

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*When Should Children Be Baptized? – Part III.*"

Go ahead and open your Bibles to Acts 2.

With baptisms coming up on Easter I started preaching a few sermons to help families determine whether their children should be baptized. That's exactly what we are working through as a family.

Because we believe our children must be saved before being baptized I tried to give you some evidences of salvation to look for in our children's lives. While no parent can know for sure that their child is saved, hopefully the evidences I provided have been helpful...not only in determining whether your children are saved, but even if you are an adult, examining your own salvation.

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We are going to look at a few baptisms in the book of Acts, but first we need to have a brief discussion of circumcision and what it prefigured or foreshadowed.

I told you that we believe in credobaptism, or more commonly known as believers' baptism.

Those who believe in infant baptism are known as paedobaptists, and they see a strong relationship between circumcision and baptism. The idea is, babies were circumcised, so babies should be baptized.

But there is an important issue...

Physical circumcision always prefigured, or foreshadowed, the true and greater circumcision God wanted, which was spiritual. In other words, the true and greater circumcision God wanted His people to have was always of the heart, and it occurs when people are saved.

Listen to these verses:

- **Colossians 2:11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands** (this means it's not physical), **by putting off the body of the flesh** (this refers to the spiritual flesh), **by the circumcision of Christ.**
- **Romans 2:28 No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, NOR IS CIRCUMCISION OUTWARD AND PHYSICAL. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and CIRCUMCISION IS A MATTER OF THE HEART, by the Spirit, not by the letter.**

Paul said circumcision is a matter of the heart **BY THE SPIRIT, not by the letter.**

This means the letter of the law, which can't provide spiritual circumcision. Only the Holy Spirit can circumcise their hearts, so they repent and believe.

And at that point, they can be baptized...and this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson one: children must have circumcised hearts to be baptized.

Just so you don't think this is my opinion, let me share some verses that make this point...

God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision, but throughout the Old Testament even though many of the Jews were circumcised physically, they were not circumcised spiritually, in that their hearts weren't circumcised.

Listen to these verses making that point...

Leviticus 26:41 [God says] I walked contrary to them...if then THEIR UNCIRCUMCISED HEART IS HUMBLD AND THEY MAKE AMENDS FOR THEIR INIQUITY, 42 THEN I WILL REMEMBER MY COVENANT WITH JACOB, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham.

The interesting part of these verses is circumcision was the sign of the covenant, but God said He wouldn't remember His covenant with them unless they were circumcised spiritually...even when they were circumcised physically. So physical circumcision meant nothing if people weren't also circumcised spiritually.

Jeremiah 6:10 Behold, THEIR EARS ARE UNCIRCUMCISED, they cannot listen; behold, the word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it.

They wouldn't listen to spiritual truths, so God said their ears were uncircumcised.

Ezekiel 44:6 O house of Israel, enough of all your abominations, 7 in admitting foreigners, UNCIRCUMCISED IN HEART AND FLESH, to be in my sanctuary, profaning my temple.

God was upset the Israelites allowed foreigners into the temple, and He didn't just point out that they were uncircumcised physically, He pointed out that they were uncircumcised spiritually.

Deuteronomy 30:6 The Lord...WILL CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEART and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord...with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

This verse describes what it looks like if people's hearts are circumcised:

- They will **love the Lord with all their heart and soul.**
- Again, God was talking to people who had obeyed Him physically, but He wanted to move to their spiritual condition, which meant loving Him.

There are lots of other verses I could give you, but you get the point.

The idea, which we see throughout Scripture, not just with circumcision but with anything, is that the physical is meaningless without the spiritual.

Take for example the sermon on the Mount. Jesus makes the point that if we:

- Give physically, but we want people to know we are giving, which is to say we aren't giving right spiritually, then it's meaningless, or even hypocritical.
- Similarly, Jesus says when we pray, if we pray to be seen by others, we are praying physically, but we are not praying right spiritually.
- If we fast, but we look sad so that everyone knows we are fasting, then we are doing something physical, but because the spiritual is wrong the fasting is meaningless...again, or even hypocritical.

Think about communion for a moment...

People can eat bread and drink juice, in other words they can do what's required physically, but it means nothing if not done right spiritually.

Not only would it not mean anything, if we are partaking in an unworthy manner, God might discipline us. That's how important it is to celebrate communion spiritually.

Now let me ask...

Do you see the application for baptism?

Baptism is physical, but if those who are being baptized are not right spiritually, then baptism is meaningless. People can be lowered under the water and raised back up, but if:

- They aren't Christians
- They don't know what they are doing

Then baptism is worthless.

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Now here's the question...

