

Believer's Baptism

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Last Sunday night I introduced to you the subject of infant Baptism and really the broader subject of Baptism itself. And I made a comment that it is a paradox that the world is full of baptized non-Christians and unbaptized Christians. There is a world of people who have been baptized by the mode of infant Baptism by sprinkling, that has been a dominating form of Baptism in the Christian church historically. And as I said, there are a world of people who have been baptized that way which is not a true baptism, but nonetheless it is identified as a Baptism who have nothing to do with the church and don't know the Lord genuinely.

At the same time, there is a large group of people who do know the Lord and they're in the church and have not been baptized. This is a strange thing. Non-believers should not be baptized, and believers must be baptized. This has been an issue for me for a long, long time, this issue of unbaptized believers. And it doesn't seem to be getting any better. I'm afraid that pragmatism has been the death of the ordinances. Pragmatism, wanting to entertain people, make them feel good, pragmatism wanting a minimalist approach to everything sets aside the seriousness and the demands of Baptism, as well as that other ordinance which has been given to us by our Lord, the table of Communion and the remembrance of His cross.

Frankly, it has been many, many years since anyone has written a book emphasizing Baptism. To the writing of books, there is absolutely no end...no end. To the writing of Christian books, there is no end. To the writing of Christian books on the Christian life there seems to be no end. And look, as I may, I can't even find a chapter on Baptism and rarely a chapter on the Lord's Table.

I don't feel like there's a great movement in the church toward elevating Baptism to the priority that it deserves in the church. I don't see that. More and more people find their attachment to Christ mediated through the media, through listening to Christian radio, watching Christian television, or migrating from one Christian event to another. And there are no Baptisms in any of those environments, typically. So that in spite of the direct command of Scripture, we probably have the greatest number of people who call themselves Christians and actually may well be Christians who have never been baptized maybe in history. There exists an unbaptized church which includes some of you.

Now I didn't know how many people would come tonight. I kind of thought to myself, "Well, the folks that have been baptized don't need to come. Folks that haven't been baptized don't want to come.

So, who will be there?" But here you are. Thank you.

There are some of you who have not been baptized. There are many of you who know people who have not been baptized and what I want to do tonight is arm you with the truth about Baptism so that you can encourage your...your children who are old enough, encourage your acquaintances, your friends, your family to be obedient to the matter of Baptism.

May I be so bold as to say that this failure to take Baptism seriously, this failure to take Baptism seriously may well be at the root of some of the immense problems that exist in the church because without making an issue out of Baptism, a church can accumulate people who want to make no public profession of Christ at all. And there's a great effort being made today to make those kinds of people very comfortable. Whereas in biblical terms and in the early church, and the obedient church, the demand is laid on people if you have put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you must make that public confession openly in Baptism.

Failure to take Baptism seriously then has blurred the reality in the church of who is in Christ, and who is not. Who is a professor and who is a possessor. It may well be also that a failure to take Baptism seriously is at the root of problems in the lives of individual Christians because it betrays a level of indifference toward a very explicit, clear command.

There may be a little bit of mystery in loving the way we're commanded to love, or in believing the way we're commanded to believe, or in obeying in general the way we're commanded to obey. But one thing about Baptism, it is clear when one is baptized and when one is not. There is no mystery there. Indifference toward Baptism, disobedience toward Baptism does betray a certain unfaithfulness to the commands of the Lord and His Word and a certain reluctance to go on public record as leaving your sins behind and fully embracing the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus said, "Go into all the world and make disciples," He immediately said this, "Baptizing them....Baptizing them." That's the church's commission. When the Holy Spirit said in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized," that was a command to individuals. And when three thousand believed on the Day of Pentecost, and three thousand were baptized, that set the example.

This is very clear. It's unmistakably clear that the Lord has called us to this means of public identification with Christ. In spite of that, there's widespread non-compliance to this and even widespread indifference to this simple command. A person who claims to be a Christian but has not been baptized by believer's Baptism, not infant Baptism as we saw last week, that's not in the Bible, falls into one of the following categories...a believe who has not been baptized, falls into one of the following categories, number one, that believer may be ignorant, perhaps not taught, or perhaps taught wrongly. And there has been much wrong teaching about Baptism. In evangelical churches, people are told that their infant Baptism is sufficient and that it would be wrong, sinful, to be baptized

after you have come to faith in Christ because your infant Baptism is sufficient. So there are people who are just ignorant. They have been taught wrongly or they have not been taught at all.

