

February 27, 2005 by Steve Brandon



Water Baptism

(Various)

- Baptism is by Immersion.**
- Baptism is for Repentance.**
- Baptism is Linked with Forgiveness.**
- Baptism is for Believers.**
- Baptism Should Come Quickly After Belief.**

I know of many failures in my ministry . I know of many things that I have done, that I shouldn't have done. I know of many things that I have said, that I shouldn't have said. I know of many things that I should have done, but didn't. I know of phone calls that I should have made, but didn't. I know of notes that I should have written, but didn't. I am under no delusion that I have it all figured out. In recent days, I have been fully aware of my many deficiencies in preaching. The longer I preach, the more discouraged I am at my preaching. I trust that I am making progress in it, but it often doesn't feel like it to me.

One of the things the Lord has impressed upon my heart regarding my preaching is my own lack of emphasis upon baptism. I believe that I speak much of the grace of God. I believe that I speak much about glories of Christ. I believe that I speak much about the importance of repentance and faith. I believe that I speak much about the need to live righteously. I believe that I speak to your hearts. Yet, one area that I don't think that I have placed enough importance upon is Christian baptism.

Now, I do believe that there is some justification for some of this. It comes from the pen of Paul. He wrote in 1 Cor. 1:17, "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Paul saw baptism and preaching of the gospel as different things. It was the gospel that was of major importance. Baptism was of minor importance to him. It's not that baptism was of no importance to Paul. It's simply that the physical act of baptism ought not to receive the priority of attention that the gospel does. You can see this reflected in His epistles. They are covered from beginning to end with references to Christ and His work on the cross. And yet, mentions baptism in only 6 of his 85 chapters that he wrote, most often in passing.

Having said that, let me also affirm that baptism ought not to be neglected. It is not to be ignored. When Jesus gave His final instructions to His disciples, He mentioned baptism as crucial to this process. His instructions are found in Matthew 28, in what we call, "The Great Commission." It was the final instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples while upon the earth. It gives us our marching orders. He said, ...

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20).

My task as a pastor, and our task as a church is to make disciples of all the nations. Certainly, this phrase, "baptizing them" must include everything surrounding the entire conversion process. It includes, proclaiming the gospel, calling people to repent and to believe the gospel, seeing people confess their sins, baptizing them in water, and receiving them into the fellowship of the church. And once they are converted, it is then our task to teach them to observe all that Jesus commands (verse 20).

Though preaching the gospel is different than baptism, it is still important for us.

And so, this morning, I would like to deal with Christian Baptism. By Christian Baptism, I mean what might easily be described as "water baptism." My plan is to deal with all of the texts in the New Testament that relate to water baptism. I want to survey these Biblical texts and make some observations along the way. I don't have a formal outline this morning, but I will highlight for you five key truths about baptism. We are going to cover lots of ground this morning, so get ready to flip through your Bibles.

This message will be very pertinent for those of you who have never been baptized. If this is you, you will be challenged this morning. My aim is to press upon you the overwhelming Biblical evidence for your need to be baptized, that you will desire to be baptized. For those of you who have been baptized, I trust that my message this morning will be edifying to you as well, as you listen to the accounts of those in the scripture who were converted. I trust that you will also be strengthened in your Biblical understand of baptism. In this one sermon, I certainly won't answer all of the question that there are to be answered regarding baptism, but I plan on giving us all a Biblical grid through which we can sift these things.

Any discussion about New Testament baptism ought to start with the baptism of John the Baptist. It was his baptism that set a precedent for Christian baptism. (In a moment, I'll show you what I mean). We first encounter John the Baptist in Matthew 3. Matthew records the following:

Matthew 3:4-11

Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Let's make a few observations. The location of his baptism was outside, in the Jordan River. He went where water was in abundance. In verse 11, John said that he baptizes "with water." You could easily translate that "in water." These verses help to give us an idea of what John was doing. John was in the river, with the current rushing around his legs. People were coming to him and he was baptizing them "in water."

I believe that this means that John was receiving these people, and completely immersing them in the water. In fact, look at verse 16, which describes in detail the baptism of Jesus, "after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him." The clear sense of this is that Jesus came up, out of the water. I believe that Jesus was completely submerged in the river, and came up out of the water. John's baptism was by immersion. Baptism is by Immersion.

