

Is Water Baptism Necessary To Escape Hell & Be Saved & Are You Born Again John 3:3

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Is Water Baptism Necessary?

By Larry Wessels

Bible Text: John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5
Preached on: Monday, February 27, 2012

Christian Answers of Austin, Texas

9009 Martha's Drive
Austin, TX 78717

Website: www.biblequery.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/christiananswers

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Pastor Jackson Boyett: At one of our Reformed conferences, we had a tense moment, I'm sure you can't imagine having a tense moment at a Reformed theology conference. Hard to fathom and envision. I remember way back attending a conference at Tenth Presbyterian Church and watching the Presbyterians argue up at the front of the foyer or front of the sanctuary. But this tense moment that happened in our conference a number of years ago happened during the question and answer session. I was standing on the platform next to Tom Nettles. Tom Nettles is a dear dear brother in Christ. He is a Professor of Church History, now he teaches up at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and he's a dear man, great preacher, great singer, great friend, and we were standing there answering questions, he was. The other speaker that year was Dr. J. I. Packer. Packer and Nettles were on the platform and I was fielding questions for them and at that time, we did these conferences in cooperation with Presbyterians and so we were very very concerned to be nice, and we kept the gloves on and we only did topics that Reformed Baptists and Presbyterians could agree on. We concentrated on the topics where we could close ranks and agree.

Well, there was a particular Presbyterian out there in the audience that was famous for the fact that every time he talked about anything, he had one subject, one issue. Have you ever known anybody like that? His pet issue was infant baptism. So at one point he held up his hand and that was enough to scare me, and then I called on him and, sure enough, he asked Dr. Nettles the Baptist, about infant baptism, and as he got the question out, you know, Nettles turned to me and we knew that the whole idea of the conference was not to deal with these controversial issues. Nettles turned to me and he has a beautiful Southern accent, it is like the maple syrup on your pancakes at the crack of dawn, and Nettles turned to me when he asked this question and he said, "Oh my word." And he turned to answer this young man, everybody was waiting to see what will the Baptist say, and Nettles caught everybody off guard and answered magnificently, he said, "In the 31st chapter of Jeremiah, it says in verse 31,

31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

And Nettles simply went on to say, "The new covenant speaks of people to whom God has put his law in their hearts, who all know the Lord and don't have to be taught to know the Lord, and certainly infants do have to be taught to know the Lord, but the people of the new covenant do not have to be taught to know the Lord and they are the forgiven. Their sins have been forgiven. Their sins are not remembered anymore. And of course, that is due to Jesus' work in dying for them and then their receiving him by personal faith and repentance which infants cannot do. So the crucial question is: who is in the covenant?" And he sat down. And that is the crucial question, the crucial issue. Who is in the new covenant rather than who is in the old covenant? Who are the members of the new covenant?

Let me turn with you from our text today to 1 Peter 3:18 through 22.

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 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, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

I believe that even if Peter did not have the apostolic authority that we understand that he brings to this epistle, in other words, even if we were not convinced that Peter's words here are the word of God, I believe that the Apostle Peter can surely be trusted as a faithful guide to the subject of baptism. He was, after all, present when Jesus uttered the Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things," and so on. Peter was the man who preached the first Christian sermon on the day of

Pentecost and he ended that sermon with a command to the Jews under conviction to repent and be baptized. And he also was the instrument that God used to bring the first Gentiles into the church in the house of Cornelius and there he called for water so that those new converts might be baptized. Each of these incidents which we'll look at in greater detail, contributed to Peter's authority on the subject of baptism, and then you add to that, shall we say, natural authority or authority from a natural point of view, his apostolic authority, the fact that he was given the keys of the kingdom and so on, he was supremely qualified to teach on this or any other subject on which the Lord instructed him, but we cannot help but notice Peter's personal and experiential credentials on the subject of baptism.

Now what's interesting about our text from his first epistle is not that he gives us a strange and difficult doctrine that some of you may be hoping I'm going to explain about Jesus going and preaching to the spirits in prison. I'm not going to explain that to you today. Another time, another conference. Let me just assure you that it emphatically does not teach that Jesus went to hell for three days for further punishment from God. The point is that it is a highly controversial passage. There are, I think among the many possibilities for what the meaning of it, two possibilities that seem to do most justice to the text. But never mind, what I find most interesting about our text today is that Peter, as far as I can tell, is the only writer in the Bible who calls baptism anything. He is the only writer who labels baptism, the only writer who calls baptism something. Preachers and theologians call it things, we call it a sacrament or an ordinance or an initiatory rite. In Reformed circles, it's most commonly called a sign or the sign of the covenant. The Westminster Confession calls it a seal also. And I find this absolutely fascinating that while it may indeed be some of those things, the Bible never uses any of those terms to describe it. Those are all man-made terms.

