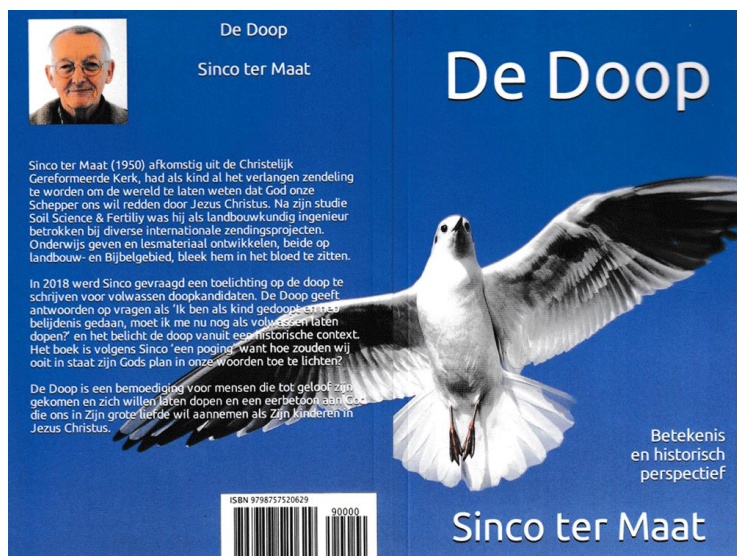


Baptism

Meaning and historical perspective

Based on the Dutch edition 2022



The Bible passages quoted are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise specified.

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Baptism

Meaning and historical perspective

Matthew 3: 16-17

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Part A – Meaning of Baptism

Part B – Baptism and New Life

Part C – Viewpoints and Historical Perspective

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Foreword

Baptisms based on faith in Jesus Christ happen in all countries and climates of the world. Every day tens of thousands of people are baptized worldwide, about 50 a minute, 3000 an hour, 70,000 a day¹, from Eskimos to Papuans. Baptism is sometimes done in a river, sometimes in a hole in the ice, sometimes in the sea, sometimes in a bathtub, in churches often in special baptismal pools, and in many other ways. The baptism we are talking about here has one thing in common: people go totally under - visibly in water - and come up again as in a new existence. Baptism is the outward sign of an inward event.

What drives these people? In many cases it is also life-threatening to be baptized. Even in the Netherlands your family can turn against you if you are baptized. In Muslim countries, you can be killed. In other situations, it can cost you your job.

The story of all these people is that their lives have been totally changed by Jesus Christ. They have realized the reality of the lostness of their own lives, and they have seen and believed in the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Every person who believes in Jesus Christ is reconciled to God, and is "born again," so to speak, into an eternal life as a child of God.

*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,
but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*

Mark 16:16

¹ Figures from "Explaining water baptism" (Pawson, 2015)

This booklet explores the biblical principles of baptism. Many human traditions have been added over the centuries. In Matthew 7 verse 13, Jesus gives a warning against wrong traditions. There it says "You invalidate the Word of God through your traditions." Unfortunately, we also see this in the history of baptism. Therefore, in addition to the teaching of the Bible, we also look at the creeping of traditions around baptism into a piece of church history.

Between people with different ideas about baptism, emotions sometimes run high. After all, one loves God and wants to honor God in his or her position on baptism. Surely this love for God is the connecting link between the different points of view. Our hope is that believers with different viewpoints will not be offended, but challenged to re-examine God's Word regarding baptism.

This booklet can be read in three parts:

Part A – Meaning of baptism

What does the original Greek word for baptism mean - baptizo? What do the Bible passages in which this word is used teach us?

Part B – Baptism and the new life

This section highlights baptism from the daily life of the person being baptized.

Part C – Viewpoints and historical perspective

Infant baptism and adult baptism stand side by side here both in their biblical underpinnings and in their historical development.

Key verses

Matthew 3:11

I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Acts 8:36-38

And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (37) And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Romans 6:2-11

*How can we who died to sin still live in it?
Do you not know that all of us who have been
baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his
death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism
into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from
the dead by the glory of the Father,
we too might walk in newness of life.*

*For if we have been united with him in a death like his,
we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection
like his.*

*We know that our old self was crucified with him in
order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing,
so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.
For one who has died has been set free from sin.*

*Now if we have died with Christ,
we believe that we will also live with him.
We know that Christ, being raised from the dead,
will never die again;
death no longer has dominion over him.
For the death he died he died to sin, once for all,
but the life he lives he lives to God.
So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and
alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

Part A

Meaning of Baptism

Meaning of baptism in the Greek text

It is of fundamental importance to know what the word baptism and baptizing means in the Bible. The original meaning in the Greek appears to be different from what we nowadays imagine the word "baptize" to mean.

Words for baptism that do not cover the Christian Baptism

Ancient Greek has the words BAPTO, EMBAPTO and BAPTISMOS for all kinds of washings. These words appear 9 times in the Bible in the sense of washing or dipping without substantial change. They do not refer to Christian baptism.

BAPTO (3x) means to dip or immerse. You find "bapto" in Luke 16:24 "...that he might dip the tip of his finger in water" and John 13:26 "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.²

² There is a stronger meaning of Bapto in Revelation 19:13 ... "a garment, which was dyed in blood..." This "dyeing" was a meaning that the word Bapto came to take on more and more in Jesus' day. The idea was that you were immersed in a dye bath and took the nature of the dye with you for life: Purple was a dye but clothing dyed in purple was also called "purple." In the dyeing process, the fabric was so completely impregnated that not a piece of it was left untreated. People now no longer called the fabric wool, silk, or linen, but purple or scarlet. It was given the name of the paint, because it became substantially and permanently different. This already goes nicely in the direction of Christian baptism. This word Bapto is not yet

EMBAPTO (3x) occurs only as a variant of "bapto". Matthew 26:23, "He that dipped his hand with Me in the dish, he shall betray Me." The same is found in Mark 14:20 and John 13:26.

BAPTISMOS (3x) is a washing, cleansing by water prescribed by the law of Moses, as in Mark 7:4 "...the washing of the drinking cups and jugs...". Hebrews 6:2 speaks of "the doctrine of baptisms." It would have been better here to read "the doctrine of washings" (baptismos) , as in Hebrews 9:10 rightly translated as "... and various washings..." precisely to indicate the difference between the various washings according to the law of Moses and Christian baptism.³

Words for baptisms that do involve biblical baptism

In the New Testament, the Greek word "baptizo" is used for baptism. It has a very distinctive meaning. In English, therefore, it has not been translated. There the Greek word was simply taken over into the language as the new English word "baptize". So with this translation you actually know nothing, just as translations in most other languages. Do the translations accurately convey the meaning?

The ancient Greek words for our Christian baptism are BAPTIZO, BAPTISMA and BAPTISTES. These words appear 97 times in the Bible and all those times the meaning in the original Greek is surprisingly much deeper than what we understand by "baptism" in our days. These words are about vital changes.

used for it anyway. The Biblical word for baptism "Baptizo" is even stronger and deeper in meaning.

³ Hebrews 9:10 uses the word baptismos as a washing prescribed by Moses instead of baptize, as an explanation of the difference between the Mosaic washings (baptismos) and the Christian baptism (baptize).

BAPTIZO (63x) is the standard verb for "baptize" in Christian baptism. "Baptizo" means to immerse in the sense of "to perish", such as sinking ships or drowning people. The addition "iz" in ancient Greek makes a word much stronger in its action. "Baptizo" is thus much stronger than "Bapto". The word explanation in the Greek-Dutch lexicon of the Online-Bible says of this: "BAPTIZO should not be confused with Bapto. The clearest example that indicates the meaning of BAPTIZO is a text by the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived around 200 BC. It is a recipe for making pickled acid and offers help because it uses both words. Nicander says that to make a pickle, the vegetable must first be "dipped" (Bapto) in boiling water and then "dipped" (BAPTIZO) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs involve dipping vegetables into a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of dipping the vegetable in vinegar, brings about a permanent change.

When used in the New Testament, it points more often to our union and identification with Christ than to our water baptism, e.g., Mark 16:16. 'Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved'. Christ says that mere intellectual acceptance is not enough. There must be union with Him, a real change, as from the vegetable to the sour!" ⁴

Thus, it is about **"our union and identification with Christ"**. In the above statement, the vegetable was completely impregnated with vinegar and took on the nature of the vinegar bath. Thus, baptism is a picture of taking on the

⁴The meaning of baptizo compared to bapto here is from the Online Bible. It is a reference to Bible Study Magazine, James Montgomery Boice, May 1989. For more word explanations including on the Logos site see https://www.logos.com/resources/LLS_46.30.3/popularhighlights/enhanced-strongs-lexicon

nature of Jesus Christ. Later in the development of the Greek language, this meaning became even stronger. In the time of Jesus, the Biblical translation of the word BAPTIZO is: "identification with"⁵. Baptism - baptizo - here is not primarily about the ritual with water - that only helps to understand - but it is about your being, about your heart! It is about the identification of you as a person with Jesus Christ, your identification with Jesus! So baptism is leaving behind an old situation once and for all, and identifying with ... or from now on fully identifying with ... Jesus!

This is a huge final step in your life, which you do wholeheartedly, which costs you everything, and which gives you so much more! You surrender to Jesus. You go down with Him, and you rise with Him in a whole new life.

BAPTISMA (20x). Baptisma is the noun "baptism." The ancient Greek word means immersion in disasters and events that cause you to be completely "overwhelmed" in the style of baptizo. It involves your whole being. Thinking in images, "baptisma" - baptism - has more to do with a tsunami than a few drops of water.

BAPTISTES (14x) denotes one who ministers baptism. In the Bible, baptistes is used only for John "the Baptist".

In summary, the meaning of our Christian baptism in the Greek foundational text is: BAPTIZO for "going down/sinking", not swimming but drowning, and BAPTISMA for "being overwhelmed". Both vital changes... go down/drowning and being overwhelmed!

It is quite understandable that these very words baptizo and baptisma are used for the Christian baptism. They indicate

⁵ (Sellers, Otis Q.)

that someone stops living his or her old life ("drowning") and identifies with Jesus Christ. One is "incorporated" into Jesus Christ to rise to a new life as a child of God.

That is the fundamental meaning of baptizo and baptisma, which we have translated as "baptism." Deep down, it has nothing to do with water. Immersion in water is only an illustration of what is happening inwardly. Baptized in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit means: we surrender and go under ourselves, but we are "identified with" or "incorporated into" the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and go on as children of God! What an unimaginably great gift from God! What does this mean for the rest of our lives?

This understanding of baptism - "baptizo" - in the sense of the end of the old life (drowning) ... and identifying with Jesus Christ - is the basis of this booklet on baptism.

Baptism in the Bible

The Baptism of John the Baptist

Baptism in the New Testament begins in Matthew with "the baptism of John." John was not just a fringe figure even though he is completely in the shadow of Jesus in the Bible. John came from a respected priestly lineage. His father Zacharias was assigned to the order of Abia for temple service. People saw John the Baptist in Jesus' day as a particularly great prophet, like Elijah or even Moses.

