# John 1:15-34 – Baptism

Perhaps no ordinance of Christianity is more unique than Baptism. Surprisingly, not every Christian denomination baptizes. Quakers and the Salvation Army do not practice baptism nor believe it is an ordinance.

Catholics believe that the baptism itself is a saving work of God’s grace and immediately removes all penalty of previous sin, including sin inherited at birth up until the moment of your baptism. Lutheran and Reformed churches believe that baptism is an act of joining the person into God’s covenant people…similar to the act of circumcision for the Jews. Most Methodists view baptism as symbolic but also as a means of prevenient grace in which God uses the baptism to give the child an opportunity to be saved.

On the other extreme, the Church of Christ teaches that Baptism is the first response to salvation and that other than in extreme circumstances one must be baptized to be saved. Since they also believe that you can lose your salvation and then be resaved, there are many Church of Christ members who have been baptized multiple times.

As Baptists, we don’t believe that there is any grace or saving ability in baptism, but that it is the public proclamation of our heart’s repentance toward God. Anabaptists, such as the Amish and Mennonites, also baptize only those who have proclaimed faith in Jesus for salvation. This view is also held by many non-denominational, charismatic and independent churches.

The majority of Christian denominations baptize infants this includes Catholics, Anglicans, Eastern Orthodox, Lutherans, Methodists, Nazarenes, Presbyterians, and many other mainline groups. In contrast, Baptists and others who believe baptism follows faith choose to baptize by immersion. So where does all this come from?

The Old Testament does not use the word baptize, it can’t because the word baptize comes from the Greek word βαπτιζω which comes from the animal tanners and cloth makers. It literally means to immerse or submerge something in a liquid.. It was also used in reference to people who drowned or ships that sank. There are, however, many symbolic washings seen in the Old Testament.

In the years before Christ, to keep the temple pure, every male was required to bathe by dipping in water three times in a ritual Mikveh (bath) before entering the temple. Many Jewish sects, such as the Essenes, required Baptism by immersion after repentance of past sins before people could join their community. Many scholars believe that John the Baptist may have been an Essene. Some of the Essene groups then also required a renewal baptism every year. The Pharisees also required repentance, followed by baptism by immersion, followed by male circumcision for any gentile wishing to become Jewish. To this day, having a Mikveh is considered more important to a Jewish community than even having a building to meet in.

It is in this setting, that Jesus came to John and asked to be baptized. From this passage, we will see that Jesus redefines baptism. From an act of repentance and submission, He changes it to an act of identification and testimony. While other passages in scripture address why we immerse instead of sprinkling and why we baptize believers and not infants, today we will see four aspects of baptism that should help us to understand what happens when someone is baptized.

We will see that Baptism is testimony that Jesus is superior. We will see that baptism is a testimony about our own needy state. We will see that baptism is done under the authority of God and that baptism represents the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

## Testimony about Jesus as superior John 1:15-18

“**15** ¶ John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’" **16** From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.

The first chapter of John often brings some confusion. The book is called John and it talks about a man named John, but the John who wrote the book is not that same John as is in chapter 1. The book is written by a fisherman who became Jesus’s disciple. This chapter is talking John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin. John the Baptist was a Levite, a member of the priestly Kohathite clan, but he was called to prepare the way for the messiah to enter Israel.

As a Levite, John would have been viewed as the cream of the crop of Jews. When a priest entered the area, the people would acknowledge them in respect, but look at what John says: “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.” John was older than Jesus, he was from a better social class, but John the Baptist tells how Jesus was both before him and better than him.

He then goes on to tell about all the blessings that Jesus gives. But, as we will see in verse 30, he didn’t even know Jesus before this point. How could John know what blessings Jesus would give? By grace through faith in the promises of God in the Old Testament scriptures. He points this out as he says the Law came through Moses, but grace and truth through Jesus Christ.

Some of you are probably thinking, wait, how could John the Baptist not know Him if he was His cousin and how could he know His name if he didn’t know Him? I have a cousin, Bonita who I only met once in my life. If I walked by her on the street, I probably would keep on walking without even recognizing her, but I know that *she is a giving and loving person (Bonnie). She is talented and full of grace, determined to achieve but in a loving way, she is intelligent, and fun, but also full of wonder (Kris). She has a heart of Gold and zest for life (Jon). Her zeal and zest for life is often mentioned. She is kind and loves to help people, willing to give anything she has to help anyone, standing up to injustice and defending those who are bullied. With all her fantastic qualities, she is not perfect, like many of us she struggles to see herself through God’s eyes and now, like all of us, she needs our fervent prayer for her to overcome some of the difficulties she has faced.*  Bonita lives in Southern California. To fly there would take about 5 hours, driving 33 hours. From Nazareth to John the Baptist’s traditional home in En Kerem takes 31 hours walking or 8 hours by horse. She is as distant from me as John the Baptist was from Jesus. I trust information about Bonita because I trust the relatives I do know. John trusted information about Jesus both because of relatives he trusted and because of prophecies from God he trusted. God made Jesus known to him.

Ultimately, when we share our testimony in baptism, we need to proclaim who Jesus is. We need to share who Jesus is through what we have seen, what we know from others, and most importantly, through what God has said in the Bible.

