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## ORDINANCES:

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### *Baptism*

#### **Types of baptisms:**

The New Testament speaks about five different types of baptism: the baptism of John, the believer's baptism, Spirit baptism, the baptism of suffering (Mark 10:38-39; Luke 12:50), and the baptism of fire (Mat. 3:11; Luke 3:16). The first three types of baptisms will be the focus of this article; how they differ from one another and which of them are relevant to the church and to the believer today.

The baptism of John the Baptist was a baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4). In his ministry, John was preparing the way for Jesus and His future ministry (Luke 3:1-6). Therefore John's ministry was specific and only to the people of the nation of Israel (Isa. 40:3-5; Mal. 3:1-3; Luke 3:8; Acts 13:24). Their Messiah was coming, and John was calling them to a state of readiness to accept their Savior and King (Luke 3:15-17; Acts 19:4). Therefore John called the people to repent of their sins and change their lives; and as a symbol of this repentance, they were baptized (cf. Luke 3:8,10-14). As a result of John's baptism, a distinction was made between believing and unbelieving Israel (cf. Luke 7:27-30).

In comparison, where John's baptism was a baptism of repentance and preparation which looked forward to the coming of Jesus (Acts 19:4), the believer's water baptism is an event which looks back to the time of his salvation through Jesus (Acts 19:5-7; cf. Acts 2:41; 8:35-38; 10:47-48; 16:14-15, 31-33; 18:8). Therefore, the two baptisms are different, having different purposes. The believer's baptism identifies him with Jesus (cf. Acts 2:38) and with the body of Christ (cf. Acts 2:41). It is a physical act which models a spiritual reality and truth (Rom. 6:3-7), that being the believer's salvation which corresponds to the third type of baptism, Spirit baptism.

During his ministry, John the Baptist said that he was not the Christ, and then said, "...As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:16-17). In this statement, John was speaking about both the first and second comings of Christ. At His first advent, which was during the time

of John, His coming resulted in believers receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:5; 2:1-4,14-18,33; 10:45; 11:15-16). But at His second advent, which is yet in the future, He will arrive bringing a baptism of fire for unbelievers (judgment; cf. John 12:47; Rev. 19:11-21).

In reference to Jesus baptizing believers with the Holy Spirit, this is an event which takes place simultaneously when a person believes, trusting in Jesus as his Savior. It is at that moment the Holy Spirit comes to indwell the new believer (Acts 19:2; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13; cf. Gal. 3:2; Rom. 8:9). When this event takes place, various things happen to the recipient by the Holy Spirit. He is: a) indwelt (John 14:16-17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19); b) regenerated (1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5); c) anointed (2 Cor. 1:21; 1 John 2:20,27; cf. Acts 10:38); d) sealed (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30); e) clothed with Christ (Gal. 3:27; cf. Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10); and f) equipped with a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:4,7,9,11). Also, as a result of this baptism, the new believer becomes a part of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). And having been baptized by the Holy Spirit, he has been buried into Christ's death and raised that he might walk in newness of life through his newly acquired capacity to live for Christ (Rom. 6:1-9; 2 Cor. 5:17). Spirit baptism, unlike believer's water baptism, is not an event which is volitional (cf. Acts 8:36); it is involuntary (1 Cor. 12:13). It is this baptism which the believer's water baptism models; the new believer being buried into the death of Christ and being raised in newness of life. Therefore, the believer's water baptism does not save a person, but is the pattern of Spirit baptism (Rom. 6:3-7; Gal. 3:27; Titus 3:5). Please see the appendix for more information on the following passages related to baptism: Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, Romans 6:1-7, Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:12, and 1 Peter 3:20-21.

### **When should water baptism take place?**

How soon after a person is saved should he be baptized? Should it be done immediately? Or should there be a waiting period to make sure that the person truly is a believer in Jesus Christ; this being a time during which he must prove his salvation before he is baptized (e.g., waiting for a smoker to stop smoking)? To answer this question, the Bible and not reason must be the believer's guide.

When considering the answer to these questions, one must take seriously the words of Jesus which He spoke to His disciples between His resurrection and His ascension. Recorded in Matthew 28:19, Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." The time period during which these instructions were given to the eleven is very significant to their importance. This is true because during this forty-day period before Jesus' ascension, very little is recorded of the things which Jesus told His disciples. But these words which were recorded, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are things which God wanted believers to know and to heed. In these verses Jesus told His disciples to make disciples (the process of bringing unbelievers to faith in Christ; cf. Acts 14:21), after which they were to baptize them, and then to teach them (Mat. 28:20). Often churches rearrange the words of Jesus, teaching the person to observe all that Christ commanded and then baptizing him, even though this was not the practice of the early church. The early church clearly baptized new converts immediately after they believed (cf. Acts 2:41; 8:35-38; 10:44-48; 16:14-15, 31-33; 18:8; 19:1-7). Why then do some churches today not follow this command of Jesus and baptize a person immediately after his salvation? Well, maybe the

weather does not permit them, or there is some other legitimate reason. Or maybe it is simply because the church leaders make it their responsibility to establish whether the new convert is truly a Christian, measuring him against a set of rules which they have established. But if that is the case, there are two major problems with this thinking. First, Jesus never commanded His disciples to do this. Second, no one can really know for sure if a person is a true believer or not. Only God can genuinely make that determination for sure (2 Tim. 2:19). Therefore, after a person claims to have accepted Christ, the church leaders should verify if the person is a believer to the best of their ability through a series of questions; and then, if the person desires baptism, they should baptize him. If this person does not want to be baptized, then this is a good indication that he may not truly be a believer or has doubts. Of course in this case the person should not be baptized and further instruction should be given to bring him to actual conversion.

