

The Responsibilities of the Church: Fellowship, Part 5

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-142

We've been talking about the anatomy of the church, as you know, and talking about those matters, which are germane to the life of the church. And I want to give you a footnote tonight on the message that we talked about last Lord's Day and that is that it is characteristic of the church to engage in fellowship, fellowship. We have taken the church in the biblical metaphor that is given for it as a body and kind of looked a little more deeply into that concept and we've looked at the skeleton of the church, the basic doctrinal foundation of the church, and we spent some weeks on that and then we spent many months looking inside the church, as it were, into the body of Christ, and looking at the internal organs, as it were, of the church, the systems, the spiritual attitudes, that carry the life of the church. And we talked about faith, and love, and humility and forgiveness and courage and all of those kinds of things that are a part of Christian character that bear, as it were, the very life of the church. What the church is on the inside, of course, is very very essential to its life.

And then in the last couple of messages we transitioned to the outside and we went from the internal organs of the church to the muscles and started talking about the church in action, what the church does based on the foundation of its doctrinal convictions, based upon its spiritual attitudes that surge through the life of the church and that is through the life of every member of the church we would trust and pray. What does the church do? What is the function of the church? And we began by saying the first and sort of widespread and pervasive function in the life of the church is fellowship, or partnership, or communion, or common life.

Just like a body we all share in the common life and we are mutually dependent on one another and we need each other. Just as every component in the human body supplies something needed by the rest every believer in the body of Christ provides something needed by all. So we talked about this whole aspect of fellowship, which is so very very vital.

But having said all that I said last Sunday, I wanted to throw in a footnote tonight, a footnote on fellowship because it's an issue of the fellowship of the church, which we didn't deal with. You remember last Lord's day that we talked about issues of fellowship. We talked about the nature of fellowship and the danger of fellowship and as we were talking about those things I also spoke about the symbol of fellowship. You remember that? And we said that the symbol of fellowship is the Lord's Table. That's where we come as sinners at the foot of the cross and remember the death of Jesus Christ for us and there we all are humble with nothing to offer God, with no credentials, with no achievements. We are spiritually bankrupt sinners at the foot of the cross embracing the Savior who

gave his life for us and there we find our common life, our common sharing, in the forgiveness of God, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of eternal life, which we receive by faith in him. And so the Lord's Table symbolizes the point of contact with the living God to the sacrifice of Christ by which we all come to salvation and therefore, it's the symbol of our common life.

But in the life of the church, there's another symbol that I want to address tonight and you see us do it every Sunday night through the year at Grace Church, and tonight was no different, and that is I want to talk about baptism, baptism. This is an essential component in the life of the church commanded by the Lord just as he commanded many things including that we come to his table and share in the bread and the cup. You very rarely hear anybody preach about baptism. You very rarely, if ever, hear anybody on the radio or on the television talk about it and even in a Christian environment, a Christian program. I would probably dare you to go into most Christian bookstores and ever find a book about it. I can't remember in years coming across any book that has been written on the subject. It is long neglected. I can honestly say I have never heard a preacher preach on it, at least in memory. I have never heard a teacher emphasize it. *Grace to You*, which is our daily radio program, and I was reminded again today that we're on about 600 times a day across America is the only Christian media program in America that puts a baptism on the air. The only one.

There exists in churches across this country and in this one as well, but perhaps not as high a percentage, thousands and tens of thousands and maybe hundreds of thousands of Christians who have never been baptized and that includes some of you. You have seen baptism, but you have not experienced it. And I would like to be so bold as to suggest what I think is true, that this failure to take baptism seriously is not only a symptom of a problem in the area of obedience, it is also a symptom of a problem in the area of sound doctrine. People who treat it lightly have a problem with obedience, and people who aren't sure exactly what form of baptism they ought to follow have a problem with theology.

I really believe that if your obedience is less than complete and if your theology is less than sound you're going to have some other problems. And frankly this sort of disdain of the issue of baptism is perhaps at the root of some of the immense problems in people's lives and in the church because it betrays people's unfaithfulness to the commands of the Lord and people's indifference to understanding what the Scripture teaches about this most important matter. To put it in its priority Jesus said this: "Go into all the world and make disciples." Everybody camps on that one and we really have almost endless evangelistic enterprises going on across the world being generated by Christian people. We go in every direction developing the most sophisticated all the way over to the humblest strategies to try to reach unconverted people with the gospel, but never seem to get beyond that point. It says, "Go into all the world and make disciples" and it immediately says, "baptizing them."

