

Introduction: The Washing with Water...

Water is lethal.

Whether as a liquid, a solid, or a gas – water kills more people than any other substance.
Too much water can kill you.
Too little water can kill you!

And yet, water is necessary for life!

We’ll be talking today about Peter’s statement in 1 Peter 3 that “baptism saves us.”
Peter says this while talking about the Flood.
In the flood, the waters of judgment were poured out on the earth –
in order to destroy all flesh.

But the same flood that destroyed the wicked saved Noah and his family.

Last time we read 1 Corinthians 10 –
which speaks of how all Israel was baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.
The same Red Sea that destroyed Pharaoh’s armies saved Israel.

Water is a curious substance.

Stone crumbles – and takes a long, long time to become stone again!
Wood, coal, and oil will burn – and be gone forever.
But water endures.

You drink it – and your body uses it – and it passes out of your body pretty much intact.
Such are properties of water that the same H₂O that flooded the earth in the days of Noah
is the same water that Abraham drank –
which is the same water that destroyed Pharaoh’s armies –
which is the same water in which Jesus was baptized.

It was also the same water which the Psalmist sang of in Psalm 42.
Psalm 42 was Augustine’s favorite baptismal hymn.
It speaks of the waters of God’s judgment crashing down upon me!
Because in our baptism, the waters of judgment *do* fall on us.

Paul will say that we are baptized into Christ’s *death*.
In our baptism we are united to his death –
just as Israel passed out of Egypt (out of the land of death) at the Red Sea,
and entered the Promised Land (the land of life) at the Jordan River –
so also we pass from death to life through baptism into Christ.

Psalm 42 looks at that Jordan River – remembering our passage from death to life –

and as we sang Psalm 42, we sang of how God is our salvation –
yes, he is the one whose waves and breakers go over us –
but he is also the one who delivers us from death *through* water.

Peter says that “baptism, which corresponds to this [the flood], now saves you.”

So the question is not *does baptism save?* –

Peter says that it does – so every Christian must affirm that baptism saves.

Do you struggle with this?

I realize that many teachers today would *deny* that baptism saves.

But the Bible is the Word of God –

the only infallible rule of faith and life.

We don't get to pick and choose what parts of the Bible to believe!

If you say that there is *no way* in which baptism saves – then you disagree with what God says.

If you look at the Greek of 1 Peter 3:21,

there is nothing difficult – nothing controversial – about the translation.

“baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you.”

So we need to start by saying that *yes*, baptism saves.

The real question is *how does baptism save?*

Or, perhaps better,

how does God use baptism to save you?

We saw last time that

A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that does administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them. (SC 91)

God uses the sacraments to save us by the blessing of Christ,

and the working of his Spirit in those that receive the sacraments by faith.

Let me say it as simply as possible right up front:

just getting wet doesn't save you;

but then again, baptism isn't just about getting wet!

So, the obvious question to ask is:

Q. 94. *What is baptism?*

A. Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, signifies and seals our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's.

Baptism is a sacrament.

And sacraments include both the outward sign and the thing signified.

In other words, there are two parts to a sacrament.

There is the outward ritual –
 in this case, the washing with water
 in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;
but then there is also the objective meaning of the sacrament:
 baptism signifies and seals our ingrafting into Christ,
 and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace,
 and our engagement to be the Lord's.

This is what baptism is *for*.
 To use Peter's language from Acts 2:38 –
 “repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ
 for the forgiveness of your sins
 and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”
Baptism is *for* the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Does that mean that everyone who is baptized
 receives the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit?

No!

Baptism is *for* the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit –
 baptism is, to use Paul's language “the washing of regeneration,” (Tit 3:5)
 but that does not mean that everyone who receives the outward sign
 automatically receives the inward reality.

Because we only receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit by faith.

If you want to see what I mean, turn over to Acts 8.

In Acts 8 we hear about the conversion of the Samaritans.

And in 8:13 we hear about the conversion – and the baptism – of Simon Magus.

But then in verses 14-16,

 we hear that the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon the Samaritans
 (the book of Acts is structured around Jesus statement in Acts 1:8
 that the apostles would be Christ's witnesses
 in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth;
 hence the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Jews (Acts 2),
 the Samaritans (Acts 8), and the Gentiles (Acts 10)
 all require the presence of the apostles – and particular Peter –
 as Jesus had said).

When the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit,

 Simon Magus gets greedy,

 and he offers Peter money if only Peter will give him this power!

And Peter says to him,

 “May your silver perish with you,

 because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!