King Herod imprisoned John partly because he saw John as a threat to himself. John had apparently bluntly pointed out to Herod his sins. The Jews so revered John that they would do anything he told them to do. Therefore Herod feared for his own skin and imprisoned him. So John was a hugely influential preacher and "all Judea" ran out to see and hear him speak. Jesus places John in the highest position in Matthew 11:11-12

Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

John stirred up a huge stir and countless people seized their opportunity to confess their sins and choose the coming Kingdom of heaven that John was talking about. The biblical narrative tells this very soberly in Matthew 3: 1-3

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist says of Jesus:

I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

I baptize you with (lit. "in") water as a sign of your conversion. So they didn't stick to the old familiar life, with the occasional sin offering if you sinned, as was common in ancient Judaism. No... they started a new life! Baptizo!

In the Old Testament, people went to the temple when they had sinned and brought sin offerings there to be reconciled with God again. After all, something had to be done about the problem of your sins! In addition, once a year, the high priest sent a goat into the wilderness for the entire people symbolically burdened with their sins. Another goat was sacrificed in the temple for the sins of the people. That was a ritual. Just read about it in Leviticus 16.

But John, with his call to repentance and baptism of circumcised Jews - God's people! - turns the lives of his listeners upside down: The rituals are approaching their fulfilment, because the Kingdom of heaven is at hand! Something new is coming!

It is not through birth as a Jew with all the rituals that go with it that you receive forgiveness of sins, but through

repentance/surrender to God within your heart that new life begins! That is groundbreaking!

The prophet Ezekiel already prophesied about this in Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh

Something new is coming! John was the pioneer of baptism by immersion in the Jordan River. Numerous commentaries and writings state that the so-called proselyte baptism was already in use at that time and that John was building on it. This is incorrect. Proselyte baptism did not appear until the second century and was a cleansing bath in addition to Jewish circumcision. Thus, the use of the word baptism in the case of proselyte baptism is misleading. In contrast, John is said to have instituted baptism, hence the name "John the Baptist" . The unique and shocking thing about John the Baptist was that he called people to repent and prepare for - to choose - the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. They had to visualize this very personally and vulnerably by descending from the bank, into the Jordan River, where they were pushed under by John. This had never happened before! This John was something new! He is "the Submerger" , but ... for the baptized, new life followed. Matthew 3: 5,6

Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

John did see his own limitation. He baptized in water as a picture of what was to come.... Only the Messiah Jesus could

truly redeem us and reconcile us with God, so that God could dwell in our hearts again with His Holy Spirit (John 14:23).

According to the ancient Greek meaning of the word, baptism is not done with water or with the Holy Spirit, but *in* water and *in* the Holy Spirit, and you come out of it completely changed as a new person. A better translation of Matthew 3:11 is

"I baptize you IN water for repentance, but He will baptize you IN the Holy Spirit and fire.

This really became clear on the Day of Pentecost and shows the difference between John and Jesus: John was earthly and baptized in water, Jesus is heavenly and would baptize us in (His) Holy Spirit.

"I baptize you in water" as a sign of your new status and life!

That new life had to be visible and produce fruits that belonged to that new life. For that reason, John refused to baptize hypocrites, like some Pharisees. For that matter, most Jewish leaders remained dry on the sidelines and passed up the offer to partake of the Kingdom of God through repentance. They felt too good to confess that they were sinners, too good to submerge humbly in the water.

John had a God-given mandate to make Israel ready for the Messiah through repentance. Luke 1:17

"... he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

In John's baptism there is also that final change: "baptizo", not just taking to the water, but going down!... Surrendering to God ... making baptism the sign of their new life. You noticed this surrender to God immediately in the baptized at John's! They confessed their sins and broke with them. They chose God!

Thus, "the people were made ready for the Lord." When asked why John baptized, he said in John 1:29-31 freely translated, that he baptized in water "so that the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, might be revealed to Israel!" His job was to reveal Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah to Israel. In John 3 we read how well John succeeded. It says there that everyone goes to Jesus.

The baptism into Jesus Christ

John's disciples come to tell him that Jesus is also baptizing and now everyone is following Jesus. John 3:26-31

And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness--look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."

John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

He must increase, but I must decrease."

He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the

earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.

In other words, John is saying that he himself was but a man of the earth. His personal authority did not extend beyond the Jordan water in which he baptized people. But Jesus came to us from heaven. Now the real work of the Kingdom of God would begin. John's joy over Jesus was complete: "I baptize you with water, but he is coming, who is stronger than I, whose belt I am not worthy to untie; who will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire."

Baptism in the Holy Spirit and in fire? Yes! It was Jesus' desire to fill our hearts with God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to make His (Jesus') life visible in us. That is being "spiritually" born again as a child of God. It is so especially beautiful to see this desire of Jesus in John 14:23

Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

In other words: God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ come to live in you together as the Holy Spirit! But first Jesus had to reconcile us to God, be raised from the dead and return to heaven Himself. In John 16:7 Jesus says:

I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

The Comforter - παρακλητος pa'rakletos, "one who helps you" - here is the Holy Spirit who, instead of the physical Jesus, dwells in our hearts and helps us. We see this becoming a reality in the churches around Ephesus, among others, where Paul writes of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 1:13

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit

They understood what Paul was talking about. They had received and experienced God's Spirit in their hearts when they became children of God through their faith in Jesus Christ! Baptism in Jesus name was the outward sign of this.

About this congregation in Ephesus we read in Acts 19 the remarkable story of a dozen men who had been baptized only in the baptism of John. They had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul then tells them of Jesus and now they are baptized in the name of Jesus and receive His Holy Spirit. Here we see beautifully the difference described above between the ministry of John's baptism - I am of the earth - and the baptism into Jesus - the heavenly one - which causes us to be born again as children of God with God's Spirit in us.

Baptism: dying and being born again into a new life

In Romans 6, Paul explains very clearly what happens when you become a child of God and how baptism "baptizo" illustrates this. It is the summary of all that has been said above.

Note the emphasis here: baptism = union with Jesus in death, burial and resurrection to a new life. Romans 6:3-5

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him

*in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him
in a resurrection like his.*

Your old life is over, you have died, and the old sin has lost.
Romans 6:6-7

*We know that our old self was crucified with him in order
that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that
we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has
died has been set free from sin.*

You are now united with Jesus. He lives in you and you now
live for God from now on! Romans 6:8-11

*Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will
also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised
from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has
dominion over him. For the death he died he died to
sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So
you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive
to God in Christ Jesus.*

It is over with the power of sin. Put yourself at the disposal of
God. From now on, let God use everything about you to do
good under the grace of God. Romans 6:12-14

*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make
you obey its passions. Do not present your members to
sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present
yourselves to God as those who have been brought from
death to life, and your members to God as instruments
for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over
you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

Baptism shows our union with Jesus Christ. This is described throughout the New Testament. It often seems that we get off on the wrong foot and read over this unification. What Paul writes in his letter to Ephesus (chapter 2) ties directly into the baptismal teaching of Romans 6. Ephesians 2:10 (GNT)

God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.

In short: Our birth as Christians is marked by baptism. It is not so much your initiation as a Christian, but really BIRTH as a Christian. Notice this fundamental difference!

In the Bible, the word "baptism" as a translation of baptizo is often used to mark this beginning of your spiritual life. These Bible verses are birth texts, as it were. You are born a spiritual baby. As a baby you can't do anything yet, but you are allowed to start growing. First you get milk, but you grow step by step to spiritual maturity.

Baptism, therefore, is not a diploma or a final destination, but a birth certificate with no prior courses!

In history, unfortunately, the emphasis has come to be on baptismal education, sometimes for years, after which one was only allowed to be baptized. Also, magical power was attributed to baptism itself, because people did not understand the word baptism as union with Jesus. Therefore, people thought that through baptism you would even receive forgiveness of sins. What a terrible thought. Only Jesus saves and our union with Him (baptizo) through faith makes us part of Him, and brings us back to God as His children.

Baptism represents our unification with Jesus Christ

Our baptism - baptizo - is symbolic of our union with Jesus and therefore symbolic of our rebirth, liberation, salvation, forgiveness, cleansing, new life, open access to God, etc.

There are those who attribute magical powers to baptism. But our salvation, forgiveness, washing away of sins do not come through our baptism, but through Jesus Christ. Everyone who accepts Him may become a child of God according to John 1:12

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

Read through the following "baptismal texts" very thoughtfully, and with each text, remember that the word "baptism" (baptizo) means "our union with Jesus Christ." Consider whether the text is clearer then.

Baptism as an act does not save, bring forgiveness, wash away sins, liberate, etc...., but our union with Jesus Christ through faith in Him does!

Just fill in "our union with Jesus" for the word "baptism":

*** Does baptism save you?**

*Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you,
not as a removal of dirt from the body
but as an appeal to God for a good conscience,
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ
(1 Peter 3:21)*

*He saved us, not because of works done by us in
righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the
washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit
(Titus 3:5)*

*** Does baptism bring forgiveness of sins?**

Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

(Acts 2:38)

*** Does baptism wash away sins?**

And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

(Acts 22:16)

*** Does baptism free you from your sins?**

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

(Romans 6:4-7)

*** Does baptism cleanses the church?**

... as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and

*without blemish.
(Ephesians 5:25-27)*

*** Does baptism bury you with Christ?**

*... having been buried with him in baptism, in which you
were also raised with him through faith in the powerful
working of God, who raised him from the dead.
(Colossians 2:12)*

*** Does baptism lead to your salvation?**

*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,
but whoever does not believe will be condemned.
(Mark 16:16)*

Only by reading "unification with Jesus" before the obscure word "baptism" (baptizo) do these texts become clear.

Self-evidentness of baptism

In John 3, Jesus teaches the Jewish Pharisee Nicodemus about baptism (water) as a natural station in entering the Kingdom of God through rebirth. John 3:5

*Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is
born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the
kingdom of God.*

These words recur after Jesus' resurrection in Matthew 28:18-20

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in
heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I*

*have commanded you. And behold, I am with you
always, to the end of the age."*

In Mark 16:15-20 this is beautifully described as

*And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim
the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and
is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe
will be condemned. And these signs will accompany
those who believe: in my name they will cast out
demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up
serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly
poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on
the sick, and they will recover."*

*So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was
taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of
God.*

*And they went out and preached everywhere, while the
Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by
accompanying signs.*

God wants the act of baptism and our obedience in it. Our obedience to this command of God opens the way to God's blessing. We find a beautiful example of this in Acts 8 where the evangelist Philip is led by God to a distinguished Ethiopian, who in his carriage is reading the scroll of Isaiah 53 and does not understand it. Philip explains it to him in Acts 8:35-39

*Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this
Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as
they were going along the road they came to some
water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What
prevents me from being baptized?"*

And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

He traveled on with a heart full of joy. In the course of history, we find that Christian congregations have sprung up in Ethiopia. Very likely, the testimony of this distinguished Ethiopian has been a blessing in them by God's grace.

