

Bible Controversies

Water Baptism

Part 2 of 3 — Lessons 10–17 | A Study by Keith Blades | Enjoy the Bible Ministries®
Study Overview & Lesson Summaries

About This Study

Part Two of Bible Controversies (Lessons 10–17) by Keith Blades of Enjoy the Bible Ministries® examines the widespread controversy surrounding water baptism. Keith demonstrates that the controversy exists entirely because of improper Bible handling — particularly the failure to rightly divide the word of truth and to keep the things of Israel’s program distinct from God’s program with the Body of Christ today. Water baptism is a carnal ordinance and rudiment of the world belonging to Israel’s Old Testament system. Since God has suspended Israel’s program and is dealing with us differently in this dispensation of grace — treating us as adult sons rather than children under tutors — water baptism has no role in the church today. The only baptism with meaning in this dispensation is the one God Himself performs: the baptism of the Holy Spirit by which every believer is placed into Christ and into the Body of Christ at the moment of saving faith.



Lessons at a Glance

| Lesson | Core Focus |
|-----------|---|
| Lesson 10 | Introduction to the Water Baptism Controversy — More varied disagreement than almost any doctrine; improper Bible handling at the root of all of it |
| Lesson 11 | Five Kinds of Baptism — Water baptism is only one of at least five; dry baptisms outnumber water 4:1; never assume “baptism” means water |
| Lesson 12 | Romans 6 Rightly Divided — Baptized into Christ is Spirit baptism, not water; water not even mentioned; our identification with Christ’s death |
| Lesson 13 | Water Baptism Belongs to Israel’s Program — A rudiment of the world; Old Testament carnal ordinance; no role in this dispensation of grace |
| Lesson 14 | God Treats Us as Sons, Not Children — Galatians 4 and Colossians 2; dead with Christ from the rudiments; no ordinances apply to us today |
| Lesson 15 | Practical Conclusions About Water Baptism — Inconsistent with this dispensation; sons not children; Paul sent not to baptize but to preach |
| Lesson 16 | Two Objections Answered — Should we follow Christ’s example? What about Acts 2? Both answered by right division and dispensational truth |
| Lesson 17 | The Only Baptism That Matters Today — Holy Spirit baptism into Christ; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6 properly understood; conclusion |

Lesson Summaries

L10

Introduction to the Water Baptism Controversy *More*

Disagreement Here Than Almost Any Other Doctrine

- Water baptism produces more varied forms of disagreement than almost any other doctrine: method (sprinkling, pouring, or immersion), timing, candidates, necessity, who may administer it, and where
- None of this disagreement is God's fault — God is not vague or unclear about water baptism; the fault lies entirely with us
- Improper Bible handling is at the root of all the controversy — including the failure to rightly divide, failure to let the Bible define its own terms, and following tradition over scripture
- A foundational issue: there is more than one kind of baptism in the Bible — assuming "baptism" always means water baptism is a widespread and consequential error
- Right division will again be decisive — water baptism belongs to Israel's program and has no function in the dispensation of grace

L11

Five Kinds of Baptism *Not All Baptisms Involve Water — At Least Five*

Distinct Kinds

- At least five kinds of baptism are spoken of in the Bible; water baptism (wet baptism) is only one of the five
- Dry baptisms — Spirit baptism, baptism of fire, baptism of suffering, and others — outnumber water baptism by at least four to one
- The word "baptism" does not automatically mean water baptism — context and right division determine which kind is in view in any given passage
- Two important conclusions: (1) never assume water baptism when the word appears; (2) water baptism is actually the minority baptism in the Bible
- Failure to recognize multiple kinds of baptism is one of the most common and far-reaching sources of water baptism error and controversy

L12

Baptism into Christ Is Not Water Baptism *Romans 6 Rightly Divided*

— Spirit, Not Water

- Romans 6:3–4: "so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death" — commonly and wrongly assumed to be about water baptism
- Water is not even mentioned in Romans 6:3–4 — the issue is being baptized into Jesus Christ, not into water
- The only baptism that places a person into Jesus Christ is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which God performs at salvation
- Spirit baptism is our identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection — a spiritual reality, not a physical ordinance
- The error of reading water into Romans 6 arises directly from failing to recognize that there are multiple kinds of baptism in the Bible

L13

Water Baptism Belongs to Israel's Program *A Rudiment of the World — Not Part of the Dispensation of Grace*

- Water baptism is one of the “rudiments of the world” (Galatians 4:3; Colossians 2:8) — the physical, elementary teaching aids God used with Israel under the law
- Since God has suspended His program with Israel, the Old Testament system and its ordinances — including water baptism — are no longer in effect
- Three things to understand about water baptism's role: (1) it is a rudiment of the world; (2) it had limited usefulness while the law covenant was in force; (3) it was specifically part of Israel's prescribed cleansing in the final stages of their program
 - John the Baptist's ministry is where this cleansing function is most visible — it belongs entirely to Israel's program
- To practice water baptism today is out of line with what God is doing in this dispensation — it is inconsistent with how He is dealing with us

L14

God Treats Us as Sons, Not as Children *Galatians 4 and Colossians 2: Liberty from the Rudiments of the World*

