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# Opening Words

We are so happy that you are here this evening. Many of you are already a part of God's family that meets here and is known as the Edmond Church of Christ. Others are visiting us tonight and are our honored guests. We would love to have you in this family as well. The God of Heaven calls and invites you through His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. His call is to come to Him – put on His yoke and find rest for your soul. He does make it clear that it is required that you be born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-7). If you have already experienced that washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5-7), then just identify yourself to us and we count you as family (Romans 16:1-2).

We might say that this topic, “How do you enter a local church and be counted a member?” – has given impetus to considerable discussion locally in the media and as people have talked back and forth in the Edmond area and even far and wide. An area church has been widely reported to have proposed that their members vote as to whether baptism must be a pre-requisite for being a member there. Reports have that same church postponing their church-wide vote until a later time.

The discussion of baptism and church membership has stirred up considerable interest and we want to explore this and related subjects this evening. But, a few preliminary words must be said.

## By Way of Introduction

Please permit me to say some things as we introduce this evening's sermon. Surely, we could all agree that what counts is not a vote. What counts is what **the Bible says** on this matter. It is not for me or you or several thousand "mes and yous" to vote and then count ballots. God's Word is final and authoritative on the subjects it treats. Our task is to study the New Testament – the covenant Scripture of the Lord Jesus Christ – and to then obey them and apply them to every portion of life doctrinally, morally, relationally and in our families and in His family.

Next, allow me to say that almost all Bible-reading people agree that no one is saved without the shed blood of Jesus Christ, *"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."* (1 Peter 1:18-19). His blood saves us and His Word guides us. Without His grace, love and mercy, there is no hope. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16) No one can ever afford to lose sight of the cross of Christ and of God's gift of His Son. And when we talk about baptism in the church we can focus on Jesus and His death, burial and resurrection.

Also, I want to say that I, speaking as a part of the Edmond Church of Christ, have great love and respect for those with whom we differ. I grew up in Fort Worth, Texas, with many excellent moral and ethical people who were of other conservative religious groups. Many of those people have always been at the forefront of the fight for baptism by immersion, religious liberty, involvement in Bible distribution, caring for the poor and down-trodden and in the lead of the fight for high moral standards in the community. They are loyal, patriotic and gracious. I studied for two summers at Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth and for several semesters at Baylor Graduate School. I counted and count my teachers there as good and kind scholars, like Dr. Ray Summers, Dr. John Drakeford, Dr. Orval Feather, Dr. Boyd Hunt, Dr. James E. Wood, Jr., Dr. Bob Patterson and Dr. James Breckinridge. I count the these people as cherished and treasured friends of mine.

So, tonight's lesson is not some kind of attack upon anyone. You could look at their books in my library, and ask my wife and my missionary and ministerial friends as to the high regard in which I hold them.

## A Few Points of Difference

There are, however, some areas in which we in churches of Christ understand certain doctrines differently than do some of our religious neighbors. I will mention three areas of doctrinal difference. First, we believe in churches of Christ that based upon Acts 20, I Timothy 3, Titus 1, I Peter 5 and Hebrews 13:17, that the local elders (also called pastors and bishops), under the Lordship of the Supreme Shepherd Jesus Christ, guide, guard, lead and protect the flock and that doctrines are not to be decided by congregational vote and counting. There must be, of course, times of dialogue between leaders and members, but not even elders can vote on doctrines of the church. Surely, we always know the scriptures are to be studied and obeyed. No votes or elections are ever needed on church doctrines.

Second, another difference would be in the area of doctrines related to salvation. Almost all Bible-reading people agree that the ground of salvation is the cross-work done by Jesus who died for us and shed His blood in his death (John 19:34). But, in churches of Christ we understand that our response is that we must believe in Christ (Acts 16:31), repent of our sins (Acts 2:38), confess His name (Romans 10:9-10) and be buried in baptism and thereby bury the old man of sin and be raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-5, 17). Upon completing this primary obedience, one is added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:41, 47), one is clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:26, 27), and one can identify with the church of Christ wherever we happen to reside by presenting ourselves (Romans 16:1-2). In churches of Christ we also believe that sadly one can fall away from grace... not abiding in Christ and then will lose the way (Galatians 5:1-4; John 15:6). However, the way back to restoration, full fellowship and the pathway to Heaven is by repentance, confession of our faults and prayer. (Acts 8:18-24; Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20).

Third, with respect to the public worship of the church, in churches of Christ, we find no authorization in the New Testament nor in the first few centuries of church history for instrumental music and therefore, we have acapella music – singing with our hearts and voices to God. (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; Heb. 13:17). We also find no New Testament authority to drop the Lord's Supper from the every Lord's Day observance found in the New Testament and in the earliest centuries (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 11:26: 16:1-2). If we can find the time in our church assemblies to take up the offering, surely we can find the time to pray and eat of the unleavened bread and drink the fruit of the vine. That no more makes the Lord's Supper too "ordinary" than the every Sunday offerings make

giving money too “ordinary.”

