

Baptism by Comparison

Comparing the New Testament model of baptism
to baptism methods & forms used today

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There are few topics in the religious world that are more debated than the topic of baptism. Each religious group has a specific teaching on baptism, its purpose & place, and method of determining candidates for baptism. The purpose behind this study is to examine the Biblical model of baptism. Upon such an examination, we will be able to compare all other “baptisms” to the Biblical model, and determine if the baptism we have experienced is the same as the Biblical baptism.

Clarity in understanding Biblical writing (or any writing) begins with a consistent method of reading the text. As we approach any Biblical writing, we must employ sound, consistent tools in order to ensure proper understanding. This is especially important in Biblical matters, since our faith & practices come from Scripture, and we do not want to misunderstand or misapply the teaching.

All Biblical teaching had a meaning to the immediate audience that received it. Since we are removed from this original audience & its culture, we must discover what the author intended when he wrote, then we will be able to determine how this applies to us today. In matters of application, we must use the same application that the author intended. Tools used to determine such matters include the context of the passage, consistent use & meaning of the term by its author, and the understanding of the original languages used by the author of the text.

As we approach this topic, it is important to remain sensitive to the following facts:

1. The Bible is **God’s Word**, or message.
2. The Bible is **without error** in its original manuscripts.
3. The Bible is **unchanging**, and timeless.
4. Correct interpretation & application of Scripture is **essential**.

In every case of faith, we must take God’s Word as the authority. The Scriptures offer authority over any man-made group, practice, tradition or teaching. Since the Scripture is clear in its presentation of baptism, we must be equally clear in our handling of the issue. Our practice and doctrinal teaching regarding baptism must match what God has already said about baptism, or we are not faithful to His Word. Additionally, we will discover that anything that falls short of God’s model of baptism also falls short of being a valid baptism honored by God.

We begin our study by looking at the use and meaning of the word “*baptism*”.

The word “*baptize*” that we use is translated from the original language that the writers of the New Testament used. The writers spoke & wrote in the Greek language, and our translation must use the same understanding of the word “*baptize*” in order to ensure a correct application of the word. Fortunately, the Greek language is a common language that is easily translated and understood.

The writers of the New Testament used the Greek word **βαπτίζω** (*baptizo*) that we have translated as “*baptize*” in our modern Bible translations. The Greek word means “*to dip, plunge, immerse.*” In understanding the meaning of the original word, we are able to ensure that our model of baptism measures up to the model that is consistently used in the New Testament, and that it fits the use and meaning of the word used by New Testament writers.

By understanding that “*baptism*”, as used by the New Testament writers, meant “*to dip, plunge, im-*

merse” we are able to determine that “*baptism*” in the New Testament, meant immerse. This is further verified by examining the method used in all baptisms recorded in the New Testament.

The Baptism of John the Baptist was immersion. **John 3:23** specifically mentions that John was baptizing in Aenon near Salim because there was “*much water there*”, and Mark 1 records that both John & Jesus went down “*in the water*” at Jesus’ baptism.

The Ethiopian eunuch was baptized by Philip in **Acts 8:38-39**, and these verses tell us that the eunuch stopped the chariot when he discovered a body of water beside the road; a body of water large enough that both Philip & the eunuch could go “*down into the water*” and then “*come up out of the water*”. This is immersion, since sprinkling or pouring would not necessitate going down into the water, or coming up out of the water; nor would “*much water*” be needed.

Every reference to baptism in the New Testament is speaking of immersion, or a complete covering. However, some of the New Testament texts that speak of “*baptism*” are not speaking of a literal, water baptism. Each of these texts are clearly identified by their context, have nothing to do with the teaching of salvation, and hold to the same application of a complete covering or immersion. These texts include:

Mark 10:38 & 39, Luke 12:50, which are the words of Christ in reference to His death. Additional texts include: **Mark 1:8, 10:38, 39, Luke 3:16, John 1:26, 33, Acts 1:5, 11:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:2**. Each of these additional verses (except 1 Cor. 10:2) is speaking of the baptism of the Holy Spirit; the Corinthian text is referring to the Israelites’ baptism into Moses in the cloud and the sea.

