

Baptism In Biblical Perspective – Covenantal Baptism – An Overview

Matthew 28:16-20

By: Dr. Harry Reeder

January 18, 2009 – Evening Sermon

It is a great blessing to be together around God's Word covering in this study one of the great blessings in the church which is baptism. Of course, in handling that we have to reference some of the dynamics of the Lord's Supper. These two ordinances or sacraments are given to us by Christ in His Church and I'm looking forward to the next four studies on Sunday night walking our way through that. Let's now look at Matthew 28:16-20; **16** *Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* This is the Word of God, it's the Truth.

Let's pray. Father, thank You that we can spend our time studying these elements that You have placed in Your church for the well-being of Your people, for their encouragement to stabilize them and to grow them. Give us an understanding that is faithful to Your Word, in Jesus name, Amen.

I will be spending 3 or 4 studies walking you through this subject matter of what is baptism. There is a little bit of selfishness in it for me because I don't think a week goes by that I'm not asked about, "do you pour, sprinkle, or dunk and is it just believers or is it believers and their household, can you help me understand this pastor?" So if we can get this on audio were down on paper then maybe I can point person to that and say, "Maybe you would like to listen to this or read this." Sunday night studies I like to use for a number of purposes not the least of which is, if I could lead you all in a small group of disciple making I would like to try to choose subjects that would enhance the disciple making of God's people. One of the things that is very important for us to understand is baptism and the Lord's Supper so let me just a little bit of our framework for the study on baptism.

First of all we are going to be covering some issues about baptism that separate the evangelical church from cults. There are cults that teach that baptism saves and that baptism is necessary for salvation. There are churches that adulterate the gospel by saying, "Jesus died for your sins that you have to be baptized for that to be effective" or "if you get baptized that's what makes it effective and so baptism is necessary." So we need to draw those distinctions in the next few studies but by and large, most of us in our discussions with our brothers and sisters, this is somewhat of an intramural discussion, one of those secondary doctrines. As long as you don't put saving efficacy behind baptism and you understand its proper role that it's the sign and seal of God's covenant of grace among His people, then it's not a primary doctrine unless somebody makes it a saving act. It's a secondary doctrine. Now that doesn't mean that it is not important.

When Paul says 1 Corinthians 15:3, "I delivered to you that which is of first importance, the Gospel" clearly if the gospel is of first importance then there are some things of secondary importance and baptism is one of those things but notice that it

doesn't mean that it is not important. It's still important and it's still crucial. It's something that needs to be understood. It's not something superficial or peripheral to the Christian life and the church but it is of secondary importance and it needs to be handled that way. In the discipling of God's people shouldn't be treated as if it is a primary issue. It's an intramural issue.

Another reason as we walk our way through the study is that you kind of live in a bubble along with me. I live in the South and you live in the South in which all around us the majority report is just believers baptized and not believers and their children. Also the majority report is immersion. Now if we could somehow get out of our bubble and live around the world, the majority report around the world is believers and their households with pouring and sprinkling. We live where we always sense the majority reports the other way but actually around the world in the church as it's making its progress from the rising to the setting of the sun the majority reports covenantal baptism and the usual administration is by pouring or sprinkling. But yet we need to handle that because the question that is always before us, "which would be proper and how should I view that?"

I believe that baptism is of secondary importance and if I didn't think it was important I wouldn't be doing a study on it, but with the mode of baptism or how much water, I agree with our concession that that would be of tertiary importance. That's not even as important as understanding the doctrine itself, the mode of baptism. Of course, that's very obvious that that is true among us because while we counsel and teach toward pouring and sprinkling, immersion is something that we certainly accept if it meets certain criteria about what is a regular baptism within the Church of Jesus Christ.

We want to see what is it that declares something a regular baptism and can be accepted within the church and what would be irregular and what would be an alien baptism, one that cannot be accepted as a Christian baptism. I hope to answer some of those questions in the next few studies. We are going to build our way through this. In this study we will start to what is baptism. In the next study we will answer who are the proper subjects of baptism, who should be baptized? In another study we will cover just how do you baptize someone?

I will never forget what one of my uncles came up to me and said, "I hear you are a preacher now." I said, "Yes sir." He said, "I hear you are a Presbyterian preacher." I said, "That's right from the Presbyterian Church in America." He said, "Do y'all baptize or sprinkle?" I said, "I think you have kind of prejudiced the argument there by the way you have phrased the question. We baptize by sprinkling and by the way we will accept yours you just got too much water. When you get to heaven we will dry clean you and get you where you need to be." So my uncle and I had an interesting discussion after that. So we will take a look at the mode of baptism. What would the Bible lead us to do?

