

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Introduction to Believer's Baptism

Acts 2:37-41

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PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: What is baptism? And how does it function and for what purpose? In Acts 2 the first Christians were told to be baptised in the name of Jesus and for the forgiveness of sin. So what is meant by those statements by the Apostle Peter? Is baptism the way to be forgiven? Are we to ignore the command of Jesus Himself when He said to baptize people in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? Is baptism even something that important or is it optional for believers? Is it something worth dividing over? These are the sort of issues this short series is designed to answer.

I. Introduction.

- A. Read Acts 2:37-41
- B. Review the passage.
- C. At issue for the church today is verse 38 and the purpose and nature of baptism.
 1. We believe and teach in what is called "Believer's Baptism" or credobaptism.
 2. But this is not the only way baptism is practiced. The most common way is some form of infant baptism or paedobaptism.
 3. And finally there are groups who believe that salvation and forgiveness of sin only occurs after baptism.
- D. This is not a small issue though today it is treated as such in many ways. (Dogmatic rank or Theological Triage).
 1. The argument: There are certain doctrines of the Christian faith that are non-negotiable. To reject them is to be outside of the biblical framework of what Christianity is. At the same time not all doctrines are as critical and there is room for disagreement and debate.
 - a. Examples of those things that are non-negotiable would be the Trinity or nature of God or salvation by grace through faith alone or the deity of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Examples of very important but not non-negotiable would be the nature of sin or the nature of the new birth/regeneration.

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- c. Examples of less important doctrines would be the nature of the Kingdom of God, the makeup of a person (two-part or three-part), or the nature and purpose of the Lord's Supper.
 2. The challenge: very few agree on exactly what doctrine goes where. The reason is that doctrine and doctrinal development is not a linear concept.
 - a. Every doctrine connects to the other doctrines in one way or another.
 - b. The sinfulness of man is tightly tied to the nature of his will and the nature of what Jesus did on the cross. The Kingdom of God is not merely something that will occur at some point. But it is connected to salvation and the resurrection and such.
 3. Baptism is one of those issues. It is not merely an issue of when a person gets wet or how wet they are to get. It is much bigger than that.
 - a. So some will try to tie it in some way or another to salvation.
 - b. Others will tie it to the removal of sin, or at least some types of sin.
 - c. Many will say that some sort of grace is given to the person through the baptism, while others will say that it is only symbolic.
- E. What I want to do is help us understand this doctrine and practice by looking at the various ways that people and churches have dealt with it over the centuries. I want to look at the various verses that groups appeal to for their positions.
 1. I will not be exhaustive nor will you want me to be that way.
 2. However, I will treat this in such a way that you are able to understand why we hold to our position and why we are not willing to budge on it.
 3. We are a baptist church and that fact helps identify us with this doctrine.
 - a. Lutherans are named after Martin Luther.
 - b. Presbyterians and Episcopalians—named after a way of governing a church.
 - c. Pentecostals—named after an event in Acts.
 - d. Baptist—named after a doctrinal distinctive.
- F. Add to this that baptism takes on, as I mentioned previously, different meanings and purposes depending on how you identify yourself within the broader Church.

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1. *Roman Catholic Church*—baptism removes original sin.
 2. *Lutheran*—baptism is a way God imparts faith, grace, and salvation.
 3. *Presbyterian/Reformed*—baptism is a sign that the child is of the elect/chosen of God. A sign of the covenant, just like the OT Israelite males were circumcised.
 4. *Church of Christ*—baptism is actually required for salvation to be completed.
- G. Various thoughts on the mode of baptism.
1. Aspersion/Sprinkling of water upon the person.
 2. Affusion/Pouring. Normally done over the head and sometimes with the person partial submerged in water.
 3. Immersion.
 - a. To be a member of this church you must have been baptized by immersion.
 - b. This is to have come after your profession of faith in Christ.
 - c. It does not affect your membership in the universal church.
 - d. The reason we hold to this standard is that we believe the biblical teaching on baptism is by immersion, only immersion, and only done to professing believers.
 - e. As a local body of Christ we are built upon shared convictions. Some of those are seen as necessary for salvation, some are not. But we see them as God-honoring and biblically based.
 - f. Therefore, to avoid needless controversy we as a church welcome as members those who hold to these basic beliefs and practices.
 - g. However we worship with a far broader group—all those who are truly in Christ by faith.
 - h. However, it is worth noting that we would be likely willing to bring into membership someone not immersed assuming there was a compelling reason they could not be baptized in that manner.
 4. Here is what you must understand: the **mode** of baptism should not be a reason to question a person's salvation.

