

Are you baptized?

By Ingo Breuer



Baptism is a recurrent subject all throughout the New Testament. The Greek word itself (baptizo) merely means 'to immerse' or 'dip'. Today we find a lot of confusion about the issue of baptism. When I ask people, if they are Christians, they often reply to me "Yes, I'm baptized". They do not tell me about an experience of salvation, but think that baptism decides whether one is a Christian or not. Is this view correct? One church sprinkles and the next church immerses. One church baptizes "in the name of the Lord" and the other baptizes "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost". One church thinks that baptism is entirely symbolic and pictorial. Another church teaches it

is necessary to salvation. And yet another church teaches that baptism is the "initiation rite" for the saved person to be placed into the Lord's church or bride of Christ. Some think baptism can be administered by any Christian. Others believe you have to have authority or a church vote. One church thinks only its baptism is "valid" while the baptism of another church is considered "alien". There comes pride and conceit. Denominational chauvinism too often overrides the simple truths of God's Word. But now let us open up the word of God and set those things in order. May the Bible be our teacher and let us for a little while set aside the many denominational confusions. God is not the author of confusion.

John's baptism and the kingdom

At the very beginning of the New Testament we read about John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea. He said "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Those who confessed their sins were baptized by John. John was preparing the nation of Israel for the coming king. Jews expect a kingdom. At the time of John the Baptist the Romans were ruling huge parts of the known world. Israel was not an independent nation and it was far away from the glory it once had under king David. But the Bible prophecies a kingdom: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." (Daniel 2:44) Isaiah 9:6,7 says that "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder ... of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever ..." The Jews expected a king and a kingdom. This is also reflected in Matthew 2:1-8. John baptized to prepare a people for the King. John said about his own ministry: And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water." (John 1:31) John's baptism was strictly for Israel. It was meant to reveal Jesus Christ to Israel. It served to prepare the Jews for their Messiah and King. No Gentile was ever baptized by John. But then came a surprise to the Jews: Jesus did not restore the kingdom (Acts 1:6) as they expected it because the people largely rejected Jesus. His works were denied (Mt. 11:20-30); His principles were refused (Mt. 12:1-

21); His person was attacked (12:22-50). Finally Jesus says: "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you." (Mt. 21:43) Jesus gets into a conflict with the rulers (Mt. 21:17-23:39) and is finally crucified. Jesus' first coming was as a suffering servant (Isa. 53), but - exactly as prophesied in the Old Testament and confirmed by Revelation in the New Testament - Jesus Christ will come again as King and will rule in the millennial kingdom literally on earth in Jerusalem (Rev. 19,20). What does this long discussion have to do with baptism? Because John's baptism deals with the preparation of this kingdom. I will now point you to Matthew 11:2,3 where it says: Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Have you ever wondered why John asked this question? Why did he express these reservations and doubts about Jesus' ministry. John had been imprisoned for preaching the truth to Herod the tetrarch. John obviously expected Jesus to come with might and power to restore the kingdom to Israel. However, John's expectation was obviously disappointed. That kingdom was not restored because the Jewish leaders rejected the Lord. Jesus came as a suffering servant. John's baptism served that kingdom specifically. The Bible tells us that the promised kingdom will come after the Tribulation when Jesus returns to earth for the millennial kingdom and defeats all His enemies (Rev. 19 and 20).

