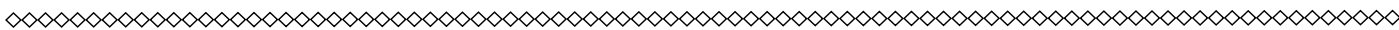




Pastor of the
International
Baptist Church
in Cologne Ger-
many.

Sermon Brief
Text: Matthew 28:16-20
Title: God's Church: Baptized Believers
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION¹

Today I want to speak to you about the role of baptism in the life of a Christian and for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We continue the emphasis begun two Sundays ago on God's church and today focus on the second part of how to join the church. Last Sunday we focused on confession of faith as essential to becoming a part of a Christian congregation. From numerous scripture texts and the teachings of the apostles, one clearly understands that believer's baptism plays an important role in that confession of faith.



From Acts 2:41 we clearly understand that those who accepted Peter's words to repent and believe in Jesus were baptized and "there was added on that day about three thousand lives" to the emerging Christian congregation in Jerusalem. Then in Acts 2:47, "the Lord was adding to the group daily those who were being saved."

When John the Baptist suddenly appeared on the scene at the beginning of the Christian era, he was requiring those who repented of their sins to be baptized by immersion in water ([Matthew 3:1-12](#)). Jesus himself submitted to John's baptism ([Matthew 3:13-17](#)), and later commissioned his disciples to baptize all who as new disciples confessed faith in Him (cf. [Matthew 28:16-20](#)). Open your Bibles with me to these last verses in the Gospel of Matthew:²

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

From that point on Christian churches began the practice of baptism that continues to our day. Jesus' words to his disciples make it clear that he expects every person becoming a disciple to be baptized.

Where did this practice originate? The roots of Christian baptism lay somewhat obscured in the ancient past. Although no such practice of baptism existed in the OT, the Israelite Law did make extensive use of water based rituals of purification and cleansing. This tradition seems to have played some formative role in the later practice of Jewish proselyte baptism that emerged during the Jewish Diaspora after the end of the OT era.³

During the 400 year period between the Old and New Testaments, growing numbers of non-Jews were attracted to the high moral standards taught by Jews through their religion based on the OT Law. From every indication available in ancient sources, the practice of baptizing these Gentile converts arose as a symbol of their purification from their previous non-Jewish way of living, considered to be sinful and pagan. It evidently was bundled together with the more important requirements of circumcision and a formal commitment to obey the Torah of God. The evidence points toward this as a common practice but not as a universally adhered to pattern among the various groups of Jews. Thus baptism was a practice for non-Jews converting to Judaism, and served as a formal indication of their conversion to Judaism.

At the beginning of the Christian era, we first see John the Baptist demanding baptism from Jews who

¹Much of the Introduction material is taken from "Baptism Study Guide" by Lorin L. Cranford at <http://cranfordville.com/IBC%20Cologne/BaptismStudyGuide.pdf>. This pamphlet is used to help prepare baptismal candidates for their baptism at the International Baptist Church of Cologne Germany.

²<28:16> Οἱ δὲ ἕνδεκα μαθηταὶ ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν εἰς τὸ ὄρος οὗ ἐτάξατο αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, <28:17> καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίσασαν. <28:18> καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς. <28:19> πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, <28:20> διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

³Ritual cleansings of the body were well established in Torah (e.g., Exod. 29:4; 30:17–21; 40:30–33; Lev. 17:15–16; Deut. 21:6), as throughout the ancient Near East. Naaman was told to wash seven times in the Jordan to be healed (2 Kgs. 5:10). Later, lustration played a central role at Qumran. Footwashing was used by Jesus as an example of his humility and of the need for submission and servanthood by his followers (John 13:2–20)." (from David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 147.)

publicly confessed and repented from their sins. “John’s practice added to proselyte baptism a still stronger emphasis on repentance, a firm background of moral teaching ([Luke 3:3,10-14,33](#)), and initiation into a community (“John’s disciples”) preparing for Messiah’s advent (Luke 3:16-17).”⁴



In early Christianity, baptism emerges as one of two “ordinances” that was practiced: the Lord’s Supper and baptism. New converts to Christianity were baptized upon the confession of Christ as Lord as an initial activity of becoming a Christian. R.E.O. White well summarizes the practice as recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts:⁵

Luke’s account of apostolic baptism assumes the rite’s original association with repentance and remission (Acts 2:38), with washing away sin (22:16), and with admission to the religious community. But his emphasis falls on baptism’s new features. Though the gospel era dates from the baptism John preached (1:22; 10:37), Christian baptism, as conferring the Holy Spirit, is contrasted with John’s (attributed to John in each Gospel, to Jesus at Acts 1:5; 11:16). This is emphasized at 18:25 and 19:1-7, and leads to rebaptism with water and the (exceptional) laying on of hands, before the Spirit is conferred. On the other hand, that Cornelius and his friends have received the Spirit becomes Peter’s justification for their subsequent baptism (10:47; 11:17; cf. 8:14-17). No formal pattern of initiation is yet evident: Order varies with circumstances and preparation. But the association of water baptism with Spirit possession gave rise to the curious phrase “baptism in/with Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5).

