

## Parson to Person

### **WHAT ABOUT BAPTISM?**

At Candlelight, we emphasize certain matters. If you've attended even just a few weeks, you've already noticed them, as reflected in certain phrases. "No Future Condemnatory Judgment for the Believer." "Grace Alone through Faith Alone in Christ Alone as in the Bible Alone, to glorify God Alone." "Let God Grow His Sheep." "If the Plain Sense Makes the Most Sense, Seek No Other Sense." "Blessed Misery." "What Dispensation?" And even, "Just Stop It!"

Perhaps our strongest emphasis is Soteriology, the study of salvation, which is succinctly summarized in the Gospel of Christ and explained this way on our website:

The good news of the Gospel is that God, in accordance with the good pleasure of His will, made provision for the total forgiveness of our sin/s. Jesus gave His life that we might have redemption through His blood. Jesus took the penalty we deserve upon Himself and died in our place. His life—the only acceptable payment for sin, given by the shedding of His blood, provides total cleansing of our sin/s. It is by the offering of Jesus' life and through the power of His resurrection we have forgiveness of sin/s and a new life in Him. By faith alone in Christ alone our sin is forgiven and exchanged for His righteousness.

Further, this faith is expressed by the believer not in "working" nor in "trying." Rather, "our effort to 'please the Lord' by 'trying harder' is an affront to His grace and power working in us. The Christian

enters into the ‘Sabbath rest’ of a relationship with Jesus and ceases striving to please the Lord, thus enjoying a continual maturing by God’s Spirit within (Hebrews 4:10).”

This maturing must and will be reflected in obedience, “the natural outflow of genuine regeneration,” since “disobedience in the life of a believer is sin and should be avoided.” This, however, is a work of God, a result of God’s gift of imputed holiness rather than an effort *toward* holiness. “We believe that imputed holiness is the experience of all believers” (Hebrews 10:10).

All this is necessary to review before considering the question, “What about baptism at Candlelight?”

## **OUR SOTERIOLOGY DEFINES OUR PRACTICES**

There has been so much confusion and false doctrine over the 20-plus centuries since Pentecost that no biblical doctrine can be correctly framed without accounting for that confusion. Arguably, the largest part of that confusion has been the blunting of soteriology, the sound teaching about how the gospel saves.

Our theology of biblical teaching about God roots first and foremost our doctrine of salvation, which is that salvation is uniquely and utterly by faith (not works); uniquely and utterly by Grace (not earned or merited); uniquely and utterly in Christ (not in, by, or of us); and uniquely and utterly of, by, and for the glory of God (not the pride or boasting of any human). This utter uniqueness of salvation must be fully understood in order to correct error and confusion among churches.

Therefore, it should be no surprise that our soteriology shapes and determines how we handle baptism, because the one thing we cannot do is practice or talk about baptism in a way that confuses or muddies the Gospel.

## **WHAT BAPTISM IS NOT**

Every error made in any and all churches regarding baptism can be summarized under one heading, and avoided with one warning. That warning is this: Salvation is not by baptism. This is why our Statement of Faith includes, both in the body and in the notes, this caveat: “We do not believe in water baptismal regeneration.”

Salvation cannot be clearly affirmed and maintained to be uniquely and utterly by Grace, not merit, if we could claim a merit of baptism.

Nor can salvation be affirmed and maintained to be utterly and uniquely by Faith, not works, if we could claim to have performed a work of baptism.

When connected to baptism, salvation is removed from the province of Grace alone, Faith Alone, to the glory of God Alone, and turned into something that is ALSO of merit, ALSO of works, and ALSO glorifies the choice and will of the one being baptized.

This is utterly unacceptable in light of the truth of the Gospel of Salvation.

Candlelight cannot, does not, and will not fall into the error of allowing salvation to be confused in this matter. This is why we insist, with Scripture, that there is no such thing as “water

baptismal regeneration.” Many unsaved, unregenerate people have been baptized in the false belief that this action will save them, either apart from or IN ADDITION TO God’s grace and faith. Such baptism is not salvific because baptism cannot be salvific. Only Grace through Faith can and does save.

Related to this caveat are several clarifications that will help you steer clear of related errors:

The water of baptism does not wash away sin nor cleanse the conscience—the blood of Christ does so. It does not immerse the believer in the Holy Spirit nor circumcise the heart—the Holy Spirit does that. It does not reconcile you to God, atone for your transgressions, cover your sins, or any other effect that the Bible affirms as an effect or consequence of becoming a believer; the shed blood of Christ does all those things.

## **WHAT BAPTISM IS**

Now we can properly explain the affirmation of Baptism contained in our Statement of Faith:

“We believe in the ordinance of baptism (Matthew 28:19–20) in water by immersion, a public expression of our faith, an identification in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:1–2).”

1. An “ordinance.” We recognize, as part of our churching, that the New Testament contains directions from the Apostles of the Lord Jesus for the Church Age (“church age,” see Dispensational Model under our “Statement of Faith”). These

directions were often, not always, directly referred to as being “ordained” or “appointed” by them:

- a. Elders (Titus 1:5)
- b. Deacons (Acts 6:1–5)
- c. Commands (Acts 16:4)
- d. Judgments (Acts 15:28–30)
- e. Callings (I Cor. 7:17)
- f. Offices (I Cor. 12:28)
- g. Missionaries (Acts 13:2–3)
- h. Baptism (Acts 10:48)

None of these practical, organizational, or leadership “ordinances” or “appointments” were salvific in any way, but they did serve an important purpose in the life of the Church. Baptism is in just such a category in the New Testament, a practice that was nearly universally followed from the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) going forward.

2. A “public expression.” The man or woman who has already believed the Gospel, and thus has been regenerated on the spot by Grace Alone through Faith Alone in Christ Alone, to the Glory of God Alone, is portrayed in the New Testament as proclaiming that salvation by being baptized:

- a. Acts 2:41 Jewish believers at Pentecost
- b. Acts 8:12 Samaritan believers
- c. Acts 8:38 Ethiopian eunuch, a believer
- d. Acts 9:18 The Apostle Paul

e. Acts 10:48 Gentile Roman regenerate, Spirit-filled believers

f. Acts 16:32 The Philippian jailer and his “household”

g. Acts 19:5 Ephesian “disciples”

In all these described cases, we can see that believers—Jew, Samaritan, and Gentile—were baptized after having believed the Gospel.

3. Paul will later explain the reasoning for this “appointed” or “ordained” activity of baptism as believers’ way of symbolizing, acting out a sign, of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Romans 6:3–5).

We love you, our Candlelight Family and Friends!

Pastor Jason