

Baptism

A Biblical Examination

Part 1- The Scandal of Disobedience

Matthew 28:18b-20

18 ... "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Mark 16:15b&16

15 ... "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

16 "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

If the Lord is pleased, this Biblical exegesis on the subject of baptism will be divided into four parts. Each one is designed to bring scriptural clarity to this important issue:

Part 1- The Scandal of Disobedience

Part 2- The Definition and History of Baptism

Part 3- Perversions of Baptism

Part 4- Biblical Baptism

Part 1- The Scandal of Disobedience

The failure to be obedient in the matter of Baptism, to take Baptism seriously, is at the root of some of many of the problems in people's lives and in the church in general because it allows the church to fill up with people who are unfaithful and disobedient to the commands of the Lord and of His Word and that's very serious.

When Jesus said, in **Matthew 28:19-20**,

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

... He was giving a command to the apostles and to the church at large, saying:

“Go out there, evangelize, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

And this makes baptism to be an “ordinance” of the Lord. And what is meant by the word, “ordinance” is that the Lord Jesus *commanded* Baptism, He *ordained* it, in a way that would make Baptism the normal, ongoing practice of the Christian Church.

The phrase in verse 19 that has to do with “making disciples” is the main verb of this entire passage. So, what Jesus is saying is:

“Having gone, (into all the earth) *make disciples* of all nations.”

And there are two defining participles in this passage:

1. Baptize them
2. Teach them

And the Christian Church is *commanded* to do both of these two things for *all* disciples through the end of this age. So “making disciples of all nations” *includes* baptizing them. So as far as Baptism is concerned it is very clear that *all* genuine believers are commanded by the Lord of the Church:

- ✓ To Baptize
- ✓ To *be* Baptized

... as part of fulfilling this Great Commission. And the time frame in this passage is defined by the Promise of Christ’s Divine Supernatural Help in **Matthew 28:20**,

... lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

So, the Promise of Divine Help is for as long as “this age” (the Church Age) lasts. So therefore, the command that Jesus promises to help us with is also for as long as this age lasts. So, based upon this we can conclude that:

Baptism is a Command, and an Ordinance of the Lord Jesus to be performed in making disciples until Christ returns at the end of the Church Age.

John Calvin taught:

“But the fanatics, such as Schuencfeldius, absurdly pervert this testimony, while they seek to take away from sacraments all their power and effect. For Peter did not mean here to teach that Christ’s institution is vain and inefficacious, but only to exclude hypocrites

from the hope of salvation, who, as far as they can, deprave and corrupt baptism. Moreover, when we speak of sacraments, two things are to be considered, the sign and the thing itself. In baptism the sign is water, but the thing is the washing of the soul by the blood of Christ and the mortifying of the flesh. The institution of Christ includes these two things. Now that the sign appears often inefficacious and fruitless, this happens through the abuse of men, which does not take away the nature of the sacrament. Let us then learn not to tear away the thing signified from the sign. We must at the same time beware of another evil, such as prevails among the Papists; for as they distinguish not as they ought between the thing and the sign, they stop at the outward element, and on that fix their hope of salvation. Therefore, the sight of the water takes away their thoughts from the blood of Christ and the power of the Spirit. They do not regard Christ as the only author of all the blessings therein offered to us; they transfer the glory of his death to the water, they tie the secret power of the Spirit to the visible sign. What then ought we to do? Not to separate what has been joined together by the Lord. We ought to acknowledge in baptism a spiritual washing, we ought to embrace therein the testimony of the remission of sin and the pledge of our renovation, and yet so as to leave to Christ his own honor, and also to the Holy Spirit; so that no part of our salvation should be transferred to the sign. Doubtless when Peter, having mentioned baptism, immediately made this exception, that it is not the putting off of the filth of the flesh, he sufficiently shewed that baptism to some is only the outward act, and that the outward sign of itself avails nothing.”¹

The Church then, is commissioned by the Lord Christ to do the work of baptizing. So, since this is so crystal clear it is amazing to witness these massive evangelistic crusades, these massive crowds of people who are all supposedly coming to Salvation in Jesus and these huge, worldwide Ministries, and yet, you seldom, if ever, see a single baptism. And with the rise of the modern Christian media outlets, baptism is rarely even discussed- much less practiced.

Yet, when we examine the Biblical Record, on the day of Pentecost when the Christian Church began and after Peter’s first Sermon, three thousand people believed the Gospel and three thousand people were baptized.

The Acts 2:40&41

40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!"

41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

When the Holy Spirit spoke in **The Acts 2:38** through the Apostle Peter,

"Repent, and each of you be baptized..."

... He gave a command to the individual who repents and believes to be baptized. So, the Church is commanded “to baptize” and the individual believer is commanded

¹ John Calvin; Commentary on 1Peter 3:21

“to be baptized”. There is absolutely no lack of clarity or confusion about this anywhere in the Bible.

