

The Believer's Baptism

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Ukiah Bible Church

Introduction

It is a joy to come and speak to you today, as we are celebrating the baptism of Lori Howard and Konrad Nabor. In the last year or two they have come to attend our Church and it has been a pleasure to watch them both grow in their faith in Christ, which in part has led them to see the need to obey the Lord's command to be baptized today.

In his book, *The Grace awakening*, **Chuck Swindoll** recounts a humorous story of one minister's experience with baptism. "The minister of a church of a different denomination contacted the pastor of a large downtown Baptist church and made an unusual request. He had several folks who had recently joined his church who preferred to be baptized by immersion rather than sprinkling, the church's normal mode of baptism. The minister requested not only the use of the baptistery but that the Baptist pastor himself baptize those who came. This posed a dilemma, what if those being baptized weren't born again? Since it's the pastor's conviction that only Christians should be baptized, he realized he couldn't with good conscience cooperate with the plan, but he wished to handle his answer with tact so as to not offend the other minister. I understand that he wrote a letter, a masterpiece of grace, in which he included this humorous statement: "we don't take in laundry, but will be happy to loan you our tub."¹

That little story about baptism emphasizes the variety of approaches churches take when it comes to baptism. **Some** churches like to sprinkle while others prefer to dunk. **Some** churches will not let you participate in communion unless you have been baptized in their church. **Some** churches teach that baptism is a necessary component to being born again. And **some** churches say you have to be baptized under their denomination in order for the baptism to be effective. With all these different modes of baptism and motives for their particular way of baptizing it leaves many people confused about the subject of baptism. So what I am going to do today is address three issues concerning baptism:

- The Motive and Mode of Baptism

¹ Swindoll, Charles R., *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, Nashville, Thomas Nelson Pub., 1998, p.45.

- The Misunderstandings Surrounding Baptism
- The Message of Water Baptism

In presenting and confronting these issues I realize I might hit a spiritual nerve for some people, especially as I address the different denominational approaches to baptism. But I assure you, I am not looking for fight, my intention is to biblically clarify the matter in a short concise way so that we put our faith in the Word of God and not a denomination or a particular church. If there is a fight to be had here it is with the Bible not me. So, giving that disclaimer lets get to our subject by being with the Motive and Mode of Baptism.

1. The Motive and Mode of Baptism

a. The motive for being baptized

There is really only one motive when it comes to being baptized, obedience to your Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the last commands the Lord Jesus gave to His disciples is found in Matt. 28:19 *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”* This was not a suggestion it was a command.

There are two ordinances (commands or rules) that Jesus gave to the Church. The first is to participate in Communion (The Lord’s Supper) with the Church and the second is to be baptized, *“in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”*

When we read the New Testament we can see how diligently the apostles observed their duties to the Lords instructions. For instance, when the Church was birthed in Acts 2, they called people to be immediately baptized (Acts. 2:38, 41). Now why was this important for them? It is because obeying Jesus expresses your submission to His Lordship over your life and second your love for Him. When you say yes to Christ command to be baptized you are in a physical way expressing the servant-Master relationship you have with Him. And by submitting to your Master you are expressing love toward Him in a way that He feels loved by you, for Jesus said, *“If you love Me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:15).

We can say this and be accurate, the motive for being baptized is one singular thing, our Master commands that we be baptized and that is the only motive we need. (Illustration Bridget Russell)

b. The mode of baptism

As I had mentioned earlier there are a variety of ways churches baptize people and the question is which one is right? To get that answer we have to turn to our Bibles to see what the word baptize means.

The word baptized comes from the Greek word, “*baptizo*” and it means to be “plunged, dipped, or immersed” into something. There are several places in the Bible where “*baptizo*” is used, I will give you four to help you think about the mode of baptism.

- Mark 1:5, highlights the ministry of John the Baptist, “*and all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River...*” What we want to notice here is the word “*in*” John was baptizing people “*in*” the Jordan River not beside, by, or near the river but in the river, which tells us that people would have gotten pretty wet.
- Mark 1:9-10, as we continue with the same story we find that John the Baptist, baptized the Lord Jesus, “*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him.*” You will notice in v.10, “*Immediately coming up out of the water*” this naturally implies that Jesus was dipped into the water in order to “*come up out of the water.*”
- John 3:23, gives as another picture of John the Baptist, baptizing people near Salim and the Bible says he was baptizing there because “*there was much water there...*” You don’t need a lot of water to sprinkle people but it would take a lot of water if you were plunging people into the water.