While this is of secondary importance for church numbers because in a church actually what is necessary to be a member of an evangelical church like Briarwood is a credible profession of faith. That's all that is necessary and obedience to the Lord's command because you love Him but if you are a preacher this becomes an important subject because, "where do I land as a preacher?" Having been raised under immersion and believers baptism only, I was drawn to the Presbyterian Church in America for so many reasons. Some of the reasons were church government, the Westminster confession of Faith but I had not lined up on baptism so I actually left the ministry for six months to work my way through this issue in 1979. After my study, I ended up coming by

conviction to be a teaching elder and a pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America. So for me this isn't just because I grew up Presbyterian because I didn't but it is something I have to work my way through. I will not share with you all of the work from my study that at least some of the fruit I gleaned from that study.

When you talk about baptism you have to talk about the sacraments in general. So we will start there, what are the sacraments? I want to use one of the most neglected, wonderful, discipling tools that are out there to disciple Christians to maturity. What would those tools be? That would be the Westminster confession of Faith and the larger and shorter catechism. Those instruments are neglected and unbelievably useful. In the 1600s because the Reformation was going on the people were wondering, "How do we have a unified church?" They needed to unify around a common confession so they commanded a group of pastors and theologians to come together. They met in London at the Westminster assembly and they began to work through and over a period of years they assemble to what is, I think, the greatest confession of faith. It is not inerrant and it is not infallible. It can be changed, it should be changed and isn't exhaustive but it is one of the best compendiums and distillations of Biblical truth I have found ever to be assembled. I always tell people that I know the Bible is inspired and the Westminster confession isn't but I think the Lord might have done a little secondary inspiration around the matter of the confession because of the way they worded it, the way they thought through it, the way they undergirded it with the Biblical text and so I highly commend your study of the confession.

But when it came out they began to see how wonderful it was and they said, "We have to give a tool for pastors to teach officers this sound doctrine." So they went back and developed the larger catechism. Catechism is a teaching tool. It is a question and answer way of teaching. You know what you want someone to learn so you give them the question and as you give them the question you teach them the answer. What is the most fundamental reason why God saved you? Why did God make me? Why did God save me? Why does God sustain me? What is the chief purpose of man? The chief purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever and then everything builds from that statement to teach us the Biblical truth that is distilled in the confession of faith which I like to call, Apostles Creed Christianity 101 and the Westminster confession is kind of Christianity 201. It takes it to another level of understanding Biblical truth.

They looked at that and said, "That's a great teaching tool for elders and pastors but the foundation of any church as a family, so can we get a tool to help fathers and we know it can't be quite as intricate but let's help fathers teach their families." So they developed something called the shorter catechism. We have since then added the children's catechism but the shorter catechism was designed for fathers to teach their children as fathers and mothers worked together to raise up their children with a sound knowledge of what it means to be a Christian. So I thought I would just simply use that as my guidepost in terms of what the shorter catechism says about the Biblical truth that you will find in the confession concerning the matter of baptism.

The first thing that we learn about a sacrament is what is a sacrament? A sacrament is a sign and seal that has been instituted in the church by Christ Himself. A sacrament is a holy ordinance. An ordinance means a law. For instance a sign posted that says 35 MPH, is a law. It is a commandment. It is an ordinance. It is a law that is given within the church. Who gave it? There is only One lawgiver for the church and

that's Jesus. It is instituted by Christ and it contains sensible signs. What do you mean sensible? They are signs that can be seen, felt or experienced, signs that can be sensed. They are not abstract. They are something significant and sensible. They are signs of Christ's saving work and the benefits of the New Covenant which are represented in those signs. In other words, those signs represent what Christ has provided as benefits for His people in the New Covenant, the covenant of grace and they serve as outward seals, that is a sealing act that's done externally to declare that those are to be applied to all true believers. They are to be seen and when they are practiced we are to teach one another that this is what baptism represents concerning the promises of God. See its application and as it is being applied it is a sensible sign that properly represents the benefits and blessings that Christ has provided in the New Covenant. As it is applied it seals that person externally into the promises of that Covenant community.

