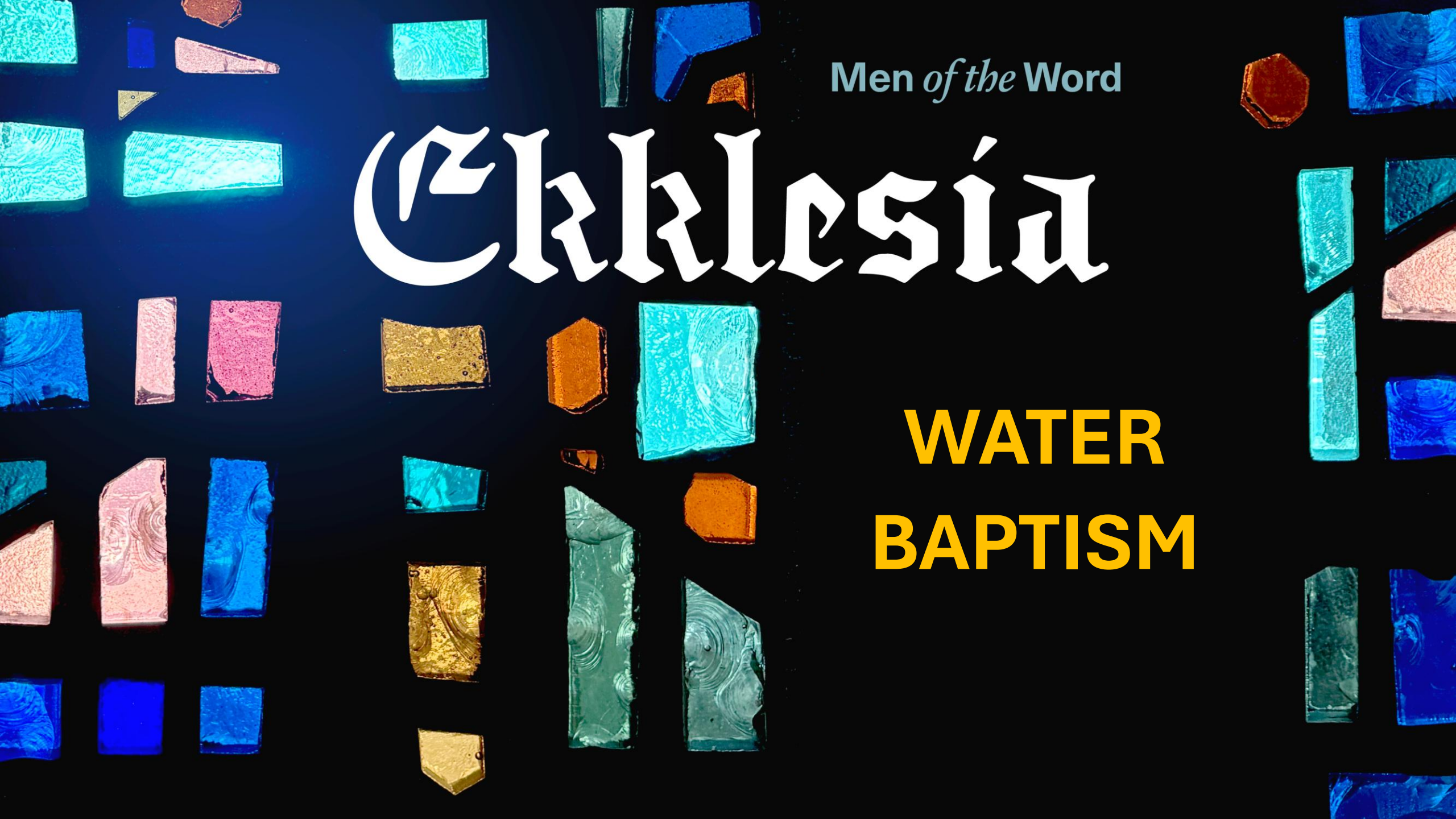




Men of the Word

Ekklesia

**WATER
BAPTISM**

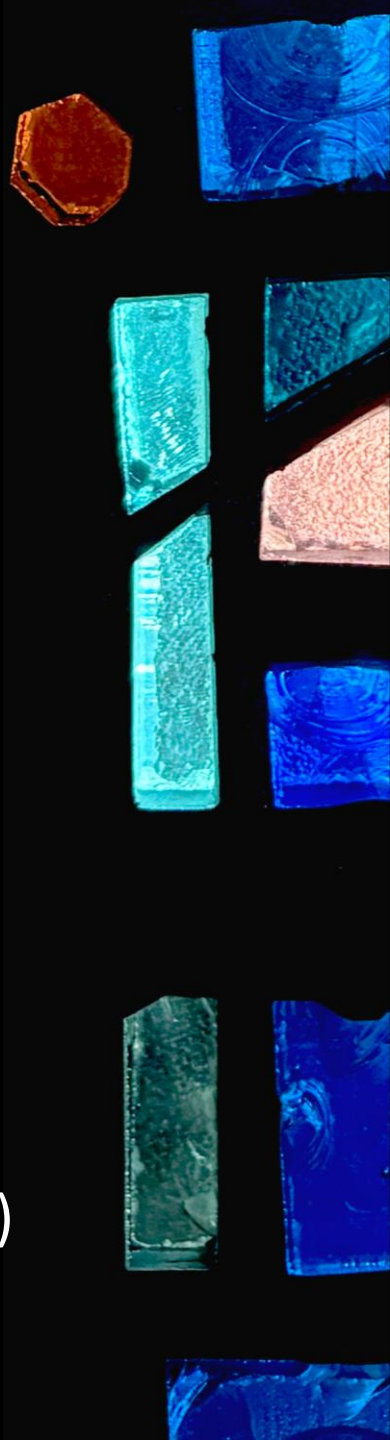


“History teaches that in matters of ritual it has always been easier for the church to add something than to take it away.”

—Robert Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, 205

“We teach that two ordinances have been committed to the local church: baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:38–42). Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36–39) is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:1–11). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible Body of Christ (Acts 2:41–42).”

—“What We Teach” (the doctrinal statement of Grace Community Church)



Key Questions about Water Baptism

- I. Why is baptism important?
- II. What does baptism do to me?
- III. What function does baptism play?
- IV. For whom is baptism intended?
- V. How is baptism to be practiced?

Ekklesia

I. IT IS ORDAINED BY JESUS CHRIST

Men *of the* Word



