

## **Baptist Essentials – Why Are We Baptists?**

### *Lesson 7 | Saved and Baptized Membership*

Tonight we reach the first S in our Baptist acrostic. The series thus far has helped us to see what we believe as Baptists and why being a Baptist is exactly what the Scriptures teach. Beloved, as I have said before, I am a Baptist not because I was raised Baptist, not because I was ordained as a Baptist pastor, or even saved inside of a Baptist church. I am a Baptist because the Scriptures don't allow me to be anything else. I realize that there are some negative connotations that the world has placed upon the name, even some well-meaning evangelicals. But, I cannot abandon what the Scriptures clearly teach. I won't be dogmatic on things that aren't not super clear, like end times stuff, that doesn't negate me developing my own opinion on things, but it won't be held as a test of fellowship. But the clear teachings of Scripture, yes, those will be held dogmatically.

I hope thus far through our series that you've realized that God really intends for every Christian to live by the theology that I have taught you so far. I hope that you have developed convictions as we have examined every doctrine. I hope your belief all has grown each week as we have discussed Biblical authority, the autonomy of the church, the priesthood of the believer, the two different offices of pastor and deacon, the individual soul liberty that every believer has, and tonight, my hope is that you'll see and believe another reason why we are Baptists.

Tonight, we are going to examine the first S of Baptist. **The first S stands for Saved and Baptized Membership**, or we could say regenerate and immersed Membership. Just so you know, moving from this point forward, I will be using the term regenerate membership instead of saved membership, so don't get confused. They are synonymous with each other.

Let's go ahead and define what we are looking at tonight so we can ensure that we are all on the same page.

**Definition: Salvation is a prerequisite to church membership. Church membership is a covenant community of Biblically baptized believers with a credible**

testimony, **agreement** to the church's doctrinal statement, and desire to **covenant** with others to exercise their spiritual gifts and work towards the Great Commission. Church membership is **not open** to unbelievers or those who cannot submit to the doctrinal statement of the church. Church membership is a commitment to **Christ** through a commitment to each **other**.

The way that we are going to tackle this is by separating the two words, Regenerate and membership. I'll first teach us the doctrine of Regeneration because so much of the requirements of membership is actually rooted in the implications of regeneration.

### Regeneration

So, what does this word, regeneration, mean? Regeneration can be defined as this -- **Regeneration is an instantaneou**s event where God gives us a brand-new heart. **The Holy Spirit works in us and enables us to see and properly respond to our sin, to have faith to follow Christ, and to obey the Bible as God's Word. Regeneration is also called being "born-again".**

Our church's doctrinal statement, the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, what every member of this church must agree to, says this about this doctrine: *Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.*

According to Jesus in John 3, you must be born again in order to enter into the Kingdom of God. But what exactly does being born again look like in practical terms? Jesus doesn't really give us that in John 3, but brother the brother Ezekiel does. Turn with me to the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 36 and we will look at 2 verses (26-27) there.

Here we find where God is speaking and says, *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be*

*careful to keep my laws.*” Notice that it’s God who is acting. *“I will”* do these things He says.

Look at verse 31, God says that after He regenerates us, we will remember our evil ways, we will loathe ourselves because of our iniquities and abominations. Isn’t that the tell-tale sign of regeneration? A recognition of our sin? It all begins with God giving us this brand new heart, or causing us to be born again. Then, we repent of the sin that we now loath. So here’s a good question to build upon, what exactly is repentance? **Repentance involves a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ<sup>1</sup>.**

Repentance is not just about the sorrow of offending a holy God. It’s not even just about honoring Him in the way that you live, as important as that it. Fundamentally, repentance is the restoration of a broken relationship with God because of sin, the remedying of which can only be had through the act of repentance. That is, forsaking my sin and being restored to God. True repentance is saying, “Ok, God, whatever it takes, I am surrendering everything over to you and will follow you with absolute abandon, no matter the cost, no matter the consequences that might follow me, no matter the sin I once loved but now hate, no matter the struggle that’ll come.” That is true repentance.

