

Emmanuel Free Church

Baptism

by Pastor Justin Smith

Baptisms are such a special time in the life of the Church. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus said, “**Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**” A couple weeks later when the Church was born on Pentecost, Peter remembered the Lord’s command to baptize when he preached the first sermon in Church history. In Acts 2:38 he said, “**Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.**” After Phillip explained to the Ethiopian official about salvation, he was immediately baptized (Acts 8:36-39). Our Lord also was baptized (Matthew 3:13-16). While it wasn’t for the same reasons as Christians, we still see His as an example to follow just like we see the rest of His life as an example (John 13:15). When a Christian is baptized they join the ranks of all those before them who have carried out this precious rite in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Why baptize?

The most important reason is because it was commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus said, “**Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**” The real simple definition of a disciple is this: *someone who obeys the teachings of Jesus*. Notice therefore how closely Jesus connects baptism and discipleship. He links them together in such a way that we can’t imagine one without the other. Actually, we can’t imagine a disciple who has not been baptized. That would be to find a disobedient disciple. (If a disciple is someone who obeys Jesus, then what is someone who doesn’t obey Him?)

Here are several other reasons baptism is important from the Scriptures.

First, baptism is a wordless Proclamation that we make. Baptism is an act that proclaims Jesus to be our Savior and Lord. When the people heard the message of Peter in Acts 2, it says in verse 41 they “**accepted the his message and were baptized, about 3,000 of them...**” These 3,000 Jews were in Jerusalem during a very big national festival. Only very recently had the Jewish nation rejected Jesus as God’s Son and crucified Him. So, much was being risked for these 3,000 Jews to accept the Apostle’s message about Jesus and get baptized in public. When a believer stands up to give their testimony and be baptized, they are proclaiming to the public that Jesus Christ is their Savior and Lord.

Second, baptism is a Picture. It pictures the finished work of Jesus Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. Standing in the water we see Christ’s death on the cross. When placed under water we see His burial. And when we are raised out of the water we see His resurrection. Baptism therefore gives a picture of the true means of salvation: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, baptism Publicly Identifies us with Jesus Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 10:32, “**Whoever acknowledges me before men I will acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.**” Baptism allows us to publicly identify with Jesus Christ that He is our Savior and we want the world to know that He is the One we stand with.

Notice how the following 2 verses indicate our identity with Christ. Romans 6:4 says, “**We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**” Colossians

2:12 says, “**having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead.**”

We no longer identify with our old self, with sin, with the world, or with Satan. We “died” to all these things. The verses say we were “**buried with [Christ] through baptism into death**”. We have a new identity – one that is in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Since He was raised to life He has power to raise us up to new life also. Central to this new life is our desire to obey His commands. The first step of obedience is to be baptized and publicly identify ourselves with Him.

What Baptism Does Not Do

First, baptism does not save us. Only through believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ can a person be saved (Eph. 2:8-9; Acts 16:31; Galatians 2:16). Baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality. Much like a ring symbolizes the marriage union between a man and a woman, so too baptism symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ’s work of salvation.

It should be mentioned too that baptism does not predict, foreshadow or guarantee someone will come to faith and be reborn in the future when they get older. No examples or statements are found in Scripture of a pre-salvation baptism in this sense. All occurrences in the Bible of Christian baptisms are subsequent to the person’s faith in Christ and the result of an obedient response to be baptized.

However, while we must never think baptism is necessary for salvation, we do need to see that the Bible does tie the two closely together. It is the pattern in Scripture for someone to be baptized soon after they are saved (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 10:44-48; 16:14-15, 32-34; 1 Cor. 1:16). For someone to seek salvation in Jesus Christ but not seek baptism afterward would be a very strange and incongruous thing in light of Scripture.

Second, baptism does not give us the Holy Spirit. A person will not be regenerated by God’s Holy Spirit through the experience of water baptism. While this is the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, it is not the teaching of Scripture. The Holy Spirit is given to someone and they become regenerated (“born again”) at the moment they place their trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation (John 3:3; Ephesians 1:13).