It is possible, also, that there are folks who are just proud. They're not willing to humble themselves, they're not willing to admit that they have been disobedient. They are embarrassed to acknowledge their disobedience because so much time has gone on and the more time goes on, the harder it is to eat humble pie and confess that disobedience and be baptized. So, personal pride comes into play in some cases.

It is also possible that there are people who are not baptized because they're just indifferent. They can't be bothered. They don't get around to it. It's not a priority. They understand that it is commanded, but it's not something that they're concerned to obey. Just indifferent. Don't want to argue about it, just never get around to it.

There are another...there's another kind of attitude toward Baptism among people in the church and even among believers and that's who we're talking about, and I guess we could call it defiance. They refuse to obey for many reasons. Usually people like that are sinning. They would feel hypocritical. And so in that rebellion, they don't want to raise the stakes in their life by making a public proclamation of their repentance and devotion to Christ and then be viewed by those who know them as hypocrites.

And then I suppose lastly, there are people in the church who profess Christ who actually are unregenerate, not true Christians and so they have no real desire to make a public confession. They want to be thought to be Christians. They're hiding in the church, masquerading as Christians when they're really not.

You, who haven't been baptized, fit somewhere in there. If you have not been baptized with true believer's Baptism, you're in one of those categories. Either you haven't been taught correctly, you aren't willing to humble yourself. It doesn't matter to you. You refuse to be baptized because you don't want to put your life on record that way or you're hiding in the church as a non-believer. Apart from that, I can't figure any reason or any category where we could place you. So I want to help you to understand the importance of Baptism.

Let's just do it the way we did it last week. I asked a series of questions and answered them, and we'll ask a series tonight. Last week we asked questions about infant Baptism, and answered them, tonight we're going to ask questions about the true biblical Baptism of believer and answer them.

Question number one...What is Baptism? What is Baptism?

There may be some of you who are so new in the faith that you don't even know what I'm talking about. Maybe you've never been here on a Sunday night when we had a Baptism, maybe you came from another church where it was never done, or it was done in an unbiblical way. What is Baptism?

It is a service in which a person is immersed into water. That's what it is. The...the old word was "dunked." In fact, people who did this were called "dunkers." Two verbs in the New Testament support this basic idea. They are the verb *bapto* used four times in the New Testament, it means to immerse, it means to dip into. It would be a word used to dip cloth into dye so that it was totally submerged so as to be fully colored by the dye. *Bapto* means to dip into or to immerse.

And then there is an intensified form of *bapto*, *baptizo*. That's simply used many, many times in the New Testament and it means to dip completely and the noun, *baptismo*, is always used in the New Testament in the book of Acts, always to refer to a person who is confessing Christ being immersed fully into water.

So whether you're talking about the verbs or the nouns, all of them refer to a complete dunking in water, a complete immersing in water. In fact, they become technical terms for such immersion and that is why they are transliterated instead of translated. Everywhere where *bapto* appears and everywhere where *baptizo* appears, it could have been translated immersed, submerged, immersed. But instead, the translators of English Bibles transliterated the Greek and created a word "baptized," because it had become a technical term for immersion from its biblical use. It does not mean sprinkle, that's a completely different Greek word, *rhantizo* or *rhantizomai* that's the word to sprinkle water on someone, to splash water on someone. And that is never used in the ceremony of Christian baptism.

The word could be best be translated immerse. It would have helped a whole lot of the translators had just translated it immerse. But every New Testament use of the word requires that its translation and its understanding be immersion. Even John Calvin who was a baby baptizer, who advocated sprinkling babies, said, "The word "baptize" means to immerse, and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the early church," and I quoted that for you last week because that is what the word means and that is what the early church did.

Now it is also interesting to note that the verbs, *bapto* and *baptizo*, are never used in a passive sense. Water is never said to be baptized on someone, baptized on a person, such as in the case of sprinkling, or dripping, or touching with water, or pouring a little water on someone. The New Testament usage of these words make immersion, submersion the only possible meaning...the only possible meaning.

