

BAPTIZING THEM

Matthew 28.19

I cannot imagine any pastor who is not a Baptist pastor delivering this type of message from God's Word. That is sad, since preachers ought to be Pauline, who said to the Ephesian elders when he saw them for the last time, in Acts 20.27,

“For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

Let us begin by reading from Matthew 28.17:

- 17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.
- 18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.
- 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 alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

About seven weeks before the events recorded in this passage occurred, the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified in fulfillment of ancient Biblical prophecies, but rose from the dead after three days and nights as He predicted, and then appeared to His disciples numerous times, to 500 people on one occasion.¹ During that time, after His bodily resurrection from the dead, and before His final ascension to sit at His Father's right hand on high, where He is presently enthroned until He comes for His own,² He issued what has come to be known as the Great Commission on several occasions.

A proper exegesis of the Greek text reveals that the risen Lord issued a straightforward directive: the Church was to make disciples of Jesus Christ by going, baptizing, and teaching all things whatsoever He commanded.³ Thus, all three activities are integral to the process of making disciples.

I direct your attention to the second of the three activities, the only one that can accurately be described as an event, since both the evangelizing of the lost and the training of the saved in obedience are correctly recognized as processes that are undertaken over time. Notice what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 28.19 concerning this practice we call baptism. He said, “baptizing them.”

I expand on that brief phrase this morning under twelve headings, without pretending to exhaust the topic of Scriptural baptism:

First, BAPTISM IS AN ANCIENT ORDINANCE

¹ 1 Corinthians 15.6

² Psalm 16.11; 110.1; Matthew 26.64; Mark 12.36; 14.62; 16.19; Luke 20.42; 22.69; John 3.13; 13.1; 14.2-4; Acts 1.9-11; 2.33, 34-35; 7.56; Romans 8.34; Ephesians 1.20; 6.9; Colossians 3.1; Second Thessalonians 1.7; Hebrews 1.3, 13; 8.1; 9.24; 10.12-13; 12.2; 1 Peter 3.22; Revelation 19.11

³ R. T. France, *The Gospel Of Matthew - NICNT*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), page 1115.

By ancient, I mean that baptism was instituted over 2,000 years ago by the forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ, that greatest of all prophets known as John the Baptist.⁴ Mark 1.1-5:

- ¹ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;
- ² As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.
- ³ The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
- ⁴ John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.
- ⁵ And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

Baptism was not an ancient ordinance in the time of our Lord Jesus Christ. Despite the assertions of many forgetful modern scholars to the contrary, our great Baptist theologian and student of all things Jewish and Talmudic, John Gill, persuasively established that baptism was not a widely employed rite when John the Baptist first began his ministry.⁵ So, while John the Baptist did not adapt baptism, but instituted it himself when he began his prophetic ministry as our Lord's forerunner, this new ordinance of baptism has endured through uninterrupted practice from that day to this, for more than 2,000 years of observance.

By ordinance, I refer not to anything like a sacrament (more on this later), but to an observance. Baptism is a practice the Lord Jesus Christ directed His apostles to observe and maintain as part of every Church's life. As they led the Church the Lord Jesus Christ founded, other Churches were to be established that would carry on the same practices. Two ordinances in congregations follow the New Testament pattern of worship: baptism and the Lord's Supper. From time to time, as God gives us the fruit of our prayers and efforts, it is our practice to engage in this ordinance of baptism by immersing candidates who we are persuaded have credible testimonies of conversion to Jesus Christ, which we refer to as believer's baptism.

I do not think it is rightly labeled believers' baptism, because it is not a practice owned by believers who are baptized. Believers are nowhere commanded to be baptized. The practice is owned by the Savior and authorized by Him to be properly observed by Churches in obedience to His Great Commission. Hence, believer baptism is the baptism of those who, in a Church, are persuaded to have believed in Christ.

Next, BAPTISM IS AN AUTHORIZED ORDINANCE

Notice, in Matthew 28.18, the Lord Jesus told His apostles and disciples,

“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”

The Greek word there translated “power” does not refer to might, but to authority, the *right* to control or command.⁶ Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ declared that He had complete authority, the absolute right in heaven and on earth to exercise His discretion, to exercise His will, and to delegate to them, that first congregation, this noble charge.

