

Baptism: Why Wait?

Acts 22:6-16

PRAY, READ: Acts 22:6-16

TITLE: “Baptism: Why Wait?”

INTRO

We have just read one of the three retellings of the Apostle Paul’s conversion in the book of Acts. The story is familiar, Paul intends to go to Damascus to stop the spread of Christianity (by imprisoning Christians) but instead he is gloriously converted and becomes a Christian himself. In this particular text, Ananias emphasizes Paul’s need for baptism and includes an intriguing question that I’m borrowing as part of this sermon’s title. Look at verse 16 again with me: “*And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.*” (My sermon title is “Baptism: Why Wait?”)

Now that is a good question. Standing where we do and knowing what we know of Paul and his stature in the history of Christianity, why does Paul need to bother with getting wet? Hadn’t Ananias already told Paul that Jesus had chosen him specially that he would “be a witness to everyone”? Why worry about a ritual like baptism? In our day, baptism is often an after-thought for Christians. We have a Bible, and we have a multitude of churches available – and many of them have differences when it comes to baptism. So why can’t we

just major on the Gospel and the big important truths of Jesus and Christian love, and on being a moral witness against the polarizing and spiritually dying culture around us?

Now it is true that the Gospel is most important, and some very influential Evangelists like Billy Graham decided to avoid the topic of baptism in order to reach more people. But with the rise of parachurch ministries and inter-denominational unity against the rise of liberalism and the threat that secularism now poses to our way of life, many Christians have forgotten about the role and purpose of baptism. Baptism has become “an optional add-on to the Christian life” as Timothy George puts it [*Believer’s Baptism*, ed. Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright (B&H, 2006), p. xvi].

My reply is that baptism is very important – important enough for Paul to delay until he was ready to embrace it. He waited at least three days before Ananias came to him (9:9). There are valid reasons to wait for baptism, as we will see. And I hope to persuade some of us to not wait any longer, but to respond to Ananias’s question by actively seeking to be baptized soon.

We don’t have a lot of time and so I’m not going to cover every possible point with regard to baptism. There are all sorts of interesting historical questions and a lovely debate over whether we should baptize babies (like the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and even the Presbyterians). I will just state that our church holds to a Baptist position, meaning we believe that only believer’s should be baptized. The verses we will look at today will provide plenty of examples that support that position.

Now then, here is my plan of attack for the rest of this short message:

- 1) Pattern of baptism (in Acts)
- 2) Picture of baptism (what it symbolizes)
- 3) Profit of baptism (what it does)
- 4) Postponement of baptism (reasons why some wait)

I. Pattern of Baptism *(in Acts)*

A. General Summary Descriptions

1. Acts is the story of the Church fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) “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.”
2. So, it is no surprise to find baptism explicitly mentioned in the vast majority of descriptions of conversion in Acts.
3. Tracing how baptism is mentioned in descriptions of conversion in Acts helps us understand the place of baptism in the spread of Christianity – and its importance.

Acts 8:12 “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 18:8 “many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.”

B. Specific Conversion Accounts

1. Peter’s Sermon (Acts 2)
 - Miraculous display + Preaching of Word
 - Question from hearers: “What shall we do?” (v. 37)

- Answer: “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” (v. 38)
- Response: “those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” (v. 41)

2. Philip & the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8)

- Preaching of the Word (Isaiah 53)
- Question from hearers: “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” (v. 36)
- [Implied answer // v. 37 in E]
- Response: “they both went down into the water... and he baptized him” (v. 38)

3. I have skipped other examples and can only mention them here but if you look at them you’ll see a similar pattern

- Peter’s sermon to Cornelius Acts 10:34-48 (order is reversed due to the unusual situation of Gentiles first being converted)
- Philippian jailor’s question to Paul Acts 16:25-34

C. Takeaway

1. Conversion in Acts involves “repentance”, “faith/belief/receiving the word”, and “baptism”.
2. When one speaks of any one aspect of this event (repentance or faith or baptism) the rest of the equation is assumed.
3. Repentance-faith-baptism always occurs on the same day in Acts and is the start of a person/persons Christian life.

