

# 15 The Church - Baptism

## Introduction

He won't trade that cell phone in even though it is getting older and beaten up. And every night he replays the voice-mail with the sound of his wife and his two children. "Hey daddy we love you!" The sound of two boys in the background, "Hey daddy we love you!" And every time he hears that voice he very carefully hits 9 to save it always fearful he is going to hit 7 and delete it. He listens and he listens and he listens and he listens to the voice of the woman and children he lost in a car accident three months ago.

If you were sitting with him in his apartment as he is listening to that voice-mail, would you say to him, "it's just a voice, its just sound waves. they're not really here, its just a recording." You would not say that because it is not true. It's not just a voice it is everything to him. It is a sign of a love that he has had and a love that he has lost. It creates a reality, it is much more than just a word. These words create a reality for this man.<sup>1</sup>

As a general rule, don't think that anything God gives us in this book is unimportant. He did not send the Holy Spirit on an unimportant mission. You will hear me say on many issues that we need a higher view of it. Baptism is no exception. Of all the billions of books in the world and the countless number of words spent on a dizzying array of topics. This is all that God gave us. Just one, small volume. Of all the millions of topics on which God could have written, why did he limit himself to just what we have here? These must be of great importance indeed. So as we consider baptism, I want us to have a deep view of it. I want us to have a thirst for more. There is no way that I can do anything but scratch on the surface of this subject. Before I get into the meat of this sermon, let me just take a moment to address the hot topics and get them out of the way. First, I believe that baptism is only for those who believe in Jesus. Thus I do not think we should baptize infants. There is no evidence in scripture that infants ever were baptized. I am sympathetic to the covenant link of circumcision with baptism, but ultimately I think there are far too many problems with it.

Second, I think the proper mode of baptism is by submersion. But in my opinion, this is where we Baptists need to show some grace. Unlike believer's baptism, which is expressly stated in the Bible, the mode is never prescribed for us. I think submersion is the most proper form, but I wouldn't make a big deal of it.

## Union With Christ

Baptism, first and foremost, signifies our union with Christ.

**Gal 3:27** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

**Rom. 6:3-7** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order

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1. Russell Moore, "Dead Man Washing", accessed 5/5/10, available from <http://vimeo.com/5683667>.

that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin.

**Col. 2:11-12** In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

There are several things that flow out of this.

## Acknowledgment of Guilt & Judgment

In baptism, there is an acknowledgment of guilt.

**1 Peter 3:20-21** they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

**1 Corinthians 10:2** and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, Both of these passages speak of judgment. The flood was brought on mankind because God looked down from heaven and saw that the thoughts of men were only evil continually. The flood was an act of judgment on an evil world.

In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul talks about Israel being baptized into Moses in the sea. This too was an act of judgment. Israel was about to die at the hand of the Egyptian army, and the Egyptians did die as they tried to cross the sea and God shut the way. The ark and the passage through the Red Sea were both paths of salvation through the waters of judgment.

When we, therefore, submit to baptism, we are claiming that we are worthy of death. Baptism is a visual admission that you have sinned, that those sins are worthy of death, and that God would be just if he were to take your life from you right now.

Our court systems are famous for taking forever and consuming massive amounts of money in the process. Do you know why that is? A large part of that is because guilty people refuse to admit their guilt and take responsibility for it. They don't want to admit to wrong doing. They will fight the charges to the bitter end.

That is the opposite of what Christian baptism should be. We honestly and humbly confess our sins. We admit that they are worthy to be punished. We acknowledge it and we throw ourselves on the mercy of the court. "I am guilty! I know it. Please have mercy on me!" That should be our plea. "Son of David have mercy on me!" That should be our cry.

## Forgiveness of Sins

When we have come to that point in our life where we recognize our sins, we agree that we are worthy of death, and we call out to Christ Jesus, the judge of the living and the dead, to have mercy on us, then we have forgiveness of sins. Baptism signifies this cleansing.

