

September 2, 2001 by Steve Brandon



Baptism and Its History

Matthew 28:18-20; 3:1-12; Acts

1. Baptism Before Christ
2. Baptism of the Apostles
3. Baptism until Today

I mentioned last week how our Lord instituted 2 ordinances of the church: The Lord's Supper and Baptism. Jesus initiated the Lord's Supper, as an ordinance for the church to follow, on the night before His death. Jesus initiated Baptism, as an ordinance for the church to follow, soon after His resurrection from the dead.

Last week, we celebrated the Lord's Supper last week for the first time at Rock Valley Bible Church. For completeness sake, I thought it appropriate for us to examine the ordinance of Christian Baptism this week.

Having said that, I recognize, that there are those in this room, who will not agree with the position that I will set forth in this sermon, because I have talked to you about it in the past. However, let me say that what I set forth is what we, as a church, will practice. If you disagree, may I simply urge you to demonstrate your love to us, as we will our love to you.

Furthermore, we will hardly be exhaustive in our approach tonight. My main focus will be on the history of Baptism. Thus, I have entitled my sermon this evening, "Christian Baptism and Its History." Last week when we examined the Lord's Supper, we looked at it in light of the historical context in which Jesus initiated His Supper. The meaning of the Lord's Supper begins to make incredible sense when we see the parallels between the Passover lamb and the upcoming sacrifice of our Lord. This week, we trust that the historical context in which Jesus initiated baptism will make clear our understanding of Christian baptism as well.

Open in your Bibles to Matthew, chapter 28:18-20. After His resurrection, Jesus had sent His disciples from Jerusalem to Galilee, a northern journey of 120 miles (28:10). In these verses, we find Jesus in Galilee speaking to His disciples. These words are precious words, because they are some of the last words that He spoke to His disciples. These verses have been called, "The Great Commission," because Jesus essentially sums up the purpose, role, and vision of the church in a few short words.

Matthew 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

In these words, we see the Plan and the Process of the church.

The Plan

The plan is simply "to make disciples." The Greek word here is *matheteuo*, which simply means "to make disciples, to make learners." If you write in your Bibles, circle this word. It is the main thought. All other thoughts surrounding the Great Commission are dependent upon this word.

What is the church about? It is about disciple making. It is about preaching the gospel, seeing people converted, and bringing them to maturity in Christ (i.e. making disciples of them). What is Rock Valley Bible Church all about? Making disciples.

The Process

The process is equally as simple. Jesus outlines it for us in 3 steps (using 3 subordinate participles):

1. Going - Going forth, speaking with others, expanding your influence
2. Baptizing - This speaks of the conversion process
3. Teaching - This speaks of the maturing process

This is obviously a sermon about baptism, so we won't spend much time on #1 and #3 (going and teaching), as important as they are. Let us look now at step #2 (baptizing).

Let me ask you a question at this point, when Jesus told His disciples to "baptize" all the nations, what was Jesus telling them to do? What would the disciples have thought? Jesus' command to them didn't come in a vacuum. There was certainly some prior context to his commission to His disciples to "baptize the nations." In order to understand this context, in my first point tonight, I would like to look at ...

1. Baptism Before Christ

I would like for us to understand how Baptism was understood before Jesus issued his mandate to baptize all the nations. Today, if you ask your typical American what "baptism" is, he will describe a baby being sprinkled with water at the front of a church, or perhaps Jesus freaks standing in the ocean with white robes on. But I want to ask you about how Jesus intended this command and how the disciples understood this command? When Jesus told them to go forth and "baptize," what did they think that Jesus was telling them to do?

Is this a fair question? It is the question you always ask in Bible interpretation. What was the original intent of the writing (or speaking) to the original hearers? We always need to know find out the original intent of the writing and then, and only then, bring the application to us today.

How did the disciples understand this command?

1. The apostles would have understood the meaning of the word, "Baptize."

"Baptize" is a word that has been transliterated into our English. This means that it is exactly the same word in the Greek. The Greek word is baptizw(baptizo). Our English word is exactly the same: baptism. Rather than translating the word, the translators "transliterated" it. They exchanged letter for letter. In translating the Bible, translators often transliterate. This is usually done in one of three instances.