Because physical circumcision in the Old Testament looked forward to the true and greater circumcision of the heart, does anyone know when that finally took place for the Jews?

Let me show you. We will back up and start at **Acts 2:23** for context...

Acts 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, YOU CRUCIFIED and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Peter says they crucified Christ. Look at **verse 36**...—

Acts 2:36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED."

Not only did they reject the Messiah they had been waiting centuries for, they crucified Him...giving Him the most excruciating, shameful death imaginable.

This is a brutal indictment.

But they needed to hear this, because after waiting 2,000 years, from the time circumcision was given to Abraham, look what finally happened...

Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this they were CUT TO THE HEART, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

This is it! The Jews finally received the spiritual circumcision of the heart that God wanted them to have.

And now they are able to also experience the first Christian baptisms, or in other words the first baptisms that identify with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

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But here's the thing...

There's no guarantee that this circumcision is going to take place.

Briefly turn to **Acts 7**.

We saw part of Peter's great sermon, and this is the end of Stephen's great sermon. They share many similarities.

Look at **verse 51**...

Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked people, UNCIRCUMCISED IN HEART and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

These Jews were physically circumcised, but Stephen says they were not spiritually circumcised.

Acts 7:52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, WHOM YOU HAVE NOW BETRAYED AND MURDERED, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

Stephen also accused them of murdering the Messiah...but look at the completely different response...

Acts 7:54 Now when they heard these things they...were CUT TO THE HEART just like the Jews in Acts 2? Nope.

Acts 7:54 Now when they heard these things THEY WERE ENRAGED, and they ground their teeth at him.

Skip to **verse 58 Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him.**

Stephen said their hearts were uncircumcised and then they showed the uncircumcision of their hearts with one of the vilest acts in the NT: first, they murdered Jesus, and then they murdered Stephen.

Peter and Stephen preached similar sermons. But if you take your minds to the parable of the sower, even if the seed is the same, it matters the type of soil that it lands on. The Jews in **Acts 2** had different soils than the Jews in **Acts 7**.

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Now look back at **Acts 2** to see the Jews who had good soil that led to spiritually circumcised hearts...

Acts 2:38 And 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.

They were convicted of their sin, and Peter told them to repent and be baptized.

Look at **verse 41**...

Acts 2:41 So those who received his word WERE BAPTIZED, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

I want you to notice something about these Jews that is important...

Not long before they were baptized they were accused of crucifying Christ. What could possibly make people look more spiritually immature than this?

So here's my point...

These Jews went from being accused of crucifying Christ to being baptized, which shows they didn't need some amount of maturity...and this brings us to the next part of lesson two, which we began in our first sermon...

Lesson two: (part one) salvation is the requirement for baptism (part two) but spiritual maturity is not.

Let me explain the point of this lesson...

The requirement for baptism is salvation, so the next question is:

- How long do people need to be Christians before being baptized?
- How mature do they need to be?

These Christians were not very mature.

You would almost think if anyone needed to go to some classes to learn Christianity before being baptized it would be them, but they got baptized right after they **received his word**, which means right after they were saved. There was no lengthy:

- Growth in the knowledge of Scripture
- Plan for maturity

They literally simply believed and were baptized.

And this establishes the pattern in the book of Acts...

New believers, or spiritually immature believers, can – and should – be baptized, soon after conversion.

And we are going to look at two other examples.

Go ahead and turn to **Acts 8**.

Here's the context. God told Philip to chase a chariot that had an Ethiopian in it. Look at **verse 30**...

Acts 8:30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” 31 And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Speaking of our children, this is a good example of what it can look like in our parenting...

We ask our children if they understand what they are reading, and they need us to guide them.

Acts 8:32 Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. 33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” 34 And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”

Talk about an open door!

Now I will be the first to say that there are some confusing parts in the book of Isaiah, but most of us would say this is not one of them.

Not only is this one of the clearest descriptions of Christ in Isaiah, it is one of the clearest descriptions of Christ in the entire Old Testament. Yet the Ethiopian didn't know if Isaiah was talking about himself or someone else. He didn't even list Jesus as one of the options for the verses.

Now I'm definitely not mocking or even criticizing the Ethiopian. I'm simply making the point that this man had very little spiritual understanding.

But look at **verse 35**...

Acts 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news (or gospel) about Jesus. 36 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?”

Now when the Ethiopian said, “What prevents me?”, there are quite a few things that might come to mind:

- The fact that he's spiritually immature
- The fact that he knows almost nothing about the Bible

- Only moments earlier he didn't even know **Isaiah 53** was about Jesus

But there was nothing preventing him, because he had become a Christian and that's the only requirement.

Notice what happened...

Acts 8:38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 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.

I wasn't aware of this until a few years ago, so maybe some of you aren't as well...

