

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Key Perspectives on Baptism

Acts 2:37-41

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SermonAudio Blurb: In the world of the Church there are various views for baptism. In this sermon we explore the key reasons and positions in preparation to considering the many passages used to explain and teach baptism.

I. Introduction.

- A. Last week I began to introduce the subject of baptism.
 - 1. Views range from baptism actually removing sin to being symbolic only.
 - 2. In between those two extremes are various ways that baptism sets a person apart as a Christian or at least as a part of the visible church (explain).
 - 3. This is no small thing and it is not something we ought to brush aside casually. Rather this is worth our time and energy to study and understand.
 - 4. Gone are the days where the American Christian can just vaguely worship in whatever way he wants. Battle lines are being drawn and what constitutes a true Christian matters.
- B. Now these differences are the real issue. The "mode" is much less important than "the why."
- C. Therefore, last week I pressed hard on a few key points that if we can agree, will allow us to study this subject with value. If we can't, then we talk past each other and waste our time.
 - 1. *The authority of the Bible.*
 - (1) Our authority must be the Bible and only the Bible.
 - (2) Many appeal to this, but truly their authority is their catechism, their creed, or their church's tradition.

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(3) Of course, it is easy to appeal to the Bible as your authority, but not know how to handle the Bible. Therefore I gave you a couple of pointers that are helpful in interpretation.

b. *We are dead in our sins.*

(1) If you believe that somehow before God people are inherently good then there is a bigger problem than what is the purpose and meaning of baptism.

(2) We are by nature sinners. This is why we commit sin. And this sin makes us spiritually dead before God. And we are born as sinners, under the wrath of God.

(3) This must be kept in mind when we go deeper into the practice of water baptism.

c. *Salvation is by grace through faith alone.*

(1) This is utterly important to accept and for the most part people in various denominations will do so.

(2) But often when dealing with baptism, this gets rather muddled. I will bring this out in this short series.

(3) Grace means that salvation is utterly unearned by any act we can do. Faith means that we must believe and rest in the promises of the gospel. That it is not via the instrument of works, deeds that we do.

D. Now we will consider the basic views about baptism from two common perspectives.

1. The sacramental perspective.
2. The covenantal perspective.

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- E. Before looking at these two perspectives let me make a quick observation about the Reformation which started in 1517.
1. Martin Luther started something huge when he nailed his 95 questions onto the door of the local Roman Catholic church.
 2. There are many points to the Reformation but at the core was how was a person saved. By faith, by works, by a combination? And closely tied to this is where is the authority for doctrine and truth? Does it lie in the Word of God or in the visible Church and its traditions?
 3. Often though, we forget that the Reformation was first to reform the Roman Catholic Church. Luther saw it was in serious error.
 4. It was never intended to be separate from them, but it was forced to due to the rejection by the Roman Catholic Church. The key Reformers of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin were tightly connected to the Roman Catholic Church at one point.
 - a. Luther and Zwingli were priests and this is important to remember.
 - b. John Calvin was not a priest but was raised in a very staunch Roman Catholic tradition.
 - c. Out of these men rose the Lutheran tradition and the Reformed tradition.
 5. But what is often missed is another group known as the Anabaptists.
 - a. This was made up of a very diverse group of people, some who were flat out crazy and others who were extremely sincere about their faith and practice.
 - b. The crazy side is usually what people hear about and the movement is dismissed because of it. But they represent a critical part of church history and specifically baptism.