But tonight, we are here, to talk about New Testament baptism: its meaning and its purpose. That we shall do with the help of the Lord and by following the authority of His Holy Word.

Hebrews 13:17 teaches that the local elders, under the Lordship of the Supreme Shepherd Jesus Christ, guide, guard, lead and protect the flock. Doctrines are not decided by congregational vote. The Scriptures must be studied and obeyed. No votes or elections are ever needed on church doctrines.

## **A Prayer for God’s Blessing**

Let us pray for God’s blessing upon us and for Him to bless everyone on earth tonight. May we through His truth learn to live with the kind of respect and unity Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount and prayed for in John 17.

Our dear Heavenly Father,  
Help us tonight as we gather to speak of Your Holy Word and of important teachings that some understand differently than do others. May we speak Your Word in truth and with love. May we by following Your Word and by trusting and obeying Your Son learn to live in physical peace and in spiritual serenity and unity.

Insofar as any of us need growth in grace and knowledge – please lead us and help us.

In Jesus’ Name,  
Amen

## **The Meaning of Baptism**

Now to address directly “The Meaning and Purpose of Baptism.” First, the meaning of baptism will be explored: the English word “baptism” in its various verb or noun forms comes from the Greek word, “bapto.” Practically every Bible student agrees means “to dip, plunge or immerse, submerge, to wash completely.” The reference is to an object or a person being thoroughly and completely submerged. We would not expect any questioning of this definition.

Interestingly, in view of the backdrop of this evening’s discussion, I

would cite two epochal books written in the past fifty years that thoroughly discuss baptism and its meaning. One is by a British Baptist Bible scholar, the late Dr. G.R. Beasley-Murray, who taught at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. His book is Baptism in the New Testament. The other is by Dr. Everett Ferguson, professor emeritus at Abilene Christian University, premier early church historian, in his work, The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today. Either of these books would be extremely helpful for an in-depth study of baptism: its meaning and purpose. Beasley-Murray devotes his entire 415-page book to baptism and Ferguson refers to baptism extensively and very fairly catalogues and systematizes the New Testament teaching on baptism in his 443-page book.

The New Testament makes it clear that baptism is a burial in several passages. In Acts 8:38, in preparation for the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism, both Philip and the eunuch got out of the chariot and both went down into water and then both came up out of the water, clearly indicating an immersion which urgently stopped their journey.

But two passages (Col. 2 and Romans 6) even more explicit are in Paul's writings. In Colossians 2:12-13, Paul shows baptism as immersion: *"having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins..."* These verses from Colossians also make it evident that in baptism one is not only buried with Christ, but also raised with Christ through faith. And in the major passage on baptism and ethics in the New Testament, Paul also shows the literal meaning and the profound implications of baptism in Romans 6:1-7, 12, 16-18, 22-23. *"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."* (12) *"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."* (16-18) *"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether*

*you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."*

*(22-23) "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

How could anyone deny that baptism is a burial,...that it unites and identifies one with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, ...that it is the breaking point of sin's bondage,...or that from that point onward one begins the new life?

The only other passages we will cite on the meaning of baptism, at this point, are the Great Commission from Matthew 28:18-20, and the first recorded application of the Great Commission in Acts 2. The Great Commission reads as follows: *"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

And now the implementation of the Commission in Acts 2:36-39, 41, 46-47, *"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

*(41) "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."*

*(46-47) "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*

Clearly and unequivocally, baptism follows faith, is indispensable to becoming a disciple, is for the remission of sins and is coupled with the promise of receiving the Holy Spirit as a gift. It is the time, when upon

baptism's completion, one is added to the church. Where is there a place for your vote or mine? Baptism is not a time to vote, ...it is a time to devote. Nothing is immature, optional or shallow about Biblical baptism. It is deathly serious and it is a burial of the old man of sin!

## The Purpose of Baptism

Now, as to the purpose of baptism. It is referred to in the New Testament in several ways that point to its purpose:

A being born of water and the Spirit – John 3:3-7.

A command to be obeyed – Acts. 2:38; 10:48.

A putting on or being clothed with Christ – Galatians 3:26-27.

A being incorporated into the body of Christ, the church – I Cor. 12:13.

Not a self-righteous act, but a washing of regeneration – Titus 3:5-7.

It is a time of an enacted calling upon the Lord – Acts. 22:16.

It is a washing – I Cor. 6:11.

It is for the forgiveness of sins – Acts 2:38.

