

“WE ACKNOWLEDGE ONE BAPTISM”
Acts 19:1-7, Romans 6:1-5, Galatians 3:23-29, Hebrews 10:19-23
September 23 & 24, 2023

“The minister of a church of a different denomination contacted the pastor of a large downtown Baptist Church and made an unusual request. He had several folks who had recently joined his church who preferred to be baptized by immersion rather than sprinkling, the church’s normal mode of baptism. The minister requested not only the use of their baptistery, but that the Baptist pastor himself baptize those who came.

“This posed a dilemma [for the Baptist pastor] - what if those being baptized weren’t born again? Since it was the pastor’s conviction that only Christians should be baptized, he realized he couldn’t, with good conscience, cooperate with the plan, but he wished to handle his answer with tact so as not to offend the other minister. I understand that he wrote a letter, a masterpiece of grace, in which he included this humorous statement: ‘We don’t take in laundry, but we’ll be happy to loan you our tub.’”¹ I’m not sure how much grace that presented to the first pastor, but it did get the point across.

And we can see from this illustration that institution of baptism is viewed differently across the spectrum of Christian denominations. Some insist upon only providing baptism by total immersion, while others use sprinkling, and others use pouring of water onto the heads of those ready to be baptized.

Some denominations insist that infant baptism is optimal recognizing that the process is completed at a later time so that the individual might take on the vows that their parents made at the child’s baptism. This usually demands for catechism or confirmation to take place during their middle school years, after the child has grown up in the church, being a part of the Christian education programs available for them. This demands the parents take an active part in the raising of their children in a way that helps them to understand what took place at their baptism.

Some denominations prefer dedication of the children when they are young, presenting them to the Lord, so that their involvement in the life of the church’s education program leads them to a point

¹ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 45)

when they can make their own statement of faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. And some denominations recognize baptism for all ages, helping individuals grow in their faith in Jesus throughout their lives.

Unfortunately, these are some of the details that divide the Christian Church, and therefore the sacrament of baptism is understood differently by different faith groups. So today, I hope to take us past the dividing points of baptism and help us to see that the central importance of this sacrament our faith in Jesus Christ.

As we make our statement of faith using the Nicene Creed, we come upon the next statement dealing with this Sacrament: “**We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.**” That’s a great statement, but what do we really mean when we state this phrase?

As we begin our journey in the Global Methodist Church, it is important for all of us to know that baptism signifies entrance into the household of faith and is a symbol of repentance and inner cleansing from sin. It’s more than how baptism is imputed onto us, but Who it is that we are being baptized into.

Scriptures tell us plainly that “...*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*” (Romans 3:23). None of us is perfect, and we are all separated from God because of our sinfulness against Him. Because God is holy, He cannot tolerate sin at any level, so even the slightest rebellion against His laws, even the tiniest disobedience, expels us out of His presence. Just one sin causes that separation. Just consider what happened in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) - all it took for Adam and Eve to be cast out of God’s garden was the breaking of one command, and they were out of Eden, forever out of face-to-face contact with God, and out on their own to live as they could in a world now broken and out of alignment with God’s will. That one sin changed everything, and forever put a separation between God and mankind.

So in order for us to regain connection with the Lord God Almighty, the only way for us to come back into His presence, is to repent of our sins and claim His way of Salvation through Jesus Christ.

Paul explains this very well in Romans 6:1-5.

Our baptism is our outward declaration to the world that we are confessing our sinfulness before the Lord our God, and we are claiming that Jesus Christ is the Way that God gave us to find forgiveness from our sins and redemption back into His presence. That baptism of water signifies that we have turned away from the sinfulness of this world, and have now claimed that Jesus is our Messiah who leads us into a new life.

But unfortunately some, though they were baptized, continue to live in the sinfulness of this world, in rebellion against God's commands and defiant against God's Laws. They act as if they had not professed their faith in Jesus Christ. They live just like the rest of the world, thumbing their noses at God's ways and are determined to live however they want. Yet they believe that because they have been baptized, they will be with the Lord when their life here ends. They think they can live how they want to live and still receive eternal life. Sorry folks, that's not the way it works!

Baptism is the sign we take upon ourselves that states to the world that we determine to live differently than the world, and that we strive to live according to God's will and God's ways. Though it is an outward sign of an inward, spiritual grace, baptism is not to be taken lightly as a sort of fire insurance policy that becomes our "get out of Hell free" card. No, to be baptized means that the individual recognizes that their own sinfulness brings death, that their rebellion against God's commands brings ruin and disaster, and that they are turning from those ways TOWARD God, to follow HIM all their days.