Right there in the command of the great commission came the command to baptize. And when, you remember on the day of Pentecost Peter preached that great sermon in which 3,000 people were converted and the church was born, at the end of the sermon he said, "Repent and be baptized." It's not as if it was some late historic addition. It was right there at the very beginning.

He gave a command to the church to baptize people. He gave a command to individuals to be baptized. And it's interesting to note in Acts 2 that all 3,000 people who believed were baptized, all over the city, all in one day, by the apostles and those who were associated with them probably in every available pond and pool.

Even though there's no question about what the Bible teaches regarding baptism there is widespread non-compliance with this simple command. Now a person who claims to be a Christian but has not been baptized would fit into one of the following categories: One, ignorant, that is to say they have not been baptized because they don't understand its importance. They haven't been taught properly or they've been taught improperly. And there has been, by the way, much error taught regarding baptism and many many people have been victimized by that.

I would say secondly, it is possible that people are not baptized because of pride. That is to say, they are not willing to humble themselves, they're not willing to publicly admit that they have been disobedient up to now and they're a little bit embarrassed to acknowledge their past disobedience by being baptized so long after they have come to know Christ. It's kind of hard to swallow that and do it, as we heard that sweet girl say tonight she put it off a long time and differed obedience as disobedience. Sometimes our pride gets in the way.

There's a third possibility as well why people don't get baptized and that is indifference. They just don't see it as a priority. It's just not that important. They don't ever get around to it. They can't be bothered with it and that's serious because the word of God commands it. And I suppose we could add a fourth category of folks. Some people don't get baptized just out of defiance. They refuse to obey. They just are rebellious. They just don't want to do it and usually that's a dead giveaway of a life that is full of sin and hypocrisy and they don't want to be more hypocritical by being baptized and making a profession that only elevates their sense of guilt.

And then the other reason that people don't get baptized, though they're in the church, is that they're not regenerate. They're not true Christians. They may be in the church. They may be involved. They have no desire to make a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ. They want to be thought of as a Christian and for what ever reason they want to be in the church, but they're not willing to take the public stand and name the name of Jesus Christ.

And I think if we think about those categories that puts the issue squarely where it belongs. If you have not been baptized with what the Bible calls believer's baptism or commands you to do you've

got to fit into one or more of those categories. I want to help you a little bit to understand the importance of baptism because it is a point of entry that relates to our fellowship. We all came to Christ, we all put our faith in him, we all in a sense were placed into Christ who died and rose again for us, we were in Christ in his death and burial and resurrection, we have been joined to Christ, that's very clear in Scripture, we're all in Christ, we all came in the same way, we've all been baptized with the Spirit into the church spiritually, this then, baptism, is a very important initial point of our fellowship and belongs in a very high priority area.

Contemporary Christianity has really spelled the death of interest in this, in large part, in fact in many cases people are so busy entertaining in the church that they can't get serious about a lot of things and this is very serious. Now let me answer some questions tonight, not going to take a long time, but some very important questions.

Number one: what is baptism? What is it? And you had a visual aid already so and many of you understand it so I know we can build on that. It is a ceremony by which a person is dunked in water. That's it. You saw it. That was it. It is a ceremony by which a person is immersed in water. There are two key verbs in the New Testament in the original language, Greek, which point us to the meaning of baptism. One is bapto, from which we get baptism and Baptist and all those things. And baptois used four times and it means to dip into. It means to dye something. It was used of taking something and immersing it a colored liquid in order to dye it. It means to immerse, bapto.

Now another word in the Greek is baptiso, from the same root, but a different word. It's used many many times. I didn't even count them all up. But it is an intensified use of bapto and it means to dip completely and if you were going to say in Greek somebody drowned that's the word you'd use. Now hopefully we can avoid that as often as possible in baptism, but that's basically what the word means. It means literally to bury someone in water. The noun form of the verb baptisois baptisimas and it is used always in the book of Acts to refer to Christians being immersed in water. That's what it means. So those three terms, all of those three terms, refer to an immersing in water, a dipping into, submerging, dunking, dipping completely they become then technical terms for such immersion that interestingly enough they were transliterated rather than translated. What I mean by that is you're reading along in your Bible and it says go into all the world and make disciples baptizing, that is a transliteration of the Greek term baptisor rather than a translation, which would say immersing.