As soon as he understood that Jesus is the Christ, he was baptized! Faith and baptism belong together. Again Mark 16:16

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

More freely translated:

"Those who entrust themselves to Jesus (actively in everything) and thereby become one with Him (passively, it happens to you from God) will be saved, those who do not entrust themselves to Jesus will be condemned (for your guilt will remain on you).

Baptism is a given for a believer. An unbaptized believer is a contradiction in terms - internal contradiction - like liquid ice or icy heat. An unbaptized believer actually does not exist Biblically! A person who comes to faith is baptized! Thus, baptism marks one's rebirth, the beginning of one's life as a follower of Jesus. Over the course of church history, this picture has gradually become confused.

Other references to baptism in the Bible

There are some comparisons and mentions of baptism in the Bible that we need to think about carefully.

The Flood

In 1 Peter 3, Peter describes Noah's salvation through the waters of the flood as a picture of baptism. God allows a world full of violence and perversion to suffer through a global flood, but right through it one family was saved in the ark. It is a picture in which salvation through the ark represents salvation through Jesus Christ. The ark was rejected by Noah's contemporaries and so (salvation in) Jesus Christ is rejected by most people. But Noah and his sons and their wives did believe God and went into the ark and were saved through the water. They emerged from the flood and began a new life. You can so put Romans 6 next to this as a picture of baptism. Peter writes in 1 Peter 3: 20-22

The ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Baptism here is called a request to God for a good conscience. It expresses the intense desire to live as a child of God from now on.

Passage of Israel through the Red Sea

Paul cites Israel's salvation through the Red Sea to make sense of baptism. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 he writes:

For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea

What had happened? When the Israelites fled from Egypt, Pharaoh went after them with his army. The Israelites got "stuck" between the Red Sea (gulf of Eilat) in front of them and Pharaoh with his army behind them. But God miraculously saved them, which is not unusual for God. By God's intervention, the sea parted and a wide dry path emerged for the people of Israel to escape to the other side. When Pharaoh and his army also tried they got stuck, after which the sea receded and they drowned. But the people of Israel became free for good. Paul calls this event "baptized in Moses" - one with Moses. The old Egyptian life was left behind, and with Moses they went on as a free people. Here the people of Israel were born and with Moses as their leader - as God's representative - entered a new future.

Christians move on "in" Christ! Through baptism "into Christ" you have become one with Christ and continue to live in Him. Paul describes our birth as a child of God in Galatians 3:26-27 (GNT)

It is through faith that all of you are God's children in union with Christ Jesus. You were baptized into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ himself.

Does it need to be said any more clearly?

"By faith" and not by natural birth you become a child of God and continue with God on your life's journey in union with Christ Jesus!

Jesus' suffering and baptism

A very clear picture of baptism which also shows that the concept of baptism/baptizo goes far beyond anything with water is found in Mark 10:38

Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking for. Can you drink the cup of suffering that I must drink? Can you be baptized in the way I must be baptized?"

Luke 12:50

I have a baptism to receive, and how distressed I am until it is over!

This is clearly about the upcoming suffering and death of Jesus - baptizo – going down! Baptism as Jesus' death to reconcile us to God with the concluding words "It is finished!"

Jesus' death is actually His victory and is followed by Jesus' glorious resurrection on the third day. A striking picture of what Paul later describes of baptism in Romans 6: Making us partakers of dying ... and rising with Jesus Christ.

To be baptized for the dead?

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul comments on people who say that the dead are not raised and that Jesus did not rise from the dead either. This includes a seemingly crazy sentence in 1 Corinthians 15:28-29

But when all things have been placed under Christ's rule, then he himself, the Son, will place himself under God, who placed all things under him; and God will rule completely over all. Now, what about those people who are baptized for the dead? What do they hope to accomplish? If it is true, as some claim, that the dead are

*not raised to life, **why are those people being baptized for the dead?***

Baptizing for the dead? What is meant by this?

These words are difficult to understand because of our poor understanding of the ancient Greek root text. "Why then are they still baptized for the dead?"

However, in this section Paul is speaking of Jesus Christ who rose from the dead... see 1 Cor. 15:4,12 and 20. So does Jesus belong to the dead or the living? To the living!

Paul here refutes people who deny Jesus' resurrection in verse 12-15 and claim that Jesus is dead. If that is true, then there is also no resurrection from the dead, then there is no new life as a child of God, and then being baptized has no meaning.... !

When we read for the word "baptize = identify with Jesus," the risen and living Lord, then suddenly this sentence becomes clear:

"If dead men do not rise, what should those do who are identified with a dead Christ?"

After all, identification with a dead Christ - baptized into a dead Jesus, without a resurrection from the dead - has no meaning or content!

But to be identified with the resurrected living Christ, the Son of God who gives eternal life, that is the final solution for our lives! That is why Paul concludes his argument in 1 Corinthians 15:20 with

But the truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised.

Part B

Baptism and New Life

Repentance and your New Life in the Kingdom of God

Let's pay closer attention to what John and later Jesus are saying with "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near!"

In military terms, this coming of God's Kingdom would mean, "Surrender to the Kingdom of heaven!"

It is as if the super-army of the super King stands before the gate of the city of your life and the herald of the King (John the Baptist and in our days The Bible) says: "In the name of the King, open the gate!" The word "surrender" could very well be used to reflect the meaning of "repent" with John and Jesus. "Surrender! Surrender to God, to the Kingdom of God!"

In the Greek root text, the word for "repent" is "μετανοεω - metano'eo". The word meta indicates a change. The change it indicates is also found in a word like metamorphosis (change of form), or metaphor (giving another image for a concept). The word "no'eo" means to perceive with the mind, to understand, to have understanding, to ponder, to consider ... in short, your whole spiritual and intellectual being. Metano'eo therefore means: a change of your whole understanding and all your considerations, of your whole being. So it is not as superficial as "turn around and do something different!"... That would still be your "old self" doing something different. No, it is about you yourself in your deepest being - all of your worldview and consequent actions - surrendering to God and changing!

What precedes baptism, then, is that your whole being is turned upside down: metano'eo! You surrender! Baptism confirms an extremely deep change in your existence.

If you think of baptism as a ceremony at all, then baptism is more akin to joining the army with the oath of allegiance and obedience, than an exam party. This is the oath/promise you take for the Dutch army:

*I swear (promise) allegiance to the King, obedience to
the laws and submission to the discipline of war.
So help me God Almighty*

So help me God Almighty! A prayer with your promise! That is why Peter calls baptism a prayer (supplication or intense desire). 1 Peter 3:21 - 4:2

*Baptism,
... as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through
the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
... so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no
longer for human passions but for the will of God.*

Compare it to being sworn in as a Royal Marine Commando. From that moment on, your life is completely different. It creates obligations! Slothfulness is impossible. You train, make sure you are ready for any duty, ready for battle, and when the King calls you to something, you go unconditionally! It would be to your credit to forsake anything.

You will agree with me that our King Jesus and God are far above any earthly king. Likewise, baptism is far above becoming a Commando. Baptism is joining the order of God, the family of God, with all that goes with it.

So here is no room at all for impure motives. Indeed, there are those who are baptized because the warmth of the church community attracts them. The Sunday service and the weekly groups are then like a warm blanket and one goes with the flow and gets baptized, including a testimony that you know is expected of you.

Test yourself how you stand in this: will you go for Jesus, the ultimate King, even if it costs you your life?

Remember that Baptizo means originally that you go down in a medium and take on the character of that medium. A definite change. Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit means that your old life goes under, and you "take on the character" of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That you become one with Them!

What a grace to be accepted by God as His child! Nicodemus learned that when he came to Jesus one night. John 3: 3-7

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

This "birth" is already anticipated In John 1: 12,13

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of

God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Should you understand everything before baptism?

Most of the teaching on baptism in the New Testament is given after the fact. You don't have to understand in advance what it all means. Paul writes about his conversion and baptism in Acts 22:12-16

And one Ananias, ... came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, ... why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

In short: Hurry up! Don't be so difficult! Be obedient! You are born again by your faith in Jesus Christ, not by your knowledge or by your sense of righteousness.

It's like your natural birth: you grow into it in the womb and...whoop, there you are! You don't have to understand everything right away. Your journey as a human being has begun.

So too with baptism. With your baptism, you are not a mature Christian, but a baby Christian. You have risen with Jesus to new life, you are now on the right Way to your destination. All you have to do now is continue, grow, persevere! Persevere! After the (spiritual) birth you have to breathe, drink, eat, grow, learn to walk, ride a bike, swim, go to school, interact with other people, etc. ... on to spiritual maturity. That all comes after baptism.

After baptism - Growing up in God's family - God's house style "The Sermon on the Mount"

In Matthew 5-7 we find Jesus' longest speech as the beginning and basis of His teaching. It is called the Sermon on the Mount, because Jesus went up the mountain to teach. Matthew says "the mountain" because for Jesus and His disciples this was the familiar mountain in Galilee on which He sometimes withdrew and where He would meet the disciples again after His resurrection.

In Luke 6, this Sermon on the Mount is rendered in an abbreviated form. There we read that Jesus had a night of prayer on this mountain beforehand, after which He selected His 12 disciples and then descended to a flat area where a crowd of followers from Jerusalem and Judea to even Tyre and Sidon were gathered. There He begins His famous Sermon on the Mount, the Messianic Throne Speech, the Messiah's program of action, the constitution of the Kingdom of God. How do you become truly happy? If someone hits you on one cheek, turn him your other cheek too. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. How do you pray? Christians should read these chapters 5-7 in the gospel to Matthew at least every month. It is so contrary to our "old" human nature that people reason away this Sermon on the Mount as deliberately exaggerated and not quite to be taken seriously. However, that is not God's intention. Jesus finishes this Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24,26 with His words

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of

*mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man
who built his house on the sand.*

In Matthew 28, Jesus points this out again when He meets the remaining 11 disciples again on "the mountain" and says in Matthew 28:19-20

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing
them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have
commanded you.*

"All that I have commanded you!" No doubt the disciples remembered ... the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' style, the house-style of God.

This style in God's family is quite different from our earthly "nature". We more than need God's Spirit in us as a paraklete/Helper to start growing in God's style. Much of the New Testament is focused on showing us this way, the constitution of the Kingdom of God. It is important to act accordingly!

Take, for example, Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. The first three chapters describe how we have been reconciled to God in Christ and have become household members of God with God's Spirit in us according to Ephesians 1:13-14

*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the
gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were
sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the
guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession
of it, to the praise of his glory.*

When you came to believe in Christ, God gave you the Holy Spirit, whom He had promised as a proof that you are Christ's. That happened at the beginning of your spiritual life.

The second three chapters then state how that new life is lived, summarizing Ephesians 4:17-24

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

But that is not the way you learned Christ!-- assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

You are growing different! The Bible repeatedly describes this growth process as putting off or separating from wrong things and accepting and putting on what God gives you. You might call that the LOPO principle, "Lay off, put on."

If you have truly heard His voice and He has made known to you the truth about Himself, you must lay off your old human nature like old clothes; your former way of life, through which you thought you found happiness and peace, but which in reality brought you death and destruction. Your thinking must be thoroughly renewed. Indeed, you must become a completely new person, living only for God, pure and good. Put on a new nature like a set of new clothes.