Not only is this clear from the straightforward reading of this passage, but it is also abundantly clear from the meaning of the word, "baptism." Without a doubt, "baptism" mean "immersion." It doesn't mean, "sprinkling." It means, "completely overwhelmed and submerged," which is exactly what John was doing in the Jordan river with those who came to him.

In this passage in Matthew, the meaning of his baptism is made clear. Verse 6 says that John baptized those who were coming to him "as they confessed their sins." In other words, John didn't simply baptize everyone who came to him. He baptized those who came humbly and repentantly, willing to confess their sins. Indeed, confession of sins was a crucial ingredient to entire process of John's baptism.

A baptism without confession is like a basketball game without a ball. If you don't have the ball, you can't play the game. You can imagine that you make a fade-away jumper at the buzzer to win the game, but you aren't playing. A baptism without confession is like purchasing an item without money. If you don't have the money, you can't purchase the item.

In fact, those who tried to come for baptism without confession were chastised and ultimately turned away. This is what John the Baptist did. The Pharisees and Sadducees were "coming for baptism" (verse 7). They were coming with the intention of being baptized. But, John turned them away, calling them a "brood of vipers" (verse 7). This wasn't a kind term of endearment. This was a harsh rebuke. In verse 8, John puts it all on the table, ... "Bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance" (verse 8). Though these Pharisees and Sadducees wanted to be baptized by John, he refused to do so, because they weren't repentant. John knew this because there was no fruit in their lives.

Some have argued that the text doesn't explicitly say that they weren't baptized by John. This is technically true. But the thrust of the text appears to be that John would refuse their baptism. Indeed, you can read Luke 7:30, where it says clearly that the Pharisees had not been baptized by John.

John's baptism was for repentance. This is verbatim what John says in verse 11, "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance." Baptism is for Repentance.

The account that Mark and Luke give of John's baptism line up perfectly with the picture that we get from Matthew. John adds a few details that are worthy of our attention. In John 1, we see John under the inquisition of the Pharisees. They were trying to figure him out. They were asking him whether or not he was the Christ. When John denied it, they asked him whether or not he was Elijah or "the Prophet." Each time, John denied it. He simply said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" John was quoting from Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, which indicate that before Messiah would come, there would be one who would first prepare the way. This was John: He was preparing the way.

I want for you to take notice of verse 25, where they asked John, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" From this verse, I simply want to make the observation that baptism was understood by the Pharisees. It wasn't some sort of ritual that John simply made up. Nor did it come from nowhere. In the Jewish mindset was this idea that an outward cleaning was representative of an inward renewal. In fact, when a Jewish worshiper would approach the temple, they would often take a ceremonial bath before coming to the temple. Today, if you would travel to see the ruins of the temple, you would see several of these baths called Mikvehs. The worshiper would descend into these baths from one door and come out of these baths from another door. This was to cleanse them for their worship.

When John the Baptist was in the Jordan River baptizing those who were coming to him, these Pharisees knew that it was a sign of cleansing and renewal, as prophesied in Ezekiel 36, where the Lord talked about washing them with water in the New Covenant. As they saw that there was confession and repentance, they knew that this was connected somehow with the coming of the Messiah. They were even disturbed that John would be baptizing if he wasn't the Messiah. They knew that when Messiah came, there would be a baptism. This Messianic baptism came in John 3.

After the discussion that Jesus had with Nicodemus, we read, "After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them baptizing" (verse 22). John has been on the scene baptizing. And now, Jesus comes on the scene

doing the same thing that John had done. There is seemingly no distinction made between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus. We can only presume that they were doing the same thing.

In John 4, we read another comparison between Jesus and John, "When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee" (John 4:1-3). There is only one mention of a distinction between what John was doing and what Jesus was doing. When John baptized, he was the one doing it. But, when Jesus baptized, it was His disciples that did it.

We can only presume that everything else was the same. It was the same in procedure and purpose. If the baptism of Jesus had been different than the baptism of John (sprinkling, rather than immersion), I believe that it would have been mentioned. If Jesus was baptizing indiscriminately all who were coming (even those who came without repentance), I believe that it would have been mentioned. But, there is no distinction. The baptism of Jesus was like the baptism of John. Notice that those whom Jesus was baptizing were becoming His disciples. Certainly, repentance is implied, for now disciple of Christ ever comes to Him without repentance.

