

Why the Church Baptizes

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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Why the Church Baptizes

I. Introduction

- A. Video: “Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?” by One Minute Apologist
- B. Baptism is not the same as belief, but baptism visually represents belief. It is possible for a person to have entered the kingdom of God and have their life changed by the power of the Holy Spirit, having believed in Jesus, without having the experience of baptism. While this doesn’t mean baptism isn’t important, it merely points out that water baptism is not necessary to secure the benefits of Jesus. On the other hand, belief and baptism are intended by God to be found together and go hand in hand. While they are not the same, they are inseparable. Water baptism visually pictures what Jesus accomplished for humanity in His life and the intended impact He has on people’s lives—what He can do for them.
- C. In other words, baptism is a big deal. Genuine spiritual realities and transformations happen in people’s lives which are enacted and represented in water baptism. Engaging in water baptism acts out the rescue mission of Jesus. We will be looking at some of the main reasons why baptism is so important and why the church has practiced baptism since the time of Jesus.

II. 6 Reasons Why Baptism is Important

- A. Like the Lord’s Supper (or communion), water baptism draws our attention to that which is most important within Christianity: Jesus and what He’s done for us. In God’s amazing wisdom, He developed a way to visually represent the message of Jesus and a proper response to Jesus in the same event. Baptism points to what Jesus accomplished on behalf of humanity and the way people should respond to what He’s done at the same time. God, as the master teacher, regularly used powerful teaching aids to help communicate and remind us of the most important truths we need to know; baptism is no exception. Through baptism, God tells us what He has done and what we should do as a result of what He’s done. The basic message of Christianity is proclaimed in baptism.
- B. Baptism is valuable and important to the heart of God; this becomes clear as we read the Bible and see the life of Jesus. The church, going all the way back to its very beginning, practiced baptism following the pattern and command of Jesus. The habit of baptism has endured throughout the centuries for good reason. There hasn’t been a single generation of the church with access to the word of God who felt compelled to move away from the practice of baptism, which allows water baptism to have a long and rich history. We are going to look at six reasons why the church baptizes.
- C. The first reason comes in the life of John the Baptist. John was a messenger of God through whom God communicated to the world, called a prophet. He was identified by Jesus as the special prophet who would prepare the way for the hero through which God was going to rescue the world, called the Messiah (Mt. 11:7-15, Lk. 7:24-28).¹ The Christian practice of baptism begins with John the Baptist. While other forms of baptism existed prior to John, the type of baptism John offered was very different from all its predecessors.

¹ Jesus also implied that John the Baptist’s authority came from heaven in the argument He used to defend His own authority (Mt. 21:24-27, Mk. 11:29-33, Lk. 20:3-8). Jesus further endorsed John’s message and ministry in saying that John was “more than a prophet” (Mt. 11:9, Lk. 7:26).

- D. John not only baptized people in water, He said God Himself commanded Him to do so in preparation for the arrival of Jesus. John said this about his ministry of baptism: “³³ I did not recognize Him [Jesus as the Messiah], but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’” (Jn. 1:33). John admits he didn’t take the initiative by himself to do what he was doing (“He who sent me to baptize in water said to me”). John the Baptist claims to have been commanded by someone else to conduct a ministry that included the practice of baptism in water. John was sent to do this. Who told John to start a ministry and instructed him how to do it? We get the answer earlier in this chapter: “⁶ There came a man sent from God, whose name was John.” (Jn. 1:6). God sent John the Baptist to baptize others as a means of preparing for Jesus. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance and forgiveness (Mk. 1:4. Lk. 3:3, Ac. 13:24).² Luke confirms this point as well when he says, “the word of God came to John” (Lk. 3:2). Baptism has been associated with Jesus even before Jesus began His public ministry. The church baptizes because God commanded John the Baptist to baptize in preparation for Jesus.
- E. The second reason the church practices baptism, even today, is because Jesus was baptized as our example and as a requirement of God. Jesus Himself came to John the Baptist to get baptized and gives the justification for His actions as described by Matthew:
- ¹³ Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan *coming* to John, to be baptized by him.¹⁴ But John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?’¹⁵ But Jesus answering said to him, ‘Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he permitted Him. Mt. 3:13-15
- Jesus demonstrated the necessity of baptism in His own life as the pattern for the Christian life.³ In His baptism, Jesus pointed out our human need for a complete transformation of life (repentance) and the need to be rescued by God from ourselves (salvation) as Jesus took steps to meet those needs. Jesus is doing for us what we ourselves ought to be doing, but were unable to do. Jesus is living a perfectly righteous life of obedience on our behalf. He persisted in it even when there was a push to prevent it from happening because it is “fitting” for Jesus to get baptized—it is right and proper.⁴ On Jesus’s view, baptism is necessary, “to fulfill all righteousness” (v. 15). This means to complete everything that is required by God in a life of obedience.⁵ Through His baptism, Jesus makes Himself one of us in the process of salvation that He will accomplish.⁶
- F. The third reason the church baptizes is because Jesus endorsed the practice by partnering with John the Baptist and allowing His disciples to engage in performing baptisms.⁷ Before His public ministry in Galilee, Jesus spent time with John the Baptist confirming his message—at least in part. Here is how the apostle John describes Jesus’ earliest ministry: “²² After these things Jesus