Thirdly, baptism does not make us spiritually mature. Spiritual maturity happens as we study the Word of God and obediently apply it in our lives consistently (Heb. 5:11-14; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Lastly, baptism is not a New Testament counterpart to circumcision in the Old Testament. In many churches baptism is carried out with infants in the belief that the infant is now a part of the covenant community. It is believed that just like circumcision was the sign of membership in the OT covenant community (Israel), baptism is said to be the sign in the NT covenant community (Church). However, the Church is not referred to as a “covenant community” in the New Testament, nor is it taught that water baptism is the means to become a member of the Church. It is only by faith in Jesus Christ that someone can be saved and at that point the Holy Spirit makes them part of the community of believers called the Church (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13).

Q & A Regarding Baptism

Why don’t we baptize babies?

Baptizing babies is called “paedobaptism”, which literally means “child-baptism”. There is no teaching or instance in the NT showing babies are to be baptized. When Scripture says “*households*”

were baptized (Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16) it is supposed by some that infants were a part of those households. However, that is an assumption. Those passages of Scripture do not say there were in fact any infants. Incidentally, a careful reading of each of those passages will show that the households baptized are also credited with believing. Since the NT teaches that only those who can exercise faith in Jesus Christ are to be baptized, and babies cannot do that, babies should not be baptized.ⁱ

“What if I was baptized when I was a baby? Should I be baptized again now that I have accepted Jesus Christ?”

Yes, I encourage you to do so. The primary reason for getting baptized is obedience (as a Christian) to the command of your Savior Jesus Christ. If you did not choose to be baptized (someone chose it for you when you were an infant), then you cannot be credited with obedience to the Lord’s command. Secondly, the reasons you were baptized as a baby are not reasons the Bible says we Christians are to be baptized. Infants are usually baptized because it is believed baptism either saves the child, or makes the child part of a covenant community, or because it is believed the infant will then grow up and come to faith. However, as was mentioned earlier, no examples in Scripture support any of these beliefs. The only community of God in the NT is the Church and only faith (not baptism) gives someone membership into the Church (1 Cor. 12:12-13). Also, the Bible does not say that baptizing anyone *before* they have faith will result in them coming to faith later on. Instead, the Bible teaches that baptism is what someone does after they are saved. For these reasons if you have not been baptized after your salvation you are encouraged to do so – even if you were baptized as a baby.ⁱⁱ

Why do we baptize by immersion?

The Greek word for baptism is “baptizo” which literally means “to dip under”. The Greek words for “sprinkle” and “pour” are never used for baptism in the Bible. Every baptism in the NT was immersion (e.g., everyone baptized by John the Baptist, the Ethiopian official, the early Church, and Jesus Christ). Immersion best symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ according to Romans 6:4.ⁱⁱⁱ It also seems evident that if baptism symbolizes the washing away of sins then immersion would give a stronger picture of this than sprinkling.

If it won’t affect my salvation then it doesn’t matter if I’m baptized

The argument being made here is basically “*I can still be saved if I don’t obey this command*”. I think of 3 responses. First, where does that argument end? The basis for rejecting this command is the same basis for rejecting any and all other commands. Obedience to the Lord should not be selective. Secondly, obedience is never rooted in the fear of losing our salvation. Rather we obey out of love for God (John 14:15; Psalm 119), a desire to please Him (2 Cor. 5:9), to glorify Him (1 Cor. 10:31), and to gain reward (1 Cor. 3:14). Thirdly, as a Pastor, I am not willing to tell you that you *do not have to* follow a command that the Lord Himself and His Apostles have given. If you are a believer and you have not been baptized you are encouraged to make arrangements to do so.

i See Geisler, Norman. Systematic Theology. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011; pg. 1167-9

ii Consider the 12 men who were baptized by John the Baptist but were re-baptized after becoming Christians (Acts 19:1-5).

iii See Charles Ryrie Study Bible, pg 2008, Doctrine of the Church II.B.3.c