

A Closer Look at Baptism

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For those of you that are a regular part of our church, you know that over the past few months we've done a lot of heavy lifting out of the book of Ephesians Sunday by Sunday from our pulpit and we're going to do some things a little bit different this month and maybe bleeding over into July, doing a few standalone messages that will account for people being away on vacation and let us just kind of deal with some topics that we need to address in the life of our church and so I'm very excited about what lies ahead and encourage you to continue to be with us during the busy summer months.

Today we're going to address the matter of baptism. We're going to take a closer look at baptism. It's probably a little bit overdue from the pastoral perspective but we're just going to go back to some basics here today. We're going to go back to some of the very fundamentals of what it means to be a Christian and what we celebrate in baptism is this: is that Jesus Christ came to save sinners just like you; that Christ came and lived a life of perfect obedience to his Father, knowing full well that as he lived that life on earth in the Middle East some 2,000 years ago, that he was destined to die on a cross. That was the reason that he came. He was born in order to die and that death is the only way that a sinner can be reconciled to God. Christ died as a substitute payment for your sins. He offered his innocent life for your guilty life. God took his innocent life and punished it as though he had committed the sins that you had committed and Jesus suffered and bled and died in the place of sinners just like you so that you might be called to salvation; that whoever would believe in Christ for salvation would find the full and complete unconditional forgiveness of their sins and the promise of eternal life that there would no longer be any fear in death. We sung often here just this morning about, "When I tread the verge of Jordan and when death comes, bid my anxious fears subside." That's all an overflow of true salvation that death no longer holds any sting; there is no longer any fear in death because Christ has rendered that on our behalf. He was buried, he was raised on the third day, he ascended into heaven. One day he will return to receive his people and judge a sinful and guilty world. Those are the basics of the Gospel. This is why we exist. Those simple facts are the basis upon which redemption relies and it's what we celebrate when we practice the ordinance of baptism.

And for those of you that are here that do not know Christ, today through the preaching of your word, Christ himself is calling you to salvation. He's calling out your sinful soul. He's calling out your guilt before a holy God and saying, "Don't go into eternity with your sins unforgiven. Come to me for salvation. Give up your allegiance to sin and to

yourself and give your allegiance to Christ that you might be saved." It's the wonder and the beauty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So as I'm preaching today, I am offering to those of you who do not know him, those who have never truly repented, I am offering to you a full and complete Savior who promises to take away all of your sins forever if you'll just come to him in humble repentance and faith. Why would you turn away from an offer like that? There is no good reason. There is no reason to turn away and refuse a Savior who would willingly save you if you would come to him. That's kind of at the core of the message of baptism.

For those of you that have believed in Christ, kind of going back and thinking of things from the very beginning; you've come to Christ, the question becomes: what should you do if you have believed in Christ? If you are aware that you've been born again, what comes next? Well, Scripture would say that you should be baptized publicly, confessing your conversion before men. Jesus said, "He who confesses me before men, I will confess him before my Father who is in heaven." And he has given the ordinance of baptism to his church as a means by which new Christians could stand before a body of believers and say, "I too have been born again. Christ has saved me. Christ has changed my life and I am here to manifest and to declare to you the work of Christ in my heart and to pledge my allegiance to him henceforth and forevermore." Baptism is a way of proclaiming your conversion and of pledging your future loyalty to Christ. We're going to see that as we go through the Scriptures here today.

And what I want to do today is answer four key questions about baptism. We've never taught on this yet in the four years, 4 1/2 years of our existence. It's long past time that I do that and, you know, the reason that we do a message like this is to not take anything for granted. We realize that some people come to our church and have had a long history of good biblical instruction and you understand baptism and we're grateful for that, but we also realize that new people come that haven't been taught in the Scriptures, that have had maybe confused ideas or conflicting instruction about baptism who need to understand some of the basics about the most fundamental ordinance of baptism. Well, what we want to do today is just answer some really basic questions so that there can be a common foundation that informs our practice of baptism going forward in the future and so we're going to address it in a kind of question and answer format. But as we do this, one of the things that you should be doing is just asking yourself as you listen, just kind of echoing in your mind: do the marks of true conversion manifest themselves in my life? Because here's one of the risks of baptism. I may touch on this a little bit later but I want to touch on it right now and so that's what I'm going to do. You know, one of the things is that it's quite possible, in fact it's quite common, for people to grow up in a Christian church, be baptized either as an infant or at a very very young age before they are really old enough to understand what they're doing, and to just operate on an assumption, "Well, the water was applied to my body therefore I'm free to do whatever I want. I can live however I want. I'm a Christian. I've been baptized and therefore life is mine to live." If you're here and you think that way about baptism, my friend, you don't understand the first thing about what it means to be a Christian, let alone to be baptized. So we need to start from the beginning. We need to not make assumptions.

