

Baptism: The Gateway to the Church, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

So basic knowledge of God is required at the time of baptism, but also the new convert must understand that Christian discipleship is a commitment to lifelong learning. Jesus said we make disciples by baptizing them, and then it says there, "teaching them to" do what? Not just "all that I've commanded;" it says teaching them "to observe all that I've commanded." They have to be doers of the Word, not just hearers. "All that I've commanded you." Boy, that encompasses a lot, doesn't it? It's enough for a lifetime of discipleship.

Now, can infants make that kind of a commitment? No. Do babies have that basic level of understanding about the Trinity or about the Gospel? No. And this is where we differ with our Pre, Presbyterian brothers and sisters. This is where we differ with the Lutherans, the Anglicans, those who practice infant baptism. We don't believe that.

We understand even in childhood salvation that sometimes children just don't understand very well. It takes some time. It takes some, maybe some time for their minds to grow and to mature where they can grasp some of these concepts and be able to make distinctions.

Not setting an age on that. We don't know the age of accountability, but we do want to talk about the condition of accountability. The practice of infant baptism and maybe even little, little childhood baptism, it's really not warranted biblically when you consider the full import of Jesus' Great Commission here.

When you take a look at the record of the early church in the book of Acts, you find the first Christians practicing exactly what we've learned here. Turn over to Acts 2:38, just as a start there, Acts 2:38. Peter said to the people, you know, he'd been preaching day of Pentecost. There are Jews from all over the Roman Empire visiting Jerusalem on that day. So Jerusalem was clogged with people.

And Pentecost happens. The Holy Spirit comes on that early church, those 120 disciples gathered in the upper room. And you know what? They break out onto the streets and they start preaching, and they're preaching in the languages of all those visitors, all those different visitors. The Holy Spirit gives them the ability to speak in tongues that they did not study before. They preached to them.

And Peter says to the people there, this is kind of a summation of what they were all saying, all the Apostles were saying. Peter said, "Repent," verse 38, "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." Now look at verse 41. "So those who received his word were baptized. And there were added that day about 3,000 souls."

They received his word. That means they understood his word. They understood his preaching. They understood who Jesus Christ was. They heard all the stories of Jesus' crucifixion. They understood. They understood the, the rumors of his resurrection. Peter preached to them, they understood his word, they received his word.

And then it says they were baptized. That's believer's baptism. They received his word. That means they embraced it. They believed it. They were baptized after that, and they were added that day about 3,000 souls added. Added to what? Added to that local church right there in Jerusalem.

Baptism was the initiation right into that local church. Turn over to acts Chapter 8. Two instances of baptism in Acts 8. The first is when the Samaritans believed the Gospel, and Philip had them baptized in verse 12. Turn to Acts 8:35. But in verse 12 Philip baptized the Samaritans. It says, "When they believed Phillip as he preached the good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." See, there's content, they believed it. "They were baptized, both men and women."

Baptism was the initiation ritual that brought a new convert into the fellowship of the local church. It pictured the nature of their conversion. It pictured the substance of the profession that they were making publicly.

Now all that was point one. The next three points are shorter, I promise. But we needed to take that time to lay down a foundation, a definition of baptism, understand its origins, see a picture of it throughout the Scripture to inform everything else we cover.

Let's get into that. Point two. Point two is the implication of baptism. The implication of baptism. And the question we're asking here, is what were the implications of participating in the baptism ritual for those early Christians?

Listen, baptism had massive cultural and social implications for Christians in the first and second centuries, those who entered into fellowship with their local church. Christians suffered greatly, then, when they identified with Jesus Christ and baptism. Culturally, baptism meant you were turning your back on your heritage.

Socially, it meant you were cutting yourself off from your family and your friends. Why? Because you were making a theological judgment about your fellow Jews when you entered

into baptism. You know what you were saying, here's how they interpreted that when you got baptized as a Jew. Christian baptism was interpreted, rightly interpreted, by the way, as a judgment against anyone who condemned and rejected Jesus Christ.

That is the whole Jewish nation. The whole Jewish nation was under this condemnation because they condemned and crucified Christ. "His blood be on our heads and on the heads of our children," is what they said. People then didn't have a live-and-let-live attitude about that. They took religious matters seriously. They still do in the Middle East.

The first-century Jewish community rightly interpreted the actions of a Christian disciple either as an affirmation or a condemnation of what they believed. Those first-century Jews had condemned and crucified Jesus Christ. So if those Christians were right, well, the whole Jewish nation was under condemnation. If you're a faithful Jew and you have affirmed the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as some rabble-rousing, would-be Messiah, their, their condemnation against you by being baptized, someone right out of your own family, unthinkable. Intolerable.

