

The Meaning of The Sacraments - Baptism

By Sacrament we mean something that Jesus did Himself and wants us to do also. There are only two rites that all of Christendom agree are Sacraments and that is Baptism and Communion.

The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches also include penance, confirmation, holy orders, matrimony, and the anointing of the sick as Sacraments. Of everything the church does, baptism and Communion are unique because they are practices that were initiated by Jesus Himself.

Baptism was practiced by Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. The reason they called him that was because he baptized people, not because he went to a Baptist church. "Baptist" was not a denomination back then. Jesus didn't have other cousins like Simon the Methodist, or Bubba the Episcopalian.

John's baptism was a way for Israelites to say: *"I want to repent. I want to be known as one who loves God. I know I need cleansing, and I know that God is the only one who can clean me up."*

When it comes to birthdays, weddings, anniversaries and funerals we commemorate them in certain ways. Some with parties and the giving of gifts, some with solemn assemblies. **We like to mark special occasions** in our life's journey in unique and special ways.

Somewhere in the psyche of human beings is the need to celebrate or mark the important moments of life. **Plants and animals** don't have this hang-up. Your cocker spaniel doesn't get all bent out of shape if you forget his birthday. Your house plants may have an aversion to dying but the neighbor's plants will feel no need to attend the funeral.

Rites of passage matter a lot to most people! Just forget an **anniversary** and find out how much rites of passage mean to people. And Jesus setup a way to mark the special occasion of when you accepted Him as your Savior.

You can tell when someone is celebrating their birthday because there is a party going on. You can certainly tell when a wedding or funeral is happening because they are commemorated in a certain way. And **you can tell** when a person has accepted the Lord because they are baptized.

That is the rite that Jesus setup to mark that important milestone in your life. Matt 28:18-20, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*

1. What exactly is baptism? *“A ceremonial immersion in water as an entrance rite or sacrament of the Christian church.”*

The NT was originally written in **Greek**, and the word baptize comes from the Greek word “Baptizo. βαπτίζω. Which means to immerse, to dip completely under. If a woman was washing the dishes and she dipped a cup completely under in the dishwater, the word they would use would be “*baptizo*.” She baptized the cup.

History Lesson: Back in the 1700's they started translating the Bible into English from the original Greek, up to that time all the English translations had come the Latin Vulgate which was a Latin version that Jerome had produced over a 1,000 years before. Well, when the scholars that were translating the Bible from the Greek into English, they came to the Greek word **“βαπτίζω.”** They knew the word meant to dip completely under the water but there was a problem, the Church of England didn't do that, they just sprinkled water on people's heads. So they just left the Greek word and put English letters in place of the Greek ones. (This is called “transliteration.”) The church told its members that sprinkling was “being baptized.”

2. What is the significance of baptism?

Romans 6:3-7, *“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”* This might be the most important verse in the Bible about Baptism, because it explains the significance.

Baptism Represents the Death, Burial and Resurrection – the very basis of our salvation. It is also symbolic of washing, of being clean, of a fresh start.

In the early days of the church, **baptism was a declaration** that the believer was identifying himself with that group of people who were called Christians. This meant something as Christians were despised and hated.

It meant persecution, maybe death; it meant being ostracized from your family, shunned by friends. And the one act which was the final declaration of this identification was BAPTISM.

As long as a man met with Christians, he was tolerated, but once he submitted to baptism, he declared to the entire world, I BELONG TO THIS DESPISED GROUP, and immediately he was persecuted, hated, and despised.

This is still true in many parts of the world today.

3. Why should we be baptized?

As we have already seen **Jesus commanded us to be baptized**. Matt 28:18-20, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*

Obedience is a choice. We can choose to obey or we can chose to disobey.

Some people argue that the **“Thief on the Cross”** was saved and he wasn’t baptized, so baptism isn’t important or required. I am surprised when some very well trained Bible College graduates say this because Jesus and the thief lived and died under the Old Covenant and baptism wasn’t part of that covenant. And that means saying that the thief wasn’t baptized is the same, as saying Moses or Abraham weren’t baptized, because like the thief, they lived and died under the Old Covenant.

Remember that Christian baptism represents the Death, Burial and Resurrection and the Death of Christ, and the Burial and Resurrection of Christ had not happened yet when Jesus saved the thief on the Cross.

After Jesus died and rose again on the third day, putting the New Covenant into effect, everyone who accepted Him as their Savior was baptized, **there are no exceptions**. It is as simple and straightforward as that.

Now lets look at an event that took place right before Jesus started His ministry. Matthew 3:13-15, *“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.”*

Show film clip of Jesus being baptized where Jesus tells John...

What did Jesus mean when he told John that He needed to be baptized *“... to fulfill all righteousness.”* ? He was saying we need to do this so that we do everything that God expects us to do. So, does that mean if we refuse to be baptized we are not fulfilling all righteousness? We are not doing what God expects us to do?

Baptism is a statement of faith. Colossians 2:12, *“having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”* God has always asked people to express their faith.

Now despite the fact that we just read that baptism is a part of having faith, I have heard people say that *“baptism is a “work”* and we are not saved by *“works”* therefore we shouldn't be baptized.”

Let me ask you something, when the Israelites marched around the Walls of **Jericho** 7 times and the walls fell down, did the walls fall because they marched in the right way? No the walls fell because of the power of God. And they expressed their faith in God by doing what He asked them to do which was to march around the walls 7 times.

If they didn't believe, if they didn't have faith they would not have marched around the wall even once, let alone 7 times.

