

Baptism: A Matter of Obedience - John MacArthur

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by
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I was flying across the country this week—a long flight—all the way to the east coast and the Lord always makes things serendipitous, always has a surprise or two; I was sitting next to a man who eventually took out a Bible and started reading it and as he was reading it, I said to him, "That's a Bible you've got there." He said, "It is," and I said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" I thought I'd just play Philip for a while. I said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" and he said, "Well, some of it. I know one thing: that there are many ways to God." I said, "Keep reading. You're not done yet." He said, "Well, It's kind of hard to understand." I said, "Well, would you like to be able to understand the Bible?" and he said, "I really want to be able to understand the Bible—I really do." So, I took out my MacArthur Study Bible and I opened this thing and he said, "This has all the answers!" Anyway, I had the opportunity to expose him to the gospel and I'm going to send him one of those Bibles.

But, what a wonderful thing the Lord does in just kind of placing the right people in the right place at the right time and I'm always grateful for that. This is the right place and the right time for you, this morning, because I have a word from the Lord for you—it's from the Scriptures and it's on the subject of baptism. Now, as a faithful pastor, I am duty-bound to speak on this subject; if I don't, I'd be unfaithful to the Lord who commands us to be baptized and if we are to be faithful under-shepherds, we have to bring the issue to the people. It's been a number of years since I addressed the subject; it's been—in fact—somewhere between 5 and 10 years since I've addressed this subject. I confess to a certain amount of unfaithfulness in that regard.

This is not something that we can overlook or pass by lightly. It is not a particularly popular subject today—it's not of great interest in the evangelical community; it's been years since I've seen any new book written on baptism or any book emphasizing baptism or any series of messages or any preacher or teacher emphasizing baptism. I never hear about it on the radio—I never hear about it on Christian radio, Christian television programs, I never see a baptism on Christian television programs, though you have a lot of services, you rarely, if ever, see a baptismal service. The interest in baptism has sort of gone away—sad to say, in many cases.

And, we have a largely unbaptized church which includes some of you. I don't mean this church, I mean the church in general. It's amazing how many people who proclaim Christ and confess Christ, have never been properly baptized. Now, probably the greatest number of people who call themselves Christians have never been baptized, according to New Testament baptism. It may well be that the majority of those who call themselves Christians have not been properly baptized. It's not as if it's not clear about what baptism is and how it is to be done—it is clear. It's just that there has been a sort of an indifference to that very, very important matter. I would like to, if I can, put an end to that indifference this morning, if that, in fact, is the case.

There are, no doubt, many of you here this morning who have confessed Christ as Lord and Savior and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, but you've never been baptized. There are some of you, who maybe have never seen a baptismal service. We have one here every Sunday night, but you're here in the morning and not at night and you may not have seen one or maybe only a few. May I be so bold as to suggest that a failure to be obedient in the matter of baptism, to take baptism seriously is at the root of some of the immense problems in people's lives and in the church in general because it allows the church to fill up with people who are unfaithful to the simplest commands of the Lord and of His Word and that's serious.

When Jesus said, "Go unto all the world and make disciples, baptizing them..." He was giving a command to the apostles and to the church, saying: go out there, evangelize, make disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe whatsoever things I have commanded you. The church then, is commissioned, in the great commission, to do the work of baptizing. It's amazing to me, you see massive evangelistic crusades—these massive crowds of people, these huge crowds of people, and, supposedly, people coming to Christ—never do you see a baptism. Never is there a baptism at such events. And yet, on the day of Pentecost, three thousand people believed and three thousand people were baptized, when the church began. When the Holy Spirit spoke in Acts 2:38, speaking through Peter, "Repent and be baptized," He gave a command there to the individual who repents and believes.

So, the church is commanded to baptize—the individual is commanded to be baptized. There is really no lack of clarity with regard to this. In fact, in each of the cases where the great commission is given, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there's an emphasis on baptism. In spite of this, there is widespread noncompliance with what is a very simple command. In many ways, it's sort of the easiest act of obedience as a Christian you can do because all the rest have to do with sorting out the stuff that's in your mind and heart, for the most part. This simple act, when obediently done, demonstrates a heart that seeks to honor the Word of the Lord. When not done, it betrays several possible motivations.

A person who claims to be a Christian and has not been baptized, fits into the following categories.

1. One, ignorance—that is, they've never been taught about baptism and that's very possible in many, many places. From time to time, we have people baptized here who were converted years ago but never were taught the significance of baptism. And, some have been taught wrong. They have been taught that if they were baptized or if they were immersed or christened as a baby, that's sufficient. So, it's possible that some people are unbaptized in the church because of ignorance.

2. Secondly, pride is an issue. People who have allowed a long period of time to go since their conversion—they've named the name of Christ for a long time, they are involved with the church, they are known as Christian people, they have never been baptized—it's a little bit embarrassing to acknowledge that failure and that disobedience for such a long time and so they're not willing to humble themselves, admit they've been disobedient, and be baptized. So, it could be ignorance, it could be pride.