Why is baptism important?



Christ, the Builder and Head of the church (Matt 16:18; Eph 1:22–23; Col 1:18), *commanded* water baptism.

- Thus, baptism—together with the Lord’s Supper—is called an “**ordinance**” because it was *ordained* by Jesus Christ.
 - **Matthew 28:18–20** – “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

- The apostles, Christ's authorized spokesmen, also *commanded* water baptism, and the early church acknowledged it.
 - **Acts 2:38, 41** – “Peter *said* to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ . . . So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”
 - **Acts 8:12** – “But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.”

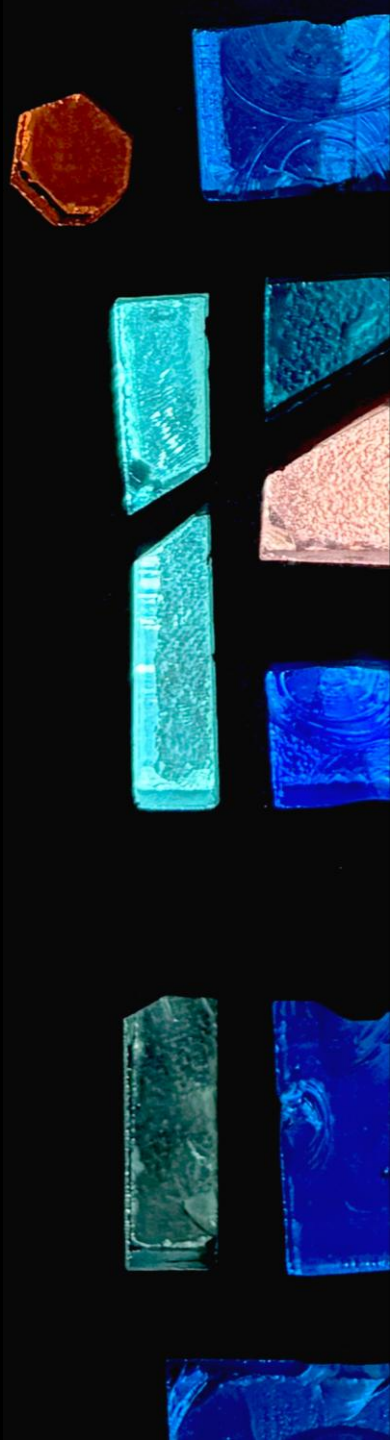
- **Acts 8:36–38** – “As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ‘Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ . . . And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.”
- **Acts 9:17–18** – “So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized.”

