

What Makes Baptism Valid?

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“What Makes Baptism Valid?”

Practically every church in the world requires their members to be baptized. Thus, a large portion of the world’s population believes they have experienced proper baptism; however, Baptist churches do not accept all of these baptisms. In fact, much confusion exists over what constitutes valid baptism. Some believe in the validity of infant baptism while others accept only believers’ baptism. Some practice baptism by sprinkling or pouring while others only immerse. Some divide over the doctrine of baptism while others consider it a minor doctrine of little importance.

Perhaps some categories may help us embark upon an investigation of this issue. A Christian baptism could be validated by continuing in the historical tradition of the “Christian church.” If valid baptism is based on the foundation of Christian tradition, then Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, and other Protestant groups which make up the “Christian tradition” possess valid baptism. The Baptists are part of the Christian tradition yet do not accept as valid the baptism of these other groups. Baptists generally refer back to Scripture in an effort to determine what is baptism according to Scripture alone. Based on their understanding of Scripture, Baptists have denied the validity of infant and non-immersion baptisms. Thus, a second category could be scriptural baptism. This essay will focus primarily on what Scripture has to say about baptism but will secondarily discuss the view of the Baptist tradition on baptism as the author deems it relevant.

In order to discuss completely the ordinance of baptism, this paper will address six overlapping categories. Some of these categories have been more emphasized by Baptists than others and some of them have been the central problem in controversies. Nevertheless, one must examine and determine the importance of these six aspects in order to understand baptism. This author will now list these categories with a brief sentence of how they relate. The remainder of the article will explain in more detail the importance of each category, attempting to focus more attention on the more problematic elements and providing historical illumination where beneficial. As always, the Bible is the final source of authority.

Six Categories of Baptism

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| I. | Subject | The subject of baptism must be a believer. Any other subject cannot make a profession of faith or identify with Christ or His church. |
| II. | Mode | Immersion is the proper mode of baptism. No other mode is supported by Scripture. |
| III. | Meaning | Baptism is not essential for salvation and does not grant an elevated status of sinlessness. Baptism is the profession of the |

- believer placing his/her allegiance with Christ, and the initiatory ordinance into the local church. Baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- IV. Church Proper baptism must be performed in connection with a true church. Baptism is a church ordinance and not a Christian ordinance. As this is perhaps the least understood view, a necessary discussion of the definition of a true church must also occur.
- V. Administrator The administrator should be someone selected by the local church. Overemphasis on this can lead to problems, as it did with the Donatists.
- VI. Formula The traditional formula is baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost in older times). Valid baptism must at the very least be in Jesus' name.

I. The Subject of Baptism

Baptists have historically understood baptism in its most basic definition to have a believer as the subject and immersion as the mode. Many New Testament examples could be discussed to lay the foundation for believers as the proper subjects of baptism; however, only a few will be mentioned. For a complete discussion, this author has written another article dedicated to this topic which should be consulted.¹ First, the Great Commission of Christ states that we are to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them....” People must first be made disciples or become believers before baptism. Peter states in Acts 2:38, “repent and be baptized.” Repentance leads one to become a believer before baptism. Philip preached the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch and the eunuch then requested baptism. While many Pedobaptists appeal to the household baptisms in Acts as precedent for infant baptism, careful study demonstrates no foundation anywhere in the Scriptures for infant baptism. The Scriptures know of only believers as the subjects of baptism. Infant baptism did not begin until a few hundred years after Christ, based upon a misconception of original sin. The Council of Carthage in A.D. 258 discussed how infants should be baptized, thus demonstrating the newness of infant baptism and an improper theological view of the practice.²

¹Thomas White, “The Proper Subject of Baptism” (Fort Worth: Center for Theological Research, 2006). Available online at www.BaptistTheology.org.