Now I only point that out so your understanding clearly what I'm saying. It would be best to take all the uses of bapto and baptiso and just translate them immerse. Every New Testament use of these words either requires or permits the meaning of immersion. This is so clear that no less than John Calvin, who is not associated with immersion because, of course, he's associated with Presbyterianism, which has a sprinkling ceremony for babies, but John Calvin wrote this: "The word baptize means to immerse. It is certain that immersion was the practice of the early church." He's right there can be absolutely no question about that.

Now it is interesting to note that those verbs are never used in the passive. That is to say water is never said to be baptized on someone, as if it was sprinkled or poured. It is always the person who is placed in the water, never the water that is placed on the person. And when you look at the New Testament it makes it very clear that immersion or submerging the individual is the issue.

In Matthew Chapter 3 let's kind of start and we're going to look at a few passages. In Matthew 3:6 it says in that verse, "They were being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River." In the Jordan River, they were in the river. The river wasn't scooped up and poured on them. They went down into the river. Verse 16, "And after being baptized Jesus went up immediately," literally, "out of the water." So very clearly the first occasion of baptism indicated in the New Testament they were in the river and whoever was being baptized, in the case of Jesus here, came up out of the water.

In John's gospel chapter 3 we find in verse 23 John also was baptizing in Anon near Salem why? Because there was much water there. And they were coming and being baptized. Need a lot of water to get some people down. I don't know why I thought of this but I had a baptismal service, my first baptismal service as a seminary student in a black church in South Central Los Angeles. What a glorious evening we had and they had about 30 or 40 or maybe 50 people who needed to be baptized in that church and they didn't have at the time a pastor and so they invited me to come down because I had been teaching in the L.A. Training Center, which is a training center and has been for years for inner city pastors and I've always had a special joy in ministering with those guys and with their churches, so they said, "Would you come down, John, and would you baptize all these people who what to be baptized and there were about 40 or 50 people that wanted to be baptized. And somehow they had a problem with the water and they only got about a foot of it in the baptistry. Now that is difficult to submerge somebody in a foot of water. And also to get them back up and out of it. And when you hit about person number 45 it's fascinating. So I understand what John said. He's going to baptize he wants to be where there's much water to make it as easy as possible.

In Mark 1:5, "All the country of Judea" again about John the Baptist, "was going out to him and all the people of Jerusalem and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River." It is just without possible argument to understand that baptism starting with John was an immersion in water.

In Acts 8 the last one we'll look at in this regard you remember that Phillip was giving the gospel to an Ethiopian who was a eunuch associated with a Candace who was queen of Ethiopia and he had presented the gospel to this eunuch and in verse 36 of Acts 8, "The Eunuch said, 'Look, water. What prevents me from being baptized?'" So obviously in presenting the gospel Phillip had instructed this man that there was a way in which to demonstrate your faith and that was through baptism. "And he said, 'Look there's the water, what prevents me from being baptized?'" "And Phillip said, 'If you believe with all your heart you may,' and he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,' and he ordered the chariot to stop and they both went down into the water, Phillip as well as

the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water the Spirit of the Lord snatched Phillip away." You see clearly they went down into the water and came back up out of the water.

Now it's clear then from the language, from the words, from the pictures that you have of baptism that it is immersion into water. Now beyond that only immersion fits the reality being symbolized in baptism. Only immersion fits the reality being symbolized in baptism. Nothing else really does. There are some figurative baptisms that we will not discuss. There is the baptism, as I mentioned earlier, with the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. That's a spiritual immersing. It's a spiritual use of the word we're immersed into the church, we're immersed into the communion of the redeemed, I Corinthians 12:13. That's talking about a spiritual immersion. And then the word baptism is also used as a baptism of fire and that is to say that there will be an immersing of unbelievers into the fury of God's wrath. Those are both used in metaphoric terms, the immersion of the believer into the communion of the redeemed or the church that occurs at salvation is by the Holy Spirit and the immersing of unbelievers into the fury of the Son's wrath will come in the time of judgment. That's noted in Revelation 20:15.

Now John the Baptist, when he came, spoke about both of those. John made reference to both of those and he did so as recorded back in the passage Matthew Chapter 3 and I only remind you of it. In Matthew 3:11, "As for me I baptize you with water, John said, for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I and I'm not fit to remove his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." And there John made reference to both of those spiritual immersions. The first one with the Holy Spirit into the church for those who believe; the second one with fire into the wrath of God for those who do not believe. So there is an immersing into the community of believers at salvation and for those who do not believe there will be an immersing into the full wrath of God in the end.