Notice also back in chapter 3, verse 23, we see the mode of baptism described once again. In this verse, we read that John had moved on to another location to carry on his baptizing ministry. He had moved on to Aenon near Salim, "because there was much water there." In other words, you need much water to be baptized. The implication is clearly immersion. Jesus and His disciples were baptizing people by immersion for repentance. Baptism is by Immersion. Baptism is for Repentance.

With respect to further data regarding baptism, the gospel writers are fairly silent. There are a few more references to John's baptism. But, they simply mention his baptism, to use as a description of his ministry (Matt. 21:25; Mark 11:30; Luke 20:4). In those verses, Jesus simply asked the Pharisees, "was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men?" Also, there are a few references to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which isn't our focus this morning (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). Our focus this morning regards water baptism. There are a few other usages of the word, "baptism," but none of them refer to water baptism (Mark 10:38-39). In these verses, Jesus says to those wanting prominence in the kingdom of heaven, "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? Or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?" Water baptism is in view here, but rather, an overwhelming persecution that would end in death.

The topic of baptism comes up once again at the very end of the ministry of Jesus (i.e. in Matthew 28:19), which we have seen already. I simply want to add one additional comment regarding Jesus' command to baptize. When Jesus speaks of baptism, you must have in your mind the baptizing that John was doing, as well as the baptism that Jesus was doing. When Jesus tells His disciples to make disciples of all the nations by going, baptizing and teaching, you must understand this in reference to the ministry of John and Jesus, which is exactly what the early church did. The early church understood Jesus' words very clearly. We find water baptism being mentioned in the book of Acts far more than any other book. Baptism took a prominent role in the life of the early church.

The first time that we see the apostles baptizing anybody is in Acts 2. Perhaps you remember what took place on the day of Pentecost. The baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) came upon the church for the first time. The disciples "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance" (Acts 1:4). These were languages that they didn't know, but that others understood. It caused a great commotion and gave Peter an opportunity to preach the gospel to these people in Jerusalem. Jesus told the Jews there that they had murdered their Messiah. The summary of the message comes in verse 36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified." Pierced to the heart, they knew that they had done a very bad thing. They said (in verse 37), "What shall we do?" Peter's answer comes in verse 38, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Central to the message of Peter was baptism.

In fact, some people have taken this verse to mean that you must be baptized to be saved. They say, "Here it is! You must 'be baptized ... for the forgiveness of your sins.'" I don't believe this verse is teaching that you must be baptized to be forgiven of your sin. We have already seen in 1 Corinthians 1, how Paul viewed the gospel and baptism as two distinct, different things. Certainly, Paul's ministry was all about seeing people repent from their sin and saved from the wrath to come. He understood that it was faith in the gospel that accomplished this, and not baptism, "for Christ did not send [him] to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17). Surely, baptism isn't necessary to salvation, for why would Paul preach only a partial message.

But, some will say, "That's well and good, but look at what Peter said! He said, 'Let each of you be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins.' Isn't that clear? You need to be baptized to be saved!" I respond by saying that the best way to understand this is to remember how John described his baptism. He said that he baptized "in water for repentance" (Matt. 3:11). In no way did John the Baptist mean that your baptism give you repentance. Remember, he turned away those who hadn't repented. Rather, John was saying that "in light of repentance, he baptized." I believe that the similar sense ought to be taken here in Acts 2:38, "in light of your forgiveness (which comes through repentance), you should be baptized."

Furthermore, you need to understand Acts 2:38 in light of the many, many passages in the New Testament that teach that your forgiveness comes by grace alone through faith. In the vast majority of these passages, baptism is not even mentioned. Consider the following verses:

Ephesians 2:8, 9, "For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

Titus 3:5, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy."

1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Should baptism be necessary for forgiveness, then each of these verses are only presenting a part of the truth. If baptism was necessary to the forgiveness of sins, you ought to expect for it come up more than it does. In fact, the next time Peter preaches, he puts upon those to whom he is preaching no requirements of baptism for forgiveness. He simply says in Acts 3:19, "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away." So, I don't believe that you need to be baptized to have your sins forgiven.

However, don't lose the weight of this close connection between baptism and forgiveness. We ought to keep them separated. But, we ought not to separate them too much. Certainly, I believe that you don't need to be baptized to be forgiven. The water doesn't wash away your sin. But, let's not so separate what the apostles kept close together. My point is simply that Baptism is Linked with Forgiveness. Baptism should be closely related to forgiveness.

