

BAPTISM
Sunday Class | Jeff Purswell
March 1, 2015

I. The Nature of Baptism: A Sacrament

A. The Sacraments in General

“Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him: as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.” (WCF XXVII.1)

1. “Signs and seals”

- Throughout salvation-history, God established covenant relationships by which he related to his people.
- These covenants were marked by physical emblems that serve as signs and seals of the promised enshrined in that covenant.
- The signs of the new covenant: baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
- As “signs,” they visibly express the promises of the new covenant: our union and fellowship with Christ.
- As “seals,” they confirm the promises to us and strengthen our faith in the promises.

2. “Immediately instituted by God”

- No other rite was established by Jesus for His church.
- They were given to us for our *good*.

3. “To put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world.”

These outward signs mark out a visible fellowship; they structure Christ's church as a community with membership. Baptism requires a decision about admission to the community. The Supper, a sign of continuing fellowship, implies the exclusion of those who have turned away from the Lord. . . . the sacraments testify that the church must have organized form as well as organic life."

Edmund Clowney, *The Church*, p. 272.

II. The Meaning of Baptism

"Christian baptism . . . is a sign from God that signifies inward cleansing and remission of sins (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27), Spirit-wrought regeneration and new life (Titus 3:5), and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as God's seal testifying and guaranteeing that one will be kept safe in Christ forever (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13-14). Baptism carries these meanings because first and fundamentally it signifies union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-7; Col. 2:11-12); and this union with Christ is the source of every element in our salvation (1 John 5:11-12). Receiving the sign in faith assures the persons baptized that God's gift of new life in Christ is freely given to them. At the same time it commits them to live henceforth in a new way as committed disciples of Jesus."¹

A. A Picture

1. Baptism signifies our union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection, by grace, through faith.

Romans 6:3-4: *"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."*

2. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward work that has already taken place.

B. A Proclamation

1. Baptism is a public proclamation of one's personal faith.

¹ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, p. 212.

Acts 2:37-38: *“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins . . .”*

“In baptism there is a transference of the rights of possession (‘into the name,’)... As he submits to baptism in obedience to Christ’s command, the believer gives outward evidence, by an oral and public confession, of his inward belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and his intent to show lifelong devotion and loyalty to his Master with whom he has died, been buried, and raised (Romans 6:1-11).”²

2. Baptism is an obedient response to Jesus Christ by someone saved by grace.

Matthew 28:18-19: *“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

Acts 8:12: *“But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”*

C. An Entrance

1. Baptism signifies a person’s entrance into the church—the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13: *“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”*

“Baptism is the sign of the initiation by which we are received into the society of the church, in order that, engrafted in Christ, we may be reckoned among God’s children.”³

2. Baptism is the initiation rite into the Christian church.

² Murray J. Harris, “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper,” in *In God’s Community: The Church and Its Ministry*, eds. David J. Ellis and W. Ward Gasque (1978).

³ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.15.1

III. The Recipients of Baptism

- A. **All who respond to the gospel with faith and repentance are also to obey the command to be baptized.**
- B. **Only those with a credible profession of faith should be baptized.**

Scripture is clear that only those who are truly disciples of Jesus Christ—who have identified with him through a sincere profession of faith and whose lives are consistent with faith and repentance—are to be baptized.

- Clarity on the gospel
- Affection for Christ
- A resolve to obey & follow Christ
- A conviction over sin & rejection of sin

Therefore, infants of Christian parents are not to be baptized.

- In Scripture, baptism isn't a pledge of future salvation, but the glad response of the saved.
- Every NT instruction or command regarding baptism, and every clear NT example of baptism, involves people who have repented from their sins & trusted in Jesus Christ.

IV. The Blessings of Baptism

- A. **The right practice of baptism fosters gospel-centeredness.**
- B. **The right practice of baptism protects the church.**

“Baptism, then is the ordinance that guards the front door of the local church. It ensures, as far as externally possible, that those who become members of our churches really are members of the New Covenant, complete with new hearts. . . . As baptism guards the front door of the church, the Lord’s Supper takes its post at the back door. Communion is the sign of the unity and fellowship of the church. The prerequisites for participation in that symbol are continued repentance and belief. It follows, then, that those who do not meet the prerequisites of unity with the church should be excluded from participation in the symbol of that unity.”⁴

- C. **The right practice of baptism strengthens believers.**

⁴ Mark Dever, *The Deliberate Church*, pp. 105-107