So don't fool yourself by pretending to be a Christian after your baptism, but in reality not being serious about obeying

God. Your thinking needs to be renewed. You have to grow after your baptism and you do that with good food: hearing or reading God's Word, prayerfully contemplating and obeying. Thus, after your conversion and baptism, growth into spiritual maturity begins. 1 Peter 2:2

*... Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk,
that by it you may grow up into salvation*

It's all about choosing God's style! Baptism marks your birth into the family of God ... with God's house style. Radically different from the established order in your past thinking and our world.

We need Jesus in our hearts to live this new life. Very nicely Jesus illustrates this in Matthew 11:28-30 with the image of plowing oxen ... How do you teach a young ox to plow? By letting that unexperienced ox walk under a yoke with an ox that knows how. In this way Jesus invites us to walk with Him under the yoke, together with Jesus through your life!

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I
will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn
from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will
find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my
burden is light."*

Baptism and sin

Many people struggle with the problem of sin after becoming a Christian. They are baptized, but realize that they are still not perfect and do not yet live up to God's standard.

Someone told me, "After a week I am already dirty with certain sins.... I have been trying to start over for so long. I am desperate! Shouldn't I be baptized every month, for example?"

In the Bible, the letter to the Hebrews (Christian Jews in the New Testament) clearly states the one-time nature of God's solution to sin. Hebrews 9: 24-26 says

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

So your baptism is the sign that you have risen with Jesus into a new life: born again! Jesus stands in our place before God and has once and for all dealt with our sins. That is how God has had it put in the Bible and we may simply believe that childishly unconditionally.

What about sinning? The Bible says two things about this, which seemingly contradict each other. Seemingly because here is a play on words with Greek grammar.

1. A Christian does sin - 1 John 1:8-10
2. A Christian does not sin - 1 John 3:9

This is not a contradiction but shows the tension field in which you live. That's how it is, but keep courage! Paul, John and Peter know this field of tension and describe it. God knows who you are and encourages you in 1 John 1: 8-10

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

But in the same letter from John, it says in 1 John 3:9

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

So what is meant here?

The original Greek word used in "cannot" keep on sinning is δυναμαι 'dunamai, in which we recognize the word dynamics or also dynamo. Your internal drive. That which gives you energy, your drives, have become different. So it doesn't mean that in practice you don't sin anymore, but that you don't want to sin anymore. After all, you are born again, a different person with different drives, ... but not yet perfect! The latter will come when Jesus returns! Now you are still living in this broken world, but with a different motive! Now you are on your way with God with trial and error. That is why it says in 1 John 2:1-2

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an

advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

The problem of a new life and still sinning is described very clearly by Paul in Romans 7:21- 8:1

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Again, it says that Jesus has dealt with your sins. You do not need to be baptized again and again, because you are not born again and again either. As a newborn child of God your sins are and will be forgiven as long as you are on the road with God. May be you stumble or do not even know what to do, but God holds your hand and puts you back on your feet and is there to help you further. You may ask and receive forgiveness, become wise and dependent of God through God's holy Spirit. This is how you grow and become more and more like Jesus!

Again, it is the LOPO principle: You lay off wrong things, and put on the new style of God. So don't get discouraged. Keep walking with God. You are growing! It's just like regular babies and children...trial and error! Above all, keep getting

up and learning and growing through the right food, the Word of God! Spiritual maturity does not come in one day!

Spiritual struggle

You have come to faith and are aware of the need for repentance and salvation, regeneration. This is also where the spiritual struggle begins for most people. Things will happen in your life that are now trying to keep you away from God. For example:

- An unbelieving friend/relative pulls you in the wrong direction
- You have to take a course for work instead of Bible study, or your child gets sick just when you want to go to a Bible study
- You get fired and wonder where God is
- There are family circumstances and difficulties
- You start having doubts because of articles or comments
- etc.

After all, you "stir" in the reign of the evil one. You stir up a lot in the spiritual world.

With a friend whom I will call Josh, the following happened:

When Josh came to faith, no one would have thought it possible. But it was really true, his life was totally changed when he came to know Jesus and chose to follow Him. Everything regained color in his life. Another close friend said to him, "Josh, count on there being spiritual battles to come. The Evil One is not going to just let you go and try in many ways to keep you with him."

And it did. Unexpectedly, old "friends" came his way again and tried to entice him to return to their circuit and way of life. He faced unexpected difficulties that now required a sacrifice from him to choose God. What have I gotten myself into? Am I going to keep this up? Fortunately, he persevered to this day and realizes every day how wonderfully beautiful it is to be able to live as a child of God for all eternity.

Spiritual struggle from the outside

These kinds of struggles, when you choose God and are born again like Josh, are common. People often call this spiritual war because it seems like war. After all, you are wresting yourself from the grip of the Evil One in your way of thinking and acting and coming into God's light. This escaping from the Evil One and coming home to God is described in 2 Timothy 2:26

... they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

You escape from the devil's camp. That causes consternation there and you notice it. Many people experience that their life is difficult around the time of their conversion and baptism. You can be ridiculed for trusting Jesus, you can lose good friends, you experience something of the suffering of Jesus who was also despised. Some people are actually assailed in other areas by doubts about whether you can trust God and His Word - the Bible. The devil is tricky and it is good that you are warned. Don't let that struggle confuse you. Peter writes in 1 Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

You will not only notice this "struggle" at your conversion and baptism. You will experience this all your life here on earth, perhaps at times when you do not count on it at all. That is when you are vulnerable. To win the battle, two things are very important.

Know your enemy

You must know your enemy and not underestimate him, but also not overestimate him. Satan is not remotely comparable to God. He is a created angel who has turned away from God. Jesus will crush the head of this great adversary of God once and for all. But for now we do have to deal with him. In 1 Peter 5:8 Peter warns us in the name of God:

... Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Sometimes this great adversary - Satan - works very subtly as a "believer" or God's messenger. Don't fall for it. 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 says

Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.

Arm yourself

You must be well armed yourself and use the weapons against the tricks of the devil! In Ephesians 6: 10-18, these weapons are described as the armor of God containing truth, righteousness, commitment to the gospel, faith, salvation, God's Spirit, God's Word, prayer, and watchfulness.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

You must practice to handle these "weapons" effectively, like the shield of faith, and the sword of God's Word. Do you know God's Word? Make sure you get to know it! That is an important part of your spiritual growth-process.

Spiritual struggle from within

The "enemy" is not only outside but also inside. Even though you have been converted, you still have to live up to your choice every day. It is like an alcoholic who is clean. You know what a blessing it is to not be addicted to alcohol anymore, but you still have to make the choice to stay clean all the time! Jesus speaks of our insides in Mark 7:21

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery

So spiritual struggle also has everything to do with your own "self". To Cain, God already said in Genesis 4:7

sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

These evil ideas from within seem difficult to combat. In the movie Ben Hur, at the beginning of the movie the question is asked, "How do you fight an idea?" The answer is, "By a better idea!" This is not new. Paul writes about this in Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Feed your thoughts with the good things. Sing beautiful songs and pray!

The evangelist Billy Graham used the illustration of two dogs fighting in you , a black one representing sin, and a white one representing life with Jesus. They are fighting each other...who is going to win?

The dog you feed wins! How do you feed that white dog? The whole punch line of spiritual struggle and overcoming is ultimately to stay "in Jesus" and feed on what He gives you. Jesus Himself explains this in John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Such a vine gets its position in the sun, and its water and food through the vine - Jesus. So get your food for your life from Jesus, and not somewhere else because then you will wither away! There is nothing woolly about this. What are you feeding yourself with? With many hours of Netflix movies or with God's Word? How are you really being build up?

The Bible teaches us in many other places how to "fight and overcome as a good soldier in the Kingdom of God." And that is usually very different from what we do naturally. Overcome evil by doing and thinking good, trusting God, keeping and doing His Word, witnessing in Word and deed, being willing to give your life for God. It is not we who overcome in our strength, but Jesus who has overcome and we "IN HIM". The following texts make this clear.

John 16:33 "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Romans 12:21 "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"

Hebrews 11:33 "... who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions."

1 John 2:14 "I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

1 John 4:4 "Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

Revelation 12:11 "... they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death."

In this whole battle we are never alone. God's name is YAHWEH - I am! I am with you! God is with you in every trial. Many places in the Bible say that He is our refuge and that we can trust in Him. A very famous verse is Psalm 50:15 which is also called the mobile number of heaven...

Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

Thus, the heavy-laden word "spiritual war or struggle" becomes a shout of victory with God, Who is with Exodus 34:6-7

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin

This is our Father in heaven!

For those who trust in Jesus, the outcome of our spiritual battle is guaranteed as Romans 8:37 says

in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Part C

Viewpoints and historical perspective

Infant-baptism or faith-baptism?

It has been seen in the foregoing that baptism occurs in adults on the basis of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

In church history, however, we soon find that infant baptism is mentioned and that this infant baptism becomes standard practice in the churches from about the 6th century.

Between proponents of infant baptism and proponents of faith baptism there is a kind of "battle" to this day.

This brings us to a question that is current for many Christians in our day: Is baptism instituted only for people who repent and follow Jesus, born-again people? Or is baptism also for non-reborn people, like babies? Behind this question are two completely different ideas about what the meaning of baptism is.

Adult baptism based on faith

Proponents of adult baptism assume that baptism is the sign of being reborn, and that baptism follows conscious conversion to God. By faith and conversion you belong to God. Therefore, this is called "faith baptism." John 3:3

*Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you,
unless one is born again
he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

Not by natural birth, but by being "spiritually" born again as children of God, we can see God's Kingdom. By believing in Jesus name we may be children of God (John 1:12-13). Only by faith in Jesus Christ are we born as God's children and not by natural birth.

Paul represents God's promises in the Old Testament as an old thick olive tree, some branches of which have been broken away and on which other wild olive branches have been grafted. Those wild olive branches are us - people from the "Gentiles" - who have come to faith and are now God's people. Romans 11: 17,20

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree,... They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith.

So you owe your place to faith, not birth!

Infant baptism

The background of infant baptism becomes clearer when we know how infant baptism historically made its way into the churches.

Proponents of infant baptism say roughly the following:

Baptism is the sign that God commits Himself to the child if the child has believing parents.

Baptism is thus the sign of God's covenant with believing parents and their children: by birth you belong to God.

Baptism in the New Testament replaces circumcision in the Old Testament.

The underlying idea is that the Church has come to succeed the role of Israel.

In the reformation these thoughts behind infant baptism are explained in both the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Dutch

Confession of Faith (1561) and the Dordt doctrines (1619)⁶. Again and again, the central idea is erroneously that baptism has come to replace circumcision. As an example, we look at the Heidelberg Catechism question and answer 74

Question 74. Shall young children also be baptized?

Answer. Yes; For since they, as well as the adults, are included in the covenant of God and in His church ^a, and through Christ's blood the remission of sins ^b and the Holy Spirit, Who works faith, is promised to them no less than to the adults ^c, they must also be incorporated into the Christian church through Baptism, as through the sign of the covenant, and distinguished from the children of unbelievers ^d, as was done in the Old Covenant or Testament through Circumcision ^e, for which in the New Covenant Baptism is instituted^f.

