

# Baptizing in Christ

## *The Path of Discipleship:*

Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16

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One day I was officiating a wedding at a college chapel, and Diane and I ran into a friend of ours. She was a pastor's wife, a counselor and conference speaker. She had a very difficult childhood culminating in two abortions and an attempt to take her own life. However, Jesus did a profound work in her life. Julie became a ministering disciple of Jesus. At one point her parents disinherited her. An older couple, who knew and loved her, adopted this mother of four as their own daughter. We broke away from the wedding for a few minutes to enjoy an open house-type celebration of her adoption. One of the greatest gifts of love is adoption. To be chosen, whatever the age, as another person's child is a great honor.

God gives us this wonderful image of adoption in the Bible. The Bible says:

***(God) chose us in (Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love (God) predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ... (Ephesians 1:4-5, NIV)***

In love God desires to adopt you. Through sin we joined a cosmic rebellion against God, defying his rightful authority. Through Jesus Christ we receive the right to be children of God.

***To all who received (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:12-13, NIV)***

Like adoption, the Bible speaks of a legal transaction – “the right to become children of God.” It is not a matter of natural descent or biology. Unlike adoption, however, there is a spiritual transition, so that you are not only adopted by God. You are also born of God. You are

born a second time, in the order of Jesus who was conceived through the work of the Holy Spirit. You become a fresh work of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, there is an end to your old life that is separated from God, and there is a beginning to a new one in communion with God. The Bible says:

***God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters.*** (Romans 8:29, NLT)

The term firstborn means that Jesus is the first in a new family of humanity and he is their leader. This new family of human beings is intimately connected with God and following their firstborn leader in fulfilling God's will. The Bible tells us of Jesus:

***He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*** (Colossians 1:15, NIV)

God's first recorded words about humanity are:

***Let us make man (or the Adam) in our image, in our likeness and let them rule...*** (Genesis 1:26, NIV)

Jesus fulfills that role of the Adam to reflect God and rule creation. St. Paul called Jesus the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). We are to receive our life from the Last Adam and rule with him over creation fulfilling Genesis 1:26 as God intended. We are to be the "them" in God's command that says "let them rule." Now with understanding listen to what Jesus said:

***I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*** (Matthew 28:18-19, NLT)

Jesus has been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. He has been installed as the ruler, as the firstborn over creation. **Therefore**, consequently, for that reason, Jesus told the Twelve to make disciples, to make apprentice-learners of all nations, of all ethnic groups. The goal he gave the Twelve was not to make believers, but to make disciples. Jesus wasn't interest

in you being a believer. He wants you to be his disciple through your belief. Jesus wasn't interested in you being a fan. He wants you to be a follower. He calls you to follow him. Jesus wasn't interested in you being a baptized believer. He wants you to become his family and his disciple through your baptism. Make disciples (or the Greek verb "disciple") is the main verb, going, baptizing and teaching to obey are the means to make one.

When Jesus called you to follow him, he wasn't telling you to do what he does without his special relationship to God. He was inviting you to share in his special relationship with God. Your sins disqualify you, but Jesus wants you to follow him right into his privileged and intimate relationship with God. Jesus declared:

***Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved.*** (Mark 16:16, NLT)

Something very special happens in baptism. When the Rabbi Saul, who was blinded by a great light, turned from persecuting Christians to faith in Jesus, Ananias, who healed him, said:

***What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.*** (Acts 22:16, NIV)

As Saul or Paul, whichever name you use for him, engaged in the process of being baptized and called on Jesus' name, he, a chief among sinners, washed his sins away. He simply embraced the gift provided by Jesus, and through it cleansed himself of sin. About baptism, Peter wrote:

***In [Noah's Ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also-not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand-with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*** (1 Peter 3:20-22, NIV)

In what way were the passengers on Noah's Ark saved through water? I thought they were threatened by the water and saved by the ark, but Peter says that they were saved by the

water. How? The water covered the earth and wiped it clean of the sin and violence that threatened to devour those passengers. In that way, the water blessed them and made the world safe for them. Peter explained that we are not about to be devoured by the dirt or germs on our bodies that are removed as we are washed in baptism. Instead, we're saved by the pledge, appeal or answer of a good conscience toward God. The Message Bible explains it this way:

***The waters of baptism do that for you, not by washing away dirt from your skin but by presenting you through Jesus' resurrection before God with a clear conscience. Jesus has the last word on everything and everyone, from angels to armies. He's standing right alongside God, and what he says goes.*** (1 Peter 3:21-22, Mes)

Because all authority in heaven and earth belongs to Jesus, he can and does present you to the judge of all and to every other authority through baptism as free of guilt and belonging to the holy community of God. Therefore, we are to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are identified by name with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are baptizing people into a holy community of God. We are now admitted into this community for which we were created: God said in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make the Adam in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule.” The apostles of Jesus explained:

***We are telling you about what we ourselves have actually seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*** (1 John 1:3, NLT)

You are called by Jesus today into a special relationship with God and his people. Do not despise the words of Jesus or his apostles. Do not despise baptism or the special standing, privilege and relationships, it affords you. You don't deserve it. It's a gift like adoption. You have new family like adoption. You have new resources like adoption. You have new responsibilities like adoption. Don't despise being baptized into the name of the Father, into the name of the Son, into the name of the Spirit, into one body by that Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).

If you don't embrace, honor and celebrate this gift of baptism, you will not have the mind or power to obey all the things Jesus commands you. To move from fan of Christ to follower of Christ and live as a disciple of Christ, you must follow Jesus into the special privilege of being in close community with God and his people. Only then will you walk as a powerful disciple of Jesus. This is your privilege. This is your calling. Will you obey or will you turn away? Those of you with ears, hear the call of your savior.