



BAPTISM: STUDY

SESSION I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of our study together is to provide a full understanding of the meaning of baptism. A full biblical understanding of baptism is part of a firm foundation in the Christian faith. A firm foundation offers us protection against faulty doctrine and doubts that may creep in and destroy a genuine faith.

Two things to note as we study together: First, you are encouraged to make notes, especially in your points of discussion. In your walk with Christ, undoubtedly you will continue to understand more and more. There may even come a time you doubt that you understood enough to be baptized in the first place. By making a record in writing of what you understand, this will help confirm your faith and assure you that you have started on a solid foundation. It can also serve as a reminder in difficult times, of why you started this great journey with Christ in the first place.

Secondly, don't feel you have to give the 'right' answer in the points of discussion. Although there are absolute truths in the Word of God, there is room for personal understanding. Working out your answers in advance will help enrich our class time. It is by exploring our understanding that we may learn from each other.

PART 1: THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

MATTHEW 3: 11. ``With water I baptize those who repent of their sins; but someone else is coming, far greater than I am, so great that I am not worthy to carry his shoes! He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

MARK 1: 4. This messenger was John the Baptist. He lived in the wilderness and taught that all should be baptized as a public announcement of their decision to turn their backs on sin, so that God could forgive them.

Baptism with water (v. 11) had been practiced among the Jews in connection with the proselytism [converting] of the Gentiles, and was the outward sign by which the latter signified the change of mind and purpose supposed to have taken place within, and which is really the meaning of "repentance." This baptism of John, however, is not identical with Christian baptism as will be seen later.

(Gray's Home Bible Commentary)

The practice of baptism was nothing new to the Jews. What was new with John the Baptist, was that the Jews themselves, recognized the need for baptism. There was a new realization that even those who considered themselves God's chosen had sin to deal with, and a need for reconciliation with God.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE BASIC ACT OF BAPTISM BEFORE CHRIST?

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MATTHEW 3: 13. Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized there by John.

14. John didn't want to do it. ``This isn't proper," he said. ``I am the one who needs to be baptized by you."

15. But Jesus said, ``Please do it, for I must do all that is right." So then John baptized him.

From the earliest times thinkers were puzzled by the fact that Jesus submitted to be baptized. But there were reasons, and good reasons, why he did. ...

The voice which Jesus heard at the baptism is of supreme importance." This is my beloved Son," it said, "with whom I am well pleased." That sentence is composed of two quotations. "This is my beloved Son," is a quotation from Ps.2:7. Every Jew accepted that Psalm as a description of the Messiah, the mighty King of God who was to come. "With whom I am well pleased" is a quotation from Isa.42:1, which is a description of the Suffering Servant, a description which culminates in Isa.53.

*So in the baptism there came to Jesus two certainties--the certainty that he was indeed the chosen One of God, and the certainty that the way in front of him was the way of the Cross. In that moment he knew that he was chosen to be King, but he also knew that his throne must be a Cross. In that moment he knew that he was destined to be a conqueror, but that his conquest must have as its only weapon the power of suffering love. In that moment there was set before Jesus both his task and the only way to the fulfilling of it.
(Barclay's Daily Study Bible)*

The fact that Jesus, Himself, was baptized illustrates the importance of the practice of baptism. Baptism as important spiritual act, transcends, even the New Testament. There were certain foundations about Christ that were not revealed until He submitted to baptism.

POINT OF DISCUSSION

WHAT DOES THE FACT THAT JESUS, HIMSELF, WAS BAPTIZED MEAN TO YOU?

PART 2: THE CHRISTIAN SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

ACTS 8: 35. So Philip began with this same Scripture and then used many others to tell him about Jesus.

36. As they rode along, they came to a small body of water, and the eunuch said, ``Look! Water! Why can't I be baptized?"

It was an obvious first response for the Ethiopian eunuch- once he was convinced of the Lordship of Christ; he was to be baptized in Christ's name. The question is, why was this an important first response?

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ACTS 2: 37. These words of Peter's moved them deeply, and they said to him and to the other apostles, ``Brothers, what should we do?''

ACTS 2: 38. And Peter replied, ``Each one of you must turn from sin, return to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ...

