

Baptism: Being Raised Into Newness of Life



by Faber McMullen - Pastor, Union Grove Baptist Church - **Lessons for Living** © 2018

As most of you all know, I am now in my third year of being pastor to Union Grove Baptist Church. During this time together we have studied the Book of Daniel, the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), and now we are walking our way through the early church in the Book of Acts. On several occasions I've done special sermons. They've been mostly on topics involving times of holidays like Advent, Christmas, and Resurrection Sunday. One of my favorite special topics is baptism. Please stand with me in honor of God's Word as we read the focal passage for today.

Dead to Sin, Alive to God

6 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ 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. (Romans 6:1-4, NKJV).

In past sermons on this subject I have told you about a conversation I had several years ago with a tour guide in Greece. Sandy and I went to Greece with a group of pastors and professors from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Our tour guide, Konstance, was impressed with our collective biblical knowledge, and after we had been there a few days he cornered me and asked, "What exactly do Baptists believe?"

I explained to him that Baptists practice what is called a "Believer's Baptism." There is a lot of information in those two words. We'll talk about that for a minute, but then I want to concentrate on the changes we should see in a believer's life after baptism. Let's take a look at the basics:

The "Who" of Baptism

When a person comes to faith that Jesus is his or her Lord and savior, baptism is the first step of obedience in a person's journey of following Jesus. It is an act reserved for believers only. A "believer" is any person who has put his or her complete faith in Jesus and His substitutionary death on the cross as payment for one's sins. This begins with the realization that "all humans have sinned and have come short of the glory of God." None

of us have lived up to God's standard. And this universal "all" includes you and me.¹

When a person comes to faith they realize that because of their sinful nature they are deserving of and destined to an eternity of separation from God.² This is eternal death. The good news is that God came in human form and allowed Himself to be humbled, humiliated, and killed. Scripture sums this up by telling us that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."³ That's the promise of God. That is the essence of the Gospel.

I want to remind all who are listening today that there is nothing we can do to earn or deserve this salvation. It is freely given. Getting baptized doesn't get anyone saved. Salvation comes with belief and that's it. When infants are baptized it results in a wet baby. I think the greatest danger in the baptizing of infants is that it might cause some to mistakenly believe that the act itself somehow saves the baby. This could well lead to a lack of urgency in seeing that child have a true encounter with Jesus. When scripture is taken in its entirety, God's plan to reach and redeem mankind is based in belief, not in getting wet or going through a ceremony of some kind. Last Tuesday at men's Bible study, we looked at Genesis chapter 15 and I was reminded that belief has ALWAYS been God's requirement for an intimate relationship with Him. I love the passage where God brings Abram out of a tent in the wilderness, shows him the stars in the sky, and He tells him, "Abram so shall your descendents be." The text then tells us that Abram believed God and God accounted that belief in God as "righteousness." That standard of "belief" is still God's requirement for each of us today.

The Why and When of Baptism

The "why" of baptism can be summed up in one word, "obedience." When I was growing up my dad had a Jewish tailor who made all of his suits. His name was Mr. Levy. He would not use thread that was not the same material as the fabric he was using. One day my father asked him, "Mr. Levy, why do you think God commanded the Jews to not mix threads in the making of cloth? What is the reasoning behind this?" Dad said that Mr. Levy paused and then he said, "It is about obedience. We just do what God asks us to do." After we come to faith in Jesus, God asks us to do two things: be baptized, and take Communion regularly. We simply do these things out of obedience. Neither of these save us, nor do they dispense grace to us. They are simply acts of obedience.

I want to add that in scripture there is no instance of true belief in Jesus without baptism following with immediacy.⁴ It is not important who baptizes you or where you are baptized.⁵ However, believers often choose to be baptized by someone who has made a spiritual difference in their lives. And, they often choose to be baptized before a group (a

¹ Romans 3:23

² Romans 6:23

³ John 3:16

⁴ See instances of the Day of Pentecost "The text says, "they gladly received his word and were baptized." And the Ethiopian Eunuch, "As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?"(Acts Chapter 8)

⁵ Acts 10:46-48; 16:14-15; 16:33; 18:8; 19:1-5

church) that has been supportive of what God is doing in their life. That is why Larry Waddell, one of our worship leaders, has decided to be baptized this morning at Union Grove by the ministers here. In one way baptism is sort of like a funeral. It is a symbolic taking of one's sinful self into the grave and being buried with Jesus. The coming up out of the water symbolizes a sincere desire to walk in newness of life. It is also sort of like a wedding. By doing this publicly, it is a witnessed declaration that a believer truly wants to walk with his or her savior and Lord and experience a new kind of walk with Him. It is like putting a wedding ring on your hand that tells the whole world you belong to Jesus.

To accept the Lord and to avoid baptism is either an act of ignorance or it is an act of rebellion. After this message this morning you can no longer claim ignorance. Baptism is a simple act to which a believer is commanded to submit, but it really is a great first-step of obedience. To accept the Lord and never seek to be baptized is as strange as being a Christian and never participating in the Lord's Supper. These are precisely the two things that Jesus specifically commands His followers to do. This is why Baptists call these the "two ordinances."