²This view resulted from a belief in “original guilt” or “infant guilt” by which infants had to be baptized in order to remove their original guilt in order for them to go to heaven should they die in infancy. Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1989), 188, said, “Cyprian of Carthage was the first to argue that infants are baptized because of the ‘contagion of death’ inherited from Adam.” Cyprian also addressed this at the council of Carthage in A.D. 253. See Cyprian, “The Epistles of Cyprian,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 5 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 353-5. This belief can also be traced to Augustine. Neville Clark, “Theology of Baptism,” in *Christian Baptism*, ed. Alec Gilmore (Chicago: Judson Press, 1959), 320, states, “Upon the basis provided by Tertullian and Cyprian in their doctrine of original sin, Ambrose and Augustine superimposed a theology of original guilt. From such guilt infant baptism guaranteed deliverance.” Augustine’s thoughts on

II. The Mode of Baptism

Baptists have universally held that immersion is the only proper mode of baptism, and without immersion there is no true baptism. The New Testament continually uses the word *baptizo*. This Greek word has been brought directly into the English language as the word, “baptize.” Properly translated, instead of transliterated, this word means “immerse.” One may consult any number of Greek lexicons and even Pedobaptist scholars to support this definition.³ Perhaps the writing of John Calvin himself should be read. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin wrote, “But whether the person being baptized should be wholly immersed, and whether thrice or once, whether he should only be sprinkled with poured water—these details are of no importance, but ought to be optional to churches according to the diversity of countries. Yet the word ‘baptize’ means to immerse, and it is clear that the rite of immersion was observed in the ancient church.”⁴ For additional evidence from history, one need only visit the ruins of ancient churches, noticing the variety of immersion baptistries in those churches.⁵ The question may arise, How did sprinkling become a common practice? William Wall, a Pedobaptist, explains in his *History of Infant Baptism*:

Now, Calvin had not only given his Dictate, in his Institutions, that *the difference is of no moment, whether thrice or once; or whether he be only wetted with the water poured on him*: But he had also drawn up for the use of his church at Geneva (and afterward published to the world) *a form of administering the sacraments*, where, when he comes to the order of baptizing, he words it thus: *Then the minister of baptism pours water on the infant; saying, I baptize thee*, etc. There had been, as I said, some Synods in the Dioceses of France that had spoken of affusion without mentioning immersion at all; that being the common practice; but for an Office or Liturgy of any church; this is, I believe the first in the world that prescribes affusion absolutely.⁶

the relationship between infant baptism and original sin can be seen in Augustine, “On Original Sin,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 5 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 237–57.

³One may consult John Wesley, who said, “Mary Welsh, aged eleven days, was baptized, according to the custom of the first church and the rule of the Church of England, *by immersion*.” John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock vol. 1 (London: Epworth Press, 1938), 166. See also Moses Stuart, *Is the Mode of Christian Baptism Prescribed in the New Testament?* (Nashville: Graves, Mark & Rutland, 1856), 41; and Thomas Chalmers, *Lectures on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (New York: Carter, 1845), 152.

⁴John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in *Library of Christian Classics*, trans. by F. L. Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1320.

⁵Lloyd Harsch, “The Architecture of Baptistries in North Africa,” paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society (Valley Forge: Pennsylvania, 2005).

⁶William Wall, *The History of Infant Baptism*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1862), 580–1.

It quickly becomes obvious that church history and not Scripture forms the basis for any other mode than immersion. Lastly, the symbolic representation of the ordinance, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, can only be fulfilled by immersion. Immersion is so central to baptism that without it the ordinance is nullified.

III. The Meaning of Baptism

The vast majority of Baptists have always believed that baptism is a symbolic ordinance which identifies the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To a lesser degree than in the past, Baptists have identified the ordinance of baptism as the following: 1) the believer's public profession of faith, 2) the believer's identification with Christ, and 3) the initiatory ordinance into the local church. All of these meanings of baptism have scriptural foundation. The identification of baptism as symbolic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and the Christian comes from Rom 6:3–4, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

Baptism as the believer's public profession of faith comes from Acts 2:38, where Peter states, "Repent and be baptized for the remission of your sin." This close association with salvation also indicates the importance of baptism. Philip, when presenting the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, did so in such a way that the eunuch responded not with a prayer or by signing a card, but by asking to be baptized.