- **Acts 10:47–48** – “‘Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?’ And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. . . .”
- **Acts 16:14–15** – “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized”

- **Acts 16:31–33** – “They said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that *very* hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.”
- **Acts 18:8** – “Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.”
- **Acts 19:5** – “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

**“The idea of an unbaptized Christian is
simply not entertained in the New
Testament.”**

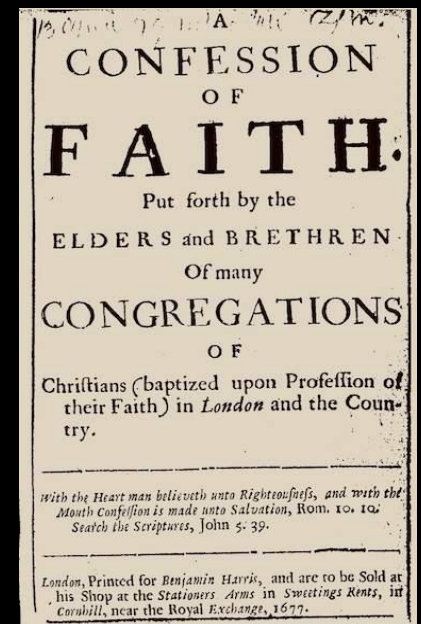
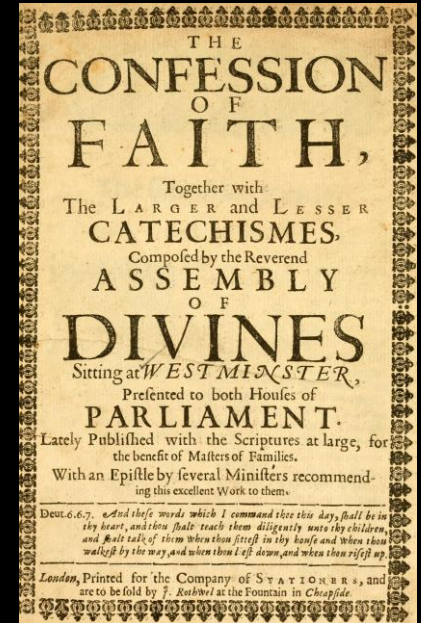
—F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 77

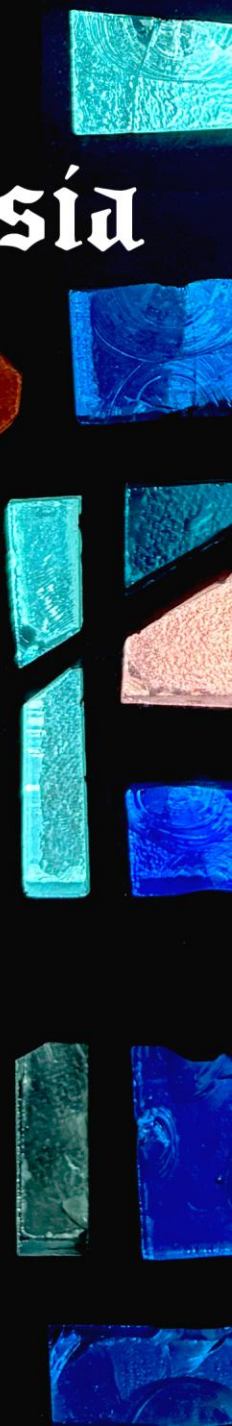


- The term “**ordinance**” is intentionally different from the term “**sacrament**”—a term that came into usage in the *complexity creep* of the post-apostolic era.
- The term is based off the Latin, *sacramentum*, which was used in Jerome’s Latin Vulgate to translate the Greek term “**mystery**” (μυστήριον, *mystērion*) in Ephesians 5:32.
- Over time, the Roman Catholic Church determined seven sacraments as part of necessary Christian practice: *baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, marriage, holy orders, and last rites*.
- As a *sacrament*, Roman Catholics believe baptism imparts divine grace and makes one holy by itself, regardless of the state of the recipient (*ex opera operato* – “by the work performed” in itself).