Baptism is not in addition to faith but is an expression of faith. Let's look at what God says about it: Galatians 3:26-27 *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”* Again, the Bible connects baptism with having faith in Christ Jesus.

In baptism the focus is on Christ and what He did. I'm talking about the gospel, about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, of which baptism is a symbol.

There is an interesting passage in Genesis 17:10-11, *“This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.”*

The way the Jewish nation “**signed**” the contract or covenant agreeing that they would keep God’s commands and God agreed to be their God was by every male being circumcised. In religious talk this is called the “sign of the seal of the covenant.”

Now lets move to the new covenant, the new agreement that God has offered to not only the Jews but to all of us, and look at Colossians 2:11-12, *“In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”*

Now the part I especially want you to notice is , *not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God,* It appears from this passage that baptism has replaced circumcision as a sign that the individual stands in a covenant relationship with God.

We now have a symbol of this covenant that can also be practiced by women. It is even more general than before and it includes more people than before.

We are talking about **Membership** in His kingdom, Acts 2:41 *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”*

I believe that our **baptism is a mile marker in our life** that we can look back on and remember what happened at that moment.

Paul says in his letter to Galatia 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”*

My baptism reminds me that I am in a new position and I view life with a new perspective. The way we now view life is radically different from before. It’s a radical change, and I need to be reminded of that. I don’t live the way I used to live or by the same rules that I used to live by.

Colossians 3:2 *“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”* I live with a new morality, **Not only do I have a new position but I also have a new standard.**

A man wrote "**Dear Abby**, I am having an affair on my wife with two different women and I don't know what to do. Please give me some advice but don't give me any of that morality stuff."

Abby had a great response. "Dear Sir, "The only thing that makes us different from the animals is morality. Maybe you should write a veterinarian"."

Continuing on in Colossians 11:3, "*Where this happens, there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, uncivilized person, slave, or free person. Instead, Christ is everything and in everything.*" (GW)

Baptism helps us remember that we are all equal in God's eyes. Rich or poor, Royalty or common, Educated or illiterate, Man, woman, Black, Latino, Asian, Native or White and all shades in between – need to be baptized. The ground is level at the foot of the Cross!

Who should get baptized? Everyone who accepts Christ as their Savior: "*And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch saith, Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? "And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.*" Acts 8:35-37.

And we ask the same thing. When someone is baptized here at Baxter we ask them "**Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and do you accept Him as your personal Savior?**"

A man walked up to a vending machine, put in a coin, pressed the buttons labeled, "coffee, double cream, sugar." No cup appeared, but the nozzles went into action sending forth coffee, cream and sugar. After the proper amounts had gone down the drain, the machine turned off. "*Now that's real automation,*" said the man. "*This thing even drinks it for you.*"

That is just how some people want their faith. They want to make a deposit, put in some money and let the rest be taken care of automatically. But that is not the way it works. Jesus will freely pour out His love for you but you need to put the cup in the right place. The religion of Jesus requires personal discipline, if we truly love Jesus we will not hesitate to do anything He asks us to do.

Baptism is a **public declaration**, that the person getting baptized has accepted Jesus Christ's death on Calvary as payment for his or her sins, and asked Him to come into their heart and be their Lord and Savior.

Who are candidates for baptism? *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized.”* (Acts 2:41). Those who **“gladly”** receive and believe in the truth about Jesus.

Baptism is a commitment that a person makes because they are being transformed by the grace of God. Now you can baptize hundreds of people but it will not get them into the kingdom of God if they are not believers. All that happened to them was that they got wet.

How should we be baptized? We follow the pattern we find in the NT, we dip a person completely under the water.

If you were baptized as a baby should you be baptized as an adult? Some groups baptize babies and in truth, it is a wonderful, sometimes even a spiritual experience for the parents, but it didn't mean anything to the baby. And we can praise God that the parents were concerned about the baby's spiritual well being.

If that was you, I strongly suggest that you should be baptized as an adult when you know why you are doing it. In the Bible baptism was always a choice that someone made for themselves. When you were baptized as a baby that was for your parents now you need to do it for yourself to, as Jesus said, **“to fulfill all righteousness.”**

Sometimes someone will ask if they can get into heaven even if they say “No” to baptism. That question **puzzles** me. Because in a they are saying to Jesus, *“Jesus, I know You suffered for me. I know You died an agonizing death on the cross for me. I understand You clearly commanded that all of your followers are to be baptized.*

And I'm willing to take Your sacrifice to get into Heaven, but when it comes to obeying You in the very first step of the Christian life...when it comes to declaring to the church and the world that my devotion is to You...I think I'll take a pass. When it comes to the first thing You've asked me to do...to obey You in the sacrament of baptism...I think I'll disobey You.”

Let me encourage you. If you are a follower of Jesus, and if you have never been baptized, to do so next Sunday.

When you take that step, it is a moment of celebration for everyone. If you haven't done it ... if you've been waiting for a spouse or somebody else to decide so you can do it together ... stop waiting.

Sometimes people have known Jesus for a long time, and they are embarrassed, because they don't want other people to know that they have never been baptized. Is embarrassment a good reason not to get baptized? No.

Jesus went through so much for us. I encourage you to obey what Jesus is asking is asking you to do.

“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” Acts 22:16

To the rest of us I want to ask you. **Do you need to remember** what happened at your baptism?

Let me remind you that most of the things we read today were not written to non-Christians but to those in the family of God.

Paul is saying in Romans 6 remember that when we were baptized we were buried and resurrected with Christ. We were dead to sin and alive to God and Paul told them a baptized person doesn't act the way you are acting.