

“What is baptism?”

May 21, 2017

Romans 6:1-4

I. Introduction

The first sentence in our church constitution is: *“We believe the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.”* This statement along with the rest of those in our doctrinal statement is referenced by close to 100 Scripture references. As Christians first and as Baptists second, we believe that the Bible is the only authority for faith and conduct. This is why Baptists are sometimes called “People of the Book.” One could say that “B-I-B-L-E” is an acronym for God’s “Basic Instruction Book for Life on Earth.”

As we read and study the New Testament, there are 2 actions or ceremonies that Jesus tells His followers to do. These are the 2 ordinances we “do” as “people of the Book.” You already know what they are. The first ordinance is the one we celebrated a couple of Sundays ago—the Lord’s Table. Turn to the familiar passage we often read when we come to the Lord’s Table: [turn to 1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#). Neither Jesus nor Paul said how often to do this, but when we do, we are to remember what Jesus did for us. As a church, we have decided to celebrate Communion once a month. The frequency is up to us, but the ceremony and purpose have been established. It is a memorial service.

Does celebrating or not celebrating your birthday affect how old you are? Some of you may wish this were true, but, as we all know, it isn’t. It is just a reminder of something that happened earlier—for some of us it happened a long time ago. In the same way, celebrating or not celebrating Communion doesn’t affect whether or not you are saved. Communion is a way of remembering something important that happened a long time ago.

The second ceremony or ordinance is found in [Matthew 28:19](#) when Jesus said, **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy**

Spirit.” The 2nd ordinance is baptism. Since in a little while we are going to baptism several people, it seemed important that we take some time this morning and consider baptism. Throughout the years, men and women have come up with a variety of thoughts about baptism, but as people of the Book—God’s Word—we need to ask, “*What does the Bible say about baptism?*” This morning we are going to spend a little time looking at different Bible passages to answer questions about baptism.

II. What does the Bible say about baptism?

A. How is baptism done? First, how is baptism supposed to be done? Christianity didn’t start until after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—until then, the only way to God was through the Mosaic Laws. But, although its meaning was different, baptism was already being practiced when Jesus came on the scene. Turn to **Mark 1:4-5**. Now go down to **Mark 1:9-11**. Jesus’ baptism changed the meaning or picture of baptism. As **2 Corinthians 5:21** says, Jesus was sinless. Unlike those that John was baptizing, Jesus had no sins from which to repent. For Jesus, baptism was a sign of the beginning of His 3-year ministry leading up to His crucifixion and death. It was a sign of His obedience to the Father.

The word “baptism” or “baptize” comes from the Greek word “*baptizo*” which means to dip, immerse, or to plunge something into something else – usually water. The descriptions we have in the New Testament are pretty clear that people went down into the water to be immersed, rather than have water brought to them to be sprinkled; e.g. **Matthew 3:6** says: “**Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him, i.e. John, in the Jordan River.**” **John 3:23** says: “**Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized.**” **Acts 8:38** says: “**Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.**” Every time we read the word “*baptize*”, it would be absolutely correct to say “*immerse*.” If we look at our Scripture for today in Romans, we see that baptism—immersion is symbolic; it’s symbolic of being buried with Christ and being raised with Him to newness of life. How does sprinkling symbolize being buried? It doesn’t. For “people of the Book”, baptism is by immersion.

B. Who is baptized? So according to the Bible who is supposed to be baptized? To find this answer, we have several verses to look at in the record of New Testament history—the Book of Acts. Turn to Peter’s first sermon—the one he gave after Pentecost—[Acts 2:37-38](#). Now turn to [Acts 8:12-13](#). Now turn to [Acts 10:44-48](#); [Acts 16:29-33](#); [Acts 18:7-8](#); and, finally, turn to [Acts 19:1-5](#). These are more examples, but do you see a pattern? As it said in [Acts 8:12](#): “Those that believed the Good News of the kingdom of God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ were baptized.” Even John the Baptist’s disciples, men who had been baptized by John before they knew who Jesus was, were baptized a second time after they believed. So who does the Bible indicate is to be baptized? Those who have made Jesus their Lord and Savior—believers are baptized. This is why this is often called Believer’s Baptism.

C. Why baptize? So, according to the Bible, after a person was saved—i.e. has believed that Jesus died and rose again for his/her sins—then he/she was to be immersed in water. In [Mark 16:16](#) we read: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” The emphasis in this verse is “believe.” A person is condemned, i.e. bound for hell, if he or she doesn’t believe. So why baptize at all? As we read in [Matthew 28:19](#), Jesus said to do it. We also see it modeled throughout the Book of Acts. Like it was for Jesus, being baptized is an act of obedience—obeying the one we have made the Lord of our lives.