- Some Protestants continue to use the term “sacrament” to refer to baptism:
 - **Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), 28.1** – “Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ”
- But due to the history and ambiguity of the term “sacrament,” it is best to avoid it and use “ordinance” instead.
 - **London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), 29.1** – “Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ”



A decorative stained glass pattern in the top right corner, featuring various colored glass pieces in shades of red, orange, yellow, and green, arranged in a geometric, mosaic-like fashion.

Ekklesia

II. IT IS NOT SALVIFIC IN NATURE

Men *of the* Word



What does baptism do to me?



It does not regenerate or save.

- Many within Christendom believe in forms of ***baptismal regeneration***.
 - “**Baptismal Regeneration**” – baptism “is a means by which God imparts saving grace; it results in the remission of sins. By either awakening or strengthening faith, baptism effects the washing of regeneration” (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3.1090).
 - For Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, the rite of *baptism alone* is sufficient for regeneration; for some Protestants (Lutherans, Church of Christ), it must be *faith plus baptism*.

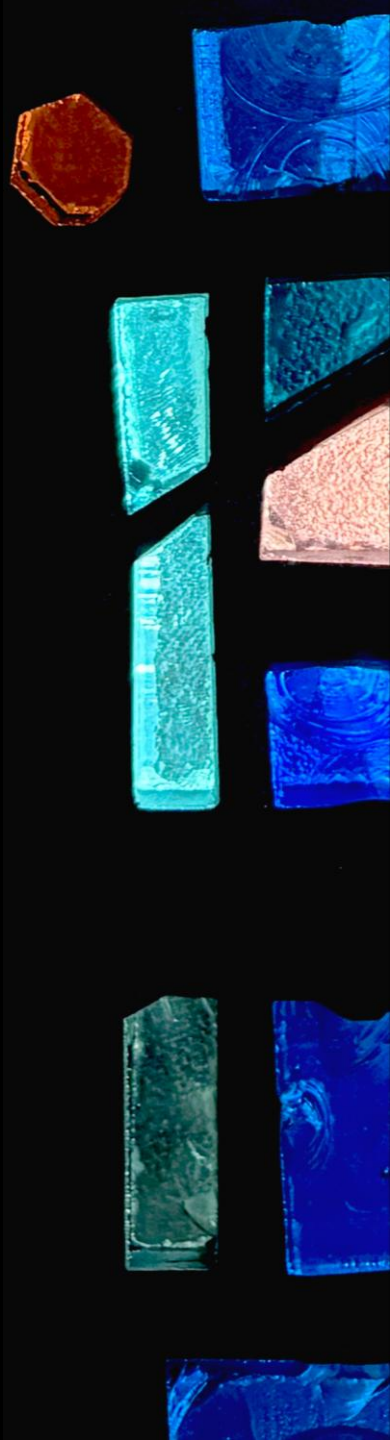
- The common proof-text is **Acts 2:38** – “Peter *said* to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”
- But adding *baptism* as a necessity for salvation is erroneous:

1) It *misinterprets* Peter’s intent in Acts 2:38.

- There is an unmistakable shift in grammar in Peter’s commands: “**Repent** [2nd person plural], and each of you **be baptized** [3rd person singular].”
- Peter expected the *response of faith* as natural, and so could not speak of conversion without speaking about baptism; the reality (genuine repentance) assumes the symbol (baptism).
- **Verse 41** also suggests a separation between the reality and the symbol: “those who had received his word were baptized.”

“Though baptism does not produce salvation, it is closely associated with it (cf. Eph 4:5). In the book of Acts, those who believed were baptized immediately (Acts 2:41; 8:38; 9:18; 10:48; 18:8; 19:1-5), indicating that it should closely follow a genuine profession of faith.”

—John MacArthur & Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 786



2) It *ignores* Peter's own words later in the conversion of Cornelius.