In Mark 16:16 we read, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." Notice how closely linked baptism is with salvation. But, notice how one's ultimate condemnation comes about because of disbelief, not because of a lack of baptism.

If baptism means anything, it means that you have been cleansed from your sins! Water is a washing agent. The picture is that of a purified soul. Peter communicated this close connection in his epistle. He wrote, "Baptism now saves you!" (1 Pet. 3:21). Lest you think that he is talking about baptismal regeneration, he added some more words. He said, "Baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." In other words, it's not the water that makes you clean, it is your appeal to God for a good conscience that makes you clean. Certainly, this is speaking about your repentance and your plea to God for forgiveness. And in the mind of Peter, this takes place in baptism, so that Peter can say, "Baptism now saves you." You cannot deny that there is a link between baptism and salvation.

Furthermore, you should notice that every single time that Paul refers to baptism, he links it to conversion. In Romans 6, Paul says, "How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (verses 3-5). Do you see what Paul is doing? He is equating the dying to sin with baptism. Paul says, "When you were baptized, you died to sin."

There are many who will take these words in Romans 6 and say that Paul isn't speaking about water baptism, but rather that he is talking about spirit baptism. They say that Paul is talking about conversion and that there is no water in these verses. That may well be the case, and pushed against the wall, it's what I believe. Their argument is helped in 1 Corinthians 12:13, where Paul says that "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." However, I'm not so ready to make this huge distinction between conversion and water baptism that many will make. Because, when Paul speaks of baptism in this verse, His words fit the picture of water baptism completely. He pictures dying in the water and being raised out of the water to walk in newness of life. I believe that Paul could speak this way, because his experience was that those who were converted were baptized so quickly thereafter, that their water baptism became inseparably linked to their conversion.

I believe that the key in this is that genuine faith is an obedient faith. This is what James teaches. He says, "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). That "faith" that doesn't obey is an ill-founded faith. Baptism is an act of obedience. Those who want to obey will be baptized. In that sense, their baptism becomes the picture of them dying in Christ.

Paul refers to water baptism on two other occasions in his writings (with the possible exception of 1 Cor. 15:29). They make the same connection between baptism and salvation. In Galatians 3:27, Paul wrote, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." In Colossians 2:11-12, Paul wrote, "In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." My point is simply this: Baptism should be closely related to forgiveness. Baptism is Linked with Forgiveness.

I know the danger in saying these things. For, many will have the tendency to be superstitious, viewing the water as some type of magic water, which is able to wash away sins. This is surely wrong, for the Bible clearly speaks of faith in Christ as the only thing that will wash away your sins. To protect against this danger, there have been many well-intentioned efforts to keep them far away from each other. And yet, we must see the close link in which the Bible places them.

We also learn from Acts 2 that only those who believed were baptized. Look down in verse 41, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized;" Baptism isn't for anybody and for everybody. Baptism is for those who have heard the gospel and have believed the gospel. Baptism is for those who have confessed their sin, repented of their sin, and cried out to the Lord to save them. Baptism is for those who have come to faith in Christ. Baptism is for Believers.

As we continue on through Acts, we are going to see that this is always the pattern. It is always belief then baptism. Belief, then baptism. Belief, then baptism. Closely related to this point is this: Baptism Should Come Quickly After Belief. Those who come to faith should be baptized. Time shouldn't linger on. In Acts 2, this is exactly what happened. Let's finish reading verse 41, "and there were added that day about three thousand souls." The same day that Peter preached was the same day that the people were baptized. There weren't long, intervening periods of time between faith and baptism. It was short. In this case, it was the same day.

In our society today, with baptism taking a back seat in many churches, the act of baptism often comes years after one has been converted. As a pastor, and as a church, we ought to work on reducing that time. I know the difficulties in the process, especially when dealing with children. For many children, they can never remember a time in which they didn't believe the gospel. When ought they to be baptized? (That's a good question. I hope to answer it at the end of my message).

For many new converts, they need to be taught what baptism is and what it means. These who were converted on the day of Pentecost knew full well what baptism meant. It was ingrained into their culture. For years, they had come to the temple and washed in the mikveh. And now, to be told that they needed to be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ." They knew what this meant. It didn't take them long to understand what was required of them. And so, new converts should be taught about baptism. But, this shouldn't take years. It shouldn't take months. It might take only an hour, listening to someone explain from the Bible what baptism is.

