

The Meaning and Purpose of Baptism

Baptism is a means whereby one is brought into the membership of the church visible and one may properly ask then; why do we include our children in the church? Is it mere tradition or is it just a “left-over” in the church of the Reformation from the traditions of Rome?

And since, this morning, we will be receiving into the visible church the newly born son of Wesley and Nicole Wilkinson, I desire to take this time to explain why we baptized infants and bring them into the baptized roll of our church. To understand infant baptism correctly, baptism must be considered in relation to what it typifies, how it corresponds to circumcision and thus how it was thereby authorized in the covenant with Abraham. If one does not understand these things one will not understand the reason we baptize our infants. The difference we have with those who reject infant baptism has nothing to do with when we baptize or how we baptize but with ones understanding as to why the church baptizes; when it bring either an adult or an infant into the church of Jesus Christ.

Why does the church baptize at all? Is it a mere ritual? Is it just tradition? Or does baptism say something? I believe that all would agree that baptism is properly called a sign, that is, it is a ritual in the church and it does signify something. It certainly does not accomplish something. I mean by that it does not save; it does not wash away one’s sins. So if its purpose is to signify something, if it is a means of proclaiming something, this brings us to this question, “Who is it who is speaking in the rite of baptism”? Is it the person who is being baptized or is it God who is making a proclamation in ones baptism?

Those that hold to believer’s baptism would say; it is the person being baptized that is giving witness to their faith in Christ in a public manner. The problem here is the church can only take that person at their word; they may or may not be a true believer. Now it is proper and has always been the practice of the church to receive individuals into the church by baptism upon the profession of their faith. However, if baptism is saying this person is a believer then many baptisms have been carried out in error. For not everyone who is baptized has always been a true believer. On the other hand, even when the church baptizes an adult upon their profession and even if they are not a true believer, if baptism is God proclaiming the necessity of cleansing and Christ as the means of that cleansing, then the message remains true and clear to all who observe. One can just trust that in time by careful discipleship that person may yet come to true repentance and true faith.

So let us consider why we baptize an Infant by asking this morning, what is the meaning of baptism and what is its purpose? Then I will take time to explain why we baptize an infant and bring them into the membership of the visible church.

A. The meaning and purpose of baptism

1. A proper understanding of any external ceremony depends upon a correct understanding of the promise and spiritual meanings, which our Lord ordains for them to represent.
 - a. There can always be a difference between what we think them to mean and what God has purposed them to mean
 - b. The only means we can know what God purposes is to search it out in Scripture
2. What then do scriptures teach us as to the meaning of baptism?
 - a. Scripture declares that baptism first points to the cleansing of our sins, which we obtain from Christ’s blood. (see also Eph. 5:25; Heb. 13:12; Heb. 9:14-15)

1 Peter 3:21 There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

Heb 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

- (1) We understand that this is not saying the water of baptism cleanses us for Scripture interpreting Scripture tells us that we are cleansed by the blood of Christ

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Rev 1:5 To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood

- (2) We can conclude that baptism does speak of cleansing by the blood of Christ

b. Secondly it speaks of the mortification of our flesh

(1) Buried with Him in baptism

*Col 2:11-14 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, **buried with Him in baptism**, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*

(2) Therefore baptism tells us we are to put to death our old man and walk with Him in newness of life

Col 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

c. However nowhere do we read that it is a symbol bearing witness to our faith in Christ

3. We can conclude then that it is God proclaiming to us our need of cleansing and that He has provided for us a means of our cleansing

B. Baptism is the sign of the covenant of grace as it was first given to Abraham in circumcision.

1. Paul clearly relates it to circumcision

Col 2:11-14 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us.

2. Let us look to the Old Testament for the meaning of circumcision

a. I would remind you that a proper understanding of any external ceremony depends upon a correct understanding of the promise and spiritual meanings, which our Lord ordains for them to represent.

b. Circumcision in the Old Testament gives the same spiritual promise that Baptism gives us in the New Testament

(1) Circumcision spoke of cleansing from sin

Deut 30:6 And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Jer 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts

(2) Circumcision spoke of the mortification of our flesh

Col 2:11-12 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God

C. Salvation under both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant has been provided by the work of Christ.

1. Under the Old Covenant they look forward to the Christ and His work

a. Understood by Abraham

John 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."

b. Understood by Job

Job 19:25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth.

c. Understood by Elijah and Moses

Luke 9:29-32 As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

2. Christ has provided salvation for His elect under both covenants thus making us under the New Covenant one with those who were under the Old Covenant
 - a. Those living under the New Testament were once strangers from the covenants of promise being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and were therefore without God, without Christ, and without hope.

Eph 2:12-13 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

- b. The saints under the Old Covenant have been saved by Christ in the same manner the saints now under the New Covenant have been saved.

Eph 2:13-18 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

- (1) We who were far off - that is Gentiles - brought near by the blood of Christ
- (2) Christ has made both one, those under the old covenant and those under the new covenant.
- (3) He has reconciled both to God in **one body** through the cross
- (4) Proclaimed peace to both, those near and far, those under both covenants
- (5) Through Him **we both** have access by one Spirit to the Father

CONCLUSION: The covenants and promises of both testaments were all about Jesus

The Old Testament covenant promise sealed by circumcision spoke of Christ and His cleansing blood.

The New Testament covenant signified to us by baptism speaks of Christ and His cleansing blood

Scripture proclaims that both circumcision and baptism speak of the same promise and means

When in the Old Testament a new convert or an infant was circumcised, it brought them into the commonwealth of Israel and spoke to them of cleansing, the circumcision of the sinful heart and newness of life in the coming Redeemer

When in the New Testament a new convert or an infant is baptized, it brings them into the commonwealth of Israel it speaks to us of cleansing, the washing away of sin and newness of life in the Redeemer who has come and fulfilled all of the ordinances of the Old Testament

For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

There was not one means of the grace of salvation in the Old and different means in the New.

We, as adopted descendants of Abraham by faith (see Rom. 4:9-17), in that in he was made the father of **many nations** we now baptize our children and bring them into the church, which Paul called the commonwealth of Israel in his letter to the believers in Ephesus

I trust this helps all to understand what will take place when we baptize the little lad Becket this morning

It will not provide for his cleansing. It does not require his profession of faith. It does require the profession of faith on part of his parents.

But above all it will speak of Christ, His shed blood. It will also speak of Becket's and our need of cleansing and God means of providing for us that cleansing and granting of life in Christ Jesus.

Can anyone forbid water?