The first, and most basic reason for baptism is that God has told us to do it. With a change in our hearts and minds, which is a 'return to God,' the first physical response demanded, is baptism. So what does baptism do?

ROMANS 6: 6. knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

COL 3: 9. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,

10. and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him...

✓ Baptism is symbolic.

It mirrors in the physical world, what is being done in the spiritual. Our 'old man' or old nature, or, our old ways; are being laid in the grave. This is symbolized by our immersion into the water. We are raised as new creatures, not improved, but transformed. We are in effect, resurrected.

A second point of symbolism is this: We are following the path of Christ. He died on the cross. In so doing He was obedient to God the Father, and a perfect sacrifice for us. We die to our old selves in obedience. Christ was raised in the authority and glory of God. We are also raised to the same nature and ultimate destiny. Scripture says we shall judge angels (1 Cor 6:3), and that we shall sit by Him on His throne. (Rev 3:21)

✓ Baptism is the first physical illustration of faith, which God requires.

MARK 16: 16. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved. But those who refuse to believe will be condemned.

Baptism, as an obedient response to God, is a first step into spiritual life. It is the first active response God calls to belief.

POINT OF DISCUSSION

DISCUSS THE PROBLEM WITH WANTING BAPTISM, BEFORE ACCEPTING CHRIST- OR ACCEPTING CHRIST AND REFUSING BAPTISM.

HAVE YOU PROFESSED CHRIST AS LORD? (ROMANS 10:7-11)

✓ Baptism initiates a new spiritual condition:

ACTS 2: 38. And Peter replied, ``Each one of you must turn from sin, return to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; then you also shall receive this gift, the Holy Spirit.

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✓ We are baptized into a new way of life:

ROMANS 6: 2. ... Should we keep on sinning when we don't have to? For sin's power over us was broken when we became Christians and were baptized to become a part of Jesus Christ; through his death the power of your sinful nature was shattered.

At one time, the old sinful nature had full control because there was no alternative. The Holy Spirit allows a new understanding and the ability to pursue that new understanding. The old nature is not annihilated, but it no longer holds complete control. We have a choice.

We have a new way of life in that we have a new fellowship, we become 'a part of Jesus Christ', that is, part of His people here on earth (the church). We are baptized into that fellowship.

✓ We are baptized into a new purpose in life:

ACTS 1: 8. But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power to testify about me with great effect, to the people in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, about my death and resurrection."

We are baptized into a life of powerful testimony. Now that we are spiritually alive, we are concerned with the spiritual life of others. We no longer operate within the scope of mere physical life, but the infinite horizon of eternal life, and communion with a Holy God.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

WHAT DOES LAYING DOWN THE OLD NATURE AND TAKING UP A NEW NATURE MEAN TO YOU?

WHAT DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE SAYING TO GOD THROUGH BAPTISM?

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM BAPTISM?

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THESE BIBLICAL CLAIMS?





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WHO THEN, SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

Rom 10:8-9

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:

9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

(NIV)

Mark 16:16

16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

(NIV)

Acts 2:38

38 Peter replied, "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.

(NIV)

*If we look at these three passages, we can find a line of qualification that goes like this: **Belief, confession, repentance, baptism, gift of God's Spirit.***

The first step is belief. Belief in what? First that 'Jesus is Lord.' What does it mean to be Lord? In ancient Greek, there were at least six different words that referred to some kind of lordship. The word used in this verse is 'kurios', the highest connotation of the word. It means, "one with authority", "owner" or "master". When the Bible talks about Jesus as Lord, it doesn't mean someone who is our guide, or even our main reference. It means someone who is the ruling agent in our lives.

Imagine an individual who has performed a terrible crime, and is now condemned to death. Imagine this individual has a twin who looks just like him or her. And this twin says, "I will take your place and face the execution for you. But we must switch identities. You must live as me for the rest of your life."

When we go down in the waters of baptism, in effect, that is what is happening. We lay to rest the 'old identity.' We no longer have the right to hate, to treat people with preference, to be greedy, to be those things of the old nature. We have agreed to take on the new identity of our 'twin' who is Christ. Our objective in life is now to be more and more like him. The person who is being baptized is surrendering to this Lordship of Christ.