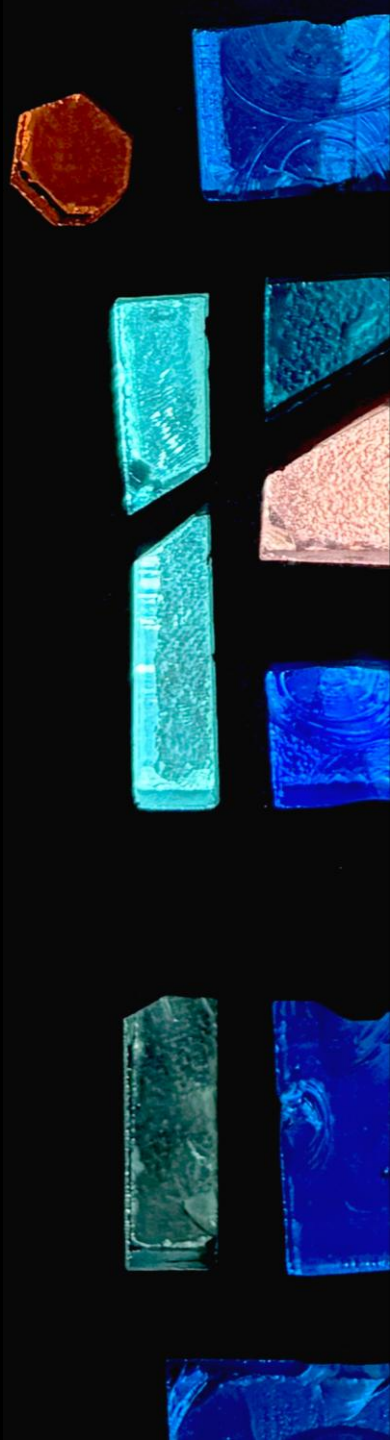
- **Acts 10:44–48** – “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, ‘Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?’ And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. . . .”
- **Acts 11:17** – “Therefore if God gave to them the same gift [the Holy Spirit] as *He gave* to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?”

3) It *rejects* Scripture's emphasis that salvation is always *by grace alone*.

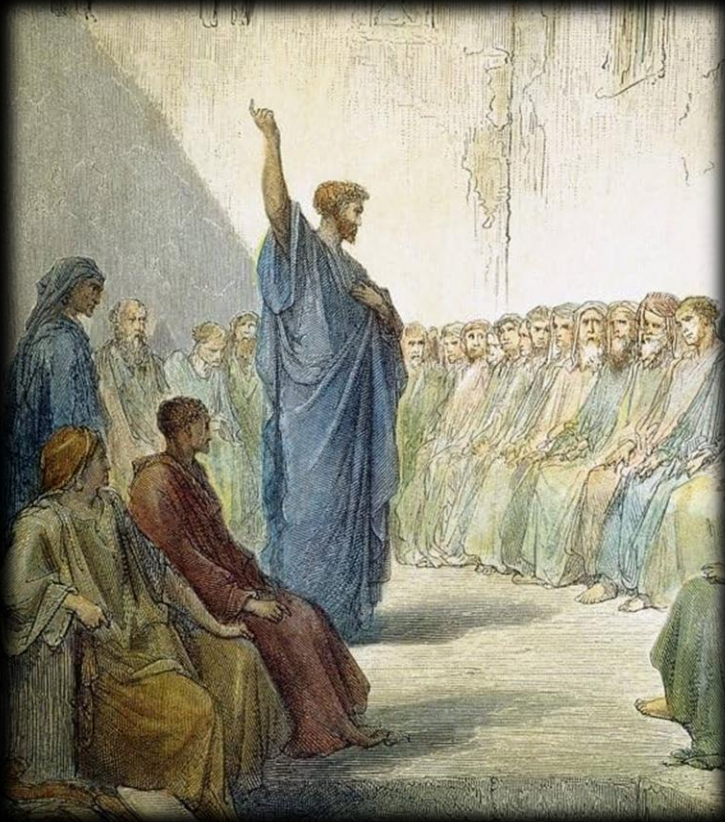
- **Genesis 15:6** – “Then he [Abram] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”
- **Romans 4:5** – “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.”
- **Ephesians 2:8–9** – “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
- **1 Peter 1:23** – “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.”