1) You have a proper noun. For instance, Jerusalem is Greek is "Jerusalem." Galilee in Greek is "Galilee." Nathaniel in Greek is "Nathaniel." It makes no sense to try to translate these words, since they make perfect sense in English (or any other language into which you are translating).

2) You have a difficulty in understanding the meaning of a word. For instance, in the Old Testament, there is great difficulty in understanding the meaning of the Hebrew word, "Sheol." Does it mean "hell" or "Hades" or "death" or "the grave" or "the pit"? Old Testament scholars are baffled by this word, so they merely take the Hebrew word and make an English word out of it. Another instance of this is the foundation stones to the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21. Scholars don't exactly know what "sardonyx" or "sardius" or "chrysolite" stones are because of their obscurity, so they transliterate them. They are Greek words, which are transferred over into English. By the way, this is good technique of translation. You press the understanding of these words to the reader, rather than interpreting some obscure word.

3) You have a controversy in understanding what the word means. With the word, "baptism," there has been much controversy over the years. Let me explain...

There is no doubt as to the meaning of this word. It means, "to immerse, dunk, bury" in a literal sense. In a metaphorical sense, it means "to overwhelm." The picture is not a squirt-gun, but a swimming pool.

The reason why it is transliterated (or transferred) into English, rather than translated, is that it would stir unbelievable controversy. Additionally, such a translation would only sell to less than half of the professing church -- only the baptists would purchase such a Bible.

In 1835, such an attempt was made to translate this word into the English equivalent, "to immerse" by the American Bible Union. It stirred up great controversy. Debate continued for 20 years until a man named Thomas Conant wrote a book called, "The Meaning and Use of Baptizein." This is a tremendous book that seeks to put within its historical context every use of the meaning of baptizw(baptizo) (over 150 usages) from all types and periods of the Greek language.

In every case, the word has the basic idea of being immersed, submerged, buried, covered up, drowned." When speaking metaphorically, it has the idea of being "overwhelmed." A drunk man is "baptized" (i.e. overwhelmed) by wine. A righteous man is "baptized" (i.e. overwhelmed) by evils around Him. This metaphorical sense is how Jesus used this word in Luke 12:50 - "I have a baptism to undergo [i.e. His crucifixion], and how distressed I am until it is accomplished."

The meaning of the word is clear. Baptizw(baptizo) means, "to immerse or over-whelm." This describes the mode of baptism. The meaning of baptism is far more important than the mode, and is found in the second way in which the disciples would have understood baptism.

2. The apostles would have understood these words to have parallels with the ministry of John the Baptist.

Let's turn our attention to John by turning in our Bibles to Matthew, chapter 3:1-12. It is here that we hear of the ministry of John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of the Messiah, of whom Malachi and Isaiah spoke. John's function was to point to Jesus, as the Messiah. As we read Matthew 3:1-12, notice what John's baptizing meant to those being baptized.

Matthew 3:1-12

1. Now in those days John the Baptist *came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,

2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'"

4 Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan;

6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

7. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

8 "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance;

9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

10 "And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

12 "And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Look at what we have here. John is a preacher in the wilderness (verse 1). His message is simple, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (i.e. the Messiah is here!) (verse 2). Jerusalem and Judea and the district around the Jordan were coming to him (verse 5). They were being baptized by him as they confessed their sins (verse 6).

John's message was repentance (i.e. a confession of your sins and a turning from them). John's baptism was for repentance. There was a great revival in Jerusalem and in the surrounding regions. People were coming and acknowledging their sins and confessing them. In response to their repentance, John was baptizing them.

Notice that his baptism didn't intrinsically forgive sins. There was nothing "cleansing" about it. It was a picture of the cleansing that accompanied the confession. Neither did his baptism bring about repentance. Rather, the baptism was an identification that one had repented. That is why he turned away the Pharisees in verses 7-8.

7. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

8 "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance;"

John wasn't about to baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees, who weren't repentant. Because, he said, "I baptize you with water for repentance" (:11). In other words, John's baptism was an outward sign of an inward reality. His baptism merely identified the repentant ones and symbolized their cleansing.