Now we use such man-made terms for convenience and communication, much like we do the term Trinity which never occurs in the Scripture but which is, nonetheless, a true doctrine. So there's nothing wrong with some good man-made terms as long as they reflect the situation accurately and label fairly and truthfully. We need truth and accuracy in our labeling of theological concepts, but I think it would do us good to look closely this morning at the one thing that baptism is specifically called in the Bible because it never is called anything other than this: the answer of a good conscience toward God or probably more accurately, the pledge of a good conscience toward God.

Now in calling baptism this, Peter supports what Jesus taught him and he supports the understanding of baptism that he, himself, experienced and applied, namely that baptism is for believers only, and this is, of course, the sad division in the Reformed camp, the saddest of all, because we Baptists want Presbyterians to like us, we want them to think that we are not, you know, bumbling idiots when it comes to Scripture, that we are unable to see into the Bible as deeply as they do. I sometimes think that Presbyterians who are so strong and committed to the doctrine of infant baptism have an attitude toward Baptists that is very much like indulgent parents who watch their children running around the yard looking in all kinds of places willy-nilly for Easter eggs on Resurrection day morning. Here's how they are like those parents: they know where the eggs are. But here's how

they're also like those parents: they know where the eggs are because they put them there. In other words, if we're going to look at Scripture alone, not at tradition, not even at the history of the church, although we don't come off so badly when we look at the history of the church. The earliest church manual, the Didache which was written probably no later than the year 125, has a long involved prescription for how to baptize and the baptism is clearly of a believer only by immersion. It's believer only by immersion. There are no instructions for baptizing infants whatsoever, instead the catechumen is to be taught all of these things that are in this Didache church manual and then it says that he is to be baptized in running water and if you can't get that, okay, still waters, fine. He is to be baptized in cold water. If you can't get that, okay, use warm. But the point is that even though we can't rest our arguments on church history, we can say that the earliest post-apostolic record clearly shows that baptism of believers by immersion was the practice of the church.

Now, again I say, Scripture is what is important. It is Scripture that must dictate our practice and belief concerning this doctrine, but when I say that baptism is for believers only, I am saying that baptism is for members of the new covenant. It is for those people described in Jeremiah 31 and, therefore, what Peter is teaching here today in this text is that baptism is the pledge of membership in the new covenant. Now how do you get in the new covenant? You get in the new covenant through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You get in the new covenant because God has birthed you again, put his law in your heart, you know him and have eternal life, and you have your sins forgiven, and all of that is accomplished for you through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in his atonement and in his sending of the Spirit and you receive all that by faith and you become part of the new covenant, but then the next step, the very next step of obedience according to Scripture is baptism, but it is for believers only.

One of the things that we do here at Dayspring is to actually withhold the Lord's Supper until the new believer has gone ahead and committed themselves to the Lord in baptism, submitted to this pledge of a good conscience toward God. This leads to some interesting things. One thing it leads to is the submission to many people who want to take communion but who have stubbornly refused to be obedient to Jesus and be baptized. Another thing it leads to is some comical attitudes on the part of our children. I remember a number of years ago there was a child from our church who was about 4 years old and she was taking a bath with a little friend of hers in the same tub and their mother was overhearing their conversation. There was a great deal of splashing and talking going on and what was going on is that the two little girls were playing baptism. They called it baskism and being bastized, and one little girl was asking the other little girl the questions that I always ask the candidates for baptism. "Why have you come to be baptized?" And the other little girl said, "So I can eat and drink." It is not the worthiest of motives, but it will do.

I don't believe that you should have the privilege of the Lord's Table until your rebellion about baptism has been dealt with in some way or another. Now as you know, we do not press the necessity of believer's baptism because we know among our Reformed friends that this is a very strongly held and a deeply felt issue that touches the conscience of our

brothers and sisters in Christ. So we simply ask that you're baptized according to your conscience but oh, do we work hard to try to change the conscience around here, and that's what I'll be doing this morning.