3. It could be indifference. There are plenty of people who just can't be bothered—they can't find a spot in their daytimer for it, it doesn't fit into their schedule, it's not a priority. They know it's commanded in the Bible, but obedience isn't the main thing with them—they have other priorities. That's a sad situation—to be apathetic toward a specific command, to be indifferent toward a very direct command from our Lord, Himself, which brings honor to Him and blessing to the one who is obedient. But, there are people who are just indifferent—they just can't get around to it, "I've been planning to do it, I've thought about it; it just doesn't fit on the priority list."

4. And, then fourthly, could be the defiant people—those who basically aren't baptized because they are just rebellious—they refuse to obey. Usually those kinds of people are sinning...they're in a pattern of sin and it would just sort of elevate their hypocrisy if they were to have to come up and give a testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ and celebrate His wonderful redemption on their behalf. So, people who are defiant and rebellious and just won't be baptized, generally are in a pattern of sinning.

5. Then, fifthly, it's possible that you're unregenerate—you're just not a true Christian, you have no desire to make a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ because you don't want to be identified with Him in a public way. You may come and you may like to kind of hang on the edges and on the fringes here, but you're not about to take your public stand with Christ. Those are the only reasons I can think of. Either you're ignorant, you're too proud to humble yourself and be baptized, you're apathetic and indifferent toward that matter of obedience, you're defiant, or you're not a believer. That puts the issue squarely where it belongs and it backs you, if you've never been baptized, sort of into a corner to sort that out. It could be a combination of several of those things in some cases, but you're in there somewhere.

Now, I want to explain baptism to you and I want to see if I can't motivate you to be obedient for the glory of the Lord and for your own blessing. I guess the best way to do this...somebody said this morning that I wasn't in much of a preaching mode and that's probably true...this is more of a teaching time, this is more of sort of sorting out the issues with regard to baptism in a way that is teaching you the principles and the truths, but I'll try to yell occasionally just so you don't feel cheated.

1. Question number one: What is baptism?

What are we talking about here when we talk about baptism? Simply, here's a definition: it is a ceremony by which a person is immersed into water. That's what it is. It's a ceremony by which a person is immersed into water or "dunked," they used to say, in fact, there were people who baptized this way were called "dunkers." So, this is simply a ceremony by which people are immersed in water; that's it. And, right behind me here and under the floor, there's a pool of water where that is done every Sunday evening.

Now, we do this because it's instructed in the New Testament—we've already commented on the fact that the Great Commission's all tell us to baptize and Peter, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, told those who heard and believed, to be baptized. Let me go to the Word so we give you an understanding of this. There are two Greek verbs that are used in the New Testament with regard to baptism—they are translated baptism": bapto and baptizo—bapto is the less common, used only four times in the New Testament and it means "to dip into." "To dip," "to dip into," in fact, it was used for "dyeing" when you immerse something in a dye. It's the word "immerse'...bapto.

Baptizo is an intensified form of bapto—the Greeks had ways of sticking in a few extra letters and intensifying a word. Baptizo is used many, many times in the New Testament; many, many times. It means "to dip completely" and it's the Greek word for "drowning"; that shows you how complete the dipping is, potentially. It's the word "to submerge" or "immerse"—in fact, the Latin equivalent is immersio (sp.) or submersio (sp.). The noun "baptism"—baptismas—is used always in the book of Acts to refer to a Christian being immersed in water...it's always used to refer to a Christian being immersed in water. So, that is what baptism is: it's a ceremony by which a person believes the gospel and is then immersed into water.

In fact, the terms bapto and baptizo, the verb, and baptismas, the noun, could have been translated "immerse" and probably would have solved a lot of problems, but the translators chose to transliterate the Greek baptizo into "baptise." They transliterated it rather than translate it because it had become such a technical term for "immersion." So, they just transliterated it across, but that doesn't change the meaning—it means "to immerse."

In fact, the Greeks had a different word for "sprinkling" and that word *rhantisanti* is used of "sprinkling or splattering with water"—it's a different word altogether. We're not talking about "sprinkling"—there's no such thing as a ceremony of sprinkling in the Bible, or pouring or any application of water to the individual. Whenever you find "baptism" in the Bible, it is the word "immerse" or "submerge" and it means "putting the person under the water." Every New Testament use of these terms, requires or permits the idea of immersion. This is so obvious that even John Calvin, who basically came down on the side of infant sprinkling or infant baptism, says this, he writes, "The word 'baptize' means 'to immerse.'" No linguist can come up with anything else. Calvin says, "The word 'baptize' means 'to immerse'; it is certain that immersion was the practice of the early church." There really is no argument, there's no debate at that point.

The verbs—*bapto*, *baptizo*—are never used in the passive. That is to say, water is never said to be baptized on someone such as sprinkling or pouring or touching with water which is done in a great, great portion of the church today. They sprinkle, they pour, or they dip and just touch the water to the forehead or to some other part of the head. Never are those verbs used in the passive sense of water being placed on someone. They're always used in the sense of someone being placed in water. Whenever you read in the New Testament about a baptism—an actual occasion of baptism—immersion is the only possible meaning.

