

“Baptism”

Romans 6:3-4

In most church constitution and by-laws, baptism (in whatever form the church observes) is a prerequisite for membership. Our church is no different. The first two points of the church statement under Article V: Membership: Qualifications for Membership – a person shall qualify for membership who:

- a. Has trusted Jesus Christ as his/her personal Savior and Lord.
- b. Has been baptized by immersion in obedience to the command of Christ (Matt. 28:19).

As we consider the issue of church membership from First Corinthians 12 in the weeks to come, it is necessary that we firmly establish these first two points.

We call “water baptism” by the term “believer’s baptism” because it is only those that have put their trust in Christ for their salvation that can be baptized. This is a biblical principle, as we will see, as well as an historical principle, dating to the days of the early church as recorded in Scripture. I’m going to combine a few points I have made in the years past on this subject so some of this may sound familiar, but it is important that it be reiterated at this point.

One point that needs to be stated at the very beginning is that baptism does not save (more on the importance of baptism later) – Jesus’ baptism indicates as much. If baptism were to be, as some teach, “for the remission of sins” in the aspect of being the mediating force, then Jesus would not have been baptized because that would have shown Him to be sinful – and that would be HERESY. The

“remission of sins” took place because of repentance, not the baptism. Baptism was just an outward proof of one’s repentance. In that respect, Jesus being baptized differs from ours – He needed no repentance. However, His being baptized very surely set the precedence for us to follow – He was our example in this, as well as many other things.

There has been, for ages, a very great controversy over the subject of baptism. It is amazing to consider that such a simple subject in the Bible would be one of such great debate and division. Jesus established the importance when He was baptized, and He stated (recorded for us in Matt. 3:15) that it was to “fulfill all righteousness” – that is to say that baptism is simply part of a life of righteousness that a person is to live in order to be in the center of the Father’s will.

Some of these points may be repetitive but they are essential.

I. UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL BAPTISM

A. What biblical baptism is?

1. Simply put, it is immersion in water, or to plunge in water. It’s used of washing hands in Mark 7:4 and Luke 11:38 – a reference by the Pharisees to the ceremonial washing where they would forcibly plunge their hands in water as a ritualistic way of cleansing themselves. (Matt. 3:6, 16; John 3:23; Acts 8:38-39; Rom. 6:4-5)
2. Pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:4-5, Colossians 2:10-12).

- a) This is an outward symbol of an inward work of grace.
- b) It is a testimony to all that we have trusted in Christ as our personal Savior, and that we believe in His death, burial and resurrection for our sins.

B. Who is to be baptized?

What are the prerequisites for baptism?

1. Born-again children of God

- a) Instruction – before a person can be baptized, he must first understand enough to be saved – Matt. 28:19; Acts 8:36-37; Acts 18:8.

Matthew 28:19

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Acts 8:36–37

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Acts 18:8

8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

“If he [the believer] has a good background in the Bible, that instruction may be

minimal. But like the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:35-37, some people will need much detailed instruction before they will understand God's way of salvation. Missionaries have reported that in some cultures the instruction of a national may take years before he is ready to become a Christian." (Bere, Bible Doctrines for Today, Book 2)

- b) Repentance – once a person has been instructed in the way of salvation, he must then repent of his sin in order to become a Christian. Once he is saved, he is ready to follow the Lord in believer's baptism. The Bible order is always repentance first, then baptism.

Acts 2:38

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

A certain man thought that by being immersed he could find salvation. A friend of his had quite a time explaining to him that it was not so. But this man insisted that, as water would purify the body, so water consecrated by a minister or priest would purify the soul. Finally, to demonstrate that baptism did not mean regeneration, the friend decided upon an object lesson. "Here," he said. "I take an ink bottle, cork it tight, put a string round the neck, and drag it through the river. How long will it take to clean out the inside?" The answer was obvious, "You will never in the world clean it out that way." We must understand once and for all that no

outward act will ever cleanse us within. Repentance is an act that takes place within us, while baptism is an outward act that demonstrates to the world what has already happened in our hearts. Thus, neither John the Baptist nor anyone else in the New Testament speaks of “repentance of baptism” but of “baptism of repentance.” Baptism depends upon and is caused by repentance and not vice versa. It does not make sense for the unrepentant to be baptized.

- c) Faith – goes with repentance – without faith, one cannot be saved – Acts 2:41; 8:37.

Acts 2:41

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Acts 8:37

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

“In many foreign countries, following the Lord in baptism is a real test of a convert’s faith. By baptism he is publicly identifying himself with a group whose beliefs are contrary to the religion of his country and family. Many a new Christian has been ‘declared to be dead’ when he follows the Lord in believer’s baptism.” (Bere)

2. Only those old enough to trust Christ as their Savior are old enough to be baptized – infant baptism has no place in Scripture,

and, therefore, has no place in the church.

