

Week 5 – Baptism – An important step in your life

Day 1 - Baptism – An important step in your life

Biblical baptism is a hot topic. Often people get upset about it even if they are born again.

Why?

Biblical baptism is one of the most important steps for a disciple of Jesus. For this reason, baptism is central to our spiritual life. It is not a secret that especially the essential aspects of spiritual life are subject to numerous attacks. Therefore it is crucial that we understand the biblical significance of baptism. It's a question of understanding what Jesus and the Bible teach about baptism and not what religious tradition has made of it.

The attitude of Jesus concerning baptism

The following passage of the Bible is a good example to get an idea of what baptism really is and means. If we have understood this, it becomes clear why biblical baptism is such an essential step for each of us.

Read Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus wants to be baptised by John. At first, why does John not want to carry out this baptism?

What does Jesus answer?

God's Word makes it clear: Jesus Christ wanted to be baptised! John the Baptist, who had understood who Jesus was, didn't want to baptise God's Son.

Jesus' argument is interesting: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." (demanded by God).

In his ministry Jesus had one goal: to seek and carry out the will of the Father in all things. Through the way Jesus reacts to John's reluctance to baptise him we learn that the Father wanted His Son Jesus to be baptised.

In Jesus' words we identify another important fact. Jesus points out that something would be missing if He were not to be baptised. God's Son is baptised to underline the importance of baptism for the individual who wants to dedicate himself completely and 100% to God.

Considering that Jesus always looked to fulfill the righteousness of God and His will and therefore insisted on his baptism, then how much more important is baptism for us.

Jesus himself established baptism

Our Lord does not limit the principle of baptism to His own person. He even linked the mandate to baptise with the Great Commission of the church.

Read the passages in Matthew 28:18-20 (English Standard Version):

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (ESV)

The mandate that Jesus has entrusted to us is powerful, but also challenging. This not only in terms of the absolute claim made by Jesus, but also in relation to the truth given by our Lord about baptism.

When we have a closer look at the statement of Jesus, an interesting point becomes evident: we see the fundamental mandate to the church to go and make disciples. When the Bible speaks of a disciple, it literally refers to a *learner*. This is a person who deliberately submits himself to the authority of a teacher. But Jesus adds something very important on top of this: Individuals who are baptised become disciples in the full meaning of the word. Essence of this statement: being a disciple in the biblical sense requires being baptised!

The person who comes to Jesus, who opens his heart to God's Word and declares that he wants to live his life according to God's commands, becomes a disciple. But if he stops at this point his spiritual discipleship comes to a standstill.

The following passages show us that the early Christians strictly followed this command of Jesus:

Read Acts 2:38:

Renewing of the mind and baptism as a logical result of the Pentecostal Sermon

Read Acts 8:36-39

Enlightenment about Jesus and baptism result in joy

Read Acts 10:47f

Baptism as a response to God's sovereign work

Even these few passages in Acts reveal to us that baptism is not just wishful thinking on the part of our Lord. In fact, for the apostles and early Christians baptism was the standard for every disciple.

It is also striking that in practically all cases baptism has been fulfilled immediately after people have been born again. For this reason, it can be said that, biblically speaking, baptism is part of being born again. This thought can be very challenging nowadays and highlights the area of conflict that we often meet concerning baptism.



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Day 2 – Is baptism still relevant?

In relation to baptism very often the following question arises:

Who should be baptised?

We are going to answer this question with God's Word:

Read Acts 2:38

What should the people to do who wanted to accept Jesus after Peter's Sermon at Pentecost?

A: Repent (turn away from your sins) // B: Be baptised

Here we have to take into account two important points:

1. Turn away from your sins (repentance)

Baptism is relevant to those who have renewed their mind (see Week 1), that is, who have turned away from sin and have turned to God.

This statement answers an important and frequently asked question: is infant baptism a biblical baptism?

Excursion: Is the baptism of babies a baptism in the sense of God's Word?

The tradition of infant baptism is very common in our western culture. In countries which claim to be Christian we have become used to the fact that a baby is baptised – or rather sprinkled – with water shortly after its birth.