But John said, "I have come not to do those things, which the Lord will do, but to baptize you with water." And we're focusing then on this water baptism, which is commanded of every believer, every believer as a picture, as an object lesson, as a symbol, as a physical analogy of a great profound spiritual reality. It is one of the ways that God wants you to confess him openly. It is one of the ways that God wants you to demonstrate the reality of salvation. It is a way in which God has designed that the most wonderful truth of all, the truth of salvation, can be proclaimed.

And any student of Scripture knows that God has always taught spiritual truth through symbols, pictures, illustrations, parables and analogies. And whether you're dealing in the Old Testament or the New Testament you come across that all the time, but never is there a greater explosion of those analogies, illustrations and parables than in the teaching of God incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ.

For all along in redemptive history God initiated symbols. As you know I've been going through the Old Testament and working on writing the Study Bible and thank the Lord I believe we'll be finished by Friday or Saturday of this week with the whole of the Old Testament and then we can get on in the next couple of months and finish the New, but in going through all of that I continually see the symbols which God has ordained to graphically depict spiritual truth. He did it through all of his dealings with Israel of old and he has designed that in the life of the church there is this marvelous symbol, which is to demonstrate outwardly what is going on in the spiritual realm. It is a teaching tool, which God has designed to use.

It was remarkable. You remember in the early church when 3,000 people believed on the Lord Jesus Christ whom the religious establishment had just executed. There was just a matter of a little over a month since the execution and resurrection of Jesus Christ when they thought they would have been able to stamp out this whole movement with regard to Jesus, the Romans wanted it stamped out because they had been told that he was a political rebel and might lead an insurrection and they were already afraid of the zealots and the secarai who went around as terrorists stabbing Roman soldiers. And then the Jews believed that somehow this man was a threat to their religious system and the combination of the two put him to death and here we are just a matter of weeks later and 3,000 people proclaimed their faith in Jesus Christ and just to let the whole city know the reality of that they're being baptized all over Jerusalem. And the testimonies of these transformed people are ringing across the city from every fountain and every pool and every place where they could be immersed. Baptism at that point made a demonstration that was absolutely graphic and dramatic of how those people had been united with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection and were professing him as Lord and God.

Baptism is one of the Lord's favorite symbols and along with communion the only two symbols that he left us for this church age. It is an object lesson. It is a visual representation of a spiritual reality and that is what baptism is.

Second question: what has been the history of baptism? How did we get to a point of confusion if it's all so clear? Well going back before the New Testament was written there was in Judaism a series of washings and there was what was called a proselyte baptism. Let's say you were a Gentile and you heard about the true God and you came to meet some Jews and they showed you the Old Testament and they told you the truth about the true God and about the fact that he forgave sinners and that God would love the sinner who came and repented and put his faith in him and you said that's what I want. I want to come to know the true God, I want to turn from my idols, I want to turn from my polytheism to monotheism and worship the one true and living God, the creator of heaven and earth and all that is in it, and you identify to the true God. And you became a proselyte to Judaism. If that was the case then you went through a three-stage ceremony.

The Jews called the first stage mela. Now the first stage was circumcision, circumcision that unique surgical sign that was used by God to demonstrate in symbol form how desperately people needed cleansing. And we've talked about in the past and I don't want to belabor the issue but just to say very briefly that is a marvelous marvelous symbol that God has chosen. I don't want to get too clinical about it but it is a demonstration of how desperately humanity needs cleansing. When God designed circumcision it was not just to prevent the passing on of some disease. That was not God's primary intention, although it is true through history and quite interesting to note that medical journals have said through history, it's not so much true today because of the cleanliness of our culture, but through history Jewish women have had the lowest rate of cervical cancer in the world and that is related to the cleansing of circumcision, which removes the passing on of certain potential diseases. And so there was certainly a health element to it.

But there was something far far deeper as it had the capability to prevent the passing on of disease it also illustrated that man needed a cleansing at the point of passing on but not at the point of passing on disease, but at the point of passing on sin. You never could ever have a better illustration of human depravity than the procreative act. Say what do you mean by that? Well if you want to know if a person is a sinner you could say well I could listen to him talk. That's true but some people can't talk and some people don't say things that they don't think people will like. Some people guard their tongue. That's one way to tell if people are depraved. But maybe you can't always tell that. You say well I can tell by what they do. Well many people don't sin in public. But there's one way to tell a person's depravity that they cannot hide and that is through the children that they have, because they just produce sinners, more and more sinners and sinners and sinners. That's the endemic systemic depravity that reproduces itself. And by circumcision God was saying you have a profound sin problem that desperately needs cleansing that is demonstrated in procreation as you keep populating the world with sinners and sinners and sinners. And the sign of circumcision was a symbol of depravity and the desperate need for cleansing.