I want to give you a little insight into that. Turn to Matthew 3...Matthew 3, John the Baptist in his ministry, verse 6, "They were being baptized by him, not with the water from the Jordan River, but in the Jordan River. They were being baptized by him in the Jordan River." And how much into the river

did they go? Verse 16, “After being baptized, Jesus...who was baptized there by John...came up immediately out from the water, out of the water.” He came up out of the water. So we have there in just those two references a visual picture of what John the Baptist was doing, placing people into the water, including the Lord Jesus, and then bringing them up out of the water.

In chapter 3 of John’s gospel, we get another insight into the baptizing ministry of John the Baptist. In verse 23, “He was baptizing in a place called Aenon near Salim.” Why was he baptizing there? “Because there was much water there.” You need enough water to get them under.

I remember the first baptismal service I ever did, there was a church in south-central Los Angeles, a black gospel church, precious people and they had been without a pastor and they called up the seminary where I was at the time and they said, “Could you send somebody? We’ve got about 25 people who need to be baptized.” And then they called me and said, “Would you go and do this baptism?” And I went down to this little church and I preached a message, and then I prepared to baptize them.

Well, the little baptistry they had wasn’t functioning very well and they had about ten inches of water, at the most. Now I’ve got to be true to the Bible. So essentially trying to get people under all the way, ten inches of water, and then drag them back out was an experience which I was trying to keep somewhat serious, but failed miserably in the process. It was one of the most hilarious events of my early ministry life.

Again, in Mark chapter 1 verse 5, “All the country of Judea was going out to him and all the people of Jerusalem and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River.” Again, the picture here is you need a river; you need a lot of water in order to immerse these people.

In the eighth chapter of the book of Acts, this is the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. “They were going along the road. They came to some water and the Ethiopian said, ‘Look, water. What prevents me from being baptized?’ And Philip ordered the chariot to stop.” Verse 38, “They went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him, he submerged him, he immersed him. When they came up out of the water, a Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.” Again, it is crystal clear what baptism is, it is immersion, it is immersion. And, of course, as we’re going to see, that’s the only thing...the only means by which you can actually symbolize what baptism is trying to articulate, trying to demonstrate.

There are some figurative uses of the verb *baptizo* in the New Testament. When you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you are by the Holy Spirit baptized into the body of Christ, 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 13. You are literally immersed into, buried into, submerged into the body of Christ.

John the Baptist preached about two baptisms. He preached about the baptism of repentance, which was an immersion into water; and the baptism of fire, in the great and final judgment. An immersing of believers into water and an immersing of unbelievers into fiery, furious, divine judgment. And you can see them both in Matthew chapter 3. Now we're going to focus on the baptism into water, but even in those metaphoric uses of baptism, the idea is to be completely submerged into judgment, or submerged into water, or submerged fully into the body of Christ. This water immersion is a picture, it is an object lesson, it is a symbol, it is a physical analogy of a great, profound, spiritual reality. And here's the point, it is the way God wants to teach the most wonderful truth of all, the union of the believer into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ which is the salvation reality.

Any student of Scripture knows that God has always taught spiritual truth using symbols. There were many symbols in the Old Testament, many pictures, many illustrations, and even in the New, many parables, many analogies. Throughout the Old Testament, God instituted many symbols, many ceremonies to commemorate events, to illustrate spiritual truth. And when these symbols and ceremonies were carried out, the people would say, "This is what it means..." or the children would ask, "What does this mean?" And they would receive an explanation. So they were symbols to those who understood them, and they were teaching aides who didn't yet understand them.

Baptism is one of the Lord's most treasured symbols. He's only left two of them with us in the church, just two. All those in the Old Testament have been wiped out. Only two, baptism and His table of communion. Baptism then is a symbol, an object lesson, a visual representation of a spiritual reality that describes and defines a complete submersion and immersion into Christ.

Okay, a second question. What has been the history of baptism? What has been the history of baptism? Is it old, or was it invented in the New Testament?

Well, I'm happy to say it is very old. It goes back long before the New Testament. And the most important baptism, Old Testament baptism, was that which was designed by God to be a visual commitment to Him on the part of a non-Jew, a Gentile who wanted to become identified with the Jews and worship the true God.