John's message was about repentance from sin. John's baptism was about repentance from sin. That is the baptism of John.

For the sake of our main point, when Jesus' disciples heard Jesus telling them to go and "baptize" the nations, John was their model. They were to preach repentance and forgiveness in the cross of Jesus Christ and baptize those who responded to the message as an identification with Jesus Christ and as a symbol of their cleansing.

How did the Jews understand John's activity?

But let me ask another question: when John was out in the wilderness preaching repentance and baptizing those who repented, what did the Jewish people think that he was doing? Just as I asked you about what the disciples understood, I now ask you about what the Jewish people would have understood. Is there any precedent for such a thing? Did John make up this cleansing ritual? Did John say, "Hey, this would be cool, we go a preach and we give a bath to those who respond! Yeah, that would be a cool ministry."

No. John didn't dream this up in his head. His precedent for doing this was based upon Jewish cleansing rituals, called "mikveh." Mikveh literally means, "a collection" or "gathering" as the waters were "gathered together" in Genesis 1:10. But the Mikveh, later came to be known for this cleansing ritual.

For nearly a century before John came on the scene, "the Jewish people had practiced immersion of Gentile converts to Judaism" (Moishe Rosen, Y'Shua, p. 28). Those Gentiles who wished to convert would undergo this ritual in which they would give testimony of a repentant heart that has confessed and renounced their sin. You can read about this emphasis of one's heart condition in the Dead Sea Scrolls. These writings detail how the purifying water of the mikveh doesn't cleanse in an of itself, but when united with the "spirit of uprightness and humility. And when his flesh is sprinkled with purifying water and sanctified by cleansing water [mikveh], it shall be made clan by the humble submission of his soul to all the precepts of God" (Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, pp. 64,69,70).

So, when John was out in the Jordan River dunking people who had renounced their sins, it was very clear to the people of his day what he was doing. This was a common practice for Gentile converts to undergo for converting to Judaism.

Furthermore, this was also a common practice for Jewish worshipers coming to worship in the temple. If you go to Jerusalem, near the temple mount, where the temple was, you will see many, many of these mikveh (or mikvot in the plural) all around the temple mount. They were used also for the cleansing of the Jewish worshipers as they came to worship in the temple area.

They were big structures. You can easily walk in and walk out of them. (We have pictures of them. Ask me about them sometime when you visit our house and I will show you what they look like).

Where did this cleansing ritual get started?

Did the Jews simply dream up the idea. Did the Jews say, "Hey, we need to make sure that the people coming to worship are ceremonially clean. So, let's build some bath houses." No. This practice came from the pages of the Old Testament. In Numbers 19:20-22, and Lev. 15:13, explicit directions are given for purification after defilement by touching a dead body or having an emission of bodily fluid.

The Jews had taken this practice and had developed this cleansing ritual into the mikveh ritual. These "mikvot" (Jewish bath houses) were

the practical manifestation of how the Jews worked out the injunctions in the Old Testament to be ceremonially clean before worship. This is similar to our practice of using little plastic cups for communion. Nothing tells us that have to do communion this way, but it is how we have worked out our practice.

So, when John comes and preaches a baptism of repentance, the Jews knew exactly what he was doing. It wasn't some strange thing. It was natural. He took the traditional Jewish practice of ritual cleansing and preached to Israel that they would repent and demonstrate this in their baptism.

How did the disciples understand Jesus' command to baptize?

Let's get back to the first question that I asked. When Jesus told the disciples to make disciples by baptizing them, how did they understand it? What did Jesus mean?

I believe that the answer in light of the historical context is crystal clear. Jesus was telling His disciples to go out and preach repentance and forgiveness in the cross of Christ. Those who repent and believe are to be baptized to identify themselves with Christ and to symbolize their cleansing in Him.

Let's examine this question a bit further, how did the apostles baptize? This will show how they understood the command.

2. Baptism of the Apostles

This task is pretty simple. We simply need to take Acts and trace the baptismal activity of the apostles through this book. It will show how they understood Christ's command to baptize.

The first instance of apostolic baptism is in Acts, chapter 2. Turn there. In this chapter, the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost upon the early church. Men began to speak in tongues (i.e. languages that they didn't know, but that others knew and understood in their mother tongue). It was such a strange phenomenon that people were quite alarmed. To many, it appeared as if they were simply babbling. So many said, "Oh, they are just drunk."