^a Gen 17:7 ^b Mat 19:14 ^c Luk 1:15 Ps 22:10 Isa 44:1-3
Act 2:39 ^d Acts 10:47 ^e Gen 17:14 ^f Col 2:11-13

Is this correct? Has baptism in the New Covenant taken the place of circumcision in the Old Covenant?

⁶ These three theological writings were accepted by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-1619 as the confession of the Protestant church in The Netherlands at that time and still form the basis of the Dutch and Protestant churches today. The Dutch Confession of Faith was drafted by Guido de Brès in 1561, the Heidelberg Catechism was drafted by Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus in 1563, and the Dordtse Leerregels were drafted by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-1619. They are representative for protestant churches worldwide.

Baptism instead of circumcision?

The Bible shows very clearly that God commits Himself to man with promises. Right after the Fall in Genesis 3, God already mentions His plan of salvation, and promises that the Seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent (Satan), Genesis 3:15

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

The translation already shows that it is not about Eve's descendants in general, but about her Descendant Jesus Christ. Here Jesus is already presented as the Savior for all mankind.

God maintains this line of redemption through the Messiah by saving Noah and his family from the Flood. This memory lives on among virtually all the nations of the earth!

Noah's son Shem is the ancestor of Abraham. In Abraham, God's interference with us humans in the Bible takes specific shape and focuses on Israel and the nations.

God promises to make Abraham into a great nation (while he and Sarah were childless) and that through him (his Descendant/Seed – singular, Jesus, according to Galatians 3:16) all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

There are two lines of God's promises in the life of Abraham:

1. God promises to give Abraham and his natural descendants the land of Canaan. Of this promise or covenant, circumcision is the symbol based on natural birth as a descendant of Abraham.

2. God promises that in Abraham all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Circumcision is not a symbol of this, otherwise all peoples would have to be circumcised. No, this blessing came through Abraham's descendant Jesus Christ, and the key to this blessing is not natural birth but faith in Him. Baptism is the symbol of this new covenant in Jesus death showing the believers unification with Jesus in His death and resurrection. So baptism is the sign of this spiritual birth as a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

These promises of God are also known as covenants.

The covenant between God and the physical descendants of Abraham – the people and nation of Israel – is called the Old Covenant or Old Testament, marked by *circumcision* and the *law*.

The covenant between God and the spiritual descendants of Abraham – based on Jesus' blood – is called the New Covenant or New Testament, marked by *faith* and the gift of the *Holy Spirit*.

Abraham's natural descendants - by virtue of birth

The sign of God's promises and covenant with Abraham's natural offspring - circumcision - is instituted in Genesis 17. There, the institution of circumcision is about natural offspring in a naturally promised land of Canaan. Genesis 17:8-10

And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my

covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.

This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

So the institution of circumcision in Genesis 17 is about God's covenant with the natural descendants of Abraham in the natural land of Canaan. God then gave many promises throughout history and fulfilled them in corresponding deeds to His natural people Israel.

Abraham's spiritual descendants - on the basis of faith in God

In addition, God also made many promises in the Old Testament about how Abraham (and Israel) would become a blessing to all nations. This was finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Messiah - the Anointed One - descendant of Abraham. Genesis 12:3

... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Paul explains in Galatians 3 that the New Covenant in Jesus Christ is about the spiritual descendants of Abraham, namely those who have come to faith from all over the world, the Gentiles. Galatians 3:7-9

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

"Know then!" ... You only become a child of God through your faith! Galatians 3:26,29 adds:

*... for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God,
through faith.*

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ
have put on Christ.*

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor
free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in
Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are
Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

So the New Testament emphasizes that you are only a "descendant of Abraham" if you belong to Jesus "by faith." The Bible is very clear that you do not become a child of God by natural birth, but only by faith.

Colossians 2:11-13 is often incorrectly cited to show that baptism has replaced circumcision and therefore occurs by virtue of birth. Again, the Bible clearly says that *through faith* something spiritual has happened: being born again and receiving new life. Colossians 2:11-12 says:

*In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision
made without hands, by putting off the body of the
flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried
with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with
him through faith in the powerful working of God, who
raised him from the dead.*

Here it is clearly stated that the New Covenant established by Jesus is precisely NOT a continuation of physical circumcision - the biological line - but a spiritual one "by faith"! We already read in Galatians 3:7 "... those of faith who are the sons of Abraham". Colossians also points here to baptism by faith

and not by birth. So Colossians 2 does not support but contradicts infant baptism!

"For you is this promise and for your children"

In Acts 2, Peter comforts his Jewish listeners, who have just been deeply affected because they realize they have crucified Jesus, their Messiah. Acts 2: 38-39

Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

" For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off". Proponents of infant baptism say: "You see that our children automatically belong under God's promises!" But so do all who are far away! This "far off" here means both distance on earth, as well as future generations. It apparently refers to all peoples in all ages. "For you is the promise" is here the motivation of "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized". It is clear that adult hearers are meant here, for a newborn baby cannot decide to repent and be baptized. So baptism here also follows repentance and faith. The interpretation that children should be baptized here is unjustified. Then "all who are far away" - all distant peoples - should immediately be baptized as well, even before their conscious conversion and faith, and that is not what even the proponents of infant baptism believe.

The promise of Jesus Christ and His grace is for you, for your children as descendants, and for all who are distant - distant

foreign nations not yet "reached" ..., anyone who will listen and repent.

Are family relationships an argument for infant baptism?

In covenant theology, the natural relationship in domestic families is seen as the basis for infant baptism. Examples of involving families include:

- Noah and his family are saved in the flood - Genesis 7:1
- Abraham will command his children to serve God - Genesis 18:19
- Israel goes out of Egypt with "Young and old, sons and daughters, the small livestock and the cattle, everything goes with them" - Exodus 10:9
- The paschal lamb was slaughtered by family - Exodus 12:3
- Rahab was saved with all her family in her home - Joshua 2: 18vv.

All the texts are about the value of families, but the link with the baptism instituted by Jesus is not here. It is not even about circumcision here. Being born and raised in a Christian family is a special privilege, but is not connected with baptism. "Faith baptism" sees this privilege too and expresses their trust in the faithfulness of God and their gratitude by dedicating their children to God.

The "... and his house" verses

From the New Testament, the so-called "house" texts are often cited as an argument for infant baptism. A person was baptized and the people living or working in his/her house. It

is then assumed that babies were among them. These are the following Bible passages:

*** Lydia - Acts 16:14-15**

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay."

Those who were baptized were with Lydia at the place of worship, then they proceed to her house only. The Ethiopian version of Acts even speaks of her servants here, "and she was baptized with all her people." In Acts 16:40 these believers are called "the brethren". In any case, it is most obvious to think here of the helpers in her trade who also gave faith to Paul's words. It is questionable whether the businesswoman Lydia was married and had children. As such, this section is certainly not evidence for infant baptism.

*** Philippi - The Prison Guard - Acts 16:33-34**

And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

It says that they had come to faith as the basis for baptism. The Greek word for faith here is *pis'teuo*, which is primarily the commitment or dedication of faith. This is clearly not talking about babies. Nor can it be about a family, because Philippi was a Roman garrison town and the guard belonged

to the Roman army. Until AD 140, a Roman soldier like the jailer was not allowed to be married and women were not allowed in the army-post.

*** Corinth - Crispus - Acts 18:8**

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

Again, it says that all the household members came to faith (pis'teuo), the commitment of faith, and so were not babies. And those who *believed* were *baptized*. Again, a clear indication of faith baptism.

*** Corinth - the family of Stefanos. 1 Corinthians 1:16**

I did baptize also the household of Stephanas.

This is the continuation of the family of Crispus, of which we saw that those who came to faith were baptized. There is no reason to believe that this was any different with the family of Stephanas.

*** Caesarea – Cornelius – Acts 10**

Finally, among the “house” texts, Acts 10 is often mentioned, where the baptism of Cornelius, a centurion in the Roman army, with “all who were in his house” is mentioned. Cornelius was already expecting Peter and had called together his relatives and his closest friends (v. 24). Of those who were baptized, it says in verse 46-47 that they received the Holy Spirit, spoke in foreign tongues and they glorified God ! Not babies. Acts 10:46-47

... they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone

withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

Conclusion: None of these "house" texts is indicative of baby baptism, but they are all indicative of baptism by faith.

Children are holy because of their parents

Children are holy because of their parents according to 1 Corinthians 7:14

For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

What does it mean? The word translated with holy and holiness come from the Greek word *αγιον* *hagion*, used especially in Hebrews for the place where God is... sanctuary! Holy means that someone or something is in a special relationship with God.

The text says that through a believing wife or husband, both the partners and the children are also "holy" or "sanctified", meaning that they too have now come into God's presence! It does not say "and should be baptized!"

In practice, this means that these children come to know God from an early age and are privileged above many who lack this. Both the unbelieving partner and the children are "holy" and have something with God. Is that a reason to baptize them? No. If it were, the unbelieving partner would also need to be baptized, and each sees that this is not what is meant here. So it is not an argument for baptism. Biblical baptism always follows faith and repentance.

Is the kingdom of God specifically for children?

Jesus says in all three gospels Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16

But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

To such belongs the kingdom of God. This is clearly about the characteristics of children. Who is like the children? Jesus asks in Matthew 18:3

"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

What qualities these are we can somewhat sense: simplicity, humility, dependence, trust, joy As opposed to the self-righteousness and pride of our "maturity."

Does this mean that little children should be baptized? No.

Jesus did not baptize the children, but we read in Mark 10:16

And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Therefore, congregations with faith-based baptism have the practice of blessing the little children under the laying on of hands, following Jesus. This is done in the dedication of the little children to God. Later, when they themselves are responsible for their thoughts, actions and behavior, baptism on the basis of faith comes into the picture.

In short, the arguments for baptism to baby's are not valid. We do not need to worry about these children. God is both loving and just. He knows how to deal with children even if they are not yet baptized, like the children around Jesus.

But when children grow up and reach the age that they can be held accountable they will have to make the choice: Do I repent, give up my "old" life and live in Jesus Christ, as Paul explains in Romans 6:3,7,8

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
.... For one who has died has been set free from sin.
Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*

Is faith baptism an offense to someone's infant baptism?

Much "struggle" takes place around the following situation:

1. You were baptized as a child.
2. You made a "confession" of your faith, as in many churches, around age 18
3. Later you come to the understanding as an adult that baptism follows faith and not natural birth, or you only really come to faith as an adult according to John 1:12-13

Should you then be baptized again as an adult? Proponents of infant baptism think this is "denying your baptism as a baby" and it is called over-baptizing. Is that true?

Infant baptism and believer's baptism are two very different things! Therefore you cannot speak of "over-baptizing". Infant baptism - no matter what deeper value one attributes to it - is comparable to dedicating your child to God. You cannot speak of a personal choice of faith with small children. It is wonderful to dedicate your child to God from an early age. Later, when the child becomes an adult, the time comes

to choose to accept Jesus Christ in faith yourself and be baptized on that basis.