Some people think that John was the founder of the Baptist denomination since John's title was "Baptist". According to this teaching John received the authority to baptize from God and he prepared a people for the church rather than the kingdom. John baptized Jesus and the apostles and then the authority to baptize was placed in the church. Only the "true church" can administer "valid" baptism and this "true church" can produce a line of such "valid" baptisms all the way back to John. The authority that John had is somehow mysteriously passed down from generation to generation throughout the ages. A new born believer, according to that teaching, must find a "true" church with lineage to John in order to get "Baptist baptism". Such baptism then will add him to the Lord's church. Any other baptism would be "alien". This church is not a universal body of Christ, but a mere local congregation. Those who are saved just belong to the family of God, but not to the church. This teaching is false because of the following reasons:

- It confuses the church with the Kingdom. These are two separate entities. John did not prepare the material for a "church kingdom".
- It contradicts Acts 19:1-7. These disciples were baptized by John - supposedly the proper, valid authority for baptism. However, when Paul ministered to these twelve disciples they were rebaptized because they did not even know about the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost has a convicts the sinner, indwells the believer and makes him a part of Christ's body. These disciples were probably still waiting for the restoration of the kingdom, but they were not ready for the church.
- It also contradicts Acts 18:24-28. Apollos knew only John's baptism and it was necessary for Aquila and Priscilla to expound unto him the way of God more perfectly. Those who think John's baptism - or a supposed succession thereof - is the only "valid" baptism today do not know the complete way of the Lord and teach an abridged gospel. John's baptism is not the 'one baptism' mentioned in Eph. 4:4-6.
- It elevates John over Jesus. To make John the foundation of your church is dangerous. The Bible says that we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. No mention of John. See Eph. 2:20-22. John said that he must decrease and Jesus must increase.

- The Baptist denomination did not get its name from John the Baptist. The church got its names from the denunciations of its enemies. During the Dark Ages the true believers were called Anabaptists by the Catholics since they immersed those people who got out of the Catholic Babylon. Only after the reformation the word "ana" was dropped. If John was the first Baptist, then why doesn't it say Jesus the Baptist or Paul the Baptist or "unto the Baptist church of the Thessalonians" (1. Thess. 1:1). "Baptist" was John's personal title and not a denominational name. Beware of denominational pride!
- Water baptism is an entirely symbolic, pictorial act of obedience to the Gospel. It shows that we identify with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. That's all. Baptism does not save us, nor does it place us in a church kingdom or the bride of Christ.
- It is impossible to trace back a line of "valid" baptisms all the way back to John. Churches who believe in this doctrine of "Baptist succession" usually fail to produce such evidence of their proper lineage back to John. Do you have names, places, and times available? Some can go back for two or three centuries, but the rest seems rather hypothetical. Throughout the Dark Ages there were faithful witnesses to the gospel truth such as the Paulicians, Waldenses, Donatists or Albigenses, but it is an exaggeration to claim they are the "true church" with an unbroken line of "valid" baptisms back to John. This exaggerated thinking has misled some Baptists of today to believe that their little Baptist faction is the "true church" and "bride of Christ" and all others - including the other Baptists - are not a church. This poor doctrine also makes locality a factor in whether you are part of the "true church" - the bride of Christ - or not because you are supposed to join a local church with such lineage back to John. Where can you find such a church? If there is none in your area, you won't be part of the bride because you didn't get "Baptist baptism", but you can at least be a wedding guest at the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19). This false doctrine makes Christ's bride to be quite conceited and arrogant. The Baptist bride error is based purely on pride. Pride is a sin and needs to be repented of.
- Many Scriptures point to the fact that faithfulness to God's word is the deciding factor in determining what a true church is rather than the historical pedigree of a certain denomination. A dead church does not amount to much - whether it has lineage back to John or not. Read Revelation 2 and 3, Matthew 18:19,20, Ephesians 5:22-33, Colossians 1:18. Obedience to the Lord matters. Not lineage. The church is not a clan. The church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23).
- The Scriptures do not make a distinction between the family of God and the church of God. Those who teach that baptism is the entrance to the "Lord's church" are basically creating a two-class system. They claim that all the saved people - the children of God - make up the family of God. However, only those who have received Baptist baptism have the privilege of being part of the highly exclusive "Lord's church". Here comes pride and arrogance again. Beware! Have you ever read that we are all equal as brothers and sisters in Christ? Read Gal. 3:28, Ro. 10:12, Jas. 2:4, Col. 3:11. The Bible teaches that all those who are saved are in Christ, i. e. baptized into his body, which is the church and there are no distinctions. The term 'family of God' is not in the Bible, but the Bible does say that in this dispensation God is dealing with only three groups of people: Jews, Gentiles, and the church of God. (1. Cor. 10:32).

