

SHOULD YOU BE BAPTIZED?

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Intro: Last week we considered together why we observe the Lord's Supper, and our text was 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Today I want to take up the subject of baptism and the question of its importance for us today. Last Sunday I did not take up the different ideas that the people of God hold with regard to the Lord's Supper. I simply wanted to present from Scripture the purposes we should have in mind when we come to remember the Lord in His death when we observe the Lord's Supper. There certainly is no question but that the Lord's Supper is to be observed by us who claim to know the Lord. But only the Scriptures can teach us how to observe it, and why. I feel that we miss many blessings because we concentrate on our differences rather than on the teaching of Scripture.

The same can be said about baptism. The church throughout its history has been divided about baptism, who should be baptized, how we should baptize, and why. But again today I want to concentrate, not on the history of how churches have handled this truth, but what the Scriptures teach about it. And I am particularly concerned about baptism after the death and resurrection of the Lord.

And so the first question I want to raise is:

I. SHOULD WE BAPTIZE AT ALL?

By this I mean, Is there Scriptural evidence that the New Testament church observed the ordinance of baptism?

One reason I have chosen the text that I have in 1 Corinthians 1 is because it seems when we first read this passage that Paul was saying that we should not baptize. Please look with me at verse 17. (Read.)

But when you look back at verses 14 through 16 you will see that Paul did baptize. So, when he said, "Christ sent me not to baptize," he must not have meant that we should not baptize.

Reading the whole passage, as we have done this morning, you will see that Paul was grieved because of the divisions in the church at Corinth. Some preferred him. Some preferred Cephas (which was Peter's name in Aramaic). And some preferred Apollos. Now this not only meant that different people were attracted to these men because of their teaching, but it probably, from the context, would mean that when one group would say, "I am of Paul," they meant by that, "I was

baptized by Paul!"

This grieved Paul very much, as it must have grieved Peter and Apollos. I do not doubt but that Paul had to put up with this all of his life, and perhaps people were even stronger about it after Paul died. I am sure there were many people in London who used to say, "I was baptized by Mr. Spurgeon." This has always been the case with well-known leaders. People have been quick to say, "He baptized me."

It was in this context that Paul said, if I may paraphrase his words, "To baptize was not the main purpose of my calling. My ministry is to preach the Gospel, and baptism is a part of that, but certainly not the main part."

You will often hear it said when people are asked if they are Christians, "Yes, I was baptized at such and such a time." I want to deal further with statements like that in just a moment. But it does seem, especially in churches which have gotten away from preaching the Gospel, that both baptism and the Lord's Supper are the main things that the people in the church are concerned about. Both of the ordinances of the church are important, but they lose their importance if we elevate them to a position above the Gospel, and the preaching of the Gospel. Dr. Mitchell used to say that when we emphasized any teaching above the place that it has in Scripture, it becomes the basis of heresy--and I agree 100%! It surely can be said about every generation of professing Christians who have lived during the time from the ascension of Christ to the present day, that there have been many who have been very scrupulous about baptism and the Lord's Supper, but they have had little or no interest in the preaching of the Gospel. That is a tragedy when that happens, and probably identifies such people as not truly born again.

And so Paul was not saying that we should not baptize. You find many references to baptism in the book of Acts as the Gospel spread from place to place. Water baptism is mentioned in Acts 2, 8, 9 (where Paul himself was baptized), 10, 16, 18, 19, 22. This far surpasses the references in Scripture to the Lord's Supper. So there can be no question but that they baptized in the early Church. And that practice has continued down to the present day.

So I am convinced in my own mind that there is as much, if not more, Scriptural support for the observance of baptism than there is for the observance of the Lord's Supper. I hope you are convinced of this, too. The main thing that we need to be concerned about is the teaching of Scripture.

But now let me ask another question:

II. WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

So, when I asked my first question, "Should you be baptized?", my answer is this: It depends upon who you are. Let me explain what I mean.

As you examine the Scriptures you will find that the Lord's Supper is for people who are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. And you find the same thing about baptism. The people who were baptized in NT times were people who had made a sincere profession of receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. They were not baptized in order to be saved; they were baptized because they were saved, and wanted to give testimony to their salvation.

