

Harvest's Annual Baptism & Church Picnic

One of the most joyous days in *Harvest's* calendar is our *Annual Church Picnic and Baptism*. Usually held on the first Sunday in August, it is a day filled with fun, food and Christian fellowship. But the highlight of the day is certainly when we walk to the lake and baptize some of our brothers and sisters into the next phase of their walk with Jesus.

This page will explain our view of the importance of baptism in pretty good detail. Please enjoy these pictures from our Church Picnic and Baptism as you read through it. You can download this document without pictures [HERE](#).

Harvest's Confession of Faith declares:

We believe the evidence of salvation
is, in the sight of God, real piety,
and in the sight of man apparent piety,
and that all who are in right standing with God
have a right to *the two divine ordinances:*
the Lord's Table and Baptism.

While we celebrate *one* of these ordinances – the Lord's Table – each month, Baptism, the *other* ordinance, we observe annually. It's such an important event for us that we rent out a section of Spring Lake in Burrillville, Rhode Island, and build our worship service around it.

Baptism is not a footnote to the Christian life; our Lord commanded His followers to be baptized in water. Furthermore, it's a part of the so-called *Great Commission*. Just before His Ascension into Heaven to take His place at the Father's right hand, Jesus instructed His disciples to "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" (Matthew 28:19-20a).

What we actually hear is a single verb: "MAKE" + a few participles: "going" and "baptizing" and "teaching." So, Jesus commanded them to "make disciples," and to do so by (1) "going," (2) "baptizing," and (3) "teaching."

Students in the School of Jesus

To be a follower of Jesus is to *do the things that He says* – to obey His commandments. In Luke 6:46, Jesus asked a straightforward, yet poignant, question: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”

To be a disciple of Jesus is to be enrolled in the *School of Jesus*, little-by-little becoming more like Him. In contrast to every other school with their *many* teachers, for Jesus’ followers there is *One Teacher* – *He alone is their Teacher and Master*. A Christian is always, and only, *a student* of Jesus. Jesus holds a unique position that cannot be transferred to any of His disciples or to any other teachers. That’s what He meant when He said: “You are not to be called ‘Rabbi’, for you have only one Master and you are all brothers ... Nor are you to be called ‘teacher’, for you have one Teacher, the Christ” (Matthew 23:8, 10).

So, in Christianity, believers who study God’s Word under a certain Bible teacher or pastor *are never disciples of that teacher*. No matter how special a certain brother or sister may be to you – no matter what impact he or she may have had on your spiritual life – you are always a disciple of ONE Teacher alone in the School of Jesus. There are many under-shepherds in the Christian faith, but there is only ever One Shepherd. Ecclesiastes 12:11: “The words of the wise are like goads [prods, the stick a rancher uses to make his animals move], and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.”

Obedience is the greatest evidence we can produce of our love for Him. That includes His command that His disciples be baptized in water.

John the Baptist’s Baptism

The Bible is exceedingly clear about what baptism is, who it’s for, and what it accomplishes. Let’s try to sort it out. Baptism is introduced for the first time in the New Testament in Matthew 3:1-12, where we meet John the Baptist.

John was baptizing and preaching a straightforward message to the Jews of his day: ‘Repent of your sins because Messiah is coming VERY soon!’ That Messiah, of course, was Jesus.

Now, let’s understand what the visual picture of water baptism would have meant to a Jew in the 1st century. Water was used extensively in the Old Testament in connection with *ceremonial cleansing*. So, they would have understood this as

some sort of cleansing, of making something fit for the Lord's use – much as a dirty dish, once it is washed, is once again fit for use.

This common connection of water with *ceremonial cleansing* would have significantly shaped their understanding of what John was doing. They would have seen it as a kind of preparatory cleansing. For what? The coming of Messiah!

Those being baptized by John were signifying their Messianic expectation. They were preparing themselves to encounter the Messiah, who John promised was coming very soon.

So, ultimately, John's was a baptism of repentance, a change of mind. In Acts 19:4, Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."

Jesus' Baptism

Then, one day as John was baptizing, Jesus Himself came to be baptized (Matthew 3:13-17). John was floored by this. It seemed to him SO inappropriate that he should baptize HIM!

Now, the baptism of Jesus was obviously unique. It wasn't a baptism of *repentance*, because He had no sin to repent of! It wasn't an indication that He was *turning to God*, for He was and is VERY God!

No. Jesus' baptism signified the inauguration of His earthly ministry – a ministry that would end some three years later with His sacrificial death upon the cross for the sins of the world.

