

Covenant Community

Baptism: Identification with the New Covenant

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BAPTISM: IDENTIFICATION WITH THE NEW COVENANT Acts 2:36-41

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Acts 2 and to pull out those notes that you received in your Worship Guide when you came in. Tonight, we are going to dive into the first of two pictures that Scripture gives us that represent the new covenant and the whole picture of covenant community we've been talking about over the last few weeks. Been in Hebrews 10 and Ephesians 1, and we've seen through foundational truths, we're recipients of a new covenant, and how Christ has inaugurated a covenant that changes everything about our relationship to God but not just our relationship to God, but our relationship to each other, the way we relate to each other. We belong to Christ and to each other.

The Importance of Baptism

So, we're going to dive in tonight and next week into the two pictures that are key in this whole picture of covenant community, and the first one we're going to look at is baptism. You've got at the top of your notes kind of a sentence that sums up where we're going; pretty key sentence in the importance of baptism. The church comprises a covenant community of believers who have identified with Christ through baptism. The church comprises a covenant community of believers who have identified with Christ through baptism.

Now, in some senses that's a pretty strong statement. Some might think or some might say, "Well, I thought the church was comprised of all Christians regardless of whether or not you've been baptized. You don't have to be baptized in order to be considered a part of the church." However, is that really what the New Testament teaches? Look at Acts 2:36, this is the first Christian sermon. Beginning of this chapter, the Holy Spirit comes down at Pentecost, and Peter stands up, and he starts to preach, and verse 36 is the climax of his message; it's where it's all headed toward.

He says in verse 36,

"Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Every single one of them was baptized, every one who believed in Christ, every one who repented, who turned from sin and trusted in Christ, baptized. This is the picture. Even the phrase, what Peter said in Acts 2:38, "*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ...*", that's a word picture in the original language of the New Testament. It's literally an identification with Him, into His name, you're uniting with Him. Repent and be baptized, be identified with Christ, make that identification clear in this picture called baptism.

In fact, you look and...turn to the right, Acts 8:16, and what you'll see is this phrase come up over and over again. We won't look at every instance where people are baptized in the book of Acts, necessarily, but look at this phrase, "being baptized into the name", identified with Christ. Look at Acts 8:16. Start in verse 15 to get the context, "*When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized...*" Here it is, you might underline it. Same phrase we say in Acts 2:38, "*...into the name of the Lord Jesus.*"

Keep going to the right, and you come to Acts 10:48, and you'll see the same phrase, you can underline it there. This is Peter at Cornelius' house, and Peter speaks here, verse 48, "*So he,*" being Peter, "*ordered that they be baptized...*" Here it is, underline it, "*...in the name of Jesus Christ.*" "Into the name of Jesus Christ." Keep going to the right, and you'll come to Acts 19:4-5. This is Paul, he's in Ephesus with some Ephesian believers, and Paul says in verse 4...Acts 19:4, "*Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized...*" Underline it there, "*...into the name of the Lord Jesus.*"

So, this is the picture that the book of Acts, the New Testament is giving us. Baptism is an identification with Christ. It's the uniting of our lives, the picture of how are lives are united with Christ. Now, bring that back around to the question or the thought, "Well, to be a part of the church, all you have to do is believe in Christ. You don't need to be baptized." There's a grain of truth to that. We're going to talk about it in a minute, but think about it; think about what the New Testament is saying here and what logic says. It makes absolutely no sense for anyone to say, "Well, I believe in Jesus, but I don't want to be identified with Him. I believe in Jesus, but I'm not going to show that my life is united with Him."

This is why, when you come to the New Testament, the book of Acts, all the letters in the New Testament, the New Testament has absolutely no category, not even a comprehension of an un-baptized believer. That makes no sense in Scripture. It's like an oxymoron in the New Testament, like jumbo shrimp or Microsoft Works, un-baptized believer, they don't go together. They contradict; they don't make sense. That's the picture that the New Testament is giving us here.

So, based on what the New Testament teaches, I want to say tonight as clearly, and in some senses, as bluntly as possible: If you are a follower of Christ, and you have not been baptized, you are living contrary to the New Testament. You're walking out of step with what it means to be a follower of Christ. We'll see, very clearly, you are disobeying Christ.

It's interesting how far we've come. When you look at the New Testament, and you see no category, comprehension of an un-baptized believer, and you see what we've done in the church today with baptism. We've made it an optional extra. We've made it a matter of preference. "Well, if you'd like to, if you're willing to do that, if it feels all right to you." Scripture has no comprehension of that kind of thinking.

Not just Scripture, our brothers and sisters around the world. I will never forget the first time teaching on baptism in an underground house church in Asia. As we talked about baptism, realizing that for these people in this culture, in this country, in this setting, for them to be baptized, literally, could cost them their lives. There were two brothers that were being baptized, and they were brought out in front of all the other church leaders, and they asked both of those brothers, point blank, "Are you willing to be baptized today, knowing that it may cost you your life?" First brother said, "I've already sacrificed everything to follow Jesus. I want to be baptized." Second brother was a teenager. "Are you willing to be baptized today, knowing that it may cost you your life?" He looks at them, and he says, "Jesus is my Lord, whenever He says, 'Do,' I will do it."

