

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Lesson Guide
September 14, 2014
"Baptism"

Memory verse:

"and a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17, NIV

Baptism: What is it?

Since this is the second of two lessons on the two Ordinances of the Church, there will be some distinct similarities. This week we will discuss the ordinance of Baptism.

References for Jesus' Baptism and Baptisms in the Early Church: Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 3:23, Acts 2:41-42, Acts 8:35-39, Acts 16:30-33

From Article VII of the Baptist Faith and Message (2000)

"Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper."

Why do we do it?

1. Jesus **commanded** us to. (Mat. 28:19-20)

A quick review from last week's lesson on the ordinance of Communion, or the Lord's Supper: The definition of an ordinance is "an authoritative order or decree." It is not a general commandment about life such as the commandments against murder and theft; it is an instruction for a specific observance, ritual or ceremony, an instruction to take a certain action.

We know that baptism is an important part of being a Christian because it is named specifically as one of the practices to be used in converting and discipling the nations in Jesus' final commands to His followers: the Great Commission.

*"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." (Mat. 28:19-20).*

Being baptized in the name of the Trinity, we identify with God, give evidence of our faith with an outward sign of our inward decision to follow Christ and to trust Him for our salvation. That's a very powerful statement in such a simple but profound action of obedience!

2. To **identify** with Christ . . . (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12)

a. In **Death** and . . . (Romans 6:3)

Christ's great work of salvation cost His life, so if we wish to identify with Him, how can we expect any less. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German theologian says in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him **come and die.**" The death we are called to is death to ourselves (our fleshly desires) and to sin. Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross (a metaphorical instrument of our execution, our death) and follow Him. Our immersion into the water symbolizes that death. However, this death is not anymore final than Christ's literal death on the cross and burial in the tomb. We are also called to identify with Christ...

b. In **Life!** (Romans 6:4-5)

Christ's death was the work He came to do on Earth. He fulfilled every Messianic prophecy. He lived a sinless life, though He was tempted in every way as we are. He endured the agony and shameful death of the Cross, and finished the task He had elected to complete before the foundations of the world were laid. And likewise, at precisely the right moment, He arose from the dead, triumphant and glorified.

When we arise from the water, in the act of baptism, we symbolize not only Christ's victorious resurrection, but our own, through the salvation His grace affords us. Romans 6:4-5 says "*just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.*" In following Christ, in choosing to identify with Him and accept His salvation, we become dead to sin and we too can "*walk in the newness of life.*" (Rom 6:4, KJV)

3. To identify with **the Church.** (1 Corinthians 12:13)

When we follow Christ and are baptized, we not only identify with Him, but with His body, the Church. We are not called to be Lone Ranger Christians. We are not vigilantes, solo acts or privateers in God's Army. No, we are parts of a whole, a family, a body, and without that body, we will wither away. As much as a newborn baby needs his or her family for nourishment, nurturing and protection, a "newly born" Christian needs to connect with his or her spiritual family, and they will crave that sense of identity, common purpose and connection, by God's design.

The Local Church holds believer's baptism as a prerequisite for membership, not because it is some elite country club trying to keep out the riff-raff, but because only those who are willing to identify with Christ (through baptism) are part of the body, and only those who are a part of the body are willing to identify with Christ. The Ethiopian Eunuch is one of the clearest of biblical examples (Acts 8:35-38). No sooner had Philip revealed Christ to the eunuch, the eunuch could not possibly wait any longer to identify with Christ. Philip confirms the eunuch's belief in Christ as the Son of God and promptly baptizes him in a pool of water beside the road, fulfilling the role of welcoming him into the body of Christ and giving him the sense of identity that the new Christian so desired.

Purposes:

Very similar to the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, Believer's Baptism has several spiritual focuses:

1. **Past Focus:** Jesus' baptism identified Him as the Son of God the way our baptism identifies us as His children. Also, Jesus' death, burial and resurrection are recreated symbolically as we participate in Baptism.

2. **Present Focus:** As we continue to make new disciples and baptize them, we demonstrate God's power to change lives for the better in the present. Jesus didn't die to make dirty men clean again; He died to make dead men alive, and that's exactly what He does every day, little by little *"until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He promised long ago through his holy prophets"* (Acts 3:21 NIV).
3. **Future Focus:** Finally, every new disciple and each baptism represents the resurrection power of Christ, not only to redeem us in the past and present, but the sweet promise that we will be resurrected and glorified and live forever in the presence of Christ in His eternal kingdom.

Assurances:

- All believers are united WITH Christ and IN Christ (as His body, the Church!)
- His Resurrection and Eternal Life will be ours one day!!

Your charge is, once again, to remember these assurances this week. Let them renew your peace and confidence and help inspire you to share your faith with others!

What other assurances can we learn from the act of Baptism?