The act of infant baptism is usually linked with the name-giving and has only secondarily to do with faith in Christ.

When people give their life to Jesus and are then confronted with baptism, many of them say: I was baptised as a baby, therefore I hold onto this baptism and do not need to be baptised again.

There are several objections to this way of thinking:

- The word "baptism" (Greek *baptizo*) means, to completely immerse in water, not only to be sprinkled with drops of water.
- Before a person is baptised a renewing of the mind must have taken place. Can a baby discern, hate and abandon sin? Only someone who has heard and accepted God's Word is able to make this decision. And this excludes babies.
- Peter does not consider baptism a sacrament, meaning an act of salvation, but a decision which is made on the basis of personal enlightenment.

A baby is not able to make this decision. So the parents take on this responsibility for the child and have it baptised. To eliminate this discrepancy, the Reformed Church introduced the Protestant Confirmation: a teenager has to confirm what has taken place in his infant baptism (lat. confirmare).

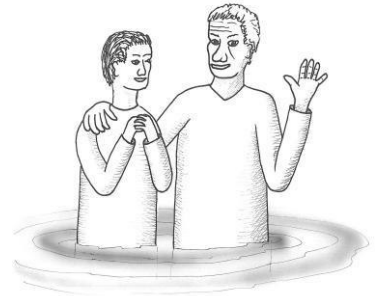
Let's recapitulate:

Infant baptism or, better, the sprinkling of babies, is something completely different from the baptism described in the Bible. Surely the parents meant well and most likely acted to their best knowledge and in good faith. But this has nothing to do with the baptism the Bible describes.

2. Be baptised, every one of you

Baptism is a voluntary decision! Peter does not say: Be pushed, forced or coerced. Obligation contradicts the meaning of baptism.

As we have already seen, faith and understanding of salvation are the biblical preconditions for baptism. The act of baptism is a voluntary decision made on the basis of thankful, loving and joyful obedience to Jesus.



How is baptism performed?

The New Testament uses in its original language the noun *baptizo*.

This term has the meaning of immersion, submersion. This word can also be used to describe a ship which has sunk.

When the Bible uses this term, it makes the following clear: baptism means that somebody is being fully immersed in the water, so that he is completely surrounded by it.

Read John 3:23

Why did John baptise people at Aenon:

- He was there, because there lived many people.
- It was in the desert, his dwelling.
- He was there, because there was plenty of water.

Surely you have found it out: he baptised at Aenon, because there was plenty of water. The baptism was carried out in a manner that required a lot of water. That they went down into the water is also mentioned in the following verse:

Read Acts 8:39

It says that Philip and the Ethiopian came out of the water after the baptism.

In the early church, baptism was carried out in correspondence with the Greek term *baptizo* through immersion in water.

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Day 3 – Burial and resurrection

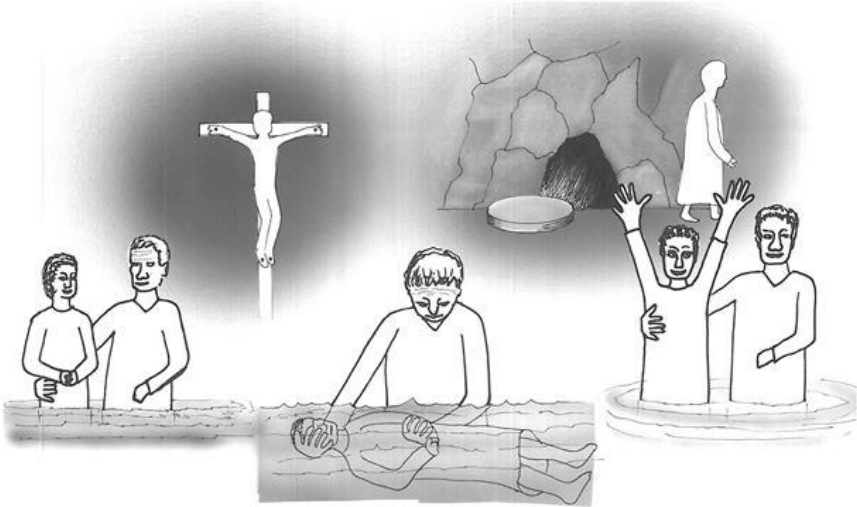
In the three remaining days of the week, we will concentrate on the crucial question of the meaning and purpose of baptism.

