

BAPTISM

Session 8: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, Your Son Jesus Christ was baptized, and commanded all of us to be baptized. Help me better understand this great gift and how You make it work throughout my life. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

I know what you might be thinking. How seriously should you view your Baptism? After all, it's just a short, spiritual ceremony, a quick splash or two, right? Wrong! Baptism is so much more!

Baptism is an extremely significant and powerful moment in the life of a Christian. It is a special gift from God, for the individual. Called a sacrament, it is the very promise by God that He has claimed you and you are His forever! Your Baptism never runs out of its forgiving power, ever!

Christians take Baptism very seriously because it is God's blessings and promise upon them! Why would Christians desire as many people to be baptized as possible? When you have good news, really Good News, you want to share it!

8.1. A SACRAMENT SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING "SACRED." IS THAT CORRECT?

Yes! A sacrament is a sacred or holy act God does for His people—which takes away their sin and makes them holy or sacred. It is a divine act

1. instituted by God;
2. in which God Himself has joined His Word of promise to visible elements;
3. by which He offers, gives and seals the forgiveness of sin earned by Christ.

8.2. HOW CAN BAPTISM SAVE ME? I THOUGHT JESUS DOES THE SAVING.

Undoubtedly Jesus saved us by paying for our sins on the cross. But Baptism is a means by which He gives us the forgiveness and peace He earned through His suffering, death and resurrection.

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16a)

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were 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 by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. (Romans 6:3-7)

Moreover, He gives and delivers to us this certainty through Baptism so that we know and have assurance that His forgiving Word has covered us and we have been saved by Him.

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. (1 Peter 3:20-21)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is it important that Baptism always remains linked to Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection?

8.3. WHO IS DOING THE WORK OR ACTION IN BAPTISM—THE INDIVIDUAL OR GOD?

Baptism is entirely God's work, 100 percent upon and towards the individual. Remember, it is not what your word says about God; rather, it is what God's Word says about you. You are forgiven because God says you are. God is making the public announcement, not the individual.

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What is the difference between seeing Baptism as something you do for God and seeing it as something God does for you?
- What kinds of questions or doubts would come to mind if Baptism's effectiveness depended on you?

8.4. WHY IS BAPTISM NOT JUST WATER ONLY?

Only the Word of God can forgive us of our sins, without God's forgiving Word, one is just "swimming" aimlessly.

For the Word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12a)

8.5. WHY IS BAPTISM NOT JUST WORD ONLY, DO I REALLY HAVE TO GET WET?

Baptism is not simply a spiritual event in the life of the individual, but also a physical event that can be witnessed and experienced through our senses. God reminds us His salvation is not just for our spirit, but for our spirit and body. We "take the plunge," so to speak, and get wet in Baptism to remind us Jesus has washed us completely—body and spirit. The word for "baptize" in the original language of the New Testament is the general word for washing.

And there are many other traditions that they (the Pharisees) observe, such as the washing (baptizing) of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. (Mark 7:4b)

8.6. IS THERE ONLY ONE SPECIAL WAY TO GET BAPTIZED?

All that is required is water and God's Word, "I baptize you in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." The amount of water used, the location of a Baptism, or the time we're baptized, does not matter. Water can be sprinkled or poured on the person, or the person can be dipped in it; any way is acceptable. Some Christians insist Baptism is only valid if the entire body is immersed in the water. But Jesus never specifically requires immersion; instead, He commands His church to baptize. Jesus showed by His use of the word "baptize" in connection with cleaning up after meals that it can refer to immersion, pouring or sprinkling:

And there are many other traditions that they (the Pharisees) observe, such as the washing (baptizing) of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. (Mark 7:4b)

When they washed (baptized) dining couches, they certainly did not immerse them.

Sponsors, also known as "godparents," are not necessary, but are certainly helpful to the newly baptized person. Sponsors are to help the new Christian (1) grow in his or her faith; (2) understand and use God's Word; and (3) appreciate the many blessing of Baptism. In the case of young children getting baptized, sponsors are witnesses who can attest the child was actually baptized.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does the variety of ways one can baptize or wash focus our attention on the Word of God spoken; rather, than the way in which the water is applied?

- What does that say about the importance of God's Word in this holy act?

8.7. IF BAPTISM IS SO IMPORTANT, WHY IS IT NOT MENTIONED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Baptism is mentioned first in the New Testament in the third chapter of Matthew. Besides, very early in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, God instituted a holy act that was the Old Testament equivalent of Baptism.

