

Celebrating God with Baptism

I. The Ordinance of Baptism

- Matthew 28:19-20
- This is the passage that establishes God's precise command that we baptize and be baptized. Of course, there are many more supporting passages in the Scriptures, but this came directly from Jesus' mouth.
- Both baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted by Jesus and required a corresponding tangible sign. For example, in order to participate in the Lord's Supper, you need bread and the fruit of the vine. And in order to participate in baptism, everyone agrees that you need water.

II. The Purpose of Baptism

- Baptism is always shown to follow genuine conversion.
- There were also people in the Bible who believed on Christ who never had the chance to be baptized.
- The point is that baptism was prescribed to follow salvation, and we know there were people who were truly born again but who were not baptized, and we know that there were people who were baptized but who were not truly born again. All of this points to the fact that baptism absolutely does not save us. It was never intended to save us. It's not part of the saving process. Baptism is something else entirely.
- In the ancient Middle East, to be baptized was to testify to the fact that the individual was fully aligning him or herself with a new way of life.
- John MacArthur puts it this way, "This water immersion is a picture, it is an object lesson, it is a symbol, it is a physical analogy of a great, profound, spiritual reality. And here's the point: It is the way God wants to teach the most wonderful truth of all, the union of the believer into the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the salvation reality."
- It doesn't save us, but it's a testimony to the fact that we are saved. We are born again. We're a completely new individual.

III. The Act of Baptism

- **The Way**
 - In Greek, the word refers to being immersed into something else — whether figuratively or literally. Therefore, the act of baptism requires submersing, dipping, immersing someone into water. And that is repeatedly illustrated in the Scriptures. Jesus' own baptism in Matthew 3:13 says that He was immersed and then "came up immediately from the water."
 - In fact, you will not discover anywhere in the Scriptures where it can even be remotely inferred that the individual was not immersed because of two things — 1. There's no description of sprinkling, pouring, or the like. And 2. We must not forget that the actual word means to immerse.
- **The One Baptizing**
 - I Corinthians 1:15
 - The men who glorified God as they baptized others were themselves born again. This is consistent throughout all of the biblical examples of Christ-honoring baptism.
 - They were all men. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we see women baptizing anyone. And this is important because . . .

- They were all church elders. Now, we can get into some trouble with this term depending on how your church understands the term *elders*.
- Biblically speaking, the term elder can and should apply to every born again, spiritually mature man in your church. Therefore, it can and does often refer to pastors (who — as a side note — must be men), but that doesn't mean that only the voted-in preaching pastor is the only person who can baptize. In fact, Paul's argument for why he didn't baptize many people could be easily used to suggest that allowing a lesser-known man of God to baptize new believers could help circumvent potential temptation for the new believer.
 - Obviously it would not be wrong for any mature believing man to baptize a new convert, but we have to acknowledge it's appropriate for any professing Christian who has exemplified Christ-honoring character to baptize someone. We could put it this way, any man who could be biblically called upon to be a deacon or a pastor should be allowed to participate in baptizing.
 - And — using other relational principles we see in Scripture — we could argue that mature, born again fathers would be a wonderful choice to baptize his children, and we could argue that the mature Christian man who lead the individual to the Lord would be a good choice to baptize them.
- **The One Baptized**
 - Baptism does not save a person. It's not a special means of grace.
 - People are born again when they believe in Christ's crosswork and resurrection and confess Him as their Lord. Salvation is simply believing God's promises as He communicates them in the Bible. Salvation is always the results of the gift of faith, and it is not procured by any act of righteousness.
 - And no unsaved person will ever see heaven. Everyone who has not put their trust in Jesus Christ will spend an eternity in hell.
 - Baptism does not save anyone. But no one can be saved if they have not been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. But that is a spiritual reality which symbolically fulfills Noah's experience. I Peter 3:20-22 is not a proof-text for baptismal regeneration.
 - So, we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. The Bible will never contradict itself, and when we read it and understand it normally, it perfectly informs all of our decisions in Christ-honoring ways.
- **The Witnesses of the Baptism**
 - It's clear that the ancient Jews understood the importance of witnesses at a conversion immersion. And it appears that every time someone is baptized in the New Testament, there are more than just the one baptizing and the one being baptized. There were likely two groups of individuals witnessing the baptism that day. On one hand you had other believers who likely were already baptized, new converts waiting to be baptized, and — quite often — unbelievers who were curious about the gathering or who happened to be passing by.
 - But in many modern baptisms, the vast, vast majority of the witnesses are professing believers.
 - There's nothing wrong with testifying to your new life in Christ to a group of believers.
 - But what about the unbelievers? Since baptism is an ordinance and not a sacrament, and since baptism is the opportunity for a new convert to publicly testify to the fact that they are now a child and servant and follower of Christ, doesn't it make sense that this testimony would have a significant — and potentially more potent — impact on the unbelievers who have not — themselves — chosen to follow Christ?