Matthew 3—look at it...or just listen to it—Matthew 3:6, John the Baptist, "They were being baptized by him in the Jordan River." They were being baptized in the Jordan River. They came down into the river and they were baptized there. The river was not taken to them; they were taken to the river. Matthew 3:16, "After being baptized, Jesus," having been baptized, "went up immediately," literally, "out of the water." Jesus went down into the water...came up out of the water. Again, that clearly indicates that He went down into the water in order that He might be placed into that water and that's the use of the word baptism...means immersed in that water.

In John 3...when John the Baptist was doing this baptism, he picked a place at the Jordan River that was deep. It says in verse 23 of John 3, "John was baptizing in Anon, near Salem." Of all the spots you could stop along the Jordan River, he picked that one because "there was much water there" which is simply another way of saying the water was deep. There was enough water there to get people under it—that was the whole point. In Mark, chapter 1, verse 5, same thing, "All the country of Judea was going out to him and all the people of Jerusalem, they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River"... "in the Jordan River." You remember in Acts, chapter 8, when Philip came across the Ethiopian eunuch, you remember the statement in verse 36, "Look; water! What prevents me from being baptized," verse 38, "he ordered the chariot to stop, they both went down into the water, and he immersed him."

Now, that is what baptism is. That's what *baptizo* means. Baptism is a ceremony by which a person is immersed into water. That is the only kind of baptism the New Testament knows anything about—it doesn't know anything about sprinkling, pouring, touching with water, and particularly doesn't know anything about baptizing infants. I'm going to address that issue because it is an important issue and some of you will remember I made a presentation of that at a past *Ligoneer* (sp.) conference—there is one here this week, by the way, and that was completely coincidental that, in my preaching schedule, that this issue came up at this time. Many of the people who will be at the conference, of course, would affirm the things that I am teaching. Next Sunday morning, I think, I may do it next Sunday—I may postpone it a week, I'm not sure yet—I want to address the issue of infant baptism from a biblical perspective. You'll find a very, very fascinating discussion.

But, as far as the New Testament is concerned, there is no such thing as pouring, sprinkling, touching with water, or baptizing infants. It was an act by which an adult person was placed into water. It had great spiritual significance and the significance of baptism can only be depicted in immersion. The significance of baptism, the spiritual significance, can only be depicted in immersion—I'll say more about that later.

Now, when you look at baptism in the New Testament, you're going to come across some other baptisms that are not water baptisms—there are times when the word *baptizo* is dry. There are times when the word *baptizo* isn't talking about water at all, but we use it that way. We talk about people going through a baptism of fire, right? We mean, by that, that he was immersed in a very difficult situation. John the Baptist talked about a baptism of fire in John, chapter 3. What he was talking about was the immersing of unbelievers in the full fury of God's fiery wrath.

There is a baptism by Christ, with the Holy Spirit, into the body of Christ, I Corinthians 12, "We've all been baptized with the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ." When you became a Christian, you were immersed into the communion of the redeemed. You were placed in the union with every other believer so that he who that is joined with the Lord is one spirit with every other believer. So, there is the immersing of the believer into the body of Christ. There is the immersing of the unbeliever into the full fury and wrath of God under which he is completely submerged.

In I Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 2, it says, "The children of Israel were immersed into Moses." It's talking about solidarity. They were joined unto Moses in his leadership. What he did, they did. What he said, they followed. They literally...he was their leader and they were immersed into Moses. Where he went, they went. Solidarity, union, communion—the word then can have that sort of metaphoric meaning where it means being immersed into something. You could say, "I was immersed in my work. I was immersed in thought." Those kinds of expressions don't necessarily refer to water, but they refer to using the idea of water as a metaphor for being engulfed in something. So, there are times in the New Testament, when you read about a baptism, that isn't a baptism by water; there are other times when, of course, it is as we've seen—a baptism by water.

We're going to focus on the issue of the baptisms that have to do with water. This water immersion, commanded of every believer, is basically not negotiable. We don't have an option with this. This is a command; it is a reiterated and repeated and obeyed command in the New Testament. It is in itself, a simple act, and were it no more than just to put somebody in water and take them out, we could say it was nothing but a dunk. It was nothing but a cleansing, it was nothing but a refreshing...nothing more.

But, there is much more because it is an object lesson. It is a depiction—it is a picture—it is a symbol—it is a physical analogy of a great spiritual truth that is profound—and it is crucial, if you understand what baptism signifies, to stick with the New Testament mode. If you change the mode of immersion, you then confound it's symbol. God has designed that this simple ordinance teach us most wonderful truth—the most wonderful truth of all, the truth of personal salvation. It's all wrapped up in this act of baptism.