The pledge of membership in the new covenant. We're going to look at the specific designation of baptism as a pledge and then we're going to see how this is consistent with Peter's understanding of baptism, and then finally, we'll see how this understanding of baptism is necessary if reformation of the church is to continue.

The first thing, notice that baptism is an answer or a pledge. It's the pledge of a good conscience toward God. What does that mean? Don't let the word "answer" in your English translation confuse you into thinking that it's the same word used up in 3:15 where he says, "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer." There "defense" is the better translation and it's a different word, the word is "apologia," which is the word from which we get the term "apologetics." Our word here for pledge or answer is an unusual technical word, it's "eperotema" which comes from the business and legal world. When you and I sign contracts today, even if we tear off a form that's a coupon and send it in to order something, there's usually a place down at the bottom of the page where it says, "I agree to the above terms of the contract," and then there'll be a lot of binding technical language, and then right below that there will be a line and an "X" where we sign our name, and we have just said that we have agreed to that language. In Peter's day, this last part of binding you to the contract was not done on the contract itself, it was done with a verbal question and answer before witnesses and that made the contract legal and binding. The question would be asked: do you accept the terms of this contract and bind yourself to observe it? And the witnesses would hear you answer yes, and that made the contract valid. Well, the technical term for that question and response was this word, eperotema, Peter's word here.

So what Peter is saying is that just as the executor or buyer of a contract or party to a contract goes to his business deal with either the money to buy or prepared to sell something and receive the money or prepared to render a service for money, the party is prepared before they come because of their situation. Peter is saying that in the same way when you are baptized, you come with a clear conscience toward God and you say yes to God by your baptism. You are affirming that you are a new creature in Christ Jesus, you are affirming that your sins have been forgiven, you are affirming that you have a good conscience before God. And under the old covenant, the Mosaic covenant, you could never have a good conscience. It was impossible to have a good conscience. It was impossible to have a clear conscience before God.

Turn with me to Hebrews 9 for just a moment. Hebrews 9, beginning with verse 6. The writer to the Hebrews is talking about the worship of the tabernacle and he says concerning all the tabernacle furniture and amenities and so on,

6 Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. 7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood,

which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; 8 the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience-- 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings [and that word is "baptisms"], and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

So what's our situation? It means that the Jew under the old covenant could certainly hope that the offerings were in some way efficacious, in some way helpful, in some way pleasing to God, but he could never have the kind of clear conscience that you and I have when we come to the Lord Jesus Christ on the basis of 1 John 1:9 which says,

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Why is God just to do that? Why is God just to cleanse you from all unrighteousness and forgive your sins when he is a God who will by no means clear the guilty? The reason is that he set Jesus Christ up as guilty, as a substitute sinner, and he by no means refused to clear him and he laid on him the transgressions of us all, and it is unjust for him to punish the same sin twice. So if we have already been punished in our representative and our life is hidden with Christ in God, then God, I say it reverently, must forgive us. That's his rule, not ours. He must forgive us, he cannot do anything other than forgive us because it is just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and when you believe that and embrace that and rejoice in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that has provided you with that full and free forgiveness, you can rise from prayer to God confessing your sins, saying, "There is no condemnation for me who is in Christ Jesus and I have a clear conscience before my God." Is that right? Amen.

So the point is the writer to the Hebrews goes on to say in verse 11,

11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh [and that's what he has just said, that all of these things were external sorts of cleansing], 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Wonderful stuff. What it's saying here that I want you to see is that the way we handle our conscience, of course, is to do dead works. That's the way our Catholic friends handle their conscience. They find out what dead works to do and they do those dead works, and that is the way so often we behave when we have sinned. All of a sudden we think, well, we've got to do things to make up for that, but all of those things that we do can never atone. "Thou must save and thou alone." All we have to do is constantly keep coming back to the cross, to the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from all sin and understand that it is his blood that purges our conscience.

So let me just ask you this morning: how is your conscience? Can you actually say, "Jesus died for my sins, for every wicked thing I've ever thought, said or done, and every wicked thing that I will ever think, say or do. My salvation is in Christ alone. My righteousness is his imputed righteousness to me. He is my Lord. I am in him and, therefore, God pronounces me righteous all the time. God did not cease to pronounce me righteous even when I was in that sin." Do you believe that? That is the Gospel, brothers and sisters. It's mind-boggling. It's the most amazing thing in the world and you can say, "I have repented. I have come back to the Lord. I have confessed my sin to him and now he forgives me and my conscience is clear."