Baptism also served as the initiatory ordinance into the local church. Matthew 28:19–20 states, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." The Commission is to make disciples. The acceptance of Christ is an inward decision of faith and repentance. This decision is made public by baptizing the believer in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. However, in order to teach them all things, they must then associate or gather for further instruction. The place for this teaching is the New Testament church. In Acts, baptisms resulted in the recipients gathering daily for additional instruction. The *ecclesia* or local church of the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Commission of Christ. The New Testament knows nothing of baptized believers not associated with a local church.

Perhaps this author should also identify what baptism is not. The Churches of Christ, formed initially by Alexander Campbell in the nineteenth century, among other denominations, believed that baptism was essential for salvation.⁷ While many such

⁷Alexander Campbell believed that "three things are essential to the Christian profession—that a person must believe, and repent, and be baptized." See Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptism with Its Antecedents and Consequents* (Bethany: Published by the author, 1851; reprint, Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1951), 84. For more information on this topic see Austin Bennett Amonette, "Alexander Campbell Among the Baptists: An Examination of the Beginning, Ambiguity, and Deterioration of Their Relationship, 1812–1830" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002). For a good history of the Campbellite movement from that perspective, see W. E. Garrison and A. T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publications, 1948).

groups no longer believe what their founders taught, Oneness Pentecostals continue to teach the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. Although many passages could be used, this author has chosen two passages as evidence to dismiss such claims. First, the thief on the cross did not experience baptism and yet that very day he was in the presence of the Lord. Luke 23:42–43 states, “And he was saying, ‘Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!’ And He said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.’” Second, Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:17 states, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” If baptism were required for salvation, Paul would never have made this claim. Thus, baptism is not essential for salvation.

The more dangerous option for Baptists today is minimizing the ordinance to the point of irrelevance. By tacking baptism onto the end of services focused on other subjects, by neglecting to allow the recipient an opportunity to make a profession of faith, and by not investigating a new member’s baptism before extending the right hand of fellowship, some Baptist churches have practically, if not intellectually, minimized the importance of this ordinance. Many pieces of evidence could be cited to note the importance of the ordinance; however, the “Great Commission” of Christ should suffice. Christ included many things by saying, “teach them to observe all things,” but he specifically pointed out “making disciples” and “baptizing.” The mention of this ordinance by name and immediately following the command to make disciples should adequately place emphasis on the ordinance.

Without the proper meaning, baptism is nothing more than the dunking of the individual in water. The proper meaning is essential to proper baptism. Does the recipient have to understand everything in theology? No. However, the subject must understand that baptism is not salvific, grants no additional grace, and does not insure sinlessness. Because the subject must understand, the subject cannot be an infant. The subject should also accept that baptism is the public profession of faith, identification with Christ, and the door to the local church.

IV. The Place for Baptism—the Local Church

An essential part of this discussion is the definition of a true church. Thus, later in this section, the definition of a true church will be discussed. However, for now it is enough to note that the ordinances (for this discussion, baptism) separate para-church groups, seminary classrooms, and private Bible studies from being churches. The ordinances logically are administered by the local church and more specifically true churches. Most Christian churches reject Mormon, Hindu, Scientology, or Muslim baptisms, should they perform them, because they are not true churches and the meaning of the ordinances is irrevocably harmed. This is not baptism into Christ but a false religion. Valid Christian baptism is into Christ alone. For proof of this one need only look at Acts 19:1-5 where Paul required rebaptism of a group of followers who had been baptized with John’s baptism but not Christ’s. If a baptism as closely related to Christ’s baptism as John’s would not do, then nothing other than baptism into Christ will do.