4. Repentance-faith-baptism is specifically tied to “forgiveness of sins” or cleansing from sin.
5. Repentance-faith-baptism is directed to Jesus Christ (baptized in his name, believe in him, repent to follow him.)

D. Analogy of Marriage**

1. A marriage involves:
 - Saying of vows
 - Giving/receiving rings
 - Pronouncement of marriage by the minister
 - Signing of marriage license
 - Change of reference/name (Mrs. Robert Hayton)
 - Sexual consummation
2. Which of the above results in you actually becoming married?
3. This is similar to the elements of conversion as given in Acts. Each item is going to be present (occasionally the order might be different), but it will be present.
4. Theologically, (as we’ll see), baptism is a symbol (like a ring or a certificate), but that doesn’t make it meaningless or of no value. *** Analogy idea comes from Robert Stein, Believer’s Baptism p. 57-58.*

E. Acts 22 in light of the Pattern

1. We see a miraculous revelation of Christ
2. There is a question “What shall I do, Lord?” (v. 10)
3. Answer is two-fold: wait, and then Ananias gives the rest: “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name” (v. 16)

4. Response is given in 9:18 “then he rose and was baptized”

II. Picture of Baptism (*what it symbolizes*)

A. In/under WATER – Cleansing from Sin

1. Water is universally used in cleaning.
2. The Brass Laver in the Tabernacle/Temple was for cleansing and it was filled with water.
3. OT ritual cleansings with water stand behind the idea of baptism to some degree
4. Acts emphasizes that baptism is “for the forgiveness of sins” and in our text “be baptized and wash away your sins...”
5. This is symbolic obviously, as Jesus had to die for sin to be cleansed (as Acts points out in 3:18-19). 1 Peter 3:21 clarifies that “baptism... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”
6. Other verses may reference baptism when they mention a spiritual washing: Heb. 10:22; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26.

B. Out of WATER – Death and Resurrection / New Life in Christ

1. Baptism involves going into the water and coming out of it. It symbolizes going down into a tomb and coming up out of it.
2. This symbolism is explicitly mentioned in these verses: Col. 2:12 “having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith...”

Rom. 6:4 “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.”

3. Baptism is a picture of Christ’s death and resurrection, and a testimonial that I too have died to sin and have been raised spiritually to new life in Christ.

C. Takeaway

- More could be said, but at a minimum, Baptism pictures that my sins have been washed away and I have repented and died to my sin, in Christ, and have been raised to new life in Him.

III. Profit of Baptism (what it does)

A. For the Believer

1. Baptism joins you to Christ – Gal. 3:27 “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”
 - a. The NT assumes all believers are baptized, so the benefits it lists for baptism apply to salvation as well.
 - b. But in some sense there is a spiritual benefit to us at baptism in that we are formally declaring our allegiance to Christ, and appealing to God for a good conscience.
 - c. We are identifying with Christ and claiming Him as ours.
 - d. We can remember our baptism and the truth it speaks about the work of Christ accomplished on our behalf. It reminds us

that we died to sin and have been risen with Christ – through faith.

2. Baptism joins you to the local Body of Christ (the Church).
 - a. Baptism is the “initiator rite of the church” (per theologian Millard Erickson**).
 - b. Baptism is a public confession of faith in Christ before the church.
 - c. The pattern in Acts 2 goes on to say that the baptized were added to the church. And for each of the baptisms in Acts, that is the assumption – the believers joined or began churches.
 - d. For our church (and most other Baptist churches), in order for you to join the church (and receive more specific pastoral care and be able to serve in greater capacities) you must have been baptized as a believer, as a public confession of your faith. ** quoted in *40 Questions about Baptism and the Lord’s Supper*, ed. John Hammet (Kregel Academic, 2015), p. 116.

B. For the Church

1. Believer’s baptism preserves a regenerate (saved) church membership.
2. In baptism, the Church confirms the testimony of believers and tests the genuineness of their faith – for the believer’s and the church’s good.
3. Acts 16:14-15 gives the brief story of Lydia’s conversion – she listened to Pauls’ teaching and God opened her heart, then she was baptized.