However, that is where the analogy ends, because Jesus is more than a human twin. Since He is also God, He continues to live in us, which brings us to the second point of belief.

We are to believe in our hearts that "God has raised Him from the dead." In fact the Bible says: 1 COR 15: 17. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead is pivotal to the Christian hope. Christ did not raise Himself. The Bible makes it clear that God the Father raised Him. This is important, because it shows us Christ as our example. If we have Christ inside, the Father will raise us just as He has ALREADY

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raised Him. The Bible says we are raised to a new way of living now, and to a new glory at the return of Christ.

1 Cor 15:42-44

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;

43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

(NIV)

When we come up from the water we symbolize this hope. The person who is being baptized must believe in the resurrection of Christ, and in their personal resurrection as surely as they believe they are rising out of the water.

*The idea of belief is locked in with the concept of **physical response**. In Romans, the physical act of speaking about what you believe is linked in the same sentence with internal belief. Baptism is the next step in physical response; it is going beyond simply saying to doing something in your belief. Baptism is for the individual who is convinced enough about the Lordship of the risen Christ, they are willing to respond physically in that belief.*

*When we are convinced of our human situation, and who the person of Christ really is- the Bible says the initial response, even before baptism is one of "**repentance**." What exactly is repentance? It is an interesting compound word in the original Greek, "**metanoeo**." As defined in the Greek dictionary, "to perceive afterwards" (meta, "after," implying "change," noeo, "to perceive"; nous, "the mind, the seat of moral reflection") In other words, repentance was to come to an new understanding which causes us to change our minds. In the New Testament, it usually has to do with sin, and it always has to do with making a change for the better. The person who is being baptized is "perceiving" things in a new way, and has a change of heart on how they want to live.*

Acts 4:12

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

(NIV)

God is perfect, his plans are perfect- His plan to save mankind was to offer only the best; His own Son. There is no plan B. The person being baptized is convinced there is no alternative to Christ.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

IN SHORT, BAPTISM IS FOR THE PERSON WHO WANTS A NEW LIFE, AND BELIEVES THE ONLY VIABLE OPTION IS CHRIST. ARE YOU CONVINCED OF THIS?

WHAT LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING DO YOU FEEL IS NECESSARY FOR BAPTISM?

DO YOU WISH TO GIVE A TESTIMONY OF ANY KIND BEFORE YOUR BAPTISM?

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR BAPTISM

What to wear

Men please wear a white T-shirt and light colored slacks. Women wear a swim suit, or a light top and slacks. The church will provide baptismal robes but please keep in mind they are quite transparent once they are wet. By tradition, the church furnishes towels, but it would be a good idea to bring a towel with you as well as a change of clothes. In the baptismal, no shoes or socks should be worn.

Where to meet

Please meet with the pastor at 9:15 in the choir room (left as you face the platform). At the point of baptism, women will be given the left, choir room as a changing room, and the men, the right room. We will enter the baptismal along the stage back hall, and exit to our prospective rooms to change. The deaconesses will be on hand to help you through the process. Baptisms outside of the church will be arranged between the pastor and candidates on a case by case basis.

How we'll do it

The candidate, properly robed or clothed, will enter the water, face the congregation and, at the pastor's invitation, share his or her assurance of salvation through Jesus Christ. (*A sample of assurance is printed below*) The candidate will then turn to the right and, as the minister begins the words, "I baptize you...", he or she will clasp the minister's wrist with both hands. The minister, holding a folded handkerchief over the candidate's nose and mouth and placing his other hand back of the candidate's shoulders, will lower him or her backward into the water. The minister will then assist the candidate to an upright position.

The candidate may be asked to give a short testimony during the service.

Sample: Vows of Assurance

Minister:	Do you know that you are God's child through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal savior?
Candidate:	I do.
Minister:	Is it your earnest desire to follow Christ in death to self and to walk with Him in newness of Life?
Candidate:	It is
Minister:	_____, upon your confession of faith in the Lord Jesus, and by this step of obedience, I baptize you* in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Time at which candidate is lowered into the water.*