How does one receive baptism into Christ? Can a six-year-old boy in his backyard lead a friend to Christ and baptize him? Will the local church accept that baptism as valid? Typically this strikes us as unwise. Why? Because the ordinance should be

practiced by the church and not by an individual, a seminary or a denomination. The gathered believers should see the person’s baptism and accept him or her into fellowship. It is a church ordinance. Thus, baptism must be associated with a local church. Moreover, it is wisest to have the candidate actually make a confession before we baptize them “upon the profession of faith.” Such an important profession should occur in front of as many members of the church as possible and be taken as a seriously responsibility of the local church. Proper baptism helps create the community desired by Christ for His churches.

One immediate question arises with regard to missionary baptisms. The missionary is sent by the local church for the purpose of establishing more churches. Nothing could have a closer church connection than missionary baptisms. By having baptism linked to the authority given by Christ to the local church, one may safeguard baptism and regenerate church membership by ruling out all false churches. Accurate wording here clarifies all the various movements which alter the Gospel message while also avoiding the problems of historical high-churchism. The problem arises when one’s definition of a “true church” is incorrect. If, as the Landmark movement did, one adds the incorrect requirements to the “being” of a church, then local church authority can be distorted and result in problems. Thus, this discussion will now address the proper definition of a “true church.”

The Definition of a True Church

<u>Being (<i>esse</i>)</u>	<u>Well-Being (<i>bene esse</i>)</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gospel • Ordinances • Believers intentionally gathered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offices (pastor and deacon) • Church discipline • Baptism by immersion of believers • Memorial view of the Lord’s Supper • Regenerate congregation • Missionary focus • Expository preaching, etc.

The above chart contains two classifications. These two classifications allow one to discuss the various marks of the true church without de-churching large majorities of the evangelical world. The first category contains what is essential for the “being” or existence of a true church. At the very minimum, you must have a few believers who have intentionally gathered for the purpose of being a church with the Gospel presented and the ordinances administered.

At a Minimum

Let us look at what happens should one of these be removed. If you remove the Gospel, you do not have anything Christian. This could be any number of cults, and it is not logical to conclude that such a gathering could constitute a Christian church. Thus, the Gospel must be present. If you remove the ordinances administered, then any Bible study group, seminary class, or para-church ministry could be a church. As this is certainly not the case, the ordinances must exist for the “being” of a church. The purpose of the believers gathered together demonstrates the intent to be a church. A true church is intentional and does not occur on accident. Furthermore, a true church at a minimum must contain some believers who intentionally gathered for the purpose of being a church.

Adding to the Minimum

Okay, so you want to move something from the “well-being” category to the “being” category? For argument’s sake and for clarity, let us explore the options. If the offices (pastor and deacon) are moved into the “being” of a church, then when the pastor leaves one church for another or retires, that church ceases being a true church for a time. In addition, a church plant with no elected deacons would not be a true church until such time as they had men qualified and elected. These two offices are essential to the well-being of a church. While a church may continue without one or both offices temporarily, a continuance of this state will result in negative consequences.

If church discipline is moved into the “being” of a church, then half of the Southern Baptist Convention, and most denominations which do not practice church discipline, have immediately been un-churched. Also, this means that one overlooked occurrence or improperly handled case results in the loss of being a true church. This was the contention of J.R. Graves against the First Baptist Church of Nashville and R.B.C. Howell in the middle of the 1800s.⁸ Church discipline protects the regenerate church membership, seeks restoration, and adds meaning to membership, but it does not belong in the marks of a true church. It adds greatly, however, to the “well-being” of a church.

If the ordinances “rightly administered,” as Calvin put it, are moved into the category of the “being” of a church, you have Landmarkism. In essence, you have just un-churched all Pedobaptist gatherings. While baptism is properly executed by immersion of believers, and while the Lord’s Supper is a memorial ordinance looking back at Christ’s death, around in fellowship, and forward in anticipation, the proper practice of these ordinances cannot be added to the “being” of a church without repeating historical mistakes.