So after the proselyte was circumcised and that could be an experience if you happen to be like Abraham who was circumcised at 96, I think. Then there was a second ceremony tebulaand that was an immersion into water. It was to symbolize that you were dead to the old life even in pre-Christian Judaism, that you were dead to the old life apart from God's truth and apart from God's promises and apart from God's word and you were dead to the old life and you were risen now to be in the new family of God. And baptism symbolized that in Judaism.

And then the third element in the ceremony was called corbinand and it was an animal sacrifice. And the animal was sacrificed and the blood was splattered on the person symbolizing that they were committing themselves in a covenant with God to obey him. So this idea of baptism had a place in Judaism. And by the time we come to the New Testament, however, the Jews are very very familiar with immersion because they've seen it in this context. So it's not surprising when John the Baptist, who by the way was the last Old Testament prophet, it's not surprising that when he began his

ministry he began by baptizing. It was an amazing thing, really, because you know what these Jews were saying? When they came out to John the Baptist and asked to be baptized, they were saying this: and you can imagine what genuine repentance this was, they were saying we are to God as Gentiles. That's what they were saying. We are to God as the uncircumcised. We are to God as those outside the covenant. Therein was real repentance, because you remember the Jewish elite, the literati, the highbrows, the religious leaders, the priests and scribes, they would deny that, that's why they condemned Jesus because he confronted their sin and they would not acknowledge it. But here under the preaching of John the Baptist and John was preaching about sin and he was calling them to repentance and he was saying, "The Messiah's coming, the Messiah's coming, now's the time to repent, now's the time to repent of your sin. And they were coming to him and all of the whole of Judea was coming out there to the river in the wilderness to see this man who had a hide for a garment and ate locust and wild honey. This great prophet was out there baptizing these masses of people who were coming out there and they were saying, "We are to God as Gentiles, we are to God as the uncircumcised," quite a profound acknowledgment of their sin.

He called for people to turn from iniquity. He called for them to confess their sins and repent and ask God to cleanse their life and to die to the old life and to live to the new life and be ready for the arrival of the Messiah and there was no better outward symbol for that than immersion. To all who submitted to his baptism in the Jordan River there was given the opportunity publically to confess their sins and say I am a sinner and I am worthy only of death, but God in his mercy is giving me new life. So the baptism of John the Baptist marked a turning point in the life of a sinful Jew who said to God I am as a Gentile, as an outcast, as the uncircumcised. I am outside the covenant, outside the promises, outside the blessings, outside salvation and I want to repent. And John was gathering all of these repentant people to make them ready for the Messiah's arrival.

On one special day in the baptizing ministry of John the Baptist a momentous event happened. Jesus appeared. Verse 13 of Matthew 3, "Then 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?" I mean John just was shocked at the prospect of baptizing the Lamb of God, the Son of God, God incarnate, Christ the Messiah. "I have need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?" And by the way he knew who Jesus was because they were related remember that? "Jesus answered and 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." This was unthinkable to John. He knew Jesus. He knew his divine identity. When he first arrived he said to the crowd, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world," as recorded in John 1:29. He knew he was God's anointed. He knew he was sinless. He knew he was spotless. By this time Jesus was in his 30's. John had grown up to know him. His sinlessness was widely known by those intimately acquainted with him. And widely confirmed, of course, by the revelation of God as well and the promises of a sinless spotless lamb in the Old Testament prophecies. And John, you see, he understood baptism to be the confession of sin. He understood baptism to be the moment of repentance and the death of the old life and the

rising of a new life and he couldn't understand how that could connect to Jesus because he wasn't sinful and he didn't need to put away the old life and there couldn't be any new life. What John was doing was preparing people to meet the king, but why would the sinless king want to be baptized. And so John actually tried to prevent it from happening and said it ought to be the other way around.

And I suppose at this point it is fair to ask the question why in the world did Jesus do this? Well he says why. Verse 15, "Permit it at this time. For in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." It was necessary for him to do it. It was necessary to fulfill God's plan for him. It was a righteous act of obedience to the Father. You say well in what sense? Well it is possible that he wanted to identify with the people who were making ready their hearts for him.