I want to go a little bit further with the sacrament to break it down so we understand it further. What is necessary for that sacrament to be established? The first thing that is necessary is that it must be commanded by Christ, by precept and practice. Should baptism be a sacrament in the church? By the way, is sacrament in the Bible? No, the word sacrament is not in the Bible. So what is it? It is a descriptive term of theological importance like the word trinity. The word trinity is not in the Bible. At Christmas we celebrate the incarnation of Christ. The word incarnation is not in the Bible. The church develops theologically descriptive terms. So why the word trinity? One God, three persons which is tri-unity. It became a descriptive theological term to try to make a declaration of who God is. Incarna means in flesh who was the Son of God who became fully man. Sacrament comes from a word that has quite a history that basically means a sacred oath that can be seen and declared. It is a sacred oath of blessing that can be seen and declare.

So where do the two sacraments come from? As a side note, in the 1600s this was a huge discussion on what is the sacrament and before that it was the Reformation. As they are coming out of the Roman the church, the Roman church says there are seven sacraments. In this study I will show you that there are only two sacraments. So why would they discard the other five, like marriage, confession, extremunction and absolution? So why would they dismiss the other five sacraments as the church went back to its first century roots in the Scripture? It is because they didn't meet the test of what a holy ordinance or sacrament should be. First of all a holy ordinance or sacrament must be instituted by Christ. He is the only Lawgiver. It is instituted by Christ by precept and practice. That is He teaches it or commands it and He does it.

So did Jesus command us to baptize? The answer to this was in our text for this study in Matthew 28:19; "Make disciples and baptize them..." How are we to do this? "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit..." Did Jesus model baptism as well as instruct us? Look in Matthew 3 in which we will be studying this in the next few weeks. Matthew 3:13-17 says, **13** *Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14* *John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15* *But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16* *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17* *and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well*

pleased.” So Christ, the First born of the Church, the Head of the Church is baptized and therefore by command, precept and practice, the sacrament of baptism is now instituted.

The second thing that puts baptism as a sacrament is that it must be a visible sign of an invisible grace. Baptism, is it visible, is it sensible, can it be seen, is there a touch to it, is there a feel to it? Yes to all of those. It is a visible sign of an invisible grace. What are those graces that it would be visible about? We will cover that in a minute but I want to finish the reasons first.

The third thing is that it must be intentionally instituted as a permanent ordinance in Christ’s church by the Apostles. That is any sacrament would have come into the New Testament, any new covenant sign and seal, would have been commanded by Christ, modeled by Christ and then under Christ’s command it would have been instituted as a permanent ordinance. In other words, the Apostles would have put it into the life and practice of the Church if it is to be in the life and practice of the Church. In Acts 2 Peter stands up and preaches the Gospel. In the midst of Peter preaching the Gospel people come under conviction. Acts 2:37, 38 says, **37** *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?”* **38** *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, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* Peter is telling them to be baptized under the authority of Christ which is not the formula. The formula is “in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.” In this passage he is referring to being baptized under the authority of Jesus that they are now baptized. He has commanded baptism and attached to His name is a blessing. It is an invisible blessing attached to the external sign in which the external sign declares the invisible blessing and grace of the Gospel which is the forgiveness of your sins and the gift, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that you are baptized with the Holy Spirit.

He goes on to say in Acts 2:39, *For the promise (the outpouring of the Holy Spirit) is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.* So here in Acts 2 we see that the Apostles institute it. When they go to Judea they baptize. When they go to Samaria they baptize. When they go to the world they baptize. So the whole book of Acts are believers and their households time after time after time being baptized by the authority of Jesus Christ and in that baptism it is applied in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

The fourth thing about a sacrament is that it must serve as a seal to strengthen, and confirm the faith and life of all believers who receive it *rightly*. How is rightly? It is by faith and repentance. That is the right reception of it. In other words it is a seal of the relationship that you have with the Lord when you receive it rightly. Galatians 3:23-29 says, **23** *Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.* **24** *So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.* **25** *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,* **26** *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.* **27** *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* **28** *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* **29** *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.* What was the external sign in the Old Covenant? It was circumcision for the children of Abraham. What is the sign of the children of Abraham, the children of faith, people who have put their trust in Christ, which is

credited unto them as righteousness, under the New Covenant? The external sign under the New Covenant is baptism. How does it serve? It serves as a seal of the blessings of being in Christ and the salvation. It is the external seal of the internal sealing work of the Holy Spirit who has been poured out upon us. Those are the four elements of a sacrament.