⁴ Matthew 11.9-11

⁵ John Gill, *The Collected Writings of John Gill - Version 2.0*, (Paris, AK: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2000-2003), *A Dissertation Concerning the Baptism of Jewish Proselytes*

⁶ Bauer, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pages 352-353.

What, then, did the Lord Jesus Christ do as an expression of His authority? He issued an order, a directive, a command, that we now refer to these centuries later as the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, what Calvary Road Baptist Church does in seeking the salvation of the lost, and then baptizing those converted to Jesus Christ, and subsequently teaching them to observe all things Christ has commanded, is what we have been authorized to do by the One Who has all authority.

No institution on the face of this earth has greater authority to preach the Gospel, to baptize those who have embraced the Gospel message, and then to train them, than we and other congregations like us do. Many governments and institutions seek to interfere with the proper exercise of the authority by which we act, but they do so illegitimately and without authorization from God Himself. In like manner, many professing Christians at large, as well as many religious gatherings that are not New Testament Churches at all, imagine without Scriptural support for what they do that they are authorized to engage in this Great Commission. They are mistaken.

Third, BAPTISM IS A COMMANDED ORDINANCE

You may think I am making a fine distinction between baptism being authorized and baptism being commanded, but I do so for a reason.

Some years ago, I had a staff member who was a wonderful Christian man who had previously been the pastor of an independent Baptist church in California. During a long conversation in my office one evening, he poured out his heart and told me the tragedy of that congregation's refusal to obey Christ's commission to make disciples.

It is a heavily Hispanic farming community, with less than a third of the population being Anglo, and only a sprinkling of black people and Asian folks living there. The congregation in question was an all-white group until this preacher arrived from Michigan, where he had attended Church with and served God alongside Christians from many different backgrounds.

He told me that after only a few weeks as the new pastor, he brought a Hispanic couple to the church, who then expressed interest in joining the body. It was the church's custom to consider such matters at a monthly business meeting. But at that business meeting, the consideration of the Hispanic couple was tabled. Over the next month, a racially mixed couple began attending and expressed interest in joining the church. Their membership, too, was an item that was tabled at the following business meeting.

Not wanting to violate long-established customs, the pastor waited several months before making an issue of these two couples' desire to become members. When he did bring the matter up, he pointed out that in fulfilling the Great Commission, Churches would naturally see people of different backgrounds converted, baptized, and incorporated into the Church for training under the pastor's oversight. Thus, their church needed to act on the two couples who wanted to join, since it was only a matter of time before someone who was not white would be brought to Christ and baptized, beginning the process of integrating the congregation.

The members saw the logic of the pastor's argument and did not quarrel with the importance of baptizing new converts and bringing them into the church. Therefore, after asking him to step outside so they could discuss the matter among themselves privately, the church unanimously voted to abstain from the Great Commission. They were determined to remain an all-white congregation. The pastor, himself a white man, when informed of the church's unscriptural decision, immediately resigned.

That congregation understood that they were authorized to fulfill the Great Commission, but they did not realize that they were also *commanded* to do so. Thus, not only are we authorized to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Ghost, but we are also *commanded* to do the same by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourth, BAPTISM IS A DESIRED ORDINANCE

Real Christians want to be baptized. Read the Gospel accounts and you will find no evidence of compulsion in John the Baptist's ministry. Neither will you find any evidence of compulsion in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, or connected to the apostles' ministries, such as on the Day of Pentecost, or after that day.

Why is this so? Real Christians want to be baptized because baptism is not a dangerous or frightening thing. It is an ancient practice of Gospel-preaching Churches to baptize converts to Jesus Christ. And when sinners are converted to Jesus Christ, they are typically thrilled at the opportunity to be baptized at Christ's command and by His authority. Though he was eager to follow the Lord in believer baptism, our friend Samuel Rai's reputation was such that the Church he attended held off baptizing him for six months for fear of his reputation. That said, they did not prevent him from attending the Church, despite his rightly earned history as an incredibly lethal man. Oh, how he wanted to be baptized.