Then Peter stands up and says that they aren't drunk, but rather this is a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. Peter continues on to describe Jesus Christ to them. He finally ends with the punch-line...

Acts 2:36 - "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ -- this Jesus whom you crucified."

Acts 2:37 - They were pierced to the heart and said, "What shall we do?"

Acts 2:38 - "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins;"

This sounds amazingly like John's baptism. You remember that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He said, "I baptize with water for repentance" (Matt. 3:11). John baptized those who had repented. Peter here is saying the same thing. Repentance is the message. Baptism for (i.e. as a result of) forgiveness is the response.

We read later, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). In other words, those who believed were baptized.

The next instance of baptism in Acts is found in Acts 8. Turn over there. In this passage, we find that Philip had come to Samaria to preach. "When they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike" (Acts 8:12). Those who believed were baptized.

Later on in chapter 8, we have the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch, reading Is. 53 in his chariot, but being confused. We read, "Philip ... beginning from this Scripture [i.e. Is. 53] he preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35). The Eunuch responded and said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (8:36). In other words, the Eunuch was convinced of Philip's message, believed it, and wanted to be baptized in response to the message. Some manuscripts add Philip's clarifying remark in verse 37: "If you believe with all your heart, you may [be baptized]." The Eunuch believed and was baptized.

Turn next to Acts 9. This is the story of the conversion of Paul. Paul was struck blind and came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Look at verse 18, "Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized." Paul believed and was baptized.

Next time we see the apostles baptizing is in Acts 10. We find Peter preaching to the Gentiles. When he concludes, the Holy Spirit fell upon those who were listening to the message. Peter "ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ," because they believed his message" (verse 48). Again, they believe and were baptized.

Do we detect a pattern here?

We could continue on and on and on. But the point is this: the apostles baptized those who believed the message of the gospel. The pattern is always belief, then baptism.

One more verse to imbed this concept into your minds. Acts 18:8 - "And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized."

The way to best understand baptism is that it is a visual representation of what has already taken place in the heart. I like to say, "baptism is

an outward sign to an inward reality." There is nothing magical that God does through the waters of baptism. There is no spiritual transaction that takes place. It is simply a symbol of what has occurred.

In this respect, it is exactly like the Lord's Supper. There is nothing that you get through the elements of the bread and the fruit of the vine. It is simply a symbol of Christ's death, which we proclaim in our partaking.

The pattern is "belief first, then baptism."

In the Bible, we never see someone being baptized first, then coming to faith. Those who object to this often refer to the baptism of household. In Acts 16, we have two "household baptisms": Lydia's household and the Philippian jailor's household. But, everyone in the Philippian jailor's household believed. Look at verse 34, "He [the jailor] brought them [Paul and Silas] into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household." With Lydia's household (verse 15) we are given no such explicit data. But, to assume that a portion of her household were unbelievers is to go against every other verse in Acts which represents the apostolic baptismal practice.

Baptism before Christ was a baptism of repentance, following closely after the Jewish cleansing ritual of the mikveh. The baptism of the Apostles was always a baptism that followed saving faith in Jesus. Baptism is nothing more and nothing less than a step of obedience. Jesus told us to be baptized, so we are baptized.

Let's now look at ...

3. Baptism until Today

Obviously, today, there is a difference of opinion as to what genuine baptism is. Some sprinkle infants, while others immerse believers. As a result this has created conflict and tension in the church today.

I like the story of the Presbyterian and Baptist who were debating the merits of sprinkling vs. immersion.

The Presbyterian said, "Tell me this. You're a Baptist. If a man goes into the water up to his knees, is he baptized?"

The Baptist said "No, he is not."

"Well if he goes in up to his waist, is he baptized?"

"Of course not."

"If he goes in up to his shoulders?"

"Not yet."

"Well, suppose he goes in clear up to the top of his head, is he baptized then?"

"Yes!" the Baptist said.

"Ah," said the Presbyterian, "you see, it's the water on top of the head that counts!"