And, of course, any student of the Bible knows that God teaches with symbols. In the Old Testament...all kinds of symbols and analogies and types and pictures and ceremonies...depicting a spiritual truth in some physical way. Certainly, in the New Testament, Jesus did that with His parables and His analogies...The apostle Paul does it with his illustrations. So we have long seen God dispense truth to us in sort of abstract terms, but connected with very concrete, pragmatic, tangible things which can graphically illustrate the truth...and baptism is one of those. It is an external, physical, symbolic act which depicts a profound and deep and essential spiritual truth. Now, let's go to the second question. We know what baptism is.

2. What has been the history of baptism? How are we to understand its history?

Well, let's go back, before the New Testament and we'll get at least a portion of the history of baptism. There were a number of washings in Israel, a number of cleansings and ceremonial washings of the hands that the priests went through and the people went through and the washing of pots and things like that...that were certain kinds of immersions were necessary that depict cleansing.

But, Christian baptism has at least one very important sort of a precursor and that is Judaistic proselyte baptism. Before the New Testament...let's say a Gentile had come to the knowledge of the true God. Some Gentile had heard the prophets or he had heard the testimony of a faithful Israelite or he'd come to Israel and he moved into the land and he took up residence there. Or he lived on the border or whatever and he was exposed to the living and true God, God moved upon his heart...he came to believe in the true and living God, he repented of his sin, and he became a follower of the true God, and he was a saved individual—a saved Gentile—who wanted to identify with God's people, he would be called a proselyte. He had been proselytized, if you will—he was now a proselyte to Judaism. He was a Gentile wanting to become identified with the Jews and worship their God—like Cornelius would be, in the New Testament. Now, he would have to go through a three-stage ceremony... the Jews had developed a ceremony by which a proselyte would enter into privilege in the covenant community.

First of all, the first phase is called *mela* (sp.) and that amounted to circumcision. Because circumcision was a God-ordained sign, any male who came in, even in an adult, would need to be circumcised. He would need, therefore, to identify himself with the people of God by this unique circumcision ceremony.

The second thing that would happen to him, would be *tebula* (sp.)—*mela* (sp.) was the first one, *tebula* (sp.) was the second one—and that was an immersion. He would be dunked in water, submerged in water, in order to demonstrate this—this is what they said—it was to demonstrate that they were dead as to their old life. They were dead as to their old customs, their old habits, their old traditions, most of all their old idolatry, and their old iniquity. That was now gone; they were burying it. That submersion into water depicted the death of that old life. They would come out of that water, having arisen to walk in a cleansed and new life with God's community—God's family.

The third part of that three-phase induction of a Gentile into the people of God, was called *corban* (sp.) and it had to do with the sacrificial animal. They were to bring an animal to be slaughtered and the reason for the slaughtering of the animal was to remind that Gentile that their forgiveness—the forgiveness of their sin...they were coming into the community of God's people...they were repenting and confessing the true and living God—that forgiveness of sin which God would grant to them would only come to them through death. So, here was the death of a substitute animal to picture the fact that there would have to be a substitute to die for their sins. They literally passed on, as it were, the symbol of a substitutionary death to those Gentiles who came in, again depicting the ultimate lamb who would come and truly take away sin. So, any Gentile who wanted to come in, would be circumcised, would be immersed, and would have to offer a blood sacrifice which was an open confession that their sin was going to require the death of a substitute. That, of course, looked forward to the Messiah who was that substitute.

Now, into this Jewish community comes John the Baptist and John comes preaching, and he comes preaching repentance, and then, he comes baptizing. That's not surprising. That's not surprising that John would come baptizing; they were used to that; they had gone through the ceremony; they were used to seeing people baptized, but what was shocking—what was devastating, what was remarkable—was that John the Baptist was asking Jews to be baptized. Why was that remarkable? It was an amazing thing. He was in effect saying to them, you are as what? You're as Gentiles. You're outside the covenant, you're without hope in the world, you're without God, you need to be immersed as a symbol that

you have died to the old life, been washed, and brought into the cleansed family of God.

Now, for a Jew to admit that he was equal to being a Gentile was a stretch. I mean, it was a huge stretch. For the most part, they hated the Gentiles. The Gentiles had been their oppressors; the Gentiles were non-covenantal people. They (the Jews) ridiculed [them] in ridiculing ways, called them the uncircumcised. When they would come from a Gentile country back into Israel, they would stop before they crossed the border and shake the dust off their cloak so they didn't take any Gentile dirt into their land. They wouldn't go into the home of a Gentile because they were unclean. They wouldn't eat food with a Gentile because they were unclean. They had all of these social prohibitions that they had erected which really were not consistent with the law of God, they had fabricated them. You remember Jonah—when a whole Gentile city, Nineveh repented—went out and wept and said he'd rather be dead than see Gentiles being allowed to come into the family of the true and living God? They had deep-seated racial animosity.

But, here comes John the Baptist and he says to them, "You need to be immersed!" and he's treating them as if they are in the same condition as Gentiles outside the covenant. But, you know what? He preached repentance and he must have been a powerful preacher because he was very convincing and people began to repent, didn't they? They really began to repent; this is a powerful man. He may have been the most powerful of all preachers...in fact, wasn't it Jesus who clearly told us that? He said, "Of all who've ever lived, John the Baptist is the greatest." Up until Christ, the greatest prophet ever—I would love to have heard him preach; he must have been something fierce, they chopped his head off for it and served it up on a platter at a party just to silence him.