Every male descendant of Abraham was to be circumcised when he was eight days old. That act brought them into God's covenant with Abraham and made them God's own children. Jesus bridged circumcision and Baptism by being circumcised when He was eight days old, and baptized when He was around 30.

There are actually some really amazing Old Testament stories that foreshadow God's grace for His people through water Baptism. Here are a few times when God saved his people through water, brought them into a land of promise, and gave them a new name: the **Flood** in Genesis 7; Jacob crossing the **Jabbok River** in Genesis 32; the Israelites crossing the **Red Sea** in Exodus 14; and crossing the **River Jordan** in Joshua 3.

8.8. WHY DO MOST CHRISTIANS BAPTIZE INFANTS?

While some churches object to this, it is the long-standing teaching of the vast majority of Christians.

The Bible gives us four reasons as to why infants should be baptized:

- 1.) Jesus commanded His church to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. Since babies receive citizenship at birth, they are included in the "all nations" Jesus commanded His church to baptize.

(Jesus said) "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20a)

Likewise, the book of Acts records Peter's words on the matter:

And Peter said to them, "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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord calls to Himself." (Acts 2:38-39)

Again, we would certainly consider newborn babies our children.

- 2.) Jesus also especially invited little children to come to Him.

And they were bringing children to Him that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to Me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." (Mark 10:13-15)

Once again, newborn babies certainly qualify as "little children."

- 3.) Babies are sinners who need the forgiveness Baptism offers.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Psalm 51:5)

(We) were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:3b)

- 4.) Since faith is the work of the Holy Spirit, He is able to work faith in a baby.

(Jesus said) "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6)

8.9. DON'T CHILDREN HAVE TO BE OLD ENOUGH TO BELIEVE?

No one, no matter their age, is able to believe on their own. The Bible teaches that if a person has faith, it is always given by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Scripture never refers to an age when a child becomes accountable for his or her sin. For as we saw in the Ephesians 2:3 passage above, "[We] were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

Sin is in all of us (even in the womb): "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). That means all of us are accountable for our sin from the time of conception. The Bible teaches "the wages of sin is death" (see Romans 6:23), and, sadly, babies die. Therefore, Baptism is important for everyone, including infants!

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Baptism offers parents the certainty their babies have been given the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit. Why shouldn't parents want to ensure their babies are baptized at the earliest opportunity?

8.10. IF I WAS BAPTIZED AS A BABY, DO I NEED TO BE RE-BAPTIZED AS AN ADULT?

No! You have been given your name at birth, and it remains with you the rest of your life, right? Well, so does the promise of God upon you at your Baptism; it is with you forever!

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. (Deuteronomy 31:6)

8.11. CAN I BE SAVED WITHOUT BAPTISM?

A famous Church Father of the early Christian church, St. Augustine, once said, "It is not the absence of Baptism that condemns us, but the absence of faith." God makes it clear to us that He wants us to be baptized and to baptize. To argue otherwise would be rejecting God's loving and gracious will for us.

(Jesus said) "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

In the case of babies or young children we baptize first, then teach the faith when they are old enough to understand. In the case of older children and adults, we teach the faith first, then baptize. This is because the Holy Spirit creates saving faith through the Word of God and through Baptism.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What might be some reasons or situations that would make it impossible to baptize a person before he or she dies?

8.12. IS BAPTISM A GET-INTO-HEAVEN-FREE CARD?

Baptism truly brings us Jesus' salvation because of the faith the Holy Spirit creates in us through water and the Word. It is this faith in Jesus Christ that makes us right in God's eyes. If a baptized person rejects the faith and never returns to Jesus Christ, his baptism will not save him.

But while this life continues, God still holds out His offer of salvation through our Baptism—no matter how long ago we were baptized. When God brings us to repentance through His Law and restores our faith in Jesus through the Gospel, our Baptism again joins us to Christ’s death and resurrection. Our sins are removed, and we are God’s children anew.

(Jesus said) “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16)

8.13. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM IN OUR DAILY LIFE?

Thinking about Baptism reminds us that every day our old, sinful nature, with its evil actions and desires, should be drowned by our repentance. Through God’s forgiveness and Baptism, we are daily washed clean and can live new lives of goodness and holiness.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were 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 by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

The name of the game in Baptism is assurance! We can be assured we are saved by God because He says so by the power of His Word!

Closing Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, in Baptism You adopt us as Your own children, brothers and sisters of Your Son Jesus Christ. Keep us in this faith that we may live with You in heaven forever. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.