So Peter is saying in our text today in 1 Peter 3 that baptism does not save in any sense when it's a mere external washing and all you do is remove the filth of the flesh. In other words, Peter is saying in verse 21, "This baptism I'm talking about is not the removal of the filth of the flesh." You don't go into the baptistery just to get clean. Something inside has to have happened. Something in your nature has to have changed.

The only true baptism is one that comes from a good conscience and here is the question: where do you and I get a good conscience toward God when we're dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world to the prince of the power of the air, which is what we were before we became Christians? How can you and I possibly get a good conscience? The Bible describes the thoughts and intents of men's heart is only evil continually. How can such people get a good conscience toward God? The Apostle Paul said, "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them because they are foolishness unto him." Where is that man going to get a good conscience toward God? Clearly the cleansing of the conscience must be done by the blood of Christ, received in faith and repentance and faith and repentance can only come from a regenerate heart, the heart of one who has been born again by the Holy Spirit. And all these blessings were procured for the people of God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that's Peter's phrase in verse 21, he says this baptism saves "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him."

You know, Paul says in Romans 4:25 that Jesus was delivered up for our offenses and he was raised because of our justification. The interesting thing about that is that it's saying that the reason he was raised from the dead is because your acquittal was accomplished, your justification was ready to be applied to you. He was raised because your justification had been achieved in his atonement. Messiah was cut off but not for himself. He couldn't

stay dead because it was impossible for death to hold him. He was without sin. He died as a substitute for others and so he was raised from the dead and that resurrection demonstrates that his work on the cross worked; that it was for others and not for himself and that God was, as John has just reminded us, declaring him to be the Son of God with power.

Now when he was raised, you were in him. Paul says in Ephesians 2 that you've been raised together with him all the way up to the heavenly places. So intimate is the connection between Jesus' death and God's regarding you as having died, and Jesus' resurrection and God as regarding you as having been raised, that Paul can say, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile. You're still in your sins." But the resurrection proves that you who believe are not in your sins, you are now new creatures, your consciences are cleansed, you're children of God, you're saved, you're members of the new covenant, you have God's law written in your heart, you know the Lord from the least of you to the greatest, and your sins are forgiven.

None of these things come through baptism. Baptism simply pictures how you receive these blessings through union with Christ. As a matter of fact, one of the greatest passages that tells you the meaning of baptism is Romans 6 where it says in verse 3,

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

When we are baptized by immersion, we are showing forth the death of the believer to his former life, to his sinful ways, as united to Jesus in his death and resurrection. Baptism is a burial and a death and a resurrection enacted. So what happens is that the candidate is put into the water and there is the death, and then there's a split second where you don't see the candidate anymore because the old man has passed away, the old candidate is gone as one who was in Adam, the old candidate is gone and for that split second you see the burial pictured, and then comes the resurrection as the person comes out and is testifying that he or she is a new creature in Christ. United to Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection.

Now, all of this is accomplished, this being united to Jesus, before the baptism. The baptism just pictures it. The baptism displays it just as the Lord's Supper, again, displays the death of Jesus. Why, then, does Peter say baptism saves you? Baptism saves you? He doesn't quite say it so starkly but he says something close enough to scare us. He says baptism saves you, and if you paid attention to Brother Richard last night, you know perfectly well that baptism does not save you, not any works of righteousness which you have done but according to his mercy, God saved you by the washing of regeneration.

Regeneration is your washing that saves you but not baptism. So how can Peter say that there is an antitype here that saves us, namely baptism? I think the key to understanding what he's saying is to concentrate on that word "antitype," on that word which means that he's making a parallel statement to the description of Noah's family in the ark in the time of the judgment by the flood. In other words, the only sense in which baptism saves us is simply as an analogy to that other rescue when the family was rescued from destruction by God.

A type in Scripture is a pattern or example. An antitype is a corresponding pattern or example. So the King James translation is pretty good here. It calls baptism "the like figure." The like figure of what? Well, it's the like figure of two things actually, it's the like figure not only of what we know it to be the figure of, the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus, but it's also the like figure of the ark as the ark was inundated in the waters of judgment. Those waters were dangerous, you know. The water represented the judgment of God and yet the ark and its passengers were delivered.