But, all Israel was coming out there and here were all these people who basically were being redefined as if they were Gentiles—outside the covenant, outside the promise, outside the hope, outside salvation, and needing to repent of their sin—died of the old life of legalism and self-righteousness and all the Judaistic trappings, and to come to the true understanding of their sin and cast themselves on the mercy of God, and go into this baptism as a symbol that they wanted a new life and they wanted to be ready for the Messiah. So, he preached repentance and righteousness and he called for people to turn from iniquity to holiness, from the old life to a new one. In order to symbolize it, he selected baptism and Matthew 3 shows him, in the first 8 verses, baptizing people. "They were confessing their sins," it says, and they were confessing that they were worthy of death, they were worthy of burial, and they needed a new life, and that was depicted in their immersion. So, the baptism of John the Baptist really did mark a turning point in the heart of a sinful Jew who wanted to be ready to face the Messiah and knew he wasn't.

On one particular day, however, an incredible thing occurred and I need to comment on it—Jesus showed up. He had showed up before and John had said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." So, John knew who he was and John had identified him as the Messiah, the One who would die for sin, the true Lamb who would be the final and full sacrifice.

But, Jesus showed up on another occasion in Matthew 3:13 and He comes to John to be baptized by John—this is quite remarkable. Well, he can't handle this, verse 14, "John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You and You come to me?" This doesn't make sense! You don't need to reject Your old life. You don't need to repent of anything—You're sinless, holy, and undefiled. You don't need to say no to the past and yes to the future. You don't need to have some death to the old symbolized, and some resurrection to the new dramatized—that doesn't make sense. This doesn't fit You." But, Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time, for this is just for now—it needs to be done, for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted him." Why did He do this? Well, He says it: "to fulfill all righteousness." Listen; that's so important. John understood baptism to be the confession of sin. John understood baptism to be repentance. John understood baptism to be the death of the old life, to rise and walk in new life. But, Jesus didn't need to do that. He was sinless. Well, what's the point? The whole idea of this baptism was to prepare sinners to receive the sinless King, so John tried to prevent Him, but Jesus said, "No. I have to do this for now because I need to fulfill all righteousness."

Well, what does he mean by that? Some people say, "Well, He wanted to identify with the people who were getting ready for Him." That's possible. Others have said that, "He wanted to set the example for believers in the future." I think that's very possible—that's getting close. But, let me just kind of cap it off. What He wanted to do was fulfill all righteousness and for us, all righteousness would include what? Baptism. If you're going to fulfill all the righteousness that God asks of you, you're going to be baptized. I think Jesus...you know His life was imputed to us, our sins were imputed to Him, His righteous life imputed to us...and He fulfilled all righteousness...all righteousness.

Yes, it was a symbol of His coming death. Yes, it was a symbol of His coming resurrection, of course. A sort of a prophesy of that, a sort of a type of that, a picture of that, a prefiguring of that, but I think what He says here is: I don't have a choice about this because this is the standard of righteousness—to be baptized. It will continue to be the standard of righteousness—to be baptized, and since I am here, living as a man to fulfill all righteousness, I will be baptized. Of course, it doesn't have the same exact meaning for Him, but He knows that this is a call from God. He knows that John the Baptist is preaching God's message—it is God, through John, calling people to be baptized and it is God through the apostles and God through the preachers, calling you to be baptized. Jesus is simply saying, "In order to fulfill all righteousness, I will be obedient to what God desires. If I'm going to live as a man, I'm going to obey all the commands."

So, in submitting to baptism, Jesus is showing us how critical obedience is. So critical that He did it, even though there was no need for Him to go through any kind of cleansing, any kind of repentance, any kind of confession of sin. Yes, I think Jesus, when He was going through that baptism by John and being immersed in water, anticipated that that's what

His death, burial, and resurrection was going to be like and that out of that would come a new symbol of baptism. But, He did it to fulfill all righteousness.

So, baptism is clearly a ceremony—very simple, somebody immersed in water and it has a spiritual significance of great importance. What is the history of it? It really is sort of a transition from proselyte baptism, which was also to identify some one as a sinner who is repentant, confessed his sin, and desired new life...and desired to be associated with the kingdom of the true and living God and His Son, the Messiah. Well, more to say...let me go to a third question.

3. What is the specific meaning of Christian baptism?

What is the specific meaning of Christian baptism? And, you already kind of know it, but let's dig a little deeper into the text of the New Testament. All throughout the New Testament, Christian baptism is clearly identified for us. It's really not hard at all. It's—in fact—it's crystal clear. Look at Romans, chapter 6 and I want to show you a couple of verses, so you can turn there and we're not going to spend a lot of time there, but just a couple of thoughts and it will be very obvious to you.

