

Pastor's Corner – 2-17-2018

Baptized

Seventh-day Adventists practice something called “believer baptism.” What this means is that we will only baptize someone who has made the conscious decision to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. We believe that baptism is the outward act of someone who has been converted or born again. One outgrowth of this belief is that we only baptize people who are old enough to understand sin and its penalty and who can choose to follow Jesus, i.e. not babies or small children. This belief is in contrast to what is practiced by Catholics and some other mainline traditional churches (Lutherans for example). These churches practice infant baptism and have a fundamentally different view of what baptism is all about.

For most protestant evangelical churches, baptism is a symbol of a changed life. It's also an outward pledge of loyalty and commitment to Christ. We can compare baptism to a marriage ceremony. We get married when we fall in love with someone and want to publicly dedicate ourselves to them for the rest of our life. We don't tend to marry people that we don't know or love (hopefully) and we certainly don't marry infants. That's because marriage is a lifelong commitment that has to be entered into willfully. The same thing is true when we enter into a lifelong relationship with Christ, it can only be done consciously and by faith. Once we enter that relationship we publicly declare our commitment to him through baptism.

For Catholics baptism is not a symbolic act performed by a believer who is born again. Rather it is a quasi-magical act that removes the taint of original sin allowing the recipient to escape the fires of hell. No belief is required on the part of the recipient. All they need is to be sprinkled with water while the trinitarian formula is spoken over them and the inherited guilt of sin is removed (see why I call it quasi-magical? Speak the incantation, apply the water and alakazam! Sin is gone.). That's why babies can be baptized, because the act has nothing to do with their faith or belief, it's a sacrament that literally washes away sin. As one Catholic web site notes, “We don't ask a baby if it wants its diaper changed, we simply change the diaper. We don't ask a baby if it needs a bath, we simply give the baby a bath when it is dirty.”

So which view is correct? Is baptism a symbol of a changed life or is it a sacrament that literally washes away sin (regardless of conversion, faith, or understanding)?

A quick online survey of the word “baptized” in the Bible (I used biblegateway.com) gives a pretty good idea of what the scriptures teach on the subject. One thing that stood out to me in all the cases of baptism mentioned in the New Testament is that in each and every case the person being baptized expressed some kind of faith before being baptized. Either they repented, acknowledged Jesus, or in some way made a profession of faith. Nowhere, and I mean *not even once*, do we have an instance where an infant is baptized.

What's especially interesting is that there *is* a story where infants are brought to Jesus. In Luke 18:15-16 there are some little children, even infants, who are brought to Jesus so that he could touch them and bless them. It's significant to note that these children aren't baptized. They are blessed by the laying on of hands. But no baptism is given. By the way, this is why we perform baby dedications in our church - we're following the specific example of Jesus.

Let's take a look at a few of those baptism passages and see the theme.

Matthew 3:6 - *Confessing their sins*, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Mark 1:5 - The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. *Confessing their sins*, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Mark 16:16 - *Whoever believes* and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Acts 2:38 - Peter replied, “*Repent* and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 2:41 - Those who *accepted his message* were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Acts 8:12 - But when *they believed* Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Acts 18:8 - Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household *believed in the Lord*; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

The common thread in all of these passages is that belief comes first and it is then followed by baptism. The Bible record is consistent that faith and baptism go hand in hand. There is not a single example of it happening any other way. Let me repeat that. There is not a single person in the entire Bible who is baptized without first expressing faith or belief. Faith must precede baptism.

Let me briefly try to hit a couple related issues.

Can someone who has not been baptized be saved? Of course. The thief on the cross is a great example. When he expressed faith in Jesus (“remember me when you come into your kingdom”), Jesus assured him that he would be with him in paradise. There was no chance for him to be baptized but God's grace covered him. In fact, we believe

that Jesus applies his own baptism (which he didn't need) in such cases. This is why we believe children can be saved before baptism.

Is baptism really necessary? Sure is. Again, let's compare it to marriage. Is marriage really necessary? Admittedly there are many secular people who would say that it is not, but Christians generally agree that marriage is pretty important. But why? Does anything magical happen at a wedding? Not really. It's a symbol of the love and commitment that a couple has for each other. But here's the thing, symbols are important. Baptism may just be a symbol but it is every bit as significant as getting married.

What's the correct mode of baptism? That would be by immersion. Again, looking at the symbolic nature of the act we understand that baptism is when we unite ourselves with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. As a person is lowered under the water they are saying to God, "I am dying to self today." As they are raised up they are saying, "I will now live my life as if I have been raised back to life, free from my sins." It's our symbolic death, burial, and resurrection.

More could be said but I've gone on too long already. In conclusion I would like to extend an offer to anyone who would like to be baptized to come see me some time. If God is calling you to commit your life to him then it's time to take that step and be baptized. Make the commitment and publicly declare your love for God.

Have a happy Sabbath,
Pastor Tyler