You remember that it says in Philippians Chapter 2 that when Jesus humbled himself he came all the way down and took upon himself the form of a servant? When he humbled himself he came all the way down to live with man and it is possible that he wanted to identify with the people who were making their hearts ready for him. Secondly, it is also possible that he wanted to set the example for believers in the future. That he wanted to demonstrate how absolutely important this was for all believers in that he for whom that baptism didn't really have any specific significance, because he was sinless, nevertheless went through it in order to establish the example for us to whom it is so significant that we might be obedient in following it. It is possible also that this was part of his complete identification with sinners. But most of all, and I think all of those things may be a part of it, most of all I believe his baptism was a symbol of his own death and resurrection and a prefiguring, a preliminary picture of what Christian baptism would mean. I think he took the baptism of John, an Old Testament baptism of bringing someone into the covenant, done mostly to Gentiles, but here to repentant Jews and he took that Old Testament symbol and transformed it in the same way that he took the Passover when he took the cup and the bread and turned it into the symbols of his own body and blood. That he took Old Testament baptism and gave a picture of New Testament baptism, that they would die with him and rise with him to walk in newness of life. That is part of fulfilling all the righteousness that God had designed for him.

In Mark 10:38, I think that understanding is supported. Jesus said this, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink," listen to this, "Or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" Be immersed with the immersion with which I am immersed. And there he uses the very terms of baptism to refer to his death and his burial. And I think he was prophesying that in a picture at the time of his own baptism. In Luke 12:50 he told his disciples, "I have a baptism to undergo," and he was looking at the cross.

So in submitting to baptism Jesus prefigured, or prophesied, or depicted the purpose for which he came. He came to die, he came to be buried, and he came to rise again. Isn't that a magnificent picture and he gave them the whole picture right there at the river when he announced the beginning of his ministry. He would be buried under the waves of divine judgment for sinners, and he who knew

no sin would become sin for us. His baptism in Judea was but a shadow of a far more solemn baptism, which he had to undergo. And when John understood that it was necessary he permitted him to be baptized.

So even Christ's baptism is a picture of his death, burial, and resurrection. When you ask what baptism symbolizes that is it. And that is another compelling reason to understand baptism as immersion. There's no other way to understand it. It demonstrates death, burial, resurrection and no other mode of baptism can symbolize that.

The apostles, after understanding the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ depicted in his baptism, obeyed his example themselves. They got the picture. John 4, "When therefore 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 you know what happened is Jesus began his ministry they began to baptize, the disciples began to baptize. Jesus probably avoided doing it himself lest some people see that as a point of pride.

Now after Jesus died and after he rose again baptism was fixed in place and that's when we read this: go therefore, and make disciples of all nations baptizing them, baptizing them. And that's the way it's been ever since the church was born. Acts 2:41, verse 40, "They said, 'be saved.'" Verse 41, "Those who received his word were baptized and there were added that day about 3,000 souls."

Let me ask a third question and answer it briefly. What is the meaning of Christian meaning? What is the meaning of it? Yes, we know it depicts the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. But what is the meaning of it? Well throughout all the New Testament it is taught as a picture of the central spiritual truth in salvation. Are you ready for this? Here is the central truth in the doctrine of salvation and that is this: that the one who believes in Christ is united in his death and his burial and his resurrection with him. That is the profound reality.

We are immersed into Christ, solidarity with Christ so that the Apostle Paul says, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." My whole life is Christ. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me and the life which I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit. Over and over and over and over Paul says in Christ, in Christ, in Christ, in Christ, in Christ. You could study the religions of the world and you're not going to read, for example, of people being in Buddha or in Mohammad, or in Confucius. Only in Christianity are people in Christ. We are placed into union with Jesus Christ so that his death under the fury of God's wrath becomes our death and his resurrection becomes our resurrection and we rise in him to walk in newness of life.

This is what Paul called in writing to Titus the washing of regeneration. This is what Acts 22:16 calls the washing away of our sins. This is what I Peter 3:21 calls the baptism that saves us. It is the

water? No. It is the immersion into Christ that is only pictured in the water. It is an immense miracle, incomprehensible to us in its fullness.

