (5:14) The word for "dipped" here is the word "baptize" in the Septuagint. Naaman immersed himself 7 times in the water and when he came out the seventh time he was healed. Baptism also means "to overwhelm." Isaiah 21:4 says, "My mind reels, horror overwhelms me; the twilight I longed for has been turned for me into trembling." The word "overwhelms" is the word "baptize" in the Septuagint. In the New Testament, James and John asked Jesus if they could sit on the right and left hand of His throne. Jesus asked if they could drink the same cup as He, or be baptized with the same baptism as He. Jesus was using "baptism" to associate His coming death as being "overwhelmed" with suffering (Mark 10:38). The picture of being overwhelmed is a complete covering by something. So the picture of baptism is being completely immersed or completely overwhelmed with something. We believe that the proper mode of baptism is through the complete immersion of one's body into water. There are three reasons we hold this view. First, the understanding of Judaism from which baptism originated saw conversion baptism as a complete immersion into water. Second, the Greek word baptizo from which the word "baptize" comes means "to immerse, or dip," not to "sprinkle or pour." Third, the major pictures of baptism – cleansing, death and resurrection, new birth, blood covering, etc. – all point to immersion as the proper physical picture of the spiritual reality. Finally, it is clear from the passages given to us in scripture that baptism was practiced primarily by immersion, not by sprinkling or pouring; hence the need for people to go to the Jordan or some body of water to be baptized (2 Kings 5:14; Matt. 3:16; Acts 8:38).

WHAT SPIRITUAL REALITIES ARE REPRESENTED BY BAPTISM?

Baptism is the picture of our initiation of membership into the Universal Church. (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; I Cor. 12:13). The Universal Church is the group of all who are truly followers of Christ. When we unite together it isn't into a religion, but a union with Christ Himself, making us God's sons and daughters (Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:3ff). We are all baptized into one body, one Spirit, and one faith (I Cor. 12:13; Eph 4:5). Baptism is the picture of our participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Just as Christ died to this physical life, we die to our current life of sin. Just as Christ was buried in the earth, our old life is buried in the water. As Christ was raised to new life, we too raise as newborn children (I Pet. 3:21; Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:1). In Baptism we are dying to our sinful passions and conduct by the renunciation of self, and "rising" to a new way of living for the glory of God. Baptism is the picture of our deliverance from the evil powers of this world, as well as our deliverance from God's wrath (Col. 1:13). When the children of Israel were fleeing from Pharaoh and his Egyptian army, they went into the Red Sea on one side and came up out of the Red Sea on the other. When they reached the

other side, the water collapsed on the Egyptian army, defeating them. This is another picture of baptism. Because of our belief in Jesus, we are delivered from destruction and the eternal wrath of God (I Pet. 3:21). Baptism is also the picture of Christ's blood cleansing us through the work of the Holy Spirit. Our sins are forgiven because, just as the water covers us, Christ's blood washes away our sin (I Pet 1:18; 3:21; Rev. 1:5; Titus 3:5; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; Heb. 10:22; I Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26). The cleansing is not just for past sins, but for future sins as well (Eph. 5:26-27; Heb. 10:10-22).

IS THE CONCEPT OF BAPTISM NEW TO CHRISTIANITY?

ANCIENT RELIGIONS

Water rituals were much more common in the ancient world than they are today. Every major people group or religion had some type of water ritual. History records that the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and Hittites all used water in some sorts of purification rituals. Jewish subcultures like the Essenes from the Qumran community were meticulous in their ritual baths and would usually do them daily. Even in Greek culture many of the philosophers such as the Stoics and Pythagoreans, as well as some of the mystery cults, used water for initiation rites.

JEWISH BACKGROUND

God introduced the concept of water cleansing in the Old Testament. The Jews were to do various water rituals for the purpose of purity and cleansing. Water rituals were not just connected to physical cleansing, but to spiritual cleansing. Most importantly it was the complete cleansing of the heart that would come with the future Messiah (Eze. 36:25; Zech. 13:1; Isa. 4:4). Although cleansing could be done on the hands or the feet, usually the cleansings were complete immersions or ablutions into water (Jewish Encyclopedia, pg. 69). Immersions were conducted for leprosy (Lev. 14:8-9), for the installation of a priest (Ex. 29:4; 40:12), for priests before certain official duties (Lev. 16:24, 26, 28), etc. The Jews added many ritual bathings to the list. One that was most relevant to Christian baptism is the immersion of a Gentile convert. If a Gentile wanted to convert to Judaism and away from his sinful life, he had to be fully immersed in water with certain specifications, he had to be circumcised, and he had to have a sincere heart. (See Baptism in the New Testament, pg. 23-31.) The Jewish Rabbis wrote that for someone to be converted in this way was "like a newborn child" (Yeb. 22a; 48b; 97b; Mass. Ger. c.ii), completely separated from his or her Gentile past. Part of the process of baptism for Jewish converts was that the candidates made special preparations. They cut their nails, undressed completely and made a fresh profession of faith before the designated witnesses that were present. In this way, the Jews had a clear understanding of baptism as a picture of conversion from one life to another.