There were only two responses to that early Christian community that was calling for repentance and baptism. A person either repented or they persecuted. They either repented or persecuted. In Acts 2:36, we see the response of repentance, a blessed, humble response. When you're wrong, you repent. Peter said, "Let all the House of Israel, therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. And when they heard this, they were cut to the heart. And they said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' 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 they repented; Three thousand of them that day. And that was without following the Spontaneous Baptism's Guide, too.

But there's another reaction recorded after the Jewish leaders heard the preaching of Stephen. The same condemnation of their actions toward Jesus, Acts 7:54 says, "When they heard these things from Stephen, they were enraged. And they ground their teeth at him. They cried out with a loud voice. They

stopped their ears and rushed together at him. They cast him out of the city and stoned him.”

The writer of Hebrews, he wrote to warn, to admonish, and also to encourage Jewish Christians who were facing that kind of attitude toward them. They were dealing with persecution for being identified with the Christian Church. Listen, the cultural pressure to leave the church and to return to their Jewish community was so strong. Some were really tempted to fall away.

So the writer warns them throughout the Book of Hebrews, saying, Don't do that. But in Hebrews 10: 32 and following, he encourages them. He says, “Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, sometimes being partners with those so treated.

“For you had compassion on those in prison. You joyfully accepted the plundering of your property since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.



Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.”

Unfortunately, baptism doesn't carry that same significance today. It's easy. It's pretty inconsequential to get baptized in a church here in America. But imagine if it did cost you. The secularists gain such prominence that they make sure you lose your job if you're baptized in Jesus' name. You're, you're socially ostracized. You're shunned by family and friends.

I wonder how many would go through baptism then? What if the Islamo-fascists take over, and they started killing those who want to be baptized as Christians? You think those mega-churches, celebrity pastors with their crowd mani, manipulation schemes, you think they're going to keep the water warm in their baptismal tanks?

Even if the implications and the consequences of baptism are not as severe at the moment, and listen, we can thank God for that. I'm glad to be worshiping in a country where I'm not killed for my faith. It allows us to talk freely and openly like

this. We can still do it when the pressure comes. It just costs more, just hurts a little more. But the end, the end is coming soon. Listen, baptism still carries the same weight, the same significance it always has.

We've seen, number one, the definition of baptism; number two, the implication of baptism; point three, the demonstration of baptism. What does baptism demonstrate? What does it signify? Why, why did Jesus choose baptism to be the gateway for new converts entering his church? Well, you know the answer to this.

Baptism symbolizes what happened in salvation. It signifies our union with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, and that's why it's the perfect way to introduce a new convert to the community of faith, right?

John taught the people that when the Messiah came, he was going to come with a baptism far superior to his own. If we, we're going to be more precise about it, Jesus actually came preaching two baptisms, right? One was an immersion into

judgment called a baptism of fire. The other is immersion into blessing, the baptism of the Spirit.

Turn back to Matthew's Gospel again, and we'll just continue reading where we left off there in verse 7. John saw all these people coming from, it says Jerusalem, all Judea, the region about the Jordan, all these people were flocking to him. You think, Wow, what a revival! Look what he says in verse 7. "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them," this is not very seeker friendly to say this, but he said this, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Sounds like James chapter 2, doesn't it?

"And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptized you with water for repentance. But he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I'm not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Wow! John didn't baptize just anyone. He baptized only the humble, the repentant. For the rest, like the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they could only expect a baptism of judgment. John says, verse 11, "He'll baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." That's Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire. In a time of grave judgment to come, Jesus will literally immerse the ungodly in fire. He will submerge them in fire, saturate them in fire. Sounds terrifying, doesn't it? Folks, we need to preach the Gospel to these people. We need to let them know.

The other baptism, though, is what we know as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And that was a baptism of blessing for all those who belong to Jesus Christ. Turn just quickly to John chapter 1, John chapter 1, and we're just starting there in

verse 29. John is baptizing the penitent there. They're all coming toward him. Jesus sees them walking toward him.

John 1:29 says this, "The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him, and he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said after me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.'" "

John bore witness. "'I saw the spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" "

First context in Matthew chapter 3, the baptism of fire, that was what was emphasized there because John was speaking to the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the brood of vipers. Here, though, what's emphasized is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There's so much here in this passage. It's beyond the scope of what we're

trying to accomplish for this morning, to develop the full theology of Spirit baptism, but it's important to say this at the very least.