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- a. Notice that I said “mode.”
 - b. If you have come to Christ in faith alone for salvation, then frankly being dipped, sprinkled, or immersed does not affect that reality.
 - c. At the same time, too many, far too many, believe they are saved because they have been baptized. And that, beloved, is simply unbiblical. So back to the idea of dogmatic rank, this pushes baptism into a very high level, if not the highest.
- H. To deal with this subject properly, requires that we consider some basic doctrines first.

II. Baptism and The Authority of the Word of God.

- A. Our authority must be the Bible and only the Bible.
- B. The Bible is the faith once delivered and if there is no agreement here, then we have nowhere to appeal to as our final word.
- C. Yet too often the Word is not our final authority.
 - 1. The Nazarene church and their “manual.”
 - 2. RCC and their tradition and the Pope.
 - 3. Many others have their councils and creeds, and their catechisms, which become the true point of authority.
 - 4. There is nothing wrong with creeds and confessions. They are good and helpful. But they are not the ultimate authority. Scripture must be the final and ultimate authority.
- D. This raises a problem however. Often we talk to other people about some doctrine and find that they have a different perspective on a specific passage. How do we resolve this?
 - 1. I find that the problem commonly comes in 1 of 3 ways.
 - a. Tradition, this is a huge point within the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox church.
 - b. Theology (Arminianism’s theology requires lost of salvation).
 - c. Difficult/vague passages become the controlling passages over everything else.

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2. Here are some basic pointers that I believe are critical to properly approaching the Bible.
 - a. Context.
 - (1) Verses must be understood in their context—not by themselves.
 - (2) Example is Matthew 18 a few messages ago (where 2-3 are gathered...). I would recommend our “Fixing Fables” sub-series for this.
 - (3) This involves bringing an understanding of the language, grammar, and history.
 - (4) It involves the broader context, or “analogy of the faith.”
 - (a) This is simply not closing your mind to something because you have ‘a verse.’
 - (b) It is submitting it to the rest of the Bible, making certain it is not in conflict.
 - (c) e.g. the Bible clearly teaches we are justified through faith, but James says we are justified by works.
 - (d) But it also means that you keep passages within their context and purpose. Often people take for themselves a passage that is clearly given to Israel.
 - (5) We must differentiate between the ‘didactic and the narrative.’
 - (a) One man called this the ‘is’ and the ‘ought.’
 - (b) The ‘is’ is simply telling you what happened. It is not necessarily commanding you to do it, nor is it necessarily something you must be doing.
 - (c) The ‘ought’ is that which teaches us to do something.
 - (d) **Never mix the two.** So often this is into which error comes. This is the challenge in the book of

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Acts as most of it is a narrative that contains some didactic, or teaching, elements.

- E. If you are ever going to get a basic, foundational grasp on the real issues about baptism you have to settle certain biblical doctrines. If these become settled in your mind then half of the challenges related to the practice and purpose of baptism simply go away.

III. We are dead in our sins by nature.

- A. This is so basic and yet I find that many simply don't really believe it.
 - 1. Ephesians 2:1, 5.
 - 2. Colossians 2:13.
- B. These are not hard to understand but they can be hard to accept. But until a person is gripped by them then salvation, baptism and such become rather muddled.
- C. Consider these passages as well, all of which most of you know well:
 - 1. Romans 3:9-18.
 - 2. Romans 5: 12.
 - 3. "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)
 - 4. Mark 7:21.
- D. This is not exhaustive but it is sufficient for our purposes. The bible does not describe the human condition as being sick or merely deceived. Nor does it say that we are basically good by nature but do bad things.
 - 1. We are dead in our sins.
 - 2. We do not fear God.
 - 3. The core of our being is the most deceitful thing in existence.
 - 4. And sin finds its origins from within our heart, not from outside of us.

IV. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.

- A. In the most simplest of terms, all false religions teach a salvation by works.

