

The Dividing Line

Slide –

Slide –Matthew 10:34-36 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’

Regardless of what point you start from; most religious discussions boil down to one issue - where's the dividing line?

Between you and me where's the dividing line

Between truth and error where's the dividing line

Between what is essential in religion and what is not where's the dividing line

Between salvation and loss of salvation where's the dividing line

We like to dance around this issue because the trend in our society is to be inclusive, tolerant, open - minded.

For example, our education system is moving towards a position where there is no "pass or fail", in other words, there is no Dividing line, but rather various levels of maturity, ability, potential.

The same is true for our moral standards in society.

We are reluctant to say that someone is evil or bad and what they do is evil and bad.

Instead we describe their environment as disadvantaged or seek to blame society as a whole for the evil committed by one person.

The worse thing to be in our world today is intolerant, judgement, or critical

because this means that you have set upon a dividing line from which you are making value judgements –

and that is unacceptable because the new mantra of our society is that we must strive to accept everyone and everything exactly as they are.

We are using the court system to make sure no one makes a value judgement

This does not bode well for Christians because our entire faith system is based on crucial judgements and choices where we decide one way over another; one fact over another, one truth over another.

In a past article in Vigil magazine, Dr. Hugo McCord highlighted this very issue when he talked about the dividing line that is constantly drawn between God's people and other people throughout the Bible.

Over and over again God has compelled people to use the free will that they have been given in order to make decisions concerning Himself and His will.

I'd like to briefly reviews these diving lines as they've been established throughout history,

and some modern-day conclusions from our study.

The Dividing Line in History

First of all, I'd like to say that whether a person agrees or not, likes it or not, finds it fair or not - is not the point here.

The point is that the Bible does draw dividing lines and asks people to line up on one side or the other, and it has done this from the very beginning.

For example:

Adam had to choose to eat the fruit or not eat the fruit and suffer the consequences.

Noah had to build the boat or stay on dry land.

Abraham had to go to Canaan or stay home.

Moses had to face the Pharaoh or remain in hiding.

Esther had to speak up or remain silent.

Joseph had to take Mary as his wife or divorce her.

Matthew had to follow Jesus or stay in the tax booth.

Even Jesus had to go to the cross or return to Nazareth where He began His earthly life.

All dividing lines.

God draws a line in the sand for each and every person, sooner or later, and asks them to stand with Him or reject His offer by their choice.

We accept God's will in our life by choosing it

Or we reject it by choosing it.

As I said before, this principle, this scenario is repeated over and over in the Bible.

Now the people I've just mentioned, and their choices were special cases because they were asked to serve God and His purpose in special ways and so their dividing lines were unique to their situation and God's call:

After all - God doesn't call everyone to build an arc or be the earthly parent of the Messiah – these were special "one - time" choices for these people; a "one time" dividing line.

However, there is another dividing line that appears over and over again that isn't just for leaders and prophets but is for everyone.

The basic dividing line has always served to separate those who were saved from those who were lost; those who, of their own free will, were accepted by God, from those who of their own free will, were rejected by Him.

You could say that this is the bottom line as far as dividing lines are considered.

The Bible refers to this essential dividing line as Baptism.

Slide -The Dividing Line of Baptism

From the very earliest times when God began to communicate with man concerning his salvation (Time of Noah) – to the last communication about His salvation (Time of Jesus) –

Baptism, in one form or another has served as the physical and historical dividing line between being saved or lost.

Allow me to list some of the examples of this:

Slide -1. Noah's Baptism

Slide -I Peter 3:20-21 “when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism”

Peter compares the salvation of Noah, his family through the watery flood, to the baptism that believers received in his day.

His point here is that the dividing line between life and death for Noah, just like the Christians of Peter's day was the water.

For Noah those who were saved were above the water in the boat (the unsaved were drowned).

Slide -I Peter 3:21 “There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”

For Peter those who were saved had their consciences cleansed by the water of baptism (the unsaved remained in their guilt and condemnation).

Regardless of the century, water was the dividing line between saved and unsaved.

One was a baptism through the flood, the other a baptism by immersion –

both produced salvation for their recipients and was understood this way by them.

Slide -2. Israelite's Baptism

The Israelites, as they escaped from Egyptian bondage, did not consider themselves saved until after they passed through the parted waters of the Red Sea.