So what Peter is simply saying here is in terms of an analogy or an example, baptism is a kind of deliverance too. It saves only in its analogy as an antitype with the waters of Noah's ark. The person with the good conscience is already saved when he or she is baptized or else the good conscience wouldn't be there, and this text which seems to play right into the hands of those who believe and preach baptismal regeneration, actually is one of the worst enemies of those who preach baptismal regeneration because anyone who preaches baptismal regeneration obviously is preaching in some way or another the need for such regeneration. In other words, the sinner needs to be born again whether it's those who baptize babies as our Catholic friends and our Lutheran friends, and others who baptize infants and then proclaim them to be Christians, or whether it's folks like the Church of Christ who believe that the grace is imparted in the baptismal waters and that's when regeneration happens. Either way, you have a right to go to such people and say, "Wait a minute, this baptism is the answer of a good conscience. How did your sinful baby get a good conscience? Or how did your sinful candidate for baptism get a good conscience? How could they possibly have a good conscience before they're baptized if baptism is supposedly what gives them the good conscience? Do you see? So don't be afraid because Peter just tosses off this remark that baptism saves us. Don't be afraid to go here with a proponent of baptismal regeneration because the text is teaching exactly the opposite.

Now we've seen that the good conscience only can apply to those whose consciences have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus. That means believers. And so let's ask or verify that believer's baptism or baptism of new covenant members is what Peter knew and experienced. Consider the words of our Lord in the Great Commission. Peter was there when Jesus gave the words and you know them well. They're at the end of Matthew in Matthew 28:18. Jesus starts by saying,

18 ... All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Let's take that very seriously for just a moment. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." He is boldly proclaiming his kingship, his lordship, and he has instructions for his servants and he says in verse 19,

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

He commanded that disciples should be baptized. Baptizing them. Who? Disciples. That really should settle this issue. He did not say, "Baptizing them and their seed." He did not say, "Baptizing them and their children."

Now Reformed Christians who baptize infants agree that there is no command to baptize the children of believers but, they say, there is no command that forbids it either. I beg to differ. Can we baptize adult unbelievers? There is no command forbidding it, is there? There's really not. There's no command forbidding us to baptize an adult unbeliever, you see, because the command is actually there. There is a command that forbids you to baptize an adult unbeliever. There is a command that forbids you to baptize an unbeliever. It's this one. It forbids it. It says make disciples of all the nations, baptizing the disciples. So you can't be baptized until you're a disciple. By virtue of the fact that this defines who is to be baptized, then those who are not defined here should be understood to be excluded. When Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church," do you say, "Well, sure, I'm supposed to do that but that doesn't prevent me from loving another woman as Christ loved the church, does it?" And when he says, "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands," is that saying that the wife is supposed to submit herself to every man? No, of course not. Just because there is not an explicit text forbidding it does not mean that we cannot conclude from the specific objects of the commandment who is not supposed to be the object of it.

So consider Peter's own experiences with baptism. Look at Pentecost again, Acts 2:37-44. There he is preaching and all of a sudden his sermon is virtually interrupted.

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ [the preposition is epi, so it's saying on the authority of Jesus, it's not denying the Trinity] for the remission of sins [it is eis would be the transliteration for the remission of sins, and he's saying which you have already received before your baptism, for the remission of sins that is before the baptism]; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Our pedobaptist friends love to quote, "For the promise is to you and to your children," but they don't quote the rest of it, "to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God

will call." That describes who the proper subjects of baptism are. It's clear that it's those that the Lord calls effectually who will give evidence of their calling in faith and repentance who are to be baptized.

The same thing over in Cornelius' house where Peter had the privilege of speaking the Gospel to the Gentiles and seeing them saved. Cornelius' house, Acts 10:44,

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter [those are the Jews], because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

One verse. It tells you who the proper subjects of baptism are, those who are presumed to have received the Spirit, those who are presumed to have received the Spirit, all those who have God's law in their hearts, all those who know the Lord, all those whose sins are forgiven. This was not only Peter's experience, it was Philip's experience in Samaria with the Ethiopian eunuch, it was Paul's experience, it's the pattern in the book of Acts.