The Importance of Baptism

We're seeing a New Testament pattern emerge: *baptism is important – REALLY important.*

The great preacher J.C. Ryle wrote: "We see ... the high honor the Lord Jesus placed on baptism ... [even] the Savior of the world ... was *baptized*... An ordinance which the Son of God was pleased to use, and later appointed to be used by his whole church, should always be held in special reverence by His people ..." (Ryle, J. C., *Luke: The Crossway Classic Commentaries*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998, *ad loc.*).

So then, John baptized BEFORE Jesus began His ministry, Jesus Himself was baptized by John, and Jesus' disciples baptized DURING His lifetime. It is uncertain whether or not Jesus personally baptized, but He certainly supervised His disciples doing that important work (John 4:2)!

Then, before He ascended into Heaven, Jesus instructed His disciples to make more disciples of every nation by *going, teaching and baptizing*.

Finally, we read that the apostles baptized AFTER Jesus. In the Book of Acts, AFTER the Holy Spirit had come upon the Church, the Apostle Philip famously baptized an Ethiopian Eunuch.

“The eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.³⁶ 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?”³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him” (Acts 8:34-38).

The Apostle Paul too tells us that he baptized – Crispus and Gaius and others (1 Corinthians 1:14). And on and on it goes. So, believers were baptized BEFORE, DURING and AFTER the earthly ministry of Jesus. And our Lord Himself commanded His followers to make disciples *by baptizing*, among other things.

So, what does this say about the importance of water baptism? Truth is, water baptism in the New Testament always *signifies that something MOMENTOUS has happened in the spiritual life of the one being baptized!* It is important. It just matters.

The Meaning of Baptism

However, what we call the “Believer’s Baptism” – the baptism we practice in the Church today – is far different from John’s baptism and Jesus’ baptism.

The *primary* meaning of the Greek verb baptidzo (βαπτίζω) is to *immerse* or to *dip* – even to *wash*. In non-Christian Greek literature, it meant to *plunge*, to *sink*, to *drench*, or even to *overwhelm* (Bauer, Walter, Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Danker, Frederick W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early*

Christian Literature, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, on baptidzo; βαπτίζω.)

But, while the *primary* meaning of the word baptidzo is to *immerse* or *dip*, that's not the only meaning of the word. And it's its *secondary* meaning that really helps us to understand the meaning of some tricky New Testament passages.

In fact, it's the *secondary* meaning of the word that really gets to the heart of why baptism is so important to Christians. The *secondary* meaning of the word is to 'identify' something with something else. And this is a very common use of the word. As it turns out, the Bible too likes to use baptidzo in the sense of *identification*.

And this brings clarity to a number of thorny passages. Let's look at a few of them:

✠ 1 Corinthians 10:1-2: "... our fathers ... all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses ..."

So, what does it mean to be *baptized into Moses*. It simply means that all who were *identified with Moses* were delivered safely through the Red Sea, while those who were *identified with Pharaoh*, perished! See it?

✠ In Luke 12:50, Jesus said to His disciples, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!"

Here Jesus was referring to His imminent death upon the cross. So, we call this the *Baptism of the Cross*. What does it mean? Jesus was going to the cross where He would die for our sins. On the cross, He *identified with our personal sins* and was judged for them in our place. And through this *baptism*, He became the very Savior of the world.

✠ Then there's something that John the Baptist said in Luke 3:16.

He said, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

What did John mean by this? He was saying that, when the Messiah comes people would either believe in Him or reject Him. Those who believed in

Him He would *identify* [baptidzo; βαπτίζω] with the Holy Spirit. But those who did not, He would *identify* [baptidzo; βαπτίζω] with fire.

Everyone in this age will be identified with one or the other of these! Believers, He would “baptize” or *identify* with “the Holy Spirit” for all eternity. Unbelievers, He would “baptize” or *identify* with “fire” for all eternity. I don’t think I need to explain what being identified with fire means.

✠ Finally, a passage that has caused much confusion and false teaching, but which is easily understood when one sees baptism as identifying something with something else.

1 Corinthians 12:13: “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.”

The ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’ is *not* the gift of tongues, *nor* the ‘afterglow,’ *nor* the ‘second blessing,’ nor any of the other unbiblical ideas that men have dreamt up. *The ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’ is the act whereby God the Holy Spirit, at the very moment of salvation, forever identifies the believer with Christ and with His people.*

The ‘baptism of the Spirit’ puts us (1) in union with Christ and (2) in union with all other believers in the Body instantly at the moment of salvation. That’s what Paul’s referring to when he lists the seven essential, intrinsic unities in Ephesians 4:4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Do you see how understanding that the word baptidzo means ‘to identify’ clarifies a number of difficult passages?