That's what allows us entrance into the household of faith! We cannot expect to state words of baptism and continue to live on in disobedience to the commands of God. "*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*" Paul asks. "*By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*" (Rom. 6:1-2)? Baptism recognizes us as people who have decided to follow Jesus, that we have committed our lives to reject sin and seek righteousness according to God's Word in the Bible.

Baptism is the symbol of repentance and inner cleansing from sin, making us new creatures in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 makes that very clear, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creature: the old things passed away; behold new things have come.*” We cannot operate in both the old things and the new things. We cannot live in Hell and in Heaven at the same time. It has to be one or the other.

So Paul asks correctly, “can we be baptized and still live in sin, expecting God’s grace despite the fact that we are rejecting Him” (Rom. 6:1, Waddell paraphrase)? He answers decisively, “NO!” If we profess our faith in Jesus Christ, if we are baptized and welcomed into the household of faith, we are to live new lives, rejecting the old things of this world and welcoming the new things of God found in the Bible. As we repent of sin, we are not to go right on purposefully sinning, expecting God’s grace to still flow onto us. If we do that, the world can rightly call us hypocrites, because we are professing one thing and living another thing. That is NOT to be as followers of Jesus! It’s not the purpose of baptism.

Baptism is a representation of the new birth in Christ Jesus. It is our deciding that the ways of this world that drive us to sin against God by rejecting His commands, will no longer be the way that we will live our lives. Our statement of faith in Jesus Christ is to be our starting point within the household of faith, AND the intentional decision to follow all of God’s commands for the rest of our lives as we strive to live like Jesus.

Water “baptism signifies that the old Adam in us is to be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and perish with all sins and evil lusts, and that the new man should daily come forth again and rise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”² It is that deliberate decision to seek after all the ways of God by following the example of Jesus Christ. It is no longer seeking our own way, but conforming to God’s will and God’s way.

That means that our mind and heart and life are all pointed in only one direction - toward God. We cannot profess to be a follower of Jesus Christ and then blatantly disregard the teachings of the Bible

² (Luther’s Small Catechism, Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000] pg. 43)

if we are true to our profession of faith in Jesus. Our baptism into Jesus Christ means that we are now a part of the family of God, and are actively promoting faithfulness to God's commands in every way that we live.

So as a part of the family of God, we are to live according to the rules and guidelines of that family. We are no longer under the guardianship of the laws of this world; we now have new laws to govern our lives - the laws of God (Galatians 3:23-25). Even though we live here in this world, we are no longer held captive to the laws of this world, but are called to live according to God's higher laws of righteousness and grace. And as we live according to God's higher standards, we then become heirs of God according to the promise given to Abraham (Galatians 3:29).

Water baptism, then, is the initial step into becoming a true disciple of Jesus Christ as we repent of our sin and profess that we will live with Jesus as our Lord, the One who guides and directs our lives. Acts 19:1-7 help us to see that profession of faith in Jesus is the first step, and then water baptism is the public profession of our commitment to Jesus. Then, once baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit begins to work in and through us to enable us to do the work of Jesus in our world today.

“The idea of a baptized believer is that they have gone public in declaring that they are wedded to another - to Jesus Christ. We would think it odd if a husband never wanted to go out in public with his wife. He might say, ‘I’ll eat dinner with you as long as it’s at home,’ or ‘I’ll watch a movie with you as long as it’s at home,’ or ‘I’ll talk to you as long as it’s at home.’ That kind of behavior would be an insult.

“Jesus Christ is insulted regularly by His children because in private they will identify with Him, but in public they don’t want folks to know that they are associated with Him.”³ They hide their loyalty to Jesus behind their conformance with the ways of the world. When the world says, “Keep your faith to yourself,” they acquiesce to the request, and no one knows anything different. No! It needs to be one or the other, not both. Those who are baptized into the household of the faith, and declare their loyalty

³ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 17, #18)

to Jesus must demonstrate that loyalty by living as a new person, guided by the power of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise they may have professed their sins, but their actions with regard to Jesus tells a completely different story. Their heart was not changed like their words had indicated.

You see, “when a person gets married, they put on a ring. That ring does not make them married. The person could be married without a ring, just like you could be saved without being baptized. But what the ring does do is serve as a sign that the person is married.

“Many times when you see a guy talking to a girl, you will see his eyes follow the girl’s hands. He is looking at the left hand to see whether or not she has already been spoken for and belongs to another.

