

**Scripture:** Romans 6:1-14

**Subject:** *The efficacy of believer's baptism...*

**Complement:** *... in uniting us to Christ and separating us from sin's power.*

**Big Idea:** Believer's baptism is 1) An act of obedience; 2) A Symbol of our union with Christ; 3) A time of initiation, and 4) A time of commissioning.

## **Introduction**

In a clear and powerful sermon on baptism, Pastor John MacArthur said this:

...the world is full of baptized non-Christians and unbaptized Christians. There is a world of people who have been baptized by the mode of infant baptism by sprinkling... (which is not a true baptism) ... who have nothing to do with the church and don't know the Lord genuinely. At the same time, there is a large group of people who do know the Lord and they're in the church and have not been baptized. This is a strange thing. Non-believers should not be baptized, and believers must be baptized.<sup>1</sup>

MacArthur suggests that two main factors for this sorry state of affairs, the first being pragmatism, which he defines as: "*Pragmatism, wanting to entertain people, make them feel good, pragmatism wanting a minimalist approach to everything sets aside the seriousness and the demands of Baptism...*" There is no shortage of evidence of churches that are watering down the Gospel to make things "easy" for people, churches that no longer wish to be obedient but accessible or "contemporary", to their shame and peril, so I think he's right on that score. But he also blames our modern propensity for living in- and through- the media:

More and more people find their attachment to Christ mediated through the media, through listening to Christian radio, watching Christian television, or migrating from one Christian event to another. And there are no Baptisms in any of those environments, typically... in spite of the direct command of Scripture, we probably have the greatest number of people who call themselves Christians (and actually may well be Christians) who have never been baptized maybe in history. There exists an unbaptized church which includes some of you.<sup>2</sup>

When we are publicly baptized, we are proclaiming our *commitment* to Christ, and demonstrating our complete surrender-to and identification-with Christ. Baptism is for Believers the public declaration of our love, surrender and commitment to Jesus Christ as our Leader and Forgiver. We must remember that **Christ** underwent baptism, He preached baptism, and He commanded the church to baptize all new believers. For all those who would commit their lives to Christ, baptism is both necessary and important. So then, why should you be baptized? Or perhaps more appropriately, "Why on earth haven't you been baptized yet?!"

## **I. Believer's baptism is an act of obedience**

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." *Mat 28:19-20*

It is true that we believe that baptism isn't necessary for salvation. But it is also true that believers are to be baptized because baptism is an act of obedience to God's revealed will. The

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from John MacArthur's sermon "Believer's Baptism" (Code: 80-370).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

charge which Christ gave to the apostles to *make disciples* also included the command to baptize believers into the church. Baptism is not an option for disciples of Christ. It is an essential step of faith and commitment. Along with the Lord's Table, baptism is the only other **ordinance** which the Evangelical church recognizes.

When Jesus said, "Go into all the world and make disciples," He immediately said this, "Baptizing them....*baptizing them*." That's the church's commission. When [Peter through] the Holy Spirit said in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized [*every one of you*]," that was a command to individuals. And when three thousand believed on the Day of Pentecost, and three thousand were baptized, that set the example.<sup>3</sup>

Consider Jesus' attitude towards baptism. Although He was sinless and not in need of the baptism which John offered, **He did so out of obedience** to his Father in heaven. When the Baptist protested that it was he who should come to Jesus, Christ simply said: "*Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness*" (Mat 3:15). John's baptism was one of confession and repentance, a preparing for the coming of God's salvation through His Son. Obviously Jesus didn't need this baptism, but John was a prophet sent from God, and so in obedience to the command of the prophet, so Jesus showed perfect obedience to His father!

Then there is Paul, who immediately after his dramatic conversion, received a visitor named Ananias, who restored the Apostle's sight, and then *baptized* him into the church. Over and over again in Acts, where the proclamation of the Gospel leads to salvation, we see people *immediately* entering the waters of baptism; from Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, when 3,000 were saved and baptized, to the Ethiopian official who heard the Gospel from Phillip and then was baptized, **baptism followed belief**.