In the Bible we see multiple baptisms. One case of "over-baptizing" we see in Ephesus where Paul encounters 12 men who had already been baptized with the baptism of John the Baptist. This was a baptism of repentance (in water) and Paul now baptizes them on their faith in Jesus Christ (in Holy Spirit). So these are two different baptisms. Acts 19:1-5

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus.

There he found some disciples.

And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?"

They said, "Into John's baptism."

And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."

On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

They were baptized twice! It was ultimately about believing in the One Who was to come – Jesus.

And what about the first congregation of 5,000 people who were baptized on and just after Pentecost. How many among them were baptized before by John the Baptist? When John (the Baptist) was alive all of Judea ran out to be baptized by him. Mark 1:5 says

And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

On the first day of Pentecost 3000 people were baptized and a little later there are already 5000. Among them many will have been baptized by John the Baptist. Those men had been 1) circumcised, 2) baptized by John and now 3) baptized in the name of Jesus! Three times! Those were three very different things and quite rightly on that Day of Pentecost they let themselves be baptized in the name of Jesus on the basis of their faith.

When the Bible speaks of the one baptism, it means baptism based on repentance and faith in Jesus, as elaborated in many places in the New Testament. There is only one baptism and that is not infant baptism, no matter how much these children are loved by God and safe in His arms. Infant baptism is really the same as "dedicating" children, whereby you are sanctified in the faith of your parents. It does not have the status of Biblical baptism. Therefore, "over-baptism" on account of your faith is a wrong word for the Biblical baptism after your infant baptism.

Baptism because of your own faith in Jesus Christ is the only baptism connected to Jesus' word in John 3:3

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Confession does not take the place of baptism. It is very beautiful and good to confess your faith, but it should be immediately followed by your obedience to Jesus' word - that is what you confess - and being baptized!

Age for baptism

An important question then remains: How old do you have to be to be baptized?

A related question is: When can you be held responsible for your choices? At what age did you develop from child to mental and emotional responsible adult?

It is known that your brain is not really developed until around age 25. Do you have to wait that long?

The transition from child to adulthood is called adolescence. The ages considered part of adolescence vary by culture. In the United States, people consider adolescence to begin around age 13 and it lasts until about age 24.

The World Health Organization defines adolescence as the period of a person's life between the ages of 10 and 20.

Wikipedia says "a legal adult is a person who has attained the age of majority and is therefore regarded as independent, self-sufficient, and responsible. The typical age of attaining legal adulthood is 18, although definition may vary by legal rights, country, and psychological development."

In short, the age at which a person is expected to be able to make reliable choices is closer to 20 than it is to 10 or younger.

In any case, there comes an age when people become aware of the power of sin in their life, and that they become responsible for their behavior... feel the break with God because of these sins.

It is important to see where the adolescent stands in this process. At 8, 9 or 10 years old, children have normally not reached that point, even if they love God. At 16, 17 or 18,

teenagers may be. These ages are not hard...you need to gain insight in a personal conversation.

Are you lost if you believe but are not baptized?

It has already been said that baptism in itself has no magical power. It is an outward sign to make visible what is happening inwardly. The word baptizo /baptism means much more than a water bath... it stands for your identification with Jesus Christ through your faith in Him!

Only Jesus saves and you partake of Him through your faith and not through your baptism. So you are not lost if you believe, but due to circumstances have not yet been baptized. But you do show that you believe, by being obedient to Jesus' command and being baptized. And then Jesus word comes into the picture again in John 14:23

Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Doing what Jesus says means being baptized when you believe.

Church History focused on Baptism

We have seen that in the Bible Christians were baptized immediately after their conversion on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, history shows that pretty soon all kinds of rituals around baptism occurred, which we do not find in the Bible. How could this happen?

Questions that were prevalent in the new churches were in the first decades of Christianity answered biblically by the apostles from Jerusalem. Later this influence from the Judeo-Christian roots in Jerusalem diminished and congregations in different regions sought their own answers. Reasons for this shift were:

1. The vast increase of believers among the Gentiles compared to the believers in Jerusalem.
2. After the first Jewish revolt against the Romans, Jerusalem was conquered in AD 70 and the temple burned and demolished to the last stone. Millions of Jews were killed or taken away as slaves. Jerusalem lost its position as the beating heart of the young church.
3. The generation of disciples and followers of Jesus who had witnessed Jesus' life, death and resurrection died out.
4. In AD 135 after the second Jewish revolt against the Romans, Jerusalem became forbidden to the Jews. The land of Israel was renamed Palestine (from Philistines) and the people and the nation of Israel practically ceased to exist. The Christian Jews were

there above accused of treason and were cut off from the Jewish community. After this, the break between Christians and the Jewish people seemed final.

In Romans 9-11 we read that the very purpose of Christians from among the Gentiles is to make Israel jealous rather than to repel Israel, as happened in history. Romans 11:11

*So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall?
By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation
has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous..*

In the second century of our era, the Jewish people disappeared from Jerusalem, the temple was gone, Israel no longer existed. The great Jewish feasts were disconnected from the Jewish calendar and replaced by pagan holidays. The Jewish Passover was established in AD 196 as Easter on the feast day of the goddess Astarte. You can still see this in the English name "Easter". The Sabbath was replaced by Sunday in AD 321 under the Emperor Constantine the Great.

The promises for Israel were projected onto the Church, and the symbol of the covenant with Israel - boys were circumcised on the 8th day - was integrated into the Church as child-baptism. Later, this would return in Protestant confessional writings as "... baptism substituted for circumcision."

As early as the second century, questions and disputes emerged about infant baptism, preparation for baptism, power and effects of baptism, and many other points. Direction was given to these issues through councils. Unfortunately, not always according to God's Word. Consider that all kinds of regions like Persia, Armenia, Syria,

Jerusalem, North Africa or France, had their own specific development.

Gradually the church in Rome would gain more and more power and develop into the leading church with the pope at its head.

Baptism disconnected from repentance and faith

Baptism was soon separated from conversion and faith. In fact, several years of study preceded baptism around the year 200. Hippolytus of Rome (170-235) describes that the quality of Christians was strictly guarded by:

1. excluding certain professions from baptism
2. receiving several years of instruction before baptism: the catechumenate
3. checking the candidates (catechumens) to see if they were baptismally worthy ⁷

Well intended a kind of entrance examination to be baptized - born as a child of God. It is no longer your faith in Jesus Christ that is decisive, but your knowledge of Biblical matters and your own baptismal worthiness.

There are also more and more elements to the baptismal ritual, such as renouncing the devil, confessing faith in the baptismal water, anointing the head and body, and the kiss of

⁷ In "History of Christian worship in the West and in the East." (Wegman, 1977 p. 37) A splendid book containing much information on the history of baptism (in Dutch)

peace. A prayer of praise was said over the water before baptism⁸.

After baptism, the person baptized was given white clothes to symbolize his new covering with Christ. This is what our baptismal gown is made of.

Very early discussions arose about the baptism of children and infants. Apparently around the year 200 infant baptism was practiced, because from Tertullianus (ca. 150-222) we know, that he wanted to postpone infant baptism to a later age, so that people could decide for themselves to follow Jesus.⁹

However, the synod of 252 at Carthage (North Africa) with 67 bishops unanimously accepted infant baptism with the words:

"We are all unanimous in our opinion that no human being should be deprived of God's grace and mercy at birth. For if even the greatest of sinners, who have formerly offended severely against God, when they have later accepted the faith, should obtain forgiveness of sins and not be excluded from baptism and grace, how

⁸ See "The roots of our Baptism" by Rolanda en Peter Noordzij (Dutch). (Noordzij, 2002 p. 4). They also rely in large part on Wegman's book. (Wegman, 1977)

⁹ Tertullian (ca. 150-222) had a practical argument for postponing infant baptism. His objection concerned the great responsibility of the baptizers, who had to take care of the Christian upbringing of the children. He feared that these children would later fall into sin again and then they could not be baptized a second time (De Baptismo,18). From his book we can conclude that in his time it was normal for children to be baptized. For otherwise he would not have had to advocate the postponement of the baptism of children. (Dieperink, 2001)

much less should the newborn child be excluded who has not yet committed a sinful act, but born of Adam only according to the flesh, has by that first birth contracted the contagion of the old death guilt."

Thus, "newborn children should not be excluded from baptism because of their innocence". Using this human logic instead of Bible authority, you could baptize all the newborn children of the whole world, but surely that was not the idea of Jesus' command in Matthew 28. Check for yourself that this completely invalidates "baptizo" baptism as Jesus instituted and described it in Romans 6. Note that in the statement of this Synod of Carthage, the last sentence speaks of being infected with the death debt of Adam through your natural birth. Later this would be elaborated as "original sin," a theological concept not found in the Bible. Baptism would deliver you from the curse of this original sin. This became a major self-conceived but un-Biblical argument for infant baptism.

Christianity becomes state religion

A landmark year in church history is AD 313. After many years of persecution for Christians who would not worship the emperor as God, Emperor Constantine the Great came to power. He issued the Edict of Milan (Tolerance Edict) in that year 313: Christians were granted freedom of religion. Christian persecution thus came to an end in this part of the Roman Empire. State and church actually entered into an alliance at that time.

In 321 Emperor Constantine decreed that Sunday would become the day of rest in his empire. In 325, the emperor convened the famous Council of Nicea, where, among other

things, a creed was established. That council marked the end of the early Christian period.¹⁰

Emperor Constantine the Great made large donations to the church. The splendor of the imperial donations defined the image of the Church of Rome, and so the power of the church leadership in Rome grew.

Christians were appointed to important positions in the now Christian Roman Empire. Many people became so-called Christians for career reasons. This eroded the spiritual life of the church. There was little difference in those days between these new Christians and old pagans.

Emperor Constantine is reported to have said, "I might well be the God-appointed bishop over the exterior of the church." It gradually came to a complete domination of the state over the church. Emperor Theodosius even banned pagan worship around AD 388,¹¹ ... Pagan persecution rather than Christian persecution.

¹⁰ Historiek - Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor (Koops, 2016). Koops writes: "The Edict of Tolerance marks a crucial moment in world history: in effect, at that moment state and church entered into an alliance. From this event, the Roman Catholic Church also began to see itself increasingly as the spiritual successor to the state Roman Empire, which would subsequently fall into decline.

In 321, Constantine determined that Sunday would become the day of rest in his empire. From 324, after having the Eastern Roman emperor Licinius put to death in the spring, Constantine was autocrat of the Roman Empire. A year later, the emperor convened the famous Council of Nicea. At this council, among other things, a creed was established and the church condemned the teachings of Arius. The council marked the end of the early Christian period."

¹¹ History of the Church - 9 part book series (Itterzon, et al., 1963 - 2nd revised edition pp. dl 2 - p8). The time after the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great is described, "It gradually came to a complete

With this, the status of the Bishop of Rome grew and the church services in which he presided took on an extra solemn character. The bishop of Rome became more and more pope (papa) and to this extent his liturgy and position became more solemn and he developed the title "Vicar of Jesus Christ on Earth" as the successor of Peter.