God, help us not to sit thousands of miles away in a comfortable setting like this and say, "I just don't know if baptism is for me." To believe in Christ is to identify with Christ; they go together. I want to show you this in Scripture tonight. The only problem is, we don't have a passage in the New Testament where there is a systematic treatment of all the questions we have about baptism, all the theological or practical questions we have about baptism. We don't have a passage we can go to. We've got some passages that are loaded theologically, that show us the picture of baptism.

The Questions About Baptism ...

However, what I've done is I've put it there in your notes, five primary questions about baptism. What we're going to do is we're going to take a survey throughout the New Testament. We're going to turn to a variety of different passages, some we won't have time to turn to. I want to encourage you to write down these passages that we turn to or that we're not able to turn to, that we reference, so that you, if you want to, can dive back in and go deeper into these passages that we're just going to be able to run through tonight. Five questions about baptism.

Why should I be baptized?

First, why should I be baptized? If you're in here tonight, and you're a follower of Christ and you have not been baptized, this is particularly important. "Well, why should I be baptized?" Three reasons: Number one, to follow the example of Christ, to follow the example of Christ. Go with me to Matthew 3, Matthew 3. What we've got in Matthew 3 is, at the beginning of this chapter, first half of this chapter is a picture of John the Baptist. John the Baptist, out of the Jordan River, he's baptizing people, a baptism of repentance; that's what it's all about with John the Baptist. Verse 2, verse 6, verse 11 in Matthew 3, talking about repenting, people coming out and confessing their sins, repenting of their sins.

So, when you get to Matthew 3:13, Jesus comes up to John and listen to what happens. Just imagine this scene. Matthew 3:13, "*Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'*" Can you imagine that scene? Just put yourself in John's shoes there. Jesus, the Son of God, God in the flesh comes to you and says, "I need you to baptize me." John looks at Him and says, "No, no, no, no. I need you to baptize me." You can just imagine this back and forth, "No, you." "No, you." "No, you." "No."

This is intense. Jesus, God in the flesh, "You need to baptize me." Verse 15,

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he

went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

This is the inauguration of Jesus' ministry. The whole Trinity involved in this picture: Father, Son, Spirit.

However, it begs the question, "If baptism was about repentance, then why was Jesus being baptized? He had nothing to repent of; He was sinless. So, why does He need to be baptized?" Listen to what He says there in verse 15, "*It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.*" What Jesus is doing is He is giving an example. What it...an example of obedience, and an example for all who would follow Him. This is a picture of Him identifying with us and all who would follow after Him, all who would be baptized as followers of His.

It's an even deeper picture, as we'll talk about later, this baptism of what He was going to do in His death and His resurrection. However, the picture is catch the gravity of the grace and the humility here that the Son of God stoops to be baptized by man, as an example to you and to me and to all who would follow Him, that He is identified with us, and we are identified with Him. He is our substitute for sin and death, and we experience His righteousness. That's the whole picture here. So, to follow the example of Christ.

Second, to obey the command of Christ; to obey the command of Christ. Jesus' ministry starts here in Matthew 3. Go to the end of Matthew, Matthew 28. Matthew 28. Now, we've already seen this in Acts 2 when Peter said, "Repent and be baptized...". That was a command in the New Testament. It was not, "Repent and consider baptism", or "Repent and pray about baptism", or "Repent and think about baptism", or "Repent and ponder baptism". You get the point. It's, "Repent and be baptized." This was a command in the New Testament, a non-negotiable, so to speak.

Why? Why was it being commanded there in the book of Acts? Well, listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, a passage that I'm guessing is familiar to many. I hope close to all of us. Matthew 28:19, "*Therefore, go and make disciples...*" This is the end of Jesus' ministry in Matthew, "*...make disciples of all nations...*" Doing, what? "*...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit...*" You've got that picture again of the name. You have the whole Trinity involved in this thing. Same picture we saw in Matthew 3.

Jesus says, "Go and disciple people; make disciples and baptize them." This is why, when you get to the book of Acts, you see, whenever somebody is coming to Christ, they're getting baptized, because Jesus had commanded it. Put this together. We've talked about this passage, the Great Commission, and how every follower of Christ in this room is commanded here to make disciples. We're all to be about making disciples of all nations. Well, it begs the question, "How can we make disciples and lead people to be baptized if we're not being...if we're not willing to be baptized ourselves?" "You need to be baptized, identified with Christ." "Well, I'm not." Totally doesn't add up.