As stated, though these specific texts do not refer to water baptism, the application of the use of the term still signifies a complete covering or immersion. (A complete commitment, participation or identification... “*covering*”, in the event being referenced.) From this use of the word, we are able to conclude that immersion is the only method of water baptism used in the New Testament, and immersion is intended for our application of baptism today.

Having established the Biblical form of baptism, we are now able to look at the qualifications of the candidates of baptism, according to the New Testament pattern. A word search for “*baptism*” in the New American Standard Bible, 1995 edition (NASB’95) reveals 20 occurrences of the word. A word search for “*baptize*”, “*baptized*” & “*baptizing*” from the NASB’95 reveals 71 occurrences. These account for every New Testament record of baptism, & are listed for your personal study at the end of this document.

Every single baptism in the New Testament holds the following common factors:

1. Biblical baptism is for adults. Not one single record of infant baptism is found in the entire Bible. So, where did the teaching of infant baptism come from? This application began as a result of poor teaching in the late second century by Irenaeus, who wrongly concluded that man “*is born in sinfulness*”. By the early third century the misapplication was continued in the teaching of Tertullian who stated that every soul, because of Adam, was unclean and evil “*until it is born again in Christ.*” This is the introduction of the doctrine of “*partial depravity*” which prevailed in much of Christendom until the late fourth & early fifth centuries. At that time, Augustine declared that man not only “*inherited*” partial sin from Adam, but that man was “*totally deprived*” from before birth. Since baptism was undisputed in being the place where God removes sin, Augustine concluded that the only cure for this total depravity was the cure of baptism, even of infants. This was a widely accepted practice that has become concentered in much of the religious world today, and is directly tied to the false teaching of total depravity, known today as “**Calvinism**” or “**Augustinianism**”.

2. Biblical baptism is immersion of adults. Not a single baptism in Scripture records a form, or

method of baptism other than immersion. Remember, the word *“baptism”* literally means *“to dip, plunge, immerse.”* This means that the *“forms of baptism”* widely used by many in religious circles are not actually baptism. Forms like sprinkling or pouring are not valid since they do not match the Biblical model of immersion. Some have argued that sprinkling, pouring and immersion are all *“baptism”*, yet the Greek language has words for each. *ῥαντίζω (rhantizo)* is the Greek word for *“sprinkling”*, *χεύω (cheo)* is the Greek word for *“pour”*. Since the Greek language has separate words for each, it is not reasonable to replace the meaning of *“baptism”* with *“pour”* or *“sprinkle”*, nor is it correct to say that these three terms are interchangeable.

So, where did the practice of sprinkling or pouring come from? Following the acceptance of Augustine’s doctrine of total depravity, the Roman Church instituted an acceptance of the practice of sprinkling & pouring, since these were easier than completely immersing a newborn infant. Eventually, since everyone was being sprinkled or poured as an infant, (a practice known as Christening) the Biblical form of immersion was “phased out”.

3. Biblical baptism resembles death, burial & resurrection. Baptism was a widely known & accepted practice in the Jewish community long before Jesus implemented it as a part of His plan for our forgiveness. Because it was widely accepted as a significant act of devotion, it was reasonable for Jesus to use as a practice for identifying His followers. There is another reason for Jesus using baptism. **Romans 6:3-7** states that baptism is the point at which we are identified with the death of Christ, and *“raised up”* with Him in His resurrection. That is a wonderful word picture of what actually happens at our baptism. We are *“buried with Christ”* and *“raised up with Him”*. This use of phrasing helps enforce the baptism by immersion model. Think about it: do we sprinkle dirt onto a casket & refer to it as burial? No! We cover the casket completely, just like immersion resembles burial by our complete covering over with water. Sprinkling & pouring do not accomplish this. Additionally, if we are sprinkled or poured we cannot *“rise up from the grave”* as is clearly done in immersion. We come up out of the covering of water, just as Jesus came up from within the covering of the grave. As a result, New Testament baptism acts as a proclamation of the Gospel by symbolically referencing Christ’s death, burial & resurrection.