In nine instances Luke represents baptism as the expected response to hearing and receiving the gospel. In four of these, kinsmen, close friends, or a household hear and respond; at 16:14-15 and 18:8 it is not stated that the household believed.

This response was to the gospel of Jesus, Son of God and Savior, who was crucified, rose again, forgives sins, bestows the Spirit, and will come again as Judge, all summarized succinctly but clearly in baptism in or into the name of Jesus as Christ, Lord, Son of God (8:37). “In the name” implied Jesus’ authority for the rite; “into the name” (8:16; 19:5) indicated passing into Jesus’ ownership, as one “redeemed.” James 2:7 suggests an invocation of Jesus (to be present?); elsewhere, the irrevocable public confession of Christ as Lord (Rom 10:9-13; 14:9; Php 2:11) marks the decisive commitment of the baptized to all the privileges and obligations of Christian life. Such baptismal confession became the germ of later creeds; the trinitarian formulation in Matthew 28:18-20 may well represent an early stage in credal development.

The position of the apostle Paul on baptism is consistent with that found elsewhere in the NT. Again, White provides a helpful summation of the main aspects found in the writings of Paul inside the New Testament:⁶

Thus Paul, baptized within three days of his dramatic conversion, was evidently familiar with the need, despite the Pharisees’ hostility toward it (John 1:24-25). He gives it surprising prominence among essentials that unite the church (Eph 4:4; the Eucharist is not included). He administered, or authorized, baptism throughout his missions, yet would not boast of baptizing anyone and resented baptism being made a badge of partisanship (1 Co 1:13-17). And he assumes that baptism is understood in churches he had not visited (Rome, Colossae).

So, too, Paul assumes the original method of immersion (Rom 6) and the accompanying confession of Christ’s lordship (Rom 10:9-13), which in 1 Corinthians 1:12-13, 6:19-20, and Galatians 3:29, 5:24 clearly implies belonging to Christ. But he adds the idea of being “sealed” with the purchaser’s mark, as property awaiting collection (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 4:30). This “good confession” (1 Tim 6:12) made at baptism responds to Paul’s gospel of a suffering and risen Lord, presented through the gracious initiative of God and offered to faith, trust, and obedience. Paul insists that none are saved by their own good works, not even by the good work of baptism, but only by faith in Christ (Rom 3:20; 4:4-5; Gal 3:2, 11; Eph 2:8).

Paul retained, too, the original interpretation of baptism as entrance to the religious community: “We were all baptized ... into one body” (1 Cor 12:13). Some think that Paul means this by the phrase “baptized into Christ” (Ga 3:27). They understand his description of the Christian as “in Christ” as an ecclesiological formula—the believer is baptized into “the whole Christ,” of which the risen Lord is head and the church is the body. Others interpret “in Christ” as a more individual, mystical relationship. Doubtless Paul would affirm that a true baptism introduced the convert to both privileges.

In the centuries after the apostolic era, the first Christian century, the understanding of baptism experienced profound re-definition, as did most of Christian doctrine. When the prevailing Greek philosophy of the time was merged with the teachings of the New Testament, baptism took on a very different meaning. It gradually came to be viewed as cleansing an infant child of “original sin” and was a ritual done by sprinkling water over the infant a short time after birth. Not until the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s did careful study of the New Testament produce objections to this practice of infant baptism by the Roman Catholic Church in the west and the Orthodox Church in the east. And it wasn’t the reformers such as Luther, Calvin and Zwinglii who made the objections. Much of their understanding of the NT simply continued the prevailing practices of the Roman Catholic Church. The strident call to return to biblical principles of baptism was first heard by the radical reformers, often called the [Anabaptists](#).⁷

⁴from White, [ibid.](#)

⁵from White, [ibid.](#)

⁶from White, [ibid.](#)

⁷The Protestant Reformers inherited a split pattern of infant baptism and later catechesis/confirmation and Communion. They largely got rid of the more “material” features — apart from the water — of the medieval rites of initiation. Lutherans and Anglicans retained the proxy profession of faith by sponsors on behalf of infants, while Calvinists appealed rather to the analogy with circumcision and did not call for the family to “speak for” the child. All the magisterial Reformers emphasized catechism for children at the age of understanding, but it was the Anglicans who retained the strongest form of confirmation as both a personal profession of faith and an imposition of episcopal hands with prayer for the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit. The Roman Catholic Church continued to baptize predominantly infants, with confirmation and First Communion following at a distance and in a sequence that