What changes should church leaders see in the life of a person before he can be baptized? When reading passages such as Acts 2:37-38,41 and Acts 8:36-38, the change which was evident was a desire in the person to become a disciple of Jesus. When the person desired that, as imperfect as he might have been, he was baptized. So can a person who smokes, for example, be baptized before he stops smoking? Does the fact that he smokes make his desire to follow Christ any less than that of the person who does not smoke? Though some new converts may not smoke, they may struggle with other sins such as pornography, a hidden sin that the church may not know about. So when a person struggles with sin, this does not mean that he did not become a Christian and will not eventually stop the sins in which he is involved. It just means that he is imperfect, and hopefully over time, as the Holy Spirit convicts him of his sins, he will on his own make the necessary changes through the power of the Holy Spirit. Even the Apostle Peter and Barnabas were not perfect and had to be rebuked by the Apostle Paul for their hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-14). And Paul himself -- a baptized believer who was specifically chosen by Christ as an apostle -- spoke of his own personal struggle with sin (Rom. 7:14-25). Another example is Simon. Shortly after his conversion and baptism (Acts 8:13), Peter had to rebuke him for wanting to purchase the ability to lay hands on people and give them the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18-24). He was by no means perfect and yet clung to issues related to his past (cf. Acts 8:9-11,19), even though Philip had baptized him and more than likely began to disciple him (Acts 8:12-13). How then can church leaders expect new believers to be perfect, thus not allowing them to be baptized? Baptism is a command of Christ (Mat. 28:19); and when a person who is saved desires baptism, he should be allowed to be baptized. If he is not allowed for some reason which has been determined by the church's leaders, are they not standing in the way of the new convert and his obedience to Christ? Absolutely! And this is wrong! This is the very thing which the Pharisees did (c.f., Mark 7:1-13).

When church leaders try to force change on a person before they baptize him, they need to understand that forced change is generally not a lasting change in a person's life. However, when a person is convicted by the Holy Spirit to make a change, then that change is usually lasting. Christian leaders need to make sure that they do not become as the Pharisees, expecting people to live up to their man-made rules; thus adding to the Word of God things which are not taught in the Bible (cf. Mat. 15:1-9). People cannot and should not try to take the place of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others! This is why church leaders need to allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in the new believer. I asked one group of pastors whom I taught, "If I could show everyone in this room a video of all the things in your life which you do not

want anyone else to know about you, things that you do and think about, would those here today baptize you? More importantly, would you baptize someone like yourself?" How would you answer this?

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## APPLICATION QUESTIONS:



1. Today some church leaders teach that when they baptize a person their baptism is a continuance of John's baptism, and that people must be baptized by them to receive the true baptism. Do you agree with this? If so, how do you defend this from a biblical perspective?
  
2. What would you say to a person who comes into your church and says that according to Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, and 1 Peter 3:21, a person must be baptized to be saved? Would you consider what they say as heresy? After reading the appendix article on difficult passages related to baptism, please explain your answer, taking into account Galatians 1:6-10 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.
  
3. The baptism of new believers:
  - When do they receive Spirit baptism (Acts 19:2; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13; cf. Gal. 3:2; Rom. 8:9)?
  - When did Jesus tell His disciples to baptize new believers (Mat. 28:19)?
  - When were the new believers baptized whom Peter preached to on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-41)?
  - When did Philip baptize the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35-38)?
  - When should your church baptize new believers?
  
4. Is there a minimum age given in the Bible when a person can be baptized? If not, then what should be your church's guideline for when a person may be baptized?
  
5. What would you do if a person:
  - said that he was a believer but refused to be baptized?
  
  - was baptized in a non-evangelical Christian church? Would you expect them to be baptized again?

- who shows all the signs of being a true believer wants to receive communion, but has not been baptized due to circumstances beyond his control (e.g., he is in prison, sick dying in a hospital, or because of the weather are not able to baptize him in a lake or river, etc.)? Would you allow him to receive communion? Please explain your answer.

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## **SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH PLANTERS:**

1. When will you baptize new believers -- immediately after salvation, or after a period of instruction? Please explain your answer below.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Will you allow unbaptized believers to serve in your church? If so, what positions will you allow them to serve in and which positions will you not allow them to serve in?

Positions they can serve in:

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Positions they cannot serve in:

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