Question 93 that would be in the catechism is what are the sacraments of the New Testament? What is it in the New Testament that fits this criteria? Christ institutes it by command and practice. It is a visible sign of an invisible grace and taught as such. It is intentionally instituted as a permanent ordinance in Christ's church by the Apostles and it serves as a sealing statement externally of the internal sealing of the blessings of the Holy Spirit. So what are the sacraments that meet that? The sacraments of the New Testament are baptism and the Lord's Supper. Those are the New Covenant's signs and seals. Let me go ahead and preempt this; in the Old Covenant that was anticipating Christ what were the signs and seals? What was the sign that initiated the believer and his household into the covenant? It was circumcision. What was the sign of a covenant meal of renewal? It was the Passover. They are all pointing to Christ.

Now Jesus comes and according to three books of your Bible, Galatians, Colossians and Hebrews, we don't circumcise anymore because Christ is our circumcision. He fulfills it. We don't celebrate the Passover any longer as a sign and seal of the covenant because Christ is our Passover. Now He institutes two new signs to take their place. The old sign of circumcision was the cutting off of the skin, a symbolic death, in which there is no hope in generation because you need regeneration, the shedding of blood in which a death must occur to pay for the sins. It was such a symbolic act of teaching them that they needed a sacrifice, a Redeemer. The old sign of the Passover was the lamb had to be sacrificed a sacrifice for renewal. These two old signs are both pointing to Jesus. So what does Galatians, Colossians and Hebrews tell us? They tell us that Christ is our Circumcision. He cut away our old heart and gives us a new heart. He cut away our sin record and nailed it to the cross. Christ is our Passover Lamb and because of Him we are passed over. The Lord renews us day by day.

Now what does He put in their place in the New Covenant? In the New Covenant He puts baptism in the place of circumcision. As He puts it in the place of circumcision as the initiatory sign of the believer in the household, He puts in place a sign without any blood that points back to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The sacrifice has been given. When we sit at the Lord's Supper there is no blood. There is the fruit of the vine and the bread that points back to Christ. These blood signs and seals are fulfilled in Christ and His sacrifice which is once and for all and then these New Covenant signs are bloodless pointing back to the Sacrifice that is sufficient and triumphant to bless the people of God and establish the grace and mercy that we need through Him. Now the two new covenant signs that fit the criteria, laid out in Scripture that become an ordinance in the church to bless God's people with visible signs and seals of internal works of grace, fulfilled because of the finished work of Christ, are baptism and the Lord's Supper.

This sealing aspect is emphasized in Romans 6 as Paul deals with the kind of life a Christian ought to lead. Romans 6:1-4 says, *1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 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. We, who have identified with Christ in baptism, have been sealed into Him with the blessings of forgiveness and the call to walk before Him are ours. Not only are the blessings of His death but the triumph of His resurrection have been sealed into us that we now have the power to walk in obedience to Him. We who were dead in our sins are now alive through this resurrected Christ to serve Him. We don't have time to go in detail about the Lord's Supper but remember that Jesus commanded it and Jesus practiced it, "Do this." The early church put it into place; "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." So baptism and the Lord's Supper were the two sacraments. The other five that were handed to them out of ritual and superstition were dismissed. These were the only two that the reformers said that fit the criteria that were instituted by Christ and fit that which the Bible teaches of ordinances within the church.

Aren't you glad there are just two? Sometimes when I read the Old Testament and all the things that the priests had to do and remember it's a lot. There were feasts, fasts and you had to remember to do this and that on this day of the month and that day of the month. I can't hardly remember where I'm supposed to be tomorrow morning but isn't wonderful in the New Covenant that worship is simple. Read, preach, confess, pray and sing. It's simple and the ordinances of the church are very simple. They are baptism and the Lord's Supper. When they are done rightly they become the blessing upon and in the lives of God's people.

Now, what is baptism? Baptism is a sacrament wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit does signify and seal, what blessings? It is our in grafting into Christ, our partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace. What are those benefits? I am forgiven. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). I am in the family of God. I have been adopted. I have the righteousness of Christ. I have the forgiveness of His shed blood. I am a part of His family. I have title right to heaven because of the righteousness of Jesus. I am in Christ. Christ is in me. The benefits of His death and resurrection are now mine because He has assigned them to me. Baptism proclaims those benefits and it also proclaims my engagement to Christ. Christ is mine. I am His. For to me to live is Christ and the Lord has me and will bring me to glory. That is what is to be proclaimed in that glorious truth of baptism.