“I’m certain that a wife who refused to wear her ring would insult any husband. He would probably take that as a rejection of him. The ring is more than a piece of jewelry. The piece of jewelry represents an institution and a covenant. Like a ring is symbolic for marriage, baptism is a sign of our covenant with God.”⁴

Baptism, then, is a mark of Christian discipleship. We are announcing to the world that we are striving for faithfulness in Jesus Christ. And when we put our spirits to work at following Jesus, then the rest of our mind and body follow suit, and we begin to reject the old things of this world and begin to live the new things of Jesus Christ.

You see, a disciple is one who accepts the teachings and leadership of the one they are following. They study the work of their “master” and strive to become just like him. They give their whole attention to abiding by the ways of that one, and they work diligently to be so like that one that everyone knows that they follow that one, because they live like him.

And we hear that powerfully in the words of Hebrews 10:19-23. Listen to this call to persevere in faith. (READ Hebrews 10:19-23). Through baptism we can “*draw near to God*,” come right into His presence, because we profess the blood of Jesus as our sacrifice for our sins. In Him we are able to find

⁴ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, pg. 16, #17)

relief from our guilty consciences because of the freedom from our sins. Through baptism, we become washed clean and can then begin to live a new life established in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I so like the “words that Philip Henry, father of Matthew Henry, wrote for his children [as] their baptismal statement. He wrote: I take God to be my chief end and highest good.

“I take God the Son to be my prince and Savior.

“I take God the Holy Spirit to be my sanctifier, teacher, guide, and comforter.

“I take the Word of God to be my rule in all my actions and the people of God to be my people under all conditions.

“I do hereby dedicate and devote to the Lord all that I am, all that I have, and all I can do.

“And this I do deliberately, freely, and forever.”⁵ Now, that’s a baptismal statement!

That is precisely what baptism is about! In baptism we are making God the God of our life, letting only Him be our guide and way. Who is higher than the Lord God Almighty? No one! So why not commit our life to the biggest and the best in all of the universe? Who has more power or authority than God? No one! So why don’t we submit ourselves to His power and authority so that we might work in that same power and authority?

In baptism we are making Jesus Christ to be the one who leads us back into the presence of God the Father, as we put our trust and loyalty in Him as our King. Who else has the authority to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness? No one! Only Jesus! So why not let Him be the one to teach us God’s ways so that we might follow them?

In baptism we are inviting the Holy Spirit into our lives to clean us of all the wicked and evil ways of the world and are asking Him to teach us all that we need to know to be faithful to Jesus. He is the One who can guide us into all truthfulness in following Jesus. And He is the One who supports us, comforts us and consoles us when life turns up-side-down. He empowers us to keep on doing the work of the Lord and grants us power beyond anything we could ever have on our own. He supplies us with

⁵ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 45)

gifts and abilities that can be used to accomplish the work of Salvation for our world. He knows our hearts cry and He supplies us with just the right encouragement to remain strong in our Christian walk. And He empowers us with qualities that we can use to remain focused on keeping God's law.

In Baptism, we take the Bible to be our Book that guides our lives, trusting that all the words within it are true and trustworthy. As we follow God's Word, we are never led astray, but are enlightened by the Truth that it contains. We can see how different the lives are of those who have followed and those who have rejected God, and we are challenged to be among the faithful. And as we let the Word of God dwell within us, our actions reflect the righteousness of God.

In baptism, we commit everything to the Lord our God so that He might use us, even as we are, to touch the lives of those around us with hope and life. Everything at our disposal is available to bring about a difference to the ones who are hurting, or struggling, or questioning, and we can be the blessing of God to them as we minister to them.

In baptism, we give our lives to God, deliberately, with no strings attached, and for as long as we live. Baptism is a one-time decision that is lived out for the rest of our lives in order to bring honor and glory to the Lord our God, through Jesus Christ our Savior and King. Let's pray.

Father God, thank You for inviting us into a relationship with You through baptism. Thanks You for the forgiveness we receive as we turn over our lives to You. Thank You for the freedom we receive having been released from the penalty of sin. Thanks You for the new life we have in Jesus Christ our Messiah. Help us to live each day for You, giving up the world and all its ways, and taking on Your will and ways more and more each day. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit so that we might become empowered to complete the work of Salvation for our world as we faithfully seek to follow Jesus. Give us the courage to put feet on our faith, using all that we have and are to glorify You. Continue to guide us and lead us back to Yourself, so that we might rejoice in being a child of God. May we never be ashamed of our baptism in Jesus, but openly live in confidence of Your love for us. This we pray in the name of our risen and glorified Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.