For those of you that live a life of indifference to Christ but you have been baptized, I beg you, I plead with you through the holy Scriptures not to put your trust in a rite that happened in your life many years ago when the fruit of your life has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. That would be the ultimate in self-deception for you to think that you were a Christian when you live in indifference or outright disobedience to him. So we need to be clear on that as we enter into answering four key questions about baptism from a biblical perspective. So I'm eager to lay these things before you. I've been looking forward to this day for many many weeks and now it is finally here. I couldn't be happier with what lies ahead in this next 45 minutes or so.

Question 1 if you're taking notes and I encourage you to take notes, and even if you're just taking mental notes, you need to tick these things off in your mind. Question 1, a simple fundamental question: why do we practice baptism? Why does the Christian faith practice baptism? Why do we at Truth Community Church practice baptism? Well, there's a very simple answer to that question. Why do we practice baptism? I'm going to show you all these things from Scripture. We practice baptism for the simple reason that Jesus Christ commanded it. Jesus Christ commanded it. When Christ saved us, he brought us under his authority. He brought us into the realm of his kingdom and we submit to his instruction, we submit to his authority, we obey him, we follow and do whatever Jesus told us to do and Jesus makes what he wants done known in the 66 books of the Bible. Not through some silly vision that some preacher says that he had someplace that you can't verify for yourself; that's not where Jesus speaks. Jesus speaks in a way that is accessible to everyone who will open a Bible and read it and that's what we do when we answer the question: why do we practice baptism? We come and we look at what Scripture says.

So with that little bit in mind, turn in your Bible to Matthew 28. I just want to show you some really basic things and as you're turning to Matthew 28, let me just say this about today's message. I'm not at all trying to answer every conceivable question that could be asked about baptism. We're not going to try to engage and answer the disputes that have occupied a lot of ink and paper throughout the halls of church history. We simply want to lay forth some basic fundamentals from Scripture that would guide our practice of baptism here in a local church and so we recognize the limits of what we're doing for the sake of covering a broad swath of ground without getting buried in details that would overwhelm us. We're just going to ask and answer four simple questions as we go forward.

Why do we practice baptism? It's because Christ commanded it. That's all the reason that we need. Look at Matthew 28:18, "Jesus came up and spoke to his disciples," this is after his resurrection, and he said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." There it is in plain black and white, the great commission that Christ gave to the apostles that is carried out now through the church. Here is what the church does: we make disciples through the teaching of God's word. That's fundamental to what Christ says the church should do. That's why

we are unapologetic in being a teaching church is because it is the teaching of God's word that makes disciples of Christ. As part of that disciple making process, as part of that teaching process, Jesus says you are to baptize those who become disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. It's simple really. It's right there on the pages of Scripture. Why do we baptize? You should be able to go quickly in your mind and say, "Our church baptizes because of Matthew 28:19 and 20. Jesus commanded it. We are under his authority, all authority has been given to him. We are submitted to the Lordship of Christ. We are grateful to have a Savior who loved us and gave himself up for us. The least that we could do is give over our lives to him since he gave his life over for us." And so, of course what we do is we obey him. One of the things that he has said for us to do is to baptize disciples in the name of Christ. It's the teaching of Christ that compels us to baptism, not church tradition, not because elders like to baptize or anything like that. There's a singular authority in the church, that authority is the Lord Jesus Christ. The church belongs to him and Christ said, "Church, here's what I want you to do, I want you to teach and baptize." And we say, "Yes, Sir. Yes, Lord. Gladly, Lord. Whatever you would have us to do. After you have saved our souls, Lord, what could we do except respond and do whatever you ask us to do?" And so we baptize as part of our response in obedience to a wonderful wonderful Lord. So that's the first question.