*Because baptism is an act of obedience, by definition it must be reserved for believers.* It is not a rite for the uncommitted, but for those who have consciously made a decision to follow Jesus Christ as their Leader and Forgiver. That is why we call it 'believer's baptism'. Baptism is the believer's willing response to a life of obedience to Christ, and those who would be baptized, must **understand** the commitment.

The method — full immersion — is important theologically and spiritually. The word itself is derived from two closely-linked Greek words, the one meaning "to dip in" or "to dip under," was often used of **dying fabric**. The second word from the earliest of times was used to mean **total immersion**. To be fully submerged symbolizes the totality of our commitment, and our acceptance of the *totality and supremacy* of Christ's claim on our life. Symbolism and ritual are significant. Jesus tells us that "**whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven**" (Mat. 18:18). This literal, physical act of obedience is also significant and binding in the spiritual realms: it can only be undertaken, therefore, by those who understand the consequences of their actions.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

There is also the matter of those who have previously indicated their intention to follow Christ by owning their infant dedication or baptism through the ceremony of confirmation. Let me say right off, that for those persons who have given evidence of their faith in Christ by confirmation, **baptism is not a repudiation of that commitment**, but rather the completion of that commitment. When we are dedicated or baptized as infants, our parents claim the promise for us, and in confirmation, we willingly claim that promise for ourselves. *But it is not just our words which are required; we must still be baptized to complete our oath of obedience to Christ, even as Christ publicly accepted His mission, and then was baptized.*

Infant baptism, or sprinkling, or whatever the mode **is not believer's baptism**. There is no way you were a believer when you were a few days or months old! You must publicly be baptized and profess your faith in Christ for yourself, just as Christ did. Even John Calvin who was a baby baptizer, who advocated sprinkling babies, said, "The word "baptize" means to immerse, and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the early church." Baptism is a symbol, an object lesson, a visual representation of a spiritual reality that describes and defines a complete submersion and immersion into Christ. *Baptism is first and foremost an act of obedience for believers.*

## **II. Believer's baptism is a confirmation and a pledge of our union with Christ**

Baptism is an important step in the life of the believer, because through baptism we are *confirming* what we have professed. Namely, that we believe that Christ is the sinless Son of God who has purchased our forgiveness and eternal life through His death on the cross, and that we are willing to be *identified* with Him in all aspects. Baptism by immersion is a powerful representation of our being *buried* with Him in death, and *raised* with Him to eternal life. Paul writes:

... don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were **baptized into his death**? We were therefore **buried with him** through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, **we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.** *Ro 6:3-5*

Believer's baptism is the irrefutable *evidence* that we now belong to Christ alone. There may be no external mark on our person to show our commitment (as there was with circumcision), but our public baptism by immersion and our verbal confession of Christ sets us apart.

To be sure, we are saved by grace through faith alone, but baptism into Christ seals that private, personal relationship and forever witnesses to its reality. When Martin Luther was asked, "How do you know you are a Christian?" he answered, "*Because I have been baptized.*" Our baptism is the outward picture of the inner spiritual reality of our identification with Christ.

It is also, as Paul says, the moment when we become "*crucified with him*" and therefore no longer slaves to our sinful past. It seems ironic to think this way, but when we are dead, we don't have to worry about sinning any more; in fact, we don't have to worry about doing anything any more, because we are in fact dead! That is why Paul could say:

<sup>19</sup> For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. *Galatians 2:19-20*

In baptism we are also proving our hope for eternal life in Christ. As Paul says in Romans: “*We were... buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*” Christ was resurrected to a new and glorious life to rule as Lord of all, and so we have the sure hope that one day we will share in His resurrection. As Jesus promised the Samaritan woman,

... “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.* Do you believe this?” Jn 11:25-26 NIV

*For the believer, baptism is the confirmation and pledge of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Why should you be baptized? Because...*

### **III. Believer’s baptism is our initiation into the Body of Christ, the Church**

In baptism, the believer is set apart by Christ to be a member of His church. *Baptism is the means by which we are initiated into Christ’s Body.* It is more than a ritual washing, or some arcane ritual. No, *baptism is the means by which we identify-with and become a part-of God’s people.* It’s not about getting our name on a membership role somewhere, it’s about identifying ourselves completely with Christ, and pledging our full participation-in and experience-of His body, the Church. Through baptism, we are willingly joining ourselves *to everyone else* who has like-wise surrendered to Christ. Baptism is being joined to Christ and other believers!