What follows repentance? Faith does. **Faith is a transfer of confidence in my good works to reliance upon Christ alone for salvation.**

Faith has three basic elements: 1) knowledge of Christ, 2) belief in Christ, 3) trust in Christ

First, faith must include knowledge of Christ and what He’s done in the gospel. We must have some basic knowledge and understanding about the facts surrounding Jesus Christ. We can’t have faith in something or someone we don’t know, don’t have a relationship with, or don’t understand.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 11:18, Acts 2:37, Joel 2:13, Psalm 119:59

*Romans 10:14 says How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*

So in order to have faith, one must know.

Secondly, faith must include an actual belief in the Gospel. I must take the knowledge that I have now put under my belt and I now believe it. John 3:16 For God so loved the world that whoever believes. There is a belief, an application of that belief.

The final element of faith is trusting. Trusting and believing are different. How do I arrive at this? Well, the book of James tells me that the demons believe but they ain't going to go to heaven, are they? So there must be something fundamentally different. The final element of faith is trusting, meaning that I must trust what I believe to be true and right, able to withhold me when I fling myself upon it.

The final element of regeneration that I want us to examine before moving on is that this change of heart that leads us to repent and believe in the Lord also enables us to obey. Turn with me to the book of Acts chapter 16 and I want to see what happens to Lydia. Verse 14: *Now a certain woman named Lydia heard from us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.* Now there is a lot here to pull out, but all I want us to see is that the regeneration of Lydia's heart, the opening of her heart by God, enabled Lydia to heed, or to obey, the things that Paul spoke to her about. I do believe this is speaking strictly about salvation, but an implication of salvation leads us to obedience, such as this woman.

Now as a side note, and in some ways getting ahead of myself, I need to provide some clarity to our title and definition this evening where I said that one must be Biblically baptized. I will not go into detail concerning what Biblical baptism is beyond the fact that it is to be by immersion. We will save that for another evening within our series. But the question that I am wanting to ask is why is baptism part of the membership process? If there has been a single element that I can point to that hinders folks the most from membership, it's this.

Before moving forward, I will admit, there is no Biblical evidence or commands to support why Baptists believe that you must be baptized before you can become a member. So do we just believe it blindly and shrug our shoulders? Absolutely not. So what is our argument for baptism before admitting anybody to church membership? Well, we believe that it is directly connected to the obedience part that we just went over. Question—if you have been born again, why haven't you been baptized? There could be, of course, many answers to that. But most of them can be drawn back to a lack of obedience. Now could their baptism be illegitimate? Sure. Could they be a child and their parents, or even us as pastors, are having them wait for a time being? Absolutely. This is not disobedience. This is either ignorance or actual obedience to their authority. This is why I said most of the time it really boils down to a disobedient demeanor towards getting baptized. Now I realize that is not a super popular thing to say and I might get some flack for it, that's ok. I receive that. But what I am wanting us to see this evening is why baptism must be a requirement for membership. Bottom here is this—baptism serves two things for us. First, it proves that there was a legitimate or credible testimony given by the person and was observed either by a pastor here or another. Secondly, without that baptism, there hasn't been a credible testimony given that was observed by another pastor. And if that baptism has been prolonged, is it because of disobedience?

With all of that behind us now, this leads us to really the main course for this evening, that being church membership. Why and how is it Biblical? First of all, let me come right out of the gate and say that there isn't a single verse in the Bible that says, thou shalt become a member of thy local church. No where does the Bible state that. This is where churches like Calvary Chapel builds their lack of church membership into their church. But, if that was the hermeneutic that we use, then we also cannot believe in the Trinity because the word is never used, not a single time.

There are doctrines taught in the Bible that are explicit, like that of regeneration. But, there are other doctrines that are taught implicitly, such as where we are heading now, church membership.

## Church Membership Evidence

There are multiple pieces of evidence that I want to try to hit this evening as we think through this. It is very important this to help you to see how the Bible prescribes local church membership without the explicit command of it. While there are multiple examples that we could point to, for the purpose of this book we will highlight the 4 clearest indications of church membership that we have in the New Testament. To be fair, the following four pieces of evidence have come from Pastor Zach's sermon called Membership Matters and is also found in our Discovery Class booklet where him and I collaborated together on that material.