I want to pause here before we even go onto this next reason, because we're going to talk in this next reason about how baptism relates to, what it means to be a member of the church and to see how these go together. However, before we even get there, I want to be very, very clear, based on what we're seeing here in Scripture, the primary reason we should be baptized. We're going to talk about church membership, baptism, and how that comes together, but the primary reason to be baptized is not to become a member of a church. The primary reason to be baptized is to obey Christ, period. Baptism is not primarily

a church membership issue. Baptism is primarily an obedience issue, and this is the primary reason why every single follower of Christ in this room needs to be baptized, to follow the example of Christ and to obey the command of Christ. Because not to be baptized is to live in disobedience, to live in sin. It's strong; that's what the New Testament is teaching.

The third reason...to follow the example of Christ, to obey the command of Christ, and third, be baptized to unite with the body of Christ; to unite with the body of Christ. Go with me here to 1 Corinthians 12. You go to the right, you'll go past the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Then, Acts, then Romans, then 1 Corinthians. I want to show you two places in Paul...1 Corinthians 12...two places where Paul shows the relationship between baptism and the body of Christ. We've seen the unity we have as a body; we saw this last week. We are united by the grace of Christ. It's what Ephesians 1 and 2 remind us of.

Think about this unity as it relates to baptism. 1 Corinthians 12, we'll start in verse 12. He's talking about the body of Christ. *"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized..."* Listen to this, *"...baptized by one Spirit into one body." Baptized into one body "by one Spirit - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." So, we were baptized into one body.*

Then, you go to the right and go to Ephesians; a couple books...a few books to the right. You go to 2 Corinthians, then Galatians, then Ephesians. Ephesians 4, another passage where Paul is talking about unity in the body of Christ, what it means to be together in the body of Christ. Ephesians 4, look at verse...we'll start in verse 3. Hear the tone here as Paul is encouraging, exhorting them to unity. He says, Ephesians 4:3, *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body..."* Here it is, *"...one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one..."* What? *"...baptism."* One Lord, one faith, one baptism. Verse 5, *"...one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*

Think about the plain level that Paul just put baptism on. What unites us is the body of Christ. We have one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of all, one baptism. That's the level he puts this on. What we have done in saying, "Well, baptism's not that important in being a member of a church; baptism's not that important in being part of the body of Christ. It's an optional..." is what we've said is, "Well, we have unity: One Lord, one faith, one God but not one baptism", and that's completely contrary to what the New Testament is teaching.

Now, some would say, "Well, what if Paul's talking here about Spirit baptism instead of water baptism. When we are...when our hearts are regenerated, and the Spirit transforms our hearts, maybe that's what he's talking about." However, that's the picture the New Testament is showing us here, is that Spirit baptism and water baptism are not separated in the sense that everybody who has been baptized by the Spirit is baptized in water. It's just a given. Everybody who's following Christ in the book of Acts and letters to follow...everybody that's following Christ has been baptized. No category for un-baptized believer to unite with the body of Christ. This makes sense in this whole body. Christ is the head of the body. When you unite your life with the head, you're automatically united with the body, whether you like it or not.

If you are here tonight, and you are not a follower of Christ, the reality of what the New Testament teaches is, that if you come to faith in Christ, you don't just get Christ; you get us too. I'm in no way trying to dissuade you from coming to Christ, but this is the reality. This is the reality. It's what we've been talking about. We are recipients of a new covenant,

members of a new community, and when we identify with Christ, we identify with each other. So, catch what the New Testament's teaching here.

For Christians to say, "I'm not going to be baptized" is to say, "I'm not going to identify with Christ", and to say to the church, "I'm not identifying with you either." That's heavy stuff that goes completely contrary to what the New Testament is teaching. So, this is why we are baptized. Follow the example of Christ, obey the command of Christ, and unite with the body of Christ.

I want to stop here for a second, and I want to show you something. I want to show you a video. Earlier in our 11:00 worship gathering today, there was a small group...small group, I'm not sure exactly how many folks are in this whole small group, but eight folks from this small group were baptized together this morning. It's a small group where some of them have just recently come to faith in Christ. Others of them had followed Christ before and had never been baptized. They began studying Scripture together as they have been sharing life together. Over the last few months, especially, have been looking at what is salvation and what is baptism. Parents, kids, together, looking at this picture, and they said, "We..." The ones who had not been baptized, "We need to be baptized." Or the ones who had just come to faith in Christ, "We need to be baptized." They said, "We want to do this as a community." So, this morning, all eight of them packed into that baptism water over there, and they were baptized together.

I want you to hear just a glimpse...I wish you could hear each of the stories that's represented here completely, but just hear a glimpse and see a picture of these three reasons all coming together. Watch this with me.

(Video)

What is the meaning of baptism?

Baptism: Identification with Christ and with each other; into Christ and into a community. This is what Scripture teaches, to be baptized, follow the example of Christ, to obey the command of Christ and to unite with the body of Christ. Well, what is the meaning of baptism? What does baptism mean?

