

Sunday, December 26, 2021
Multiple Passages (Believer's Baptism)
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Intro

How should we think about baptism? A 2nd rank doctrine. 1st rank doctrines are necessary elements of true Christianity. Some doctrines need to be affirmed. Inerrancy, the Trinity, deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, justification by faith alone, etc. Some doctrines can't be denied. The fall, our sinful nature, hell, Jesus' resurrection, etc. 2nd rank doctrines are convictions on practical matters that impact how the local church does life together. Matters which genuine Christians disagree on, but matters that affect how we obey Scripture. Baptism falls here. 3rd rank doctrines are matters we can disagree on in the local church while still fellowshiping together. Matters that don't affect church practice. Matters like the end times and the age of the earth.

Where does PCC stand? PCC considers baptism a 2nd tier matter. Our Constitution explicitly affirms that baptism is by immersion and for believers. We require members to be baptized as believers and to subscribe to our statement on baptism.

This morning we're going to answer three questions about baptism:

Who should be baptized? Does baptism save? How do we determine if a person should be baptized?

READ Acts 2:37-41

PRAY

Body

Sermon overview

Answering three questions about baptism with application throughout.

Point 1: Who should be baptized? (arguments for believer's baptism)

Believers should be baptized following their conversion.

The New Testament pattern is baptism after belief

"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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." – Matt 28:19-20

A person becomes a disciple (they repent and believe) and then they're baptized. The New Testament assumes that every believer is baptized.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. – Gal 3:27

Writing to local churches in Galatia, Paul assumes those who've put on Christ (defined as exercising faith in the chapter – Gal 3:23-26) were baptized. Paul doesn't have a category for unbaptized Christians.

Baptism was by immersion. Immersion = "to plunge" = to go completely under the water and be brought up from it.

And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ 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. – Acts 8:38-39

Baptism involved coming "up out of the water." That's immersion.

How did baptism function in the early church? Believers entered the local church through baptism. The pattern was receiving the preached word (faith and repentance) → baptism → added to the local church (Acts 2:41, 47). Baptism was the marker that indicated whether a person was in or out, whether a person was an insider or outsider, believer or unbeliever (see 1 Cor 5:12-13; 14:22-25 for these distinctions in the early church). In church membership we make formal what was practiced in the New Testament. That's why we require every member to have been baptized after believing.

There's no evidence of infant baptism in the New Testament

- 1) No instruction to baptize infants.
- 2) No examples of infants baptized.

We see household baptisms, but those accounts assume everyone baptized had faith and there's no discussion of children baptized.

Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ 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. ³⁴ 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. – Acts 16:30-34

The gospel was spoken to all in the house and they were commanded to believe for salvation. The whole family was baptized. It's implied they all believed because they were all baptized.

Baptism symbolizes realities of the new birth

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ We know that our old self was

crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. – Rom 6:1-6

Baptism symbolizes realities that are only true of a born again believer: dying to sin, newness of life by the Spirit, union with Christ (indwelt by him), future bodily resurrection. The fact that baptism symbolizes realities experienced by believers only = baptism is for believers only. Baptism is a picture of what happens at conversion.

Application

If you have repented of your sins and placed your faith in Christ alone for forgiveness of sins, there's an obligation to be baptized. If you were baptized prior to faith (e.g., infant baptism), there's an obligation to partake in believer baptism. Don't put off baptism for shame of not being baptized when you first believed.

Illustration

I was saved, and the pastors at that church where I was saved knew I was saved, but they never approached me about baptism. When I moved to Virginia, I was accepted into a church as a member without being baptized. I was accepted into seminary, at a seminary that taught believer baptism, without being baptized. I was sent to seminary by a pastor whose church doctrine was believer baptism without him ensuring I was baptized.

I was a victim of unhealthy churches. Pastors should encourage new converts towards baptism. New converts shouldn't have to harass pastors to be baptized. The summer before seminary I was at Hampton beach (New Hampshire) with a friend who was a youth pastor and I asked him to baptize me in the ocean. He didn't feel right and refused. I agree with his decision. Baptism marks entry into the local church so the local church should conduct baptisms, not individuals.

I was at seminary and a fellow student found out I wasn't baptized. He threatened to dunk me in the pond at the school. I approached the pastor of the young adult community on Wednesday night and a baptism was scheduled. The other three being baptized with me were people who had been Christians for a number of years without being baptized. I was ashamed that I hadn't obeyed Jesus' command. I was saved for 28 months before I was baptized. I was leading Bible studies at the church. I was training to be a pastor.

Act in obedience even if it's shameful. Don't feel ashamed if unhealthy churches contributed to you not being baptized.

Point 2: Does baptism save? (erroneous understandings of baptism)

Error 1: baptism saves or is required for salvation

Some traditions teach the act of baptism saves, or you can't be saved without being baptized. A quick reading of Acts 2:38 gives that impression. Peter makes it sound like we need baptism to be forgiven of sin, and we need baptism to receive the indwelling Spirit.

Let's not respond by using Scripture to cancel out Scripture. Like using a verse on how we're saved by faith alone to settle the matter. We can't just cancel what Acts 2:38 says. We need to actually understand it. God wisely chose this passage to be in the Bible so let's not ignore it.