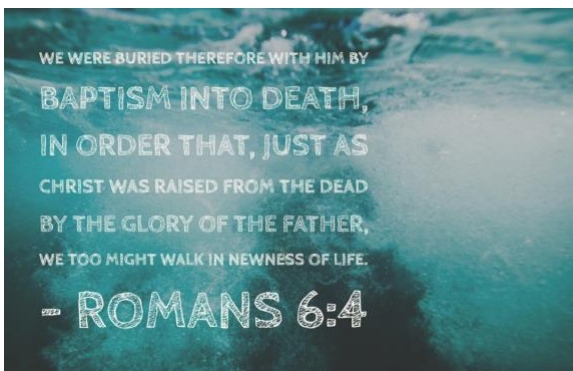
The "How" of Baptism - By Immersion Only



There are many paintings and renderings showing Jesus having water poured over Him as John the Baptist baptized Him. These depictions cannot be accurate. Jewish law, custom, and protocol only allow total immersion. The text we just read tells us that "as soon as He was baptized **He went up out of the water.**" A person can not come "up out of the water" if they are not under the water. As a Jew, Jesus would have submitted only to

baptism by immersion. Our Baptist practice is based in the most ancient of practices in Judaism. We do this because that is how Jesus experienced baptism.

The word "baptism" occurs over 100 times in the New Testament. Of those actually referring to the act of being baptized, 100% or ALL of the 69 words used are the word "baptizo" meaning, "dip or immerse." There is no instance of anyone being sprinkled or having water poured over them (effusion) anywhere in the New Testament. Baptists make a "big deal" out of going under the water to demonstrate and identify ourselves with Christ's death and burial. We come up out of the water to demonstrate our being raised up into newness of life with Him. As Paul so beautifully stated, "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."⁶ This is not a question having to do with salvation, but rather it is a question of obedience.



Being Raised with Him to Walk In Newness of Life - Holiness - It is a

Deliberate Choice

One source of great sadness to me, as a pastor, is to have people come to me desiring to be baptized who have no real desire to walk in "newness of life." They never tell me this, but I discover it in the moments, days, months, or years after they have professed a supposed "new found faith," or after they have told me that they truly desire to "follow Jesus." It is as though they think that the act of baptism will give them momentum to live their Christian life without putting any effort into it. Hence, they fail. What I see in them is a failure to make an effort. A disciple must make an effort, and God will bless that effort. Baptism doesn't really make us holy, but desiring holiness brings a desire for sincere baptism. Baptism is a "starting point" in the journey of true discipleship. Baptism should be followed by sincere Holy Spirit empowered effort.

The day of one's believer's baptism should be a starting point of submission to the Holy Spirit and God's will for one's life. Many of you in this congregation may think that I never struggle with sinful thoughts and desires. I am human. I do. When I get those crazy thoughts I have to stop and remind myself of my commitments to the Lord. Sometimes, I even have to remind myself of my commitments to my bride. Discipleship calls for change. It is a call to "newness of life." Let's read the verses that follow the passage we first read a few minutes ago. Look at Romans chapter 6 verses 5-14.

⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.

¹³ And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

This being raised in "newness of life" means you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, take the sin in your life captive. Paul tells the Corinthian church, "⁴ For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:4-5 NKJV).

What does this mean? It means you begin to recognize sinful thoughts, actions, and deeds for what they are, and you begin to say: "God, I agree with you that you have given me victory over sin and death. I agree with your Word that you have made me a new creation. I will not accept this version of myself which is not your will for my life. I will not think this way. I have been bought with a price. I am redeemed by the blood of the

lamb. I am a child of the King, and you have something better for me than being a slave to my own flesh." That deliberative movement toward holiness is "walking in newness of life". This newness of life is based on receiving and acting on biblical truth.

Verse 10 and 11 clearly tell the reader that our former way of looking at things made us dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. But notice that verses 12, 13, and 14 are commands. Holiness, or walking in newness of life, is something that doesn't happen automatically, but requires you and me to make an effort to do and not do certain things.

Verse 12 starts by saying "therefore." As Brother Ward often reminds us, this word tells us what the preceding passage is there for. It is there to tell us that we can indeed be free of sin, and that WE can make a conscious decision to "not let sin reign in our mortal bodies, that we should obey it in its lusts." This means sometimes you need to have a "talking to" to your self. Sometimes I have to say, "Self, that is not right thinking, and that will not lead to right conduct! Lord, I want to obey You. Lord, I want to live my life for You. Lord, take away from me the desire to do things that run contrary to Your will for my life. Lord, I do not want Your covering, protection, and blessing taken from me. Lord, I lay those desires down and cling only to You."

Verse 13 goes on to say "¹³ *And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*" Again, this requires action on your part. Paul is essentially saying, "Take control over yourself and yield yourself to God. This will move you from the realm of the dead into the land of the living."

So where does this leave you this morning? In summary:

- 1) If you have never received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior then today can be the day of your salvation. You may receive Him and His word for you through admitting your sinful condition and putting all of your faith and hope in Him for your salvation.
- 2) If you already have received Jesus as your Savior, have you submitted in obedience to a believer's baptism? If not, could it be that you are in rebellion against God's command? Ignorance is no longer an excuse if you have heard this message today.
- 3) If you have been baptized are you committed to walking in newness of life? Are you still allowing yourself to be a slave to sin? If so, confess that today and get right with God. It is an effort. It is ongoing.

Listen to what the Holy Spirit is asking you to do today, and I encourage you to do it; whatever it is. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep my commandments." ⁷

Let us pray.

⁷ John 14:15

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Fryday - Webster, Texas.)