### 1) The Practice of the **Early church**

The book of Acts records the history of the early church. It provides rich insight into how they conducted themselves and how they operated. We find some fascinating details as we first fly over this early church record. As you read through the book of Acts, you can't help but notice the church was meticulously detailed in its ministry and record keeping.

**Acts 1:15** *And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty)*

**Acts 2:41** *Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.*

The early church kept lists of their members and their specific needs. Acts 6 records complaints coming to the disciples because there were widows being neglected in the daily distribution of food. So, the disciples set aside qualified men to coordinate these efforts. We see a similar list of caring for widows show up again in 1 Timothy 5:9-13 where Paul gives specifics about who should be enrolled in widow care.

The early church recorded the transfer of a member if they moved to another city and provided a letter of recommendation to take to their new church.

**Acts 18:27** *And when he (Apollos) desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace*

**Romans 16:1-2** *I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.*

**Galatians 2:9** records the early church leaders receiving Paul, helping discern Paul's spiritual state, and then sending him and Barnabas out as missionaries.

## 2) The Priority of the **Assembly**

**Hebrews 10:24-25** *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

The author states we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. This strongly implies there is a local community of believers that every believer must commit to belonging to. Otherwise, it wouldn't matter where you assembled, as long as you were assembling with other believers.

## 3) The Prescription to **Pastors**

**1 Peter 5:2** *Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly*

What is the qualification given to pastors? To shepherd the flock of God *which is among you*. Meaning, pastors only have responsibility and authority given by God in the church that God has placed them in. The pastors of FBC Weston do *not* have the responsibility to shepherd the church down the street. Rather, the responsibility of the pastors is to shepherd those at this church. This is the role of pastors, but there is also the role of members to their pastors.

**Hebrews 13:17** *Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*

In this verse, there are 2 questions raised which point towards church membership.

1. If you are to obey and submit to your rulers (pastors), how do you know who to submit to if you don't belong to a local church?
2. Pastors will give an account for the souls of those whom they care for. How am I supposed to know who I am responsible for?

The pastor gives account to the Lord for those who have committed themselves to his church and are willing to receiving teaching, instruction, care, and correction. What if a member of the church does not receive instruction and correction but goes the way of sin? The New Testament teaches how church membership is even revealed through the picture of Church Discipline.

#### **4) The Picture of Church Discipline**

**Matthew 18:15-17** records what is known as church discipline. A method that is practiced at FBC Weston though not commonly practiced in many churches today? Why not? It holds members accountable for the unrepentant sin in their lives and it's difficult.

*Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*

Church Discipline is laid out as a four-step process:

**Step 1** – When a member sins, he is to be confronted privately by a fellow believer in the church.

**Step 2** – If the sinning person refuses to repent, that individual is to take one or two other believers with them to confront the sinning person.

**Step 3** – If the sinning individual refuses to listen to the two or three it is brought to the church.

**Step 4** – If there is still no repentance, the final step is to put the person out of the church.

We see a situation like this presented in 1 Corinthians 5:1-12, where there is an individual in the Corinthian church who committed a grievous act of sexual immorality. And Paul tells the church in verse 2.

**1 Corinthians 5:2** *And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.*

Paul says to remove this man who was in unrepentant sin. Here is the question regarding membership: How can you put someone out of something if they are not in it? You can only remove someone if they belonged to begin with. This implies a committed community of members in the church. Those who want to commit to gathering together to worship God. Those who are committed to God and one another to care for each other. And those who are committed to the leadership of the church, to help hold them accountable for sin in their lives, and to bring correction where needed.

We could go on, but I think the point is made that membership to a local church is a Biblical doctrine. So let's move on and begin to merge the two of these together. Does the Bible teach that churches must consist of only Christians? I believe yes and exclusively yes. Let's examine.

### The Biblical Support of Regenerate Church Membership

1. **The New Testament Epistles were written to churches and spoke to the people of those churches with the presupposition that they were all believers.** We don't find anywhere in the New Testament where instructions are given to unbelievers, outside of repent and believe.
2. Both the Old and New Testament teaches the same idea of what the church is. The OT Hebrew word *qāhāl* and the NT Greek word *ekklēsia* both express the

same meaning: the called out assembled ones. **The church is simply defined as the born again assembled ones.** Therefore, if the church is defined as people who are born again, then having unbelievers as part of that church is a contradiction to the very definition of the word.