Now so far all of our infant baptizing Christian brothers and sisters will agree with what I've said. They're not going to argue with the book of Acts except they might argue with my contention that children's baptism is specifically forbidden by virtue of the fact that Jesus says it's for disciples, but they certainly have the right to ask this: what about the household baptisms in the book of Acts? To take the most famous example in Acts 16, let's just turn over there and start with verse 31 when Paul said to the Philippian jailer,

31 ... "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

What's he saying there? Is he saying that all of your household is going to be saved because of your belief? No. He would never say that. The Bible doesn't teach that. He is simply saying that, "You and your household can be saved and will be saved on the same condition, that you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and anybody in your household who believes on Jesus will also be saved."

32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. [So everybody in the household hold the word of God.] 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

In other words the Scripture says clearly that all the household heard and all the household believed, then certainly all the household should have been baptized. There is

no evidence here that there were any infants present, no infants are mentioned that we may be sure of one thing, if any infants were present, they heard the word of God, they believed the word of God and were baptized and rejoiced with their father. Any other household baptisms I will not go into. They are mentioned in Acts 16:15 and 1 Corinthians 1:16 and, again, no infants are mentioned.

But now here is the difficult issue. Someone else may ask, "What about the connection between circumcision as the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament and baptism as the sign of the new covenant? Surely as infants once were circumcised under the old covenant, they should be baptized in the new covenant." This is the most formidable argument for infant baptism and the one that has been so enticing over the years to people learning about the Reformed faith, to people who read Calvin, the Puritans and the Westminster Confession. The first thing to say is that the relationship of circumcision to baptism is based on a third thing and that thing is what circumcision points to and that is regeneration. Circumcision is fulfilled in regeneration.

Circumcision was a sign given to Abraham, it's called a sign and a seal, and it was given not only to Abraham but also to his seed after him, and it was symbolic of cleansing. It was symbolic of cleansing and it became a badge of ethnic identity and signified the promise of the land and of the earthly blessings for the Jews, but first of all it was a sign of cleansing, but in God's commands to Israel about circumcision of the heart, we see what circumcision of the body typified. Deuteronomy 10:16,

16 "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer."

The command is, "Make your heart toward me to match your body." Jeremiah 4:4 says essentially the same thing. Having said that, I must say that I don't agree with John MacArthur that there's no connection at all between circumcision and baptism. It would be nice if we could say that, but we do have to give the Scriptures their due and there is a relationship but, again, the relationship comes through the reality that both of them are signifying which is regeneration.

So now let's go to the classic proof text, Colossians 2:11-12.

11 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands [that means the circumcision that is of the Spirit, of the heart], by putting off the body [I'm going to skip those three words, "of the sins." I don't think they belong to the text.] by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

Now what that's saying is that Jesus has circumcised every single one of us in the new covenant. Then Paul goes on to say you are

12 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.

So what's the relationship? It's simply this: what circumcision pointed toward, baptism points back to, but baptism never points toward it. Insofar as circumcision pointed toward the fulfillment of regeneration, baptism is done after regeneration. The circumcision done by Christ, the heart that now knows the Lord and his law and his forgiveness, the new covenant heart is the one that now submits to baptism.

I'll give you an example where we took our vacation to the Canadian Rockies. I had a brochure and it had pictures of the Canadian Rockies. It pointed me forward to a place I'd never been, a place I'd never seen. Then I went up there and I experienced the Canadian Rockies and I breathed the air, I looked at the mountains, I rejoiced in the Lord. I said, "How great thou art." And I took slides of the Canadian Rockies. Now I have slides of the Canadian Rockies. Do you know what? I never look at the travel brochures now because the slides point me back to the experience that I had and when you are baptized, it's like a slide or a photograph taken of the inward spiritual reality that has happened inside you and you can think back on your baptism just as you think on the Lord's Supper and you can say, "This is what it means. This is the truth. This is the reality. This happened to me."

The second thing to say about the circumcision baptism argument is that there's not the remotest connection made between the two rituals anywhere in the Bible. In other words, yes, Colossians speaks of circumcision of the heart and baptism but no text brings together physical circumcision and baptism. There's not the remotest connection made between the two rituals anywhere in the Bible. Nobody ever teaches that baptism answers to circumcision and they could have. Paul had the perfect opportunity when he wrote to the Galatians who were being troubled by Judaizers who said, "Unless you're circumcised, you cannot be saved." If Paul had believed covenant theology, he could've just written, "No. You don't understand. Circumcision has been fulfilled in baptism. Love, Paul." The letter to the Galatians might have been a postcard. Furthermore, the same issue necessitating calling the Council at Jerusalem. So where were the council theologians who were covenant theologians to say, "Wait a minute, circumcision has been fulfilled by baptism. Meeting adjourned."

