

# "ALWAYS BEING PREPARED..."<sup>1</sup>

To explain our beliefs about baptism

*Colossians 2:11-12*

Certain beliefs and practices define us as a religious group in our thinking and the thinking of other religious groups. Because we have a responsibility to be "prepared to make a defense" for the things we believe (*1 Peter 3:15*), we need to have a conversational understanding of our beliefs and practices that we can share with others. This lesson begins a series looking at some of the more apparent beliefs and practices that tend to define us, things like baptism, communion, and music in worship, and will offer a biblical explanation for them. We continue our series with our exploration of our beliefs about baptism:

***We believe baptism symbolizes Jesus' death and resurrection and is required by God for participation in His covenant community and the enjoyment of His covenant blessings***

## God's new covenant

- Our understanding of baptism begins with Paul's description of the act as "the circumcision of Christ" (*Colossians 2:11-12*). His comment ties baptism to the Old Testament's story of God's covenant relationship with Israel.
  - While His covenant with Israel entered a new, crucial phase through the Law of Moses, God inaugurated the covenant with Abraham more than four hundred years before giving to the Law (*Genesis 15:1-21*).
  - God's covenant with Abraham required circumcision as a mark of one's membership in His covenant community (*Genesis 17:9-14; cf. Exodus 4:24-26*) and as a reminder of the requirements that came with that membership.
    - Numerous nations in the ancient near east with which Israel had contact practiced circumcision primarily as a marriage rite symbolizing a young man's entrance into adulthood and belonging in his community.
    - God adapted the practice to remind Israel of their need to commit to a faithful relationship with Him (*Deuteronomy 10:12-20; Jeremiah 9:25-26*).
- The Old Testament's story of Israel's covenant relationship with God included the promise of a new and different future covenant connected with the rule of God's messianic king (*Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-36; 37:15-28*).
- The gospels reveal Jesus' identity as God's promised messianic king (*cf. Matthew 1:1-2:11*) and record his institution of a new covenant (*Matthew 26:26-28*).

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<sup>1</sup> *1 Peter 3:15*. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

- As with God's covenant with Abraham, Jesus' new covenant requires a symbolic act to participate in it.
  - Baptism, like circumcision, adapted a common practice and gave it a new meaning.
    - Several passages in the Law of Moses prescribed washings to create and maintain ritual purity (*cf. Leviticus 11:24, 32; 14:6–16; 15:5–27; Numbers 19:17–20*).
    - Those ritual washing, by the time of the first century, became associated with immersion and were even codified in Jewish religious tradition. Archeologists, for example, have discovered a large number of ceremonial baptismal pools in Jerusalem that they date to the time of Jesus, pools commonly used by the Jews for their ritual purifications.
    - Paul gave the Jewish practice of ritual immersion a new meaning by connecting it to Jesus' death, writing that baptism replayed Jesus' burial and resurrection (*Romans 6:1-11*).
  - God requires baptism in the New Testament in the same way He required circumcision in the Old Testament (*Acts 2:37-38; 1 Peter 3:21; Genesis 17:9-14*).
  - Also, like circumcision, baptism symbolizes one's covenant relationship with God (*Colossians 2:8-4:1*).
  - A difference does exist between circumcision and baptism – God ties forgiveness to baptism, which He did not connect to circumcision (*Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21*).
- Additionally, even though God required circumcision in the Old Testament and requires baptism in the New Testament, neither circumcision (*Jeremiah 9:25-26*) nor baptism (*Acts 19:1-7*) - *by themselves* - merit a relationship with God (*Romans 4:1-4; 3:23; 6:23*).
  - Baptism, by itself, does not earn salvation (*Acts 19:1-7*), but God nevertheless ties forgiveness of sins to baptism (*Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21*).
  - Instead, baptism saves as a response of faith that accesses God's grace (*John 3:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 16:30-34*).

## Applications

- Our convictions about baptism do not rest only on a handful of verses in the New Testament; our beliefs follow a pattern established by circumcision's clearly defined place in the Bible.
- In addition to being consistent with God's expectations throughout the Bible's story, our convictions about baptism also clearly connect to Jesus – it reenacts his death and resurrection.
- Because baptism embodies our choice to enter into a faithful covenant relationship with God, it expects transformation in the lives of all baptized people (*Romans 6:1-11*).