Now remember, Israel, God's chosen people, were chosen not to be an end, but a means to an end. And the end was that they would be an evangelistic people who would proclaim the glories of the true God to the ends of the earth, to all the nations around them. They were calling other nations to worship the one, true, and living God and abandon all the false deities. When a Gentile came along and wanted to become a proselyte, or wanted to become a worshiper of Jehovah, of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the true and living God, the Creator and the Redeemer, he would go through a three-stage ceremony. First was called *Melah*. This was the painful part, circumcision, the unique sign of the people of God to demonstrate in symbol their identification with God's people. It was even more than that. They needed to demonstrate in circumcision that they were sinful. And

listen carefully, there is no place on the human body in which the evidence of our sinfulness is more profound than in the reproductive area because if you ever question the sinfulness of man and woman, all you have to do is look at what they produce, nothing but more sinners.

Circumcision, then, was a way to ceremonially demonstrate not only that you belong to the people of God, but that you needed a soul cleansing at a profound level. A Gentile would have to go through that. Not easy to say I want to belong to the people of God and worship the true God, *melah*. Then there was *Tebalaw*, that was the second aspect of the ceremony, immersion in water. That's right, immersion in water. Why? To demonstrate they were dead as to the old life. It was a kind of water burial. They were dead to the old life, apart from God's Word, apart from God's truth, apart from God's promises, apart from God's people, and that old life was buried and they had risen into a new life and a new family.

And then there was a third phase, *Corban* an animal was sacrificed. The blood of that animal was sprinkled on the person, on the Gentile, symbolizing the need for forgiveness of sins, provided through the death of a substitute. That substitute would be eventually the Lord Jesus Christ.

So there was a proselyte baptism, very, very familiar to the people in Jerusalem and Judea. By the time we come then to the New Testament, they are familiar with immersion. They know what it is to be baptized. They know it is connected to coming to worship the true God. It is a symbol of the death of the old life, and the beginning of a new life. It is not surprising to them, then when John the Baptist appears. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets, and he begins his ministry by calling for baptism. And it's an amazing thing because all these people are coming to him, the gospels tell us all Judea was coming out to him. And these masses of people were being baptized because John was saying the Messiah is coming, the Kingdom is coming, you must repent, you must be ready for the Messiah and the Kingdom. You need to be washed. You need to be cleansed. You need to be prepared for the Messiah's arrival. And he was calling on them to repent and be baptized, and listen to this, to literally view themselves as if they were Gentiles, as if they were outside the covenant, outside the Kingdom, aliens of God, strangers to the promises. And they prided themselves on being the people of God. They prided themselves on being the Jews. It was for them enough that they were Jewish. God was bound to love them and embrace them forever in His Kingdom just because they were Jewish, they thought. That wasn't John's message. John's message was you need to view yourself as if you were an alienated Gentile outside the covenant, outside the promises, under judgment. This was a bitter pill for them to swallow.

But they came and they were baptized with a proselyte baptism. John preached repentance from sin and a call to righteousness, to be ready for the Messiah; called for people to turn from iniquity to holiness, to die to the old life, and to come into a new life. And there was no better outward symbol for that than what they were familiar with, baptism—to testify that they were willing to make that dramatic confession of their alienation and turn to God in righteousness.

If you go back to Matthew 3 you see John coming and people being baptized in the wilderness, verse 6, in the Jordan as they confessed their sins...as they confessed their sins. That was the whole point, being baptized, confessing sins. In Mark 1:4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Now they knew enough about Ezekiel 18 and maybe John liked to preach out of Ezekiel 18 because Ezekiel 18 is all about individual responsibility, and it talks about the fact that you're not going to be punished for the sins of your father, or the sins of your son. You're going to be dealt with for your own sins. Every individual has to face his own sin and his own potential judgment.

So the baptism of John marked the returning, the repentance of a sinful Jew who said, "I'm no better than an alienated Gentile, I want to leave my sin behind, pursue righteousness, face the Messiah in a manner that is ready and be associated with others who are being baptized as a penitent people ready for the Messiah's arrival and establishment of His Kingdom. By the way, John the Baptist obviously had many temporary repenters....many temporary repenters.

It was a special day, back to Matthew 3 for a moment, it was a special day when John was in the midst of this. Verse 13 says, "Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan, coming to John to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by You and do You come to me?' Jesus answering said to him, 'Permit it at this time for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then He permitted him."