Undoubtedly this is the most important question to be answered in order to understand what baptism is all about. Basically we can say: Baptism testifies and illustrates outwardly what already has happened inwardly.

In this sense baptism bears testimony to our decision to leave our old life behind and from now on live with God (week 1). Therefore, the one who is being baptised gives testimony before God (Heaven), the devil (hell) and the people present in the church.

Today and on the two days following we are going to look at four points which show us what happens during and through baptism:

Point 1: Baptism is the burial of the old life and the resurrection to a new life with Jesus Christ



Read Romans 6:3-7

Paul uses the image of a burial to symbolically explain baptism.

Mark the correct answer:

In baptism the person being baptised bears testimony to...

- ...the burial of Jesus
- ...the burial of his old and sinful self
- ...the burial that will take place when they die

Solution:

The Baptisand bears testimony of the burial of his old and sinful man

While being immersed we show that our old self has died. We bury it under the water.

During the act of baptism the baptisand also bears testimony to a second aspect:

Finish the following sentence according to Romans 6:3-7:

The baptisand testifies that he died with Jesus Christ and ...

When emerging from the water we display that through turning to Jesus and being born again we have become a new creation.

Something basic has changed in our life: we don't live as we did in the past anymore, but as new individuals, according to the principles of God, who directs our life now.

The old sinful nature is dead. The new nature, Jesus' nature, lives within us now. When we are baptised, we officially declare this as a fact. Essentially we have signed our own death certificate.

Unfortunately we need to state that our old nature has a strong tendency to resurrect! Even Martin Luther used to say: "The miserable wretch can swim ..."

The devil will always try to attack us through our old nature. The question is how we are going to react. If we have signed the death certificate we can remind him that we are dead to his temptations. We can try to tempt a corpse all day long, but it won't react.

Remember: Paul teaches that baptism symbolically shows what happened at the Cross and in the Resurrection:

The old sinful man has died, the old and filthy is gone; something new has begun.

The fact that we have died and risen with Jesus Christ is more than an idea, it is a powerful reality.

Have you already experienced that things have changed for the better since you have become a Christian, for instance character traits or sinful habits? Or have you noticed that you have acquired new habits that please God? – Are there still aspects in your life that bother you?



Discuss these things with your companion and pray for each other.

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Day 4 - Pure and separated from the world

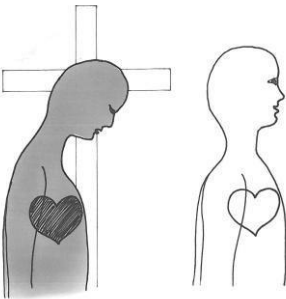
Yesterday we saw that baptism symbolically demonstrates that we have died and risen with Jesus Christ to a new life in communion with Him.

Today, we will take a look at two more points that baptism stands for and testifies to.

Point 2: Baptism, an image to demonstrate that our sins are washed away:

Read Acts 22:16

In this verse, God's Word makes an important statement about baptism. However, we have to understand it correctly.



Paul points out that baptism symbolically demonstrates what happens through the forgiveness of sins. It is not the act of baptism that has the power to forgive sins; otherwise it would be a sacrament. As far as the water is concerned, it does not have the capacity to wash sins away either, otherwise water would be the means that cleanses us before God.

God's Word clearly stipulates that the blood of Jesus shed on the Cross for our sins is the only "means" to have sins forgiven that has ever existed and will ever exist in eternity.

This passage points out that through baptism...

- ...Paul's sins were washed away and that he would never sin again.
- ...it is demonstrated symbolically that Paul's sins have been forgiven.
- ...water has the power to wash sins away.