In this 4th century of church peace and Roman state church, the content of the catechumenate as preparation for baptism changed. It WAS a path of conversion, but became a step of social inclusion. One became a catechumenate - baptismal candidate - and thus an official (state) church member, with career opportunities, but without church responsibilities. A half-Christian state of life. Baptism itself was postponed.¹²

In this 4th century, baptism was increasingly seen as a one-time way to forgive sins. It was taught (un-Biblically) that you were lost after your baptism if you still sinned. As a result, people increasingly postponed baptism until just before your death. Thus, in the 4th and 5th centuries, you could live a dissolute life and, by being baptized at the last minute, still appear before God without sin. Constantine the Great was also baptized only just before his death on May 22, 337. Children were baptized only if the parents dared to take the step of baptizing their children anyway.

The meaning of baptism was tossed back and forth between all sorts of winds of doctrine.

domination of the state government over the church, until at last under Theodosius about 388 the Nicene Creed was declared the foundation of the empire, the pagan temples were destroyed or made into Christian churches, and pagan worship was forbidden on severe penalties."

¹² History of Christian worship (Wegman, 1977 p. 83 vv)

The churches were not happy about delaying baptism because of possible sins, and opened ways to still forgive sins after baptism. Thus, confession and settlement of sins through prayers and penance took off.

Original sin and final emergence of infant baptism

On May 1, AD 418, there was another synod in Carthage with 200 bishops. Here original sin was discussed. It was established, that you inherit your sinful nature from your (for) parents and must be redeemed from it - totally un-Biblically - by baptism. Not the Biblical way of faith in Jesus Christ, but redemption from this so-called inherited sin was seen as the basis for baptism. However, the Bible clearly states that the sins of the fathers are not imputed to the children. Ezekiel 18:2-4 (BK)

"Why do the people of Israel use the proverb: The children are punished for the sins committed by their fathers? So where I live, says the Supreme LORD, you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. For all souls belong to Me (both of fathers and sons), and this is My maxim: A man shall die exclusively for his own sins."

Nevertheless, this synod became an important basis for the institution of infant baptism. This paved the way for many church leaders/bishops to start baptizing children¹³. This is also the background of the so-called emergency baptism: a baby who was about to die did need to be baptized quickly to be saved from original sin. Therefore, anyone was allowed to perform this emergency baptism.

¹³ The roots of our baptism (Noordzij, 2002)

This baptism of children also fitted better into man's thinking for other reasons:

1. The covenant between God and physical Israel in the Old Testament was made visible in the circumcision of young boys on the 8th day after birth. By birth you belonged to the natural people of God, Israel. Circumcision was the sign of this covenant with God. This line was extended to baptism, completely against Jesus' teaching in John 3. After all, there it says that one does not enter the Kingdom of God by natural birth but by being born again. Despite this, infant baptism became more and more normal. In the current baptismal form in churches that practice infant baptism you still read literally "Because therefore now Baptism has come in the place of circumcision, so the young children, as heirs of the kingdom of God and of His covenant, shall be baptized." In the Bible, we read just the opposite in Colossians 2:11-12.
2. The church was also dealing with ancient pagan rituals, where children were not named until their naming day. This naming day took place after the first risky weeks or months in children's lives, when it became clear that you would survive. Officially, children only then came to "life." It was even called rebirth in these pagan cultures, and sometimes came with a ritual of sprinkling with water. It was connected to the idea that the person you were named after lived on in you. So the name did something to you. So infant baptism could nicely "replace" this pagan ritual of "officially recognized

life." From this we derive the custom of "baptismal names""¹⁴.

By the 6th century, infant baptism had thus become quite common. The emphasis was on the removal of original sin in newborns. However, the baptismal liturgies still stated that the baptized had to answer the baptismal questions to testify to his/her faith. This was inconvenient for infants, so "godparenthood" was introduced in the late 6th century. Two people, the "Peter" and the "Meter" answered the baptismal questions instead of the baby and became substitute "witnesses" to the faith.¹⁵

The custom of anointing the baptized and laying on of hands immediately after baptism pointed in tradition to the inner anointing with the Holy Spirit. This anointing and laying on of hands was first done by priests, but gradually left to the bishop (regional church leader). Since the bishop could not always be present at every infant baptism, this anointing was separated from baptism.

As a result, baptism and the gift of God's Spirit took on a life of their own in church history. Baptism was there for the forgiveness of original sin, and receiving God's Spirit was part of the anointing by the bishop.

The role of the Holy Spirit thus became smaller and smaller in the Western Church and was linked to the visit of the bishop. Thus Confirmation emerged as a separate sacrament of laying on of hands-anointing-cross by the bishop, separate

¹⁴ (Giessen, 2006)

¹⁵ (Noordzij, 2002)

from Baptism which was administered by the priest.¹⁶ Even today, Roman Catholic children can receive confirmation/oil anointing at age 12.

The original baptism instituted by Jesus thus snowballed in church history and became unrecognizable in traditions with infant baptism.

From the 12th to 14th centuries, sprinkling became the normal mode of baptism in Western Europe, although immersion continued in addition until the 16th century.¹⁷

Reformation and Anabaptists

The multiformity in the development of the church until the early 16th century cannot be captured in a few sentences.

We see genuine faith and devotion of a few through the centuries, but the big picture is a downward spiral with a revival here and there. The official church decayed into unimaginable corruption, wickedness and morality.¹⁸

Knowledge of the Word of God was often nil. Luther, for example, first got his hands on a Latin Bible in 1501. He was 18 years old at the time and had not seen a Bible before that.

¹⁶ About confirmation (Wegman, 1977 p. 136)

¹⁷ Throughout the Middle Ages there was considerable variation in the type of facility required for baptism, from the baptismal pool large enough to immerse several adults at once in the 13th-century baptistery at Pisa, to the half-meter-deep basin in the baptistery of ancient Cologne Cathedral." (Wikipedia)

¹⁸ The general "History of the Church" describes the far-reaching greed and morality of popes, bishops, priests, abbots and monks and the reaction to it as a run-up to the Reformation (Itterzon, et al., 1963 - 2e herz. druk pp. deel 3,4,5)

He only then discovered that the Bible contained many more texts, gospels and letters than he had heard in the church.

There were fortunately many pious people left who felt that profound changes were needed. Translations of Bible passages into the vernacular languages brought attention back to the Bible. Thus the ground was prepared for the Reformation. In 1517, Martin Luther actually ignited this reform with the publication of his 95 Theses against abuses in the Roman Catholic Church with its infamous trade in "indulgences"¹⁹. In many places in Europe, such a reformation reared its head. Thanks to the printing press, more and more people had access to the Bible. There was a hunger for God's Word and a desire to live by God's Word.

Despite the reformation under Luther, Calvin and, in Switzerland, Zwingli, not much changed among their followers in terms of infant baptism.²⁰ The rationale for infant baptism at that time was intertwined with church and secular government and power. For infant baptism also meant "incorporation into the church" by which you were thus under church authority. You were thus in the picture and registered through your baptism and were thus also under secular government and authority. People wanted to keep it that way. Through adult baptism many people could become and remain out of the picture. It would go too far to go into these socio-political backgrounds here.

¹⁹ An indulgence is a remission of a temporary punishment for your sins by the church. In Luther's time, people could buy these indulgences. The proceeds were mainly used to build St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City.

²⁰ The Reformation choice - The celebration of baptism in the church (Wegman, 1977 p. 220 vv)

With the rediscovery of the Bible by ordinary people, not only did the misinformation of the old Roman Catholic Church come to light, but new insights flared up. One such insight concerned baptism based on one's faith rather than birth. Groups of believers emerged in various parts of Europe - especially among the lower class - who advocated this faith-based baptism. They were called "Anabaptists" or "Anabaptists," due to their "over-baptism" as adults. These were basically peace-loving people who wanted to live in the spirit of Jesus Christ. This required a thorough inner conversion. You had to become a new person, "born again" according to John 3, and focus completely on Jesus Christ. Many Anabaptists felt that for them the new age had arrived of the Kingdom of God on earth, where God reigns in the hearts of men. All evil is done away in that kingdom of peace and there is no more poverty. The latter appealed greatly to these generally very poor people.

Church leaders and civil authorities were not happy about this adult baptism. It undermined their control over society. After all, infant baptism was also a means of registration with the government and bonding with the church. It is too weak to say that both Catholics and Lutherans discouraged adult baptism. Horrific persecution of these "Anabaptists" sometimes ensued. Both those who baptized adults and those who baptized adults could even face the death penalty in some areas.

Unfortunately, abuses occurred again among these Anabaptists. A violent branch of these Anabaptists was able to flourish because of the dire poverty of many people and oppression by the rich.²¹ These "desperados" or desperate

²¹ (Wikipedia, 2019)

people expected to be delivered from their dire poverty by the coming of the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20.

The city of Munster in Germany developed into the city of these Anabaptists in 1533, who believed it would become the new Jerusalem. The rich and Lutherans fled the city and the poor divided the wealth among themselves. In 1535, the city was "recaptured" after 15 months of siege. The leaders were killed.

Then in the Netherlands there were also acts of violence by Anabaptists, who mainly targeted the property of churches and government. Well known is the attack on the city hall of Amsterdam (1535). Because of these excesses, the Anabaptists came to this day in a bad light. Many died as martyrs for their faith in the early days of our Reformation. Anyone who was an Anabaptist, or sheltered an Anabaptist, was executed. Despite this, there were many followers, especially in Friesland. Here Menno Simonsz (1496 - 1561) gained increasing influence from about 1539 and led them in more peaceful directions²². In other countries, Anabaptists are still called Mennonites (Mennonites) after this foreman.

As mentioned, the Protestant Church and Roman Catholic Church strongly opposed "these Anabaptists and other insurgents." We find this reaction against the Anabaptists in confessional writings in favor of infant baptism.

Adult baptism in the Netherlands from the Reformation onward

²² See "Highlights of Church History" article series - Part 7: Anabaptists: a reformation overshoot (Groenewold)

In the course of time more and more groups came to recognize faith-based baptism - adult baptism - as correct and not the historically rooted infant baptism.

- From around 1521 we see the rise of the Anabaptists or "Wederdopers" with the dramatic outbreak of disorder around 1535. From 1579 they were no longer persecuted for their faith, they were tolerated, but not allowed to visibly practice their faith. Thus they became the "quiet ones in the land." A famous Mennonite of that time was the Dutch poet/writer Joost van den Vondel.

In the Netherlands, over time, Mennonites became increasingly liberal. Right-wing Mennonites left the "Doopsgezinden" and went over to Free Evangelical Churches or to the Reformed churches. Now the Baptist church is known as liberal with personal religious freedom held in high regard.

