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Baptism and the Early Church; Acts 16:11-15, 25-34

GBC

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Introduction – Our Lord Jesus has given the church two ordinances; baptism and the Lord’s Supper. An ordinance is a sacred service that powerfully and visually proclaims the gospel. An ordinance is a God-given illustration of the gospel. The Lord’s Supper visually portrays how our salvation was accomplished by the death of Christ, and baptism visually portrays the radical, life-transforming effects of embracing the gospel. It is the picture that we have brought from death to life.

If Jesus has given these ordinances to His people, and if Jesus Himself took part in them, and if these are meant to be portrayals of the glorious gospel, then the more we understand them, the more our faith is strengthened by them.

One way to learn the rich meaning and the right practice of baptism is by observing baptism in the early church. In Acts 16 we find 2 examples of baptism and there is much here to learn about its meaning and practice.

- I. Lydia’s Conversion and Baptism (16:11-15)
 - a. Observations and Lessons – 3 (vv14-15)
 - i. What was Paul saying?
 1. Look back to v10. It was the gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.
 2. The Bible says Lydia was a worshipper of God, meaning that she believed in the God of the OT scripture. She believed the God of the OT was the one, true God and she desired to know Him and follow Him, but she had not yet heard the good news that God’s promised salvation had come in Jesus.
 3. And so down by the river, on that Sabbath day, Paul was doing exactly what he had come to Macedonia to do – proclaiming the gospel of salvation in Christ.
 4. *Baptism is never separate or disconnected from gospel proclamation. If it is a visual portrayal of the gospel, by necessity then, you must know the message being portrayed. Otherwise, it loses all its meaning

and becomes mere ritual. The proclaimed gospel gives the visualized gospel its context.

ii. What was the Lord doing?

1. “opened her heart” meaning that in order for us to grasp and receive and embrace the gospel message, we need a work of grace in our hearts. We need God to open our hearts so that we can then believe.
2. These words “opened her heart” are simply another way of stating the New Covenant work of grace described in Deut 30:6 – “God will circumcise your heart so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you might live.” That’s what God was doing in Lydia’s heart, opening her heart to embrace the gospel so that she might love the Lord and that she might live.
3. Ez 11:19-20 God says I will remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh...and they shall be my people and I will be their God” That’s what God was doing in Lydia’s heart – opening her heart, giving her a new heart to hear, obey and be a child of God.
4. Paul says it this way over in Eph 2:5 that “even when we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ.” That’s what God was doing in Lydia’s heart. We call this regeneration. God was opening her heart and making her new so that she would willingly respond in faith to the gospel of Christ.
5. *Baptism, then, is only rightly practiced when one has truly been born again by the Spirit of God. The gospel must be proclaimed, and the gospel must be embraced for baptism to have its meaning.

iii. When was she baptized?

1. It was after she had heard the gospel and had embraced the gospel. It was after she had repented of her sins and trusted in Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior that she was then baptized. We call this believer’s baptism.

b. Theology: The Role of the Church – 1 (v15)

- i. Notice Lydia's insightful, provocative, instructive language! "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord" Wow! That strikes right at the heart of our rugged American individualism and our post-modern autonomy in which we self-determine, judge, and justify everything on our own merit without any sense of need or any want of any input. "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord" What's going on here?
- ii. Notice when Lydia reached that conclusion – it was after she had been baptized by Paul and his company. In other words, while baptism did not make Lydia a believer, God made Lydia a believer in v14, baptism identified Lydia as a believer on the authority of the Apostle Paul who had agreed that her profession of faith was sincere and true.
- iii. *Baptism then is the earthly recognition of a heavenly work of grace.
- iv. Now as we move from Acts to the NT epistles, we see the ministry of the apostles coming to a close as the local church is established and elders and pastors begin to take on the roles previously entrusted to the apostles.
- v. In the NT era of the church, the authority to identify believers, baptize believers, is entrusted to and practiced in local congregations who are spiritually overseen by elders or pastors.
- vi. That's exactly the way Jesus said it would be – Matt 18:18.
- vii. Baptism, then, in its best, ideal practice, is a local church, corporate practice. Explain ideal – mission field, illness prevents corporate practice. But those are the exceptions to the rule. The rule is corporate practice because God has given His church the authority to identify His people. God identifies His people by His people.

II. The Philippian Jailer's Conversion and Baptism (16:24-34)

a. Theology: Baptism and Salvation – 1 (v31)

- i. I just want to stress that baptism does not save anyone. Baptismal regeneration is a false gospel. If someone says, if you are not baptized, you won't go to heaven, they are a heretic! Jesus told the thief on the cross who expressed his faith Christ, "today you will be with me in paradise. He

didn't say, too bad, you can't be baptized. Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailor, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. They didn't say, "believe and be baptized and then you will be saved." If you find yourself disagreeing with Jesus and Paul, you are wrong!

- ii. Now, that being said, just because baptism is not necessary to be saved, that does not mean it is not necessary for our Christian life. Because it does not save us does not mean we can make up our own mind about it, that it is an optional part of our faith or obedience, or that we can delay or make our own decision about it. Our identification in Christ by the church is fundamental to our growth in Christ and is our entry into the local church. Baptism is what takes the invisible declaration of heaven and invisible, individual work of grace in our hearts and makes it legitimately, authentically public.
- iii. If it wasn't essential, Christ would not have commanded it and Paul would not have practiced it. It doesn't save, but it does sanctify – it sets us apart as being the people of God.

b. Observations and Lessons

- i. V32 – household baptisms are sometimes used as evidence that infants were baptized in the NT. The problem with that interpretation is v32.
- ii. V33 – Notice the timing.
- iii. V34 – notice the joy!
- iv. Ill. Diploma. It's not your education but it identifies you with having a degree. It is conferred upon you by an educational institution that has judged you as having completed your education.

Conclusion – Have you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you been identified as a believer by God's instrument of identifying His people? Is your faith just your individual testament, or has the church, the people of God, the Body of Christ, affirmed and agreed and celebrated and acknowledged your profession of faith?