Secondly, we ask another question, an important question: who should be baptized? Who should be baptized? And we'll answer the question this way and we'll deal with different practices at the end of this point, but in answer to that question: who should be baptized? Everyone who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ should be baptized. If you have been born again, you must be baptized in obedience to Christ. This is what Christ calls us to, and without exception, everyone who has believed in Christ should be baptized and I'm going to show you a number of passages from the book of Acts to help you see that this is the biblical pattern. Listen, just stating it very plainly and just trying to keep things very simple but hopefully clear and direct, the biblical pattern in the New Testament is obvious. People were baptized upon confessing faith in Christ as they heard the word of God. When people heard the word, when they believed the Gospel, when they repented and put their faith in Christ, over and over and over and over and over and over again in the book of Acts you see them being baptized. The Bible – listen to me – the Bible does not know anything about a Christian going forward in life and not being baptized with the singular exception of the thief on the cross. So for those of you who name the name of Christ and say, "I'm a Christian," the question then becomes, "Well, have you been baptized?" It becomes the singular focus of Scripture as you see the pattern in the book of Acts.

Look at Acts 2 as we begin. And you know, one of the things that would be a great encouragement to your heart on this issue for the sake of time, I'm not going to give you all of the passages in the book of Acts that we could look at, I kept trimming and trimming and trimming them back. Sometime, get out a concordance and just look up the word "baptize" or "baptizing," look at the various forms of that English word and then trace it and follow through and see where it is mentioned in the book of Acts. You will find without exception that there is some kind of conscious, intelligent, volitional

response to Christ in response to the preaching of his word that undergirds the practice of baptism.

Acts 2:38, we'll start there. What is it? Who should be baptized? Well, the Apostle Peter in verse 38 said to those who were listening to him, he said, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Baptism is linked to repentance from sin and receiving the Holy Spirit. So someone who has truly repented of their sins should see that baptism follows as a necessary consequence of their conversion.

You can keep reading. Verse 40, Peter says, "with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'" Verse 41, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." Peter calls them to salvation through the preaching of the word and what happened when they received his word? They were baptized. They heard the Gospel, they repented, they received Christ, baptism followed as an expression of the inward change that had occurred in their lives.

There are other ways that Dr. Luke chose to describe this as he wrote the Gospel of Acts, look at Acts 8. We're answering the question: who should be baptized? And the answer is: those who have truly believed on Christ should be baptized. And Scripture uses different phrases to communicate that inner reality: they received the word; they repented. Here in Acts 8:12, you see the phrase, "they believed the good news." Look at chapter 8, verse 12, "when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike." Across both genders, adult people were hearing the word of God, they believed what was being said about the Gospel of Christ and the kingdom of God and in response to their believing in their heart, they were baptized in their outer man. This pattern is repeated over and over again.

Look at Acts 16. We'll skip over one at the end of chapter 8 and come back to it for another purpose later on. Acts 16. Who should be baptized? Well, look at chapter 16, verse 14, "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us." Notice what happened in the life of Lydia. She was a God-fearing woman, but at that time before she had heard the Gospel, she was not yet converted. And so she comes under the sound of the preaching of the Apostle Paul, what happens in her heart? What happens in her life? God opens her heart so that she is able to respond to the truths of the Gospel that she's hearing. How did she respond? The same way that everybody else in the book of Acts did. It's just said over and over and over again and it doesn't have to be repeated in each and every single verse of conversion that's shown, she repented from her sins and she believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. The Lord opened her heart to respond to the Gospel in that way and she

believed the good news. Her heart had been opened and what followed was her baptism. Those things are joined together.