- **The Baptists** originated in Holland in 1609 from a group of believing refugees from England who came into contact with Dutch Baptists (Doopsgezinden) in Amsterdam. They had to flee from England because they had founded their own church out of dissatisfaction with the half-baked reformation in the official English state church. In Holland they came to the understanding of faith baptism. Later, some of them returned to England where they were called Baptists. Thus from 1609 the Baptist church grew in Holland, England to presently a worldwide community.
- **The "Assembly of Believers"** was another separation from the Anglican Church in England in 1828. They

wanted to meet without outward show simply as believers in simple loving meetings as brothers and sisters. That blew over to the Netherlands. Baptism takes place by immersion based on one's faith. There is no denomination, institution or organizational form. One basically comes together simply as brothers and sisters ... an "assembly of believers".

- **Evangelical and Pentecostal groups** emerged from revival movements in America beginning in the 19th century and also spread throughout the Netherlands in the 20th century. Personal faith is central to this and with it baptism to adults based on their faith.

Closing

In these fragments of baptismal history we see that from the second century onward, infant baptism has played a major role. It is also striking that in this history of baptism, biblical teaching has often had to bow to what people think is right or just. A theology of its own was built around baptism. Baptism was also used to support registration in church or world power structures. Thus the meaning and practice of baptism bowed under the opinion of men, rather than according to the Word of God.

The history of baptism has been outlined here in very broad terms and hopefully provides tools to discern human traditions from the Word of God.

Summary

Baptism is an essential element of our faith and relationship with God. Jesus does not say "baptize them and teach them to keep" for nothing. Baptism marks your demise as an "old man" and your beginning as a "child of God." The Greek word for baptism "baptizo" means much more than our word baptism. It implies a definite change, like a ship sinking or a person drowning. Baptism means the demise of your old person and the rising of you as a new person. You become one with Jesus and child of God.

Baptism thus marks a very radical moment in the life of a Christian. A birth followed by spiritual life "in Christ," but still in enemy territory. Baptism, therefore, cannot be separated from the spiritual growth and struggle that follows. This growth and victory in battle can only occur through hearing and doing God's Word. Through your rebirth as God's child, you receive God's Spirit - The Spirit of the Father and the Son - to help you.

Repentance and faith are the basis for baptism. Therefore, infant baptism is not baptism in the Biblical sense; it has grown historically in the church. This infant baptism corresponds to the ordination of children in evangelical churches. Baptism based on one's faith as an adult is thus not an overbaptism, but the intended Biblical baptism.

The age for baptism is where a person mentally emotionally begins to realize and take responsibility to God, and repents. It is difficult to pinpoint an age for this, but this age will be closer to 20 than to 10.

Processing

Individual

1. Describe in your own words the meaning of the word baptizo and baptisma. Do this without using our word "baptize" in your description.
2. Describe the following text in your own words, considering which is clearer to read here: "baptism" that saves us or "identification with Jesus."

1 Peter 3:21".... an image pointing forward to the baptism by which you are now saved. This baptism does not wash the dirt from the body, but is a request to God for a clean conscience. Baptism saves you thanks to the resurrection of Christ."

3. Read Mark 7:4, Heb. 6:2 and Heb. 9:10. These three texts use the word baptismos and not the word baptizo. In Hebrews 6, our Dutch translation reads "a doctrine of baptism." Check whether this means that there are different Christian baptisms or whether it refers to ritual washing. After all, the word baptismos, used here, means washings without any substantial change in the object, as they were prescribed in Judaism for various occasions.
4. Read Luke 3:1-22 The baptism of John - preparer of Jesus. Describe in your own words, like a short newspaper report, how John here turns the image of "Surely we are the people of God/we are members of the church!" upside down and what he says in its place!

Then you can decide for yourself whether you would stand by the Jordan River and watch, or whether you

would descend and sink into the Jordan River in front of everyone. Would you surrender to the Kingdom of God?

5. The text says, "Baptism is not so much your initiation as a Christian, but really REPRESENTATION as a Christian. Notice this difference!" Initiation is initiation into an "order" as a ritual. What is this difference? Describe this difference in the style of a short letter to someone (or yourself) and incorporate Romans 6, Ezekiel 11:19 and Ezekiel 36:26 in your own words.
6. Study the following "baptismal texts" and before the word baptism, always read aloud "our union with Jesus Christ" for the correct meaning and see if the text is then clearer.
 - 6.1. Baptism leads to your salvation. Mark 16:16
 - 6.2. Baptism brings forgiveness of sins. Acts 2:38
 - 6.3. Baptism washes away sins. Acts 22:16
 - 6.4. Baptism frees from sin. Romans 6:4-7
 - 6.5. Baptism cleanses the church. Ephesians 5:25-27
 - 6.6. Baptism buries (and awakens) with Christ. Colossians 2:12
 - 6.7. Baptism is the water bath of regeneration. Titus 3:5
 - 6.8. Baptism saves. 1 Peter 3:21 Compare this with Ephesians 1 where it is repeated that we have everything "in Him," "in Christ." Check that this also means here "in our union with Jesus."
7. In baptism, of course, there is no room at all for impure motives. In fact, there are people who are baptized

because the warmth of the church community attracts them. The Sunday service and weekly circles are then like a warm blanket and one goes with the flow and also gets baptized, including a testimony that you know is expected of you. Test yourself whether you really give yourself to Jesus even if it costs you your life! or whether you are merely seeking a place in a warm church.

8. Unfortunately, history has emphasized baptismal instruction, sometimes for years, only then being allowed to be baptized. Why does this fit or not fit the meaning of baptism?
9. In Jesus you are more than conqueror, a super conqueror. Consider how this plays out in the lives of Christians in John 16:33, Romans 8, Romans 12:21, Hebrews 11:33, 1 John 2:13,14, 1 John 4:4 and Revelation 12:11. What does it mean for you to be victorious "in Jesus"?
10. Compare Hebrews 12:1-3, Romans 6:12-14 and Romans 12:1-2 with its elaboration in the rest of that chapter. In 3 sentences in simple language, write down what you see in these as marching orders for you for the rest of your life.
11. Spiritual struggles. Go through Ephesians 6 carefully about spiritual battle. There are orders in here for believers. Examine how you wield the "weapons" God gives you for this battle in your life. Pray specifically for growth at each point. Possible focal points include:
 - 11.1. Girded with truth means that you correct past lies and live in truth on all fronts. It is your

clothing, that is how people recognize you. Compare Psalm 15

- 11.2. The armor of righteousness. It is not only because you are doing the truth, but also because your guilt with God has been forgiven. You are free! Jesus has borne your debt. You have been bought and paid for! Arrows of accusations by Satan "You are not good enough" ricochet off. Straighten your back and thank God.
- 11.3. The sandals on your feet can be seen as how you stand in this world. That is your firm belief in the gospel without deviating an inch from it, but also "the commitment to the gospel of peace" as the NBV puts it. This commitment is a clear command. If every Christian had seen this as a daily marching order, every nation on this earth would have been reached by now. The word commitment/ preparedness also means preparing to bring the gospel of peace. This is where your desire for Bible study and prayer emerges to share the gospel with others in the best way.
- 11.4. The shield of faith represents your trust in God and Jesus and their Word as revealed in the Bible. You are now God's child with the Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son in your heart. Use this shield. Cry out to God and believe His Word. Psalm 50 verse 15 has been called the alarm number of heaven. It has everything to do with this.
- 11.5. Your helmet is your salvation. You have been bought and paid for by Jesus Christ. No matter what

blows you take, you have been ransomed for God's eternity through Jesus alone! Jesus is your helmet!

11.6. The sword of the Spirit is God's Word. You must know God's Word then. That is a growth process, so don't be frustrated if it comes step by step. Everything from God's Word hanging in your memory helps you see through error and choose God. The Holy Spirit brings God's Word to your mind at the right time usually as far as what you have already heard or read. Set a plan for yourself to grow in this.

11.7. Pray in this! God listens to every sincere prayer no matter how simple. The power of prayer is not in the excellence of the person praying, but in the faithfulness and love of the One who listens: God!

If you go through life praying (just with your eyes open!), asking God's blessing for those around you, etc.... then things change because God answers prayers. Maybe differently than you have in mind ... better! Make arrangements with yourself how to live a prayerful life. God has it written down in Philippians 4:6 for a reason:

"Be anxious in nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your desires be made known to God."

12. Consider whether your experience of baptism does justice to the meaning of baptism as baptizo (you change completely and take on the mind of Jesus) or baptisma (something overwhelms you like a tsunami). Do you

realize the awesome actuality that baptism portrays your identification with Jesus Christ?

13. Read John 3 again and try to get an understanding of being born again. What spiritual impact does this being born again, God's Spirit now walking with you in your life and growing up, have on this enemy territory where the devil is still pulling at you on all sides?
14. 14. Baptism is more than a ritual. It is, on our part, in many cases, choosing God at the risk of our lives... showing this. It is also a step of spiritually coming home to God "in Jesus." You regularly see that people, who do not make the step of baptism, fall back into their old life. You see this especially in countries where the choice of baptism clearly gives struggle, but also fruit! What do you notice about this choice **in your situation?**
15. 15. Baptism shows that you are "in Jesus." What key words can you find for "being in Jesus"? You find this expression especially in Ephesians 1 and the first letter of John. Example: in Jesus I am more than conqueror. List yourself with: In Jesus I am ,
In Jesus I am , In Jesus I am
How do you experience that, that you may now continue "in Jesus" as a child of God?
16. List again the facts that distinguish faith baptism from infant baptism.
 - 16.1. Has baptism replaced circumcision?
 - 16.2. Should children be baptized because their parents are Christians?
 - 16.3. Does God's New Covenant involve natural birth or repentance and faith?

- 16.4. Consider whether baptizing on the basis of your faith as an adult can be seen as over-baptizing if you have already been baptized as a child.
- 16.5. How old do you have to be to undergo baptism by faith? What are your considerations in this regard?

Small group conversation

The following discussion questions are not so much for simple answers, but to get a group discussion going. You will then be able to discuss the topic from different perspectives.

Baptism and Baptizo

1. What does the Biblical word Baptizo mean?
2. Does it (and in what) differ from our understanding of the word baptism?

Baptism - ritual only

You show that you believe in the Lord Jesus and want to live with God from now on. God has given you this sign to confirm that you have been born or risen from death into a new life in Jesus Christ. Peter illustrates this new life as a yearning of your soul for holiness:

1 Peter 3:21 NBV "...Baptism does not wash the dirt from your body; it is a request to God for a clean conscience."

What does this mean? Can we ask for this thanks to the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Does it imply the assurance of God's assistance in this life after baptism?

3. Do you recognize this change in your own life?

Life after baptism "in Christ"

4. Baptism shows that you are "in Christ," born again. What does "in Christ" mean in your daily life?

Birth or faith?

Recap the facts that distinguish faith baptism from infant baptism.

5. Does God's New Covenant involve natural birth or repentance and faith?
6. Has baptism replaced circumcision?
7. Should children be baptized because their parents are Christians?
8. So what does God's Word say about children?

Growth and struggle

9. What does it take - after baptism - to grow as a child of God?
10. What struggles can you expect in the present age?

How to move forward?

Jesus says in Matthew 28 "19 Go therefore, teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

11. How can you take that to heart in your situation?

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