So, what are the things about baptism that we would say are absolutely essential? When someone comes in and says they were baptized in a certain church or in this movement, what is absolutely necessary that we determine from the Bible that makes an acceptable Christian baptism? There are three things. The first thing is water. You can't do it with Pepsi colas or anything else. The right administration is water. How much water? The Bible has a certain amount of ambiguity. I think the weight of the evidence is pouring and sprinkling and I will get to that in the next few studies on this. But the Greek word "baptizo" means is washing. Have you ever wondered why the early translators didn't try to translate it into pouring or sprinkling? Have you ever wondered why in the Old Testament they usually translate it to cleansing or washing? Have you ever wondered why they just transliterated it "baptizo" became baptism? It is because there are multiple modes of baptism when the word is applied in historic use of that word.

So what is it that the church demands? The church demands not so much the amount but the fact that water is used.

The second thing that makes for a Christian baptism is that it is done Trinitarian, in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Of course, that requires some work because there are some cults that baptize in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit but they don't mean what we mean by Father, Son and Holy Spirit. An example of a cult that does this is the Church of the Latter Day Saints. There are various movements that will use a Trinitarian statement but they don't mean One God eternally existing in Three Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Even though it sounds the same by the confession of that church it is not the same.

The third thing that makes for a Christian baptism is that it must be by a church that is confessionally committed to the Gospel. It is a church that is committed to the essentials of the Gospel which is that you are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. If it is a baptism of a church that says you are saved by grace plus baptism then that church is not teaching the Gospel of grace. It must be in a church that is teaching the Gospel of grace. Might that church have a different form of government? Might that church be congregational and not Presbyterian or have a bishop system? Yes those still can teach the Gospel of grace but in its essence of its confessional commitment it teaches and preaches the Gospel of grace – all of the promises of the Gospel, all of the benefits of the Gospel, the Gospel call and the Gospel blessings. The Gospel blessing make a Gospel call that the One who has given you life now says, “Your life is Mine. You have been bought with a price, now glorify God in your body.” Churches that hold the Gospel blessings in Christ, the Gospel call upon the life, using water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is an acceptable baptism. That is received fully.

If that is what declares baptism then how is that I am to see baptism? Number one, realize that in the New Covenant the sign and seal of baptism is replacing circumcision from the Old Covenant just as the Lord's Supper replaces the Passover. That has already been laid out previously in this study. In the Old Covenant there were two signs pointing to Jesus and in the New Covenant you have two signs pointing back to Jesus. The two signs in the Old Covenant are circumcision and the Passover. By the way, this notion of a covenant sign with an initiatory sign and a renewal sign are done on a regular basis. The Passover was done every year and we can do the Lord's Supper as often as we desire. We do the Lord's Supper ten times a year at Briarwood. Some churches do it every week. Some churches do it every quarter. Some churches actually do it only once a year. The Bible doesn't tell us how often to do it. It just says as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup so it seems as if it ought to be more than once a year. It ought to be often but it doesn't tell us how often. When these signs are instituted in the church and they are brought to us and put in place note that they have this regular dynamic within the church in which it is practiced. It is practiced in such a way that it is to be done thoughtfully and with integrity because these things have impact and meaning. So the Lord's Supper has an impact in my life.

Think of another covenant with me for a moment. There is the covenant of marriage. What is the external sign and seal of the marriage? We use a ring but that's not it. Can you find the ring in the Bible? I can't. That is just a nice way to do something publicly and actually the external sign is not the ring. It is the marriage bed. In fact, if you hear me do a wedding you will hear me end it this way; “Upon the

consummation of this union before God I pronounce you man and wife.” It is the marriage bed that signs and seals the covenant. What we have done is established the covenant in that ceremony and then we did a ring deal because that’s a nice public way to say something. But what is the purpose of that ring? It is for the one who made the promise to tell the one to whom was promised that I will do what I promise and what does the other one say? I believe you, no. For instance, the man says, “I will, I will, I will, I promise, I promise, I promise...” Then I as the pastor performing the ceremony will say, “What sign did you bring to acknowledge the sincerity of your promise?” The groom will say, “This ring. I will take this ring and give to her” and what does she say? In a fit of absolute ignorance she looks and says, “I believe you.” What hope must be in the breast of that bride in that moment. I believe you is that you will do what you promised. Does a sign make a marriage? No, the sign is used for the promise maker to say I will do what I promised and then the one whom receives the promise says I receive this by faith. I believe you.