It was unthinkable to John the Baptist to baptize Jesus. Why? Because this was a baptism of repentance. This was a baptism for sinners. This was a baptism for confessed felons, as it were, who had violated the Law of God. He knew Jesus. He knew His divine identity. He had probably known about Him for quite a while, since they were related as Elizabeth and Mary were related.

In John 1:29 when he first saw Him, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He knew He wasn't an ordinary man. He knew He was the final and everlasting sacrifice. He knew He was God's anointed, the spotless sinless one. And since John understood baptism and he understood that baptism was the confession of sin and repentance, and the death of the old life and the beginning of a new life, and he knew Jesus was sinless and didn't need to leave a sinful life and embark upon a new righteous life, the whole exercise seemed ridiculous to him, nonsense. Why would the sinless one want to be baptized? And so, John tried to prevent Jesus and said, "No, no, no, let's turn it around. You baptize me." John resisted baptizing Jesus for the opposite reason that he resisted baptizing the Pharisees and the scribes that came to him and the Sadducees. Back in verse 7, "Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance.'" He wasn't about to baptize them, he rejected them because though they were in need of repentance,

they were unwilling to ask for it. He refused to baptize them because they were not willing to admit their sin. Opposite that, he refused to baptize Jesus because He had no sin. Hebrews 4:15 says, "He was without sin."

But Jesus prevailed upon him. Why? Why did Jesus insist upon being baptized? Well He says it, doesn't He, there? Verse 15, "Permit it at this time for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Some have suggested that Jesus wanted to be baptized in order to identify with the people who were making ready for Him. He just wanted to be a part of that group of people. Some suggest that He wanted to set an example for them, identify with them.

No, I don't think that's it. It was really a matter of fulfilling all righteousness. It was a command to be baptized and Jesus obeyed that command the way He obeyed every command that God ever gave. This is critical to His active righteousness which is imputed to us at salvation. His passive righteousness is in His dying. His active righteousness was in His living. Since it was a command of God, since it was a ceremony ordained by God, commanded by the prophet of God who was the voice of God, Jesus said, "Although I don't fit the symbol of it, I do it because it is righteous to obey every command...every command."

And I believe beyond that, He knew that this baptism which had long been a symbol of the death of an old way of life and the beginning of a new way of life, was going to be the symbol that marked the believer and his union with Christ in His death and resurrection. I think He saw in this a prefiguring of Christian baptism.

Not long before his final trip to Jerusalem, Luke 12, He told His disciples, "I have a baptism to undergo and how distressed I am...He said...until it is accomplished." He had His own submersion, immersion into death, into judgment, into darkness. But in that, that baptism would be the very death of believers and resurrection of believers symbolized by Christian baptism.

So, in submitting to baptism in John's case, He was being obedient because it was commanded and He was previewing what it would be like for Him when He was buried under the waves of divine judgment, bearing our sin, literally we were there in His death, burial, and with Him in His resurrection. Jesus said, "This is necessary. This is necessary."

The Apostles knew Jesus was baptized. They followed John the Baptist and baptized more people. Listen to John 4:1 and 2, "When the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were, so they just picked up with John and they were doing the same baptism unto repentance that would eventually be transformed into the symbol of the believer's union in the death, burial, resurrection of Christ." That's why in the Great Commission, "Go into all the world, make disciples, baptizing them..."

And that takes us to the third question. We've already given you the answer but let's just develop it a little bit. What is the meaning of Christian baptism? What is the meaning of Christian baptism?

I don't know what the meaning would be of baby baptism, it has no meaning. I don't know what the meaning would be of splattering water on somebody's head, trickling it, pouring it out of a pitcher. I don't know what the meaning would be of putting water on someone's forehead, or three or four spots in the sign of a cross on their face. I don't know what the meaning of that is. Biblically it has absolutely no meaning. But I do know what the meaning is of submerging someone in water. That's clear. Because that is what the New Testament teaches.

When you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you're immersed into Christ. I want to show you this because you need to understand it. So let's...let's take a look at this in Romans 6...Romans 6. We won't spend a lot of time here, but just to give you the picture. Romans 6:3, now this is a dry section, okay? There's no real H₂O here. While this gives us the spiritual reality pictured in water baptism, this is not the water baptism, this is the spiritual reality section.