In Romans Chapter 6, just one of the most monumental chapters in all the Bible, in Romans Chapter 6 we read this: "Do you not know that all of us who have been immersed into Christ Jesus have been immersed into his death." Now by the way that's a dry verse. There's no water there. He's talking about the spiritual reality. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ you are immersed into Christ, you are immersed into his death. Verse 4, "Therefore we have been buried with him through that immersion into death in order that as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." This is the incredible spiritual miracle. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ you are placed into Christ you die in him so that all your sins are paid and you rise to walk in newness of life. This is the incredible reality of the Christian faith.

Verse 5, "If we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." That's what it means to be a Christian. It means to be linked with Jesus Christ so that his death is the death for your sin, his burial is the burial of your old life, and his resurrection is the resurrection of your new life.

The fourth question: what is the relation of immersion to salvation? What is the relation of immersion to salvation? Without taking a lot of time let me just say it this way. Baptism is the immediate and inseparable indicator that salvation has already taken place. Water is not going to save you, particularly Los Angeles water. The water is not going to save you. It makes no contribution to your salvation. It is an immediate and inseparable indicator that you have been saved. The Apostles insisted on it. If a convert was not willing to do that there was little confidence in the true nature of that repentance.

You remember when the Scribes and Pharisees came down and they said to John, "We want to be baptized." They were afraid they were losing the crowd. They wanted to make sure they got in on the deal. And you remember what John said to them? "You snakes. Bring forth first the fruit of" what? "Repentance." Let's see that the repentance was real then we can enact the act of obedience.

We go into the world, we preach the gospel, when people believe it they are baptized. It's the inseparable sign of true salvation. In fact it became so inseparable that they used to talk about each other as The Baptized. In Ephesians 4 there's one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Well that really means one Lord, one faith, one salvation, but it was so synonymous with baptism because baptism was the symbol.

I remember in one of my early trips to the former Soviet Union when they were merging out of the terrible communist oppression some American evangelists came in and they brought in these new techniques of evangelism and some of the pastors sat down with me and they said, "We're very

distressed." And they told me what happened. They said these evangelists came and they said if you've invited Christ into your life and you're a Christian, and they'd give a gospel message, put your hand in the air. So they'd never seen anything like this so people would put their hand in the air if they had prayed this little prayer that the evangelist gave them to pray. Much to the horror and chagrin of the people they would then be said now you're Christians and this is wonderful and you can believe it and they gave them some little thing to make them feel like they could know they were saved because they went through that little prayer and they put their hand in the air. And they told me about one occasion where 300 people did that and they had a meeting afterwards for those who wanted to stay and find out how to grow in Christ and about 10 people came. And their great distress was that they had always believed that you didn't know whether a person was a Christian until they were willing to take a profession of faith in Jesus Christ public in a Communist environment. That's how we know if they're real. This was all new. And that's what baptism was intended to indicate, that a person was willing to stand up publically and declare identification with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.

In Acts 2:38, it says, "Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins." And some people get very concerned about that verse because it sounds like if you're not baptized you're not going to get forgiven. The construction of that verse, repent and be baptized for the remissions of sins could be translated be baptized because of the remission of sins. The very same construction is thus translated in Matthew 12:41. But it's very clear in the New Testament that you are baptized as a demonstration, as a public declaration in marvelous symbols of what had already happened in your life. And if you weren't willing to do that the early church and the church long after had every right to be suspicious of the integrity of your profession. And so the relation of immersion to baptism is simply this: it's an act of obedience. "For by grace are you saved through," what? "Faith, that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not of works," and that includes water baptism. That's not going to save you. "If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and with your mouth you've confessed him as Lord you shall be saved." The baptism comes after.

In the early church baptism, though, became synonymous with salvation so that someone who refused baptism would be someone who refused Christ because that was the way you took your public stand. In Matthew 10:32, Jesus said it this way, "Everyone, therefore, who shall confess me before men I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever shall deny me before men I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven."

Actually baptism produces nothing but the blessing of being obedient. It's not given to produce anything. It's not going to make you holy. It's not going to save you. It's not going to make you a better Christian. It's just an opportunity to be obedient and you'll get the same blessing that you always get when you are obedient and when you public ally proclaim your love for Christ. Baptism, a proclamation designed by God to signify by outward sign that someone's sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ, that they have died and been buried and risen and new life in Christ.

This is the symbol baptism.