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. *For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free* - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. *1 Cor 12:12-13*

And so to that end, our baptism is not just about “us,” but a pledge of our active involvement, contribution, and mutual submission to the local church. Here at SPBC membership follows automatically with baptism, because it is your initiation into Christ’s body.

In Christ’s day and long before, when a man converted to Judaism, he was first circumcised, and then took *a ritual bath*. Circumcision was the sign that one belonged to the covenant community, that one believed in God. The uncircumcised Israelite *was not covered by the covenant promise given to Abraham* by God. Now, with the New Covenant believers comes a new sign of belonging. Paul tells us that *baptism* is the sign and seal of God’s blessing:

... you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the *putting off* of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. *Col 2:10-12*

In baptism there is no physical or external mark to show that we belong to God. Instead, as believers in Christ we are all plunged fully into His death and resurrection. *Again, we see the significance of the act and action of baptism!* In the old rite of circumcision there was a partial cutting away of physical flesh, but in the new ordinance of baptism there is the full “*stripping away*” of our old sinful nature. Baptism is a public indication that we intend to give our all to

Christ, that we have renounced who and what we were and intend to give our all for him. To not be baptized is to hold back, to show our reluctance to be joined to Christ and His church. *Believer's baptism is our initiation into the Body of Christ, the Church.* Finally,

#### **IV. Believer's baptism is our time of commissioning**

I have already stated that baptism is our means of entering God's family. You will continually hear me say in my time here, that membership in the Church involves not only benefits and privileges to believers, but responsibilities. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul teaches about spiritual gifts and the interconnectedness of the Body within the context of baptism.

<sup>13</sup> For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. <sup>27</sup> **Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.** (1 Corinthians 12:13, 27 NIV)

As Baptists, we believe in the priesthood of all believers and that each member of Christ's Church has been graced by Christ with specific spiritual gifts which they are to use to serve God and other members of the Body. *Therefore, baptism is not only an act of initiation into Christ's Body, it is also a time of commissioning when the believer is set apart for service in Christ's Kingdom.* If you take the time to read 1 Co 12 from start to finish, you will see that Paul is exhorting the church to become fully involved and fully committed to using the gifts God had given them to fulfil the commission to spread the Gospel.

When you are baptized, you are being *set apart for service*, declaring your intent and willingness to use the spiritual gifts which God has given you. As long as we draw breath, God expects us to use our gifts to serve and glorify Him! In Christ we all have gifts given by the indwelling Holy Spirit, and it is incumbent upon us to discover what they are and use them!

Why should we be baptized? Because *baptism is a time of commissioning, when as believers we are set apart for service in Christ's Kingdom.*

#### **CONCLUSION**

There are some here this morning who never have been baptized, but who are believers and are now ready. Speak to me. Those who may have been baptized as children, or perhaps even before they were believers, perhaps it is time for you to complete your commitment. Is God leading you to commit yourself to Him through the waters of baptism? I would invite you to speak to me at your earliest convenience.

Why should you be baptized? Because believer's baptism is 1) An act of obedience; 2) A confirmation of your union with Christ; 3) A time of initiation into Christ's Body, and 4) A time of commissioning. Why should you be baptized? Because believer's baptism is a significant and transforming event that ***must take place*** in the life of every Christian.

This morning, I will give everyone here the chance to *publicly own* again the commitment you have made to Christ. Come forward to affirm the decision and promises you made on the day you were baptized, and if you have not been baptized yet, come forward to express your willingness to follow Christ through the waters of baptism.