HOW DID BAPTISM BECOME A CHRISTIAN RITUAL?

JOHN'S BAPTISM

How did baptism move from a Jewish rite to a Christian rite? There were three stages in the initiation of baptism as a Christian sacrament. First was John the Baptist's baptism. It was John's baptism that acted as a transitional stage between Jewish rituals and Christian sacraments (Matt 3:1-6; Luke 3:3ff). John's baptism was familiar to the Jews in essence, but his baptism had a new purpose. Instead of baptizing Gentiles who converted to Judaism, he baptized both Gentiles and Jews who converted to Christ. The personality of John was very similar to the Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha who were both associated with the Jordan River. Elijah parted the waters, and Elisha had the Gentile Naaman wash (baptize) in the Jordan for his healing. The Old Testament prophesied that someone like Elijah would one day come to announce the imminent arrival of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5). John the Baptist seemed to fit this role. This is the reason the Jewish leadership questioned who John really was (John 1:24-25). John tells the people that his baptism is simply a preparation for one who would come later as Spirit and Fire (Matt. 3:11). With this statement, John was referring to the Holy Spirit baptism at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was first given to the church (Acts 2:3).

JESUS' BAPTISM

The second stage in the initiation of this Christian ordinance was the baptism of Jesus. Luke chapter 1 tells us that John's father was a temple priest. John, who comes from the priestly line, baptizes Jesus to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Jesus wasn't baptized to be converted from sin, but to be inaugurated as the true priest of Israel. John's baptizing of Jesus was in a sense handing off the authority of the Baptism to Jesus. When Jesus came up from under the water, the Holy Spirit came down like a dove, and a voice from Heaven spoke (Matt. 3:16; Mar. 1:10; Luke 3:22). This was a sign from Heaven as a confirmation by God that Jesus was His Son and that the baptism was legitimate. John's baptism continued for a time along with Jesus, but it shortly faded away as Jesus' baptism became more prominent (John 3:25-30).

THE APOSTLE'S BAPTISM

The final stage of this transition was Jesus' command to His apostles to baptize all new believers who converted to Christianity (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16). But, before they could initiate baptism as an ordinance of the church, the apostles themselves had to be baptized by the Spirit. Christ instructed the apostles to wait in the city until they received power from Heaven. Fifty days after Christ's death at the Feast of Pentecost, the apostles were together in one place, and the Spirit came to them in great power. Once the apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit, they traveled to the different people groups and cultures and baptized people in the name of Jesus (Acts 8:12; 16:33; 18:8; 19:3-5). As the apostles moved from town to town, they would start churches and set up elders in those churches to carry on the work of the ministry. It was now the elders' job to teach and baptize new converts in their own congregations (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:1; Titus 1:6). This is how baptism moved from Judaism to Christianity.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE REQUIRE FOR ONE TO BE BAPTIZED?

The first requirement of baptism is a personal faith. We are told to believe and then be baptized. Without belief, baptism is meaningless (Acts 8:36, Mark 16:16). If a person decides they love someone, they may get a tattoo of that person's name on their arm as a representation of that love. The tattoo is not the love, but the seal of the love. So baptism is the outward seal of the inward faith in Christ as Savior. The second requirement for baptism is repentance (Acts 2:38; Mark 6:12). Repentance does not mean to just say you're sorry, but to completely change direction (Luke 17:3-4). Repentance does not mean you will never sin, but it means that you are now willing to live according to God's Word. You are committed to His Kingdom and work. This is why Jesus many times warns of hastily committing to Him without counting the cost (Luke 14:26-35).