When you come to Christ as a nonbeliever and you put your faith in Jesus Christ and you believe and you repent of your sin and you're wonderfully saved, regenerated, born again; there is a spiritual miracle that takes place. I can't explain all of it in its actual reality—I can only tell you what the words are in the text that describe it to us. When you come to faith in Christ, you are literally immersed into Christ. You're literally immersed into Christ. His life becomes your life—it even reaches backwards so that He died bearing your sins so in that sense, you were there dying. He rose again for your justification, therefore you were there rising with Him. He was your substitute. He died and rose again for you, so in a real sense, He went to the cross carrying your sins and He comes out of the grave bearing your new life.

That's what Paul in Romans 6:3 says: "Do you not know that all of us who have been immersed into Christ Jesus, have been immersed into His death." This is a dry verse here, folks. We're not talking about water baptism—he's simply saying that when you have been immersed into Christ Jesus by faith, you have been immersed into His death. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit," I Corinthians 6 says. Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." So, here I am inseparable from Christ, as it were. Here is Christ living in me and I am in Christ. I am in Christ; Christ is in me. My body is the temple of the Spirit of God—if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. Christ dwells within me. So, I am now in this inseparable, indivisible, unity with the Lord Jesus Christ. I am in an ongoing, constant, shared life—I possess the life of God, as it were. I am a partaker of the divine life. Christ dwells within me; the Holy Spirit has taken up residency in my life.

I have been literally immersed into Christ. That includes, verse 3, having been immersed into His death. I wouldn't have this relationship to Him if I hadn't died in Him in the sense that all my sins were there when He died—He was carrying my sins. It was as if I was there. God, in a supernatural and mysterious way literally puts the sinner and all his sin, in Christ. By the way, that would put all of us there because even our righteousness is filthy rags and before you were regenerate, you were all sin and nothing else so you were there in "toto" (sp.) when Christ died. So, anybody immersed into Christ, was immersed into His death, and, verse 4 says, "You were buried with Him through that immersion into His death, and then you were raised from the dead to walk in newness of life." Verse 5 sums it up, "You were united with Him in the likeness of His death; you are united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection." Your old self was crucified with Him and you now, verse 9, have been raised from the dead along with Christ, never to die again and death is no longer master over Him or you.

So, that's the symbolism. The symbolism is of dying, being buried, and rising again. That symbolism can only be depicted in water baptism. That is the meaning of Christian baptism. It is a physical illustration—it is a physical symbol, a physical ceremony, intended to depict this reality. Whenever a person goes into the water, it symbolizes the death of the old life—they come out of the water...it symbolizes that they are now new creations.

In Colossians...well, Galatians...let's look there and then we'll go to Colossians, since they're in that order...Galatians 3:27 says, "For all of you who were immersed into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ." There's a good parallel. What he is saying...he's trying to figure ways to illustrate this union. He's saying, "You been literally submerged into Christ. You've been literally immersed into Christ." Another way to say it is: you have been clothed with Christ. In other words, you are wrapped in Christ; Christ covers you. You are underneath Him; you are contained, as it were, in Christ. He envelops you. And, there is neither Jew nor Greek...you sort of lose your identity here. There's neither slave nor free man, neither male nor female...you're all one in Christ Jesus and you belong to Christ, verse 29 says. That's the idea.

In Colossians, chapter 2, similarly, verses 12 and 13, "Having been buried with Him in baptism," that's right—same idea. You were there dying in Him—you were immersed into Him in His death. "You were also raised up with Him, all of this through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead." You put your faith in God, you believe that God raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 10, "If you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you'll be saved."), you believed that God raised Him from the dead and by faith, in God, raising Jesus from the dead, which affirms all about the cross and all about His bearing sin—all the way through to the resurrection...you affirm that, therefore you were buried with Him, immersed into Him, in that death and in that resurrection. You were placed into union with Christ, participating in His death, His resurrection...spiritually.

This is the baptism that saves. Peter talks about a baptism that saves—that's the baptism that saves...the spiritual immersing into Christ, not the water. This is the true washing of regeneration of Titus 3:5, not the H₂O. This is the real washing away of sins, Acts 22:16. Water is simply the symbol. It's simply the parable. It's simply the analogy. It's simply the illustration. Jesus, you remember back in Mark's Gospel, said, "If you're not willing to confess Me before man, I'm not willing to confess you before My Father who's in heaven." This depicts that miracle. When a child asks, "Why do you do that? What is the meaning of baptism?" It's a very graphic illustration...it makes it very clear in helping to explain to a child. When an unbeliever comes and sees a baptismal service, they're literally seeing an object lesson of the spiritual dynamics of new birth. That leads to a fourth question.

4. What is the relation of immersion to salvation?

That's what I just said, basically. It is a symbol of salvation already received. Acts 2:38 says, "Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins." Some people think, "Well, that means you can't have your sins forgiven or remitted unless you're baptized." Is that what it's saying? It could be translated, "Repent, and be baptized because of the remission of sins." That's a construction that is used, for example, in Matthew 12:41—the same construction translated that way. But, even it says, "Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins," the baptism doesn't save you. The baptism is evidence of genuine repentance and an obedient heart—it's just a way to demonstrate the genuineness.