Mark the correct answer and cross out the false ones!

Solution:

Answer 2 is correct

Point 3: Baptism is the appeal to God for a clean conscience and a separation from the sinful world

In 1 Peter 3:19-21 we can read:

...in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 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". (ESV)

Peter also uses an image, a symbol, to teach another important truth about baptism. Baptism is linked with the appeal for a pure conscience.

The reference to Noah and his ark helps us to understand the spiritual truth of this picture:

Everybody who wasn't with Noah in his ark died in the water of judgment. In this sense, the water drew a line between the old world and Noah and his family.

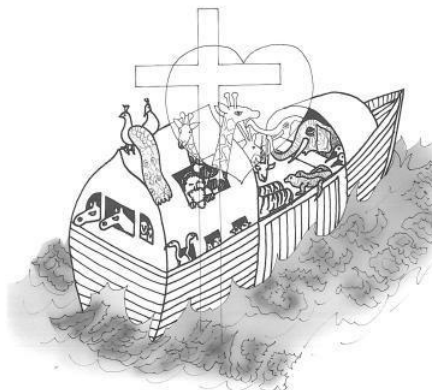
When Jesus died on the Cross, He carried the judgment for sin. He died and with that carried the effects of sin to the final consequence.

When He rose from the dead on the third day, He made the forgiveness of sins available to everyone. We don't have to carry the punishment and the judgment for our sins anymore, because Jesus Christ Himself carried the judgment for us.

Since our old self, that is our life dominated by sin, has passed away, we can have a clear conscience.

Baptism draws a final line between the world and us!

With this statement it is just as important that we understand that God's Word speaks symbolically with a picture: it is not the act of baptism that saves us. The point is rather that through baptism we can testify about the spiritual reality which already took place in us when we were saved. At no point does the Bible talk about depending on sacraments (acts of salvation), but on Jesus Christ and the privilege of having a living and personal relationship with Him!



Take the time to thank God that you have been saved from sin like Noah and his family were saved from the flood, and that you can have a clean conscience.

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Day 5 – The Covenant

After having contemplated the first three points that describe what occurs in and through baptism, today we are going to complete the week with the fourth point.

Point 4 – Baptism is the seal of the Covenant with God

In Colossians 2:11-12 we read:

“ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.” (ESV)

What is comparing Paul baptism with?

Solution:

With circumcision

Circumcision was the sign of the Covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants. While Paul symbolically relates baptism to circumcision, he points to the fact that through baptism we seal the Covenant that God has made with us.

In a symbolic sense, through baptism we sign the Covenant that God offers us.

When we enter the baptismal water with our heart full of faith, we are being connected to the power of God which will become a part of our life.

Let's summarise:

- Baptism as an act has no power to save us or to forgive our sins.
- Baptism doesn't open the way to heaven for us and neither does it turn people into Christians.
- Baptism is a step on the way of living as a disciple of Jesus: In baptism we testify before the visible and invisible world that we have understood that Jesus Christ has forgiven our sins and has given us a new life.
- We declare that we won't live the same way as before, but that we are confident of living a new life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Reflections for the end of the week

Baptism is an important step in your spiritual life. On the one side, there is the obedience towards God's Word, and on the other the decision to dedicate myself to the Lord and His Kingdom with all that I am.

After the ceremony of baptism each baptisand will receive a certificate that summarizes the significance and importance of baptism:

I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as God's Son and only Savior. Through His death at the Cross he saved me from the dominance of sin and death and gave me eternal life.

Through repentance and by faith I received the forgiveness of my sins and am now a son / daughter of the living God.

Through my baptism today I bury my old self before God and the here present witnesses.

Because Jesus Christ died and was resurrected for me, I will ever be grateful to Him that from now on I can lead a new life. For that I rely on the Holy Spirit, who daily strengthens and builds me up. I am determined to obey God, to follow Jesus Christ and to be available to the interests of His Kingdom.

Putting into practice

What has touched you this week and what do you take with into your everyday life?

Are you baptised? – Do you want to be baptised? – What still keeps you from being baptised?