Yet, despite the difference in practice today, I believe that I have clearly demonstrated what was the practice of the early church was with this regard. I believe that it is clear from the pages of Scripture that those baptized were immersed completely in water. Those who object to this have mountains of evidence piled against them. I believe that the Scriptures clearly teach that baptism always followed saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Those who believe in infant baptism have to concede that in the Bible, there are no infants who were baptized. There is no example of those who had no faith being baptized. Everyone always believed first, and then were baptized.

Now, I admit that this doesn't prove everything. For instance, there isn't an example in the Bible of a Chinese person believing the gospel of Christ. This doesn't prohibit Chinese people becoming Christians. We, who believe that those who are Chinese need to justify that they can through scriptural warrant. However, it is quite simple to justify. We see that the Bible speaks about how men from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9) will be worshiping the Lamb in glory. The Chinese people are included. Therefore, the gospel of Jesus Christ extends to the Chinese people.

Similarly, those who believe in the baptism of infants need to realize that the justification for such a practice must come through theological reasoning and not through Biblical example. The burden of my message has been eminently historical, not theological. Historically, John baptized by immersion for repentance. Likewise, the disciples baptized by immersion for repentance and belief in Jesus as the Messiah who takes away the sins of the world.

When did infant baptism start?

That being said, the question naturally comes, where, then, did infant baptism start?

I tried to trace down exactly when it started and found it very difficult. With respect to the early church fathers, there is very little mention of infant baptism until the beginning of the 3rd century. Those who believe in infant baptism demonstrate their bias in indicating that this silence doesn't prove anything, since the early church fathers don't mention adult baptism very often as well.

I believe that wide-scale infant baptism had its start with Constantine, who was the first Christian emperor of the Roman Empire. He was the emperor responsible for stopping the persecuting of Christians. He issued the edict of Milan in 313 A.D., which is often called, the edict of toleration, which allowed Christians to worship legally without breaking the law.

In 324 AD, Christianity began to escalate, when Constantine pronounced the imperial edict that all soldiers are to worship the Supreme God on the first day of the week. In that year, one source (which may be exaggerated) says that more than 12,000 men, women and children were baptized in Rome alone. This same source suggests that most were probably more motivated by the white garment and the 20 pieces of gold

that they were promised to receive as a result (Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. III, pp. 31,32).

In this edict, Constantine thus married the church and the state. Those who were part of the church were part of the state. When these two concepts are married, infant baptism begins to make sense, because conversion to Christ is no longer an issue. Those who are born into the state are born Christians. Thus, they ought to be baptized as Christians.

This, then became the official theology of the Roman Catholic Church. I recently had an opportunity to attend a Roman Catholic Baptism. I was astonished to hear the babies who were baptized were declared to be forgiven of their sins, be born again, and members of the church of Jesus Christ.

This was the prevailing view of the church until the Reformation in the 16th century. Sadly to say, with respect to baptism, nothing much changed in the Reformation. Men like John Calvin and Martin Luther still upheld the baptizing of infants.

I have found John Calvin to be difficult to understand on this issue of baptism. I believe that the reason for this is that he attempts to uphold the doctrine of justification by faith alone in the process of justifying infant baptism. The two doctrines are difficult to reconcile apart from changing the baptismal practice to something other than what the apostles did. As best as I can tell, John Calvin did back off the Roman Catholic doctrine of the new birth (regeneration) occurring through the rite of baptism. Yet, he spoke (in his Institutes of Christian Religion) of baptism as a "a token and proof of our cleansing;" Furthermore, he wrote that "at whatever time we are baptized, we are once for all washed and purged for our whole life."

Where did baptism by immersion reemerge into prominence?

There were some, however, during the Reformation, who saw, in the scripture that it was only believers who were baptized. In Zurich in 1525, a man named Conrad Grebel was holding Bible classes in which he became convinced that the apostolic form of baptism was the immersion of adults. The church in Zurich ordered these classes to be stopped and that all parents were to have their babies baptized within eight days of birth, or they would face banishment from the territory.

As the opposition mounted, "George Blaurock, a former priest, stepped over to Conrad Grebel and asked him for baptism in the apostolic fashion -- upon confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ. Grebel baptized him on the spot and Blaurock proceeded to baptize the others" (Bruce L. Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, p. 265). If memory serves me correctly, I think that there were a small handful of people there.