WHY SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

If baptism is just an outward picture of an inward reality, why should we be baptized? The first reason we should be baptized is that it is commanded by God, as a demonstration of our belief (Matt. 28:19; 1 Pet 3:21). Christ commanded all His followers to be baptized as their first act of obedience to Him. For that reason alone, we should be baptized. If you are not willing to take the basic first step of obedience, then it is probably a clear indication of your true commitment to Christ. The second reason we should be baptized is that baptism serves to confirm our faith. Christianity is not a secret religion. Many can claim to believe in Jesus, but the act of baptism puts legitimacy to the claim. If you wanted to purchase a house and were asked to sign an agreement at the end, you would sign it if you could. You wouldn't say, "I refuse to sign your agreement. My word is my bond." Sure, you may verbally keep your word, but the act of signing the paper gives even more significance to what you say. It time-stamps the contract, and legitimizes it. There is something suspect about someone who won't sign a paper as proof of his or her internal commitment. So it is with baptism. Baptism represents your commitment. It legitimizes what you claim to believe. Paul expected that those who were true believers would have made a good profession of their belief before witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12). If you are truly a Christian you will publicly acknowledge that fact, even if you lose family and friends over it (Matt. 10:33-39; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 2 Tim. 2:12). If you are truly a Christian, then you have to be willing to give up your life and submit to God (Matt. 16:24-26). If you are truly a Christian, then you choose heavenly priorities over earthly priorities (Matt. 6:24). By being baptized you take that first step of obedience and publicly acknowledge your belief and new accountability both to God and the church. You sign your name to the contract showing your true commitment.

WHAT ARE SOME INCORRECT VIEWS OF BAPTISM?

SHORT HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Very shortly after the inception of the Christian church, there was much confusion on certain doctrines of the church. Within 50 years, philosophy and teaching began to creep into the church that deviated from the Bible. There were many types of Christian writings that developed in the early church. First, there were commentaries from early church leaders. These

church leaders, called Church Fathers, wrote their own interpretations of Scripture. Most of their writings were written as apologies (defenses) against local heresies and false religions. Their writings are divided into two major categories. There are the Apostolic Fathers, spanning from the 1st to 2nd century A.D., which include the writings of Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius. Then there are the Patristic Fathers, spanning from the 2nd to 5th century A.D., which include the writings of Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius, and Augustine. Another type of writing that developed was called creeds. These creeds were documents that were developed as a way to unify the church around some basic common belief system, and to dispel heretical beliefs in the church. Some of the most common creeds were: the Apostle's Creed, which was developed in the early first century, the Nicene Creed, which was developed after the Council of Nicene in 325 A.D., and the Athanasian Creed, which was developed in the 5th century A.D. There were other 1st century writings such as the Didache (Teachings of the Apostles) that delineated early church rituals and instructions. Somewhat unique to the teaching at Seed Church is that we value the historic Christian faith. We value the writings of church leaders who have come before us, because there is much truth that comes from their writings. However, we side with the Bible if the traditions differ from what is clearly demonstrated in the Bible. Not all of the incorrect views of baptism have come from the early church writings; however, many of them did. The following are the main views of baptism with which Seed Church disagrees.

False View #1:

Baptism is necessary for salvation. Although baptism is an important sign for Christianity, there is no physical act that brings salvation to anyone. Salvation is completely by faith alone (Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:8-9). Baptism can only represent what you truly believe. There are many examples of individuals in the New Testament who were not baptized, but were true believers in Christ. The thief on the cross (Luke 23:43), the preacher Apollos (Acts 18ff), and many of Paul's converts in the Corinthian church (I Cor. 1:11-17) were examples of believers who were not baptized with water. Although it is likely that some of Christ's 12 apostles were baptized in water by John the Baptist (John 1:35-40) and all of them were baptized by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost there is no record that any of the 12 apostles were physically baptized in water by Jesus. Physical baptism is a very important act as a physical picture of a spiritual reality; however, it has no power in itself to save man from condemnation or to keep men from Heaven.

False View #2:

Immersion is the only legitimate mode of baptism. Although we believe immersion to be the best method, we do not feel that the mode of baptism is essential to obedience to Christ. The water in itself does nothing, and there are exceptions to the rule. In times of sickness, lack of necessary water supply, or other exceptions, other modes of baptism are acceptable. There is evidence in the early church that exceptions to immersion were made. The Didache is one of the oldest writings we have available, and was probably written before A.D. 100. It was a document written for church instruction. It says: "In regard to baptism - baptize thus: After the foregoing instructions, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

in living water. If you have no living water, then baptize in other water; and if you are not able in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, pour water three times on the head, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (7.1)" Here, we agree with the early church position. Although at Seed we will always baptize through immersion when humanly possible, there are exceptions. The mode is not as important as the meaning behind baptism. What is primarily important is that faith and confession come first, and water is part of the ceremony.