Look down a little further in the book of Acts, chapter 16, verse 30. The Philippian jailer, after a great earthquake shook him in more ways than one, he comes trembling with fear and he fell down before Paul and Silas because he had been hearing them singing hymns of praise to God. So he had been hearing things that were awakening his heart and then this great earthquake happens and all of a sudden everything in his heart is needing an answer and in verse 30, "he brought them out," he brought Paul and Silas out and he sat down these two men of God and "he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'" And in verse 31, "They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'" Now, a lot of people like to stop at verse 31 and just kind of narrow things down to raising your hand or praying a prayer at a particular point and time but don't do that. Let's let God's word continue to speak. That's not the only verse in this passage. What followed after they said that to him? "They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved,'" let me explain to you what that means. Verse 32, "And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household." He believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was saved and as a response of that, as a follow-up to that, he was baptized along with those others in his household who had also believed. They all heard the word of God, they all believed and therefore they were all baptized. You start to see the pattern, don't you? It goes on and on and on. Believe, receive the word, repent, and what follows is baptism. This is the pattern for those of us who come to Christ. We are to be baptized in response to our conversion.

Look at Acts 18:8. You see, what should be coming and being impressed upon your mind is the way that baptism is glued together with true belief in Christ. I realize that the pattern in the modern church is to separate the two and to diminish baptism as if it were something that really weren't that important. We'll talk about that a little bit more in just a moment but what you need to see as someone responding to God's word here today in this room, you need to see that Scripture puts those two things together and what Scripture puts together, man should not separate.

Acts 18:8, "Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians," look at this, "when they heard were believing and being baptized." The pattern again. They heard the Gospel. They heard the presentation about the saving work and power of Jesus Christ just like we opened the message here today. They believed from their heart the things that were being spoken and what followed as their first act of obedience after believing was to be baptized.

One more pattern that we can see, one more phrase that is used to describe it in Acts 22. This is the account of Paul's conversion. Ananias is speaking to him when Paul came and received instruction from God through Ananias. Paul is giving his testimony here in verse 16 and he's quoting what happened at a prior time in his life. What did Ananias say to him in verse 16? He said, "Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." The idea and the grammar of this is that having called on the name of Jesus

Christ, here's what you do: get up and get yourself baptized because this is what Christians do. When you have received new life from Christ, when you have been born again, what you do is that you get baptized as a response to that. You see, and the point of baptism is to make a public testimony. There is a cleavage that takes place. We often talk about leave and cleave in the context of marriage, don't we? But with conversion, there is a leaving and cleaving that takes place as well. We leave behind our sins. We leave behind our love of self. We leave behind the world and its affections and its loves and its perversions. We leave that behind in our heart. We say, "I repent. I turn away from that. I come out of that in order to come to Jesus Christ for salvation. I turn my back on my prior life. I turn my back on my sins. I turn back on my love of self and give myself over completely, wholly, and undividedly to the Lord Jesus Christ without condition, without qualification." And if you have not done that, you're not a Christian. I just have to be candid with you. We just have to cut it straight and not try to smooth off the rough edges of things.

Now, here's the thing, how does that relate to baptism? Baptism is the means that God has appointed for you to step into the water and make a public declaration that, "That inner change in my heart has taken place. I have turned my back on the world and therefore I enter into these waters of baptism to manifest and to confess to you the reality of my faith in Christ, that I am believing in him, I am trusting in him alone for my salvation, and this act of baptism is a way of putting a public seal and a public confession to that, and tying those things together." You know, once a true Christian has been baptized, I mean, it has made a statement. There is no going back on that. You've made a public cleavage, a public separation from your prior life.

I didn't have this in my notes but I'm going to tell you this story anyway just because it's so precious to me, the story of my own baptism. You know, I had become a Christian, been a Christian for a few months and it started to dawn on me I had never been baptized and so it was starting to weigh on my mind like probably it is on some of you here today. And I went to the pastor of the church that I was attending and I said, "You know, I've never been baptized." And he very graciously, lovingly, kindly, I wish I had an ounce of his kindness in my own heart, I would be ten times the man I am. But he just kindly walked me through and said, "Look, here's what we need to do," and walked me through the process of what was going to come.