First, baptism is a celebration of the grace of Christ. A celebration of the grace of Christ. Go with me to Romans. If you're in Ephesians, turn back a few books to the left. Romans is right before 1 Corinthians, which we looked at earlier. Romans 6. Now, the key here, let me be very clear, is that baptism is not necessary for salvation. I'm specifically talking about justification there. It's not necessary to be baptized in order to be made right before God. Now, certainly the sanctification process, the process of growing in Christ, baptism is integral to that, that's really the beginning of that process in a sense, because this is the initial thing you do as a follower of Christ is you're baptized.

However, some will teach, but the New Testament does not teach that baptism is a necessary work in order to be made right before God. We've seen this all over Galatians. It is all over the New Testament. We are saved by grace alone through, what? Faith alone, in Christ alone. Not faith plus baptism, not faith plus this, faith plus anything. As soon as we add plus to that, we undercut grace. We undercut salvation, the whole picture of salvation. It's faith alone.

Now, we see this...we see this in Jesus on the cross. To the thief next to Him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Certainly not baptized, but receiving a promise. Now, some would say, though, "Well, that's even right before Jesus died, so that doesn't count. You

look after." However, you look after, and the New Testament is filled, whether it's in book of Acts, especially Acts 10, evidences of salvation before baptism. That salvation doesn't happen when baptism happens...water baptism happens.

Water baptism is a celebration of the grace of Christ that has occurred in salvation. Baptism is an external celebration of an internal transformation; external celebration of an internal transformation. Something that's happened on the inside through faith alone in Christ alone.

Romans 6, this is what Paul's talking about. This picture in Romans 4, 5 and 6 is just all about grace, and he's just giving us an incredible picture of what it means to be justified before God, through faith, through grace. In Romans 6:1, he says,

What should we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Now, here's the picture, and you've got this in your notes. Paul has just built at the end of Romans 5, and he's carrying here in Romans 6, Christ died on a cross as our substitute. Last half of Romans 5, we're in the line of Adam, sinful line, and Christ has taken our sin upon Himself, so that, through faith in Him, we can be forgiven of all of our sins, all of our trespasses. We are buried with Him through baptism. His baptism, showing us a picture that we are dead to sin because He has conquered sin on our behalf. He died on a cross as our substitute, took our place, died for our sins, and then He rose from the grave as our Savior. Baptism is a celebration of that. Baptism is a celebration of the fact that we have been made right before God because of what He did, not because of what we do. If we say baptism is necessary for salvation, we reverse that around. Now, we're being made right before God because of what we are doing; that misses the whole point. We were made right before God, justified before God because of what He did, the trust, faith alone in what He did. Celebration of the grace of Christ.

Second, baptism is an illustration of the gospel of Christ. Baptism is a picture of the gospel displayed before all to see. I want to show you a picture up here on the screen. Those are two really cute kids. Now, here's the reality: You look at the screen, you have Caleb on the right, Joshua on the left, and just side note, it is about impossible to get these two kids to smile at the exact same time for the camera. Could I get an "Amen" from parents in this room? It's impossible. That's the best we could get. So, you look at the screen. The reality is, that is not my kids; that is a representation of my kids. My kids are running around in the preschool area right now doing who knows what, hopefully not doing anything they shouldn't be doing, but they're over in the preschool area right now. That's where my kids are. On the screen, not my kids, representation of my kids, picture of my kids, illustration of my kids.

In the same way, you see what happens in baptism. When a brother of ours is baptized in a little bit, this is not salvation taking place. It's a picture, it's a representation, it's an illustration of salvation. The reality has already taken place in his heart. This is a picture of that for the world to see. Make sense? Illustration of the gospel of Christ. This is exactly what Romans 6 is teaching, and it is an incredible illustration. When we go into the water, we're showing that we are identified with Christ in His death. We have died to sin; we've died to sin. "It no longer has mastery over us," Paul says later in Romans 6 here.

We are identified with Christ in His death to sin, our death to sin. Now, the good thing is, in this picture, when you are baptized, you go into the water, you don't stay there long; you don't stay there long at all. Why? Because Jesus didn't stay in the grave long. He rose from the grave. That's the picture in baptism. Illustration: Into the water, identification with His death; out of the water, participation in His resurrection. "Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too, may live a new life," Paul says.

Our coming out of the water is a picture of the fact that we have been risen with Christ, and we live with Him, we have life with Him. Look down in verse 9. If we die with Christ, we know...we believe we also live with Him. *"For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead...death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once and for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God."* The same way, you now live to God. You are participating in His resurrection. This is glorious truth.