Then she asks Paul to let her host them on this basis: “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord” (ESV), or “If you consider me a believer in the Lord” (CSB/NIV). In baptism, the church makes judgment on the question of whether someone is truly a believer. (The church can be wrong, but the church has a responsibility to warn/exhort/encourage each one appropriately.)

C. For both believer and church

1. Baptism is simply obeying Christ’s command (Matt. 28:19). And there is profit in obeying the Lord!

In light of the pattern in Acts, the picture Baptism gives and the profit to be had, why would we wait, why would we tarry before being baptized?

IV. Postponement of Baptism (reasons why some wait)

A. Some are willing but need to become more mature

- Child-like faith is faith that saves us. The message of the Gospel – that Jesus died to forgive us of our sins and bring us to God – if we trust in him alone – that message is simple to believe.
- But many young children believe innocently whatever their parents tell them (Dec. 25 anyone?)
- Some of these young ones get confirmed in their faith at a very young age by a public baptism – only to doubt their salvation or even walk away from the faith when they are old enough to make up their own mind. This can cause serial rebaptism on the one hand, or

inoculate them from the Church (they have already been baptized so don’t bother them with religion).

- At our church we wait for children to be mature enough to show signs of their salvation and independently express an interest in baptism. There is a path for children to follow Christ in baptism, and parents should speak with an elder or our pastor for wisdom in this area.
- Children, you can talk to your parents and/or an elder, teacher or pastor about your desire to be baptized. And these godly people will be able to discern and judge whether you are ready for baptism or not.
- This follows the pattern that we saw with Lydia – the church will judge if they are true believers and ready at this time for baptism.

This is a legitimate postponement. There are other postponements which need to be addressed.

B. Some are ignorant of baptism

- Like an Ethiopian, they need someone to explain Scripture to them (Acts 8:26-39)
- Like a band of Ephesian believers, they may be trusting in the wrong baptism (Acts 19:1-6)

Some may be hearing of baptism for the first time – I encourage you to look for resources on this topic and check with the pastors and elders here, or look in our library. Talk to someone and pursue following Christ in this area. Others may be trusting in the wrong baptism: a baptism that in your case may have been performed when you were a

baby with no faith in Christ. The picture may have meant something for your parents, but it wasn't your own testimony – and it doesn't fit the pattern we see in Acts of baptism following faith (not preceding it).

C. Some feel unworthy of baptism

- Like Cornelius, they may not understand that baptism is for them (Acts 10)

Baptism isn't something to be earned; it is an act of obedience. We all are sinful when we come to Christ and need the washing of water inwardly to cleanse us from sin. Come to the water of baptism as you are and find forgiveness because of Jesus blood, by grace alone and through your simple faith in Him.

D. Some are hesitant to be baptized

- Some are embarrassed that they have gone so long before going public with their faith.
- Others may like Paul, be hesitant to align themselves with Christianity because they know what it will do to their reputation or what persecution it might bring.
 - In places like Iran or India, for two examples, if a Muslim or Hindu trusts Christ privately – there are no big ramifications. But if they follow Christ in public profession of faith in the waters of baptism, they are then disowned and may face persecution or even death. And this is not limited to just those two places, but there are many places where it is not safe to be baptized.

Given how safe it is in America to be baptized, wouldn't it be worth it to take that step? If embarrassment is holding you back – you'd be surprised at the reaction you'll receive – as many here may have similar stories. We would rejoice with you in taking that step in your faith journey. Won't you consider breaking off your postponement and follow Christ in baptism?

CONCLUSION

Baptism is a wonderful subject and many of us remember and treasure the moment we stood in front of our church to be baptized. It is not something that is just done once and forgotten. As people get baptized regularly, we will be reminded again and again of the life-changing power of the gospel. There is nothing more encouraging.

Our own baptism can remind us of the promises of Christ to us – that he took our sin and has given us his new life. He has cleansed us and we should no longer be living for the sin which defiled our old man, but rather live for Christ.

I pray this message helps as God sees fit. If you have questions about Baptism, know that our church provides resources and meets with all who seek to follow the Lord in Baptism to ensure they understand the Bible's teaching on baptism and that they demonstrate a genuine faith in Christ before we proceed. So bring your questions, we would love to discuss this more.

PRAY -----

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