Because, you see, when a Jew was...if you were listening to Peter preach on the day of Pentecost and you were going to go and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, you were going to be baptized in the name of the one who was probably hated more than anybody else by the Jewish leadership. You were going to wind up losing your family, your social status, your job, your right to attend the synagogue...everything. You would become immediately indigent and homeless. The price was very high...you would become a pariah, a social outcast. But, true faith will pay the price, count the cost.

So, when Peter says, "Repent and be baptized," he's saying, let's see, if the repentance is real, you'll take the stand. If the repentance is real, you'll respond in obedience no matter what the price. Baptism was the immediate and inseparable indicator of salvation. True believers were obedient and they were baptized. Day of Pentecost: three thousand were saved and three thousand were baptized. The apostles insisted on it. That's why we at Grace Church ask that anyone who joins our church, be baptized. We aren't adding something; we're just trying to be faithful to what the New Testament says. If a convert was not willing to be baptized—in the early church, there was little confidence in his repentance. There was no such thing as an unbaptized church. There was no such thing as all kinds of unbaptized believers. Baptism was obedience and obedience was the fruit of repentance.

This became then, an inseparable sign of salvation—so much so that when Paul was discussing salvation in Ephesians 4, he discusses it this way, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." And, he means by that, "one salvation," but baptism and salvation had become synonymous. There are still places in the world where you don't ask someone if they were saved, you ask them if they've been baptized because it was an inseparable and immediate indicator of salvation. As the church developed through the middle ages, baptism got pushed further and further and further away from the point of salvation—tragically. It's still held at great distance by some people even in our society. As I say, you look at these crusades and these things that you see on television and there's never any baptism—it doesn't seem to be a part.

Yet, Jesus said, "Go out into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them." When He was saying that...that was synonymous with salvation because the next thing He says is, "...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." Baptism became synonymous with leading them to the knowledge of the gospel and if they were willing to receive the gospel, believe, repent...they would be baptized as an immediate response. So, when Peter says, "Repent and be baptized for the remission of sin," he's simply saying, "Repent and believe unto salvation...demonstrate the genuineness of that by the first act of obedience which is baptism.

We're not saved by the water—that's not going to save you. "By grace are you saved, through what?" "Faith, that not of yourself, not of works...not of works." Paul says in I Corinthians 1:14, "I'm glad that I baptized none of you." Now, if that was a saving act, how could he say that? It doesn't save you—you can go through all the water you want and not be saved. And, I have to confess that you can be saved and not be baptized, but you're in a condition of disobedience. Baptism produces nothing but blessing. Nothing but the joy and the reward of obedience. Nothing but the affirmation of God to an obedient child. It doesn't save you, it doesn't make you holier than somebody else...it just brings you the blessing of obedience—that's what it does.

You could sum it up like this: as a believer stands in the water, ready to be immersed, he could declare these words, "I hereby confess in my willing submission to this divinely appointed ordinance, my glad obedience to the command of my Lord and Savior. In this symbolic manner, I show forth my identification with the one who bore my sins, took my place, died in my stead, was buried, and rose again for my justification. As Christ went through the dreadful reality of suffering and death to secure my salvation, so, by my immersion in water and emergence there from, I thus publicly declare my identification with my Lord in His death, burial, and resurrection on my behalf, with the intention hence forth to walk with Him in newness of life." That's the sum of it.

That leads me to another issue, that leads me to the next message, why is there so much confusion on this? Well, I think Satan wants to break the pattern of obedience at the very start, so there's a lot of attacks on baptism. You know, there are churches that teach that it's not for us—that it's a Jewish ordinance that doesn't belong to the church, Quakers,

Friends Churches, Salvation Army, other hyper-dispensational groups—for those of you that know what that means—the Bullenger (sp) rights. Others say: you're saved by water—the Christian Church, the Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ—have taught baptismal regeneration through the years: that you can't get to heaven without going through the water. And then there are those, who, like the Mormons who have baptisms for the dead—in one year over 2.5 million Mormons are baptized—proxy-baptisms for dead people.

And then you come to the Roman Catholic Church which the only baptism they have is the sprinkling and it's infants that are sprinkled—the Roman Catholic Church has an infant baptismal regeneration belief that water cleanses the baby from original sin and results in regeneration. By the way, until the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic's immersed babies—sprinkling didn't come until the Middle Ages. The Roman Catholic church teaches that if a baby dies without being christened or baptized, it goes to the "Limbo of the Innocence." It never goes to heaven; it doesn't go to hell—just goes to the "Limbo of the Innocence." That's the place where the soul enjoys natural bliss, but is forever deprived of the vision of God. So, these unbaptized infants just go hang out in some limbo place that's some kind of natural bliss, but there's no presence of God there. That's not in the Bible, by the way. That's how they intimidated people to get their babies baptized which brought them into the system, which brought them under control of the Roman Empire.

