

# **The church of Christ and Baptism**

## ***Basics of the church of Christ – Sermon Five***

The subject of baptism merits special attention because of the nature of the disagreements concerning its place in God's salvation plan. Few denominations disagree on the importance of faith in God and His Son as a requirement for salvation. Virtually all churches will teach that, in order to be pleasing to God, one must believe what His word says. Certainly, the church of Christ champions the necessity of belief in Christ for He Himself said that if we did not believe in Him, we would die in our sins (John 8:24).

The subject of baptism, however, provokes serious disagreement. The question of interest is whether or not baptism is essential to salvation. That is, can a person go to heaven without being baptized? The answers to this question are different depending on the church answering the question. The answer given by the church of Christ is different than the majority of churches and as a result of this fact, a detailed look at baptism is warranted.

An appropriate discussion of baptism must occur with an understanding of the importance of the authority of the New Testament scriptures. A firm reliance on the bedrock principle of the necessity of Biblical authority stated below will help all who desire to know the truth to focus their attention solely on the scriptures:

*One must consider the following key passages: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Timothy 3:16-17) and "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (I Peter 4:11). Upon the consideration of these passages, it should be clear, that in all matters of church organization, church doctrine and church practice, there must remain a firm reliance upon the Bible and it alone.*

### ◆ The Bible and Baptism ...

As we examine what the scriptures have to say on the subject of baptism, it seems prudent to list some of the verses of interest in the New Testament.

- ⇒ Matthew 3:13-17 – The first mention of baptism, this is the account of Jesus’ baptism which, as we see recorded, greatly pleased the Father.
- ⇒ Matthew 28:18-20 – In the great commission, Jesus told His followers to go into the world and baptize individuals.
- ⇒ Mark 16:15-16 – In another account of the great commission, Jesus told His disciples, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”
- ⇒ Acts 2:37-38 – At the establishment of the church on Pentecost, those in Peter’s audience asked what they should do given their status as sinners. Peter answered, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”
- ⇒ Acts 8:12-13 – After hearing Philip preach the gospel, Simon believed and was baptized.
- ⇒ Acts 8:35-39 – Philip went to the desert to preach Jesus to the Ethiopian Eunuch. That preaching led to the Ethiopian’s confession of faith in Christ and his baptism.
- ⇒ Acts 10:48 – Peter commanded Cornelius and his household to be baptized.
- ⇒ Acts 22:16 – Remembering his conversion to Christianity, the Apostle Paul recalled Ananias asking what he was waiting for and then told the persecutor, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”
- ⇒ Romans 6:3-4 – Paul told the Romans that we are “buried with Him [Christ] through baptism into death.”
- ⇒ Galatians 3:26-27 – According to Paul, being baptized into Christ is putting on Christ.

It should be noted that, throughout the New Testament, baptism is mentioned time and again. As a result, all who believe in New Testament Christianity must agree that it carries some importance. The church of Christ, striving to be the church of the New Testament, desires to follow the entirety of the New Testament

and, seeing baptism and salvation coupled together, teach the doctrine that baptism is essential to salvation. Furthermore, it should be noted that just as faith, repentance and confession of faith are required for salvation, so is baptism an essential component to the salvation plan laid out by God and delivered some 2000 years ago (see sermon four on “The church of Christ and The Plan of Salvation”).

◆ Baptism Specifics...

Before examining the differences on the subject of baptism in greater detail, some space should be devoted to two issues wherein the church of Christ and denominations differ.

⇒ *The Method of Baptism*

A number of churches will “baptize” someone by sprinkling or pouring water on the head of the person being baptized. The problem with this practice, simply stated, is that it is never authorized in the New Testament, either by specific command or example. Furthermore, the Greek word for baptism leads one to conclude that it *is* a burial.

In Romans 6:4, the Apostle Paul wrote the following: “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” As Jesus died, was buried and rose again, so must we, after our spiritual death, be buried to rise again.

When the Ethiopian Eunuch was converted in Acts 8, he said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Noting the importance of baptism, this man recognized a place wherein water was present and pointed that out to Philip. The question that begs an answer is, “if sprinkling or pouring was acceptable, why then didn’t Philip take some of the water that the Eunuch was certainly carrying and sprinkle it on the Ethiopian’s head?” The absurdity of this scene helps reassure us that baptism *must* be a burial wherein a person is completely immersed in water.

In this same account, Philip and the Ethiopian both went “down into the water” and they both “came up out of the water” (Acts 8:38-39). Again, one observes

that if these events are occurring, baptism is a burial, necessitating much water and a complete covering of the person being baptized.