The day came and my family was there, my parents were there who weren't at the time too excited about me being a Christian, and we were actually baptized outside either in a lake or a creek, I can't quite remember and I don't have pictures to prove it. But we were outdoors and I had to stand on the shore and I stood on these rocks looking out at a group of people somewhat like you, including my parents who were a little hostile to my faith and just gave my simple testimony to faith in Christ. And someone asked me later, he said, "What did your baptism mean to you?" I said, "Well, to me, it was an act of obedience to Christ because it was in the face of hostility from my family, from my dad in particular." It was in the face of hostility that I stood up and gave public testimony to Christ and by the grace of God, simply being able to say, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I prefer Christ to the approval of men. I prefer my new life in

Christ over my old life with my old friends such as they were, and all of that. I'm leaving all of that behind and I gladly step into these waters to make that known before men to whomever will listen." So I remember my own baptism with a lot of fondness for what the Lord was doing in my heart there, not because it was any great act on my part, this is just what Christians do. They get baptized. They gladly confess faith in Christ and they gladly say, "My old man is dead. I'm not like I used to be. I disown my prior way of life. I'm here in humble submission and obedience to the Christ who saved me from my sins and I invite you to join in and rejoicing with me as I do." That's the picture of baptism. That's what we're saying when people step into the waters of baptism.

Now, here's the thing that I would have you see as you start to process all of these things in your mind and notice, we tried to point it out as we went along in these passages in the book of Acts. The biblical pattern is absolutely clear, unmistakable and undeniable even by those who don't practice believers' baptism. Baptism is for those who have received Christ with an intelligent, volitional faith after hearing the Gospel. That means it's not for babies. Some people baptize infants. Catholics think that it saves them from sin, washes away original sin and puts them in the kingdom of God. That's not true. Scripture says that, "salvation is by grace through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Faith is an intelligent response to things that have been proclaimed to you from the word of God. Babies don't do that. Babies do a lot of other things but they don't do that and so baptism is not for infants, especially in the way that Catholics practice it.

Some Protestants baptize infants for a different reason, we need to be fair about this. They baptize infants not because they believe that it confers salvation upon them. They'll explain it in different ways but at the heart they'll say, "We are signifying that this child belongs to the covenant people of God because he belongs to believing parents and therefore this child is part of God's covenant family and we baptize them as a mark, as a sign that they belong to the covenant." Well, we won't go into all of that today. We'll simply say this: is that their support for that rests on a lot of theological assumptions without any clear biblical direction to baptize infants from the New Testament whatsoever. Every New Testament example is of people of intelligent position in life responding to the Gospel with repentance and belief in Christ. Infants don't do that and therefore at Truth Community Church, we do not believe that baptism is appropriate for infants and that's why we don't baptize them. There is better warrant as we've tried to show you here today for only baptizing true disciples of Jesus Christ.

Now, one little thing here as just kind of an adjunct to that, a little sidecar excursion here, is that we baptize people on the basis of a credible testimony of conversion to Christ. As elders, we can't look into someone's heart and know whether they're actually saved or not. A conversion is an invisible act that we cannot render final infallible judgment on. We don't have that capacity. God hasn't given that to us. What we do is we baptize people when they present a credible testimony of faith in Christ that says, that somehow expresses, "I understand the Gospel. I understand that I'm a sinner who has offended a holy God. I have turned from my sin and received Christ as my Lord and Savior and my life has changed as a result of that." If somebody comes with that kind of testimony, we'll baptize them if they haven't been previously baptized as a believer. We'll baptize them.

We can't guarantee that they're actually regenerate but we also don't probe into and challenge a credible testimony. We take it at face value and accept it for that and if somebody came and tried to deceive us with that, that's on them, not on us. Our duty as church leadership is to baptize people in response to a credible testimony of faith and we accept those at face value.