- Acts 8:36-38, we have the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip led the Ethiopian to Christ for salvation and instead of sprinkling him with water to baptize him they waited until they came to a body of water and the Scriptures say they both went “*down into the water.*” Again, there is no need to get into the water just to sprinkle someone. You go into the water to dunk someone.

When consider these occasions of baptism it makes most sense to understand them as baptism by immersion. And this is why we practice baptism by immersion in our church. And you can see our commitment to this by the size of our baptismal tank, a 150,000 gal swimming pool. All kidding aside, I do believe baptism by immersion is Biblical but I have made exceptions to this on one occasion. *There was a lady in our church in Nebraska who had a decease and she was undergoing some delicate treatments for her condition and because of that it was not safe for her to go into the pond we were using for our baptismal service. So, what I did was for her was to take a gallon of purified water and drenched her with it.* But other than her everyone else I have baptized has been by plunging them into the water as the mode of baptism.

2. The Misunderstandings and Comprehending Baptism

In this section I am going to name names, not to pick on anyone group but to point out what their own doctrine teaches. There are three areas of baptism I am going to address: Infant Baptism, Baptismal Regeneration, and the Believers Baptism

a. Infant baptism

i. Roman Catholic Church

The Catholic church teaches that infants should be baptized and the reason for this is that they believe baptism is necessary for one’s salvation. Catholic doctrine goes so far as to say that baptism itself causes regeneration or causes a person to be born-again. For the Catholic Church baptism is imperative to receive the grace of God. Thus, it is critical to baptize people as soon as possible, therefore they stress infant baptism.

Now, I realize some people might say to themselves, “is this really that important?” And the Bible answers the question, yes, extremely important. I would remind us to consider what the Reformation was all about. It centered upon this very issue, how is a person saved, is it by faith alone or

works. The answer for the Reformer came out of the Bible, salvation comes by faith in Christ alone. This is what men like Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Tyndale and others were castigated for and many killed because they stood against Catholic doctrine, which said that men were not saved by faith but by the works of Catholic doctrine. You see, if you misunderstand or misapply the doctrine of baptism you will put a persons soul in jeopardy of the Lake of Fire.

Consider this, how similar the Catholic teaching on baptism is to the those that argued in the apostles Paul's day that circumcision was a necessary component of salvation. Paul called that "*a different gospel*" (Gal.1:6). And he went on to say in Gal. 3:10 "*all who rely on works of the law are under a curse.*" And then he made a very harsh statement in Gal. 5:4, that must have chapped the spiritual hide of his opposition, "*you are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law: you have fallen away from grace.*" The point Paul was making was simply this, when it comes to being justified before God, no work of man will satisfy God's righteous demand. Therefore, infant baptism as taught by the Roman Catholic Church is a different gospel than that of Christ, the apostles and the Scriptures. And a different gospel is not a saving gospel.

ii. Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians and Reformed churches.

These churches practice infant baptism but for a different reason than the Catholic Church does. Their view on infant baptism is known as the "Covenant" argument. This view sees infants born to believers as part of the "Covenant Community" of God's people and their teaching follows this line of thought:

- First, they say infants were circumcised under the Old Testament Covenant. Where all Jewish males eight days after they were born were circumcised as God had commanded. The circumcision established the baby as part of God's covenant people.
- Secondly, they say baptisms is the New Testament parallel to Old Testament circumcision. These churches contend that the church is a covenantal people and thus, it would follow that infant baptism

should be administered to the children of believing parents to bring the baby under the New Covenant.

- Finally, they say households were baptized in the New Testament. They see the reports in Acts and 1 Cor. of whole households being saved and baptized as evidence that infants were baptized along with the adults. Acts 16:15, Lydia's household was baptized, Acts 16:33 the Philippine jailer's household was baptized and 1 Cor. 1:16 the household of Stephanas was baptized.

How are we to respond to this teaching?