And yet, in rebellion to the clear Command of Scripture, in far too many areas of the modern Church, there is a large *unbaptized* population of professing believers. And seemingly, this really isn't something they're too concerned about. And this blatant disobedience is symptomatic of the individualism and unfaithfulness that typifies much of modern “Christianity”- people who lay claim to belong to Jesus by the miracle of the New Birth and yet who function autonomously like *consumers*- rather than under Biblical Authority.

In every case where the Great Commission is recorded in the Scriptures there's an emphasis on Baptism. But in spite of this, there is widespread noncompliance with what is a very simple command. And at the same time- there is a rather strange paradox going on in that while genuine believers are *not* being baptized we also see a very large population of baptized members in the modern Church who have never been saved.

So, if there's anything that needs some clear teaching, I think we need to be taught about Baptism. And people in the Church, who have a disregard for Baptism or who have not been baptized fall into one of five categories:

1. They are Ignorant
2. They are Prideful
3. They are Indifferent
4. They are Defiant
5. They are Unregenerate

Let's examine these together.

1. Unbaptized People in the Church are Ignorant

These people may very well be truly saved, but they attend a Church where the Bible is not taught at all or is taught very poorly and haphazardly. As a result, these truly saved people have never been taught about Baptism at all or they haven't been taught correctly about Baptism and know nothing about this ordinance being a commandment of the Lord Jesus.

Some of these would include those who have been taught that it's sufficient if they have been “christened” or “baptized” as a baby. So, as they grew, heard the Gospel, repented, and trusted in Christ alone for Salvation (based on the wrong or incomplete Teaching that they received as a child) they think that they are in obedience when they are actually living in ongoing *disobedience*. The fix for this ignorance is clear and consistent teaching and preaching of God's Word.

2. Unbaptized People in the Church are Prideful

There are some people who have truly been born again but due to several reasons they have allowed an extended period of time to lapse since their conversion

and now they are ashamed to admit that they have never been obedient to the Lord's command to be Baptized and so they remain unbaptized due to their pride.

Many of these people have truly known Christ for a long time. They are involved with the local Church and have developed a reputation as being Christian people, but they have never been baptized. And the fear of being embarrassed about this keeps them disobedient because they're not willing to humble themselves and admit they've been disobedient and go ahead and be baptized.

This second reason may also be due to the Church not doing enough to verify that its members have been obedient about this issue.

3. Unbaptized People in the Church are Indifferent

There are plenty of people in our modern culture who simply can't be bothered with any requirement, demand, or expectation- even from the Lord. They never can seem to find a spot in their day timer for obedience about Baptism. To them, getting wet and going through all of that is simply not a priority. These people know it's commanded in the Bible- but obedience about many aspects of Christianity isn't important to them. They have other priorities. This is truly frightening.

Again, the leaders of the Church have an obligation here to assure that all of its members are "baptized believers" and should work hard to expect compliance with this issue or to begin the process of Church Discipline. Indifference to commands of the Lord is not a Christian attribute and should be confessed as "sin" and turned from.

4. Unbaptized People in the Church are Defiant

This is a step above Indifference. It is theoretically possible for these people to be genuinely born again, but these people are rebels and they are blatantly refusing to obey the clear command of the owner and creator of the universe about Baptism and should be *immediately* placed under Church Discipline.

In most cases, those who are blatantly rebelling against being baptized are sinning in many different ways on an ongoing basis and it would only elevate their outward hypocrisy if they were to give a testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ and celebrate His Wonderful Redemption on their behalf by being baptized. So, these people are going to need to be examined and shepherded along several different lines before they should be baptized.

5. Unbaptized People in the Church are not Regenerate

People who are not truly converted have no desire to make a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ because they really don't want to be identified with Him in a public way. They may well enjoy being physically in the Church or they may feel

comfortable hanging on the edges and on the fringes of true faith, but they are not about to take a public stand with Christ.

And the issue of unsaved people being in the Church, remaining in the Church, and fully participating in the blessings and virtue and Grace of the Church is a very serious issue that has to be addressed on an ongoing basis. God's Biblical Plan is that the Church for which Christ died should be a collection of "called out" and chosen genuinely redeemed individuals who are earnestly and faithfully seeking to be found faithful and obedient to what the Lord of the Church has instructed and that effort has to include Baptism.

Most of the modern mass evangelized TV, radio, and stadium "converts" have been basically left to themselves without the benefit of scriptural guidance and with little or no accountability for being obedient about Baptism and a whole host of other things. And this strikes to the conscience of every believer about whether or not they understand Church Authority. Baptism is therefore critical and important and it must be understood and it must be practiced.

Baptism is not a minor matter and thus it commands our attention. Baptism is a Biblical issue and one that should re-emerge as a *primary* ministry of the Christian Church in the 21st Century.

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