Standing graveside yesterday, Chris Green, incredible man, 38 years old, who this past week, passed away unexpectedly from a heart attack. Has taught third through fifth graders across this faith family. In a variety of different ways, he's shown Christ in this faith family, and I was struck standing there at the graveside, and I remembered...I remembered going to Israel a few years ago, and I remember going to one of the sites where they think that Jesus was buried, and the stone was rolled away. I remember we had a tour guide there. He was from England, and he looked at us, and he said, "I don't understand why all you tourists travel thousands of miles to come here. There's nothing to see. He's not here." I was struck standing next to that graveside yesterday to realize Chris Green was not there; Chris Green was resurrected. That's reality: Participation in His resurrection. To be absent in the body, present with the Lord. That's what is represented in this picture of baptism.

How beautiful is this illustration? Celebration of grace, illustration of the gospel, and third, proclamation of the glory of Christ. In Colossians 2, which we'll turn to in a little bit, Paul talks about baptism in the context of Christ taking our sins and nailing our sins to the cross and making a public spectacle of sin. Declaration of His glory and His power, His victory over sin. Proclamation of His glory in the church, that's the whole picture; uniting with the body of Christ through baptism. When someone is baptized, when Chad is baptized later on in this worship gathering, and you see him go into the water, out of the water, it is a reminder to every follower of Christ in this room, "You are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ." It's a proclamation of His glory, and that's what it's intended to be to all of us.

His glory in the church and to all the world. You look at 1 Peter 3, end of 1 Peter 3, and Peter links baptism with this picture of the authority of Christ and the power of Christ over all things. Victorious picture, celebration of grace, illustration of gospel, proclamation of glory. That's what baptism means.

Third question: Now, the third and fourth questions, I need to...a little caveat before we go into these two questions, because you will likely hear somewhat different answers to these next two questions in some different churches, and you look in church history, and you will see different answers to these next two questions. In fact, some of my heroes in church history would not be on the same page here with what I'm about to say and show you in God's Word.

Now, I want to approach this as humbly as possible, because I'm not saying that my heroes in the faith were ignoring Scripture or that some brothers and sisters here in churches in Birmingham or elsewhere are ignoring Scripture. These are important questions, and the challenge is to really take an honest look at what Scripture says. In some ways, on some of

these issues that we're about to look at, they're not a dividing line, so to speak, between Christian and non-Christian. They're not issues of salvation.

Now, I will say this though. As soon as we're adding something to faith alone for salvation, now we're getting to pretty dividing issue, because it's either faith alone or not faith alone, and that has implications for what it means to be saved. However, as long as we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, these are fundamental core issues, and what we're about to talk about here, there's some disagreement on, even on those...even among those who would believe these things.

How should I be baptized?

So, here we go: How should I be baptized? The most biblical mode of baptism is immersion. The most biblical mode of baptism is immersion. I want to show you this on a variety of levels. I believe we stand on pretty firm ground in Scripture on this one. The word for "baptize" in the New Testament...primary word, "*baptizo*", most biblical scholars, the majority, overwhelming majority of biblical scholars would agree that that word, literally, means to "immerse, to submerge, to dunk." This is what...this is how John got his name. It's "John the Baptizer", "John the Dunker", that's what he did. Go out to the Jordan, John's going to dunk you; this is what happens out there.

So, that's the picture of this word, "*baptizo*", to immerse, to submerge, to dunk. Now, based on that, look at these three different levels, and these are in your notes. We'll fly through them. First, the precedent of Christ; the precedent of Christ. We looked at Matthew 3; the same picture is in Mark 1. When Jesus said, "John, I need you to baptize me", John didn't say, "Okay, let me bring a cup up there and do this." Instead, the words in the New Testament are, "He went into the water and came up out of the water"; came up out of the water. It's a picture of Jesus being immersed. So, that's the precedent of Christ, the picture we have in Christ's baptism.

Second, the pattern of church leaders. We won't turn there, but you might write this down: Acts 8:36-39 is a perfect example of this. It's Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, and they're riding in the chariot, and Philip shares the gospel with the eunuch, and the Ethiopian eunuch sees a body of water and says, "Well, why can't I get baptized now?" So, he says, "Stop the chariot." Again, Philip doesn't go down and get some water and bring it back up. Instead, it's the exact language, Acts 8:36-39, "They went into the water and came up out of the water; into the water and out of the water." It's a picture of immersion.

Then, third, the picture of the gospel. You look at what Romans 6 has shown us and what we've seen about the meaning of baptism. What picture most clearly represents identification with Christ and His death, participation with Christ in His resurrection? Clearly that is most displayed in a picture of immersion. You put all that together, "*baptizo*", to immerse, to submerge, to dunk, precedent of Christ, pattern of early church leaders, and the picture of the gospel. It becomes pretty clear that we can stand on firm Scriptural ground in this picture of immersion.

Now, obviously, there are extraneous circumstances. You can imagine someone, maybe who's bed-stricken in the hospital, near the end of their life, and they gloriously come to faith in Christ, it would not be possible at that point to take that person to immerse them in water. There's some way, somehow they cannot be disobedient to this command, but that's extraneous circumstances. The picture of baptism in the New Testament revolves around immersion. So most...how should I be baptized? The most biblical mode of baptism is immersion, that's why...that's what the picture is that we celebrate baptism with.