- First, there is a similarity to Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism but what they symbolize are different things. Under the old covenant circumcision was a physical means of one entering God's "Covenant Community." If you wanted to live among the Hebrews even if you were not born a Hebrew you could but you had to be circumcised if you were a male. But in the New Testament we learn that the real circumcision is a matter of the heart, it is a spiritual not literal circumcision, Rom. 2:9 "*But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter...*" Under the Old covenant circumcision was not restricted to those who had a saving faith it applied to every male regardless if he showed any evidence of inward faith in God.
- Second, the New Testament doesn't speak of a "covenant community" made up of believers and their unbelieving children and relatives and servants who happen to live among them. What the New Testament speaks of in terms of a "covenant community" is the Church and the only way to be a part of that "covenant community" is by trusting in clinging to and relying only upon Jesus for your salvation. So becoming a member of the Church is voluntary, spiritual, and an internal as you are born-again.
- Thirdly, the Old and the New Testament focus on two different aspects of a covenantal community, the Old Testament was focused on the physical birth and the New Testament, a spiritual birth. This is seen in several ways:
 - ✓ In the old testament the Israelites were fed on physical manner in the wilderness, in the New Testament believers

feed on Jesus Christ, the true bread that comes down from heaven (John 6:48-51).

- ✓ In the old testament the Israelites drink physical water gust from the rock in the wilderness, in the New Testament those who believe in Christ drink of the living water of eternal life (John 4:10-14)
- ✓ In the Old Testament they had a physical temple to worship God, in the New Testament believers are built into a spiritual temple (1 Pet. 2:5).
- ✓ In the old testament believers were to offer physical sacrifices of animals and crops, but in the New Testament believers offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15-16).
- ✓ In the old testament believers receive from God the physical land He promised them, in the New Testament believers will receive a heavenly country (Heb. 11:16).
- ✓ In the old testament those who were the physical seed of Abraham were members of the people of Israel, in the New Testament those who are the spiritual seed of Abraham by faith are members of the church (Gal. 3:29; Rom. 4:11-12).

So you see, but under the old covenant it was proper for an infant mill to be circumcised but in the New Testament it would not be proper to baptize infants to try to make them a part of a spiritual community which requires a saving faith an infant is not able to produce.

- Fourthly, as to the issue of entire households being baptized as we find in Acts and 1 Corinthians, the Bible gives us no details of who made up those homes. We don't know if there were infants in those homes or not. We are simply not given those details. But if we take the full context of where the Bible speaks to the issue of baptism we come to see that baptism is for those who are trusting in clinging to and relying upon the work of Jesus Christ at Calvary for the removal of their sin. In order to do this it takes a cognitive ability babies do not have. To be ready for baptism

requires repentance, that is to say that one changes their mind about who Jesus is namely the son of God, babies simply cannot understand such things. To assume that infants were in those households who were baptized disregards the clear teaching of Scripture on how one is saved and then baptized.

- Lastly, in regards to infant baptism, I would say this. In my experience especially in the midwest I found a lot of people in mainline denominational church who believed they were going to heaven because they were baptized as an infant. Unfortunately, this was driven home to me when some of the people in my church attended a funeral of a man they had known all of their lives. They said he never dark in the doors of his church and had a terrible testimony in the community and it was told me that the pastor of that church assured everyone present that this man was in heaven because he was baptized in their church as an infant. This kind of teaching is dangerous as it gives a false sense of hope of eternal life. No where in Scripture does God give anyone a promise of eternal life because you were baptized as an infant into a covenantal community.

b. Baptismal regeneration

Baptismal regeneration is a term that many people are not familiar with but should be. It's simply refers to certain church doctrine that teaches that one must be baptized in order to be saved. Some churches that teach baptismal regeneration are The Church of Christ, some Lutheran churches and Episcopalian churches hold to this.

One of the key passages that they point to is Mark 16:16, which states, “*He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.*” At first glance it seems pretty cut and dry but we need to think about what the verse is actually saying and what it is not saying.

It does say that the B leader that has been baptized will be saved but what it doesn't address is the believer that never got baptized. The verse is speaking in a broad sense without making a nitpicky qualification for every believer. There are

cases where someone has placed their faith in Christ but never had the opportunity to be baptized, the question is, will they be saved?

For instance, the thief on the cross next to Jesus asked Christ to remember him when He came into His kingdom, and Jesus said to him *“today you shall be with Me in paradise.”* There was no way this man could have been baptized but he demonstrated a saving faith in Christ and as such Jesus assured him he would be saved.

Now, the argument that the proponents of baptismal regeneration use against this incident is that they say the thief was still under the old covenant because Christ had not yet died, thus the New Covenant had not taken place yet. But not so fast, first of all Jesus inaugurated the new covenant in the upper room with his disciples (Lk. 22:19-29). Secondly, Jesus died before the two men that were beside him at Calvary. We read in John 19:32-33 *“The soldiers therefore came, and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other man who was crucified with Him. But coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.”* When Christ died His saving work was finished and that meant the thief on the cross would have had the blood of Christ applied to his life without being baptized.