I thought that the reason paedobaptists practice sprinkling is they didn't want to immerse, or dunk, a baby in water...which makes sense. But I thought that when they baptized adults they practiced immersion...just like credobaptists. I was surprised to learn that even when it comes to adults they still sprinkle versus immerse.

This is even though the word baptize means immerse. If it meant sprinkle I might rethink my doctrine.

One of the things that I don't understand about paedobaptists is if we were supposed to sprinkle, then it wouldn't say that the two of them **went down into the water**. It also wouldn't say that John the Baptist was at the Jordan baptizing people.

Many people traveled with water or had water in their homes, so it could simply say, "They took the water they had and sprinkled it on them." If you don't think you have to be immersed to be baptized then:

- Why are Philip and the Ethiopian going to walk into the water and get soaked for no reason?
- Why is John going to hang out in the Jordan, and why is anyone going to walk that far when they could simply sprinkle people in their homes?

It just doesn't make any sense.

Let me show you one more example. Turn to **Acts 16**. This is the account with the Philippian jailer. Look at verse 30...

Acts 16:30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 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.

This reveals one of the main arguments paedobaptists use. It says the household was baptized, and this must include babies. There are two problems with this...

First, we don't build our theology from silence. So if Scripture doesn't say something:

- We don't say, "Well, Scripture doesn't say that there weren't any babies, so there were probably babies."
- Instead, we say, "Because there's no mention of babies, we don't assume that were babies."

Second, in **verse 31** it says **believe and you will be saved**. The people who believed were saved, and babies can't believe.

This leaves us with a very reasonable interpretation that the verses support...

The gospel was preached to people and those who believed were saved and then baptized.

Notice in **verse 33** the words **the same hour** and **he was baptized at once**.

Again, baptism took place almost immediately after conversion. There was no delay or need for spiritual maturity.

So I would say, if you're a Christian – child or adult – God commands you to be baptized.

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This brings us back to the tension I've mentioned in the previous sermons regarding children being baptized:

- We want our children to be baptized because the Bible commands it
- But we don't want our children to be baptized if they are not Christians
- We want our children to be baptized soon after conversion
- But we want to wait until we see evidence of their salvation

And there is also what we don't want:

- We don't want to look back and feel like we baptized our children when they were too young
- We don't want our children to be baptized and then turn from Christ revealing they were never Christians
- We don't want our children to publicly identify with Christ's death burial and resurrection, but then shame Him through their actions

It is very difficult, as a parent, trying to decide, or helping your child decide, whether they should be baptized. We all want to avoid these situations...so let me give you one more recommendation...

Lesson three: don't try to talk your children into being baptized.

Here's why I don't think you should try to talk your children into being baptized...

Because if you try to talk them into being baptized, you will probably be able to talk them into being baptized.

Then your child will be baptized and you will be forced to wonder if the child's baptism is more a product of your encouragement than their conversion or heart to obey God.

If we coerce our children we will never know if it's because we talked them into it, or because – for lack of a better way to say it – the Holy Spirit talked them into it.

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To make this practical...

I would discourage you from saying something along these lines to your child:

- *Why haven't you been baptized yet?*
- *You should have been baptized by now!*
- *Haven't you seen all these other children who have been baptized? Why haven't you joined them?*

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Think about this...

If children are in a Bible teaching church they will:

- Hear teaching on baptism
- Know baptism is commanded
- Witness baptisms

So they will know they should be baptized.

Also, assuming parents are discipling their children baptism will be a topic.

Questions will arise, and this is what I would encourage:

- Answer any questions.

- Teach them basics:
 - Baptism is publicly identifying with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection
 - Baptism is commanded
 - Baptism is the next step after conversion
- Let them process the answers they hear and the teaching they receive
- Pray for their salvation and spiritual maturity, including a desire to be baptized out of obedience to Christ
- Trust the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts

Then when they seek us out say, "I really want to be baptized" we can have greater confidence God brought this about and is truly working in their regenerated hearts.

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So let me address the children...

If you are a Christian, which means you have repented of your sins and put your faith in Christ:

- There's no amount of the Bible that you must know
- There's no amount of spiritual maturity you must reach

But God commands you to be baptized soon after becoming a Christian

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Finally, I know I've addressed the children, but I want to address any adults who perhaps haven't been baptized...

If you're a Christian, the same goes for you: you should be baptized.

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Let me close with this...

Pastor Nathan and I are thrilled about our Easter Service coming up next week. Please be sure to invite friends and family. We have some neat special music to celebrate and bring glory to Christ and we are thrilled about the different people that want to get baptized.

It's not too late to sign up!

Please let us know if you feel convicted and want to be baptized.

Let's pray.