The fact is the Bible does not teach this. It is a tradition of men. It is a man-made tradition drawn from good and necessary deductions from logic but not from the pages of Scripture. To the law and to the testimony, if they do not speak according to this word, there may be life in them on many other subjects with which we agree but there is no light in them on this one.

The third thing to say is that in the old covenant you became part of the people of God by birth. All you had to do was get yourself born. Under the new covenant, how do you become part of the people? By the new birth. It's just this simple: circumcision was for the born, baptism is for the born again.

Whose is the last birth recorded in the Bible? My dear ruminative wife pointed this out to me years ago. If my wife ruminates on something long enough, look out when she finally

speaks, and she said, "Did you know there's no other birth of a baby recorded after the birth of Jesus? Did you know that even though we know the apostles were married, we don't know if they had children? Did you know that the last baby born in the Bible that we know anything about is Jesus?" To whom do the last genealogies in the Bible belong? Genesis, full of genealogies. 1 Chronicles full of genealogies. We don't have any more after Jesus. Our Lord Jesus Christ who is the seed to whom the Abrahamic promises were made has come and those who are united to that seed by faith receive the blessings promised to Abraham. If you're Christ's, then you're Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise and those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. It's no longer by birth. Paul wrote, "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything," but a new creation, a new creation is what avails.

And the fourth thing to say about the circumcision baptism argument is that children of believers are holy without being baptized as infants. They're already holy and there's nothing that you can do about it. All those infants can do about it is to grow up to be unholy. The point is that still they don't become unholy in the sense that the Bible is talking about as 1 Corinthians 7:14 says, "the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy."

A friend of mine who spent many years at Dayspring started going to a Presbyterian church in another town to which she moved, and the minister was teaching on this subject and it clearly is teaching that children of believers have special privileges; that they are set apart from this sinful world; that they have the great opportunities that come from being connected to a Christian, either a Christian mother or father, but the same blessings are true of an unbelieving husband. We wouldn't baptize the unbelieving husband because he's holy, would we? And yet he's holy too. We would say he's got to repent and believe, but the child is supposedly holy and, therefore, is supposed to be baptized when baptism is not even mentioned in the passage. My friend asked the pastor of the Bible study, "What blessing would my children receive in baptism that they don't already have?" He couldn't answer her. They already have the blessing. There's nothing that they would receive in baptism that they don't already have. They're already holy.

The fifth thing to say is something not to say. Don't say this, "While my thesis is that baptism is the pledge of membership in the new covenant, it is not the sign of the new covenant." If you say it is, do you open yourself up to the brilliant but unscriptural comparisons between circumcision and baptism. If you want to get twisted into a doctrinal pretzel, admit to one of our pedobaptist brothers or sisters that, "Yes, baptism is the sign of the covenant." Their nostrils will flair, they're eyes will flash, and they'll bring you into the discussion of the analogy of baptism and circumcision. No, baptism is not the sign of the new covenant. It isn't called that ever. What is the sign of the new covenant? As Richard will remind us this afternoon, Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." And isn't it fitting that before one can partake of that sign, he or she must examine himself? Something infants cannot do.

As for infant baptism, it is not found in Scripture. I have often wished that it were. I have often wished sometimes as Spurgeon himself wished, that we could get away from the stigma of being odd and different and separate from seemingly the majority of the church in the world. It's not found in Scripture and not only is it not found in Scripture and therefore we cannot do it, it seriously distorts the sacrament of baptism because it cannot represent union with Christ nor can it be the pledge of a good conscience toward God received by repentance and faith. And not only that, it places the members of churches who practice it, who were born in those churches, in the position of not being allowed to have scriptural baptism when they become believers. Churches who practice pedobaptism ironically will practice proper baptism to proselytes who come in but deny it to their own members who have been born in the church when they, themselves, become converted. Surely this is the major area that the Reformers refused to reform and would not come out of Catholicism except so far as to say it doesn't regenerate and Luther wouldn't even do that. Surely here is where the Reformation must continue, brothers and sisters.

