

## Who Should Be Baptized and Why?

Acts 10:34-48

July 7, 2019



Please read Acts 10:34-48 before going further in this transcript.

Today we're taking a break from our summer sermon series on the Psalms. We are beginning a 3-week series on baptism. Baptism is one of the ordinances that Jesus left for His followers. Our Statement of Faith summarizes it well: "...The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer."<sup>1</sup> At our church, the Efree Church of Bemidji, we do a nice job with consistently practicing the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. About 6 times a year, we set aside specific time to remember Jesus' sacrifice by partaking in the bread and the juice. However, baptism is something that we just don't spend as much time on. That's really kind of a shame. There is so much great symbolism and gospel significance to baptism. Now, I'm not suggesting that we should all get baptized 6 times a year in order to practice it more consistently. But, I am suggesting that it will be well worth our time to take a few Sundays and think more deeply about this important mandate from Jesus. Today, we'll begin this series by thinking a little more broadly about baptism. I invite each one of us to consider this introductory question: "Who Should Be Baptized and Why?"

Acts 10:34-48 is the dramatic finale to a wonderful moment in gospel history.<sup>2</sup> A Gentile man named Cornelius and many of his Gentile relatives and Gentile friends encounter the gospel in a powerful way. Gentile just means anyone who is not Jewish. Most of us reading this transcript are probably Gentiles. Acts 10:34-35 begins, "Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.'" You see, the Jewish people had come to believe something untrue: that God only accepted people who were Jewish. Or, those who were willing to convert to Judaism. One of the requirements for a Gentile to convert to Judaism was that the males must first be circumcised.<sup>3</sup> Any male who grew up as a Jew, would have been circumcised when he was 8 days old. However, if a Gentile family converted over to Judaism, all the males were circumcised, "regardless of their age."<sup>4</sup> This was unpopular to say the least, but more importantly for today's message, it turns out that the gospel makes circumcision entirely UNNECESSARY.<sup>5</sup> In other words, as a Jew, Peter didn't require this Gentile Cornelius and all of the men with him to be circumcised first. He simply shared the gospel message with them. We learn in Acts 10:44-45 that, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles." The Christians who had come along with Peter were all Jews; they'd all been circumcised. And they were ASTONISHED at what had just happened to these UNCIRCUMCISED Gentiles.<sup>6</sup>

It's interesting to note by the way, that Acts 10 gives us one of the most practical reasons for speaking in tongues in the Early Church. Speaking in tongues was an outward manifestation that gave convincing evidence that the Holy Spirit was inside of someone. We see this powerfully within the Jews at Pentecost in Acts 2. We see it powerfully again within the Gentiles now, in Acts 10. In other words, as the Jewish Christians stood there along with Peter and watched the Holy Spirit being poured out on Gentiles, it was irrefutable evidence of their salvation. Verse 46 declares, "For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God." For this particular time in history, when the

<sup>1</sup> Taken from Article 7 of the EFCA Statement of Faith.

<sup>2</sup> It's preferable to read the full story beginning at Acts 10:1 and reading until Acts 11:18.

<sup>3</sup> Among other things including baptism and an offering at the temple. Learn more by reading *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., by Everett Ferguson, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993, pp. 512-517, "Proselytes and Godfearers."

<sup>4</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993, p. 513.

<sup>5</sup> The book of Galatians says much more about this.

<sup>6</sup> "Apparently the early Jewish Christians failed to understand that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as for Jews." *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1846.

church was just getting started, speaking in tongues was something that God used in a very special way.<sup>7</sup> It helped the Jewish believers see that Jesus was not just Lord of the Jews, He is LORD OF ALL! God accepts people from every nation, from every tribe and tongue. Whether Jew or Gentile, whether Native or Caucasian, whether we come from a background that is Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, or whatever else. God does NOT show favoritism to any particular people group. We serve a God of ALL peoples.

What does all of this have to do with baptism? Well, actually it leads right into it. Peter states it plainly in Acts 10:47-48, “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> The reason that Cornelius and all of the Gentiles with him had received the Holy Spirit, was that they had believed in Jesus. Just a few verses earlier Acts 10:43 tells us, “...everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” In other words, those who believe in Jesus, receive forgiveness, and then they should be baptized. That is the natural progression of our faith.