4. Biblical baptism resembles new birth. Jesus refers to this new birth when speaking with a leader of the Jewish people, named Nicodemus. **John 3** records their conversation together. During this conversation, Jesus states that in order for someone to be in the Kingdom of Heaven, they must be *“born again”*. Nicodemus asked how this is possible, since a person cannot enter the mother’s womb again when they are old. Jesus answers by saying that we must be born of water and the Spirit in order to be born again. This *“new birth”* that is mentioned here is directly linked to Christian baptism. How do we know this? Because Jesus mentions being *“born of water”* and *“born of the Spirit”* as being two actions that occur simultaneously, or in the same event. The only place where water & the Spirit of God are joined is at our baptism. **Acts 2:38** states that at our baptism our sins are forgiven and we are filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact, there are only two events in the New Testament that speak of the Holy Spirit being given before Christian Baptism occurs. The first is at Pentecost, where the Spirit of God is poured out upon the Apostles. The second is with the household of Cornelius (nearly 10 years later), where the Holy Spirit is poured out in the same manner upon the Gentiles as a statement to the Apostles that God was saving all people who would accept His Gospel and become obedient to its terms. Outside of these two events, every single event in the New Testament that marks the receiving of the Holy Spirit is upon baptism.

Now we know that Biblical baptism is immersion of adults, resembling death, burial & resurrection and also resembling a new birth through water & the Spirit. But there is more!

5. Biblical baptism clothes us with Christ. Biblical baptism is unique in how it clothes us with Christ. All other forms are insufficient in “*clothing*” us. **Galatians 3:26-27** states that we are God’s sons through faith in Christ, having been clothed with Christ in our baptism. Think about it, a sprinkling doesn’t describe being clothed, nor does a pouring. However, a complete covering does! If we were told as children to get dressed and we went into our rooms and threw (sprinkled) our clothes on top of us, would we be clothed? Would our parents be able to recognize the difference? It is the same with God! He wants us clothed with Christ, not sparsely garmented.

6. Biblical baptism portrays a washing or cleansing. Using a similar scenario as above, imagine your father or mother telling you to take a bath, and you go into the washroom and run water while splashing it upon your face & body. Would this fit the criteria of a bath in the eyes of your parents? The Bible describes a washing that Baptism does for us. **1 Peter 3:21** states that baptism washes our sins, not by a removal of dirt from the body (like a regular bath) but by an appeal for a good conscience from God. **Titus 3:5** uses similar phrasing about baptism by stating that it is a washing by regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. **Acts 22:16** also states that we wash away our sins when we are baptized, “...*calling on the name of the Lord.*” This washing, regeneration, renewal and appeal for a good conscience from God only happens in our baptism. How can water baptism wash or cleanse away my sin? Our next point addresses this.

7. Biblical baptism identifies us with Christ’s death, and covers us with His blood. The Apostle Paul writes in **Ephesians 1:7** that we have redemption in Christ through His blood, and he continues in **Ephesians 2:13** to state that although we were once far away from God, we have been brought near to Him by the blood of Jesus. Since we cannot go back to Golgotha, to the place where Jesus died, and find His blood there, God has provided a means through which we are brought into contact with the blood of Christ. We are identified with the blood of Christ when we have been identified with the death of Christ. This identification only occurs at our baptism, this is doubly important in terms of the “form” of baptism, since we want to be completely covered with the blood of Christ, and not just sprinkled or poured.