In discussing the truth that baptism places one into the church, Everett Ferguson uses such clean and clear English that I do not wish to paraphrase it, but to cite it for you to compare it to the New Testament. “Both Galatians 3:28 and I Corinthians 12:13 make incorporation into Christ independent of racial, social and sexual distinctions. Baptism serves as the act of initiation into the church. Any group or organization has to have some act which marks off its members from others, however informal this may be. This is especially true in the realm of religion. Not only does the church need something to identify its members, but people need something they can look back on and say, “at that time I became a Christian, a member of the church.” God has designated something as the decisive act that only the truly converted will do. Baptism is the line between the church and the world. Membership in the church is more a result than a purpose of baptism. One is baptized not so much in order to join the church as to accept Christ and receive his salvation. Part of what is involved in that is incorporation into the people of Christ. God adds the person to the church, the community of the saved. The church is created by God.” (pp. 194-195)

Also, note what G. R. Beasley-Murray observes, “The really important fact, then, of which we have to take account is the indivisibility of the two aspects of baptism: it is baptism to Christ and into the body. It is at once intensely personal and completely corporate, involving the believer in relationship simultaneously with the Head and with all the members of the Body. ...We are called to recognize therefore that a purely private

relationship to Christ cannot exist, nor a bestowal of the Spirit given to be enjoyed on our own, as it were, in isolation from the Christian fellowship. Koinonia is a key term of the Christian life, connecting fellowship in the Holy Spirit with Christ and with his saints and it takes its rise in baptism to Christ and the body.” (p. 282)

Clearly one purpose accomplished by biblical baptism is to incorporate the one being baptized into Christ’s body, His church. Locally, how could we not recognize what the Lord has already done through His Spirit in baptism?

Another obvious purpose is that baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; I Peter 3:21). Of course, other passages in the New Testament, make it obvious that this baptism must be only for a candidate who has true faith (which changes the heart), true repentance (which changes the will), true confession (which changes the allegiance). To such a person, then, the Lord, in baptism, changes his/her state or condition from the empire of darkness to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:12-13; 2:12; Romans 6:4-5).

We all, who are Bible readers, have found that rarely does one Bible verse mention all the divine elements in our salvation (mercy, love, grace, the sinless life of Christ, the cross, the resurrection, etc.) Also, it is rare to find every element in our human response mentioned in one verse. But, hearing the gospel, believing it, repenting from sins, confessing Jesus as the Christ, putting Him on in baptism – all these are to be understood as vital. For example, John 3:16 does not eliminate repentance. Acts 11:18 does not rule out faith. I Peter 3:21 does not exclude confession of Jesus as Christ. To attempt to downgrade baptism because it is only mentioned about a hundred times in the New Testament is not a wise way to interpret Scripture. For example, John’s Gospel does not mention repentance, but many other Bible books do, therefore John’s use of “belief” must include the concept of repentance. And, it must be obvious that the usage of “faith” or “belief” does not exclude, but also includes the concept of baptism.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, baptism has several purposes – to enable us to be placed by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ and to receive remission of sins are just two. But it is not baptism alone. That, of course, is one reason why “baptism” (sprinkling) of babies is not found in the New Testament. Infants cannot believe, repent and confess. Nor do they have sins need-

ing forgiveness.

While, this discussion tonight has been fairly extensive, baptism still merits even more time for reflection. One thing we haven't discussed is the unspoken fear some Protestants seem to have that if we teach that baptism is for the remission of sins we might slide back into the doctrine of automatic forgiveness with baptism as a sacrament. That was taught by the medieval church. But we must teach God's truth about baptism. And, to teach the truth of God's Word always leads to freedom. *"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*(John 8:31-32)

## The Meaning and Purpose of Baptism in a Paragraph

The meaning of baptism is immersion in water administered to a Christ-trusting, penitent, confessing person as he/she re-enacts the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The purposes of baptism are multiple. Two principal things baptism accomplishes: one, in baptism we appropriate the forgiveness of sins Jesus made available on the cross; two, in baptism the Holy Spirit incorporates us into the body, the church and the Lord adds us to His church.

## May We Assist You?

If we can be of assistance to you in obeying Christ or if you ever would like to study this further with me or someone from the Edmond Church of Christ – just let us know. We invite you to come and be with us again. And we invite you to Christ and to His Church here. We also invite you to become a regular viewer and student of the [In Search of the Lord's Way](#) television program, sponsored by this congregation. We would also be thrilled to conduct a free Bible study in your home or, should you wish, to enroll you in a free Bible correspondence course. Also any and every Bible class or seminar here is offered for your benefit. You are always welcome here.

## God Bless You

God bless you one and all. We hope to see you again. May we be so led by God's revealed truth that we will trust Christ and obey Him so that each of us can spend an eternity in Heaven with Him and with each other!