So why do we baptize? Because Christ commanded it. Who do we baptize? Those who have turned to Christ in saving faith. The third question this morning: how do we baptize? How do we baptize? Some people sprinkle water, some people pour water, we practice baptism by immersion which is why the place over there is full of water. We're going to have a baptism in just a little bit, two of them actually. How do we baptize? We baptize by water immersion for the following reasons. First of all, the English word "baptize" is simply a transliteration of the Greek word "baptidzo," and the word "baptidzo" expresses the idea of immersion and almost any Greek dictionary or lexicon that you would look at would quickly affirm that to you. Greek dictionaries give the meaning of "to dip or to immerse," that's Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich. Kittel says "to immerse." Mount says "to put or go underwater." Thayer says it's "an immersion in water." This is multiplied over and over again with examples. It's a word that's used to dip something in dye so that it is submerged in the dye and takes on the color of the dye, for example. It's a word that is used to describe the sinking of a ship as it is submerged underwater in other ways in addition to the way that it's used biblically.

So not only the lexical form but immersion is also reinforced by the description of biblical baptisms that you see and this is even more important. Look at the Gospel of Mark here. Again, just trying to help you have an outline in your mind of why we practice baptism the way that we do. Not trying to answer every question but giving you an outline that says, "Oh, this is why we do it. This is what we see in Scripture that leads us to this practice."

Mark 1, the Gospel of Mark. Speaking of the baptism of John the Baptist in Mark 1:4. Now, we are only looking at the way that baptism was practiced. Mark 1:4, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him," watch this, "in the Jordan River, confessing their sins." Keep that in mind as you look at verse 9, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." Jesus, of course being sinless was not confessing sins in his baptism, he was fulfilling baptism in a righteous way for those who would believe in him. Verse 10 he says, "Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him." So in this passage, you see people going into the river to be baptized with a word that means immerse, and you see them coming out of the water, not just away from it but having been in the water, coming out of it, being a picture of immersion.

You also see this when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. Look at Acts 8:36. I'll give you a moment to turn there. Acts 8:35. One of the sweetest sounds in my life is the sound

of people turning the pages of their Bibles and so sometimes I just pause and listen to that and let it sink into my heart because it's such an encouragement to see you follow along in God's word. You see, here's the thing: about any preaching from this pulpit ever whether it's me or somebody else in the future, is that you should always have in your mind, say, "That's fine, preacher. I'm following you. I trust what you're saying. I just want to see it in Scripture for myself." So we spend a lot of time turning from page to page in the Bible so that your faith does not rest on what a man says to you but what you can see for yourself in the word of God. That's very crucial. You should demand that of everyone who would presume to teach you the word of God. Where is your basis in Scripture for this? That's a fair statement, a fair question to ask. We try to honor that here at Truth Community.

Acts 8:35, "Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?' And Philip," with a verse that probably is not original to the original text but still indicating the thrust of what would have been said, "said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.'" The eunuch said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." What happened? "He ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him." And in verse 39, "they came up out of the water."

Now, friends, look, what does baptism by immersion represent but going into the water, going under it, coming out of the water? We believe that that's an obvious biblical pattern and that's why we baptize the way that we do. When you combine the meaning of the word "baptize" with the idea of being in a river, you're left with a picture of immersion unless you have a theological agenda that forces you to have to explain that away.

Now finally: what does baptism represent? And this becomes very important for your spiritual lives. You know, in a room of this size, I know that there are many that struggle with assurance and try to sort out, "You know, do I belong to Christ or not?" Well, understanding what baptism is and what it isn't can actually help clarify the reality of the Gospel in your own mind and help you assess whether you should be baptized or not if you haven't been baptized.

Question 4: what does baptism represent? Baptism is an outward symbol that testifies to a prior inward reality. That's really important for you to understand. Let me say it again: baptism is an outward symbol that testifies to a prior inward reality. In other words, if you're questioning whether you're saved or not, you should not say, "I'm going to get baptized in order to get saved." It doesn't work that way. Baptism does not convey or confer salvation on anyone. It's simply a physical visible symbol that testifies to an invisible reality that has taken place. You should be baptized because you are saved. You do not get baptized in order to be saved. The distinction and the sequence of that is very important.