Acts 2:37-41 resolves the matter. Acts 2:38 isn't all that Peter said. He gave other exhortations, calling people to "*Save yourselves from this crooked generation*" (2:40). In 2:41 we see a pattern: faith ("*those who received his word*") → baptism → added to the church. So believing response to Peter's message precedes baptism, and baptism precedes entry into the church.

So why did Peter connect baptism with repentance and the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit in 2:38? Because they're all intimately connected in the salvation experience. Without repentance or faith (they're used synonymously) there's no baptism and no forgiveness of sins and no indwelling Spirit and no being added to the church. People who repent are baptized. People who repent experience forgiveness of sins. People who repent are born of the Spirit. People who repent enter the local church. Peter can command repentance and baptism while promising forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit because he expects every repentant person to be baptized. There's no such thing as a repentant person who's unbaptized. So there's no such thing as a baptized person who isn't forgiven of sins or born of the Spirit or joined to the local church. That's Peter's logic.

Furthermore, the thief on the cross was promised paradise and he was never baptized (Luke 23:39-43).

Non-Christians

We're not saved on the basis of religious ordinances. Being baptized or taking communion. We're saved on the basis of trust in a risen Savior, Jesus, who died for our sins so that we wouldn't have to pay the penalty for our rebellion. That's substitutionary atonement. We respond to Jesus by trusting in his death and resurrection and following him.

Error 2: the Spirit is given through baptism

This is based on John 3:5.

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. – John 3:5

The issue is the new birth is necessary for entering the kingdom (John 3:3). 3:5 is Jesus' explaining the nature of spiritual birth. Nothing in the context identifies the water as baptism. Water might indicate cleansing that comes through spiritual rebirth (Ezek 36:25-27). Earlier in John, spiritual rebirth was connected with belief, not baptism (John 1:12-13).

Answer: No, baptism doesn't save. Baptism pictures the new birth.

Point 3: How do we determine if a person should be baptized?

If believers are supposed to be baptized, we should baptize people with **a credible profession of faith**. This is the policy at PCC. Candidates for membership go through a membership interview

to discern a person's understanding of the gospel and whether or not they've had a conversion experience. Same with baptism. Caleb was interviewed by the elders without me present.

But does this contradict the New Testament? What about immediate entry into the church? What about immediate baptisms following repentance? The Ethiopian eunuch was baptized immediately (Acts 8:35-39). So was the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30-34). Are we as elders opposing the New Testament?

The interviews are set in place to ensure that we don't baptize people who aren't Christians. There are a number of problems that arise from baptizing non-Christians: confusing Christians and non-Christians as to what conversion actually is, assuming baptized people come into membership we admit non-Christians into membership and give them a say in the affairs of the church, and we hinder the witness of the gospel by letting those not born of the Spirit represent our message.

As for quick baptisms, the New Testament accounts were adults from non-Christian backgrounds which gave some credibility to their professions. Some were special missionary situations where there were no local churches or the local church was in its beginning stages. Philip baptizing an Ethiopian eunuch who may not have had a local church in his region. Paul baptized the Philippian jailer shortly before Paul left town. Who would have conducted the baptisms if not Philip and Paul?

The New Testament epistles were written when the church was in its early stages. Before Christian homes were multi-generational. We can imagine that if illegitimate baptisms were plaguing the church, instruction would have been provided. The early church did move away from immediate baptism and instructed candidates to review certain teachings. Candidates had to fast 1-2 days prior to baptism (see *The Didache*, end of 1st century).

False members were a problem in New Testament churches (1 John 2:19). Meaningful membership is a good corrective.

What about baptizing children?

- 1) The New Testament is silent baptism age = a matter of wisdom not obedience to clear biblical instruction
 - 2) Some baptize really young (e.g., age six)
- Children can believe.
 - All believers are supposed to be baptized.
 - Preventing obedience may trouble their conscience or discourage faith.

3) Some wait till late teenage years (e.g., 18)

- Children are more naïve and malleable and less settled in their ways than adults = faith maybe a temporary fad.
- Children in Christian homes may profess faith to please their parents.
- Children in Christian homes have never heard otherwise and they're untested = time for testing should be allowed (public high school, employment, non-Christian friends, etc.).
- Historically Baptists waited till adulthood to baptize. Baptists around the world like Europe, Africa, and Asia are more cautious than Americans and wait till adulthood to baptize. Charles Spurgeon baptized his children at 18.

→ Let's agree both sides have right motives.

4) Moderating view

- We don't want to baptize non-Christians, even if we can't ensure 100% accuracy.
- Understanding what conversion is, is critical (beware of fact only faith!).
- Parents are in the best position to assess.
- Faith can be encouraged without advocating baptism (if a kid professes faith, treat them like a disciple: call them to do spiritual disciplines, serve in the church, repent of sin, trust Christ in trial, love their neighbor, honor their parents).
- Credible profession is critical (this is what we require of members!) = treat baptism seriously like membership. What happens when we don't take membership seriously?
- I am comfortable with age 12 or so. Case by case basis.
- Not saying every early baptism is illegitimate (ongoing faith and changed life = proof the baptism was legitimate).

Illustration

When Caleb was six or seven he went to a VBS and I got a decision card in the mail saying he believed. He doesn't recall. He says he actually believed like four years later. I wasn't like phew he's going to heaven. I was more like we'll see over time where he's actually at.

Conclusion

If you have questions about baptism, get in touch. An act of obedience. A celebration of God's saving work.