D. What does baptism mean? Finally, since no one is saved by being baptized, what does baptism mean? Like the Lord’s Table or Communion, baptism is a symbol. Turn to [Colossians 2:11-12](#). Like Romans 6, Colossians is saying that baptism expresses our faith in the work of God in raising Jesus from the dead.

Baptism is a symbol of the death and burial of the old life of sin and being raised to a new life in Christ Jesus. When a person is lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when the person is raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Baptism is a sign—a testimony—to others that the one being baptized has accepted the gift of eternal life that God has offered. By being baptized a person is

publicly declaring: *“I believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead for me. In faith I have accepted Him as my Lord and Savior.”* Baptism is a sign of being identified with Christ. This is another reason to call this “Believer’s Baptism.”

III. Summary

Jesus Christ changed the meaning of the Passover meal from reminding one of the 1st Passover to reminding believers of His sacrifice on the cross for them. The baptism or immersion of John the Baptist symbolized repentance of sin and turning to God. Christ changed the meaning of baptism—immersion—into an outward act of identifying with Him through faith. Baptism is a visible, public testimony that those who are baptized belong to Him and want to obey Him. Through the process of immersion, one symbolizes the death and burial of the old life and the resurrection to a new life.

Baptism has no part in the work of salvation, but it is a God-ordained and God-commanded action to follow salvation. As we saw earlier in [Mark 16:16](#), Jesus made it clear that it is “not believing” or “*disbelief*” that keeps one from being saved—not the failure to be baptized. At the same time, Jesus made it clear that salvation and baptism go together.

The Bible says in [Ephesians 2:8-9](#) that a person is saved by God’s grace alone working through the person’s faith; it is a gift of God not by any action of the person, this includes the action of being baptized. But by God’s own words, the act of baptism/immersion is His divinely designated sign of the believer’s identification with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism is a divinely commanded act of faith and obedience. The call to Christ is not only a call to salvation but also is a call to obedience. One commanded act of obedience of a child of God is baptism in His name.

This morning we have 4 people who want to be obedient to God and be baptized. Several of them have had an infant’s baptism but they had no say in that. It certainly didn’t demonstrate their faith in the life and death of Jesus Christ for them. They weren’t old enough to understand anything about God’s gift of eternal life; for that reason they want to have a believer’s baptism—as commanded by God.

So have you been baptized, i.e. immersed after you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If you have, does your life show that you are a child of God in what you say and what you do? If you have made Jesus your Lord and Savior but haven't been baptized, why not obey Jesus—you claim He is your Lord; why not obey your Lord and be baptized/immersed?

“What is baptism? – Part 2”

In Jesus' day immersing a person wasn't something new or strange—John the Baptizer used it to represent repentance from a way of life. This is why in the New Testament we see people believing in Jesus and being immersed even on the same day—they knew what baptism was and what it signified to those watching. As we read in Romans 6 and Colossians 2, the Apostle Paul wrote that the significance of baptism for Christians was that it represented dying to the old life and rising to new life in Christ. It was a testimony to others and to the person being baptized about a change that had occurred in his or her heart. Today we don't rush into baptizing a person, first there needs to be an understanding of what immersion means and doesn't mean.

Earlier this morning we read what Jesus said in [Mark 16:16](#), “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” [Romans 10:9](#) says, “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” The Bible makes it clear that it is “not believing” that keeps one from being saved. At the same time, it is clear that salvation and baptism go together. This is why in Peter's first sermon in [Acts 2:38](#), he told those who asked what they should do to “repent and be baptized.”

This morning Nikki, Patrick, Karen, and Lori choose to be obedient to God. They want to testify to each one of you about their faith in Jesus Christ. They believe that Jesus died on the cross for their sins. They have made Jesus their Savior and their Lord. This morning, they want to follow God's directions and have a believer's baptism.

If you have had a believer's baptism, let this baptism be a reminder to you of what you promised to God, to those who witnessed your baptism, and to yourself. Several years ago I ran across a baptismal statement written by Philip Henry which summarizes what each person being immersed is saying to God and to you as their witnesses:

I take God to be my chief end and highest good.

I take God the Son to be my prince and Savior.

*I take God the Holy Spirit to be my sanctifier,
teacher, guide, and comforter.*

*I take the Word of God to be my rule in all my actions
and the people of God to be my people under all conditions.*

*I hereby dedicate and devote to the Lord all that I am,
all that I have,
and all I can do.*

And this I do deliberately, freely, and forever.

If you have never chosen to be baptized, then think of these words from [2 Peter 3:14](#), “**Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him,**” I would strongly recommend that you give serious thought to obeying God and being baptized.

_____, I have 3 questions for you.

- 1. How do you know you are saved?*
- 2. Does baptism save you?*
- 3. Then why be baptized?*

Then based on your profession of faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in your choice to obey Him, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

