

Committed to Baptism – Romans 6:1-11 (Pillars of the Local Church)

1. Intro

- a. Our current series is all about the foundations and pillars of the local church, the structure of what makes the church what it is.
- b. We have discussed commitments to the gospel, the one true God, the Scriptures, and to serving one another as Christ served.
- c. Today we will discuss something a little less obvious as a pillar of the church, at least less obvious than being committed to believing in one God and the gospel, to building your life with Scripture as your authority or following Jesus' example of serving others.
- d. Today we discuss a commitment to baptism.
- e. Read Romans 6:1-11
- f. A ceremony of faith that began two millennia ago with the beginning of the Christian church has become such a powerful image that even our culture can't help but work it into **movies**.
 - i. Shawshank
 - ii. The Matrix
 - iii. The Truman Show
 - iv. Forrest Gump
 - v. The Batman
- g. All of these movies and many more use the powerful imagery found in baptism, and that should tell us that this isn't just some religious tradition we do because it's always been done or simply because Jesus told us to (though that is a good reason in and of itself)
- h. Baptism is an incredibly vital part of what we are as a church (both local and universal)
- i. So let's discuss why – 2 parts: what is it, why is it important to us

2. What is Baptism?

- a. Sacrament or Ordinance
- b. What does it mean?
 - i. Salvation/Regeneration
 1. View of RCC
 2. Baptism necessary for salvation bc it causes regeneration
 - a. The act of baptism confers saving grace to the one baptised
 3. Key verses:
 - a. John 3:5 unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
 - b. Titus 3:5 he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy—through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.
 - c. Eph. 5:26 just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word.
 - d. 1 Pet. 3:21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a

good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

4. Rebuttal:

a. John 3:5 & Ez. 26:25-27

i. **25** I will also sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. **26** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. **27** I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.

ii. Picture is of spiritual washing of being filled with the Spirit in the days to come of the New Covenant (receive spiritual washing just as a spiritual new heart)

iii. Similar for Titus 3:5, “washing of regeneration” – it’s spiritual washing

iv. Same for Eph 5:26

b. What about 1 Peter 3:21?

i. Explicitly states that the physical act is not what is the main thing but that it requires ‘pledge of good conscience’

ii. Not only does this show that baptism does not have saving power in itself, it shows that what is truly needed for saving grace: inward exercise of faith in God

c. There is also plenty of narrative examples of people coming to saving faith where baptism is not mentioned

i. The most notable of these is perhaps the thief on the cross

d. All in all, you have to also use the whole of Scripture to interpret specific passages. The overwhelming evidence lies in favor of salvation being through faith alone in the NT. These passages must be seen through that lens

i. Further, to say that baptism is required for salvation/regeneration is similar to what Paul argued against in Galatians as he told those who tried to require circumcision in addition to Christ to be preaching “a different gospel” (1:6)

ii. After all, we read in Romans 10 that “If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” With no mention of baptism being required to apply that saving grace (this is one of many Scriptures like this)

ii. Covenantal Rite / Sign & Seal of Covenant

1. Baptism is the Christian parallel to Jewish circumcision
 - a. It is the outward sign of being part of the covenant community of God
2. It is both the initiation into the covenant and a sign of salvation
 - a. Benefits of salvation are absolute in case of adults baptized and for infants is conditional on their continuance in faith and vows made in their name
3. Key verses:
 - a. Genesis 17:7,10-11 I will confirm my covenant that is between me and you and your future offspring throughout their generations. It is a permanent covenant to be your God and the God of your offspring after you. ... This is my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you, which you are to keep: Every one of your males must be circumcised. You must circumcise the flesh of your foreskin to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and you.
 - b. Acts 2:39 For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.
 - c. Romans 4:13-18, Heb. 6:13-18, Gal. 3:13-18
 - d. Colossians 2:11-12 You were also circumcised in him with a circumcision not done with hands, by putting off the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, when you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses.
4. Rebuttal
 - a. It is true that we are all now grafted into the covenant promise of God to Abraham which is made clear in Romans 11.
 - i. But Paul is also clear in Romans that simply being descended from Israel does not guarantee you are part of the promise
 - ii. True circumcision is a circumcision of the heart, i.e. a spiritual circumcision
 1. Rom. 2:29 On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—by the Spirit, not the letter.
 - b. This means the covenant passages in Rom. Heb. Gal. apply in this way. They do not require an outward sign (i.e. circumcision, baptism) bc the main concern is that of spiritual regeneration
 - i. It seems that the NT says that circumcision as the sign of the covenant is not to be replaced by another outward act (baptism) but an internal act

