

Introduction

Last week we looked at 4 specific instances of baptism in the book of Acts. They were accounts of various persons who heard the good news of the kingdom of God and Christ Jesus and believing in him, they were baptized in his name.

This morning we continue with the matter of baptism but through dealing with texts that speak of baptism a bit more theologically. What happens when a person is baptized? Who ought to be baptized? What does baptism signify? How integral to conversion is baptism? These questions need answers. We find them in this morning’s texts. Our concentration is on Colossians 2, but we will be looking at Romans, Galatians, and 1 Peter as well.

In Colossians Paul is emphatic about the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ Jesus. He is supreme over all and he is everything you need. In this context he even mentions baptism, not because baptism is something you need in addition to Christ but because in baptism there is a connection to Christ.

I. Paul warns against anything that would lead you astray from Christ (8)

Do not allow anything to peel you away from faith in Christ Jesus. Along the way are going to come high sounding philosophies. Deep thinkers asking questions about the reason and meaning of life and searching to find the answers in their own intellect. Deism, Process Philosophy, pragmatism, modernism, post-modernism, materialism are a few of this world’s philosophies.

I like the way John Calvin describes philosophies. He writes, “In my opinion, [Paul] means everything that men contrive of themselves when wishing to be wise through means of their own understanding, and that not without a specious pretext of reason, so as to have a plausible appearance. . . . philosophy is nothing else than a persuasive speech, which insinuates itself into the minds of men by elegant and plausible arguments.”

The problem with philosophies is that they are hatched in the minds of men and they are based on the observation of the elements of world through the lens of the depraved human mind. Because of where they start and how they reason, these philosophies can only lead people away from Christ. So Paul says, “See to it that you are not taken captive by them.”

II. Paul then explains the importance of being captives of Christ and nothing else (9-14)

He highlights two reasons.

A. In Christ the fullness of deity dwells bodily and you have been filled with him.

The problem with philosophies is that they are dominated by the human mind and the human interpretation of what it experiences.

However, the foundation of human understanding, which is so messed up in the darkened human mind, is cleared up in Christ. As opposed to forming my world-view on the basis of what I observe in the elemental things of the world and processing it with my puny and depraved brain,

in Christ I come to the One in whom the fullness of deity dwells bodily. Coming to Christ I come to God, who alone, since he made the world, is able to impart to me a proper understanding of it and what it is all about. Coming to him by faith I am filled not with myself but in God in him (see v. 10) who is the head of all rule and authority. You want a right view of things, you go to the authority. You want a right view of God and His creation you go to Him. When you go to Jesus you are going to God!

Here's the most important matter about the world that we need to understand:

B. In Him you were spiritually circumcised.

This is good news! Paul explains what this means is that wicked component of your very nature and being in Christ has been put off. (11). This is the only circumcision that is necessary and it is surgery performed by God himself. When Christ died, God cut off his bodily life. The circumcision of Christ is his death. It is by his death that we who are united with him have our hearts circumcised, we have them purified unto God. This is what was demanded and this what was supplied.

Our sins are removed from us who are joined in faith with Jesus because he has cut them off from us through his death and resurrection!

III. In this context Paul places emphasis on the connection with the work of Christ and our baptism.

Here is how he does it. Look at verse 12.

A. Paul explains that our baptism displays our union with Christ in both His death and resurrection.

- In baptism you were buried with Him
- In baptism you were raised with Him

Does this mean that not until your baptism you have not been buried and raised with Christ? No. Look again at v. 12: having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him THROUGH FAITH in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

See, it is not through baptism that we are buried and raised but through faith. Our faith unites us to Christ. But in Paul's mind it would be unthinkable that there was a person of faith who had not been baptized. Baptism demonstrates the reality of what it means to be in Christ. It means to be joined with him in death and to be joined with him in resurrection. There is no mode other than immersion and emersion that rightly expresses these realities.

Baptism is an urgent need for all who believe because it decisively expresses the glorious reality of death and life in Jesus Christ.

B. Faith is the difference maker, but baptism is expressive of that faith and of the union into which we enter in Christ.

I like how John Piper compares baptism to the exchange of rings in a marriage. When we say,

“With this ring I thee wed,” Piper says, “we don’t mean that the ring or the putting of the ring on the finger is what makes us married. No, it shows the covenant and symbolizes the covenant, but the covenant-making vows make the marriage. So it is with faith and baptism.”

So, the two are associated so closely that Paul writes the way he does. Even so he says in Romans 6:3-4, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

You might say that baptism is when we formally put on the reality of our faith. That is why Peter would have said on the day of Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized!”

IV. Paul finally draws attention to the foundation of being raised from spiritual death to life: forgiveness and cancellation. (13-14)

Our natural condition is being DEAD in our trespasses and the uncircumcision of our flesh.

God is the one who makes alive.

His work in us is based on His work through Christ: forgiveness of sin, cancellation of our debt which was accomplished at the cross by Christ.

We have two ordinances Baptism and the Lord’s Supper and the focal point of both of them is the death of Jesus. They both point us forward as well. Baptism to our spiritual resurrection and the Lord’s Supper to the return of Jesus. Without the death of Jesus there is no hope. Without the death of death picture in baptism there is no hope.

Before bringing the pieces together, I want to mention a couple other NT texts which refer to baptism.

Galatians 3:26-27

for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Here again is this connection between faith and baptism. There’s just no separation in Paul’s mind of a person who has trusted in Christ and one who has been baptized in Him.

1 Peter 3:18-22

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Baptism corresponds to the flood when all the people in the world were judged by God through the flood waters. Eight persons were brought safely through the water (by faith). In this way

baptism saved them and now baptism saves. But wait! It is not the water! Peter says it is not the removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a good conscience. In other words it is not actually the water baptism but that which water baptism symbolizes, namely, an appeal to God for a clean conscience, the cleansing of our hearts. But this is what water baptism conveys: a person's immersion into water as into death and judgment by raised up through Christ in newness of life

Conclusion

So then the substance of our salvation is Jesus, namely His triumph on the cross. But access is through faith, and the emblem (ring) of our salvation is baptism. And the emblem as we have seen is of great significance. And the way we see it portrayed compels us to make several important conclusions about it.

1. Baptism, established as a mark for disciples of Jesus, remains an ongoing ordinance. We should make disciples and baptize them until Jesus returns.
2. Baptism expresses union with the death and resurrection of Jesus.
3. Baptism is immersion in water.
Immersion and emersion are the clearest corresponding ideas to the image which baptism portrays.
4. Baptism is for believers only. As an expression of faith, baptism can only rightly be administered to those who have faith. Therefore, this ordinance does not have in view those who are not yet capable of believing.
5. It does not save but is an act of obedience as from faith outwardly proclaiming one's union with Jesus.

Therefore, the church of Jesus should baptize new disciples, and they should be baptized as disciples gladly and in gratitude for what Jesus has done for us and for what He has done in us.

Have you been baptized?
More fundamentally, have you trusted in Jesus Christ?