

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Why Series: Why Baptism?
Pastor Dave Scherrer - January 13, 2013

Review the Why series: Why ask why?

[I would guess we all have an impression about baptism. How many here have been Baptized? Infant? Believer? Both? For those of you who were older, were you were kind of scared going into the baptism?]

In order for us to ask the why question, again like last week when we were talking about the church, we have to define our terms. We have to have a common understanding because there is a lot of confusion when it comes to baptism.

What is Baptism? What is the meaning of Baptism?

Here are a couple of things that mess with our true understanding of the meaning of baptism:

It is not an empty ritual or reenactment
It is not an act that 'saves you'

First ***it is not an empty ritual or a reenactment*** of some past event. By way of ritual what I mean is it is not a ritual that you do to make you feel spiritual or religious. Here is the truth - we (humanity) desperately want to be connected to God. And sometimes the pursuit of a spiritual high is mistaken for an actual encounter with God. Humanity, in our desire to connect with God, we start doing things to give them a religious feeling. Sleeping on a bed of nails, fasting for fasting's sake, extreme or dangerous activities to connect with a higher power and the endomorph high that goes with these practices is not an encounter with God. Getting baptized hoping to feel connected to God is not what baptism is about. Now don't get me wrong baptism is a very spiritual experience, and you will feel connected to God, but that is because God meets you in the sacrament not because there is something magic about the jumping in and out of water.

And it is not an act that saves you. In some denominations, the teaching is that the act of baptism carries with it the promise of salvation, as though the ritual itself is the saving criteria, rather than God. Scripture says in Ephesians that we are saved by faith not by works (including the work of baptism) and even that faith is a gift from God. And remember the conversation of Jesus with the thief crucified next to Him. The thief said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom" and Jesus answered, "I say to you today you will be with me in paradise." In neither occasion does baptism play a role in salvation. Now again don't get me wrong. Baptism is what theologians call a "means of grace" and is profoundly meaningful in the life of the believer, but it is not the act of baptism that saves you. So what is the meaning of baptism?

It is a public confession of a private faith
It is a sacrament of the faith

First it is a public confession of a private faith. Baptism is never done to yourself in private. You can't baptize yourself in the bathtub. In Scripture it is always performed by another in behalf of the believer and throughout church history baptism has generally been in front of the church. In the earliest church building we know of there was a large baptismal, almost like a pool and the ritual was accompanied with a training or catechism that might last for up to a year. It is a way of confessing Christ before the body of those who have already joined the church - "the called out". An act of initiation if you will.

Jesus said, "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32,33). Baptism is a way of giving us assurance of our faith in Christ - not by the power of the ritual itself but by the public confession that seals for us our confession of faith.

Baptism is understood as a once in a lifetime sacred command of Christ. It is from the word 'sacred' that the term sacrament finds its root. Augustine said the sacraments were "the visible and outward sign of an invisible and spiritual grace." In other words in some mysterious way, through the work of God in baptism, we are actually joined to the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism follows faith in Christ and is central to the life of the Jesus Follower.

Kinds of Baptism: Baptism of Water, Baptism of Holy Spirit, Baptism of Fire

Now regarding the Biblical references to baptism, there are 3: water, Spirit and fire. We are most familiar with water baptism remembering John the Baptist who was baptizing his disciples in the Jordan River. And we read that Jesus' disciples baptized as well. Some theologians see parallel symbolism in the saving of the family of Noah in the flood with baptism and in the parting of the Red Sea for the fleeing Hebrew nation.

Scripture also speaks to a Baptism of the Holy Spirit and a Baptism of Fire (Acts 8, 10, 19). I don't want to get off task here but just to mention that these concepts of being filled with God own Holy Spirit, and "filled some more" if you will, are very much a part of an orthodox understanding of the work of the Trinity in the life of a believer. Remember when John said speaking of Jesus, "I baptize with water but another is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit."? And then again Jesus Himself said, "I must go away but I will send the Comforter." It is not clear in Scripture what these experiences have in common with water baptism, but it is clear we cannot on our own invoke this falling of the Spirit. And you remember when the Holy Spirit first fell on the church there were flames of fire above the new believers. The thought I want to leave with you on this is that we can pray for it but the Spirit of God moves according to His purposes.