Look over at Romans 6. I'm almost done with this part. Then we're going to sing a couple of hymns and enjoy a couple of baptisms together. Romans 6, Paul here speaking about

the reality of inward conversion describes salvation as being immersed into Christ. He's not talking about being immersed into water here because he talks about being baptized into Christ. Look at verse 3, he says, "do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death," not into water, into Christ, into death, we share in spiritual realities with Christ, "so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection." What does baptism represent? Beloved, it represents this spiritual reality that when a man or woman, a young person, puts their faith in Christ and they are truly born-again, their old man dies. It has been buried with Christ and he is raised to newness of life; still in the same physical body but a completely new inner man. Baptism is designed to picture that spiritual reality. You come into the water standing, as it were, you go into the water picturing your death to your old man, buried, as it were with Christ, you are raised up out of the water picturing the new life that you henceforth go forward in. Water often is a medium of judgment in Scripture. The water in the days of Noah was an act of judgment. Well, Christ entered into the judgment of death and came out alive. Baptism pictures going into judgment with him and coming out on the other side alive to newness of life. Baptism is a picture of that reality of our death, burial and resurrection with Christ. Colossians 2:12 points to that as well.

Now, I want to give you some practical questions that can help everyone of you here even if you've been baptized, all of these questions are going to help you, and then we're going to sing a couple of hymns and I'll slip back and get ready for the baptism. Baptism, let me just say this plainly, unconditionally, clearly: baptism does not save anyone. We are justified by faith, not by works. Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith; that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, lest anyone should boast." You must be saved in order to be baptized. You do not get baptized in order to be saved. Baptism does not add merit to your account that forces God to accept you, in other words. We are saved solely on the basis of the perfect righteousness and the shed blood of Jesus Christ counted to us, imputed to our account. That is the only thing that can save you and you only receive that by faith so don't go into baptism thinking, "Oh, now I can get saved," because that's not true.

Having made that as plain and clear as I possibly know how to make it, although if I thought about it and elaborated for another 20 minutes...nah, that would probably just make it worse. Having made that as plain as I possibly can, beloved, here's what some of you need to hear. The fact that baptism does not save you does not mean that baptism is optional as if it were some secondary add-on to the Christian life that you can take or leave, as if you were getting a hamburger at Burger King and saying, "You know, I think I'll leave off the tomatoes and the lettuce. I'll just leave off the baptism, it's just not that important to me." No, that's not it at all. Jesus said, "Believe. Make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." By what prerogative do you overrule and veto the teaching of Jesus and say, "That doesn't apply to me"? That doesn't make any sense. That's high-handed rebellion to just reject it and say, "Not for me." And you know, people have different reasons. "I'm shy." Okay, that doesn't

really matter. There was honestly a woman back at that other place that I was at some years ago, who rejected baptism for a very very long time. A sweet, older woman, just a little bit confused in her head. She said, "Look, I can't get baptized because I get my hair done on Saturday." True story. She refused baptism for the longest time because that was going to mess up the hair job that she had just had. Beloved, that's not legitimate. A lot of you don't even have much hair and so it wouldn't apply to you anyway. Baptism is not optional. Beloved, here's the thing: a true Christian will desire to obey Christ in baptism as a grateful response to having his sins forgiven.

Now, that leads us to two questions, actually it leads us to a few questions. First of all I ask you this question: have you given yourself over to believers' baptism? Have you given yourself over to believers' baptism? I know that many of you have and I rejoice with you in the grace of God in your life. Your baptism is an outward evidence of the reality of the inner faith that you've had and you only have to be baptized as a believer one time so praise God for that. Maybe you've been baptized, I want to speak pastorally to you, maybe you've been baptized but in reality you're not a Christian. That happens a lot. It happens a lot to people who grow up in churches that baptize children at a very young age, six, seven years old. It looks really cute but the child hasn't actually had the opportunity to process what it really means. He's pleasing his parents or the pastor as much as he is outwardly showing a true repentance in Christ. Over time, you can tell where that was not real, where it wasn't a believer being baptized there because the child grows up and his life goes on and he goes into his preteen and teen years and into his early adult life, you can see it all the time. It makes me sick. That child baptized in the past maybe with the words of confession being planted in his mouth by an adult rather than testifying to his own faith in his own words, that child lives his life saying, "Oh, I was baptized. Oh, I prayed a prayer. Oh, I'm a Christian." But has no interest in the things of Christ. Has no interest in God's word. Does not mind living a life of unbroken sin. And shows nothing – watch this – shows nothing in his life or her life over time that would manifest the reality of the new life and new desires that baptism is supposed to symbolize having already taken place. That's a travesty. That's not right. That makes a mockery of Christ, a mockery of the Gospel, and a mockery of his ordained ordinance of baptism.