We are not saved because we are baptized; we are saved because we are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. To have been baptized without trusting Christ leaves a person as lost as if he or she had never heard the Gospel, or had never gone to church. Baptism doesn't even make our salvation more secure. The thief on the Cross who turned to the Lord during the last minutes of his life, was just as secure in his salvation as a person who has trusted Christ in his childhood, was baptized, and lived a long life serving the Lord. Baptism does not save; baptism does not even help to save.

This is where the Gospel helps us to think correctly about baptism.

The Gospel teaches us that we are saved by grace, and not by works. Cf. Eph. 2:8, 9. It is "not of yourselves," i.e., not by personal merit of any kind, nor is it "of works," i.e., anything that we have done to contribute to our salvation. Christ alone is the Savior. He does not need any help from us. By his death and resurrection He has provided for us a complete salvation. Nothing at all is lacking. And any attempt on our part to add to what Christ has done, to make up for any way in which His work was not enough, is an insult to our Savior to the God Who sent Him to redeem us from our sins. To think that we can contribute in any way to our salvation reveals a serious lack of understanding on our part as to what it means that we are dead in sins, lost, enemies of God--as we are depicted in Scripture.

But somebody says, "What about our faith? We are saved by faith; isn't this something that we do?" The answer is that even our faith comes from God. Faith is a part of the whole gift of salvation. Jesus Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Cf. Heb. 12:2. Faith is given to us by God as we hear the Word of God. Cf. Rom. 10:17.

God doesn't save us because we deserve to be saved. He saves us even though we don't deserve to be saved. We owe our salvation to the love and mercy and grace of God in sending the Lord Jesus Christ to be our Savior. He saves us, He keeps us, and He is going to present us faultless to the Father, not because we have any righteousness in ourselves, but because we are righteous in Christ, and through Him alone. And I repeat: Baptism does not save us; it does not complete what Christ left unfinished. He left nothing unfinished. He did not fail to do anything that was necessary for our salvation. We are completely and eternally saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, and by Him alone.

So, should you be baptized? Yes, if you have trusted Christ as your Savior. No, if you have not trusted Him as your Savior. The teaching of the Bible is that we are saved first, and baptized afterwards. We are saved first, and then we observe the Lord's Supper. As far as Scripture is concerned, both baptism and the Lord's Supper become a meaningless ritual unless a person has received the Lord Jesus Christ.

But now let me ask a third question:

III. IS IT IMPORTANT TO BE BAPTIZED?

If it doesn't save us, and doesn't even help to save us, then is it important to be baptized? And when you realize that many people are depending upon their baptism for their salvation, wouldn't it be better just to forget about baptism entirely?

Yes, it is important for us to be baptized, and no, it would not be better for us to forget about baptism. Let me give you at least three reasons as to why it is important to be baptized.

- A. First, it is important because the Lord told His disciples to baptize people "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

Baptism did not originate with man; it is divine in its origin. And those who may be bothered about the emphasis in the book of Acts about being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, please note that the word name in Matt. 28:19 is in the singular. It was not that people were to be baptized in the names (plural), but "in the name..." All Three Persons of the Godhead are involved in our salvation, and their union in our salvation is presented to us in the singular use of the word name. So, if you are being baptized in the name of

the Lord Jesus, you are being baptized in the name of all Three Persons of the Godhead: "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

— The people in Scripture who are mentioned as being baptized were baptized soon after they were saved. And so this means that their baptism was one of the first acts of obedience to the Lord. We are not baptized because the Lord was baptized. His baptism was unique. We are baptized because He, in effect, told us to be baptized. We are baptized to be obedient to the Lord. Thus, baptism marks the beginning of a life-long relationship with the Lord in which our obedience to Him is to be our primary concern every day that we live. Baptism is meant to teach us the importance of obedience to the Lord.

Secondly, baptism is important because:

B. It is meant to be a testimony.

We learned last week that observing the Lord's Supper is a testimony. We are proclaiming a message when we take the broken bread and drink from the cup. The same is true about baptism, although baptism is performed once, while we observe the Lord's Supper over and over again.

— What does it picture?

It pictures a death, a burial, and a resurrection. Baptism is a visible portrayal of our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Romans 6 does not teach water baptism, but Romans 6 gives us the truth which is pictured in water baptism. The Apostle Paul taught in Romans 6:4 that "we are buried with him by baptism into death." This is the reason that I believe immersion most accurately pictures our salvation. It speaks of a burial.

A. T. Robertson in his commentary on Colossians, quoted Thayer who said in his Greek Lexicon,

For all who in the rite of baptism are plunged under the water, thereby declare that they put faith in the expiatory death of Christ for the pardon of their past sins (IV, 492).