- In this dispensation God gives believers the adoption of sons — He treats us as adult sons, not as children under tutors and governors (Galatians 4:1–7)
- The rudiments of the world were designed for children — for Israel being dealt with like little children who needed physical object lessons to grasp spiritual realities
- In this dispensation God has given us the full knowledge of spiritual realities directly through Paul's epistles — no physical ordinances are needed as tutors
- “We are dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world” (Colossians 2:20) — therefore we should not be subjecting ourselves to them
- Physical circumcision, dietary laws, holy days, sabbaths, and water baptism are all rudiments of the world — none of them are part of God's program with us today

L15

Water Baptism Has No Place in This Dispensation *Paul Was Sent Not to Baptize But to Preach the Gospel*

- Not practicing water baptism today is not abandoning a Christian ordinance — it is recognizing dispensational truth and acting consistently with it
- Additional confirmation: Paul declared “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17) — a statement no one in Israel's program could have made
 - Moses, John the Baptist, and the twelve apostles were all commissioned to water baptize — because water baptism was a natural part of Israel's program
- The only baptism God is concerned with today is the one He Himself performs at salvation: the Spirit's baptism placing each believer into Christ
- This Spirit baptism is not carnal, not a rudiment of the world, not administered by any man — it is a real spiritual act performed by God alone

L16

Two Common Objections Answered *Should We Follow Christ's Example? What About Acts 2?*

- Objection 1: "Shouldn't we follow the example of Christ and be baptized?" — Christ's baptism was part of Israel's program; it was not given as a model for the Body of Christ to emulate
- Objection 2: "What about all the water baptisms in Acts 2 and the early chapters of Acts?" — Acts 2 is Israel's program in its climactic final stage, not the Body of Christ's ongoing program
- Both objections dissolve when the Bible is rightly divided — the passages cited pertain to God's program with Israel, not to us today
- The real problem: Christians see water baptism in the Bible but do not ask "who is this written to?" before applying it to themselves
- God describes water baptism as a carnal ordinance, a rudiment of the world, a weak and beggarly element — until Christians think about it as God does, they will continue to practice it in error

L17

The Only Baptism That Matters Today *Holy Spirit Baptism: The Sole Baptism for the Body of Christ*

- Conclusion: Paul's declaration "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 1:17) is the clearest possible evidence that water baptism has no function in this dispensation
- The one baptism relevant for us today is 1 Corinthians 12:13: "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" — this is God's own act, performed at salvation
- Romans 6:3–4 properly understood describes this Spirit baptism — our co-death, co-burial, and co-resurrection with Christ, which forms the doctrinal basis for our walk in newness of life
- Right division on water baptism eliminates every form of the controversy — when we understand that it belongs to Israel's program, the question of whether to practice it today is settled
- The water baptism controversy, like all Bible controversies, exists solely because the Bible is not being rightly divided — handle the word properly and the confusion disappears

Key Doctrinal Distinctions

Water Baptism Is Part of Israel's Program, Not Ours

Water baptism is a carnal ordinance and a rudiment of the world that belongs to Israel's Old Testament system. God used it as one of the physical, elementary teaching aids with which He dealt with Israel under the law. Since God has suspended His program with Israel in this dispensation of grace and is dealing with us differently, water baptism has no role or function for the Body of Christ today. To practice it is to inconsistently apply something from Israel's program to a dispensation for which it was never designed. This is the root of all the controversy surrounding it — Christians are practicing something that does not belong to their dispensation.

There Are at Least Five Kinds of Baptism in the Bible

The widespread assumption that “baptism” always refers to water baptism is one of the most consequential errors in Christian doctrine. The Bible speaks of at least five distinct kinds of baptism: the baptism of water, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the baptism of fire, the baptism of suffering, and the baptism into Moses. Dry baptisms (those not involving water) outnumber water baptism in scripture by at least four to one. Failing to recognize this leads to the common error of reading water baptism into passages that are clearly speaking of spirit baptism, as is the case in Romans 6:3–4 and 1 Corinthians 12:13.

God Treats Us as Sons, Not as Children Under the Rudiments

In this dispensation of grace God has given believers the adoption of sons (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5). He treats us as adult sons — as ones capable of receiving His full revelation of knowledge directly through Paul’s epistles without the need for the elementary, childish teaching aids He once used with Israel. The rudiments of the world, including all of the carnal ordinances of the Old Testament, were designed for children under tutors. Since God is dealing with us as sons in this dispensation, Paul teaches that we are dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world (Colossians 2:20), and that none of them — water baptism included — should be practiced by us today.

Key Scripture References

| Reference | Significance in This Study |
|----------------------------|---|
| 2 Timothy 2:15 | Rightly divide the word of truth — the key to resolving water baptism controversy; failure to do so is the root of all its disagreements |
| 1 Corinthians 1:17 | “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” — Paul’s unique commission proving water baptism has no function in this dispensation |
| Romans 6:3–4 | Baptized into Christ = Spirit baptism identifying us with His death and resurrection; water is not mentioned and is not the issue |
| 1 Corinthians 12:13 | By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body — the only baptism with meaning today; God’s own act at salvation |
| Galatians 4:1–7 | Children under tutors vs. sons who have received adoption — the rudiments of the world apply to children, not to sons |
| Colossians 2:20 | “Dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world” — therefore no carnal ordinances, including water baptism, are to be practiced today |
| 2 Corinthians 4:2 | Not handling the word of God deceitfully — honest Bible handling is the remedy for all baptism controversy |

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