“It must be said at the outset that any interpretation which makes the rite itself spiritual efficacious must be rejected. The Scriptures without equivocation teach that salvation with all of its concomitant blessings is through faith alone.”

—Robert Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, 196



- As important as baptism is, it is always treated as subordinate to the preaching of and believing in *the gospel*.
- An example is the apostle Paul's own prioritization of gospel proclamation over baptism:



- **1 Corinthians 1:14–17** – “I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.”

Ekklesia

III. IT IS SYMBOLIC OF SPIRITUAL REALITIES

Men *of the* Word



What function does baptism play?



The practice of baptism depicts in an external, concrete, and vivid manner specific spiritual realities.

- In the reaction against baptismal regeneration, some have dismissed the Lord's ordinance of baptism as optional or even unnecessary.
- “Unfortunately, we have lost sight of the significance of baptism in the church at large. We have differentiated salvation and baptism so much that baptism has become a secondary issue in many circles. For the early church, baptism was so important that it was intrinsically linked to salvation. It was the primary display of repentance, inherently symbolizing one's union with Christ” (Peter Goeman, “Does Baptism Save You?”).

- Each of the Lord's ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper) has a visible sign ascribed in order to draw attention to greater spiritual realities.
- For baptism, the sign is *submerging into and emerging from water*. This symbolic act closely represents three spiritual realities of salvation:

1) It pictures *the recipient's identification with Jesus Christ*.

- See 1 Corinthians 1:12–15 and 10:1–2 with reference to belonging to “Paul” or to “Moses.”
- Note “**in the name of Jesus**” in Acts 2:38; 8:16; and 19:5; this important phrase signifies *union* or *identity with* Jesus Christ.
- The act of baptism *symbolically portrays* that the one baptized belongs to Jesus Christ and submits to all that He represents.

2) It pictures *the message of saving faith*.

- By baptism, the one baptized portrays what he believes in; it is “faith embodied in act” (Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program*, 198).



- *Immersion into the water* represents awareness of death and burial *to sin*; *emergence from the water* represents awareness of *the new life* (Rom 6:1–11).
- Baptism depicts externally what was accomplished spiritually through the new birth—the *washing of regeneration* (1 Cor 6:11; Titus 3:5; Heb 10:22; 1 Pet 1:21).

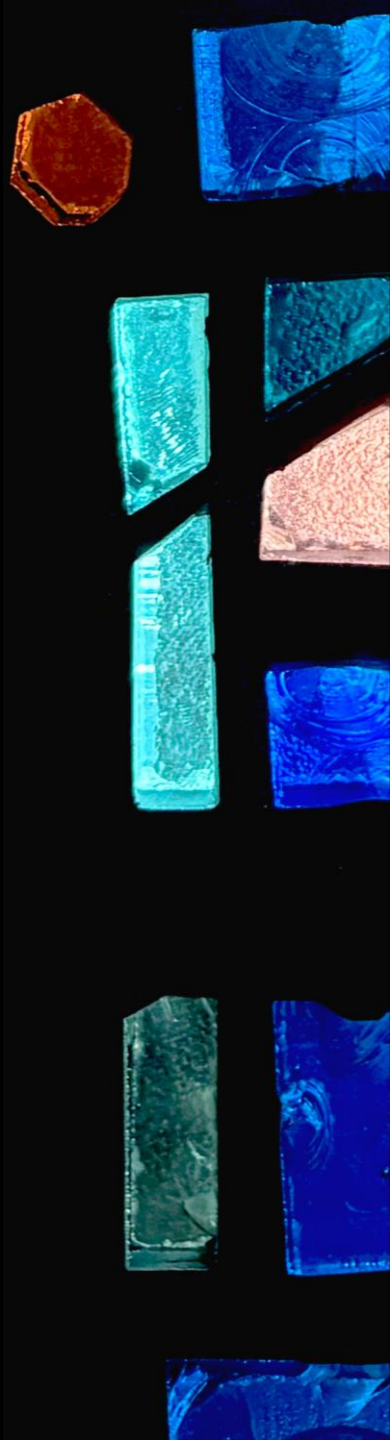
3) It pictures *solidarity with Christ's body*.