² It is clear that John’s baptism, while very important and similar, was different and distinct from the baptism of Jesus (Ac. 19:1-7); which John Himself testifies (Mt. 3:11, Mk. 1:8, Lk. 3:16).

³ Ulrich Luz, [Matthew 1–7: A Commentary on Matthew 1–7](#), ed. Helmut Koester, Rev. ed., Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 142.

⁴ Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 1–13](#), vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 56.

⁵ Craig Blomberg, [Matthew](#), vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 81.

⁶ Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to Matthew](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 65.

⁷ Gerald L. Borchert, [John 1–11](#), vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 189.

and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing.²³ John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and *people* were coming and were being baptized—²⁴ for John had not yet been thrown into prison.” (Jn. 3:22-24). Baptism was important enough to Jesus that He spent time doing it through His disciples, and He ended up baptizing more people than John (Jn. 4:1-2).⁸ Jesus could have spent at least a few months to as much as eight to nine months baptizing.⁹

- G. The fourth reason to receive and offer baptism is because Jesus commanded His disciples to do it. Baptism is what Jesus desires from the church: “¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” (Mt. 28:19). The last command Jesus gave to His disciples was to go into the world and make disciples by “baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”. The obligation to both be baptized and be baptizing comes right from the lips of Jesus. Followers of Jesus are told to baptize others by the One who they are following. The highest authority within Christianity commands baptism to be done.
- H. The fifth reason the church baptizes is because those who were personally trained by Jesus, the apostles who were the foundation of the church, baptized as part of the earliest church practices.

³⁷ Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’³⁸ Peter *said* to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.’⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’ Ac. 2:37-40

¹⁰We don’t just have the command from Jesus regarding baptism, we get a picture in the early church of how the apostles understood this command. The leaders in the early church practiced water baptism, which set the standard practice for the church.

- I. The sixth reason baptism is important is because it is God’s purpose for those who trust Him: “³⁰ But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.” (Lk. 7:30). Luke investigated the origin of Christianity very thoroughly and got His information largely from the apostles themselves. Luke’s view of baptism, which he developed from the earliest authorities for Christianity, said that rejecting baptism was rejecting “God’s purpose for” people. God intended for those alive during John the Baptist’s ministry to be baptized by John, and He expects all followers of Jesus to be baptized as a disciple. If God’s purpose for baptism applied to John the Baptist’s baptism, how much more does it apply to the baptism commanded by Jesus?

⁸ Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus happened during the Passover celebration in Jerusalem (Jn. 2:13)—April—following which Jesus spent time in the Judean wilderness perhaps after His forty days of temptation (Mt. 4:11, Mk. 1:13, Lk. 4:13). When John was imprisoned Jesus moved to Galilee (Jn. 4:1-3, Mt. 4:12, Mk. 1:14). This portion of ministry happened before Jesus ministered publicly in Galilee (Jn. 3:24).

⁹ A. T. Robertson, [A Harmony of the Gospels](#) (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), Lk 3:21–23, Mark E. Moore, [The Chronological Life of Christ](#) (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2011), 100.

