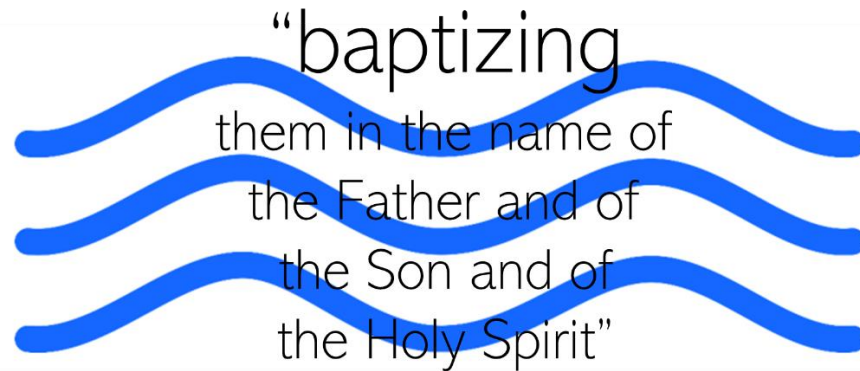


MAKE DISCIPLES



“baptizing
them in the name of
the Father and of
the Son and of
the Holy Spirit”

About a year before I got saved, I was at a youth rally in a denomination that believed in baptismal regeneration. Baptismal regeneration is the belief that getting baptized regenerates you. In other words, baptism saves you. There were probably two hundred teens there. I was fifteen years old and it was the first time I had ever experienced an altar call. At the end of the message, none of which I remember, the pianist started playing and the speaker started inviting the teens to come forward. I was a little freaked out because I had never seen such a thing. I didn't know what it was all about. I was ignorant and confused but at the same time, I felt a burning in my chest. I started having this feeling like I should go forward. It was the strangest thing. I did not understand what was happening but I had this sense that it was really important. Even stranger still, the two girls who invited me to the youth rally were getting frustrated by the altar call. It was taking too long for their liking and they were started to gripe about it. And I thought that was wrong. It didn't feel right to me, to be sort of mocking something so important, again, even though I didn't understand it.

Looking back on that incident, I believe that the Holy Spirit was at work in my heart. That burning sensation in my chest was not heartburn. It was a divine touch from the Lord. But I didn't walk forward that night for two reasons. One, I didn't have enough understanding of what it was all about. I needed more information and clarity about the gospel. Second, I believe God prevented me from going forward so that I would not confuse my salvation with baptism. Because as certain as day, had I walked forward that night, they would have pulled me aside and wanted to baptize me. I think that could have caused even more confusion in my heart and mind. About a year and a half later, I was ready. I was at my friend's Grace Brethren Church. The Saturday night before I slept at his house and we were talking about salvation. He explained that his pastor was going to have an altar call at the end of the sermon and if I felt like I wanted to go forward, my friend told me that he would walk up with me for support. That morning was heart was really on fire. The entire sermon was just for me and when he gave the invitation to believe in Christ, I immediately slipped out of the pew and walked forward, tears streaming down my face. Later my friend told me that I went so fast that he had a hard time keeping up with me.

No one talked to me about baptism that day. Actually, no one talked to me about baptism for a long time after that. I was sixteen when I was saved but was not baptized until I was nineteen. In

both cases, I experienced two problems with Christians practice of baptism. In the first example, people were trying to convince me that baptism was necessary for salvation. As a matter of fact, those two girls continued to try and convince me of my need to get baptized, but I resisted. Then when I was finally saved, no one told me I was supposed to get baptized. In the first example, baptism was over emphasized to the point of being a dangerous false doctrine and in the second example, the need to be baptized was severely under emphasized.

Our church will never make the first mistake but sometimes we might lean a little too close to the second mistake by not talking about baptism often enough. But very often those who tend to give too little emphasis to baptism do it precisely so that they don't associate it too strongly with salvation. I think many evangelicals feel that if we were to baptize people right away they might get confused and think it was a necessary part of their salvation, since that is often taught. But an under emphasis on baptism does not honor the Lord and is not healthy for a congregation.

We do hold a baptism service once per year and promote the importance and meaning of baptism but in almost eighteen years, I only recall preaching one sermon on the subject. Therefore, I wanted to give it a little more emphasis this morning. I'll start by stating our church's and our denominations belief from our Statement of Faith. This is our 7th statement out of ten.

7. The Church

We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

There are two important points in this statement.

- Though they are not the means of salvation,
- when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

The first part is a fundamentally important doctrine. For over a thousand years in the Roman catholic Church and during the protestant Reformation, church leaders taught that infant baptism brought about salvation, that saving grace was bestowed on anyone who received the rite of baptism.

Even Martin Luther, founder of the reformation who recovered the gospel of salvation by faith did not go far enough in his reforms.

“It is related of Luther that he had hours during which he was confused about everything—about the Reformation, about his faith, even about the work of Jesus Christ Himself—hours when he knew of nothing else to help him (and help him it did) save the writing in chalk on his table of the two words: Baptizatus sum!”