False View #3:

Baptism can be performed on infants. There are two major types of baptism. The first is credobaptism, which comes from the Latin "credo," meaning belief or trust. This is baptism that is performed after belief, as a demonstration of one's faith. Paedobaptism is baptism that is performed on infants, despite their ability to believe. Although there are denominations that perform infant baptisms, Seed Church does not believe that infant baptism is a legitimate form of baptism. The very nature of the phrase "infant baptism" is fallacious. To say "infant baptism" is like saying "non-alcoholic wine." Wine without alcohol is grape juice, and baptism without faith and repentance is just a bath. Baptism by its very nature requires faith and repentance for it to be legitimate. The Bible does give credence to the dedication of children or property to the Lord (Lev. 22:2-3; Num. 6:12; I Sam. 2:20; I Cor. 7:14); however, baptism indicates belief and since an infant does not have that ability, the baptism isn't valid. If infant baptism is not the correct model, then what are the reasons that some groups follow this practice? The first major reason that some hold to infant baptism is the belief that it was traditionally done by the early church. The earliest account we have of the origination of infant baptism in the church comes from Origin (A.D. 185-232), over a century after the completion of the New Testament canon (Homily on Luke 14:5). Many other church fathers after Origin held this view. There is no doubt that it is possible that infant baptism began to be practiced shortly after the inception of the church. There were many confused teachings and heresies that arose in the early church. Baptism was seen by some church fathers as having magical power in itself, and as a tool for exorcizing demons (St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments, the Protechesis, 9). Some in the early church, confused over the nature of baptism, refused to be baptized until they were almost dead; they wanted pardon for their entire lives, believing that baptism only cleanses the sins of the past (Tertullian, On Repentance vii. 12; Gregory of Nazianzus, On Holy Baptism, oratio xl.). So, the existence of particular beliefs or practices does not validate them. What is clear is that there is not one single explicit example in the New Testament of infant baptism. Even in the few examples given to us in Scripture, in which "whole households" were baptized, it is by weak implication that one concludes that infants were baptized in those situations. It was still the requirement that people hear and believe in order to be baptized (Acts 11:14; 16:33; 18:8). Though there is only scant evidence tracing infant baptism to the early church, the existence of that tradition would in no way supersede the clear teaching of Scripture. The second reason some believe infants should be baptized is because of the erroneous view that baptism into the New Covenant was a replacement for circumcision of the Old Covenant. This view emphasizes the similarities between the Old and New Covenants. Just as a Jewish child was circumcised on the 8th day as a picture of entrance into the covenant community, so Christian children should be baptized as a symbol of their entrance into the

covenant community. This thought is taken from Colossians 2:11 "and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (NAS). It is for this reason that some Presbyterian denominations believe that babies should be baptized. They do believe the baptism has no power to save the child. The child must one day have a personal faith in order to be a Christian. But they believe baptism, like circumcision, is just a general sign of the babies' entrance into the Christian community. Here at Seed Church, we do not believe this to be the case. Here are a few distinctions. The nature of the Old Covenant was distinctly different from the nature of the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was for national Israel (Ex. 19-24), while the New Covenant is for only true God-followers (Jer. 31:31; Ez. 36:26; Luke 22:20). The mediator of the Old Covenant was Moses (Ex. 20:18-19), while the mediator of the New Covenant is Jesus Christ (Heb. 8:6; 9:15). The Old Covenant promised prosperity, national security, and the opportunity to be God's treasured nation (Ex. 19:5; Lev. 26). The New Covenant promises eternal life (John 3:16), the adoption by God into His family (Rom. 8:14-17), the opportunity to know God personally (Heb. 8:10-12), and the ability to be with God forever (Rev. 21:3-7). The obligations of the Old Covenant were obedience to the law that was given through Moses (Ex. 24:3; Lev. 26; Deut. 28), while the obligations of the New Covenant are to believe and obey Christ's law (John 3:18; Gal. 6:2; I John 3:23-24). The very nature of the two covenants precludes equivocal unity between the signs that point to them. The New Covenant was not a slight change or extension of the Old Covenant, but a completely different covenant. Baptism did not replace circumcision, but was a new sign of a different covenant for a different group of people. The nature of the sign of circumcision was different from the nature of the sign of baptism. Circumcision was to be performed on only Jewish male boys, regardless of their belief in God or their understanding (Gen. 17:10). Circumcision did not represent the heart belief of the Jewish boy. Therefore, to be fleshly born as a Jewish boy was all that was necessary to be circumcised. If circumcision was connected to individual faith and therefore acceptance by God, then the Jewish girls could not hold the same faith or acceptance by God, having no ability to be circumcised. If circumcision was connected to eternal salvation, then every Jewish boy would get to heaven regardless of his hatred for God as an adult. Baptism, unlike circumcision, is never just given to someone based on nationality. Baptism is given only to those who desire it. Baptism requires personal faith before the sign can be done, limiting the sign to only those who have the capability to understand (Mark 16:16). Baptism is not a respecter of race, gender, or nationality, but is available to all who have true heart-belief in Christ as Savior. (Gal. 5:6). Circumcision had consequences for disobedience. Those Jews who refused to be circumcised could not be a part of the Jewish temporal community. They were "cut off" from the other people and the blessings of the nation in general (Gen. 17:14). Those who refuse to be baptized because they don't believe in Jesus also receive consequences, but the consequences are much different. They are condemned eternally (John 3:18). Baptism and circumcision are similar in their purpose. They are both outward signs representing initiation into a covenant. However, for the reasons listed above, the sign of baptism is very different in nature to the sign of circumcision and therefore did not replace it. Historically and biblically, baptism never replaced circumcision for the Jew. From the discussion earlier in this document it is understood that baptism began as a Jewish ritual. It ran parallel to the sign of circumcision. To the Jewish mind, circumcision represented becoming a national Jew, receiving the general benefits of the Abrahamic