The Lutherans never got too far away from that, unfortunately—Luther never really shook the grave clothes of infant baptism. He even wrote a small book entitled *The Small Baptismal Book*, aptly named. He wrote it in 1526, and at an infant baptism, this is the prayer that he designed to be prayed...You bring your baby to be baptized and this is the prayer:

Oh Lord Almighty,
I invoke Thee concerning this child,
thy servant who asks for the gift of thy baptism
and desires thy grace through the spiritual new birth—

All of a sudden, this child is a servant of God who desires grace and new birth, even though this is a totally unconscious infant in the sense of knowing anything at all about anything.

Receive him, O Lord,
and thus extend, now, the good to him who knocks,
that he may obtain the eternal blessing of this heavenly bath,
and receive the promise kingdom of thy gift,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

And then, in Luther's ceremony, the infant is asked, "Doest thou renounce the devil and all his works and nature?" The parents answer, "Yes." "Doest thou believe in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, His Son, in the Holy Spirit, and the one Christian Church?" These were asked of the infant—the parents say, "Yes." The child is then baptized, and then the concluding prayer:

The Almighty God hath begotten thee anew,
through water and the Holy Spirit,
and has forgiven thee all thy sins. Amen.

Why, that's salvation. Infant salvation, through water.

The Reformed Church has moved some beyond that. They believe that when adults turn to Christ, they are to be sprinkled because they now are...so they do have adult sprinkling...they now have come into a covenant relationship to God. And then, when they have children, their children are automatically included in the covenant of grace and they are to be baptized when they're born, as little members of the covenant. Later, they are confirmed as actual members, after satisfactorily answering the questions in the catechism—that's usually called confirmation.

No such thing is taught in Scripture. Children born into this world are not somehow introduced, by virtue of their birth, into the covenant of salvation. And, there's nothing about baptism with children at all. All of this stuff clouds the issue and so, so many people say, "Oh well...there's many views of baptism...I don't want to make an issue out of it..." and the devil gains the day, doesn't he? This is not complex, this isn't brain surgery—even I understand this. This is very straight-forward stuff. I'll tell you, in next message, you're going to find it fascinating when I talk to you about where infant baptism came from and you see why it even was developed—it had nothing to do with the Bible.

You know, during the time of the Reformation too, they thought that...they were so into infant baptism that anybody who got rebaptized after they'd been baptized as an infant was in some trouble. They were called Anabaptists because they got rebaptized. They came to the conviction that infant baptism was wrong and you needed to be baptized as an adult believer...they were rebaptized and in so doing, they were sort of slapping the face of the religious hierarchy—the national church—and the Reformation produced national churches, governmental churches, that, in many cases, weren't much better than the Roman Catholic nations. They had literally Protestant countries where the church exercised great political pressure and power. Many times the Anabaptists were persecuted and sometimes executed by Reformers—hard to imagine.

So, that they thought rebaptism was unacceptable. Well, that's another confusing thing. People ask me about that all the time: "I as baptized once as a baby; do I need to be rebaptized?" Answer: if you weren't baptized the biblical way, you'd better be baptized the biblical way. John the Baptist's disciples showed up in Acts 19; the apostles said to them, "Have you heard of the Messiah?" etc....they said, "We don't know anything about that. We were baptized with John's baptism." They didn't say, "Oh well, that's sufficient." They said, "Then you need to hear the truth about Messiah..." They heard the truth and they were baptized the right way. Well, more later...

Baptism is a command. It is the purpose of God. It is the command of Christ. And, if you say, "No!" it can't be ignorance; we've eliminated that category, if you were listening. Pride, indifference, defiance, or you're not a Christian. Jesus said, "How can you say, "Lord, Lord!" and do not the things I say?" Jesus said, "If you love me," you'll what? "Keep my commandments." Don't bring yourself under God's chastening because of disobedience in this most simple act of obedience, which will bring upon you God's favor and your own joy.

Now, make it practical. In the pew is a little green card...if you want to be baptized, we're going to be prepared to do that. You just need to take that green card and put your name on it and check off baptism, or write "baptism", and give us a phone number and address—most helpful would be a phone number---and we'll get a hold of you and include you in a baptismal service very quickly. We're going to do some special things in order to respond to you. The green cards are there—if you can't find a green card, use a beige one. Just write your name and write "baptism" and make sure your phone number is there so we can reach you and we'll arrange...our pastoral team is standing by and ready to arrange that.

All I can do is lay this on your conscious from the Lord Himself and trust that you'll do what is right. For those of you who have been baptized—you know those who haven't—you can become a little added conscience for them, to stimulate them to do what is right before God. When you go out the door, the ushers will be there and they will collect those green cards, O.K.? I'll give you a minute to do that—don't...if you're too shy to take the green card out and see somebody watching, gonna have kind of a hard time getting into the baptismal—we have to get you past that barrier if we could, my goodness. Just take one of those cards and you should be stampeding to get one because of the joy of obedience.

Let's pray—let's stand first and we'll pray.