My last point is a brief one. Baptism rightly administered upon evidence of new covenant blessings has many benefits and this is the point, that all of this is very practical. It has practical application for the church and John MacArthur has said that at this present time, there is greater neglect of the practice of baptism in America than at any time in history. First, of course, those who have been baptized as infants believe as they've been taught that they don't need it and it doesn't need to happen once they personally believe on Jesus. The second thing is that so many people are taught that salvation is by grace through faith and, therefore, they just don't need to do the actual act of obedience of being baptized. So it's neglected by those who perhaps fear the doctrine of baptismal regeneration too much but here are the blessings that it brings to the church and this is what we need to see in our day and age.

First, it affirms to the one getting baptized. His union with Christ. He says in his baptism, "I'm united to Jesus. I died with him. I was buried with him. I'm raised with him. I was there when they crucified my Lord."

The second thing, it pictures the Gospel to the congregation, encouraging them and strengthening their faith. We had some friends here at Dayspring one time who saw as adults their very first believer baptism here. It blew them away. We're used to it. We've seen it since we were children but they were shocked and stunned by the drama of it; that there is a reenactment in water of death, burial and resurrection and that that's saying that this person is united to Jesus Christ in this way. The whole family got baptized as a result of seeing that. It pictures the Gospel to the congregation.

Thirdly, it publicly marks out as much as anything can, the redeemed people of God and, therefore, proclaims them to be the church, and it prevents as much as anything can, the confusion between real and false Christians, the growth of wheat and tares together that characterizes Christendom, those countries where infant baptism is universally practiced.

It encourages true conversions, lastly. It encourages true conversions because it's a fearful thing to come to the water. It's a fearful thing to come to the baptistery. It's a humiliating

thing to come and have this done in the presence of your new family. It encourages true conversions and it guards the Lord's Supper from those who are disobedient and who refuse to follow the Lord's example and command.

Please turn with me to Hebrews 10:19 and I'm done. This is an exhortation to believers and it's a wonderful exhortation. It's a wonderful exhortation. It's an exhortation to come together into the very throne room of God, into the presence of our heavenly Father which has had the way paved for us by a merciful high priest. It's an invitation to do the most wonderful thing that you can do as a Christian, to draw nigh to God. And I want to say before I read the passage that this passage alone should make the case that the subject of baptism is in need of reformation because it's a call to experience a blessing that only those who have been scripturally baptized can fully enter. I want to just tell you that. That may seem like a hard saying but here's the word of God. It's a call to experience a blessing that only those who have been scripturally baptized can fully enter and may I say to you, having baptized so many people in my life, I wouldn't trade anything for the joy of those candidates when they come out of the water, to see their joy, to see their happiness, to see the glow that is on their faces. It's a wonderful experience. Something wonderful happens as they obey the Lord and they are happy after their baptisms. So this is a call to experience a blessing that only those who have been scripturally baptized can fully enter.

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way

I love that word "new" there, it's the only time it's used in the New Testament. It means freshly slain, freshly killed. His blood will never lose it's power. That's another sermon. Let me go on.

20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, [let me read it slowly now] 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.

Let us pray.

Our heavenly Father, we thank you that through your Son you commanded us to be baptized to show forth not what we have done or received or conjured up in our sinful hearts, but to show forth in something done to us what Jesus has done for us and your Holy Spirit has done in us. Let us hold fast to this doctrine knowing that it is a key to further reformation of your church. Please bless your word today by your Spirit and put on the hearts of anyone here who has not been scripturally baptized the urgent need to obey the command to be baptized and picture union with Christ. We ask you, Lord God, to now bless us as we go forth to eat our lunch. We pray, Lord Jesus, that you would bless our Brother Richard and prepare him for the first address of the afternoon. We pray, Lord God, for those who must leave us now and go other places today, that you

would continue to watch over them and bring those who are coming this afternoon here safely. Have mercy on us all during this time of studying your word. Again, may the work of your Holy Spirit be paramount in our lives and may your Son be glorified. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Announcer: Check out our websites:

biblequery.org – This site answers 7,700 Bible questions.

historycart.com – This site reveals early Church history and doctrine, proving Roman Catholicism is not historically or doctrinally viable.

muslimhope.com – This site is a classic refutation of Islam, a counterfeit religion created by Mohammed.

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