When the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove, dove-like, you could say, John knew, number one, that God's new covenant, the new covenant talked about in the Old Testament, that was about to be fulfilled. And number two, John knew that Jesus was the Messiah who would dispense the spiritual blessings of that new covenant. He knew those two things, and that, those new covenant blessings were to begin with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God's people.

John's mind, the Old Testament, the people of the, of that day, the, their mind would go immediately back to the promises of Isaiah 32, Isaiah 44, Ezekiel 39, that God would pour out his Spirit on his people. Joel 2 extends the promise of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles as well. I'm thankful. So are you. Those prophecies speak of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and they use water metaphors, pouring, drenching, words that correspond perfectly with baptism.

Again, remember the definition of baptism. It means immersion, saturation, every fiber in a fabric being affected by the dye, colored, and changed. That's what it means for a believer to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. No fiber of our being goes untouched, so to speak, by the Holy Spirit. He is all in us. We are all in him, and that happens to every single believer at the moment of salvation.

The Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ, uniting us with Christ. Romans 6:3-4 says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Colossians 2:12 says the same thing by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which happens at the point of salvation for every single believer, Jew, Gentile, does not matter; slave, free, rich, poor, male, female, doesn't matter. Everyone who's a

believer is baptized into Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Our immersion into Christ results in our union with Christ. Galatians 3:27, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." He, we are in him. He is on us. The Spirit creates a permanent spiritual bond between us and Jesus Christ, never to be broken. That's where our assurance comes from.

Now listen, if everyone who is baptized by the Holy Spirit, that is, spiritually united to Christ and his death, burial, and resurrection, if we're united to Christ through that spiritual baptism, that means, you know what that means? Means we're united to each other as well, right? Does that ring a bell? Ephesians 4:5? "One Lord, one faith, one baptism"? That's what it's talking about.

What about 1 Corinthians 12:12-13? "Just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ, for in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Jews or Greeks, slaves or free



and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” I like that imagery there, baptized, that's it, we're immersed into the Spirit. And we're all made to drink of the Spirit. So he goes outside of us and inside of us, through and through.

So this physical act of baptism, the ritual immersing of a new Christian in water, it's the perfect symbol of our spiritual initiation into the Christian life. Baptism does not save us from our sins. I'll say that again, baptism does not save us from our sins. The Roman Catholics are wrong here because it does not produce grace. Baptism does not produce grace. If it did, that would be earning grace by works, by what you do. In that case, grace would no longer be grace, would be what's merited.

Aberrant groups that teach baptismal regeneration like the Mormons, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Church of Christ, the Cultish One, the, the United Pentecostals, all those, they're wrong for the same reasons. Regeneration is a grace of God. It's not earned by human works at all.

Listen, everything illustrated by water baptism has happened prior to the act of water baptism. Baptism pictures, number one, break with the old life, beginning of the new. Number two, it pictures the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that inaugural promise of the New Covenant. Number three, it pictures the union with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. And number four, it pictures the incorporation with every other believer into the body of Christ.

That's why Jesus chose baptism as the rite of initiation for entry into the membership of the Christian Church. Doesn't save, doesn't confer grace, but it is significant as the first act of obedience to a clear command of our Lord and Savior. It's a blessed act of obedience that we can act out in water baptism the spiritual realities of our salvation.

Okay, we've seen the definition of baptism, the implication of baptism, the demonstration of baptism. Let's just quickly consider a fourth point: The function of baptism. The function of baptism. If you're not compelled by the theology of baptism we've covered already, I don't think you're alive, okay, but

perhaps you're wondering, you may be thinking to yourself, practically, how is baptism useful for the church today?

Yeah, it's a good question to ask. Why is it so important for us to continue practicing and emphasizing baptism here in the local church? And maybe some of you are thinking in your mind, you know, there's, there's actually a verse of Scripture I'm thinking about. We, we, we actually don't have any verses of Scripture that picture Jesus baptizing anybody.

Why is it so important? We know for a fact Paul didn't baptize too many people in Corinth. He says so in 1 Corinthians 1:14-16. He says in verse 17, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel."

So did I just undermine my entire sermon? Have I made much ado about nothing? No. I wouldn't have wasted all this time, your time or mine, teaching on the significance of baptism, if I didn't think that the Bible taught its role is vital and practical in, in, in every local church.

Paul wasn't diminishing the importance of baptizing new converts, especially in light of our Lord's words, make disciples, baptizing them. He was simply correcting the prideful Corinthian tendency to align themselves with celebrity people, celebrity apostles, and for their, their sake, he's glad he didn't baptize too many of them. His apostolic role was about laying the foundation of truth for the church. It's the role of church leadership to stay put and to baptize new converts into the fellowship.