- The act of baptism expresses the recipient's acknowledgement of his unity with the church.
- The act of baptism uniquely expresses the *unity* of the universal body of Christ; it is to be the *universal sign* shared by all Christians (Matt 28:19–20; Eph 4:4–6).
- The act of baptism provides a practical way for the leaders of the church *to identify converts* and *to count them as members* in the local church (Acts 2:41).



“In order to symbolize that internal reality of salvation, the New Testament calls believers to be baptized in water as a public testimony to their faith in and solidarity with the Lord Jesus. Water baptism, then, is the outward, post-conversion demonstration of an inward reality that has already occurred at conversion. . . . In Christ, baptism not only signifies a turning away from sin but also serves as a public affirmation of one’s identification and union with him in his death, burial, and resurrection.”

—MacArthur & Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 783



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IV. IT IS INTENDED FOR BORN-AGAIN BELIEVERS

Men *of the* Word



For whom is baptism intended?



Baptism is intended for those who have professed faith in Jesus Christ.

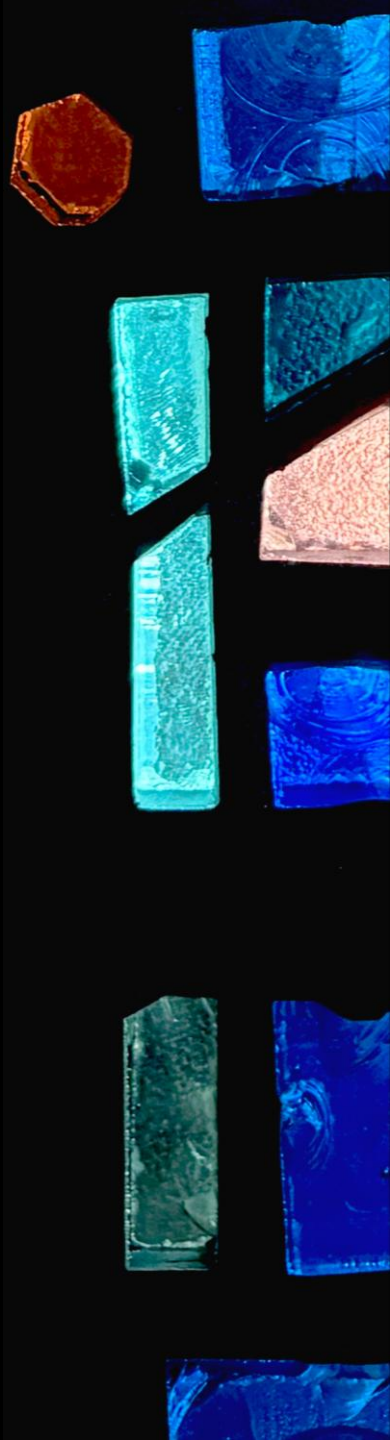
- There are many who reject *baptismal regeneration*, but who still believe that baptism can be administered to children.
- Those who believe that the infants of believers should be baptized are known as “**paedobaptists**” (from the Greek word παῖς/παιδός, *pais/paidos*, meaning “child”).
- According to paedobaptists, the children of believing parents are to be baptized not for *regeneration*, but to make them *members of the covenant community*, and thus, “heirs of the all-comprehensive covenant-promises of God” (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 683).

- Paedobaptists base their position on three fundamental arguments:
 - 1) The “**household passages**” in the NT where entire “households” are baptized (e.g., Acts 10:34-48; 11:14; 16:11-15; 1 Cor 1:16).
 - 2) The connection that baptism has with ***circumcision***; in strict continuity with the rite of circumcision (which marked an infant as a citizen of the Israelite covenant community), baptism also marks an infant as a member of the Christian covenant community.
 - 3) The ***tradition of the church***, particularly from the fourth century AD onward.
- However, each of these arguments falls short.

- 1) Not once do the “**household passages**” actually mention infants or children; instead, all the commands to “be baptized” are issued to those capable of hearing and believing (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 36–38; 9:18; *10:44–48; 16:30–33; 18:8; 19:4–5).
- 2) If *baptism* functions like *circumcision*, the apostles would have argued against the Judaizers at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) by saying that baptism *replaced* circumcision; but they argued against the necessity of circumcision along completely different lines.
- 3) That infant baptism was the practice of the church can only be proven from the 3rd or 4th centuries AD onward, just when the error of *baptismal regeneration* was growing. Prior to that, believer’s baptism was the uncontested practice of the primitive church.