So if some of you are like that, you say, "Well, I was baptized back when," don't be so quick to point to that as proof that you're a true Christian if you have no real desire for Christ; if you can live in sin without any compunction of conscience; if you don't love God's word enough to read it once in a while. Don't be deceived. That baptism won't do anything – watch this – that baptism won't do you any good at the judgment seat of God because that water has already dried off and without the inner reality that corresponds to true conversion, you should not rest in that.

Now, let me just address in another way those of you that are here and you're teachable, you're tender to God's word, let me just help you walk through a couple of thoughts about baptism as we close. You're here and you say, "Do you know what? I am a Christian but I haven't been baptized." Let me help you think through that. First of all, maybe you were just unaware before you came in today how important baptism is. Do you know what? That's fine. Let's just do this then, it's very easy to correct that. We have baptism

applications on that table straight out the door there. You can start by picking up a baptism application and going there, talking to one of the elders. We would love to help you and point you in the right direction there. If you were unaware but you haven't been baptized, okay, now you know, now you can act on it, now we can move forward in spiritual life. God will bless you for that. Maybe you are unsure whether you were truly converted. Here's the thing for you, "I'm not sure," and what I mean by that is, "You know, I don't know if I was a Christian when I was baptized as a very young person or not." Well, do this: don't ask when did I pray a prayer and try to measure it by that. If you want to know if you are a true Christian, ask yourself and you want to know when did that occur in my life, simply ask this: when did God's word come alive to me? When did I really start to love Christ? When did obedience matter to me? When was there a change in my life of some kind? And measure the reality of your conversion by the desires that conversion produces rather than an external act that you did. Asking yourself those kinds of questions can clarify the nature of salvation to you, and it can also help you have clarity about where you stand in relationship to the Lord's command to be baptized. So if you prayed a prayer but that was followed by years of disinterest, rebellion, that early prayer didn't mark a conversion. Whatever else it was, it wasn't true salvation and so don't be deceived about that.

And there's one last thing that I would say here. Do you understand baptism and yet refuse to be baptized? Don't call yourself a Christian. Really, if you understand and say, "No, I understand but I won't do that," you don't need to think about the ordinance of baptism, you need to think about the words of Jesus when he said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" You see, when you understand the ordinance of baptism, it clarifies an awful lot of things in spiritual life for you and that's why we've taught these things today so that you could understand, so that you could reflect and say, "Have I honored Christ?" Actually, "Do I know Christ? I do. I love him. I love his word. He has changed me. Praise God." Have you been baptized as a believer? "I haven't. I'm ready. Show me the way." Good for you. The more you distance yourself from that and in cold-hearted indifference refuse to even pay attention when the word is preached to you, don't rest in thinking wrong things about your life. Life change shows the reality of true conversion.

So, beloved, the question is: have you, speaking second person singular, not speaking in the plural, God's word speaking to you individually and personally, have you been baptized since coming to faith in Christ? That's the question.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Lord, we ask you to help each one respond rightly to your word. Give clarity by your Spirit to respond and act in a way that's fitting for each life. Help us as a church to honor baptism in our body life, to realize that it's not a game or a little sideshow but this is what we do in response to our obedience to Christ. And so, Father, as we move forward as a church, may you convict those who know you and yet have not been baptized, Father, convict them and move them in the direction of the obedience that they need. For those who were perhaps baptized under false pretenses, Father, we pray that you would

convict them and show them that their first need is honesty, confession of sin before you and to be born again themselves. And Father, for those of us that have been baptized rightly, properly after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, Father, we thank you that you've given us this ordinance as a public way to manifest our love for you. This is a tangible expression that says, "I do love Christ and I'm not ashamed to confess him before men." Father, we thank you that through that act of confession, Father, we have the promise of Christ who says, "I'll confess you before my Father who is in heaven." What a glory is ours in our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for it, our God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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