As a pastor, I know the tension between seeing people baptized right away, without discerning the authenticity of their repentance, and giving it some time to see if their repentance is real. Too many people start out with immediate joy, but their faith "is only temporary" (Matt. 13:20). Too many people "fall away ... when affliction or persecution arises because of the word" (Matt. 13:21). How many people are on this planet who have been baptized, but possess no real faith today. How many people are there who have a false assurance of their salvation based upon a hasty baptism. In these cases, the church is filling the world with those who are trusting in their baptism for their salvation, which they will find someday is a vain hope.

But, such a thing took place in the lives of the apostles. We see this in Acts 8. This chapter begins by describing the scattering that took place as a result of the persecution that arose as a result of Stephen's death. Philip had gone down to the city of Samaria, preaching and performing great signs. Let's pick up the story in verse 9,

"Now there was a certain man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city, and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts" (Acts 8:9-11).

Here was a witch doctor, who used to use the spirits for his own benefit. As he did these mighty powers, people respected him and looked to him for their help. And along comes Philip, "But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike" (Acts 8:12).

Let me point out again that only those who believed were baptized. They believed Philip and were baptized. Baptism is for Believers. And notice who it was that was being baptized. It was the men and women who were being baptized. There is no explicit mention of children or infants in this passage. But, there was explicit mention of men and women, which gives us a hint as to some sort of maturity that is needed to be baptized.

Then shocking thing comes in verse 13, "And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip; and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed." This magic man, who dealt in the cult believed the things that Philip was preaching. And so, Philip baptized him! But, we get a bit of an understanding about his man. He was more interested in the spiritual power than he was about Christ. For when they began to receive the Holy Spirit, verse 18 begins the story, ...

18 - when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me" (Acts 8:18-24).

Now, it's difficult to know exactly what ever happened to Simon. I tend to think that the man was a charlatan all the way. I believe that he was only in it for the power that he could receive. I believe that this is the point of why Luke recorded verses 9-10 for us. From the beginning he loved spiritual power.

The point that I want for you to see here this morning is that the apostles baptized him long before any of his true colors began to shine through. They simply took him for his word. He said that he believed, and so they baptized him. Which illustrates the point that Baptism Should Come Quickly After Belief.

We see this same thing take place with the Ethiopian eunuch later in chapter 8. Perhaps you remember that he was from Ethiopia, but he came to Jerusalem to worship. He was sitting in his chariot, reading the prophet Isaiah and was confused. The passage that he was reading is found in verses 32-33, "He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He does not open His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away; Who shall relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth." (These verses come from Isaiah 53:7-8).

In verse 34 the eunuch answered Philip and said, "'Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?'" And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. You can only imagine what Philip told this eunuch, exactly. But, it's pretty easy to imagine him telling Philip of how Jesus fulfilled each of these thing that he was reading. Jesus was the lamb of God, who was silent before those who killed him. Jesus was taken way in humiliation.

Perhaps Philip told the eunuch to back up one verse, which reads, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has cause the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Is. 53:6). From this verse, Philip could easily have spoken about the atoning work of Christ on the cross. He died as a substitute for sin. Our iniquity falls on Him. Perhaps Philip told the eunuch to look forward a few verses to verse 11, "As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied;" From this verse, Philip could easily have spoken about the resurrection of Jesus. He saw what took place and was satisfied, because He was raised from the dead.

From that point, he could have spoken about many other things about Jesus. He could have spoken of the many miraculous things that Jesus did to demonstrate that he was Messiah. He could have spoken of the life of Jesus, how he was perfect and sinless. He could have spoken of other passages of scripture that clearly point to Christ, such as Psalm 22 or Psalm 110 or 2 Samuel 7 or Deuteronomy 18 or Isaiah 7:14 or Genesis 3:15.

We don't know exactly what he said. But, we do know that he did speak about baptism with this eunuch. We know this because of his reaction. He said,

"Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" Philip then replied, "If you believe with all your heart you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him (Acts 8:36-38).

My point is this: Baptism Should Come Quickly After Belief. Before the Ethiopian eunuch finished his ride in the chariot, he believed in Christ and understood his own need to be baptized. We also see in this story that only those who believed were baptized. Philip didn't baptize the eunuch first. He baptized him after he came to faith in Christ! is for Believers. We also see the mode of baptism. Anyone who travels in the desert carries water. Certainly, they had enough water in the chariot to sprinkle this man. But, they needed a bit more to immerse the man, which they did. We read that ... "they went down into the water" (verse 38). And verse 39 speaks about how they "came up out of the water." I believe that this speaks clearly of immersion. Baptism is by Immersion.