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1. And this is where baptism becomes an issue. If we are using baptism as the means by which we are saved then there is a real problem.
2. In too many situations the idea of “grace” may be discussed but it is either redefined or given 2nd place.
 - a. So the Catholic church says that baptism removes the sin of the infant and they are now a child of God.
 - b. Many Lutherans believe that through the baptism of an infant they are now given a new birth and have new life in Christ. **The Lutheran church does not teach this, but many in the church believe it.**
3. However, when we look at the Bible we see that salvation is 100% of God.
 - a. As Jonah declared, “salvation is from the Lord.”
 - b. Ephesians 2:8-10. (Explain the flow)
 - c. John 6: 37-40, 44, 64-65. (Walk through the implications of these passages).
 - d. Where do we fit in?
 - (1) We are commanded to believe in Jesus Christ alone.
 - (2) This is not a work, but rather, a non-work, a throwing up of your hands and casting yourself, your life, your hope, upon Jesus’s work on the Cross.
 - (3) Romans 11:6 *But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.*
4. This salvation that is wholly by God’s free grace is received via faith.
 - a. **Faith does not save you.** God’s grace does, in all that it entails (i.e. the incarnation, the crucifixion, resurrection, your hearing the gospel, and such)
 - b. Faith is the instrument that brings it to you, or you to it.
 - c. Faith that is not your parent’s faith or your pastor’s faith or your church’s faith. It is your faith.

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- d. And this means it is an exercising of your mind and heart. It is you consciously trusting and resting in what God has done on your behalf.
 - e. This is worth tucking in your mind because we will learn next week that certain types of infant baptism teaches that the child is somehow saved through baptism.
- B. Now this is important with the subject of baptism.
- 1. When a church, such as the Church of Christ, tries to say that you are saved through faith in Christ **and** baptism, they simply destroy grace because they move the work of baptism into the realm that belongs to grace.
 - 2. The same is true of the Roman Catholic Church. The entrance to the Church and salvation is by the rite of baptism. They teach that the rite of baptism does five things:
 - a. It forgives all sins that may have been committed prior to a person's baptism including original sin, mortal sins, and venial sins, and it relieves the punishment for those sins.
 - b. It makes the newly baptized person "a new creature."
 - c. It turns the person into a newly adopted son of God and a member of Christ. Baptism incorporates a person into the Church, which is the body of Christ.
 - d. It brings you into communion with the whole of the Catholic Church.
 - e. Finally, baptism leaves an indelible spiritual mark of belonging to Christ on the soul. Nothing you can do will take away this mark even if you sin a million times. Those sins may prevent you from being open to the salvation God offers through baptism, but you will always carry the mark of a Christian on your soul, therefore making re-baptism impossible.
 - f. These are incredible claims that if true we should all pursue. But again the grace they claim will come to those who are baptized is through the vehicle of works rather than faith.

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- C. It is critical, then, as we approach this subject, that we see baptism as far more than merely **the way we baptize**, but rather, **the reason we baptize**.

V. Conclusion.

- A. Do not discount the importance of getting this right. One's soul literally hangs upon getting it right.
- B. In today's world of minimalism and personal opinion we so weaken the clarity of mankind's sinfulness and the utter need of God's gracious intervention that baptism is a matter of opinion.
- C. Baptism is the first command a believer obeys in a public manner. It is submitting oneself to be baptised so that in doing so they identify that their hope rests not in anything they have or will do. But in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.
- D. It stands as a public witness to all that they are a follower of Jesus Christ and that there can be no other greater love or loyalty.
- E. It is one of two ordinances that our Lord gave to the Church to practice and it functions as the very entranceway into the visible Church. In other words, the bible does not know of a Christian who is willfully unbaptized. Just like it does not know of a Christian who willfully does not associate with a local body of believers.
- F. Next week we will develop this doctrine more fully.

Benediction

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Small Group Questions

- **What conversations/situations have you had with people from some of the other religions (Catholicism, Church of Christ, Lutherans) about baptism and what did they say? How did you respond to their views and why? What do you hope learn from these sermons that would help you with these discussions in the future?**

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- **In a similar vein, .) Have you interacted with professing Christians who believe baptism saves you, or gives some special grace as a result of being baptized? How have these conversations gone? In what ways did you see how this affects their understanding of the work of Christ and the nature of grace itself?**
- **If you were baptized earlier in life (example, if you grew up Catholic or were baptized as an infant) what should your response be based on this sermon?**
- **Do you believe at this point you have a good understanding of the "how" and "why" we hold to believer's baptism? Could you articulate that to someone asking these questions?**