"Do you not know," Romans 6:3, "that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" When you come to Christ, you're literally immersed into His death. You die with Him there so that all your sins are paid for in full...solidarity with Him. Very much like 1 Corinthians 10:2 which says that the children of Israel going through the wilderness were baptized into Moses. In other words, they were immersed into Moses. They were one with their leader. So we are immersed into Christ. When you come in faith to Christ and you are redeemed and saved, you are literally immersed into Christ which means you have been immersed into His death. Verse 4, "You have been buried with Him through baptism," again a spiritual union into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we might walk also in newness of life. You were buried with Him. You died with Him. You rose with Him.

He goes on in verse 5. "We have become united with Him in the likeness of His death and also we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection. Our old self," verse 6, "was crucified with Him in order that our body of our sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin, for he who has died is freed from sin. If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." He's circling back over this massive truth again and again. As Christ has been raised from the dead never to die again, death is no longer master over Him, for the death that He died He died to sin once for all, the life He lives, He lives to God and even so, consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Salvation is not adding Jesus to your life. Salvation is immersing you into Christ. That's why the New Testament talks about being in Christ.

In Galatians 2 and verse 20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and

gave Himself for me. I have been crucified with Christ. Immersed, submerged into Christ to die His death and Live His resurrection.”

In Colossians 2:12, “Having been buried with Him in baptism,” that’s the baptism into His death, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead.” When you were dead in your transgressions in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven all our transgression.

That’s the whole point. Salvation is placing a person in union with Jesus Christ and in some amazing, supernatural way, we participate in His death, in His resurrection, spiritually. Now again, there’s no water in Romans 6. There’s no water in Galatians 2. There’s no water in Colossians 2. This is what Peter calls the baptism that saves. This is what Paul calls the washing of regeneration, or in Acts 22:16, “The washing away of your sins.” It is immersion into Christ. And that is what is depicted ceremonially, symbolically in baptism.

So, let’s ask a fourth question and they overlap as we go. What is the relation of immersion to salvation? What is the relation of immersion to salvation?

Well I think a simple way to answer that is to say that immersion is not a saving ceremony...is not a saving ceremony. It’s important but it doesn’t save you. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, “I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius. Now let me tell you something. If baptism saved, Paul would have been baptizing everybody. He said, “I did baptize the household of Stephanas, beyond that I don’t know whether I baptized anybody else. Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel.” This is a disclaimer on Paul’s part for any saving virtue in H2O. We save that in baptism here all the time.

You say, “Well wait a minute, it says in Acts 2:38, “Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.” I take it that the construction indicates there when paralleled with Matthew 12:41, “Repent and be baptized because of the remission of sins.” Baptism was an immediate, inseparable, public testimony of a true conversion. True believers were baptized on the Day of Pentecost, the same day...the same day. It wasn’t weeks later, months later, years later, decades later. The Apostles insisted on it and the people assumed it.

If a convert wasn’t willing to do that, there would be little confidence in his professed repentance. If he was willing, then he paid a price in that Jewish community to confess Jesus Christ as Lord openly and publicly. On the Day of Pentecost they must have used every pond and pool in Jerusalem to do three thousand in a day. It was an inseparable sign of true salvation. So it became spoken of as that which was the evidence of salvation.

In Ephesians 4 when it says there's one Lord, one faith, one baptism, that's talking about water baptism as the symbol of salvation. It was what they did. Now salvation is by grace through faith, not of works, right? Any doctrinal treatment of salvation makes it clear that salvation does not depend on water. You can use the thief on the cross as an illustration, if you need to. But the outward sign was water baptism. And one who refused baptism would be one who refused Christ cause they would say, "Repent and be baptized." That's how they preached in the book of Acts. "Repent and be baptized. Repent and be baptized." And if you refused to be baptized, you would, in a sense, do so because you refused to repent.

Listen to the words of Matthew 10:32, "Whoever confesses Me before men, I'll confess Him before My Father who is in heaven. Whoever denies Me before men, I'll deny before My Father who is heaven." An open, public confession of faith in Christ is the evidence, the initial evidence of one's true conversion when you're willing to go on public record as having abandoned your former life and embraced Christ.

Now if you're looking for some kind of immediate benefit from baptism, it is the same benefit as any active obedience. Baptism produces nothing but the blessing of obedience. It's not designed to make you more holy, to make you more secure, to save you. It is simply the first public step of true confession of Christ openly. The ordinance of baptism then exists for the purpose of showing in a symbol form the reality of every believer's identification with His Lord and Savior and his abandonment of the old life and embracing of the new life in Christ.