The history of Baptist understanding and practice of baptism has its roots in the Radical Reformation of the middle to late sixteenth century. Geoffrey Wainwright has provided a helpful summary of this era:⁸

The entire structure of Christendom, whether in its Catholic or in its Protestant forms, was called into question by the more radical reformers. Their intended return to primitive Christianity included baptism only on personal profession of faith. (They were able to restore initial catechesis to its prebaptismal place.) Called Anabaptists by others, they claimed not to be rebaptizing but to be administering the first authentic baptism to people who had received the rite in infancy. From continental Europe and from Britain, “believer-baptists” spread to North America, where they have thrived (=> Baptists; Mennonites). While a position of baptism solely on personal profession of faith has sometimes been accused by magisterial Protestantism of perennial => Pelagianism and modern => individualism, a number of otherwise unlikely 20th-century theologians have shown sympathy with it (e.g., K. Barth, E. Brunner, E. Jüngel, J. Moltmann).



Although at times differing over whether sprinkling or immersion is the correct mode of baptizing, [Baptists](#) since the early 1600s have seldom ever differed over the contention that the NT teaches baptism as a symbolic action affirming one’s confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. As such it stands as a prerequisite for membership in a local congregation of Baptist believers. Since the local congregation exclusively controls its membership, rather than a pastor or a denominational organization. Baptism thus stands as a “church ordinance” to be administered by ordained ministers only through authorization of the church body itself.

From [Matthew 28:16-20](#), I want to stress two primary aspects about believer’s baptism.

BODY

I. Making disciples involves baptizing them according to Jesus’ demands.

A foundation element in Jesus’ instruction to the Twelve at the close of the gospel account is “[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.](#)” The command is to make disciples (μαθητεύσατε). A disciples is a believer, one who confesses Jesus Christ publicly as Lord and Savior. His baptism experience becomes his public confession of faith.

Thus for a church to not require believer’s baptism as a necessary action for church membership means that church is not following the instructions of Jesus. It is to deny the very words of Jesus that follow the above command to baptize new disciples: “[and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.](#)” The church of Jesus Christ must therefore insist that before one can become a member of the congregation, that person has to submit to believer’s baptism. Otherwise the church can make no legitimate claim to be obeying its Lord.

This was the insight that came out of the Radical Reformation and the Anabaptist movement of the late 1500s and early 1600s. Early Baptists were persecuted severely in England because of this stand. Many Baptist pastors were imprisoned and some were executed because of this conviction. Until more recent times, persecution of Baptists and Baptist pastors over their insistence on believer’s baptism was fairly common. But the heart of this unbending commitment to believer’s baptism lay in this passage: Jesus commanded the church to baptize those who confess faith in Christ as new disciples. And the church must obey its Lord!



Finally, Jesus’ words, “[And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age,](#)” assume that the emerging church will be obedient to Him so that He can infuse the church with His enabling presence and power. If our church is going to grow and reach people in obedience to Jesus’ command here, then we must have that Divine Presence saturating our entire congregation and our lives. These eleven men were instructed by Jesus to disciple all the nations of the world. Think about it for a moment! Eleven individuals were to win an entire world to Christ. Impossible? Of course, it was impossible humanly speaking. But these apostles were not to depend on their own skills to win that world to faith in Christ. Rather, they were to rely on the empowering presence of Christ to enable them to fulfill their assignment.

My dear people, we are in the early stages of developing some tremendously exciting plans, programs, and organizational structures to prepare the church for major growth. Over the next several weeks you are going to be asked to consider and adopt a new budget, a policy manual specifying leadership positions and responsibilities, new ministry structures for deacons, women, and young people, review and revise the [varied with varying pastoral reasoning over the generations and according to geography.](#)

(From Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leiden, Netherlands: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 1999-<2003), 1:188. S.V., “Baptism” by Geoffrey Wainwright.

⁸Geoffery Wainwright. *ibid.*

church constitution -- among many other things. All of these plans are targeting reaching people and disciplining them. But none of these plans alone can get the job done. Everything rests on the blessing of our Lord and the realization of His promise to be present in our midst. Then -- and only then -- will we be able to move forward as a congregation in growth in both numbers and spiritual development.

Thus we as a church say to the world: come join us. Confess faith in Christ and be baptized.