 You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that,
if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.
For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.”
(Acts 8:20-23)

In other words, Simon had been baptized –
he had received the outward sign –
it appears that he was among the disciples who “received the Holy Spirit” in v17.
But Peter can see from his attitude that his *heart* is not right before God.

And Peter curses him – “May your silver perish with you.”
Peter is saying “may you die with your money!”
unless you repent!!

(We happen to know from the early Fathers that Simon did *not* repent –
but he went on to found an early Gnostic group that used some Jesus language –
and caused great harm to the church).

Now, from the story of Simon, you might say,
“then what’s the point of baptism?”
If what *really* matter is faith – then who needs baptism?
But look back at Acts 8:13 –
“even Simon himself *believed*.”

Simon believed – temporarily – partially – for a little while.
Simon apparently received the Holy Spirit – temporarily – partially – for a little while.

Hebrews 6 speaks of people like Simon –
“who have once been enlightened, who have tasted of the heavenly gift,
and have shared in the Holy Spirit,
and have tasted the goodness of the word of God
and the powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:4-5)
But Hebrews says that if they fall away,
it is impossible to restore them again to repentance,
“since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm.”
In other words,
if you reject Jesus, there is no other sacrifice for sins.

God has given us the sacraments to strengthen our faith.

The sacraments are signs and seals of the covenant,
both baptism and the Lord’s Supper are signs and seals of the *gospel* –
in other words they depict and confirm
our participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because the gospel – the good news –
is that Jesus has died for our sins and been raised from the dead
so that we might have life.

And even as preaching sets forth the message of this gospel,
so also the sacraments apply the message of the gospel.

And even as we receive the preaching of the Word by faith,
so also we receive the blessing of the sacraments by faith.

In the Word we hear the message of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus,
and in the sacraments we partake of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus.

So let's look a little more at what the Bible teaches about baptism.

1. ...in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

First, the outward sign consists of

“washing with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus says this in the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

When Jesus told the apostles to go and make disciples,
he told them what methods to use.

“Make disciples,
baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Mt 28:19-20)

In most of the world, baptism is a big deal.

In Muslim countries, you can learn about Jesus all you want!

You can even believe in Jesus without difficulty.

But if you get baptized?

That's when the trouble starts.

In Japan or China or India it's the same way.

Baptism signals that you are no longer part of your old community.

You are now part of Christ's community.

That's why Paul will talk about being baptized *into one body*.

In baptism you renounce all other gods,

and the name of the Triune God – the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit –
is placed upon you.

In baptism you are marked with the sign of the Holy Trinity.

That's why Jesus says that the way you become a disciple is by being baptized.

If you are not baptized, then you are not a disciple of Jesus.

If you are baptized, then you *are* a disciple of Jesus –

so long as you are being taught to observe all that Jesus commanded!

After all, Simon Magus was baptized.

And for a few weeks, apparently, he was a disciple,
as he followed Philip and was learning the way of Jesus from him.
But when Peter and John came – Simon Magus rebelled –
and so, since he was no longer willing to learn to observe
all that Jesus commanded,
he was no longer a disciple.

If you would be a disciple of Jesus there are two things necessary:

- 1) be baptized in the triune name – the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
(there are some groups out there who only baptize in the name of Jesus –
and that is *not* Christian baptism)
- and 2) you must be learning to observe all that Jesus commanded –
you cannot be a “Lone Ranger” Christian;
to be a disciple of Jesus, means to be a part of his community – the church –
this new humanity that is growing and spreading throughout all the earth.

So the outward ritual in baptism

is the washing with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

2. ...Signifies and Seals...

What does this ritual do?

It signifies and seals.

A sign points to something beyond itself.

A sign depicts something.

A seal confirms and establishes something.

A seal is a stamp that confirms the authenticity of the letter.

The sacraments are not empty signs, but powerful signs –

they communicate what they signify to those who receive them by faith.

Peter talks about how baptism “corresponds” to the flood –

in other words baptism represents and fulfills something that the flood depicted.

What does baptism signify and seal?

What does baptism depict and confirm?

a. ...Our Ingrafting into Christ and His Benefits...

What are the pictures of baptism used in the NT?

1) Cleansing.

In the gospels, we see John preaching a baptism of repentance.

He proclaims that the day of God's salvation is at hand,
and that his baptism with water is pointing to the baptism with the Spirit and fire
that the Messiah is about to bring.

This echoes the language of Ezekiel 36
where God promised that when he restored his people,
he would sprinkle them with clean water,
give them new hearts,
and place his Spirit upon them.