Let’s note something here about Cornelius. BEFORE he heard Peter declare the gospel message, he already feared God and he already lived a righteous life. We are told earlier in Acts 10:2 that, “He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.” Despite this clear description of spiritual devotion and good works, Cornelius was NOT yet saved. He had not yet received forgiveness or the Holy Spirit. Cornelius did not find salvation until he put his faith in Jesus. Acts 10:43 makes it clear that “...everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, anyone who claims that they can get to heaven by “being a good person” is wrong. We ALL need Jesus. He is the one and the only way to God.

So, I’ll say it again: “those who believe in Jesus, receive forgiveness, and then they should be baptized. That is the natural progression of our faith.” Let’s jump back to Peter’s statement in

Acts 10:47, “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, once we are convinced that someone is GENUINELY saved, what should stop them from being baptized?<sup>11</sup> I’d like to put this more directly to us today:

### **What is standing in YOUR way of being baptized?**

Biblically, there should really only be one thing that keeps us from being baptized: if we haven’t yet believed in Jesus. If we haven’t yet received forgiveness of sins through his name. That’s really about the only thing that can stand in someone’s way. And that’s something that can be remedied by placing faith in Jesus today. If you have not yet believed in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, I urge you to talk to someone about that today.

Now, if you have already believed in Jesus but you have not yet been baptized, then what is standing in your way? You may have your reasons; they may even be pretty good reasons. Some people have a fear of water; that makes baptism pretty scary. Others have social anxiety or just don’t like the idea of standing up in front in a public setting. Sometimes our age stands in the way, either because we feel that we are still too young or that they we have grown too old to be baptized. Some just don’t feel quite ready. Others just may not be convinced that baptism is really that important to their faith. There are likely many other reasons as well. But whatever might be standing in YOUR way, I encourage you to at least ATTEND one of our baptism classes. Attending does not obligate

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<sup>7</sup> This is not to suggest that speaking in tongues has necessarily ceased for today.

<sup>8</sup> It’s important that we not get distracted by the “speaking in tongues” issue. Distraction with speaking in tongues is exactly what happened in Corinth. 1 Corinthians 12:30 asks “Do all speak in tongues?” Both the grammar and context clearly indicate that the answer to this question is an undeniable, “no.” Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 14:18-19, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.” In other words, although God used speaking in tongues in some very powerful ways in the Early Church, there was also a lot of confusion about it. We should be careful not to overstate the importance of tongues over against the other spiritual gifts.

<sup>9</sup> See Isaiah 53:11.

<sup>10</sup> Some Bible translations word verse 47 as more of a question: “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people...?” (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> This is why, at our church, we ask people to share their faith testimony before they are baptized.

anyone to be baptized. Take some time to carefully think through, whatever it is that's standing in your way. Allow one of our pastors or elders to answer any questions you may have.

Baptism is the natural next step for anyone who believes in Jesus and receives forgiveness. We see this pattern not only in Acts 10 but also in many other places in the NT. Probably the most obvious place is in the Great Commission. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus commissions His followers with these familiar words: "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...." (Matthew 28:19-20) I'm not trying to unfairly pressure anyone or to force anyone to get baptized. But, as a pastor, I am urging you to seriously consider taking this step in your faith journey. I am convinced that it will be a significant blessing and benefit to your faith. And, it is ALWAYS such an encouragement and inspiration to those of us who gather to witness your baptism and to hear your testimony.

In fact, speaking of sharing our testimonies, I'd like to share my own baptism story as an encouragement to some of you today. Back when I was 7 years old, our church was having a baptism service on the shores of Lake Metonga. It's located on the south end of Crandon, WI. I grew up camping on this lake with my grandparents and my cousins. I spent countless hours on this lake having all kinds of summer fun. I loved swimming as a kid but I also liked catching crayfish (i.e. crawfish or crawdads, "lake lobsters"). I still remember the thrill of trying to catch those quick little stinkers. I can also remember the pain of reaching down under the rocks to grab one and getting pinched!