covenant. Although corrupt teaching had infiltrated Judaism during the time of Christ, equating lineage with salvation, the Old Testament was clear that inward circumcision is true circumcision. (Deu. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4) Outward circumcision had value to the Jewish nation as an act of obedience to God, but no value for personal salvation. (John 8:32-39; Rom. 2:25-29; I Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6) Baptism as a sign does not represent a general acceptance into the church, but personal acceptance by God because of the inward faith expressed by the individual. It is the picture of a change from one life to another. If baptism replaced circumcision, then it would make sense that Jewish Christians would no longer see the value in being circumcised. However, Jewish Christians, then and now, are circumcised as well as baptized. Although practice does not prove doctrine, it does shed some light on the understanding of the two signs. In Acts 15, a council of the apostles met to decide on the issue of whether or not a Gentile should be circumcised in order to be a Christian. It was finally decided that a Gentile did not have to be circumcised to be a Christian. However, the emphasis of the text was on Jew versus Gentile. They didn't conclude the meeting saying, "Jews shouldn't be circumcised anymore, because baptism has replaced it." The conclusion was that it was not necessary for Gentiles to become Jewish in order to be saved. In a later account, Paul dispelled a rumor circulating at the church in Jerusalem that he was telling Jewish Christians not to be circumcised. When the leadership realized this wasn't the case, they were greatly relieved (Acts 21:17ff). Jewish converts were still free to circumcise their infants. They continued their practice of circumcision to represent their nation, and began the practice of baptism to represent their individual belief in Christ. Not one biblical reference can be found in the entire New Testament that tells Jews to stop being circumcised because baptism has replaced it. Many intelligent and well-intentioned people disagree on the issue of infant baptism. There are distinctions though, between opinion differences and heretical differences. Those who feel it is important to baptize babies as a sign of future belief simply disagree in a minor area of theology. However, those who believe baptism in itself has the power to regenerate an infant, give him salvation, and keep him from condemnation are preaching a gospel contrary to the word of God. This is a heretical belief and we are told in the Bible to avoid teaching that is contrary to sound doctrine (I Tim. 6:3-5; Titus 1:9; Titus 2:1).

CONCLUSION

Seed Church believes that baptism is the act of immersing an individual in water as a sign of one's belief in Jesus Christ. It is an important sacrament and the first act of obedience for one who claims to follow Christ. Baptism is the sign of a believer's initiation into the spiritual family of God. Baptism in itself does not have saving power, but the sign is an important indicator of one's true belief. Although the mode of baptism is not as important as the meaning of baptism, Seed church only baptizes those who first believe and confess in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Other Sources for Reading: A History of Christian Doctrine, by Hubert Cunliffe-Jones Baptism in the New Testament, by G.R. Beasley-Murray Backgrounds of Early Christianity, by Everette Ferguson www.jewishencyclopedia.com