C. Why is baptism necessary?

1. We are expressing publicly what has happened to us inwardly at the time of our salvation.

A Chinese boy in Singapore found Christ as his Savior and arranged to be baptized shortly after his graduation. But to his surprise he won a scholarship of \$500 a year for four years in the Hong Kong University. One of the conditions was, "The winner must be a Confucianist." To a poor student the temptation to defer baptism was great, but he resisted and presented himself for baptism at the appointed time. A friend, a Confucianist, stood next in line for the scholarship, but was so impressed that he refused it, saying, "If Christianity is worth so much to my classmate, it can be worth no less to me. I will be a Christian." He trusted Christ as his Savior and was baptized.

2. It provides us a clean conscience toward God by being obedient to His command.

1 Peter 3:21

²¹ The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

D. Who is to do the baptizing?

The local, New Testament church – it isn't clear in Scripture as to the exact details of this, but since baptism is an ordinance given to the church, it would be the safest practice to keep baptism within the confines of the local church, and under its authority. The church can give anyone within its body the authority to baptize, but to be baptized outside of the authority of the church would be in contradiction of the biblical principle of ordinances.

Matthew 28:19–20

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Conclusion to this point: Simply put, baptism is the first step of obedience that a Christian can take in following "His steps."

II. UNDERSTANDING HOW BAPTISM RELATES TO MAN'S SIN – ROMANS 6:3-6

Keep in mind that this passage on baptism is in the same context (the same thought) as that of whether we are going to continue in sin after we are saved, or not. If that idea is kept in the forefront of this study, then we'll understand not only baptism better, but why we are not to sin.

Verse 3 serves as an introduction to the topic of baptism as presented in this passage. There are several things to note regarding this introductory verse:

- a. The word "into" is the same Greek word translated "in" (εἰς) in Matthew 28:19 ("...baptizing them in..."), and points to one of the principles of baptism – that being, when we are baptized, we are indicating we are submitting to Him as a servant, being dead to sin, and alive to Him.
- b. "Into Jesus Christ" is referencing that point of to Whom it is we are devoting ourselves.
- c. "Were baptized into his death" – like as Jesus died physically, and all that that means, so we die to the old man, the world, the flesh – to sin – and live again for Him.

That said, what does baptism mean in relation to man's sin? It means:

A. *Being buried – vs. 4a; Col. 2:10-15*

[Colossians 2:12](#)

¹² Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

1. If a person is dead, and buried, then he is just that – dead to this life, and buried, out of existence. When we are saved, we ought to be dead to the old flesh - dead to sin. Baptism doesn't cleanse us from sin, but it is our way of saying, "I'm going to live a life that will show my past sins are dead and buried - out of existence."
2. The passage in Colossians tells us why we

are "buried with Him in Baptism" – to show our sins have been blotted out.

B. Being risen – vs. 4b; Gal. 3:27

Galatians 3:27

²⁷ For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

1. Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, so also, He raises us from being dead to sin, and the old nature, to a new life with Him.

Ephesians 4:22–24

²² That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

²³ And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

²⁴ And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

2. Although baptism doesn't give us the newness of life, it does solidify our testimony that God has in fact risen us from the grave of the old nature.

C. Being planted – vs. 5

1. If we have been "planted together" with Christ in death, typified by baptism, then we will be "planted together" in His resurrection.

"The word used here *σὺμφυτός* *sumphutos*, does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. It properly means sown or planted at the same time; what sprouts or springs up together; and is

applied to plants and trees that are planted at the same time, and that sprout and grow together. Thus, the name would be given to a field of grain that was sown at the same time, and where the grain sprung up and grew simultaneously. Hence, it means intimately connected, or joined together. And here it denotes that Christians and the Saviour have been united intimately in regard to death; as he died and was laid in the grave, so have they by profession died to sin. And it is therefore natural to expect, that, like grain sown at the same time, they should grow up in a similar manner, and resemble each other." (Barnes)

2. The point here is, after we are saved, changed into a new creature, that new life needs to be planted, cultivated, and harvested with Christ, as He works in us. He does the changing as we allow Him to mold us – as we grow together with Him.

The ESV, and other modern translations, read, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." This does not give as clear an understanding as it should. It isn't a simple union that is seen, but a union that produces a result.

Conclusion to this point:

As newsman Clarence W. Hall followed American troops through Okinawa in 1945, he and his jeep driver came upon a

small town that stood out as a beautiful example of a Christian community. He wrote, "We had seen other Okinawan villages...down at the heels and despairing; by contrast, this one shone like a diamond in a dung heap. Everywhere we were greeted by smiles and dignified bows. Proudly the old men showed us their spotless homes, their terraced fields...their storehouses and granaries, their prized sugar mill."

