

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: The Meaning of Baptism, Acts 2:38; I John 1:9; I Peter 3:18-21; Acts 16:25-34; Romans 5-6

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INTRODUCTION: Baptism may be one of the most misunderstood teachings in the Bible. I have no idea why, other than the traditions of people have crept into the teaching. I've been in arguments about baptism, and I no longer want to argue with anyone about it. In fact, the older I get, the less I want to argue about anything.

I realize we have a diverse audience here. I also realize many mainline churches have differing views on baptism—both on its meaning and its mode. As Baptists, we have a firm belief in baptism, and our belief is shared by many non-Baptist groups.

Baptism is a joyous occasion, and everyone should be really excited when a person is baptized. Today in this church, we clap when a person is baptized. I've heard cheering at baptisms and loud "Amens." Baptism is truly a time to celebrate.

We've all heard funny stories about baptisms, and many preachers have had to learn how to baptize under different circumstances. For instance, if you baptize someone in running water, always baptize upstream. If a person has a hairpiece, make sure it's really secure. I actually saw a hairpiece come loose one time. Another thing is to make sure people do not hold their breath too soon. It hasn't happened to me when I've baptized someone, but I've seen what happens when kids do this. Recently on YouTube, I saw a video of a boy in the baptistery with his pastor. The boy was really excited about being baptized, and the pastor talked and talked. Finally, the boy went under the water all by himself.

I was seven when I was baptized. I was saved a year or so earlier and was a bit apprehensive about going under the water. Finally, I got the courage to do it. I remember I wore some type of thick nylon or polyester pants, and when I stepped

into the water, the pants held air. I literally just floated to the pastor. My feet never touched the bottom.

If you've been baptized, I trust you have a good memory of it. Recently, we've baptized several kids, including a teenager, and I really hope they remember this special time all their lives.

Today, I want to look at several scriptures about baptism and share from the scripture and from my heart.

OVERVIEW:

1. The order needs to be right— first salvation, then baptism.
2. In the Scripture, those baptized were old enough to believe.
3. In baptism we identify with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.
4. Baptism gives us a clean conscious before God.

First, THE ORDER NEEDS TO BE RIGHT: FIRST SALVATION, THEN BAPTISM.

There are very few groups who believe you must be baptized to be saved or believe baptism is salvation in and of itself. Again, I don't want to argue with anyone on this matter. I've studied it for many years and am resolute in my beliefs about baptism. I can have fellowship with those who have a differing view of baptism if they want to have fellowship with me.

Where do they get this belief? They get it from scriptures.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:38. ³⁸*Peter replied, "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..."*

Let us consider another scripture, which tells us it's Jesus' forgiveness of our sins which saves us.

SCRIPTURE: I John 1:9 ⁹*If we confess our sins, he (meaning Jesus) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

You've heard my caution against having a belief around a handful of scriptures. There are plenty more scriptures which clarify that salvation is through repentance and belief.

They also get it from the illustration about Noah.

SCRIPTURE: I Peter 3:18-20 ¹⁸*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— ²⁰to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,*

Folks, water didn't save Noah. Noah was saved from the water. The ark kept him dry. He never got wet, and the ark never went under the water. It wasn't a submarine.

EXPLANATION: Baptism follows salvation. It is not one and the same. Perhaps you have just now realized you were baptized and then later believed. Well, the right thing to do is get re-baptized, because your first experience didn't follow your conversion experience.

Second, IN THE SCRIPTURE, THOSE BAPTIZED WERE OLD ENOUGH TO BELIEVE.

I know there are many who were baptized as infants, and I certainly do not want to take away from a meaningful family experience which happened when you were a child. As I've talked with some of my fellow ministers who practice the baptism of babies and have studied early church history, I've sought to understand this. Here's what I've learned: many use the story of the Philippian jailer as the Biblical justification for baptizing infants.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:25-34 ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken.

At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.

³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

EXPLANATION: Does this scripture say anything about babies being baptized? No. However, one might think in that day, families were large, and he probably had little ones in his family. Well, that's a far stretch. In fact, that's reading something into the passage that is not there. I wouldn't want to create a doctrine based on an inference.

The next thing I've learned from some of my pastor friends who baptize infants is they equate what they call "holy tradition" with Holy Scripture. This means they believe church tradition has equal value to Scripture. Well, if people believe this, then it explains a lot, doesn't it? I believe tradition is important for several reasons (that's a talk for another time), but I don't believe church tradition is equal to scripture.

Baptism of babies really comes from early times. One of the earliest instructions about it comes from the year 220 AD by a man named Tertullian. Furthermore, political leaders who embraced Christianity as a political move promoted infant baptism.

In some traditions, infants are baptized in ceremonies with godparents and with a promise from parents to raise a child in a Christian home with the hope that one day the child will become a believer.

But again, while these may be meaningful ceremonies, they are not mentioned in the Bible.

Third, IN BAPTISM, WE IDENTIFY WITH CHRIST’S DEATH, BURIAL, AND RESURRECTION.

In Romans 5, Paul just finished writing about sin and grace, and he continued in Chapter 6:

SCRIPTURE: Romans 6:1-5 ¹ *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?* ² *By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?* ³ *Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* ⁴ *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

⁵ *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.*

EXPLANATION: Here, the symbolic nature of baptism is explained. When I say “symbol” I also mean drama. It’s a drama, and we get to show everyone what Jesus did for us. Jesus was buried and rose again. We are buried with him through baptism and we are raised to live a new life. When we were saved, we surrendered our old life and put on a new life. We died to ourselves and became alive unto Christ. If you don’t understand this, I challenge you to keep thinking about it. Ask the Lord to open it up to you, and then it will hit you.

Fourth, BAPTISM GIVES US A CLEAR CONSCIOUS BEFORE GOD.

SCRIPTURE: I Peter 3:21 ²¹ *The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (King James Version)*

SCRIPTURE: I Peter 3:21 ²¹ *and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (NIV)*

EXPLANATION: The first translation (KJV) of this verse makes it sound like baptism saves you. This Scripture was originally written in Greek. Bible translating must certainly be the most challenging and difficult work a person can do. I am going to read for you the original Greek and then give you a word for word translation.

In context, Peter is talking about those saved in Noah’s ark. In it, only eight were “saved through (or “from”) water,” and verse 21, goes on to say, regarding the water—

GREEK: ho kai hymas antitypon nyn sozei baptisma ou sarkos apothesis

Word for word translation: *which also is typical of now saving baptism not of flesh a putting away*

antitypon – transliterated as “typical” means typical of, representing by type (or pattern), corresponding to, an image.

The King James Version says “the like figure.” The NIV says “symbol.” When the King James Version was translated, “the like figure” meant “symbol.” Times have changed, and language has changed.

Baptism is a symbol of salvation— a symbol of what’s already happened— a person’s death to self, burial, and coming to new life in Christ.

I believe the good conscience this scripture talks about is directly related to obeying Jesus Christ's commands. If you obey him, you'll have a good conscience. It is the command Jesus gave people.

APPLICATION: Where does this leave you today? If you have been saved, have you been baptized? Do you have the order right? Maybe you have a lingering doubt. Maybe you aren't sure. I challenge you to get it right—be obedient. Become a baptized believer.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at www.thbc.com Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn
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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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