II. Baptism serves as a confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Implicit in Matthew 28 is the meaning of believer's baptism. Elsewhere in the New Testament, this meaning is more explicit. Baptism is a picture. But a two dimensional picture conveying two things at the same time.

The New Testament language of baptism revolves around a word group from the Greek word: βαπτίζω. A group of Greek words are typically translated as "baptize," "baptism," or "baptizer" in the English New Testament. The verb 'to baptize' comes from the Greek [NT word](#) βαπτίζω and means 'to immerse something underneath.' The [noun](#) βάπτισμα means 'baptism,' and the [personal noun](#) βαπτιστής mean 'baptizer.' Although often debated among Christian groups today, the practice and clearest meaning of these terms suggest that people were baptized in early Christianity by being immersed underneath water.⁹ Because no such ritual was practiced by the Israelites during the OT era, the terminology is only found in the New Testament.

Thus baptism is properly done only by immersion, and with the assistance of an ordained minister of the gospel. Only then can the full picture or symbolical significance of baptism be conveyed to those watching.

The first level of the picture in baptism relates to the believer's confession of faith in Jesus. In Romans 6:3-8, the apostle Paul declares:

3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For whoever has died is freed from sin. 8 But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Baptism is a public declaration by believers that their salvation experience is solely based on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Salvation comes no other way. Our baptism is expressive of their faith commitment that brings us into deep spiritual union with Christ. In this identification with Jesus' death and resurrection, we experience the transformation of life that enables us to serve and grow our Lord. Thus in baptism we declare: Jesus died for my sins, and through being raised from the dead I have new life.!

The second level of the picture in baptism relates to the believer's own life. Not only does baptism picture the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, it pictures the same thing in the life of the believer. Baptism declares outwardly what has taken place inwardly down inside the individual at conversion. In Col. 2:11-12, Paul declares, "In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." Going down under the water affirms the death of the believer to self and sinful living. Coming up out of the water declares the new spiritual life given to the believer by God in conversion. Thus when you are baptized, you say to all the world, "I have changed! My old pre-Christian life is dead and buried forever. Now I'm a new person in Christ with a brand new life."

The background of water purification rites in ancient Judaism helps define the role of water in baptism. Baptism in water links the significance of cleansing from sin with the symbolical meaning of baptism. When we come to Christ as believers, we are sinners before God. And as sinners we are not able to stand before a holy God. Our sin must be taken away if we are to find acceptance by God. That cleansing from sin can only take place in faith commitment to Christ. Our baptism affirms that indeed it has happened, and that now we are clean before God. John the Baptist's use of baptism laid the foundation, as Mark 1:4 asserts: "John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." We must repent from our sins if we want God's forgiveness. Baptism is the first step of asserting that we are turning away from sinful living. Thus Peter proclaimed to the people in the Jerusalem temple (Acts 3:19): "Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,..." Our baptism shouts out to the world, "I have repented; I have turned to God! Now I'm forgiven and my sins have been washed away."

Unlike Jewish proselyte baptism, which was self-baptism, Christian baptism is administered by another person. This model was first established by John the Baptist. During Christ's ministry, and through the first decades of



⁹A [concordance search](#) of the root word "bapti*" in the NRSV reveals some 89 instances of the words 'baptize,' 'baptism,' and 'baptizer' in the New Testament. The word group is not found in the Old Testament.

apostolic Christianity, the apostles baptized those who came to Jesus in faith.¹⁰ The implication of this for today is to affirm baptism as an ordinance of the church. The administering of baptism by an ordained minister links baptism to church membership and involvement. So baptism is a church matter. In the four hundred year history of Baptists, our insistence of believer's baptism has always been connected to baptism being administered by the church having authorized the pastor to perform it on individuals confessing faith and thereby coming into membership in the local congregation. The transferring of church membership in Baptist tradition rests in part on the former church affirming to the new congregation that the individual has confessed faith in Christ and has been scripturally baptized. This is an important part of the "Letter of Recommendation" given to the new congregation where the person has joined.

Thus we as a congregation say to you considering becoming a Christian, "Confess faith in Christ. Then submit to believer's baptism. It is a marvelous picture, a dramatic declaration, of your conversion and your confession of faith in Christ.

CONCLUSION

Christian baptism. Jesus taught His disciples to practice it. It proclaims the believer's faith in Christ in a wonderful manner. Scripturally it should be done through immersion in water, if the picture is to have correct meaning. Historically Baptists stand with other Protestant groups who insist on believer's baptism as a requirement for membership in a local congregation. Our church constitution mandates baptism as a requirement for membership in this church.

We therefore invite you to come today to confess faith in Christ and to be baptized.



¹⁰John 4:1-3 (NRSV): "Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John' — although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized — he left Judea and started back to Galilee."