Let me ask you this question. Does your marriage go perfectly day after day after day? No. So we have a little practice every year at the time you were married where we say, “Honey let’s go out. Let me take you out to eat. I also have a little gift for you. Let’s renew our relationship.” I’m not talking about the vows because you have already made the vows. So we call that an anniversary meal which is copied from the Scriptures. The initiatory sign is circumcision, a covenant meal is renewal. What is the initiatory sign of the New Covenant? It is baptism. What is the covenant meal of renewal in the New Covenant? It is the Lord’s Supper that we might be refreshed and renewed in the Lord. So baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the signs and seals of the New Covenant which replace the Old Covenant signs and seals.

The predecessor of the Lord’s Supper is the Passover and other feasts and meals. There were all kinds of feasts and meals. The Lord’s Supper not only brings the Passover but all those feasts and meals to a glorious statement of the finished work of Jesus Christ. By the way, there was not only circumcision that preceded baptism but there were all kinds of baptisms. I will go over this part in the next few studies in more detail but we’ll go to passages like Hebrews 9 which says, “Remember the Old Covenant baptism, the Old Covenant washings...” Hebrews 6 says, “Let’s press on from those different baptisms...” In the Old Covenant baptism isn’t a New Covenant act it was already there in the Old Covenant and that is why John the Baptist drew upon it when he called everybody to repentance. There was a baptism of repentance. There was a baptism of priests. There was a baptism of the things in the Holy Tabernacle by the priests. There were baptisms with blood. There were baptisms with oil. There were baptisms with water. There were all kinds of baptisms in the Old Testament that are now all done away with in Christ and now a New Testament baptism is put into place. So not only do these Old Covenant signs lead us to these two New Covenant signs but the foundation of multiple ritual cleansings and baptisms laid the ground work for us to understand the practice of baptism in the New Covenant.

Finally, what is baptism then? Is it our sign or is it God’s sign? Is baptism my sign of my faith to the world or is baptism God’s sign to be received by faith? I believe this is the most fundamental question you have to ask yourself. Let’s back up. Did God have a covenant with Noah? This isn’t a trick question. Did He give a sign to him? God said to Noah, “When you see My bow...”(Genesis 9:13). It wasn’t a believer’s bow. It

wasn't Noah's bow. It was God's bow. He said, "When you see My bow you will remember what I have promised and there will be seed time and harvest and I will not destroy the world again by water." Folks, every time you look up and see a rainbow here is what you ought to think; God will keep His promise. And I believe it. It wasn't Noah's sign. It was God's sign and Noah received it by faith. Circumcision was God's sign that Abraham received by faith. Baptism is God's sign. Jesus is the Bridegroom who has made covenant promises. His ring is baptism and we say, "We believe You that I am in You and You are in me, that I am forgiven and have a new heart. I have a new record. I have a new family. I have forgiveness of my sins. I have heaven because of You. I believe You." Then it acts as a seal upon God's covenant people.

Here are a couple of takeaways from this study. The first one is what about the sign and seals of the sacraments of the church? I want to make something as clear as I can here. Participation rightly brings blessing but participation wrongly brings judgment. Now, if you are a believer and you participate wrongly it brings the judgment of a father. If you are an unbeliever and you participate wrongly it adds to the judgment of eternity. In other words, if a person makes a false profession of faith and is baptized that act of baptism is real but it's not real in their heart. Therefore what they just did is not a good thing. It is actually a sinful thing because they did not believe. But to the believer who believes that baptism to the believer and their household becomes an enormous blessing.

What about the Lord's Supper? Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11, "I have given you this Supper for the better to be a blessing to you, so come in a manner worthy, come prepared and ready but some of you are not coming in a manner worthy, therefore you are sick and some have even died." These are not just throw aways. These are not just people getting together and saying, "Preacher we have this group getting together and I think we could all feel better by having the Lord's Supper." The Lord's Supper is not a gimmick, a pick me up. It's a holy ordinance that must be instituted rightly. It must be approached carefully, confidently in Christ and it is there for your blessing but it is not there to treat with superficiality. Baptism is a glorious blessing that He has given to His church. That glorious blessing is there to encourage the people of God.