⇒ *The Subject of Baptism*

A second point of disagreement between the church of Christ and denominations exists over the subject of baptism – that is, who needs to be baptized? Many will argue the practice of infant baptism. The church of Christ does not because the New Testament church did not.

With every example of baptism in the New Testament, one can see men and women being baptized. But never can one find an example of a child being baptized. Never does one read about a person being baptized for the remission of sins who has not believed and, since infants do not have the ability to comprehend belief in a God and His Son, they would not be candidates for baptism.

Even Jesus recognized the innocence of children and thus, their sinless nature. After his disciples rebuked children from coming to see Him, Jesus told his followers, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:13-14).

◆ Is Baptism Really Necessary for Salvation?

Many churches will agree with the church of Christ that baptism is important – after all, the Bible discusses it at great length. Yet, when the subject of whether or not the act of baptism is essential for salvation, serious disagreement exists. It is the position of the church of Christ, because of what is taught in the New Testament scriptures, that baptism *is* essential to salvation. Without being baptized, a person cannot inherit salvation. Without baptism, one cannot go to heaven.

As mentioned in sermon four, virtually all churches agree that faith is essential to salvation. The problem exists when churches stress belief without stressing the other acts of salvation. In an attempt to defend their belief that faith without baptism can save, many denominational followers turn to a number of passages which are the subject of the next few paragraphs.

In Acts 16:30-31, when the Philippian Jailor realized his sin, he asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” the answer given was “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” Stopping there, one would certainly conclude that belief in Jesus will save. And yes, belief in Jesus Christ *does* save. To argue that belief alone saves, however, is irresponsible. In Acts 16:32, Paul and Silas “spoke the word” to the jailor and his family and then, in verse 33 “washed their stripes” that very night. Why was baptism so urgent? And why did Paul and Silas immediately teach on baptism? And why was “washing” away stripes coupled with baptism? The answers seem obvious – baptism was necessary for the salvation of these people.

In Mark 16:16, Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Pointing to this verse, many people teach that, if baptism was really that essential, why then didn’t Jesus say, “but he who does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned”? An examination of the concept represented is prudent. Again, faith is essential. No one argues with that. But faith, by itself, will *not* save. James wrote that faith without works is dead and that man is not saved by faith only (James 2:17, 24).

Faith will or will not lead to action. When Paul spoke to King Agrippa, who *did* believe, Paul was saddened because Agrippa was not fully persuaded to be a Christian. Agrippa, though he believed, was not convinced to be baptized (Acts 26:27-28). Based on Mark 16:16, if a person does not believe, he will be condemned. This is certainly true for, if a person does not believe, why would he act if he did not have faith. The logical conclusion then is that both faith and baptism will save a person.

Perhaps the one example of greatest interest in the debate over whether or not baptism is necessary comes with a discussion of the “thief on the cross” whom Jesus saved when all he did was believe. It is interesting to note that many people refer to this account in Luke 23 when it is actually only one of many times that Jesus “saved” people by forgiving them of their sins. Yet, this objection to the church of Christ’s argument that baptism is essential merits comment.

Indeed, the thief believed. No one doubts that. If this is the proof, though, that baptism is really not essential, the first question is then, “why was baptism so prevalent throughout the New Testament” and, “In its frequent appearance in the scriptures, why is baptism repeatedly connected with salvation?” Does the

account of the thief on the cross conflict with what Paul wrote and spoke, as well as what Peter, Philip, James and even Jesus said? The answer *has* to be no!

Simply stated, Jesus Christ was the greatest Man in history. He could and can do whatever He wants. In Luke 23, He saved a man from his sins. The question we must ask is, “what did Jesus tell us?” As already pointed out in Mark 16:16, we are commanded to believe and to be baptized. After the establishment of the church in Acts 8, no example of a person being saved without being baptized can be found. Once Jesus left this earth, the commands He and His inspired writers gave were left for all humanity and it is our responsibility to submit to those commands if we desire to live eternally with Him.

◆ Some Final Thoughts...

The teachings of the church of Christ are reflective of the New Testament scriptures. Certainly, the essentialness of baptism puts the church of Christ at odds with most denominations. Yet, the church of Christ must teach those things taught in the New Testament or else it will cease to be the church that belongs to Him and will simply fall into the snare of being a church founded in the minds of men.

Many will teach that, while baptism is a good idea, it is not essential. Baptism, many argue, is an outward sign or testimony of an inward faith. That idea is never taught in the scriptures. Many rely on emotion for their conviction – “I feel in my heart that, having believed, I have been saved” is a common objection to the necessity of baptism. Yet, let us not rely on our emotions to convince us as to whether or not we are saved. Instead, let us rely on the scriptures, seeking to follow them and simply be obedient to all they teach us.