While Baptists and dissenting groups through history may desire to move the believer’s church into a mark for the “being of the church,” Augustine’s arguments are well heeded. He argued against the Donatists that a truly regenerate church was not possible. While the Donatists and Baptists were and are right to seek after truly

⁸For additional information, see Kenneth Vaughn Weatherford, “The Graves-Howell Controversy” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1991).

regenerate congregational membership, the requirement of such would result in constant evaluation of which churches are true and which are faulty. The effort and desire to have a regenerate church membership and the attainment of regenerate church membership adds greatly to the well-being of a church. Refusing to strive for a regenerate church is where Augustine erred. Giving up on seeking regenerate church membership harms the well-being of the church.⁹ Church discipline should help maintain this mark of the “well-being” of a church once it has been achieved. If one were to move regenerate church membership to the “being” of a church, then most churches of any tradition would be unchurched.

The marks of well-being could go on indefinitely. While a missionary focus and expositional preaching add to the “well-being” of a church, neither should be required for the “being” of a church. Other marks such as the Bible as the only standard for faith and practice, a desire to fulfill the Great Commission, and a ministry to widows and orphans should be beneficial. Any number of focused ministries could be added to the “well-being,” but the point is made. While many things add to the “well-being” of a church, the definition of the “being” of a true church should only include believers gathered together, presenting the Gospel, and administering the ordinances.

V. The Administrator of Baptism

Baptists have typically not focused upon the administrator of baptism as being essential. However, clarification of this area alleviates many problems. The largest problem arose with a group called the Donatists. This group sought to invalidate baptisms performed by ministers who had handed over the Scriptures during times of persecution. By holding that such traitorous ministers were not valid ministers, they placed too much authority for baptism in the administrator rather than in the ordinance and its meaning. Augustine argued against this movement, noting that if a minister were to have a moral failure late in his ministry, then that would invalidate all his previous baptisms. This places too much responsibility on the recipient to choose wisely who performs the baptism and creates some unscriptural power in the administrator.¹⁰ The spirituality of the administrator does not give credence to baptism.

⁹Augustine and the Donatists debated over the idea of a “pure church” or a “mixed church.” Robert Markus, “Donatism,” in *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 286, wrote, “The issue between Augustine and the Donatists concerned, at bottom, the nature of the church and of the relation between it and the world. Central to Augustine’s position was the insistence...that the church was a mixed body containing overt sinners.” Augustine refers to the church as a mixed body in a discussion of the wheat and the tares. See Augustine, “On Baptism, Against the Donatists,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 4 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 452–53. Furthermore, Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Sarasota: Christian Hymnary, 2000), 40, linked the Donatists and the Anabaptists as possessing similar visions of a pure church. See also H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 75–6.

¹⁰See Augustine, “The Three Books of Augustin, Bishop of Hippo, In Answer to the Letters of Petilian, the Donatist, Bishop of Cirta,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 4 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 515–628.

Although the administrator does not determine validity, wisdom should be used in who performs the ordinance. The ordinance which must be connected to the local church needs for that church to appoint the administrator. While no biblical mandate exists for ordination of the administrator, the local church typically “sets apart” certain men for service to the church. Each church may appoint or set apart whomever it wishes to perform the ordinance, but within the bounds of Scripture. Typically, the pastor or a staff member will perform the ordinance. In their absence, a deacon could also administer the ordinance. This author sees practical problems with opening up too widely who can perform the ordinance. The administrator should be an example to the congregation and not just any member in good standing, which could include a recently divorced single parent, a part-time attending father, or an eight-year-old school boy. In the end, however, the validity of baptism is not derived from the administrator.