8. Biblical baptism saves us, and fills us with His Holy Spirit. Much of the argument in the religious world about baptism centers around the teaching of forgiveness & salvation. Most groups teach that we are saved by faith in Christ alone, and that baptism is an act (or work) of righteousness on our part as an action of obedience to God. This is often referred to as “*faith only*” salvation and is the most widely accepted teaching in the religious world today. Although faith is an essential component in our salvation, Scripture does not state that we are saved by “*faith alone.*” This is a teaching that began as a direct result of the arrogance of a man named **Huldreich Zwingli in 1523**. The understanding of Biblical baptism was unanimously held by the Church for 1500 years until Zwingli completely replaced the correct view with his own. His view held that baptism was the same as the O.T. covenant sign of circumcision... teaching it as an “*outward sign of an inward covenant.*” Zwingli boldly stated: “*In this matter of baptism, all the doctors have been in error from the time of the Apostles.*” Essentially, he elected himself as the only “*enlightened one*” and usurped the authority & practice of the Apostles by placing his non-inspired teaching above their Holy Spirit inspired teaching. Sadly, John Calvin accepted this new teaching and it became known as the “*Reformed view of baptism*”, during the Reformation movement of the 16th Century. This dangerous teaching concluded that man is saved by placing his faith & trust in Christ alone, and, upon salvation in faith, becomes a candidate for baptism as an act of righteousness... being an “*outward sign of salvation.*” James, the brother of the Lord Jesus, puts this idea to rest in **James 2:24**. This is the only passage in the entire Bible where the words “*faith*” and “*alone*” are used side by side. In this text, James says that we are not saved by “*faith alone*”.

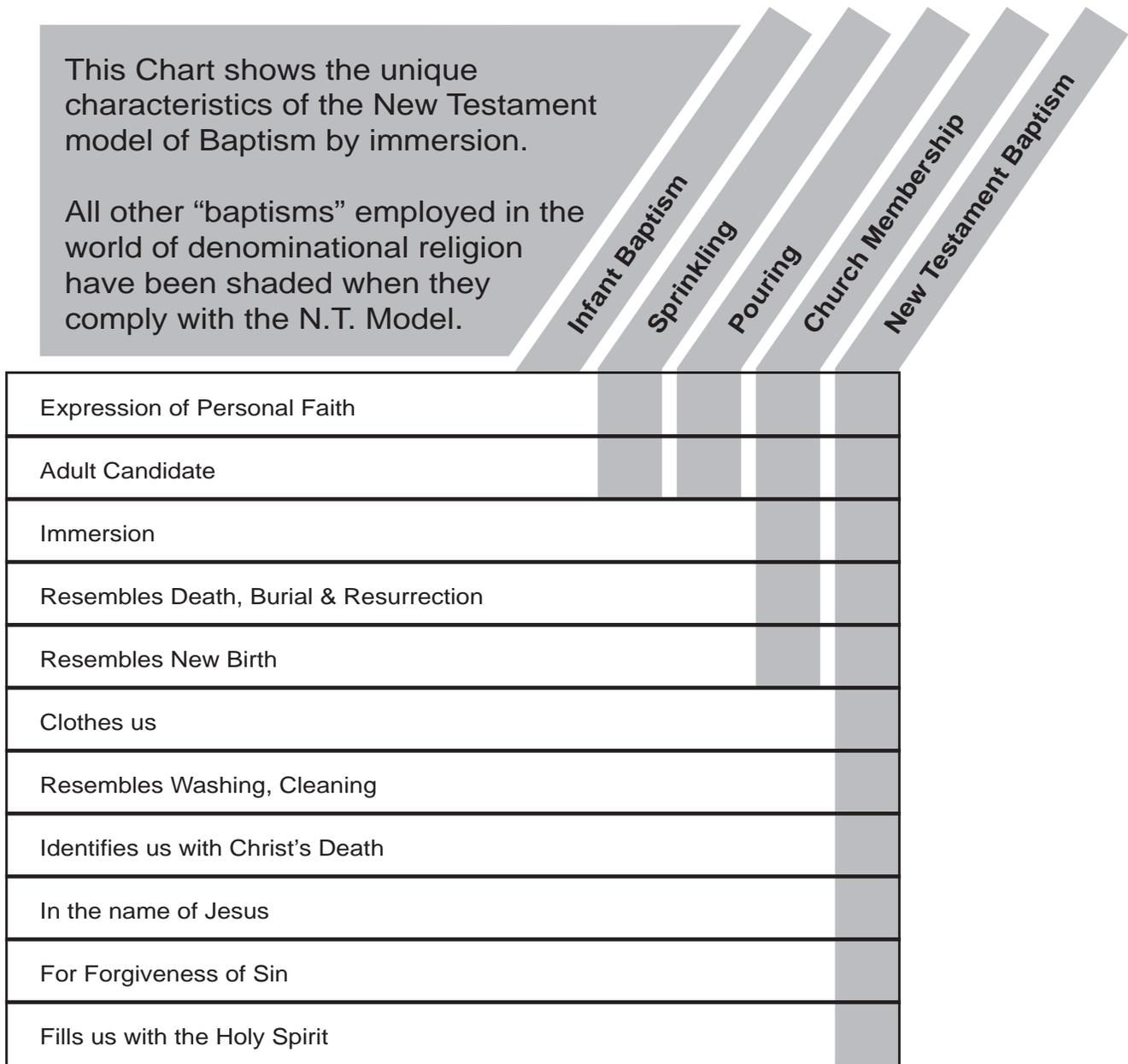
1 Peter 3:21 says that baptism saves us by washing of regeneration & renewal by the Holy Spirit. When asked what they must do in response to the Gospel, Peter told the crowd in **Acts 2:38** to *“...be baptized in the name of Christ for the forgiveness of sins and so that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* In **Romans 16** a Roman soldier asked Paul & Silas what he must do to be saved and Paul presented the Gospel to him, and he believed & was baptized and was saved. In every single account of salvation in the New Testament, baptism is an essential component. The Bible teaches that we believe in Christ, repent of our sinfulness, confess Him before men, are baptized into Christ and then we are saved; not: believe in Christ, confess Him, get saved and then get baptized. Consider this: If I were to tell you that everyone who believes and then is baptized will receive \$1,000, do you think that there would be an argument regarding the conditions required for receiving the \$1,000? It is also significant to point out that there isn't a single record of any Apostle (or anyone else for that matter) telling someone to pray for forgiveness, or to pray a prayer asking Jesus into their heart. However, in every single event the Apostles require repentance, faith in Christ, public confession of this faith, and baptism in the name of Christ.