The translation of that Latin phrase is “I am baptized!” It’s sad to think that Luther clung so tightly to his baptism. It’s not fair to judge him too harshly when you consider his historical context but we don’t want to make the same mistakes.ⁱ

The worst part of that history was during the reformation when people who were essentially evangelicals by our standards, were still holding fast to infant baptism. They held so strongly to it that they killed at least 1500 men and women who came to believe in believer’s baptism. It’s really a sad and ironic history. Reformation leaders like Luther and Calvin recovered the gospel and broke from the Roman Catholic Church. They were united by their love for the Scriptures and their hatred of the abuses of power within the church. But then many repeated the same abuses of power by killing Anabaptist believers who practiced believer’s baptism—that is, baptism was to be reserved for those who already had saving faith. The word Anabaptist just means to “baptize again,” since all of the early anabaptists were also baptized as infants.



One of the most famous Anabaptist martyrs was Dirk Willems. Willems was to be executed for his beliefs so he was able to escape prison by lowering himself over the prison wall using strips of cloth tied together. He was chased down by a prison guard who fell through the ice while in pursuit of Willems. Willems could have easily at that point but he realized that the guard was drowning in the icy lake so he went back to rescue him. Despite his

selfless act, two days later he was burned at the stake. His sentencing shows how much right doctrine matters. Willems belief in believer’s baptism declared to be “all of which is contrary to our holy Christian faith, and to the decrees of his royal majesty, and ought not to be tolerated, but severely punished, for an example to others.” His martyrdom was made all the more horrible since heavy winds that day kept blowing out the execution fires.

Now remember, his executioners were not pagans or Communists or radical Muslims. They were men who held to the basic doctrines of the Reformation, that we are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. It seems inconceivable to us that anyone would die over his or her belief in baptism but they were willing to do so because they believed that infant baptism distorted the gospel. Not all, but most people who practice infant baptism in our day also believe that this baptism brings saving grace. This is why our statement of faith is so clear—“they are not the means of salvation.” It has to be clear because otherwise you are left with a salvation by works and not by grace. Belief that baptism saves a person goes against the teaching of the entire New Testament.

Here’s the thing. These Anabaptist believers were willing to die for their belief in baptism yet the average believer today barely acknowledges the importance of baptism. Some Baptist churches and denominations give it a lot of emphasis but not always for the right reasons. There is often pressure on local churches and local pastors to record a lot of baptisms every year. The church hierarchy is not pleased if you only report a few baptisms each year. The churches and pastors who get all of the attention are the ones with the highest numbers of baptisms. Recording

baptisms like this is a bit like recording the number of conversions at an evangelistic rally. There may be some good intentions behind it, but it can easily become a numbers game. It's a good reminder that even the best things can be twisted for sinful ends. Anytime you give people authority and control, even in the most Godly of environments, things can deteriorate quickly.

This is why Peter gave a strong warning to local church elders.

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3)

Elders are called to shepherd and lead the flock but it can be so easy to fall into a posture of being domineering over others. This is what happened with the persecution of Anabaptists and it is still happening in less severe ways all of the time.

So it's vital that we rightly understand and practice baptism—as a church and as individual believers. Here are the questions we want to answer with our remaining time together?

What is baptism?

Why should I be baptized?

Who should be baptized?

How should I be baptized?

How does baptism “confirm and nourishes the believer”

What is baptism?

Baptism is a symbol of our salvation.

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:11-15)

Even though the word baptism appears in this passage, Paul was not referring to water baptism here. Paul is describing salvation. This is a spiritual baptism. We were buried with Christ in his death and raised to life in his resurrection. This passage in Colossians 2 is very similar to Ephesians 2. If you removed the word “baptism” from Colossians, the two passages would be nearly identical, but the inclusion of the word baptism throws us for a loop. We immediately assume it is referring to water baptism. The word baptism simply means “to immerse.” Paul is explaining that just as Christ was buried—immersed in the ground—and raised to life, so all believers were dead and raised to life. Both passages remind us that we were dead in our

trespasses and sins but made alive by the power of Christ's death and resurrection. And this happens "through faith in the powerful working of God."

If you have placed your faith in Christ alone for your salvation, you were buried and raised to life, just as Christ was buried and raised to life. It is a spiritual baptism, but it actually happened to us. Don't get confused by the term 'spiritual baptism.' It happened in the spiritual realm, but it is a literal, actual event. You died with Christ and then you were made alive through faith in Christ and what he accomplished for us. Romans 6 tells us that we died to sin. Galatians 2:20 says we were crucified with Christ. 1 Cor 12 states, *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.* This spiritual baptism is also called the "baptism of the Holy Spirit."

Colossians 2:11-15

¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Ephesians 2:1-7

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

When we practice water baptism, we are portraying a symbol of what actually happened to us. Going under the water symbolizes being buried in death and coming up out of the water symbolized being raised to new life. In every way, it is the perfect symbol of what Christ has done for us and what actually happened to us. So make sure you get this. The water part is the symbol, but the death and resurrection actually happened to you.

Why should I be baptized?