Hall said that he saw no jails and no drunkenness, and that divorce was unknown in this village. He was told that an American missionary had come there some 30 years earlier. While he was in the village, he had led two elderly townspeople to Christ and left them with a Japanese Bible. These new believers studied the Scriptures and started leading their fellow villagers to Jesus. Hall's jeep driver said he was amazed at the difference between this village and the others around it. He remarked, "So this is what comes out of only a Bible and a couple of old guys who wanted to live like Jesus."

III. UNDERSTANDING HOW BAPTISM RELATES TO SALVATION – MATTHEW 28:19-20; MARK 16:15-16

Matthew 28:19-20

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Mark 16:15-16

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

¹⁶ He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

A. Matt. 28:19 says we are to "teach all nations."

1. The word for "teach" here – μαθητεύω – means to make a disciple by instruction. This word "means not only to learn, but to become attached to one's teacher and to become his follower in doctrine and conduct of life" (Zodhiates).
2. The Apostles were to teach this "new doctrine" of Jesus Christ that the world had not heard before and they were to do so with the intent to make followers of Christ out of those that they taught.

B. Mark 16:15 simply states to preach the Gospel – comparing the two passages, it's clear that there is more involved in preaching today than what some think – in order to accomplish this commission, preaching must teach – plain and simple.

1. Matt. 28:19 – we are to make disciples, make converts, then once they are one, we are to baptize – not in any other order.
 - a) We are to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - b) This is the first time all three Persons of the Godhead are listed like this – pointing to the importance of all Three in the work of grace, and the work of the church.
2. Mark 16:16 is a little less clear and a lot more controversial.

- a) Because this verse says, "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," many see this as teaching that one can't be saved without baptism.

There are too many questions with that interpretation to delve into here, but a few observations are necessary:

(1) The latter part of the verse states that one is condemned because of disbelief, without mention of baptism.

(2) Many passages that deal with salvation and grace make no mention of baptism.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Acts 16:31

³¹ And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. [There is a connection in this text to baptism, showing its importance, but it is not connected in a way to show its necessary for salvation.]

(3) Perhaps the biggest argument against this viewpoint is the thief on the cross.

- b) That being said, I, in no way, want to minimize the importance of baptism in the life of the believer, and the importance placed upon it in Scripture. There are too many occurrences of baptism and salvation together to be either a coincidence or

unimportant. (Acts 2:37-41; 8:35-37; Acts 16:30-33)

- c) Baptism may not be an essential part of grace, but it is certainly an essential part of the believer's walk with the Lord – to such an extent that if one doesn't think they need to be baptized then a question can be raised for their salvation.

1 Peter 3:20-22

²⁰ Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

²¹ The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

²² Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

- d) Although baptism is a work, it is a critical one – the first one, so to speak. So important, in fact, that Jesus was baptized as a demonstration of the importance (He certainly wasn't baptized for the remission of His sins!).

Many believers in other countries pay a very severe price for being scripturally baptized – that's how important it is to them! It identifies us with Christ (Matt. 3:13-17).

Consider the act of baptism. For us believers today we approach it in a rather nonchalant

manner. It is not such a big deal. It certainly is not something we must seriously wrestle over as to whether we will do it or not as in the early church. That is because back then baptism was a very public and a very subversive action.

Indeed, in the early church – as well as in many parts of the world today – to get baptised was an extremely risky and costly action to take. As James Montgomery Boice explains, “In the ancient world, to be identified with Christ in baptism was a bold and risky declaration. It often put the believer’s life in jeopardy. There was nothing wrong with listening to Christian preaching or propaganda. But when a Christian was baptized, he was saying to the state as well as to his fellow believers that he was now a follower of Jesus Christ and that he was going to be loyal to him regardless of the outcome. It meant ‘Christ before Caesar.’”

<https://billmuehlenberg.com/2012/03/09/on-persecution/>

- e) Baptism is an outward sign of an inward belief. It is our outward confession that we have believed in the heart. (Rom. 10:9-10; 6:4; Col. 2:12)

Conclusion: We are to preach the gospel and baptize those that believe the message of the gospel and accept the gift of God’s grace for which the gospel is

given. That's the reason the church exists – to equip the believer to be able to preach the gospel with both their mouth and their life. As we consider this teaching on believer's baptism, let's not forget the greater message – the message of the gospel that needs to be preached.

Luigi Tarisio was found dead one morning with scarce a comfort in his home, but with 246 exquisite violins, which he had been collecting all his life, crammed into an attic, the best in the bottom drawer of an old rickety bureau. In his very devotion to the violin, he had robbed the world of all that music all the time he treasured them; others before him had done the same, so that when the greatest of his collection, a Stradivarius, was first played it had had 147 speechless years. Yet, how many of Christ's people are like old Tarisio? In our very love of the church we fail to give the glad tidings to the world; in our zeal for the truth we forget to publish it. When shall we all learn that the Good News needs not just to be cherished, but needs to be told? All people need to hear it.

--James S. Hewett