Again, John's baptism was a special baptism of repentance which accompanied the preaching of the KINGDOM message to ISRAEL (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4; Mat. 3:1-6; John 1:31).

Holy Ghost baptism

Now that we have cleared some of the misconceptions of John's baptism out of the way, let us take a closer look at what John did really say about baptism:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Matthew 3:11

Quite in contrast to his own water baptism of repentance, John speaks of a future Holy Ghost baptism in this verse. We can not ignore this Scripture because the subject of this verse appears again and again in the rest of the New Testament. What was John speaking of? The answer is found in I. Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Now the apostle Paul is speaking about the same thing. I. Corinthians 12 deals with only two issues. The Holy Ghost and the body of Christ. Verse 13 teaches that the Spirit baptizes a believer into the body of Christ. The Holy Ghost convicts the sinner of his sin. The sinner seeks God for salvation. He repents of his sin and trusts Jesus Christ for salvation. Then the believer is in Christ and Christ dwells in the believer (Christ in you: Romans 8:10. You in Christ: II. Cor. 5:17). At this point the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16). My friend, when that happens to you, you have been baptized by the Spirit into one body. What body? The body of Christ, which is the church (Colossians 1:18,24; Eph. 1:22,23). Amen!

Let us face it: the Holy Ghost baptism that John announced is the agent of the new birth and it places you in the body of Christ. The body of Christ, of course, is primarily a spiritual entity. It is not true when some teach that only a local church is "the body of Christ" or "a body in Christ". There are many local churches all over the earth. Are you claiming that Christ has countless bodies? Are you saying Christ has many brides? No! The body of Christ (singular), which is the church, is first and foremost a spiritual, universal entity. Local congregations are part of the Lord's body, but they definitely are not exclusively the body of Christ. Christ as only one bride so there is only one church. Christ gave himself for only one church bride (Ephesians 5:22-33). Be careful with the word "universal church". This does not mean that the church is a global organization like the UN or the Catholic church with an earthly centralization of power. We are not borrowing any ideas from them. We just let the Bible speak. The only head of the church is Jesus Christ and He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. No hierarchy, no organization, no earthly headquarters, no convention, no alliance.

Those who believe that there is no universal, spiritual church (body of Christ) usually have problems with I. Corinthians 12:13 since they do not believe that Holy Ghost baptism makes one a part of Christ's body. They claim that "valid" water baptism under church authority places a believer into the Lord's church. They usually wrest I. Corinthians 12:13 and claim that it really means "for by one Spirit are we all led to be baptized into one body ..." They just add those bold words into the verse, so it fits their preconceived doctrine. But who gives them the authority to add these words into the context? The plain text of the Authorized King James Bible says that the Spirit baptizes the new born believer into the body of Christ. Amen! It does not say that the Spirit leads the believer to a "true church" which then administers water baptism. Immersion in water does not make anyone a member of the body of Christ. That is the Holy Ghost's work. Not the work of any minister, preacher, or congregation. It is blasphemous when man tries to assume the responsibilities of God the Holy Ghost. Let us just heed what the Bible says without adding or taking away. Let us heed the whole counsel of God's word rather than taking some verses out of context and ignoring other verses completely.

Another attempt used by some to evade the truth of I. Cor. 12:13 is to say that Holy Spirit baptism

does not exist anymore and that it was administered by Christ exclusively to the Apostles and that as the apostolic signs disappeared, so did also the baptism of the Holy Ghost disappear, which supposedly leaves John's baptism as the only true baptism. Those who believe this version even go as far as wresting I. Cor. 12:13 to read: "In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body." But the Bible says: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." How can anyone dare change the meaning of verses in such an arrogant way? If your doctrine doesn't match the Bible, then you need to get rid of your doctrine. Don't wrest the word of God or it will wrest you one day. Why is the above assumption wrong?