Who should be baptized?

Next question: Who should be baptized? An answer that I'm convinced the New Testament gives is everyone who has been born again should be baptized, keyword "again". Not every one who has been born. This is where I would disagree with many of my Presbyterian friends and others from different denominations who talk about infant baptism. Now, my challenge over the next two or three minutes is to try to sum up hundreds of years of debate and discussion about infant baptism, and to do it, I hope, in a way that does not caricature or misrepresent those who would espouse infant baptism. I don't want to do that in any way.

However, the picture is, when you think about infant baptism, brief church history, pre-Reformation days, the church and the state were together, not separated; together. So, to be a citizen of the state was to be a member of the church. So, when you were born, you became a member of the church and a citizen of the state; they went together. What happens is in the Reformation, you have guys like Martin Luther and John Calvin and Zwingli and others who rise up and begin to talk about, they begin to preach salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. These are some of those heroes who preached that at the risk of their lives, gave their lives to declaring that, but still continued in the practice of infant baptism, and since then, many have continued in the practice of infant baptism.

Why? There's a variety of reasons. Some because of devotion to tradition, a high respect for tradition. Others, to show a picture in infant baptism of looking forward to future faith, that an infant who is baptized is in anticipation of saving faith at some point in the future. What's interesting is, most who would argue for infant baptism actually do it in the context of covenant, which is what we're looking at baptism in the context of. We'll talk about baptism in the context of covenant. We'll look at old covenant, Old Testament, old covenant. Entrance into the people of God in the old covenant was through a sign, a marker. What was that marker? Circumcision, and that was done...circumcision was done with infants. So, new covenant marker, sign, entrance into the new covenant community is baptism, and so, we do that with infants. Circumcision and baptism parallel one another.

This is where it's really interesting. You take a verse...we won't turn there, but like Romans 4:11. Romans 4:11 is where Paul says...and Romans 4:11 is so interesting because proponents for infant baptism and against infant baptism actually both use Romans 4:11 to build the case. Romans 4:11 says, *"Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."* So, those who argue against infant baptism will say, "Ah ha, you see, circumcision for Abraham was a sign of the faith he already had, and so, faith is what makes us right before God, and circumcision is a sign of that. Now, infants can't have faith that makes them right before God, therefore, they shouldn't be circumcised." That's the argument against.

Now, the argument for it says, "Precisely, exactly...you're exactly right. That's what happened with Abraham. It's a sign of the circumcision that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised, and even still, it was done with infants. So, God wanted it to be done with infants even though it was a sign of faith." So both will use Romans 4:11. Taking this old covenant and new covenant picture, and there are strong parallels here in a variety of different ways, and we've seen as we've studied Galatians, the relationship between the new covenant and the old covenant.

Turn with me now to Colossians 2. I want to show you, Colossians 2, a picture that I think sums up this discussion, because when you look at the old covenant and the new covenant together, there are strong parallels, but there are also significant differences, and

particularly differences as it relates to understanding baptism and how baptism parallels or doesn't parallel circumcision. Look in Colossians 2:11. Listen to what Paul says here. We're going to read 11 and 12. Paul says, *"In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."* Now, did you catch that?

Verse 11, "You were circumcised but not with a circumcision done by the hands of men, but with the circumcision done by Christ." Look at the parallel that Paul is setting up here. Old covenant, circumcision, physical circumcision done by the hands of men. New covenant, circumcision happens in the new covenant, but in a much different way. It's circumcision of the heart, Paul talks about at the end of Romans 2. It's circumcision that's done by Christ. Christ transforms your heart, He cleanses your heart of sin and transforms you from the inside out. That's the picture; it's circumcision of the heart. It's what the Bible talks about as regeneration, and our hearts are washed clean. That's the picture here.

So, there is a circumcision in the old covenant and circumcision in the new covenant, but it's circumcision of the heart, which happens when we come to faith in Christ. When we are born again, regenerated, our hearts transformed from the inside out, and you think, "Well, what about baptism as it relates to circumcision? Isn't there's some kind of parallel there?" When you think about it, I think it's very clear there's parallel, but not one-to-one in it's the exact same thing. The new covenant is inaugurating a new picture, and don't miss it: Old covenant...follow with me...old covenant, circumcision signaled physical birth into a physical community; circumcision signaled physical birth into a physical community.

Over here, new covenant, baptism signals spiritual birth into a spiritual community. The whole picture of the community over here is different. This is not just the Jewish people, the covenant people of God in the Old Testament; this is Jews and Gentiles; this is all united together, a spiritual community that happens...circumcision over here, physically done by hands of men, and over here it's a spiritual circumcision. Circumcision of the heart and baptism is a representation, a physical marker of spiritual birth into a spiritual community, and that spiritual birth into a spiritual community happens when someone's heart is transformed from the inside out, when we see our need for God. We see our sin, and we trust in Christ. We turn from our sin, and we trust in Christ. We repent, and we are baptized, and that's why everyone who has been born again should be baptized.