¹⁰ Acts 8:35-39, 1 Peter 3:21, 1 Corinthians 1:14, 16

- J. In His baptism, Jesus demonstrates the nature of His heart through the character trait of humility (Mt. 11:29). Jesus, knowing He is the superior person, humbles Himself before John and is baptized by him. Even John acknowledged the order of significance went in the other direction when John pointed out his need to be baptized by Jesus. The life of discipleship, as modeled by Jesus, begins and continues only as we maintain the internal attitude of humility. The great enemy of the Christian life is pride. As Jesus said, without humility before God a person can't even enter God's kingdom (Mt. 18:3-4). Humility is not a natural character quality that we possess, a person must be converted (undergo a transformation and change in position) to obtain it, according to Jesus.¹¹ Humility is an acquired disposition. Maintaining humility is the means by which a person progresses in Jesus's kingdom. Disciples who fail to maintain a humble attitude before God cease to progress in the life of discipleship and get stuck in their spiritual development.
- K. As followers of Jesus, humility is the most important character trait we can develop (Phil. 2:1-5). Humility is the spring from which all other Christian character flows. If we want to be like Jesus, we must learn how to be a humble person, doing nothing out of selfishness or self-importance, assess ourselves accurately, consider other people's needs and desires as more important than our own, and adopt a life perspective that is just as concerned about others as ourselves as we copy the heart and example of Jesus. Baptism expresses a humble acknowledgment and cry for God's help to heal what is sick and fix what is broken in us. Humility causes us to admit fault before God and recognize our need for Him. Without this attitude firmly in place, the life of discipleship can't even begin.

III. Reacting to the Importance of Baptism

- A. Knowing that baptism is so important to God that He expects and commands it, what have you I done about it? What have I done with what I know about baptism? How have the spiritual realities connected to baptism impacted My life? Baptism isn't just a rite or ritual that we go through that has no bearing on our lives, but rather, baptism is a statement about the trajectory of our lives and we live in baptism's shadow every moment of our lives. Disciples live alive to God and dead to self every day following the spiritual transformation accomplished in them by God as represented in baptism.
- B. It might be that you are learning for the first time how important baptism is to God. If that describes you, take a serious look, perhaps for the first time, at personally getting baptized. Look into what it means to be baptized and think about whether this initial step of obedience is something you want to participate in. What requirements are needed to be baptized? Read and study especially Romans 6:1-14, 1 Peter 3:18-22, and Galatians 3:26-27. R.C. Sproul's booklet "What is Baptism?" is a free resource that may also be helpful in understanding the meaning, symbolism, and purpose of baptism. The more you learn about baptism the greater your desire for it will become if you are an adopted child of God.
- C. If a person isn't willing to take the initial step of obedience in baptism, it is highly likely that same person will not follow Jesus in the more difficult steps of obedience either. In other words, our spiritual health is revealed in our willingness to personally participate in baptism. Those who are unwilling to get baptized will generally also live with a lower commitment to

¹¹ Logos 9 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Matthew 18:3 "converted"

obedience and Jesus. While getting baptized certainly doesn't guarantee a lifestyle of love toward God, it does seem to make it much more likely. Individuals who openly live in disobedience to Jesus' command for baptism should not expect to also live in all the blessings of Him at the same time.

- D. If you have already been baptized, have the commitments you made at your baptism and the internal attitudes it reflects continue to be true in your life? Have you developed consistency in dying to your old way of life and demonstrate being alive toward God and His way of life? Have you proven that you are part of God's kingdom as you testified at your baptism? Since you got baptized, have you been living for God by seeking the things above and His kingdom?

IV. Conclusion

- A. In a sense, baptism signifies all the benefits available through Jesus connected to the type of relationship with God He initiates.¹² The message of Jesus and the gospel are made visible in the act of baptism. Therefore, water baptism is a natural first step of obedience in a commitment to and pursuit of Jesus. The imagery of baptism sets the tone for the Christian life.
- B. Why does the church baptize? The short answer is because God and Jesus command the people of God to do it. Baptism is an act where the human and divine come together to generate the proper response to the truth of God which changes a person's life.¹³ Baptism is not an event, it's an adoption of a life philosophy.

V. Questions for Further Thought

- A. Describe when and why you got baptized, if you have.
- B. Why do you think Jesus got baptized even though He was without sin?
- C. When someone gets baptized, what commitments are they making?
- D. What heart attitudes are communicated through baptism?
- E. In what ways do I put myself ahead of others? How will I stop doing these actions?

¹² R. C. Sproul, [What Is Baptism?](#), First edition., vol. 11, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2011), 33–34.

¹³ George R. Beasley-Murray, [Baptism in the New Testament](#) (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1962), 43.