And Robertson added, "Yes, and for all future sins also."

— In John 3:23 we read that John the Baptist "was baptizing in Aeon near to Salim, **because there was much water there.**" In Act 8:38, 39 where Luke was describing the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip, he recorded that "they went down both into the water, both Philip and eunuch," and that after the eunuch was baptized, they came up out of the water. In

both of these Scriptures we have the setting for an immersion, a burial.

In Colossians 2:12, 13 Paul wrote on the same subject:

Buried with him in baptism,
 wherein also ye are risen with him
 through the faith of the operation of God,
 who hath raised him from the dead.
 And you, being dead in your sins
 and the uncircumcision of your flesh,
 hath he quickened together with him,
 having forgiven you all trespasses.

But it was not just a death and burial, but, gloriously, a resurrection. I want to deal more fully with that in just a moment, but let me pause here to think about our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. If we were joined with Christ in His death, His burial, and His resurrection, then it had to be when He died, when He was buried, and when He was raised from the dead.

The KJV says, "We are buried," but the NASB says, "We have been buried." The NIV and the NKJ both say, "We were buried," as does the old ASV. In the Greek it is an aorist passive, meaning, as I have said, not that we are crucified, buried, and raised when we are saved, but that when Christ died, we died, etc. We benefit from the death, burial, and resurrection when we are saved, but we died in Him, were buried with Him, and raised with Him when He died on the Cross, was buried, and rose again. God has chosen those who were to be saved. He did this in eternity past. Christ died for them, to guarantee their salvation. And before and after the Cross the Holy Spirit has been drawing to Christ those whom the Father has chosen to save.

Thus, baptism is a testimony of the sovereignty of God in salvation. This pictures the doctrines of grace. Water baptism is the symbol; our salvation is the reality which the symbol represents. Robertson says in his Word Pictures, "It should be said also that a symbol is not the reality, but the picture of the reality" (IV, 362). We are not saved by water baptism, but water baptism pictures our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, by Whom we are saved.

And so water baptism is not only an act of obedience, setting the tone for the new life, but it is also a testimony of our union with Christ in His death. How amazing it is to think that 2,000 years before we were born, we died with Christ, were buried with Christ, and were raised with Christ. And more amazing than that is the glorious truth that before there was any creation at all, God chose us to be His--and

His forever--and then sent the Lord Jesus to die for us.
What a marvelous salvation we have!

But I have one more word to say about the importance of our baptism, and why we should be baptized. Not only because it is an act of obedience, and a testimony, but also because:

- C. Baptism is a declaration concerning what people can expect from us from here on.

I have reference to the meaning of our being raised up out of the baptismal waters. In this same fourth verse of Romans 6 which we have been discussing, Paul said, "That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, **even so we also should walk in newness of life.**"

Baptism is a declaration that a person cannot be saved, and still live the same kind of a life he (or she) lived before salvation. "Newness" means new in quality, different from the past, a life that person has never lived before. If we can think of a lifestyle as clothing, this word "newness" suggests something which is unworn, that is, a garment that has never been worn before. This is how Thayer described it in his Lexicon. Others have lived it, but not so with someone just saved.

Baptism is a testimony of the truth of 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ..."

Concl: Do you see what wonderful truth we have pictured in water baptism? It does not save, but it pictures our salvation. It does not add anything to our salvation, but it helps to declare a message--that we expect to live a life of obedience to God and His Word, that we were joined with Christ in His death and resurrection, and that the life we live is new and different for us, although many others have lived it, and are living it. And this life is seen in its perfection in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We will never be able to make the world understand why a Christian believes what he believes, and why he lives the way he lives. But we can demonstrate it, by the grace of God, and trust that the Lord will use our lives, lived in Christ, to open blind eyes to see that there is something infinitely higher and better to be found in Christ than this world can possibly offer.

If you know the Lord, you ought to be baptized. This is the answer to my question, SHOULD YOU BE BAPTIZED. Yes, you should! If you do not know the Lord, I trust that you have been able to see today that baptism will not save you, but

that God has given us this ordinance as a testimony that salvation can only be found through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism is important, but only after you have believed. Therefore, earnestly seek from the Lord the faith to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for your eternal salvation from sin and all of its consequences. Then, when you are baptized, your baptism will be a powerful testimony of the grace of God in your life.