Why else would the Ethiopian eunuch, when brought to a saving knowledge of Christ by Philip, say, "See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?"⁷

Fifth, BAPTISM IS A GUARDED ORDINANCE

It is a tragic oversight by many pastors and congregations that the two Church ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are not adequately guarded. That is, there are always more people who want to participate in the two ordinances than are Scripturally qualified to do so. We saw this in John the Baptist's ministry, as he turned away many who wanted to be baptized but were not qualified.⁸ Thus, this nonsensical modern-day practice of automatically baptizing anyone and everyone who wants to be baptized is without precedent in the New Testament. I wonder how many congregations have *any* memory of refusing to baptize a candidate they felt was unqualified?

Keep in mind that when Jonathan Edwards was dismissed from his pastorate in Northampton in 1750, by a vote of 230 to 23, it was because he was attempting to reverse the practice of admitting unconverted nonmembers to the communion service. Sadly, most religious gaggles these days do not properly discharge a Church's duty to guard the ordinance of communion.

The same is so often true when it comes to baptism, demanding only the most perfunctory testimonies from professing Christians, if that, rather than exercising the appropriate caution such a critical ordinance would logically seem to require. Again, we term it believer baptism because we see none baptized in the New Testament save those who were considered genuine believers in Jesus Christ.

When you survey the damage done by the Corinthian fornicator in First Corinthians chapter 5, and the potential damage that might have resulted from Simon the magician in Acts chapter 8, you cannot help but wonder why Churches are not more concerned about the danger of baptizing unconverted people than they seem these days to be.

How, then, is the ordinance of baptism to be guarded? The principle of two or three witnesses is the most essential way to corroborate testimony, observable lifestyle changes, and demonstrate a basic understanding of

⁷ Acts 8.36

⁸ Matthew 3.7-12

the Gospel, which are deemed reasonable and relevant when considering the qualifications of a hopeful convert for baptism.⁹

Sixth, BAPTISM IS A JOINING ORDINANCE

A distinguishing characteristic of Baptist Churches has been our insistence throughout Christian history upon baptism *before* anyone is considered qualified to be a member of the body. Thus, when the pastor who succeeded me at my first pastorate indicated that it was at least theoretically possible for a person to join a Baptist Church without being baptized, he took a giant step toward discrediting himself with the congregation I had been privileged to lead for seven years.

We are Baptists. We baptize people. And we do not think anyone has any business being a Baptist, which is to say being a member of a Baptist Church, without being baptized. Too many Baptists have lived through oppression and public persecution down through the centuries, and too many Baptists have had their blood spilled, for what some think is the trifling insistence on baptism. Sorry, if you are unwilling to be baptized, you are unwilling to be a Baptist.

Seventh, BAPTISM IS A UNIFYING ORDINANCE

Though I do not have time to establish it as such, I am convinced Ephesians 4.5, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism,” is not a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but is a reference to the ordinance of baptism in water that is administered by the congregation’s authority.

“What difference does it make?” you may ask. The difference is this: The first half of Ephesians chapter four may be the most crucial passage in the entire Bible on the subject of spiritual unity. Written from Roman imprisonment, the Apostle Paul was there pleading with his beloved Ephesians to hang together, to demonstrate spiritual unity in the face of intensifying opposition, and he made use of their baptism, their very public profession by being openly immersed in water as a disciple of Jesus Christ, as one of the means to accomplish that quest for unity. If the baptism mentioned in Ephesians 4.5 was not water baptism, then water baptism had ceased to be a practice by then, something that is demonstrably untrue.

Eighth, BAPTISM IS A REWARDING ORDINANCE

How does one become a member of a Church? First, there is conversion. Next, there is baptism. If that is not the sequence of events, it should be the sequence of events. In other words, you come to Christ and are then baptized, by which means you become a Church member. Baptism is how a new believer becomes a member of a New Testament Church congregation.

