

D-Up: A Series on Discipleship
The Importance of Baptism in Discipleship
Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 2:41

Dr. Steve Horn

January 17, 2016

Text Introduction: This morning I am continuing a new preaching series on discipleship. We are calling this series of messages “D-Up!” For those of you who might be basketball fans, you might be familiar with that phrase. This might be a phrase that the coach yells out to the team when it is time to get more intense in their defense.

We began our journey last Sunday morning by asking the question, “Am I Even on the Right Road?”

Today, we turn our attention to baptism. We can think of baptism as the “What’s next” after our initial commitment to Christ.

Text: (Matthew 28) ⁸ Then Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

(Acts 2) ⁴¹ So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them.

Introduction: I remember hearing a sermon on Matthew 28 one time that suggested that Jesus commanded 3 actions of the church in these verses—that we make disciples, mark disciples, and mature disciples. Today, we are talking about marking disciples in baptism.

Some years ago, I was on a follow-up FAITH (our church’s organized evangelism effort) visit with one of our men. We were visiting a gentleman who had prayed to receive Christ with another team. The man had not yet been baptized, and we were going to visit him that particular evening about baptism.

We began by reviewing the Gospel and his decision. He very clearly gave evidence of his commitment to Christ, but indicated to us that he had no intention of being baptized. One reason was his age. Another reason had to do with his hesitancy to stand before such a large crowd. We listened compassionately to his story that I had heard many times before from others and was waiting to interject all of the reasons that he should be baptized. Waiting for an appropriate place to break into the conversation, my partner said, “Well that’s ok, you don’t have to be baptized if you don’t want to be baptized.” At this phrase, I just about lost it. I didn’t say anything, but I am thinking a whole lot of things.

Then, my friend proceeded with his own personal testimony. He said, “When I first was introduced to Jesus, I had the same reaction as you. I believed in Him for salvation and the forgiveness of my sin, but I said I will never be baptized. And then something happened. The Lord convicted me that I should be baptized. And then I got baptized, not because I had to be baptized, but because I wanted to be baptized. And when I came to that place where I wanted to be baptized, nobody was going to keep me from being baptized.”

My friend was instantly a genius in my eyes. The question always comes up “Do I have to be baptized to go to Heaven?” We are saved by grace. We cannot add anything to that work of grace—not even a good thing like baptism. But, there is another question to ponder. Why would a person be a follower of Jesus and not want to be baptized? To relate this matter to our theme of discipleship, the question is: Can a person be a disciple of Jesus and reject baptism?

This morning I want to talk about baptism in relationship to five important areas of our discipleship.

Identification

The first question is “Who should be baptized?” Baptism should be reserved for those who have identified with Christ.

Key Scriptures

Acts 2:37-41 helps us to understand who should be baptized. Some people, in error, read verse 38 to mean that an individual is not saved until he/she is baptized. However, the record of the whole counsel of God negates this understanding. Just a few verses later, Luke tells us this in *Acts 3:19*.

Acts 3:19 helps us to clarify that repentance and faith result in salvation. This verse gives no mention of baptism in the process of salvation. The early church so closely associated repentance and baptism that to speak of one was to speak of the other. However, the emphasis in salvation is repentance and faith.

In giving directions, we leave out details depending on our audience. If I am giving directions to our church to someone who lives in our city I might say, “Turn on Lee Avenue going towards Downtown and you will see our church.” To give those directions to a visitor from out of town would be useless. Depending on the situation, sometimes details are left out, but the assumption is that the listener would know how to understand.

Who should be baptized? Any person who has come to that place of understanding that eternal life is found in faith in Jesus Christ. In baptism, we identify with the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we have believed that, we need to declare that.

A little girl asked her pastor, “Can I get advertised?” She meant baptized, but she had it right, because our baptism is our advertisement, our public declaration that we identify with Jesus.

Initiation

The second area that demands a conversation about baptism in relationship to our discipleship is the area that could be described with the word initiation. We are not saved by baptism, but discipleship is the initiation into further areas of obedience. If a person is unwilling to be baptized, it is an inevitable certainty that the same person will resist other areas of obedience.

Your baptism cannot be before your commitment to Christ, but it ought to come immediately following your commitment to Christ.

A prominent biblical scholar and author, T. R. Glover, while visiting India for the YMCA, met some Indian students who said they wanted to be Christians, provided they would not be compelled to make a

profession of faith or join a church. They wanted to remain inside the Hindu or Muslim community and subscribe privately to Christian beliefs. That experience convinced Glover that Jesus had put baptism in just the right place, at the very beginning of a life of Christian discipleship.

What is keeping you from being baptized? In most cases, that very issue will keep you from obeying other commands of our LORD.

Imitation

The next word is imitation. Baptism is an initial area where we become imitators of Christ. We are talking about discipleship, right? What is the goal of our discipleship? The goal of discipleship as we will learn along the way is to be like Christ.

Jesus was baptized. We give evidence of our desire to imitate Christ when we submit to baptism. By the way, it is easily argued that baptism is going to be the easiest place to imitate Christ. Just as we said a moment ago about baptism and future obedience, we can also say that if we are unwilling to imitate Christ in the outward step of baptism, it is an inevitable certainty that we will not imitate Him in those more inward calls of becoming like Him.

Invitation

A fourth word is invitation. Go back to Matthew 28. The call of the church—a group of disciples—is to make disciples and mark disciples. We have the calling as His disciples to baptize. You cannot invite someone to do what you have been unwilling to do. You have eliminated yourself from the rest of the commandment of this church commission if you are not baptized.

Indecision

Baptism is decision. Resisting baptism is indecision. The Christian life is not a call to secrecy or sitting on the fence. The call to follow Christ is public and bold. As such, it comes with the outward sign of baptism.

So what?

If you have been baptized, does your life reflect a once and for all decision to follow Jesus? Have you continued in your path of discipleship? I suspect that for some the issue is not that we have not been baptized, but that we have been baptized with no real commitment to Jesus.

If you have not been baptized, what is your decision?

Remember the words of my friend: The Lord convicted me that I should be baptized. And then I got baptized, not because I had to be baptized, but because I wanted to be baptized. And when I came to that place where I wanted to be baptized, nobody was going to keep me from being baptized.”