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- c. Today people such as the Amish and the Mennonites are examples of this movement.
 - d. Baptism was seen by them as for only those who made a conscious profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore infants were not to be baptised and the reason is that it is not taught in the Word of God. And those baptized as infants needed to be baptized again after they professed faith in Christ.
6. It is helpful to realize that the Lutheran and Reformed positions never fully broke from the Roman Catholic Church and its influence from its traditions and teachings are clear and present in their own doctrinal statements.
- a. They both broke away on the issue of the gospel and how one is saved. And that is the key point to always remember.
 - b. But the idea of what happens in the Lord's Supper or baptism will be more in line with the Catholic idea than simply scripture.
 - c. So when you read their arguments for baptizing infants you will find that it is not drawn from clear passages in the bible, but from philosophy, theology and tradition.
 - d. So picture it as a grand old house which has gone through many add-ons over the years. The Reformers then took the main part of the house such as the electric, gas and water and redid it. But over all the house remained intact with medium to minor adjustments.
7. The Anabaptist movement, the Radical Reformation, however, basically threw the whole system out and sought to simply go back to the Scripture alone.
- a. So instead of starting with the way things already were, they looked at everything fresh and examined

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- each part against the Scripture. So the creeds, confessions and tradition developed were not primary in how they approached anything.
- b. This led to some of them going off into serious error, but for many it allowed them to recapture the simplicity of the Christian faith and worship.
 - c. Baptism was a key point of difference between them and the other Reformers.
 - d. So for them, instead of trying to fix the house, they demolished it and started fresh.
8. Add to all of this is that the Church and the State were essentially one. We forget this and it affects how we read history. So when the Anabaptists started to rebaptize people this created quite a societal stir to the point that it was seen as rebellion and insurrection. As a result many of them were imprisoned and killed by the other churches and the State.
- F. So when we talk about baptism we cannot merely look at it impartially like when you might study the growth and life cycle of a goat.
- G. Each view has a lot of stuff attached to it that helps direct the movement and development of the doctrine.

II. Common Views Of Baptism (a brief sketch).

- A. The sacramental perspective.
- 1. In this perspective certain things convey grace and has an effect upon the person. This grace is in some way or another used in your salvation. Either in making you saved or helping you grow in your salvation.
 - 2. The most extreme view of this is the Roman Catholic Church.
 - a. The Catholic church teaches that saving grace is given through their various sacraments, each one helping the person to make it to heaven.

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- (1) There are 7 of them: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, marriage, and orders (becoming a priest or nun).
 - (2) The last two are not necessary, but the other five in utterly indispensable for your salvation.
 - b. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that baptism is self-sufficient. In other words, the simple act of baptism, the work itself, brings grace. Faith is not an issue. All that matters is that someone present the infant and the rite is properly done.
 - c. That is utterly without warrant within the Bible and attacks the very foundation of salvation by grace through faith alone.
 - (1) So through the rite of baptism, the baby is now a child of God.
 - (2) Millions go to their grave heading to hell, simply because they have trusted that they were baptized as a baby.
 - d. It is interesting to note that the Roman Catholic Church will accept any baptism as long as it was done with the proper words of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is because the rite, in itself, imparts saving grace.
3. The Lutheran church teach a variation on that.
- a. They would see that God does impart saving grace to the child and there is a remission/removal of sin.
 - b. However, they would say that faith was already present. The baptism of water itself did not save, it was just the vehicle through which God imparted the grace and faith.
 - c. The infant is given faith in the baptism.
 - d. Romans 6:1-11 is very important to their view.

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- (1) They would say that baptism is much more than merely a symbol.
 - (2) As verses 3-4 says, it actually unites us to Christ. This is a key passage that we will look at more closely in another message.
- e. There are two groups who are to be baptized.
- (1) The adults who come to faith in Jesus Christ.
 - (a) Acts 2:41.
 - (b) Acts 8:36-38.
 - (c) At this point we are in complete agreement. Though the method of baptism would be different, truly it is a believer's baptism.
 - (d) But then a unique thing occurs. When they turn their attention to the baby, the need to repent, the need to personally receive the gospel changes.
 - (2) The second group would be the infants.
 - (a) I believe that this is nothing more than a hold over of tradition and catholicism.
 - (b) Yet they would say that the NT teaches that infants were baptized too.
 - (c) This is mostly seen in the passages where entire households are saved. The assumption, and that is all it is, is that there must have been some infants in those households.
 - (d) Acts 11:14.
 - (e) Acts 16:15.
 - (f) Acts 16:31-34.

