

Text: Acts 8.36

This afternoon we have a baptismal service once again. I want to turn to a fairly well-known passage in the book of Acts for our message.

The context is the story of Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch, a high official in the government of the Ethiopian queen. He is a proselyte, a convert to Judaism and has been in Jerusalem for one of the Jewish feasts. As he heads away from Jerusalem, he is reading from the prophecy of Isaiah.

The Holy Spirit brings Phillip to this man. Phillip joins him in his chariot and proceeds to explain the passage the man is reading. A significant event in church history occurs just at this point. Historically, it is believed that this man went on to found the church in Ethiopia which has today become the Coptic church (although they are more or less “traditional Christians” today, with serious doctrinal and practical errors).

Nevertheless, the person we are concerned with today is this Ethiopian official. He hears Philip expound the gospel, then he asks a significant question, which will form our text today:

NAU Acts 8.36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?”

This is the question whenever someone wants to be baptized: what can possibly prevent the request being denied?

As you know, we try to be careful, whether baptizing children or adults. We believe that baptism is for believers only. This belief has a long history in the church, as we shall see.

The consequence is that we do our best to make sure the person being baptized has a genuine Christian testimony.

I. The Biblical pattern of believer’s baptism

- A. Most early references to Baptism have to do with John’s baptism
- B. Jesus commissioned the apostles to make disciples by baptizing and teaching (Mt 28.19)
- C. Peter called people to repent and be baptized on Pentecost (Ac 2.38, 41)
- D. Phillip was baptizing believers in his ministry in Samaria (Ac 8.12, 13, 16)

E. Saul was baptized after he believed (Ac 9.18)

F. Cornelius and other Gentiles were baptized following belief in Christ (Ac 10.43-48)

There are numerous other references in the book of Acts — the pattern remains the same: belief first, baptism afterwards

II. The traditional insistence for believer's baptism (Ac 8.36-37)

A. The next verse in our passage is one that is questioned by scholars

1. The verse doesn't appear in the oldest manuscripts
2. If it wasn't original, it was added by a scribe somewhere along the way, but early in church history

B. The fact that a scribe thought it was necessary to add shows

1. That the early church wanted to be absolutely clear on this point
2. That the early church expected candidates for baptism to "believe in their heart"
3. This is in keeping with Paul's admonition in Rm 10.9
4. Salvation is the critical issue: is the candidate for baptism truly born again

C. If the verse was original, and the early manuscripts we have mistaken, then this was something insisted on from the beginning

Either way, the church has insisted from the beginning that real salvation is required for baptism

III. The logical requirement of believer's baptism

A. Baptism isn't the means of salvation

1. Salvation is by faith in the name of Jesus Christ
2. Salvation is not produced by any external work

B. Baptism isn't a rite of initiation

1. We are baptized by the Spirit at salvation (Ac 11.15-17)

Acts 11.15-17 “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶ “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ “Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as *He gave* to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”

2. We are baptized by salvation into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12.13)

1 Corinthians 12.13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

C. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward condition

1. If baptism occurs after faith
2. And baptism doesn't save or initiate
3. Baptism must represent that which occurred when you believed (Rm 6.3-5)

Romans 6.3-5 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection,

Conclusion:

We can't look in someone's heart to verify their salvation, but when someone

1. Professes faith in Christ
2. Desires to obey the Lord in baptism

We take it to be a sign of genuine conversion and take them at their word in their testimony until proven otherwise.