What, then, is the benefit of being a Church member? Besides obedience? Besides service? First Corinthians 3.14 points out the reward that will be given to the person who builds the temple of God with gold, silver, and precious stones, that person whose labors survive the fire of Christ’s Judgment Seat scrutiny.

What is often overlooked is that First Corinthians 3.17 points out that what is considered is the believer’s ministry in building the temple of God. This confuses many people, who mistakenly believe that the temple of God and the temple of the Holy Spirit are the same. They are not the same. The temple of the Holy Spirit is the

⁹ Numbers 35.30; Deuteronomy 17.6-7; Joshua 24.22; Ruth 4.9-11; Job 10.17; Isaiah 8.2; 43.9-12; 44.8-9; Jeremiah 32.10, 12, 25, 44; Matthew 18.15-20; Luke 24.46-48; Acts 1.8; 2.32; 3.15; 5.32; 10.39; 13.31; 2 Corinthians 13.1; 1 Thessalonians 2.10; 1 Timothy 5.19; 6.12; Hebrews 10.28; 1 John 4.1; 5.7-9; Revelation 1.1; 2.2

believer's physical body, as stated in First Corinthians 6.19, while the temple of God is the congregation, as mentioned in First Corinthians 3.17.

What does this mean? It means that a believer's rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ will result from their ministry in connection with the congregation they are a part of. But how does one become a part of a Church congregation? Baptism, generally speaking, with joining the Church by those already baptized also being an option.

Ninth, BAPTISM IS A DECLARATION ORDINANCE

How does a person declare to the world that he is a new creature in Christ? There are two ways one can make such a declaration; actually, actions are louder and more impactful than mere words. He can declare with his mouth, which is to say verbally, and he can declare through believer baptism, which is to say by his public identification with the Lord Jesus Christ via his immersion in water.

The superiority of baptism, when congregations rightly practice the ordinance, is that it is the testimony of many witnesses, and not just the say-so of one fellow who has convinced himself he is born again. Look with me at First Peter 3.18-22:

- 18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:
- 19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;
- 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.

Stipulating that salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works of any kind, notice that we have two symbolic representations in this passage of the salvation Jesus Christ provides. *First*, there is the Ark of Noah, which prefigured the salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ, as the eight souls who survived the Flood. *Then*, there is believer baptism. Although some people trip on Peter's wording, he is indicating here that baptism is a figure of salvation, just as the Ark of Noah was a figure of salvation. Essential for you to see, at this point, is that baptism is the answer of a good conscience toward God, according to verse 21. That is, it is the proper response of a conscience freed from guilt by the forgiveness that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ.

There are many reasons why people want to be baptized. Sadly, many reasons are bad reasons, because they are not related to real conversion. But when a Church faithfully discharges its responsibility to guard this ordinance, then you bring together Christ's authority and the new believer's desire to please his Savior, both combining in a public declaration.

The baptismal candidate thereby declares most persuasively, "I am saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, by grace and through faith. I am a new creature in Christ and from this point forward I purpose to live for Him and love Him all the days of my life."

But that is not all. By the congregation's willingness to baptize the candidate, we are testifying that we, too, believe this person is truly a child of God, are persuaded by his conversion testimony and visible changes in his lifestyle. We are eager to declare to the world that we stand with him in allegiance to Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Tenth, BAPTISM IS AN IMMERSION ORDINANCE

The word “baptize” is not the translation of a Greek word into an English word. If that were the case, we would be using the words “immerse,” “dunk,” “dip,” or “plunge.” The word “baptize” is what is called a transliteration, the anglicizing of a Greek word to make it pronounceable by English-speaking people.¹⁰ I am persuaded that this transliteration was initially intended to conceal the straightforward meaning of the Greek word by Anglican translators.

“Baptize” comes from the Greek word βαπτίζω, which is a common Greek word that refers to dunking, immersing, plunging, or dipping.¹¹ There is not a single instance anywhere in the Greek language of any era, much less in that day, in which the word “baptize” or any words related to it carried any meaning other than immersion.

