

## QUESTION 11: “IF BAPTISM DOESN’T SAVE US, WHY IS IT NECESSARY?” (Romans 6:2b-7)

7.21.19

### INTRODUCTION

Today our question is this: “If baptism doesn’t save us, why is it necessary?” I need to begin this message with a story: Pastor Don baptizing football offensive lineman — floating away. At that moment, I believe Pastor Don would have said that baptism is not necessary.

Now, as a Bible-believing, Bible-preaching and Bible-teaching church, we look to the Scriptures for guidance, and for answers to all our questions. But this is one of those questions where it can appear that the Bible is giving us mixed messages. Let me explain:

On the one hand, in the section of Scripture that Dan and Connor read, it sure sounds like baptism is necessary; Peter indeed tells his Pentecost Day audience upon their asking under conviction, **“Brothers, what shall we do?” — Acts 2:37b**, that they should **“[r]epent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” — Peter, Acts 2:38**. And of course, Jesus, in what has become known as the Great Commission, given to his disciples at the very end of his physical earthly ministry, famously told them: **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore [as a result of that authority] 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” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:18-20a**. In other words, Jesus was leaving them — at least in his earthly presence — but ministry for the Kingdom would be continuing through them. And these were their “marching orders” going forward — including baptism.

On the other hand, as Paul wrote to his pastor friend Titus: ***[W]hen the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done [such as being baptized], but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life — Paul, Titus 3:4-7***. What does Paul say saves us? Mercy, rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit — all poured out on us “generously” through the grace, the undeserved favor, of Jesus Christ. All of those things are, to borrow from Paul’s words to the Ephesian Christians, ***not from yourselves, [but] the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast — Paul, Ephesians 2:8b-9***.

So that does beg our question: Is baptism necessary, or not? Let’s look at some of the pieces.

### TEXT (Romans 6:2b-7)

Christians, Paul says, ***are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.*** So let’s start with the most basic question: What exactly is baptism?

Baptism comes from the Greek word BAPTIZO (bap-tid<sup>^</sup>-zo) — immerse, submerge for a religious purpose, to overwhelm, saturate, baptize. [GRADY NUTT DEFINITION.] In line with the cultural norms of the time, the early church almost universally observed baptism by means of immersion. It includes the meaning of being baptized into anything, meaning into the belief, profession, or observance of anything. Spoken of persons, it means to baptize or be baptized into a profession of faith or into anyone, in sincere obedience to him. When being baptized “into the name of someone,” it means to be identified with what the name of that one stands for, literally, indicating that the baptized person was closely bound to, or becomes the property of, the one into whose name he is being baptized. It is one of the most intimate ways we have to show our identification with Christ. But that being said, what is it about Christ with which baptism identifies us with him?

### **The Events Of His Death**

- 1) His burial. When baptism begins, a person is immersed; they are totally placed under the water. This simulates Jesus when, following his death, he was placed “under the ground” (into a tomb). That’s why Paul would say: ***[D]on’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? — Paul, Romans 6:3.*** In baptism’s sense, Christians are also reflecting a Christian’s death to sin because, as he said to the Romans, somebody who is dead is free from sin. It is a claiming of the fact that Jesus died to take away sin, thereby offering to relieve us from mankind’s ongoing slavery to sin. By being baptized, a Christian is declaring their death to sin.
- 2) His resurrection. Just as Jesus was resurrected, leaving the tomb in glorious new life, so is the Christian, as he rises back out of the water, being resurrected from spiritual “death” to spiritual “life,” by their guilt in sin changed to being declared not guilty by the justifying power of God’s amazing grace. They genuinely have “new life in Christ,” which the Scriptures reference many times:
  - a) ***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 — Paul, Romans 6:4.***
  - b) ***[P]ut on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness — Paul, Ephesians 4:24.***
  - c) ***[P]ut on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator — Paul, Colossians 3:10.***

All of this comes from the work of Jesus Christ *[w]ho, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness — Paul, Philippians 2:6-7.* In other words, Christ in his love for us actually became us, identifying with us so completely that he assumed all our sins, all our fallen nature, unto himself, that we could claim the gift of salvation, his priceless work on the cross, to be free from sin and be seen by his Father as though we had never sinned.

### **The Realities Of His Life**

All the things Jesus taught came with an “instruction manual”: his life. Jesus showed what his teachings looked like. He showed us what a life completely sold out to almighty God looked like. When we come to faith in Christ and choose to follow his command to be baptized, we are saying some stuff:

- 1) By being baptized in Jesus' name, we are declaring more than our allegiance to him or belief in him. We are declaring that we belong to him, even that we are his possession, as a slave belongs to his master. Through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, God is our master.
  - a) ***“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine” — God speaking, Isaiah 43:1b.***
  - b) ***Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price — Paul, I Corinthians 6:19-20a.***
- 2) By being baptized in Jesus' name, we are declaring that we are going to live completely different from the way we had been living, based on the fact that God is our master:
  - a) ***[I]f anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old is gone, the new is here! — Paul, II Corinthians 5:17.***
  - b) ***I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me — Paul, Galatians 2:20.***
- 3) By being baptized in Jesus' name, we are declaring that the way he lived is the way we are going to live — not just in small things, or easy things, but in every thing.
  - a) ***“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” — Jesus Christ, John 13:15.***
  - b) ***[A]ll of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ — Paul, Galatians 3:27.***
- 4) And, by being baptized in Jesus' name, we are showing our commitment to obeying our master's commands as he himself obeyed his Father's commands:
  - a) ***“[N]ot my will, but yours be done” — Jesus Christ, Luke 22:42b.***
  - b) ***“If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love” — Jesus Christ, John 15:10.***