## Testimony about ourselves John 1:19-23

**19** ¶ Now this was John’s testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. **20** He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." **21** They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." **22** Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" **23** John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’"

Notice the honesty and humility that John shows. He does not focus on himself and his goodness, in fact he denies being the messiah, he denies being a great prophet. In fact, he doesn’t want to bring attention to himself, but they force him to so John refers to himself using Isaiah 40:3-4:

“**3** ¶ A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. **4** Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.”

John the Baptist doesn’t claim to be a prophet, he claims to be a construction worker.

Now you may wonder why they specifically ask John about being Elijah. Malachi 4:5-6 predicts:

**5** See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. **6** He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.

The Jews did not distinguish between the first and second coming of Christ, so they expected Elijah to come before the Messiah appeared. They didn’t realize that Malachi refers to the second coming when Jesus comes in judgment of the world system. We know that Elijah never died and I believe that he will be one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11.

The lesson for our sharing our testimony in baptism is that we are not proclaiming ourselves as special or as holy, we are proclaiming our need for a savior. Baptism is not a demonstration of our holiness, but that we are saved by God’s grace.

## Authority to Baptize John 1:24-28

**24** Now some Pharisees who had been sent **25** questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" **26** "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. **27** He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." **28** This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Unlike the Essenes who believed in baptism for repentance, the Pharisees believed that Baptism was only for conversion and made a great distinction between conversion and ritual washing. When John is baptizing Jews, they are offended. Jews are being baptized and Jews don’t need to convert. The Pharisees also believed that both Baptism and ritual washing could only be done in very specific ritual locations, the middle of the Jordan river was not one of those locations. They also believed that only a priest could baptize and then only while he was officially working.

John responds in two ways. First, he says that his baptism is only with water. He is saying that it changes nothing about the person being baptized. Secondly he says that Jesus standing there. John adds, in the parallel passages in Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8 and Luke 3:16 that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with Fire.

When it comes to water baptism, there is no special authority needed to baptize. You don’t have to be an ordained pastor, deacon or any other authority. The reason is that baptism is not the act that changes the person but is symbolic of the change that Jesus has already done. Our real baptism takes place when Jesus baptizes our heart, the water baptism is symbolic and is a public testimony of what God has done.

In fact, we are all commanded in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and baptize them. The church has God’s authority to baptize, we don’t need permission from popes, bishops or priests. We baptize not so people are saved, but to recognize that they have been saved.

## The Spirit’s Role in Baptism John 1:29-34

**29** ¶ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! **30** This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ **31** I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." **32** Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. **33** I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ **34** I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."” (Joh 1:15-34 NIVUS)

When Jesus was baptized, John saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus in the form of a dove. Now, I think I can safely say none of you had a dove appear at your baptism. I have been at baptisms where a drunk naked guy climbed out of the river we were using, but I have never seen a dove descend. But the descent of the dove was not the important thing, that was only a symbol…turn with me to Matthew 3:16-17.

**16** As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. **17** And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Throughout the Old Testament, we see hints that God is a trinity, but this is the first place in scripture that all three members of the trinity are explicitly recognized together. The Son Jesus being baptized, the Father God speaking and the Holy Spirit descending as a Dove.

The descent of the Holy Spirit is significant. Being God, Jesus did not need the Holy Spirit to empower Him or endorse Him, but the Spirit endorsed Him all the same. I believe this is symbolic. As Jesus was endorsed by the Holy Spirit, we can receive the Holy Spirit. We are baptized in the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. We then later make that public.

An old joke has one preacher asking another how he got rid of the mice in his church. He replied that once he baptized them, he never saw them again. Part of the reason for this is far too often our churches, especially in America have baptized people without seeing a genuinely changed life. If the Holy Spirit is working in the person’s live we will see fruit of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Not that anyone will be perfect in these, but if someone is truly led by the Holy Spirit, most or all of these areas will see significant growth.

My friend Matt Carter once said, in many ways, baptism is like a wedding ring. The ring doesn’t make you married, it is an outside symbol to the world that you are married. You are married because you have committed before God to love, honor and cherish your spouse as long as you both live. In the same way, baptism in water does not save you nor baptize you in the Holy Spirit, it is an outward symbol of God’s commitment to you and your commitment to God. Baptism is your public affirmation of what the Holy Spirit has already done in your life.

## Conclusion: Wordless book

# John 1:15-34 – Baptism

## Testimony about Jesus as superior John 1:15-18

John the Baptist tells how Jesus was both \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ him and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ than him.

When we share our testimony in baptism, we need to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ who Jesus is.

## Testimony about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ John 1:19-23

John the Baptist doesn’t claim to be a prophet, he claims to be a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Isaiah 40:3-4

Ιn baptism we are not proclaiming \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, we are proclaiming our \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for a savior.

## \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to Baptize John 1:24-28

Our real baptism takes place when Jesus baptizes our \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

We baptize not so people are saved, but to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that they have been saved.

## The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Role in Baptism John 1:29-34

All three members of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ are recognized Matthew 3:16-17

* The Son Jesus being \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Τhe Father God \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Τhe Holy Spirit descending as a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

If the Holy Spirit is working in a person’s life, we see \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control Galatians 5:22-23

## Wordless book

Black \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Red \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

White \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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