Jesus own baptism is a baptism with water and the Spirit, as the Spirit comes upon him.

This theme of cleansing is continued in the book of Acts, where in 2:38
Peter declares that those who desire salvation
must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ
for the forgiveness of sins,
and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The theme of cleansing is the dominant theme in the book of Acts,
coming to its climax in 22:16 where Ananias says to Saul of Tarsus,
"Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name."

The basic idea is that sin has resulted in corruption –
we have become *unclean* – and we need the blood of Jesus to wash and cleanse us.

2) Consecration.

A second, related image of baptism is found in Hebrews 9-10.

Christ is set forth as the great high priest who has removed our sin,
the author then says that we are priests with him.

We may enter the Holy of Holies in Christ.

And therefore he uses the language of the priestly washings to describe us:

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

The high priest in the OT had to wash with water,
and be sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice
in order to enter the Holy of Holies.

Hebrews is saying that this is what we have received.

We have been consecrated as priests through our baptism,
so that we might approach the Holy of Holies in Christ.

3) Death and burial.

A third image of baptism is found in Romans 6.

Here Paul uses the language of union with Christ—of burial with him,
as the key to understanding baptism.

"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death"
Baptism, here, is portrayed not as cleansing,

but as entrance into death.
Baptism is an outward picture of an inward reality.

(Incidentally, the insistence upon immersion misses the image of Jewish burial—they did not cover their dead with dirt, but place their bodies in caves or burial chambers. The image of burial is the image of insertion into a tomb, not going down under the earth)

Baptism, therefore, is a sharing in the judgment of Christ.
It is a union with him in his death.
Through baptism we partake of his death so that we might also partake of his life.

It is this image which then draws on several OT examples:

- 1) Colossians 2:11-12 uses the example of circumcision.
Circumcision, after all, was the cutting off of the flesh,
an image of the snipping away of the old man.
And so Paul says that just as Christ was circumcised on the cross,
so now you have been circumcised through baptism.
- 2) 1 Cor 10:1-2 uses the example of the Red Sea
as Paul speaks of Israel being baptized into Moses, in the cloud and the sea.
- 3) and here in 1 Peter 3, Peter speaks of the Flood as a type of baptism,
in the context of sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

These three OT images combine the aspect of cleansing—purification,
with the image of sharing in judgment.

The flood, after all, was a sign of the coming judgment.
2 Peter will talk about the connection between the judgment with water (the Flood)
and the final judgment with fire.

Here Peter says that eight persons – Noah and his family –
were saved through water in the Flood.
And then he says that baptism corresponds to this!

The word translated “corresponds” could also be translated
“antitype” or “representation.”
It means “that which corresponds in form and structure to something else,
either as an anticipation of a later reality or as a fulfillment of a prior type.”

Jesus has taken the Last Judgment upon himself.
In 3:18 Peter says, “For Christ also suffered once for sins,
the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,
being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit...”
Jesus has endured the Flood – the cataclysm of God’s wrath.
He was innocent.
He was righteous.

He didn't deserve any of it!
The pure, holy, spotless Lamb of God
was put to death in our place –
so that he might bring us to God.

Peter uses the Flood as the example –
that just as God saved Noah through the Flood,
so also God will save you through baptism.

How does God save you through baptism?!

Notice the qualification that Peter makes:
“Not as a removal of dirt from the body
but as an appeal to God for a good conscience,
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”
Peter is NOT saying that just getting wet saves you.
No, for Peter, baptism is more than just getting wet.
Baptism includes water—but it is more than water.
And for baptism to save you, there must be something more than just water!

What is that?

The ESV says “an appeal to God for a good conscience”
The NIV says “the pledge of a good conscience to God”
And the NKJV says “the answer of a good conscience toward God”

Pledge? answer? appeal?

The greek word *ε)περωτημα*,
could be properly translated by any of these.
Appeal, pledge, answer—that is the range of meaning here.

The ESV translation only works if you understand baptism as a trial by ordeal.
This was used in the OT at times—the accused is given a test,
If you pass the test, then you are declared not guilty.
If you fail the test, then you are declared guilty.
The whole earth was given a trial by ordeal in the Flood.
Only Noah and his family survived the ordeal—
and that was because Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.
God graciously gave them the means to survive the ordeal.

And now you, like Noah and his family,
have passed through the waters of judgment,
and God has proclaimed you not guilty!

Baptism is a trial by ordeal.
Baptism, after all, is an echo of the flood.