## APPLICATION

Most fundamentally, baptism is an outward display of an inner life. It is a celebration of new life in Christ and letting the world know about it. It is a public statement of allegiance, of loyalty, of ownership, of a testimony telling everybody around us: “I belong to Jesus Christ.” It is the first moment in a lifetime of witness. Maybe try thinking of it like a wedding. [EXPAND]

Now, because I am publicly declaring, quite literally, who owns me, we should expect to see evidence of who owns me; in other words, my life should advertise my master — Jesus. Now it is even more important in these days, in this culture, that we show, that we display, our testimony. The world in which we live is day-by-day, faster and faster, retreating from any kind of Biblical worldview, exchanging it for one of what works for me, that most rewards me, that promotes and celebrates me (do you sense a theme?). In this world, it's all about what works in the moment, the end justifies the means. With that in mind, what displays of Christ does the world need to see? How about these:

- 1) Love — Jesus said it very simply and directly: ***“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I (Jesus) have loved you, so you must love one another. By this (love like Jesus) everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” — Jesus Christ, John 13:34-35.*** That doesn't mean just being nice to somebody, or only being kind to someone who has been kind to you. It means loving with the intention of Jesus,

with the power of Jesus, with the ministry of Jesus, asserting his love into every situation in which we find ourselves. We love all others without condition to identify with Jesus because he loved others without condition.

- 2) Humility — This world is so often all about flaunting self: “Am I not great? Am I not wonderful?” What does the Bible say?
  - a) From the OT: ***Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness; seek humility — Zephaniah 2:3a.*** This is not the idea of stumbling upon humility, but specifically intentionally looking for it because it pleases the Lord.
  - b) From the NT: ***Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought . . . Honor one another above yourselves. . . . [Love] does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. . . . Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others — Paul, Romans 12:3a, 10b; I Corinthians 13:4b-5; Philippians 2:3-4.*** We exercise humility before all as a way to identify with Jesus because he exercised humility before all.
- 3) Servanthood — We are not called in this life to be rulers but rather to be servants. Jesus himself pointed this out to his disciples: ***“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” — Jesus Christ, Mark 10:42-45.*** We serve as a way to identify with Jesus because he served.

## CONCLUSION

What’s the bottom line in all this? These two things:

- 1) Is baptism required to be saved? No. That would make it a “work,” and the Bible clearly says that we are NOT saved by our good works, not matter how right-minded they may be.
- 2) Is baptism necessary? Yes. It is an opportunity to publicly declare to the world, “I belong to Jesus Christ.” It is an opportunity to tell, visually and otherwise, his story. If your Christian life is missing the moment of baptism, let’s make that right — as an opportunity to be obedient to one of Christ’s commands.

But there’s so much more to the story — and it’s this: No matter the situation, no matter the circumstances, really no matter anything, each and every moment in our lives as Christians boils down to one thing: How can I show Jesus in this situation? Wow, that hurt: How do I show Jesus? That’s not fair: How do I show Jesus? He doesn’t know what he’s talking about: How do I show Jesus? I wish she’d grow up. How do I show Jesus? Difficult? Undoubtedly. But that’s the drill: If we have been saved by Jesus, if we claim Jesus, if we are owned by Jesus, if we have identified ourselves with Jesus, then we — by our lives, our attitudes, our actions, our responses, our emotions — are supposed to be living to show Jesus. That’s what ambassadors, that’s what representatives, do. They show their boss, their leader, their superior officer — period. They show who they work for.

And that gets hard especially because, like in those situations I just mentioned, it’s personal. I’ve been hurt; I’ve been cheated or taken advantage of; what if I’m smarter; what if I’m more mature.

But we get so worked up about what wrongs we perceive have been done to us — completely ignoring the opportunity for testifying to a life that goes far, far beyond the limits of our earthly lives, and completely overlooking the fact that we were not put here on this planet to worry about ourselves, to have to look out for ourselves. That’s God’s job — and I’m quite sure that he is up to the challenge. Paul went after the Corinthian Christians about that; upon hearing that they were actually pursuing lawsuits against each other, he pleaded with them: ***Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? — Paul, I Corinthians 6:7b***, those thoughts famously echoed by Peter when he wrote concerning Christ: ***When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly — I Peter 2:23***. In fact, Paul’s response to all he had lost for the sake of Christ was: ***I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him — Paul, Philippians 3:8-9a***. You see, what Paul knew and Peter knew (along with so many others) was that Jesus didn’t live and die and rise and save just so we could live for ourselves. He did all that so we would live for him. He deserves that. Folks, that’s what this thing we call church is all about: learning to live for Jesus. There is no greater life, no greater purpose, than that.

Can we do it on our own? No. Does Jesus adjust his bar, his standard, if we’re maybe new Christians or maybe just not very good at representing him? No. Can his power accomplish what we can’t? You’d better believe it.

A question as we close: If Jesus came in here, today, I mean right now, and we asked him, “So how are we doing? Are we representing you well? Are we good ambassadors?” What do you suppose he’d say? Baptism declares our identification with Jesus, and our desire to live for him — ONLY for him. If there is someplace where your life is lacking, where you’re not representing him as you know you should, where your life has been a little less of him and a whole lot more of yourself, then, before the day is over, let’s make that right. Let’s get together, let’s pray together, to confess our sins, to seek his forgiveness, and pray that God do what David prayed he’d do for him: ***Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. . . . Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me — David, Psalm 51:7, 10***. Let’s pray!