Throughout church history there have been many sad days that have centered around various nuances of baptism; sprinkling or immersion, in the name of Jesus or in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit, and whether children can be baptized or just confessing believers. In many ways I fear that fierce loyalty to certain specific approaches to baptism have caused disunity to the Body and grief to God. Maybe this is part of your Christian history. It is true for me.

Very early in church history, it is thought the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, a teaching manual for the purposes of describing appropriate church life was circulated called the Didache, which means "Teaching." It was an early catechism of sorts that described many specifics of the faith and its practice in community. In that early church manual we read these words about baptism:

"Concerning baptism, baptize thus:
Having said all these things *[exhortations to follow Christ]* beforehand, immerse in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in flowing water. If on the other hand you should not have flowing water, immerse in other water; if you are not able in cold, in warm, if you should not have either pour out water onto the head three times in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit." Didache, Ch 7

What this is telling me is that immersion is the preferred method of baptism and that indeed has been the church habit since early on. But we are not to confuse description with prescription. And we are certainly not supposed to kill each other over the nuances of baptism. It is really not all that long ago that believer baptism in replacement of infant baptism has become common. And these who would "baptize again" or "Ana-Baptists" began their practice of baptizing as a believer - they were killed by the thousands in the 16th century by those who only baptized infants. God's grief over the hurt of man against man certainly is great but again let's not get off point. So, "Why Baptism?"

Why Baptism?

To obey Him: Because He said so!

Matthew 28:18-19

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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.

If we are indeed Christ Followers then we must listen to His teaching and follow it. We are apprentices in the discipline of being like Christ, so we trust Him and do what He says. Baptism is a commandment of our Lord and is not optional. Every believer is to be baptized and if you have not yet been baptized because you are afraid of being embarrassed or getting your hair wet, think again. This is the commandment of your King and you have been called out of the concerns of this world to the concerns of a new Eternal Kingdom. Call me and let's get started in this conversation. Pray and seek God for you in these matters.

To be like Him: He too was baptized

Matthew 3:13-17

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶ 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; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

It has been some years now since Nike floated the slogan "I want to be like Mike" referring to Michael Jordan. The campaign was aimed at children so that they would buy the Michael Jordan line of shoes and clothes. They wanted kids to "be like Mike" not because his character was worth emulating but for financial branding purposes. As a Christ Follower, I want to be like Jesus, in his manner and character but more than that, in his actions. I want to live my life the way He lived His life. So that is why I get baptized, to be like Christ.

There is another important Why Baptize answer, and that is to identify with Christ.

To identify with him: We are Christ-Followers

Galatians 3:27

²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on (or clothed yourselves) with Christ.

The phrase "baptized into" occurs five times in the New Testament in four verses:

1. Romans 6:3-5, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?"
2. 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."
3. Galatians 3:27, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

To be baptized "into Christ," "into His death," and "into one body" is to be publicly identified with the thing you are being baptized into. The focus is not the baptism itself, but on the thing the baptism represents. In the case of the Romans passage being baptized into Christ is a public identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

Romans 6:3-5

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.

This doctrine of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the Good News. So then, baptism is a public statement proclaiming that the person is trusting in the sacrifice of Christ. Baptism by immersion is a perfect symbol for this work of Christ with which the Christian is identifying himself. As Christ died and was raised to a new life, so too the Christian, in Christ, is said to have died and has a new life. This new life of regeneration is by faith, the internal work. Baptism is the external work of identification with Christ.

Broncos Hat Illustration – “Clothed yourselves”

There is one final answer to the Why question of Baptism, that is “unity with Christ”:

To be unified with him: He and I are one

Romans 6:5

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.

So what then is the end result of baptism? Or put another way, “What is the work of baptism? It is two-fold - Purification and Incorporation.

Work of Baptism: Purification and Incorporation

Dying to Self

Romans 6:6-8

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. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

We go down in the water and we die to sin. Not that after baptism we never sin again but that it is our prayer that through the power of God sin would no long have its power and sway in our lives as before. “No longer enslaved.”

And not only are we are freed from the power of sin but we are free to live in Christ.

Living in Christ

He is in us and we are in Him. And not only that but in some mysterious way we have then been baptized into the Body of Christ here on earth.

1 Corinthians 12:13

¹³ 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.

Why knowing the whys of baptism changes our lives!

Baptism is a public confession of our faith that is commanded by our Lord and in some mysterious once and for all manner seals us in Him. Knowing this frees me from living a solitary and private faith to one that is communal and public.