Let me give you a second thing on sacraments. You can have the blessing signified by the sign without having the sign. Equally true, is you can have the sign but not have the blessings that the sign represents. That may sound confusing, so let me try to illustrate this. In other words, what is the blessing declared by baptism? You are in Christ, and Christ is in you. You have forgiveness of sins. You have the Holy Spirit. You have all those blessings in Christ and that's what baptism signifies. Can you have those things and not be baptized? Let's go back to Abraham. What was the sign that Abraham would have used? He would have used circumcision. When was Abraham saved? In Genesis 15:6 it says he believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness. When was Abraham circumcised? That is in Genesis 17. He was already saved he just didn't have the sign yet. You can have the blessings without the sign but that doesn't mean you ought to treat the sign as unimportant in the sense that God doesn't have a right use of it. But it's not the sign that saves you. Jesus is the One that saves you. That same thing is true of the Lord's Supper. The thief on the cross was saved but he never got baptized.

The Apostle Paul makes this amazing statement. He says in 1 Corinthians 1:16-17, **16** *(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether*

*I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to **preach the gospel**, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.* Now is Paul demeaning baptism? No, he is elevating the preaching of the Gospel because baptism, the sign, has no meaning without the Gospel preached. So if you can't be saved without the sign why would Paul leave baptism up to happenstance? If you have to be baptized to have the blessing of salvation why would Paul say what he did? Why would Paul ever leave off in his itinerary of ministry something that was essential for salvation? Baptism is not essential for salvation. Baptism is no more essential for salvation than circumcision is but it is a blessing and it is to be embraced. It is to be rightly used. So you can have the blessing without the sign. That doesn't mean we should dismiss the sign, it just means we understand the blessing is in Christ and not in baptism. Baptism is not a converting act. It is a confirming act.

By the way, the other is true. You can have the sign and not have what it signifies. You can get baptized and not be saved. Do you remember Simon the magician? He got baptized and what did Peter say to him? He said, "I perceive that your heart is still in the bondage of iniquity" (Acts 8:20-23). Simon didn't have the deal in his heart even though he had the external sign. Here is another illustration. Be a brave person and get in the car with me and we will ride down highway 280. We get to Sylacauga and we look over on the side and see the sign. The sign represents Sylacauga. It says Sylacauga city limits and you see the sign also. Then you look at the sign and say, "Pastor Reeder, we're in Sylacauga." I say, "How do you know?" You say, "I see the sign." It is because the sign identifies what it signifies, right? If I get out of the car, dig up the sign, put it in my car and drive back to Birmingham, did I bring Sylacauga home with me? No, the sign identifies what it signifies, baptism unto the forgiveness of sins but you can have the sign and not have the substance. While the sign identifies the substance it is not equal to the substance. That is found only in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

The third thing about the sacrament is that sacraments never have the power to convert but they do confirm. They confirm by faith what you believe. They confirm before the world, to one another, and before God when we properly engage in baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Here is a second takeaway which is on baptism. The purpose of baptism is to serve as the initiatory sign and seal of the covenant. It takes the place of circumcision. Therefore it needs to be handled with glorious joy because it is bloodless and it proclaims Jesus has won the victory.

Now, we have some outstanding questions. I know they are still in your mind. You probably saying, "My goodness, here we are at the end of this study and he still hasn't told me who and how." Is it just believers? Is it believers and their seed? Is it believers and their children? Just how much water and what's the indication in the Bible? Please don't miss the next study. We will get to those questions but in this study the sacred sign can't save you. It doesn't save you but it confirms the blessings of God and the promises that He has secured on the cross for us. There are just two and they are baptism and the Lord's Supper but let's don't treat them superficially but let's don't treat them superstitiously either. Let's treat them as sacred signs and seals of God's Covenant. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You that we could get started into this study on baptism. Thank You for the privilege we have to follow Jesus Christ and even though this is a secondary doctrine we know its one that is not non-important and must be administered appropriately. So would You guide us and direct us each step of the way. Would You help us embrace and understand with charity? Father, in essentials we would have unity but in these things that are not necessary for salvation we would give liberty and love as we process through it. Father, give us all the ability to while we appreciate all we have ever been taught, in a real sense, let's come a fresh and a new. Father, help us to come so that the Scripture alone declares what we believe and what we practice, in Jesus' name, Amen.