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- (g) Acts 18:8.
 - f. Now the Lutheran theologian is aware of the apparent inconsistency between justification by faith alone and infant baptism.
 - (1) They deal with it in one of two ways.
 - (2) The first is that the faith is an unconscious faith. It does not require reasoning or thinking. It is a gift that God gives to the baby.
 - (a) They would use a passage like Matthew 18:6, *“but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”*
 - (b) Another passage would be where John the Baptist is filled with the Holy Spirit while still in the womb.
 - (3) The other way of dealing with this is that it is the parent’s faith, not the baby’s, when the child is baptized. That baby later develops his own faith, but until that happens he becomes a believer through the vicarious/substituted faith of his parents.
- B. The Covenantalist view.
- 1. This the Reformed or Presbyterian view. For this group, the whole issue centers around their theology system called Covenant Theology.
 - 2. For them, baptism is the New Testament sign of being partakers of the covenant.
 - 3. In the Old Testament, the male child would be circumcised on the 8th day. This sign of circumcision was to make the person sure that he belonged to the promises of God.

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4. Because the old covenant under Moses and the new covenant under Christ are really the same covenant, then there need to be a sign of being a people of that covenant.
5. Baptism in infants and adults alike are to make them partakers of the New Covenant, the promise of grace.
6. There are benefits related to being part of the new covenant, the blessings related to being saved.
7. For the adult, they believe and then are baptized. This baptism is a sign that they haven partaken in the promises of God for salvation. They are recipients of all the benefits of the new covenant.
8. For the infant it is different. They too have received the sign that they are part of the new covenant—that they are saved. The difference is that it is conditional.
 - a. They must later personally appropriate that salvation in faith. Though the child is treated as being saved from the point of their baptism onward.
 - b. This occurs when they mature and if they stay faithful to the vows that were made when they were infants. And they normally do not talk like a Baptist would, that their child is not yet saved because they are not yet professing faith in Christ.
 - c. Then the benefits become permanent.
9. Now the arguments for who should be baptized are very similar to the Lutheran.
 - a. The adult first believes, and then is baptized.
 - b. With children, it is to be those who have believing parents.

III. Conclusion.

- A. Where does all of this leave us? With a big, confusing mess.

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- B. Next week I will try to tie it all together and give you a positive understanding of baptism.
- C. At the core of my struggle with baptism, especially infant baptism, is my desire to hold high the truth that our salvation is by faith alone.
 - 1. Once we start pushing baptism, or anything else into the process we begin to truly muddy the waters.
 - 2. Far too many have simple faith, not that Jesus Christ has saved them, but that they were saved by being baptized.
 - 3. This has no basis in the Bible. It is nothing but a dangerous assumption. And it is horrible to be resting upon that fact.
- D. When Paul began his letter to the church at Corinth he makes a clear distinction between the gospel and baptism (1 Cor. 1:10-17).
 - 1. The gospel is the answer for man's needs.
 - 2. Baptism is not. If it were, if it were the way God used to bring the gospel to a child, then Paul, the great evangelist, would have yelled it from the mountain tops.
 - 3. But he didn't. He came to preach the gospel, not baptize.
 - 4. Beloved, do you believe in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation?
 - 5. Or are you trusting in something else?

Benediction

For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen

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Small Group Questions

- **What conversations/situations have you had with people from some of the other religions (Catholicism, Church of Christ, Lutherans) about baptism and what did they say? How did you respond to their views and why? What do you hope learn from these sermons that would help you with these discussions in the future?**
- **In a similar vein, .) Have you interacted with professing Christians who believe baptism saves you, or gives some special grace as a result of being baptized? How have these conversations gone? In what ways did you see how this affects their understanding of the work of Christ and the nature of grace itself?**
- **Do you believe at this point you have a good understanding of the "how" and "why" we hold to believer's baptism? Could you articulate that to someone asking these questions?**