There's an old confession that was used in the church that went like this. Someone would be baptized and they would say, "I hereby confess in my willing submission to this divinely appointed ordinance, my glad obedience to the command of my Lord and Savior. In this manner I show forth my identification with the one who bore my sins, took my place, died in my stead, was buried and rose again for my justification. As Christ went through the dreadful reality of suffering and death to secure my salvation, so by my immersion in water and emergence there from, I thus publicly declare my identification with my Lord in His death, burial and resurrection on my behalf, with the intention henceforth to walk with Him in newness of life." What a confession. No picture could be more simple, more beautiful, more spiritually significant than that.

Fifth question...ah, with all of this being so clear, why is there so much confusion regarding baptism? Well, of course, Satan wants to break the pattern of obedience at the beginning. So many attacks have come against baptism, some deny baptism's place all together. There are people in the Christian Church who flatly, openly deny that baptism has any place in a Christian's life...Quakers, the Friends Church, the Salvation Army, and certain hyper-dispensationalists, quote/unquote evangelicals who think it was a Jewish ritual. There are others who say that it is required for salvation and if you haven't gone in the water, you can't go to heaven. That would be the Churches of Christ and those who teach baptismal regeneration, Christian churches, churches of Christ.

Some say baptism is for dead people. That would be the Mormons who have proxy baptisms for the dead at a multi-million clip a year. And you remember from last week, some say it's for babies, infant baptismal regeneration, water cleanses the baby from original sin and results in regeneration. And by the way, even in infant baptism, clear until the Middle Ages, infants were immersed. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that if a baby dies without being baptized, it goes to Limbo. It's called the Limbo of the innocents, where the soul enjoys a kind of bliss but is forever deprived of the beatific vision of God. You want to know why Catholics run their babies in there so fast? 'Cause they don't want their baby ending up in Limbo.

The Lutheran church following the lead of Martin Luther, Luther never shook the grave clothes of infant baptism, as I told you last week, he even wrote a small book called, *The Small Baptismal Book*, 1526 he wrote that book. In it there's a required prayer. This is Luther's prayer at a baby baptism. "O Almighty, I invoke Thee concerning this child, Thy servant who asks for the gift of Thy baptism and desires Thy grace through the spiritual new birth. Receive him, O Lord, and thus extend now the good to him who knocks that he may obtain the eternal blessing of this heavenly bath and receive the promised kingdom of Thy gift through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." Praying for the infant's salvation on the spot through this heavenly bath. The infant is then asked, in Luther's book, "Dost thou renounce the devil and all his works and nature?" And the parents say on behalf of the child, "Yes." Then the question, "Dost thou believe in God the Father in Jesus Christ His Son, in the Holy Spirit, and the one Christian church?" The parents then say, "Yes." And the child is baptized. Then the prayer, "The Almighty God hath begotten thee a new through water and the Holy Spirit and has forgiven thee all thy sins. Amen."

What a travesty on New Testament teaching. The Reformed churches, their view is that when adults turn to Christ, they are only to be sprinkled. Where does that come from? That's just been invented. They're sprinkled because they're in covenant relationship to God. Their children, because the adults are now in covenant relationship to God, are also brought into covenant relationship to God, included in the covenant and are to be sprinkled as, quote, "Little members of the Covenant." Later they're confirmed as actual members after satisfactorily answering the questions in the catechism. You've got all of this floating around in Christianity, confusing the issue.

During the Reformation, I told you last week, many hundreds of Christians were treated cruelly and many were murdered by Protestant leaders for being rebaptized with believer's immersion. They were called Anabaptists, rebaptizers.

Well, the picture's clear, don't you think? This is what baptism is and this is how God has designed it and ordained it. And I would encourage you to not let your unwillingness to humble yourself, your indifference or your rebelliousness to hinder you from being baptized.

You know, Jesus said, “How can you say ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I say?” This is not that complicated. You need to be faithful.

Father, confirm these things in our hearts and Your Word is so blessed, who would not want to make this confession of such a mighty gift of grace as union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection? You’ve done this for us, how could we not celebrate it with a public confession? Move on our hearts to that end, Amen.

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