**1 Cor 6:11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

**Acts 22:16** And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

Baptism signifies this cleansing. By the way, this is in part where those who sprinkle for baptism get a talking point. Many of the OT cleansing rites were done by sprinkling. They would sprinkle blood on the altar to sanctify it. They would take water and hisop and sprinkle it in a house to cleanse it. Since baptism is also a cleansing rite, they argue that it should be by sprinkling. I disagree, but that is not the point of this sermon. I just wanted you to be aware of the argument. Perhaps if you are interested you can talk to me more after the service.

We are now seen as clean by God and baptism visually captures that cleaning. This is only positional, however. **Gal 3:27** "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." When we believe and are baptized we are clothed in Christ such that when God looks at us He sees Christ. This is very similar to how the mercy seat was used in the tabernacle. The throne of God was upon the lid of the arc of the covenant. When the ark was sprinkled with blood, it was as if God saw Israel through this shed blood. Now when God sees us, He sees us through the blood of Christ. He sees us clothed in Christ's righteousness. This is our assurance. On that day we know that we will stand, not because I am so wonderful, but because of Jesus.

## Acknowledgment of Death

Corresponding to this we are united to Christ and we are buried with him in baptism. Our old nature was crucified with Christ in order that this body of death may be brought to nothing. In baptism, not only do we recognize that we are deserving of death, we also signify the putting to death of our old nature.

**Col 2:11-12, 20** In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations

**Col 3:5** Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Baptism is a big deal because it is here that we put a stake in the ground. It is here that we declare war on the enemy within. It is here that we declare which side we are one. It is here that a fundamental change occurs. Here is where we are confronted with the reality of our choice. It is a bit like marriage. At the wedding we place a stake in the ground and we say, "I am committed

to this woman. I am committed to only this woman. I will love her in sickness and health, in wealth and in poverty. I am entering into covenant with this woman and all of you are acting as witnesses to my vows." We have gotten away from that notion a bit, but we need to regain it. At a wedding we act as witnesses to the vows and we affirm that we will do all that we can to make that marriage last.

So also in baptism. It is a public declaration. It is a watershed moment in your life. At this point you say before everybody, "Henceforth I will live my life anew!" The capturing of your heart and the commitment to this woman existed before the wedding, but at the wedding you make it official. If you do not have that inner commitment, then a marriage ceremony won't create it. You are baptized because you believe. But if you never really believed, baptism won't create faith. (Incidentally, this is also why I do not re-baptize people. Suppose John married Jane for all the wrong reasons. Everything about his wedding was laughable. If John later has a change of heart and starts loving Jane for all the right reasons, do I remarry them? No. They were married once and that is sufficient. The same is true with baptism.)

Whether you have it or not, during that ceremony you are declaring that you do. You are confessing that you are deserving of death, that Jesus has washed you clean, positionally, and that you are not committed to actually cleaning up your act. You were buried with him in baptism, therefore put to death what is earthy within you.

## Living a New Life

This is the other side of the coin we just examined. We must put to death our old nature, but we must also live as a new creation. It is not enough that we kill the old man. We must also live anew. It is not enough that we take off all our filthy clothes, we must now clothe ourselves in righteousness.

**Col 3:1-17** If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. 12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and

spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This is sometimes referred to as sins of commission and sins of omission. Sins of commission are those things that we normally think of as sinful: sexual immorality, slander, hatred, lying, theft, etc. These are things that you do that transgress a law. Sins of omission are those things that we are supposed to do but don't. These are what we as church-going people really fail in. Are we sleeping around with everyone's spouse? Absolutely not! But are you actively supporting their marriage? Are you breaking into homes and stealing belongings? Absolutely not! But are you stealing from your company by not working as well as you should?

## **Baptism Isn't Just Water**

So it is with baptism. It isn't just water. This water speaks of one who loved us. It speaks of one we love. It is a reminder of the death he died. It is a reminder of the death that we nearly died had he not taken the punishment for us. Baptism is not just water anymore than that man's voicemail was just sound waves.