Now, I in no way...in no way want to minimize the significance that many will place on...many do place on having a time where parents say, "We want to dedicate our child and ourselves to raising this child to love and to honor Christ with a view toward trusting in Christ for salvation." That's a powerful picture, but it's not called baptism in the New Testament. So, who should be baptized? Everyone who has been born again.

When should I be baptized?

All right, question number five: When should I be baptized? This flows right from it. When should I be baptized? The answer the New Testament gives is as soon as you trust in Christ for salvation. We could go through a whole litany of verses in Acts that show this; that show baptism is not something you grow into, not something you kind of progress when you're at a certain point of maturity. This is something a baby follower of Christ does, so to speak. It's an initial step as a follower of Christ to be baptized. Likewise, as soon as you trust in Christ for salvation, you're baptized, and you don't have to be baptized again and again and again and again. It's not something you have do-overs for. People will talk oftentimes about

re-baptism. "I've been re-baptized" or "baptized again". Scripture, New Testament, there's nothing of re-baptism.

Now, when people talk about re-baptism, oftentimes, what they mean is that there was a point in their life when, for whatever reason, whatever circumstances, they were baptized before they had been born again, before they had trusted in Christ for salvation, before this regeneration, circumcision of the heart had happened in them, and at a point later, it happened. So, then now, they are being baptized, and they'll say, "Well, I'm being re-baptized", or "I'm being baptized again." However, the reality is, they're not being re-baptized or baptized again. They're being baptized, period. First time around they just took a swim or just enjoyed the sprinkling or whatever it was. That's what happened there. This is baptism and to say, "Well, I'm going to do it again and again and again." Well, that's just to go swimming in front of everybody again and again and again. That's not...baptism happens as soon as you trust in Christ for salvation. It is a once and for all identification with Christ and with His church as soon as you trust in Him for salvation.

Now, the other thing I would add to this at the end here, in the light of all that we've seen, as soon as you trust in Christ for salvation, and as soon as you can best publicly proclaim your salvation. Now, that's important. One of the things we do in the context of this faith family is when somebody wants to be baptized, we come aside, and we say, "Okay, do we understand what baptism means? Do we understand what salvation means?" It's important to do that; we know what we're doing when we are baptized. So, we look at that one.

For example, when children are baptized in the context of this faith family, they will go through a new Christians class that is intended to remind or teach, if they don't already know, what does baptism mean, and why it is important to really think about what it means to follow Christ. I think this is particularly important because there is...this whole re-baptism thing has become so common today that people say, "Well, I was this or that age, and I didn't know what I was doing, and now I've trusted in Christ. I need to be baptized." I want to make sure...we need to make sure in the church we guard this picture of baptism and hold it high. So, that's why we do that, and why we have time where, even with adults, we say, "Okay, what does it mean? Tell us about how Christ has changed your heart and what does it mean to be baptized so we're on the same page?"

However, when it comes to as soon as you can best publicly proclaim your salvation, baptism, this is a public declaration...we've talked about it...before the church and all the world of what Christ has done in your life. As a result, I say to every person who is going to be baptized, "Invite your family, your friends, go get people off the street and bring them in the car with you." Like, this is the picture of what Christ has done in your life. Maybe one of the clearest pictures you will ever give, and so invite as many people as you know.

Whenever we have a baptism...we're going to have a baptism in just a few moments...my prayer is that people in this room who do not know Christ will see a picture of how Christ has conquered sin in His death, enabled us to rise in victory over sin, and that you might trust in Christ. My prayer is that believers across this room, when you see someone baptized, when you see Chad baptized in a little while, that you're reminded of what Christ has done in you, and you're reminded that you have victory over sin, and you live in Christ. As soon as you can publicly proclaim your salvation.

The Beauty of Baptism...

This is the beauty of baptism. Baptism is an essential and joyful declaration to the world...essential and joyful declaration to the world that we belong to Jesus; we belong to Jesus. I'm guessing that if you've been sitting here tonight, and you're a follower of Christ, and you've not been baptized, there's a tendency to think, "Man, I got beat up in this one", but I don't want you to think that. That's not the goal; the goal is to see the beauty of this picture.

Let me tell you a story about this wedding ring right here. This is a symbol, in a simple sense, a symbol, but it represents a much, much deeper reality. It represents a youth camp I was at in high school when this girl came, and word got around she thought I was cute. So, a girl thinks I'm cute. That did not happen before, and so, I was pretty excited. We left...some of you have heard me tell this story. When we left youth camp and went back home, and we were hanging out, all friends, one night, and the guys were coming up to me saying, "Dave, if you ask her out, it's a shoe-in. She'll definitely say yes." I had never asked somebody out before, so I didn't know what to do. Saw her walk into a room by herself, so I followed her in there, and I cornered her, and I said, "What are you doing this weekend?" She said, "I'm not doing anything." I said, "Would you like to go out with me on Friday night?" She said, "Yeah." I said, "Okay, bye," then I walked out of the room. Like, I'd rehearsed my lines, did the job, didn't want to mess it up.