- It contradicts Gal. 3:14 which says, "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." This verse says that we should receive the promise of the Spirit. In John 14-16 we read frequently of that promise. That promise is not just for the apostles but for all of us today. Likewise the blessing of Abraham is not just for apostolic times but for all today. If it wasn't, we all would be lost and without hope of salvation.
- It contradicts John 3:30 where John says: "He must increase, but I must decrease." Jesus is above John. John comes baptizing with water. Jesus comes baptizing with the Holy Ghost. Which of them is greater? John told us he must decrease, so likewise his baptism will lose significance. But Christ is going to increase, and likewise his baptism with the Holy Ghost is going to be of superior importance. Those who tell us that the Holy Ghost baptism which Jesus introduced has disappeared are actually saying the opposite: John must increase and Christ decrease. God forbid!

What else does the Bible say about Holy Ghost baptism? For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Gal. 3:27,28 Where are we one? in Christ Jesus! In the body of Christ, the church! When you find the word 'baptism' in the New Testament it does not always refer to the church ordinance of water baptism. For example, read Matthew 20:22: "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Here Jesus is definitely not talking about water baptism. He announces his sufferings on Calvary to his disciples and figuratively calls this a baptism. Likewise in Gal. 3:27,28 it does not talk about a literal baptism in water, but it talks about the indwelling of the Holy Ghost within the believer and that this indwelling of the Spirit makes the believer an equal member of a larger spiritual entity: the body of Christ, which is the church.

Those who claim that Galatians 3:27 refers to mere water baptism owe us an explanation as to what it means to put on Christ. If Gal. 3:27 really refers to water baptism, then this verse means you will put on Christ only after your baptism. This, however, does not make sense. Do saved people live christless lives before they get baptized in water? God forbid! Jesus Christ indwells every believer through the Holy Ghost. Read Romans 8:9b: "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." So when you get saved you need to have the Spirit of Christ or you are none of his. The idea of "putting on Christ" is also found in Romans 13:14, Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10. It always means that we identify with Christ when we get saved and after that become more Christ-like in sanctification. Water baptism does not effect this. Holy Ghost baptism does. Water baptism symbolizes it in a beautiful picture.

Romans 6 is a chapter where the reader must discern between water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism. Verses like these can easily be misunderstood: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into

death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Ro. 6:4) Are we literally buried with Christ once we hit the creek water? Definitely not! Unless you are a Campbellite, you will most likely agree with me that you were buried with Christ and rose with him to newness of life when you first believed on him and were born again. So Romans 6 teaches that in Holy Ghost baptism your old man was crucified and you received newness of life, whereas water baptism is only a likeness or picture of that transaction. If you really believe water baptism has any part in saving a soul or joining that soul to the body of Christ, then you are shadow worshipping while you neglect the real substance: Holy Ghost baptism. We need to acknowledge that the Holy Ghost is the agent of the New Birth according to John 3:8. Most people read John 3:7 quite frequently, but fail to read the following verse which deals with the Spirit's role. Let's not neglect Scripture and let's keep scripture verses in the context where the author - God - placed it.

Errors about Holy Ghost baptism.