The next time that we see baptism in the book of Acts comes in chapter 9, verse 18. It's the story of the conversion of Saul. He was on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians (verse 3). A big light shines in the sky and blinds him (verse 8). After three days of blindness (verse 9), a man named Ananias came to him and spoke with him and opened his eyes (verse 17). We read in verse 18, "Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized." He changed his name and became the great apostle Paul, who wrote a quarter of the New Testament. Later in Acts 22:16, Paul gives a fuller description of what took place. Ananias called on Paul not to delay? He said, "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." His pattern was exactly as we have seen throughout all of the New Testament. He was baptized quickly after coming to faith. Baptism Should Come Quickly After Belief.

You also see a close connection between baptism and forgiveness. Baptism is Linked with Forgiveness. There is so close a connection that many use this verse again to teach that you need to be baptized to be saved. However, notice what is washing away Paul's sins. It is the "calling on His name" that wipes away the sin, not the baptism itself.

The next time that we see baptism in the book of Acts comes in chapter 10. This is the story of the conversion of Cornelius and his friends. After Peter preached the gospel, we read in verse 44 that the Holy Spirit fell upon those who were listening to the message. They were speaking in tongues and exalting God (verse 46). In verse 47, Peter says, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:47-48). These people believed and were quickly baptized. Baptism Should Come Quickly After Belief.

In Acts 16 we find the same pattern. Verses 14 and 15 tell the story of the first convert in Europe. "And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.'" The Lord opened her heart to believe these things. And then, she was baptized.

Now, there are some that will make a big deal of how her household was baptized. My assumption would be, in light of all of the scriptures that we have so far, that her household believed also. This is what we find with the Philippian jailer at the end of this chapter. Paul and Silas had been beaten and thrown in prison (verse 23). Rather than complaining about their harsh treatment, they were "praying and singing hymns of praise to God" in the prison (verse 25). When an earthquake opened the doors and unfastened the chains of all in prison (verse 26), the jailer almost killed himself (verse 27). But Paul told him, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!" (verse 28). Their conduct must have made a great impression upon the jailer, who said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (verse 30). Paul and Silas said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household" (verse 31). Now, look in verse 32, ...

And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household. (Acts 16:32-34).

As in the case of Lydia, his entire household was baptized. But, notice here that we read that his whole household believed. I believe that it is best to take this understanding of the household and assume that this was also the case with Lydia. We see these same things coming up. They believe and then they are quickly baptized, that very night. Baptism Should Come Quickly After Belief.

We have just a few more verses in Acts which speak about baptism. In Acts 18:8 we hear a summary of what took place in Corinth, "Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized." This is the same thing. Belief first, and then baptism quickly afterwards. Baptism Should Come Quickly After Belief.

Turn over to Acts 19. At the beginning of the chapter, we encounter a few disciples who had heard only about the baptism of John, but not the baptism of Jesus. But, when they heard that John was "telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is Jesus," they were baptized in the name of Jesus (in verse 5).

Now, we have just surveyed the entire Biblical teaching on water Baptism! An now, some questions.

What shall we do as a church? I believe that we need to work harder at placing baptism in a more prominent role. One way to do this would be to place an announcement about it in the bulletin, so that every week there is a reminder of its importance for all to see, especially for those visiting among us who have never been baptized. Perhaps we can also make this sermon freely available, so that anyone who has questions about baptism can get them answered quickly.

Furthermore, we need to work on reducing the time between conversion and baptism. I have been exposed to a few churches in recent days that have called people to obey the Lord right now in baptism. They have prepared tanks of water for people. These pastors have said, "If you are a believer in Christ, but have never been baptized, come right now and profess your faith and be baptized! If you try to object by reasoning, 'But I didn't bring a towel!' Then go home wet! What's more important? Obedience to the Lord or a dry car?" To be honest, this practice is something that scares me a bit. But, then again, there's another part of me that thinks that it is right.