One final question: why is there so much confusion then about this? Well in all honesty it's not really necessary. I've given you a pretty simple straightforward look at the Scripture. Why is there so much confusion? I believe, and I think you have to catch this very carefully, I believe Satan wants to break the pattern of obedience in a Christian's life at the very beginning and set disobedience in place. So many attacks have come on baptism and it's not that complicated. It's that simple. Some deny baptism altogether, Quakers, Friends, Salvation Army. It's called hyper-dispensationalism or Bulerginism. They deny it altogether. Some say it is necessary to save, Christian Church, Churches of Christ. Some say it must be done for the dead, so Mormons have proxy baptisms for the dead at the clip of about two and a half million a year. Others say it's for babies, such as the Roman Catholic Church, they say infant baptism produces the seed of regeneration. Water cleanses the baby from original sin and results eventually in regeneration. Interestingly enough until the Middle Ages the Roman Catholic Church only immersed and since that time they've sprinkled. Roman Catholic Church teaches that if a baby dies without being baptized or christened it goes into the limbo of the innocents where the soul enjoys natural bliss but is forever deprived of the vision of God. Is that in the Bible? No. Lutherans, Martin Luther who came along and brought what is monumental in the history of Christianity, the Reformation never shook the grave clothes of infant baptism off. He even wrote a small book on it called the Small Baptismal Bookin 1526. And here's the required prayer written by Martin Luther: "O all mighty God, I invoke thee concerning this child," and you name the 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." The infant is then asked, "Does thou renounce the devil and all of his works?" The parents say, "Yes." "Thus thou believe in God the Father, and Jesus Christ his Son, and in the Holy Spirit and in the Christian Church?" The parents say, "Yes." And when the parents have said yes the child is baptized and then the prayer that Luther wrote: "The Almighty God hath begotten thee anew through water and the Holy Spirit and has forgiven thee all thy sins. Amen." That's infant baptism in Lutheranism. Another travesty on the doctrine of salvation.

In the Reformed churches, which are closer to where we are, their view is that when adults turn to Christ they are to be sprinkled. There is no New Testament teaching for that whatsoever any place, but it is a tradition. They are to be sprinkled because they are now in covenant relationship to God and once these adults come into covenant relationship to God they get sprinkled and then their children are included in the covenant of grace and are to be baptized as quote unquote "little members of the covenant". Later they are confirmed as actual members after satisfactorily answering the questions in the catechism and they say this is the new circumcision. Often I'm asked how you deal with that and my response is always the same. You can't find it in the Bible. There are lots of things you can't find in the Bible. It's totally unsupportable.

Another strange twist that has been advocated in more modern times is that there is never to be a rebaptism; that somehow if you were ever baptized whether as an infant or a child or whatever there is never ever ever to be a rebaptism. During the Reformation period many hundreds of Christians were treated cruelly and many were killed by Protestant leaders. Why? Because they were rebaptized. There was a group who felt that New Testament believer's baptism required them to be baptized and rejected their infant sprinkling so they were baptized again. They were called Antibaptists and they were persecuted in some cases and even executed.

You see all of these things are false understandings of what is very simple. Baptism, as I've showed you, means simply you're identifying with Jesus Christ. It is an ordinance that people do after they've come to faith in him period. That's not very complicated. It's only for believers and it should happen promptly upon their faith. Our Lord recognized baptism as having a heavenly purpose. He submitted to it, he did it to others and had his apostles do it to others, he commanded that we do it, and he commanded us to have it done to us. It all fits into his purpose to demonstrate through the majesty of that symbol our union with Jesus Christ.

In Luke 7:29, "And when all the people and the tax gatherers heard this they acknowledged God's justice having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves not having been baptized by John." God had a purpose in baptism and they rejected it.

Well you can't claim ignorance anymore. There it is. It's a marvelous thing. Nothing is more thrilling to me Sunday night after Sunday night as we go along year after year than what we heard tonight. Amen?

Father, we thank you for this wonderful time, for the sweetness of music we heard and enjoyed, for wonderful echo of the testimonies of these lovely young people who have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that no pride, or indifference, or defiance stood in the way of their willingness, no ignorance. We pray for all, Lord, who are here, first of all to come to know the Savior and then to be willing to stand up and with a heart full of joy say, "Christ is mine and I am his and I have died to the old life and risen to walk in newness of life. Through faith in him my sins are forgiven washed away. This I declare the willingness to be baptized. How can we say Lord Lord and do not the things you say? How can we say we love you and not keep your commandments? Make us faithful to this beautiful ordinance and we'll thank you in Christ's name. Amen.

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