A. Before they passed through, they were very afraid of death –

Slide -Exodus 14:10-12 “And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. Then they said to Moses, “Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.”

B. Note Moses' answer to them regarding the "dividing line" of their salvation –

Slide -Exodus 14:13 “And Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever.”

This is the experience Paul is referring to when he talks about the Israelites being baptized into Moses in

Slide -I Corinthians 10:1-2 “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea”

Paul compares the definitive point where the Israelites were saved from the Egyptians, Baptism into Moses through the cloud and sea

He compares that to the definitive point where Christians are saved, Baptism into Christ through the immersion in water.

Slide -I Corinthians 10:4-5 “For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.”

His warning to the Corinthians was that even though the Israelites were safe they went back to disbelief and idolatry and died in the desert;

the Corinthians, he says, should be careful not to repeat their mistake.

The point I make for our lesson's that there was a definite point, a dividing line between safety and loss.

For the Israelites it was the Baptism in the Red Sea as it parted around them to let them go through.

For Paul's readers it was the Baptism of Jesus that allowed them to safely pass from death to life.

Those who **refused** to pass through the cloud and sea were surely killed; it was definitely a dividing line for life or death.

Slide -3. The Baptism of John

John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets and his particular task was to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah (Luke 1:17).

His baptism was the dividing line between those who accepted his message and were preparing for the appearance of Christ and those who did not.

Slide -Luke 7:29-30 "And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him."

How did they reject? Did they heckle him? Did they write an article about him? Did they denounce him at the temple?

Is that how they rejected him?

No, as it says the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves.

Note the Bible says that the dividing line was the baptism of John:

not the intention to be baptized

not the agreement that John's baptism was a good thing

not, even the belief that John's message was true.

Acceptance or rejection of God's counsel or will was decided at baptism,

That was the dividing line between those who did what God wanted them to do and those who **did not** want to do what God wanted them to do.

This is the reason Jesus Himself was baptized by John - He knew where the dividing line was!

Slide -4. The Baptism of Jesus

Slide -Matthew 28:18-19 "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"

And then also a comparable passage we usually read together

Slide -Mark 16:16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

The baptism of Jesus is the final dividing line established by God.

Immersion in water in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and reception of the Holy Spirit if the true dividing line of which all others pointed to or were a shadow of.

Peter rose up and preached to thousands who had congregated in Jerusalem for the Pentecost feast

and drew the dividing line that has remained since and will remain until Jesus returns:

Again, I am reading familiar passages, things we know, things that we have heard before.

Things that establish in our minds this dividing line

Slide -Acts 2:38-41 "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Slide -And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."

On that day about 3,000 people responded to that message and aligned themselves with Jesus Christ through baptism.

There were more than 3,000 people there but only about 3,000 made the decision to cross the line and be with Christ.

These people along with so many others before them and since them to this day,

understood that baptism is the dividing line between so many essential blessings from.

I've mentioned some this morning such as:

The dividing line between destruction and life for the people in Noah's day.

Slavery and freedom in Moses' day.

Guilt or forgiveness at John's calling.

Salvation or Condemnation by Jesus.

These are some of the references,

but there are many more that reinforce the idea that Baptism is the dividing line established by God for those He accepts and those He rejects,

for those who have His blessings and those who don't.

For example:

Slide -Ananias tells Paul, Acts 22:16 "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

A dividing line for those whose sins are washed away and those whose sins are not washed away.

When Peter and some apostles were brought on front of the Jewish leaders a second time for teaching in the name of Jesus, Peter said;

Slide -Acts 5:32 "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

A dividing line for those who possess the Holy Spirit and those who don't.

Slide -Galatians 3:27 – "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. "

A dividing line for those who are "in Christ" and those who are not.

Slide -John 3:5 "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

A dividing line for those who are in the kingdom of God and those who are not.

Slide -1 Corinthians 12:13 - A dividing line for those who are in the **body of Christ** and those who are not. "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."

The Bible is very clear on this issue,

Baptism separates for all eternity those who will share eternal life with Christ from those who will endure eternal suffering without Him.

This is not a popular idea in this day of political correctives -- that some are definitely saved and some are definitely lost that there is an unmistakable line that divides them forever.

Not popular, not easy, not comforting, but true, and if true moves us to consider and reconsider some important question for ourselves.