9. Biblical baptism is in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, but it did not save because it was not baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. John's baptism of repentance was intended as a temporary, preparatory baptism that would not be valid after Pentecost. Biblical baptism is distinct from all others in that it is in the name of Christ, and applied specifically for the forgiveness of sins. Many in the religious world teach that baptism is merely an act (work) of righteousness that follows salvation by faith. As we have already examined, faith alone does not save, and sins are not forgiven until a believer has been baptized into Christ. Many religious groups practice the correct mode (method) of baptism by immersion, but they misunderstand/misapply the order of actions that God performs in our salvation. The Biblical order, as we have already discovered, is: Belief in Jesus as Christ, Repentance of personal sins, Public confession of Jesus as Christ before others, Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ... then our sins are forgiven, and God adds us to His Church and adopts us into His family. (**Romans 8:15, Ephesians 1:5**)

10. Through Biblical baptism, God adds us to His Church. Nearly every religious group ties baptism to Church membership. Most teach that a believer (already saved by faith alone) is baptized into Church membership. In Paul's letter to the Church at Rome, he specifies that believers are baptized into Christ (**Romans 6:3**) and provided the great benefits of redemption in Christ, including being added to His Church family. (**Ephesians 1:3-17**) Baptism for Church membership is different than the New Testament baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin. Most religious groups that practice baptism for Church membership requires that a person be re-baptized upon moving their membership to another congregation. Such a practice provides clarity in identifying it as a baptism other than the Christian Baptism of the New Testament. Christian baptism never requires re-baptism in order for a Christian to transfer membership to another congregation. Most New Testament congregations simply ask for a verification of Christian baptism through a baptismal certificate, or a letter from the Church where the person was baptized.

There is a distinction between the baptism currently practiced by many religious groups, and the baptism of the New Testament. Are these distinctions important? This brings us to an important understanding about the role of baptism in salvation. Religious groups practicing a *“faith only”* teaching concerning salvation, state that baptism is a work of man, and requiring baptism for salvation is relying upon personal works, rather than faith in God. The opposite is actually true! The New Testament is clear that Christian baptism is an expression of our faith & trust in God's Word and work of salvation in us. **Colossians 2:12** states that baptism expresses our faith in God's working.