Well, crayfish have nothing to do with baptism! But, the point that I am trying to make is that I loved having fun in this lake. And when I heard that our church was having a baptism service out at Lake Metonga, I wanted to be there! I wasn't actually planning on getting baptized though. I just wanted to go swimming. But, when we got there, my parents told me that I couldn't go in the water! It wasn't like our church picnics here at Efree, where we allow some time for people to go swimming. The only people who got to go into the water were the pastor and anyone being baptized. Hum... anyone being baptized got to go into the water... light bulb! I got a great idea, "dad/mom, can I be baptized? Please, please, please!" And so, into the baptismal waters I went. The pastor<sup>12</sup> said a few words but I wasn't really listening. I was just waiting for him to dunk me under the wonderful waters of Lake Metonga. Well, he did. And then, he let me go back up on shore. Only, I didn't just wade back in, I SWAM back in. And not in a direct line. I was splashing away and taking my sweet time. The plan had worked! Well, I'm not proud of that story, but it does make me smile a little. Kids are willing to do some pretty crazy things, for any chance to go swimming.

One year later my parents sent me to a summer camp called Camp Byron. Camp Byron was super cool because they had an outdoor pool! Most importantly though, Camp Byron is where I came to saving faith in Jesus Christ. As I mentioned earlier, "those who believe in Jesus, receive forgiveness, and THEN they should be baptized. That is the natural progression of our faith." But I had a somewhat unusual problem: I'd already been baptized. Even so, I really wanted to be baptized again, this time for the right reason. And, this time with a proper understanding of what water baptism was really about. When I told my mom and dad, they were really glad to hear about my salvation. But, they were LESS THAN THRILLED to go back to the pastor and ask him to baptize me AGAIN! After lots of pleading, and a little more explaining, they came around and the pastor agreed that I could be baptized AGAIN.

My 2<sup>nd</sup> baptism was quite different from the 1<sup>st</sup>. This time, I didn't go to Lake Metonga just so that I could go swimming. And when the pastor was talking, I was listening. After he baptized me in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I didn't swim back to shore. I walked to shore soberly, in all seriousness. I now recognized the magnitude of what was happening. I had made my private devotion to Jesus, a public declaration. I now understood that my baptism was a visible/tangible

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<sup>12</sup> Either Pastor Barker or Dr. Moffet.

expression of my identification with Jesus' death/burial/resurrection. My baptism at age 8, was much different than my baptism at age 7. It wasn't just that I was a year older. It's that I was now was being baptized AS A BELIEVER, who had received forgiveness. A believer, who was filled with the Holy Spirit. A believer, who was filled with an understanding of what it means to celebrate what Jesus had done for me. It felt so good to celebrate and to obey this wonderful mandate from the Lord Jesus Himself. I thoroughly agree with our Statement of Faith, my baptism confirmed and nourished me as a believer.

I share my story in part, as an appeal to those of you who were baptized as infants. Our church has child dedications. We don't practice infant baptism, but many churches do, and we respect that. Each church tradition approaches baptism a little differently. One of the great things about the Evangelical Free Church of America, to which we belong, is that we choose not to divide over the different approaches to baptism. However, we do feel that it's important to clarify that baptism is not what saves us from sin. Only believing in Jesus can do that. Today, I simply want to encourage anyone who has not yet been baptized AS A BELIEVER, to consider whether it might be a good thing for your faith. Believe me, I know it can be a little awkward to be baptized twice. But I can also testify that it has great potential to be something VERY significant in your spiritual journey. So I urge you to pray about it. Whether you haven't been baptized at all yet, or whether you were baptized as an infant. Once again, I encourage you to attend our baptism class. We often get questions about infant baptism and we'd love to talk with you some more about that or about any questions you might have.

Let's close by reading an interesting statement that the Apostle Paul makes about baptism. He writes in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? **Were you BAPTIZED in the name of Paul?** I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...."

In other words, here Paul helps us to remember that it is best that we not get too worked up about baptism. There is a real danger that baptism could divide us, rather than unite us. So, whatever each of us decides about our own baptism, may it not distract us from the gospel. After all, that would be the opposite of what baptism is designed and intended for. Brother or Sister in Christ, may baptism be a beautiful word picture of the gospel, by which we more fully understand the Good News of what Jesus has done for us.

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
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