Now one of the basic things about preaching is you can't preach everything you know about a topic in 30 minutes.

Some of you maybe thinking well I haven't mentioned faith at all. And that is important but for another sermon.

Or what about the confessing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, I thinking you know this.

I am trying to emphasis the physical, historical moment dividing line.

Because belief is a gradual thing, you don't wake up one morning and fully believe everything you know and believe

It is gradual, it's a process.

Well you haven't mentioned repentance and that is important too.

As long as I have been a Christian, about 40 years and you know what, I am still repenting.

Everyday repenting, we are all repenting. And confessing in some way everyday

I am not talking about these issues or that process

I am talking about historical moment in time where one thing is divided for another

And the Lord has given us this information in the Scriptures and it's very clear that baptism is that historical moment

So if we understand this then we ought to ask ourselves some questions.

Questions to consider:

Slide -Q1: Is It okay to establish this line? Is this just a Church of Christ thing or a Michael Shingledecker thing?

A1: YES. Why? Because the Bible establishes it!

People are afraid to be called narrow-minded, legalistic, uncaring, judgmental.

People who accuse us of this do so because they don't want to deal with the line God has established so they attack the messenger.

Brothers and sisters the line is already there, very clear, very defined –

we are simply taking our stand on the side God commands all men and women to take and that is obedience.

The teaching that a person is saved only when they are immersed (Baptized) in Jesus' name is not a "Church of Christ" thing - it's a Bible thing.

When people reject or ridicule this, they reject the Word not us.

Our job is to keep the line where it is.

Not move it around.

Instead of changing the people with the Gospel let's move the line.

We feel like we want to move the line in order to include everyone.

Not allowed to do that.

Slide -Q2: Is it okay to verify someone's baptism before accepting them as a Christian, before accepting them as members of Christ's body, the church?

A2: Yes, of course it is!

Paul the Apostle did this very thing with a group of brethren at Ephesus in Acts 19.

He learned from them that they had been baptized correctly by immersion in water but for the wrong reason (they were baptized into John the Baptist's baptism long after it had been replaced by Jesus' baptism).

So, he questioned their baptism because he knew it was the dividing line and when he learned that it was done incorrectly, he baptized all of them again -- this time for the right reason.

These men were sincere, zealous, spiritual, and thought they were O.K. but they were not O.K.

Only when Paul re-baptized them were, they in line with God's command.

We don't have the right to change the line to suit our feelings or traditions,

but we do have the right to point out where the line is to those who are mistaken.

I'm sure that the Ephesians that Paul re-baptized didn't criticize him for caring enough to make sure they were O.K.

Slide -Q3: Is It okay to check my own baptism?

A3: YES!

Some think they are being traitors to their own families or being childish if they re-examine their own baptism.

They believe (incorrectly) that by re-examining their baptism they are rejecting or condemning family members or former teachers who originally taught them.

What they are really doing is searching for the truth and **then obeying the truth for themselves.**

Jesus said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

If we learn that Jesus' word is in conflict with what we've been taught originally,

Then we have to go with what Jesus taught not what my uncle taught me in Sunday school.

It's not a question of loving family less, it's a question of loving Jesus more.

If we don't do what's right, there is absolutely no hope to convince those we love to do it either.

We simply share in their mistake.

Jesus also said, "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

The person who is telling you that you're being foolish or childish for re-examining your baptism is Satan, not Jesus.

Anything Satan can do to block you from obeying the Lord, he will.

Your soul is the most precious possession and examining everything that affects it is wise and spiritual.

If your baptism is okay, then you can match your experience to the New Testament;

you can even undergo Paul the Apostles' examination and not change, because you know you're okay.

I have heard people say I am too old for that, well you know what, your soul doesn't have an age.

Your body has an age but your spirit is never too old to do what is right and obey.

If on the other hand, you're not lined up with God's dividing line, then you're defensive, unsure; you have nagging doubts and feel uncomfortable.

If that's your experience, then you should seriously question and reconsider your baptism.

Now brothers and sisters as I close this morning,

I want you to know that I'm not here to make you doubt your salvation,

I am doing this so you can be confident in your salvation

I am here to establish the idea in your minds and hearts that the Bible establishes a dividing line between lost and saved and baptism by its language, context and intent is that dividing line, whether we like it or not.

Please accept this teaching from the Lord and obey it if you need to.

Slide -