We should get baptized because it's the first step of discipleship. We see this is the Great Commission. *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the*

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:18-20)

There are two basic parts to making disciples—baptism and teaching obedience to Jesus’ commands. Baptizing someone means that they got saved. We are to go to all nations and preach the gospel. Once a person is saved, it is assumed that they will identify with Christ by participating in the powerful symbol of water baptism. The other part of making disciples is *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*. Many people trip over this verse and think it’s about teaching only. It’s not. Making disciple entails teaching believers to obey—and to obey everything Jesus taught.

Water baptism is meant to be the first command that a new believer obeys. You are telling the world that you belong to Jesus and to no one else. Once you are converted the understanding is that you will obey the command to be baptized. Think about it this way. If you are not willing to obey the very first command as a new believer, why would you get around to obeying the other commands. The New Testament assumes you will take this step of obedience. You can look long and hard but you will never find a believer in the New Testament who is also not baptized.

Last Sunday Don Green read the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip explained how the passage in Isaiah was referring to Jesus’ sacrificial death. It can be assumed that Philip explained the full gospel to the eunuch, including how water baptism symbolizes Jesus’ baptism as well as our spiritual baptism. The eunuch must have been very eager.

And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him (Acts 8:36-38).

Some who teach that baptism saves use this story to show that baptism is necessary for salvation. If you ripped the Bible out of context you can teach anything you want. You could even attempt to make the claim that the eunuch was saved by baptism apart from faith, since faith is not mentioned here. But that would ignore the rest of the New Testament as well as what Philip did earlier in the same chapter. *But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).*

You have to be so careful not to pit some Scriptures against others but take in the whole counsel of God. For example, recently someone told me that repentance is not necessary for salvation. One of the way they defended this belief was to tell me that the gospel of John never uses the word repent. And since John was an evangelist who taught about belief in Christ, he certainly would have told us if repentance was needed along with faith. I can very quickly tell you why this is a dangerous way of arguing your point. Two examples. One, Jesus never used the word grace. Two, the book of Acts never uses the word love. Should we therefore conclude that grace and love are not necessary? It’s just silliness, sloppiness and potentially dangerous.

So water baptism is the very first step of obedience, the first step of discipleship and it should take place as close as possible to one’s conversion.

Who should be baptized?

Once you understand the meaning of baptism, this question gets a lot easier. Are infants saved? Have they been buried and raised to life with Christ? Then they should not be baptized.

Furthermore, every time a baptism is described in the Bible, it is being done by someone who has already placed their faith in Christ. That is always the right order—belief first and then baptism.

- ***Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*** Acts 2:41
- ***But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*** Acts 8:12
- ***Simon himself believed and was baptized.*** Acts 8:13
- ***"Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.*** Acts 9:17-18
- ***The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized...*** Acts 16:14-15
- ***They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.*** Acts 16:31-34
- ***Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.*** Acts 18:8

So it is very clear that not only does baptism not save you but it is also reserved for those who are already saved. It always comes after belief in Christ.

How old do I need to be to get baptized?

The why and the who of baptism begins to answer the question of how old one should be when they get baptized. I think it's helpful to compare baptism with the Lord's Supper. My personal preference is to allow children to participate in the Lord's Supper after a profession of faith, but at an earlier age than might be appropriate for baptism. Since the Lord's Supper is an ongoing form of worship, I think younger children can learn the meaning and significance as they participate month after month, year after year. In contrast to communion, since baptism is a onetime event, it is best if the child is old enough to truly understand the meaning and significance of baptism. We have always recommended a minimum age of eleven, but we have never made it into an absolute rule.

How should I be baptized?

Baptism means to immerse. Jesus was actually buried in the ground and rose again. We were truly spiritually dead and raised to life. Therefore, immersion in water clearly most accurately

symbolizes what has happened to us. But it would also be wrong to refuse always insist on immersion. If you are in a wheelchair and would prefer to be sprinkled, that is absolutely fine.

How does baptism “confirm and nourishes the believer”?

I still remember my baptism with great fondness. I was baptized three times forward instead of once backwards. It’s the way they do it in the Grace Brethren Church as they try to capture the Trinitarian nature of the event. I imagine that those of you who were baptized feel the same way. Each of us were “nourished” as we celebrated what Jesus has done for us and continues to do for us. And one great way to be further nourished is to share in the baptism of others. Our annual baptism service is always a highlight of my year, listening to old and young alike share their testimony of faith. And it’s also a great way to disciple your younger children. Before the service you can challenge your kids to remember one thing they hear from someone’s testimony. And after the service you can talk about what they heard and experienced.

My challenge and exhortation to you is a simple question. If you have placed your faith in Christ alone but have not been baptized, why not? What is holding you back from taking this step of faith? And if you don’t yet know Christ as Savior, could it be that the Holy Spirit is also leading you?

Rich Maurer
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ⁱ Though he did clarify his belief a bit: “Thus, baptism justifies nobody, and gives advantage to nobody; rather, faith in the word of the promise to which baptism was conjoined, is what justifies, and so completes, that which the baptism signified.”ⁱ