When we begin to rightly divide the word of God as we are commanded to do in 1. Timothy 2:15 we see that the Bible never says once that speaking in tongues is the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Ghost as some claim. From the Scriptures we can glean the following facts:

- The gift of tongues was the supernatural ability of some Christians to speak in foreign languages in the presence of unbelieving Jews (Acts 2:7-11).
- The gift of tongues was given as a sign (Mar. 16:17; 1 Cor. 14:22).
- Paul said that all true Christians were baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12:13), and all true Christians were sealed with the Holy Ghost until the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30), but all Christians did not speak in tongues (1 Cor. 12:29-31).
- The filling of the Spirit in Acts 4:31 and Eph. 5:18-20 does not include speaking in tongues.
- When speaking of spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4:8-12, Paul does not mention tongues.
- Tongues are not even mentioned in the list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12:6-8.
- There were only three cases in the Book of Acts where people spoke in tongues (not unknown tongues), and these tongues were a sign to the Jews each time, because the Jews require a sign (Acts 2:1-11; 10:44-46; 19:6-8; 1 Cor. 1:22; 14:22).
- If a person does not have the spirit of Christ, he has no business waiting for the baptism of the Holy Ghost, because he doesn't even belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9). Don't let anyone fool you with Acts 8:14-17.

Now you know what Holy Ghost baptism is **NOT!**

Seven baptisms

As you read Eph. 4:4-6 it is abundantly clear that there is ONE BAPTISM. Is it therefore a contradiction when I say there are seven baptisms in the word of God? No. Here is the answer: in this dispensation of the church age it is obvious that only Holy Ghost baptism is the agent of the New Birth and the body of Christ. This baptism alone has eternal significance. The others are of a pictorial nature.

- 1) I. Cor. 10:1-2 - Here we have an Old Testament baptism according to the word of God. Have you ever heard a sermon on 'Moses' baptism'? The fact that there was a scriptural baptism before the Lord built his church would certainly blow some folks out of the water!
- 2) Matthew 3:7,11,13-16 - This is John the Baptist baptizing Jews into the nation of Israel (Jn. 1:29-31), preparing them for the coming king and kingdom.

- 3) Acts 2:38 - This is Peter dealing with the Jews. You will notice this baptism is not in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost as was commanded in Matt. 28:18-20. That is because this is not the same baptism. Peter is preparing a nation for the rapture, which the disciples thought was going to take place in their lifetime. Have you looked at Acts 2:21 with Joel 2:32 and realized the term "saved" is not always referring to being born again? Just like the word "baptism" does not always refer to water. You should keep in mind, John the Baptist baptized Jews preparing for a kingdom which did not take place because the Jewish elders rejected the Lord. Peter baptized the Jews preparing for a rapture which did not take place, possibly because the Jews rejected the message of Stephen in Acts 7 where the Lord is standing at the right hand of the Father as if he is getting ready to come. Now he is seated. So the rapture and the kingdom are yet to come. They are our blessed hope today (Titus 2:13)
- 4) Acts 10:34,35,44-48 - Peter dealing with Gentiles. This is after Peter's vision where God reveals to him that repentance is also granted to the Gentiles (Acts 10:10-43) and he gets a better understanding of the Jews being saved by grace which is obvious by Acts 15:7-11.
- 5) Mt. 3:11-12 - You have the baptism of fire or damnation which you don't want. Remember Rev. 20:14-15 talks about a lake of fire.
- 6) Mt. 20:20-22 - This is the baptism of death and is connected with Romans 6:1-6 and has nothing to do with water.
- 7) I. Cor. 12:13 - We have found the one baptism! It is the baptism of the Holy Spirit and if you have been born again you have the Holy Spirit! It is not a "second blessing" nor do you have to pray to get it. When you get saved you get the Lord Jesus Christ in the person of the Holy Spirit. See Ro. 8:9, Eph. 1:13 and I. Cor. 6:19-20.