“Unlike circumcision, baptism is *not* a sign of physical descent, nor is it a sign that anticipates gospel realities. Rather it is a sign that signifies a believer’s union with Christ and all the benefits of that union. No doubt, baptism is analogous to circumcision in that it is an initiatory right, but it is not a mere replacement of it.”

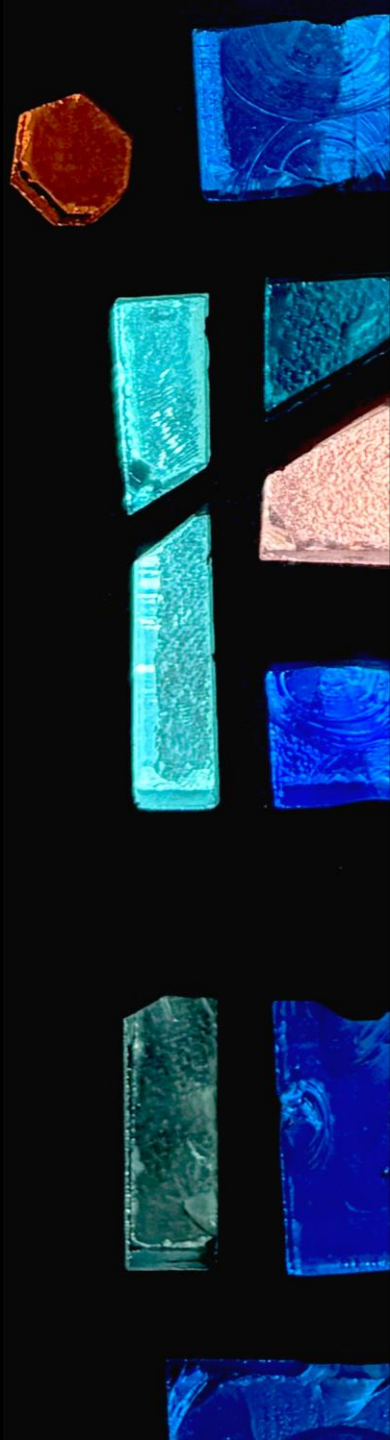
—Stephen Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” 157



- Those who believe that only professing believers should be baptized (“believer’s baptism”) are known as “**credobaptists**”—the term based on the Latin word *credo*, which means “I believe.”
- **Matthew 28:19–20** – “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
- “It is impossible, however, to find this practice [paedobaptism] in the New Testament church or in the earliest records of subsequent church history. . . . The consistent pattern of New Testament practice was hearing, believing, and being baptized” (Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program*, 199).

“Proponents of believer’s baptism insist that the biblical imperative of the Great Commission, the pattern of baptism that is set down in the New Testament, and the biblical discussions of baptism demand the conclusion that the proper recipients of baptism are people who have heard the good news, repented of their sins, and trusted in Christ for salvation.”

—Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 342



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V. IT IS ACCOMPLISHED BY IMMERSION

Men *of the* Word



How is baptism to be practiced?

A Consistent with New Testament practice and its symbolism, baptism is to be practiced by *immersion*.

- Three *modes* of baptism have been practiced at various times in church history: (1) immersion; (2) pouring; and (3) sprinkling.
- The term translated in the NT as “baptize” is the term βαπτίζω (*baptizō*), which unambiguously means “**to immerse, submerge**” (see esp. Acts 8:38–39 and “into” and “out of”).
- Moreover, the symbolism that the practice of baptism communicates requires the picture of *immersion*—not pouring or sprinkling.

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IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

Men *of the* Word

OBEY: If you profess to belong to Jesus Christ, have you submitted to Christ's fundamental command to you as one of His disciples to be baptized?

EXAMINE: If you profess to belong to Jesus Christ and want to be baptized, or if you already have been baptized, is/was your motivation biblical?

REFLECT: If you have been baptized, do you appreciate the powerful symbolism that baptism communicates, and do you live in light of that reality today?



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Tonight's resources will be
posted on-line at
gracechurch.org/motw