No wonder, then, when John the Baptist baptized the Lord Jesus Christ in the Jordan River, Mark 1.10 records that He came “up out of the water.” There is no logical or reasonable explanation for coming “up out of the water” except for baptizing being the immersion of the subject in the water.

Eleventh, BAPTISM IS AN IMPORTANT ORDINANCE

If John the Baptist was distinguished by his Gospel preaching and baptizing, then baptism is important. If the Lord Jesus Christ’s public ministry began when He was baptized by His cousin John, then baptism is important. If Jesus Christ’s apostles were selected from those baptized by John the Baptist, then baptism is important. And if His last command to His apostles before ascending to heaven for these last two thousand years included instructions to baptize, then baptism is important.

If Baptists throughout history have been willing to die rather than compromise on this ordinance, then Baptists have thought this ordinance to be important. And if it is an ancient, authorized, commanded, desired, guarded, joining, unifying, rewarding, declaring, and immersing ordinance, then who would dare expose his opposition to baptism who wanted to be thought by others to be a Christian?

But, Finally, BAPTISM IS *NOT* A SAVING ORDINANCE

Baptism is *not* required for salvation. Baptism is *not* an aid to salvation. Rather, baptism is properly understood to be, among other things, a declaration that salvation has already occurred. It is a declaration by the person submitting to baptism that he *is* a believer, and it is a declaration by the congregation performing the baptism that they are persuaded as well that the person being baptized *is* a believer.

I can prove that baptism is not necessary for anyone’s salvation by showing you that, beyond doubt, baptism was *not* insisted upon by the Lord Jesus Christ as a means of salvation. Remember the two thieves hanging on either side of our Savior when He was crucified at Calvary? When the one thief turned in repentance and faith believing to the Savior and said,

¹⁰ Adoniram Judson, *Christian Baptism*, (Laurel, Mississippi: Audubon Press, Reprint) page 3.

¹¹ The following books are recommended for a careful consideration of the meaning of the word βαπτίζω and other related Greek words: Alexander Carson, *Baptism: Its Mode and Subjects*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Reprint by Kregel Publications, 1981), Adoniram Judson, *Christian Baptism*, (Laurel, Mississippi: Reprint by Audubon Press, 2000), Fred Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone*, (Cape Coral, Florida: Founders Press, 2003), Erroll Hulse, *The Testimony Of Baptism*, (Haywards Heath Sussex, UK: Carey Publications, 1982)

“Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom,”

our gracious Lord

“said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”¹²

Though that repentant thief did **not** come down from that cross to be baptized, but hung there until he died, my Savior promised him that they would very soon be reunited. Thus, since that thief was not baptized, baptism is **not** required for salvation. Why else do you think the Gospel is taken to hospitals and hospices, where there are patients who cannot be immersed?

Baptism is properly understood to be a step of obedience, on the part of the congregation, and also on the part of the baptismal candidate. That is why the Apostle Paul wrote, in First Corinthians 1.14,

“I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius.”

This is because baptism, getting wet by being plunged beneath water and being raised, as a testimony of Christ’s death and resurrection, is a step of *obedience* to be taken by every Christian who can comply with the Master’s wishes that the Church baptize him.

“Pastor, I think I would like to be baptized.” I want to baptize you. Our Church authorizes the baptism of candidates whose testimonies I have carefully and cautiously considered, along with demonstrated lifestyle changes, whom I then recommend to the congregation for their consideration and concurrence. That authorization comes when our congregation’s members carefully and cautiously consider the candidates’ testimony and lifestyle themselves, at which time they decide whether or not to authorize the baptism of that candidate.

When our congregation is satisfied and recommends the candidate be baptized, we then arrange to discharge our duty as quickly as possible. Are we always right? Do we sometimes baptize unsaved people who convincingly profess Christ as their Savior? Sadly, yes.

We regret that we are not perfect. But we do prayerfully strive to obey our Lord. We are, after all, a baptized congregation of sinners who have been saved by God’s grace and who seek to do right.

¹² Luke 23.42-43