The Believer’s Baptism Today

OK, so what does water baptism, the Believer’s Baptism, identify us with? Well, Paul takes all the guess work out of it in Romans 6:3-4:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.”

So, the “Believer’s Baptism” *identifies* us with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ – and it does so *publicly*. In the ritual of water baptism, we’re literally acting out the drama of Christ death, burial and resurrection and we’re writing ourselves into that story.

That’s why Paul could say: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

And so, the believer’s baptism carries with it tremendous symbolism. It represents our personal identification with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection – and it does so in a profound and *public* way. Baptism is the PUBLIC proclamation of our faith in Christ, a statement of our submission to Christ, and an identification with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection.

It’s declaring to the world that we belong to Jesus and *we are not for sale*.

The Believer’s Baptism & Discipleship

So, being baptized is *an act of obedience* and *of public commitment* – and, as we’ve seen, to be a true follower of Jesus, to know Him as our *Lord*, is to be serious about obeying Him. Again, Luke 6:46: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”

Baptism doesn’t save us, nor render us sinless, but it can help us in our walk with Jesus and bring us the “newness” Paul talked about in Romans 6:4: that “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Baptism is a glorious declaration that we’re new creatures in Christ and that everything has become new in us (2 Corinthians 5:17). *That God is doing a new thing and He’s doing it in me!*

Baptism at Harvest

Everyone who (1) has been born again and (2) desires to follow and obey the Lord Jesus should be baptized. In other words, everyone who wants to be a Jesus-follower, a true disciple. But, no one should be admitted to the waters of baptism until they fully understand what baptism is and what it is not – and what it represents.

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the Christian era, preparation for baptism could take as long as three years! Craig Blasing writes that the Church needed to see that the faith professed was accompanied by the “fruits of a converted life before it would admit [a] person to baptism” (Blasing, Craig, in Kenneth Gangel, and James Wilhoit, *The Christian Educators Handbook on Spiritual Formation*, Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1994, p. 23). A disciple of Jesus should be baptized only after coming to a full understanding of its purpose with a desire to obey the Lord. No one should ever be coerced into being baptized.

Therefore, *Harvest* does not baptize babies. Infant baptism is not the Believer’s Baptism. In the Bible, everyone who underwent the Believer’s Baptism had first put his or her faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. An infant cannot do that. An infant cannot make a conscious decision to obey Christ. An infant cannot understand what water baptism symbolizes.

And, most tellingly, *there is not a single record in the entire Bible of an infant being baptized* – not one. If Christian parents wish to dedicate their child to Christ, then a baby dedication service is entirely appropriate. But remember, an infant who is dedicated to the Lord *still* has to come to faith in Jesus when they grow up if they’re to be saved.

And *no one has ever been saved by baptism. Period.* Baptism is about discipleship; it’s not about salvation.

What about *rebaptism*? Can a person be *rebaptized*? Yes. In fact, we find an example of rebaptism in the Bible – by the Apostle Paul himself in Acts 19:1-5.

“It happened that ... Paul ... came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. ² And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ³ And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” ⁴ And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Rebaptism is necessary if you were baptized as an infant. Rebaptism is also necessary if you were not baptized of your own choice or were baptized without a clear understanding of what you were doing. And I think rebaptism is necessary if you were baptized in an other-than-biblical way: if you were not immersed in

water or if you were not baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19c).

At what age should children be baptized? The Bible does not give an age. So, as soon as a child is able to (1) clearly articulate his or her faith in Jesus Christ, (2) understands what baptism means, and (3) expresses the desire to do so, I think they should be allowed.

I'm not big on forbidding what the Lord has not forbidden. When some parents brought their kids to Jesus so He might "lay his hands on them and pray," the disciples rebuked them for doing so (Matthew 19:13). But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). He laid his hands on them and went away (Matthew 19:15).

Final Thoughts

The believer's attitude toward baptism should be like the Ethiopian Eunuch's in Acts 8:36: "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?*" I think that's perfect!

What's preventing you?

At *Harvest*, we baptize each August at Spring Lake. If you've never been baptized as an adult and you want to take this important step in your walk as a follower of Jesus, please talk to Pastor Gene (dontoro@comcast.net) or Pastor Steve (smartel27@comcast.net), or simply contact the Church office (hccofwoon@gmail.com).