Something else to think about is this, the Bible is clear that when a person places saving faith in Christ, God sees them as completely justified (John 3:16; Rom. 3:20-28; 8:30; 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:7) not at the point of baptism which usually takes place later. For me, one of the biggest problems with the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration is that it inherently appeals to the natural tendency of man to depend on his own works to be saved. And this makes it especially dangerous especially in light of the fact that the Bible tells us, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast”* (Eph. 2:8-9).

c. Believers Baptism

Here we come to the biblical view of baptism. Simply stated, the only proper candidates for water baptism are people who have trusted in Jesus and his atoning work for salvation. Let me just give you a few verses to confirm what I'm saying.

- Acts 2:37-38 *“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...(v.41) So then, those **who had received his word** were baptized: and there were added that day about three thousand souls”* there is a sequence that takes place here that we need to notice. First, Peter calls the Jews to “*repent*” which is referring to changing their mind about who Jesus was and is (Acts 2:22-24, 36). Second, they “*had received his word*” which is referring to placing their faith in Christ as the promised Messiah who died for their sin at Calvary and the resurrected Lord. Third, they “*were baptized*” but note it was after they believed. They were not baptized for their salvation but because they believed.
- Acts 18:8, *“And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.”* Again, the sequence is important believe and then be baptized.

In Scripture, the one thing that is consistently repeated in relations to baptism is faith comes first than baptism. I like to think of it in terms of the coin of salvation. On the front side of the coin is justification and the back side is sanctification. Trusting in, clinging to, and relying on Christ finished work at Calvary is the only things that will justify us before a righteous God. When that kind of faith is exercised God promises you eternal life and it is a done deal. Then you turn the coin over to the back side and you spend the rest of your life learning to live a life in fellowship with Christ, this is called sanctification and the first step in the sanctified life is to learn to obey Jesus, thus baptism, Matt. 28:19-20 *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

3. The Message of Water Baptism

- a. It speaks of our identification with Christ’s, death, burial, and resurrection.**

The very act of baptism highlights the worth and splendor of the ordinance because it is a picture of what Jesus Christ personally did for us. We would think of it like this:

- The redeemed person going into the water gives us a picture of passing through the judgment of God by being in Christ.
- And when they are immersed in the water it pictures their union with Christ in His death.
- And when they come out of the water it pictures how they are united with Christ in His resurrection.

It is interesting that the two ordinance Christ gave the Church both give us picture of Himself. Communion pictures His sacrifice for us, Baptism picture our union with Him. In a humorous sense, by Jesus ordering these two ordinance He was giving us a Polaroid of Himself.

b. It tells the local church you are one with them in your faith in Christ.

The person that is being baptized is publicly testifying to their faith in Christ for salvation and claiming identity with the Church universal and the local Church. In effect the person that is being baptized is using an outward sign to testify to an inward change. The person that steps into the baptismal water is publicly saying without shame, that Jesus is their Lord and Master.

c. It reminds us that we made a commitment to Christ.

Baptism is sort of a monument for one's life with Christ. Monuments are important because they remind us of commitments that we've made in the past. A good example of this is found in the marriage ceremony and the exchanging of rings. The day that a man and a woman exchange rings stands as a monument, which reminds them of the commitment they made to one another. These sorts of things keep us on course. And one's baptism is meant to do the same thing. Not everyone can remember the day they received Jesus as their savior but every believer ought to have a memory of when they were baptized and what that represented to them.

Philip Henry was the father of the well known minister Matthew Henry, who wrote this as a baptismal statement for his son:

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 do hereby dedicated 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 forever²

Conclusion

You see, baptism represents a lot of important things. Therefore, it is not something that should be trifled with. It really is a monumental moment that should never be forgotten in a believers life because the premise behind it all, is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and what He did to buy us out of the market place of sin. Therefore, whenever someone is baptized it should be a reverent, joyful moment that is branded into their heart.

Today we have two people who are stepping forward to be baptized, Lori Howard and Konrad Nabor. I have asked each of them to give us a short testimony of how they came trust Jesus Christ to be their Savior. And after we hear from them we will make our way outside to our pool to baptize them.

² Ibid.