3. **The first church in Jerusalem consisted of believers only.** Acts 2:41-47 says those who received the Word, or those who were born again, were added to the church. Specifically verse 47 says that the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.
4. Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 6:14. *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?* What is the verse telling us? Relationally speaking, do not hitch together with an unbeliever as you have no true commonality with them. So let's ask another question based upon that—Would the Lord allow unbelievers in the church while forbidding those inside of the church to not yoking together with unbelievers? There is no consistency. Therefore, **there is a prohibition of uniting believers and unbelievers.**
5. The Bible speaks over and over again about having unity with one another and having unity within the church. Can there be TRUE unity between believers and unbelievers? No. Why? Because, **true unity is built upon the foundation of salvation.**

So the Bible is pretty clear on this matter. We had assume there are many benefits to having a regenerate membership. But, for our purposes this evening, let's think through a few of them.

## The Benefits of a Regenerate Church Membership<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Regenerate membership **pleases** the Lord

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from -- <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/counting-sheep#:~:text=Regenerate%20membership%20promotes%20the%20gospel,committed%20to%20relaying%20the%20gospel.>

Unbelievers not only live in the world but they are of the world. Therefore, being influenced by those in the church who are of the world will lead to things that do not please the Lord.

**Hebrews 11:6** *But without faith it is impossible to please Him*

**2 Corinthians 5:9** *Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to him.*

**2. Regenerate membership protects doctrine.**

Again, the unregenerate within our churches will not be amused by doctrine. They will water it down, dismiss it, or even on the other side of the spectrum will try to destroy it. Those who are truly born again will protect it as if their life depends upon it.

**3. Regenerate membership promotes the Gospel.**

It really goes without saying, those who do not believe the Gospel will never promote the Gospel. But those who know the Gospel, they love it and will share it to the whole creation.

**4. Regenerate membership produces servants.**

One of the benefits of membership is serving the church, right? And it's expected that every member in the church serves. But let's think about it for just a moment. At the time of when you were saved, God gave you a spiritual gift. That gift isn't just a single gift, it is one painting with many colors on it with a predominate color. Nevertheless, you have a gift. That gift isn't for you, it isn't for your family, and it isn't for your friends. Your gift from God is to be used for your church. With that in mind, can unbelievers practice this? Can an unbeliever truly serve the church?

**5. Regenerate membership propagates joy.**

The world is always on a trip to find their next hit of happiness. That's really how you can define the world—the pursuit of happiness. But most times, the world's definition of happiness is surrounded by sin. It accompanies the world and their happiness. Sin always promises true happiness or true joy. Yet, it always under delivers.

Unfortunately, we can actually relate to that. Think of when you harbored sin within your heart. Could you truly find joy? Turn with me to **Psalms 32** and let's read **verses 3-4**. *When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me. My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.* Harboring sin in our hearts in an unconfessed and truly repentant way only results in suffering and not in joy.

BUT, the regenerate realize that there is forgiveness to be had. And beloved, is that where true joy is found? Look at the **first two verses**. *Blessed is he whose transgressions is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

Friends, those who are born again knows joy. Therefore, having an exclusive membership that is made up of regenerate believers produces a joy that is infectious, mysterious, and unexplainable. Much of the joy that is found inside of the church is propagated from one member to another.

In closing this evening, I want to read over our definition one last time.

Definition: Salvation is a prerequisite to church membership. Church membership is a covenant community of Biblically baptized believers with a credible testimony, agreement to the church's doctrinal statement, and desire to covenant with others to exercise their spiritual gifts and work towards the Great Commission. Church membership is not open to unbelievers or those who cannot submit to the doctrinal statement of the church. Church membership is a commitment to Christ through a commitment to each other.

Not all churches practice membership to this extent. Some don't practice it at all. We don't answer to them, we answer for us. Are we being Biblical? Are we adhering to what the Lord has told us in His Word? I hope that tonight you've seen a greater glimpse into what makes us Baptist, but even more, I hope that you've seen what the Bible says and how you must apply it.

Amen? Let's pray.