Water baptism

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost ..." (Mt. 28:19)

Water baptism is a church ordinance and it serves to picture publicly what happened to you when the Spirit baptized you, i. e. when you were born again. Remember the New Birth is a mystery that has been made manifest to the saints of this dispensation of the church age (Colossians 1:24-28). The Old Testament saints did not know of a new birth experience. They believed God (Heb. 11), but they did not have "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Someone said the way of salvation has been the same from Genesis to Revelation. This is not true. Then Calvary had to take place right after man's rebellion in Eden. Then the New Testament would have to go into effect right after Genesis 3. Then someone had to go to Adam and Eve and all of their generation and tell them to "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Paul says that the gospel of the New Birth is a mystery that was hidden from the beginning of the world (Eph. 3:9,10) until it was revealed at the arrival of the church age. Jesus Christ gave a commission to the church which included the command to make disciples and to baptize those disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Mt. 28:19). Ever since water baptism has been a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is to be by immersion which means to go all the way under water. Sprinkling or pouring is not found in Scripture. The Bible does not teach baptismal regeneration. Nobody gets saved by being baptized. The Bible does not teach infant baptism. No baby was ever baptized. Only believers. Good examples are Acts 8 (Ethiopian eunuch) , Acts 10 (Cornelius), and Acts 16 (Philippian jailer).

Who can be baptized?

Philip was an evangelist and deacon of the church in Jerusalem. He was led to witness the gospel of

Christ to a eunuch of Ethiopia who just visited Jerusalem for worship. Philip told the eunuch about Jesus Christ and showed him from Isaiah 53 that Christ had to suffer and to go to the cross in order for us to be saved. The Ethiopian man got saved and asked the question: See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts 8:37) When the Ethiopian man made that confession of faith they stopped and Philip baptized him. So what is the only requirement for baptism? Faith in Jesus Christ!

It is quite telling that Philip went ahead and baptized the Ethiopian. He did not go back to Jerusalem to get "authority" to baptize. They did not have a business meeting about it. They did not have a church vote about it. The Ethiopian did not ride his chariot back to Jerusalem to "present himself for membership in the local church". None of that happened. He believed, and therefore he could be baptized. How simple and pure the word of God is! Water baptism is just a picture of what happens when a lost sinner comes to Christ and is born again by the agency of the Spirit.

Divisions about baptism

The Corinthian church mentioned in the Bible had a couple problems because of a self-righteous and proud attitude. After all, Corinth was a very prosperous town. With that prosperity came also a fleshly attitude of religious pride. Let us read in I. Cor. 1:11-17: "For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel ..." These verses describe a situation where there was division among believers on account of who baptized them. Rather than honoring Jesus Christ through obedience in baptism, these Corinthian people were puffed up because of their baptism. Everybody thought his baptism is superior to the other. Those people exalted men and created disunity. Many believers today erroneously take baptism as an occasion for denominational pride and disunity by claiming that only their baptism is valid because "It is of John the Baptist" and that only their baptism by their church authority places a believer into the body of Christ. Any other baptism is "alien". Is that so? We have already proven that John's baptism is no longer in effect today. But how does Paul himself deal with the Corinthians divisions about baptism?

The apostle Paul put baptism back into the right perspective. First of all, he says that he hardly baptized any believers himself, but delegated this task to others for God called him to preach the gospel and not to baptize. Then Paul states that he can not even remember who else he baptized in Corinth. Paul's reply shamefully exposes those who make too much of baptism. Those who believe that baptism saves (Church of Christ for example) are actually claiming that preaching and baptizing go together. Paul, however, says that preaching is his God-called priority for "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (I. Cor. 1:21) Baptism is secondary to Paul. Those who believe in baptismal regeneration would hardly agree with Paul's words in I. Cor. 1:14 "I thank God that I baptized none of you ...". To those who erroneously believe in baptismal regeneration these words should sound sarcastic and malicious. Then Paul goes on and asks a few rhetorical questions: "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" These questions should lead the reader to learn that baptism is about Jesus Christ alone and not about those who administer this pictorial ordinance. Jesus was crucified for us and we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. In baptism we obediently honor God and not a denomination, congregation or preacher.

This is plainly taught in these verses.