Grebel and Blaurock's actions started the Anabaptist movement of the Reformation, a movement filled with many abuses and extremes. I mention them to point out that these people simply went back to the apostolic pattern of baptism and believed it: baptism upon confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ.

These people were intensely persecuted. Many of them were drowned for their conviction of believer's baptism. The line from those persecuting them said, "You want to be immersed? We will immerse you."

From the Reformation on, debate has continued. Perhaps this sermon continues the debate needlessly. Let me simply say this....

Those who believe in believer's baptism by immersion do this in their reasoning.

1. They look at the meaning of the word, baptizo.
2. They look to see how the apostles understood this word
3. They take the apostles as an example and do likewise.

Those who believe in infant baptism by sprinkling do this in their reasoning.

1. They must first establish in their minds a theological framework through a study of the Bible (say ... a covenantal or theonomy perspective).
2. They then examine what the apostles did to see if it fits with their theology.
3. If it doesn't, they trust their theological framework, and baptize infants, contrary to apostolic example, in an effort to be consistent with their theology.

This is really how it works.

We don't have time this evening to deal with these theological frameworks to see how they justify the baptism of infants. Perhaps we will save this for another time. Suffice to say that I have never found them to be convincing arguments.

But, with this issue, may we have the spirit with which C. H. Spurgeon explains what compelled him to change his views on baptism. Both his father and grandfather practiced infant baptism, but Charles Spurgeon was eminently a Baptist. He said, "I have attended the house of God with my father and my grandfather; but I thought, when I read the Scriptures, that it was my business to judge for myself. I knew that my father and my grandfather took little children in their arms, and put drops of water on their faces, and they were baptized. I took up my Bible, and I could not see anything about babes being baptized. I picked up a little Greek; and I could not discover that the word 'baptized' meant to sprinkle; so I said to myself, 'Suppose they are good men, they may be wrong; and though I love and revere them, yet it is no reason why I should imitate them.' And therefore I left them, and became what I am today, a Baptist minister, so called, but I hope a great deal more a Christian than a Baptist" (Spurgeon's Sermons, Volume 3, p. 190).

May I say that we, as a church, will practice believer's baptism, by immersion. May I say that we, as a church, must be more a "Christian" church than a "Baptist church. May I say that we will tolerate those with differing views, as good men, with whom we disagree.

Having said that, let me press on to a conclusion this evening.

Perhaps there are some of you that need to be baptized.

If you have come to faith in the sufficient sacrifice for sins in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, but have not followed him in baptism, may I encourage you to follow what Jesus said in obedience to Him? When the Jews were convicted of their sins, they asked, "What should we do?" Peter said, "Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

If you haven't been baptized, and are convicted that you need to be, please come talk to me.

Recently, I have spoken with several of you children. If you sincerely believe in Jesus and want to be baptized, speak with your parents about it. Let them clearly describe to you what it means to be a Christian. Let them describe to you that you need to trust in Christ alone for your forgiveness.

I was speaking with a young boy yesterday, who never read his Bible, but was an altar boy at church, so, he thought himself to be religious. I told him that he can only be truly religious by believing in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to be all his hope of salvation. Your attendance at Rock Valley Bible Church isn't going to help your salvation. Your diligence in filling out your sermon notes every week isn't going to help your salvation. You need to believe in the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross to be sufficient to cover your sins.

Examine yourself and see if you really believe this and desire to forsake all and follow Jesus. It will cost you much. Perhaps not today, but it will. But if that is a decision you have made, talk with your parents. Then, come talk to me. I want to hear how it is that you came to believe in Jesus. I want to hear how God has changed your heart and given you new desires to follow him. Because, when you are baptized, you need to tell everybody of these things. We baptize believers, so it makes sense to hear, from their own mouths, how they have come to faith in Christ.

Let us all remember that the two ordinances that Jesus has given us are quite simple. We celebrate the Lord's supper because Jesus told us to. We baptize those who have turned from their sins and trusted Christ, because Jesus told us to. May the Lord find us doing His business when He returns.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 2, 2001 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.