Practically, it's more difficult for us to do this, as we are currently renting a facility without a baptismal font. But, we do have relationships with other churches in town where we can use their buildings for baptisms. We also can be creative in these things. John the Baptist baptized people outside. We can just as easily baptize in a pool or in a river. So, as a church, let's work on reducing the time between conversion and baptism. When someone comes to faith, let's work at baptizing them quickly.

What about infants? Well, I have surveyed every Biblical passage there is on water baptism. Nowhere is the baptism of infants to be found. Those who baptize infants do so from a theological framework, which sees the New Testament as a continuation of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, you came into the covenant by birth, and thus, babies were circumcised. They say that in the New Testament, it is the same! You get into the covenant by birth (if you are the offspring of believing parents).

But, entrance into the New Covenant is different than entrance into the Old Covenant. It's not by birth. It's by faith. And that's why the sign of entrance is different. Today, it is belief, and then baptism. Now, regardless of one's views on baptism, we must be gracious to those who disagree. Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:17. Baptism (and its mode) isn't the major issue. Belief in Christ is the major issue.

There are two types of people who believe in infant baptism. The first is the uneducated. I have met some who were convinced that infant baptism is in the Bible. For these types of people, we ought to explain to them what the Bible teaches, to take them out of their ignorance. The second type of person who believes in infant baptism is the one who has thought through the issue. They have come to a theological understanding of the nature of the covenant that God has with us. With a clear conscience before God, through a thorough understanding of the Scripture, they have come to believe that infants ought to be baptized. For these types, we ought to understand that they simply view this matter differently. It's not a matter of ignorance. In fact, there are many, many theologians who hold to this view who are far smarter than I am and know the Scriptures far better than I ever hope to know them. We ought not to press them to cross their conscience in this regard (i.e. like insisting on being baptized as a believer before being able to join the church).

What about children? The Bible is just as silent regarding the baptism of children as it is the baptism of infants. The only time that the ages of those who are baptized is mentioned is in Acts 8:12, where we read, "They were being baptized, men and women alike." In this instance, children are explicitly left out. Under the ministry of Philip, children weren't being baptized. I believe that this speaks of a level of maturity that we ought to hold to before one is baptized.

However, we do see households coming to faith. We do see households being baptized. The question then comes, who is in the household? A typical household might contain a father, a mother, some children, and some servants, perhaps. I believe that it is reasonable to believe that children were in these households who were baptized, for a "household" without children is difficult to call a "household." To be sure, we have no sense given to us of their age, but we do know that all who were in the house believed. Thus, I believe that a child old enough to believe is old enough to be baptized.

Regarding the baptism of children, I would put much of this responsibility upon you parents. You know your children better than I do. First of all, you need to realize that children have a degree of gullibility. A Sunday School teacher can easily manipulate most young children into praying a prayer that asks Jesus into their heart. You also can easily get your child to pray most any prayer and to assert to any confession. Such affirmations are not affirmations of saving faith. They are repetitions of a teacher.

At some point, each of your children will reach a level of maturity (Acts 8:12), where your child will be old enough to believe and to articulate his or her faith. At some point they will reach an age where they can communicate how Christ has changed their life and how they love Jesus. There will be a time when your child experiences and evidences a reality of faith, where you will be able to see that their faith is real. Perhaps they don't understand everything about the Christian life, but their responses to the world around them is Christlike (i.e. humble, submissive, repentant, ...). You see evidences of them having been converted. At some point, your child will understand what baptism is and what baptism is not. There may well come a time in which your child will want to be baptized. They may begin to argue with you, "Dad! I believe in Jesus. He tells me to be baptized. I want to be baptized. Why can't I be baptized?" When they start begging you to be baptized in obedience to Christ, then, by all means, let's baptize your child based upon their own profession of faith.

There is no magical age, but there are these things that we need to weigh: maturity, understanding salvation, and understanding baptism. Perhaps you could go through this sermon with them and talk to them about all of the New Testament passages that talk about baptism. And then, ask them and quiz them to see if they understand what baptism is. And then, perhaps you might even be willing to be involved in actually baptizing your children (as we have had some fathers do at Rock Valley Bible Church).

Surely, the process is difficult. I've not got it all figured out. But when your child can explain salvation, is evidencing salvation, and wants to be baptized because he or she really wants to obey Jesus, let's baptize your children.

What about you? Have you been baptized? "Surely no one can refuse the water ..." (Acts 10:47). "What prevents me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). "And now, why do you delay? Arise and be baptized!" (Acts 22:16).