I have heard the expression that people are "baptized into the church". For example, John Doe was baptized into Anyville Baptist Church down at the Any River. The above makes it clear that baptism is not an "initiation rite" into the local congregation. But I have heard preachers who compared baptism with the initiation rite to the Masonic Lodge. Freemasons initiate new candidates into a lodge through ritualistic initiation rites. The church should not be compared to such a secretive and occult manmade organization. Water baptism shows the world that we identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. It shows that we personally died to our old self, but Christ gave us new life in the new birth and we rose with him. It shows the world that we have cut ourselves off to our old life of sin and have begun a new walk with Jesus that will be separated and sanctified. Often baptism brings rejection by unsaved friends and family because it is a public statement of what you believe. However, water baptism does not put you into the church. It puts you in water, period. Holy Ghost baptism already made you part of the church as we learned from I. Cor. 12:13. Baptism gives witness to the saving power of Jesus Christ and not to the name of your denomination.

Why is it that some cannot understand the fact of an invisible, spiritual church? We have already exposed denominational pride earlier. But another major reason is one-sided, unbalanced Bible teaching. The belief in a purely local church is mostly based on the use of the word 'church' in the New Testament with specific local reference. Many of Paul's letters are addressed to local churches. For example, "unto the church of God which is at Corinth" (1. Cor. 1:2), "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), "the church of the Thessalonians" (1. Thess. 1:1), etc. The book of Revelation also contains messages to seven local churches. Such Scriptures lead some to believe that the church is purely local and visible, esp. when these Scriptures are repeated over and over for a while. But here is the problem: when you believe this, then you are ignoring a multitude of other Scriptures such as Col. 1:18, 24, Eph. 1:22,23, 5:22-33, 1. Cor. 12, Mt. 16:18. Why ignore all these Scriptures? Why ignore the teachings on the body of Christ? You cannot base a doctrine on just some preferred, favorite Scriptures but you have to compare spiritual things with spiritual (1. Cor. 2:13), rightly divide the word of truth (2. Tim 2:15), and look at ALL Scriptures the Bible provides on any given subject. You will sooner or later find out that the church is both universal and local, invisible and visible. The Bible makes mention of many local churches because these are independent, self-sustaining, self-perpetuating, and self-governing congregations. There is no convention or central organization telling them what to do. But it should not be too hard to understand that all these believers form the invisible, spiritual church, baptized into one body by the Spirit of God. This is the church you will also find in Hebrews 12:23!

Baptized into Christ!

Read Romans 6:3-9: Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."

In this Scripture Paul speaks both literally and figuratively about baptism. It becomes clear that Holy Spirit baptism is an inward experience and water baptism is an outward symbol of what transpired inwardly. What really happens is that your old man - the Adamic nature - dies and that new life is imparted to you. The above Scripture also clarifies that the only proper mode of baptism is immersion.

JESUS CHRIST	BELIEVER inward experience	BELIEVER outward symbol
death on the cross	old man crucified	buried in water
burial	body of sin destroyed	covered in water
resurrection	walk in newness of life	rise from water
= baptism of suffering	= Holy Ghost baptism	= water baptism
Christ suffered in the flesh.	Baptized into the body of Christ, the church.	Administered by the local church.

The above Scripture from Romans shows that those who have been truly baptized have died to sin and will no longer serve sin. If you are baptized, then you have made a public profession that you are on the Lord's side and that you will serve only Him. The true challenge of baptism is not worrying whether some church practices "valid" or "alien" baptism. It is not whether this church baptizes in a pool or in a creek. Let us leave behind these childish, divisive, and unbiblical questions of strife. The real challenge is: will you be faithful to your public profession that you will not yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but rather walk in newness of life and yield yourself to God as an instrument of righteousness unto God? Sin shall not have dominion over you! When you get baptized, all you do is tell the world that you are born again and that sin does no more have dominion over you. If you are not born again, please recognize that you are a sinner and then repent of your sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. I hope you have a good conscience toward God (1. Pe. 3:21). If not, please take the time now and make peace with God until you know that Jesus dwells in your heart by faith.