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# Understanding Baptism

## Topical<sup>1</sup>

*Russ Kennedy*

Today, we are graced and blessed to have a baptism. This is one of the two celebrations, directly ordered by the Lord for the church to participate in. Baptism and the Lords Table are called Ordinances of the Church. They are the only authorized symbols of the New Covenant community. Baptism represents our union in Christ and the church. The Lord's Table represents our fellowship with Christ and the church.

The ordinance of baptism is clearly developed and described in the New Testament. According to the book of Hebrews, it had some roots in the Old Testament washings, but emerges as being a New Covenant distinctive.

### **The Requirement to Baptize**

The New Testament by precept, makes baptism necessary for the church to do. This means for the local gathered body to do and for all who believe to do.

#### **Precept from Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20)**

<sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

#### **The Prophetic Baptism by John (Mark 1:4-8)**

<sup>4</sup> John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

John as the last prophet of the Old Testament baptizes Jews who want to repent of their sins and identify with the believing, repentant people of God. By taking the baptism of John, the people were acknowledging that they were repenting of sin.

Jesus will also bring the baptism with the Holy Spirit. So the physical thing they do will represent a greater spiritual reality that will come later.

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## The Pattern of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17)

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

John recognized that Jesus had no need to be baptized because of sin before God or separation from God's people. Jesus affirms that being baptized and identifying with the believing people of God is part of "fulfilling all righteousness." So Jesus is baptized because God's people will be baptized.

After Jesus is baptized, the Spirit comes upon Him so that He will be empowered for His ministry. From this moment on, Jesus will live the life we do with the indwelling work of the Spirit doing all He does in us, in Jesus too.

Further, Jesus' step of righteousness is affirmed by His Father. His Father publicly declares Jesus' identity and Jesus' approval. Jesus is God's much loved Son. Jesus is fully pleasing to God, even in taking this step of baptism.

## Practice of the Church

If we had all this but never saw it in the book of Acts, then we would have to pause and ask why? But, we do see the Apostles and the church obeying the Lord in baptizing those who believe and bow.

Acts 3:36-41

<sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." <sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 8:34-40

<sup>34</sup> And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" <sup>35</sup> Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup> 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?" <sup>38</sup> And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. <sup>39</sup> And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. <sup>40</sup> But Philip found himself at

Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

These are some of the many examples of the Apostles and Elders obeying the great commission.

### **They baptized those who believed...**

They tended to do so as soon and as quickly as possible. They baptized as an act of obedience and as a means whereby a person could identify themselves as being saved.

### **Those who were baptized were identified with the believers...**

Baptism was the only Biblically authorized means by which a person could publicly profess faith in Christ.

### **Those who were baptized were enumerated with the membership...**

People who had publicly professed Christ were considered to be a part of the church. The modern notion of believers who are never baptized does not exist in the New Testament.

Now, having said that, I want to be very clear – baptism does and cannot save a person. It is a step of obedience taken by a person who *already* has come to believe and bow to the Lord Jesus Christ. Only Jesus' work on the cross saves us. Nothing, no one thing, we do saves us. Even the faith that we have to believe in Christ is God's gift to us. But, a true believer, having been taught about Biblical baptism will (and I mean, will) seek to be baptized.

## **The Mode of Baptism**

The Biblical means for baptism is to immerse in water

### **From the Language**

*Baptizo* - to immerse, to place into

### **From the Culture**

Usually used to refer to placing a garment in water or dye.

It also was used to refer to kind of interconnected union.

### **From the Imagery (Romans 6:1-5)**

<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

The word baptism in this text should be translated "placed into, immersed in or united to" as I did in my reading of the text. However, this summary of the gospel is what is represented in water baptism. We are placed into the water signifying we have been placed into Jesus' death and burial. We come up out of the water signifying that we are raised with Jesus in His resurrection.

The imagery represents union in death and union in resurrection. It is meant to invoke the death and resurrection of Christ.

The imagery represents going down into the grave and coming up from the grave. It is a burial and a rising to new life.

The imagery represents what has already happened to us. It is a physical portrayal of an already accomplished spiritual event.

Our union with Christ means that we have died to the old and are alive in the new. We have passed from spiritual death to spiritual life. Therefore, we are to walk in the new kind of life in the Spirit since we have become a new kind of person by the Spirit.

This new person, through faith, through believing God in an obeying way, now relies on grace to actively pursue a life of holiness and wisdom. What has happened in the past at the cross, in past at our conversion now enables us to work hard at grace dependent obedience.

## **The Candidate for Baptism**

The Biblical command is to baptize those who profess belief in Christ as redeemer and ruler.

### **We are to baptize those who believe.**

In all that we have seen so far, the overwhelming Biblical language and the specific command in the Great commission is to baptize believers.

### **We are to baptize those who want to be disciples.**

Baptism is the first Biblical step in discipleship. It is often hard to get this across where baptism is just a religious rite and entry into a religious club. It is the step that person who is committing to be a follower of Jesus, makes.

### **We are not baptize unbelievers.**

This includes infants...

Baptism is not the fulfillment of circumcision. Circumcision is fulfilled in the work of the Spirit applying the cross to your inner persons and circumcising our inner man.

No infant is baptized in the New Testament records.

Household baptism is of household believers (Acts 16:25-34)

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, <sup>26</sup> and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. <sup>27</sup> When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." <sup>29</sup> And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup> And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." <sup>32</sup> And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. <sup>34</sup> Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God along with his entire household. [ESV]

<sup>34</sup> He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God. [NLT]

And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household. {NASB}

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## **Reflect and Respond**

Believe the gospel. Keep on believing the gospel. May the good news of Jesus' brutal cross-kind of death and real bodily resurrection cause you to rest and trust solely in Jesus to save you from sin and judgment.

Reflect on the gospel and the new life it calls us to...

Rejoice together in the work God is doing in the lives of people...

Pray for one another that the gospel we hear and see in this today will continue to transform our lives.