God destroyed the whole world by water.
And indeed, John promised that Jesus will baptize the world with the Spirit and with fire.
Jesus said in Luke 12:49-51–

“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled.

I have a baptism to be baptized with,
and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!
Do you think that I have come to give peace to the earth?
No, I tell you, but rather division.”

The Spirit and fire baptism that Christ brings is a trial by ordeal.
Jesus received the Spirit in his baptism at the Jordan,
And he received the fiery baptism in his death on the cross.
At Pentecost the Spirit and fire were poured out upon his church.
And it is this baptism which Peter promised on the day of Pentecost,
to all who repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

You see, we still await that fiery baptism that will consume all of God’s enemies.
But one day God will pour out his wrath on the earth.
He will send his Spirit in a judgment of fire that will destroy the wicked.
How will you avoid that wrath?
How will you survive that trial by ordeal?
The same way Noah did.

The same waters that destroyed the wicked saved Noah.
The same waters that destroyed Pharaoh’s army saved the Israelites.
Even so, the same Spirit and fire baptism that destroyed the power of sin, death and the devil,
saved Jesus.
Our righteous savior endured his fiery baptism on the cross,
as the Father poured out his wrath and judgment,
sustained and empowered by the Spirit of holiness
who had been given to him at the Jordan River.

This is how baptism saves you.
It saves you because in baptism you have the pledge of a good conscience toward God.
It is not through anything you have done.
It is because baptism is God’s work.

In Peter’s words, baptism saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ!
It is because he has passed the fiery ordeal that baptism saves us.
Your conscience has been cleansed because you have been united to Christ,
and therefore in your baptism
you have the pledge of a clean conscience toward God.
So when you are baptized, as the waters of judgment fall upon you,
as the Holy Spirit and fire are poured out upon you,
you endure that judgment through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Because HE has been vindicated,
you who belong to him are vindicated as well.
Because HE has gone to the right hand of the Father,
with angels, authorities and powers having been subjected to him,
therefore you need not fear the powers that are arrayed against you!

b. ...and Our Engagement to Be the Lord's

And finally, in baptism you are engaged to be the Lord's.

Think of a wedding ring.
A wedding ring is not a relationship.
But it *signifies* a relationship.
And, what is more, it *seals* the relationship:
“with this ring, I thee wed.”

Indeed, a wedding establishes a relationship that did not previously exist.
(Now, a wedding can be very simple – you don't need all the fancy stuff!)
But if a man and woman sleep together *before* the wedding,
they are sinning against God and each other.
But if they sleep together *after* the wedding,
they are loving God and each other.

What is it about a wedding that changes the character of the sexual act?
In the Bible there are no “church weddings”!
But what is common to all weddings in the Bible
is that there is a public union of the two.
Whether it is the formal marriage covenant drawn up
between Abraham's servant and Rebecca's family –
or the marriage feast at Cana – where our Lord turned the water to wine –
the wedding is always a public uniting of a man and a woman.

Why am I talking about weddings?

Because the wedding is a public ritual that changes the status of the persons involved.
If we say that about the wedding – which is *not* a sacrament –
how much more should we say that about *baptism* – which is a sacrament!

(Incidentally, the only reason why we do not call marriage a sacrament
is because marriage is not uniquely Christian.
It is a holy ordinance – but, like civil government, it was given by God to all people,
not just Christians)

The one who is baptized into the name of the Triune God
is marked as his.

Earlier in the chapter Peter quotes Psalm 34,

“the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer;
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

The preposition is the same in both cases.
It would be more accurate to say,
“the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous...
but the face of the Lord is on those who do evil.”

Peter’s point here (like the Psalmist before him)
is that God is just.
His eyes are on the righteous.
And his face is on the wicked.

The English translation makes it sound like God is choosing sides –
he is “for” the righteous and “against” the wicked.

The reason why you can have confidence in God
is not because God chooses sides – and God likes us better than he likes them!

No!

Your hope is that God is *just* –
and he has saved us through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And so Peter says,

“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh,
arm yourselves with the same way of thinking,
for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,
so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh
no longer for human passions but for the will of God.” (4:1-2)

Because we have endured the ordeal of baptism into Christ’s death,
we should not be surprised when we share the fiery trial of Christ’s sufferings (v12-13)

But we may take comfort that these sufferings are given to us to purify us.

For the one who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

Suffering is to detach you from your idolatries.

It is to show you the futility of all human passions,
and the beauty of the will of God.

And Peter says that your baptism is to point you down this road.

Let us walk patiently together in this way!