Take a moment to consider the following chart, which illustrates what we have discovered about the Biblical model of baptism when compared to other practices of “baptism”.



As expressed in the chart above, the only “baptism” that fits the model of the New Testament is baptism by immersion (in water) of an adult in the name of Jesus Christ as an expression of personal faith, for the forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Other models may meet certain characteristics of this New Testament pattern in part, but not in whole. Any “baptism” that does not fit each of the unique characteristics of the N.T. baptism is not a valid, Christian baptism. A believer who has experienced a baptism which does not fit these unique characteristics has not yet been compliant or obedient to God’s plan for salvation, and is not yet suited for membership into a New Testament Church, nor for the remembrance of the Lord’s Supper (communion).

Please carefully review this information, and study the following passages which provide the pattern for Christian baptism, as found in the New Testament.

Here are all of the New Testament passages that refer to baptism:

“Baptism” (20 occurrences in the New Testament, NASB’95)

- Matthew 3:7, Matthew 21:25
- Mark 1:4, Mark 10:38, Mark 10:39, Mark 11:30
- Luke 3:3, Luke 7:29, Luke 12:50, Luke 20:4
- Acts 1:22, Acts 10:37, Acts 13:24, Acts 18:25, Acts 19:3, Acts 19:4
- Romans 6:4
- Ephesians 4:5
- Colossians 2:12
- 1 Peter 3:21

Of these 20 occurrences, each is directly speaking about water baptism, except three verses, (**Mark 10:38, 39, Luke 12:50**) which are the words of Christ in reference to His death. 4 of the remaining 17 passages are directly speaking of Christian baptism (immersion), leaving the remaining 13 references to the baptism of John.

“Baptize”, “Baptizing” & “Baptized” (71 occurrences in the New Testament, NASB’95)

- Matthew 3:6, Matthew 3:11, Matthew 3:13, Matthew 3:14, Matthew 3:16, Matthew 28:19
- Mark 1:5, Mark 1:8, Mark 1:9, Mark 10:38, Mark 10:39, Mark 16:16
- Luke 3:7, Luke 3:12, Luke 3:16, Luke 3:21, Luke 7:29, Luke 7:30
- John 1:25, John 1:26, John 1:28, John 1:31, John 1:33, John 3:22, John 3:23, John 3:26, John 4:1, John 4:2, John 10:40
- Acts 1:5, Acts 2:38, Acts 2:41, Acts 8:12, Acts 8:13, Acts 8:16, Acts 8:36, Acts 8:38, Acts 9:18, Acts 10:47, Acts 10:48, Acts 11:16, Acts 16:15, Acts 16:33, Acts 18:8, Acts 19:3, Acts 19:4, Acts 19:5, Acts 22:16
- Romans 6:3
- 1 Corinthians 1:13, 1 Corinthians 1:14, 1 Corinthians 1:15, 1 Corinthians 1:16, 1 Corinthians 1:17, 1 Corinthians 10:2, 1 Corinthians 12:13, 1 Corinthians 15:29
- Galatians 3:27

Of these 71 occurrences, only 10 are not directly speaking of water baptism. These 10 verses are **Mark 1:8, 10:38, 39, Luke 3:16, 12:50, John 1:26, 33, Acts 1:5, 11:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:2**. Each of these verses (*except 1 Cor. 10:2, and Luke 12:50*) is speaking of the baptism of the Holy Spirit; the Corinthian text is referring to the Israelites’ baptism into Moses in the cloud and the sea, Luke’s is referring to Jesus’ death. John’s baptism is the subject of 29 of the 71 occurrences. Interestingly enough there are 5 of these references that share the same verse as some referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. (*Mk. 1:8, Lk. 3:16, Jn. 1:26, 33, Acts 11:16*)

Christian baptism is the focus of all of the remaining verses, with Paul underscoring the clarity of the teaching of baptism by addressing false applications in **1 Cor. 1:13, 15, and 15:29**.

If you should have further questions about faith in Christ, a proper response to Jesus as Savior or about baptism, please contact Chip at (859) 623-8597, or chip@unioncitycc.org.