That was a Sunday night. We were going to go out the next Friday night with some friends. Sunday night I go home, and I pick out the clothes that I'm going to wear on Friday night, really excited. Guys, you've done this before, right? No, okay, well, I did. I was so excited. Everything in my life changed that week. My eating patterns changed; my sleeping patterns changed. I remember my dad came up to me, he was like, "Son, you've got a problem." I'm like, "No, dad, I got a date." I would go up to my friends that week, and I'd be like, "Hey guys, what are you doing this weekend?" They would tell me, and I'd say, "Well, don't you want to know what I'm doing?" "What are you doing, Dave?" "I got a date."

I was so excited. Got to Friday, put the clothes on that I had picked out, and I got in the car to go pick her up. She lived about 20 minutes away from me. About ten minutes into the drive, I realize that I know the general vicinity where she lives, but I don't know exactly where her house is, which is a problem. You need to know where she is to go pick her up at her house. So, I go...I don't want to be late for my first date, and so I go into prayer mode, and I start praying, "God, I need you to show me where she lives." I don't know what I was expecting God to do, like, put a big yellow arrow in the sky, "She's here", but it didn't happen.

So, I pull over, call from the gas station...this was before cell phone, whatever...and I call from the gas station, and I said, "I need to know how to get to your house." She gives me directions. I'm thinking, "Great." I go and I pick her up. Now, we're from Stone Mountain, Georgia, and some of you have been to Stone Mountain before. If you've never been to Stone Mountain, it's a big mountain of stone; it's just a big rock. What they do is, during the summer, they've got this cool thing at the stone mountain called the laser show. Some of you have been to the laser show. Some of you have felt the chills go down your spine when you hear Lee Greenwood sing, "I'm proud to be an American." You know what that feels like.

If you've never been to the laser show, it is like one big redneck festival every single night. It's this huge lawn in front of a rock, and you put a blanket down, and you sit down, and when it gets dark, they shine lasers and play all this music. Some of you are thinking, "That

sounds like a redneck", but it's cool. It is the perfect first date place. So, I pick her up, and we go out to the Stone Mountain laser show. Put the blanket down, and we sit down on the blanket. It gets dark enough, and the laser starts shining on the side of the mountain and everybody is fixed on the show. I'm just fixed on the fact that I'm sitting next to a girl.

So, I start to think, "Well, what do I do? Do I just sit here, or maybe I should try to hold her hand, like, I guess that's appropriate." So, I don't want to just reach down and grab her hand, though, so I come up with a plan. I come up with a plan. I'm going to kind of just kind of stretch my arms like that. Guys, I know you've done that before. I'm going to stretch my arms, and I'm just going to kind of casually drop my hand down by my side, and I'm going to slide it over a little, a little more and then our hands will touch, and it'll be like, "Huh, let's hold hands." So, ingenious plan.

So, this is what I do. I stretch, and I drop my hand down there, and I start to slide it over a little, a little more, a little more. No lie, 25 minutes later, still not there. I mean, I'm working. I'm just trying...and her hand was waiting for it too, but I slide it over, and after about 25 minutes our hands touched, and I'm like, "Whoa!" So, we start holding hands, and 30 seconds later, the show is over. Show is over, everybody starts getting up and leaving. You know what we do, we just sat there holding hands looking at a blank rock.

Finally, I looked at her, and I said, "I guess it's time to go." She said, "Yeah." So I took her home, dropped her off and knew how to get back to my house, but was so excited I went the wrong way on the interstate around Atlanta, took me about an hour to get home. I will never forget the night when my relationship with that girl began and how it grew over the next year and two years and three years and four years, and we got engaged.

Then, in December 1999, almost ten years ago, I stand in an altar with her, and she takes this ring, and she puts it on my finger, and I take that rock, and I put it on her finger, and we publicly declare on that day that we belong to each other. Love not created on that day; love born in our hearts before that, now declared very clearly to everyone in such a way that, whenever you see me, you will see this ring on my finger, and you will know that I belong to her, and whenever you see her and see that rock on her finger, you will know that she belongs to me.

Brothers and sisters, in a much, much more beautiful way, the God of this universe, by His grace, has reached down into your hearts. He has changed you, He has transformed you, He's cleansed you from all your sin, delivered you from sin and given you life with Him. Why would you not want to identify your life with Him through the picture that He has given us in Scripture? This is an essential and joyful declaration to the church and to the world that we belong to Jesus. It doesn't matter how much pride is in us. Let it loose and be baptized. It doesn't matter what struggles we have with this or that: Be baptized. This is an incredible, beautiful, glorious picture of our lives identified with Christ and His body.

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