VI. The Formula for Baptism

A complete discussion of the formula throughout history would take more space than this brief article will allow. In brief, Scripture presents three possibilities concerning the formula for baptism. The most common formula can be found in Acts 2:38 where Peter states, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” In Acts 19:5, Paul mentions baptism in name of the Lord Jesus. This is also mentioned in Acts 8:16, and 10:48. A second but related formula appears in Galatians 3:27, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ.” The third and most popular formula can only be found in Matt 28:19, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

This author believes that the different wording poses neither a problem nor represents mutually exclusive formulas. The reason for this belief comes from the early evidence of the use of the triune formula found only once in Scripture. The *Didache* states, “Baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”¹² Justin Martyr wrote, “For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water.”¹³ Other early fathers could be quoted to demonstrate the use of the Trinitarian formula but for the purposes of this essay, the previously mentioned quotes should suffice.

What is essential is that baptism occurs in the name of Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity. It is identification with Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, that is essential. Because some in this generation use the name Jesus but do not hold to the triune presentation of God found in the New Testament, the use of the triune formula given in Matt 28:19 is the best choice. The formula clarifies what the baptismal candidate is doing. The candidate is identifying himself with and pledging allegiance to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

¹²“The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 7 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 379.

¹³ Justin Martyr, “First Apology,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 183.

There are some who insist upon baptism in “Jesus’ name” for salvation.¹⁴ This article has already dealt with the fact that baptism is not salvific and has given reasons why. It is enough to dismiss any argument vying for baptism in Jesus’ name alone to say that Jesus himself recommended the triune formula. The authority for baptism does not rest merely in the formula; otherwise they could be and often have been construed as magical words conveying some mystical infusion.

A Special Situation—Alien Immersion

Throughout history there has been an ongoing discussion of what is called “alien immersion.” This does not mean that one is immersed by an extraterrestrial being, but that a group not normally known to immerse has performed an immersion and a decision concerning the validity of that baptism must be adjudicated. Historically, many Baptists have rejected alien immersion based upon their definition of the church and the authority placed in proper ordination.¹⁵ This author, however, has chosen to travel a different road. Each case must be decided on an individual basis. The determining factor is not the church since the above prescribed definition of a true church allows for Pedobaptist churches to be true churches.

The determining factor is not the administrator or proper ordination. The determining factor is the ordinance itself. Was the ordinance performed with the proper subject, in the proper mode, and with the proper meaning by a true church? If so, then it is valid. While in this age of post-denominationalism, it may be possible to find such a case, that case would be rare.

For example, any Pedobaptist church performing immersions of believers would do so based upon the failure of that person to be baptized as a child and not upon conviction based on Scripture. Thus, the rare exception must be of a scripturally-informed person requesting baptism by immersion as a believer from a Pedobaptist church that understands the true meaning of baptism. Logic contends that no such case would ever occur because such an informed person would not wish to unite and join with a church that held an opposing view. Thus, in the majority of instances, alien immersions have harmed the meaning of baptism enough to render their practice of the ordinance null and void. However, a rare valid exception may exist.

Conclusion

All of the six categories that have been discussed are inter-related to some degree. Offering a definition of what makes baptism valid always runs the risk of being misunderstood. This author offers the following definition to encourage further thought, discussion and research, understanding that it may yet be incomplete or inaccurate: *Valid*

¹⁴ One such group is the “Oneness Pentecostal” denomination. More information can be found at www.onenesspentecostal.com.

¹⁵ See James Madison Pendleton, *An Old Landmark Re-set: or Ought Baptists Invite Pedobaptists to Preach in Their Pulpits?* (Nashville: Graves & Marks, 1854).

baptism, the door to the local church, is performed by an appropriately selected administrator of a true church who immerses a believer in water for the purpose of profession of faith with and in the name of Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, symbolizing the subject's identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. A shorter definition of valid baptism would be: the immersion of a believer with the proper meaning by a true church.

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