- ii. Not that circumcision has simply passed but that the whole framework on which it was based has passed
- c. Acts 2:39 is a similar response, and further you can see that the verse says 'as many as our Lord will call', meaning not everyone in families of believers
- d. Col. 2:11-12 present the most powerful case for this view
 - i. Does this passage put circumcision of the heart in close relation with baptism? Yes
 - ii. But let us look carefully: there is an emphasis on the fact that we were circumcised in Christ "with a circumcision not done with hands"... an odd thing to say if baptism is supposed to supplant circumcision
 - iii. Paul speaks here, once more, of a circumcision of the heart (flesh) where our old self is cut off and we are now in Christ
 - iv. He adds "when you were baptized", sure, but he is not equating baptism with circumcision in that it is the replacement of it. That would require reading more into the text than is actually there. Inferring something that is not explicitly stated.
- e. Overall, the ultimate problem with this view is the major difference between the old covenant with Abraham/Israel and the new covenant of Christ
 - i. Let us be careful here. The new covenant does not nullify or replace the old. It instead continues it and perfects it.
 - 1. E.g. It is not that sacrifice is no longer required to have right standing with God, but that Jesus has become the perfect and ultimate sacrifice on our behalf
 - ii. Applying this to the 'sign of the covenant community', we must ask, is this something from the old covenant that must continue in the new?
 - 1. When we look at Gen. 17, we see that not only all males in a household were to be circumcised: this included not only the children but also servants that had been bought by them and foreigners in their house.
 - 2. So, while true circumcision (one of the heart) was still required in the old covenant, no attempt was made to determine the spiritual state of the person circumcised.
 - 3. In other words, the covenant community in the OT was determined by physical means.

Whether you were physically descended from Jewish parents or physically belonged to a Jewish household, you were given a physical sign of circumcision and became a part of the physical covenant community of God

4. In the NT, we do not see anything like this. Instead what we see is a spiritual body, the church, that people enter into voluntarily and by being spiritually born again and having saving faith.
5. One entered the covenant community before through physical birth. One enters the church through spiritual rebirth. There are many parallels here...
 - a. Manna – Jesus, true bread of life
 - b. Water from rock – Jesus, water of life
 - c. Temple – bodies indwelt by Spirit
 - d. Sacrifices – spiritual sac. In Christ
 - e. Land – heavenly place
 - f. Physical descendants of Abraham – spiritual descendants of Abraham
6. All of these physical representations were only “a shadow of what was to come; the substance is Christ” Col. 2:17

iii. Symbolic / Token of Salvation

1. This is the view we hold as a church. Believer’s baptism
2. This view sees baptism as an outward symbol/indication/token of the inward change in a believer, namely their salvation and regeneration in Christ.
3. Baptism is a ceremony where one is able to publicly declare their laying down of their old self and beginning their new life in Christ before a church body that is able to both celebrate this occasion and welcome the one baptized into the body
4. We are not regenerated or saved by the act
 - a. The act is a testimony to the change that has already taken place in one’s heart
5. Nor are we given citizenship (or initiated into) in God’s kingdom, the church, as a result of our baptism.
 - a. Baptism is also a testimony to and symbol of this; it does not procure it in and of itself
6. **Wedding Ring Ceremony**
7. This is all not to say that baptism is not necessary at all, just that it is not necessary for salvation or to belong to God’s kingdom

- a. It is in a sense necessary because Jesus himself ordained/commanded us to do it – why we call it an ordinance
 - 8. Baptism is an act of commitment and faith
 - a. It is not required for true faith to exist, but it is a natural accompaniment to faith
 - b. Just as James 2 tells us that Abraham’s faith was made complete (or proved to be true) by his obedience in offering up Isaac, so our baptism completes our faith/salvation
 - c. This is why over and over in the book of Acts, we see people that come to faith being urged to be baptized
 - c. Who gets baptized?
 - i. Infants? Paedobaptism
 - 1. RCC
 - a. Many similarities in arguments with reformed/protestant traditions
 - b. Specifically, if baptism is required for salvation, then it makes sense for infants to be baptized so that if they pass away, they will be covered by God’s grace through their baptism
 - 2. Reformed/Protestant
 - a. Argument of children being circumcised so now they are baptized...already addressed
 - b. What about whole households being baptized?
 - i. Acts 10:48, 11:14, 16:14-15,31-34, 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16
 - ii. First of all, none of these passages are completely decisive for one position or another.
 - 1. At best they can say the household *may* have included children
 - iii. Second, we must note that in all but one of these passages, the baptism of the household is mentioned alongside the reception of the gospel by the household
 - 1. Only one does not mention the household believing alongside baptism and that’s Lydia in Acts 16:14-15
 - a. But it doesn’t say there were infants in her household and it certainly isn’t conclusive evidence for infant baptism
 - c. We must ask, what does baptism do if infants should be baptized?
 - i. These protestant traditions do not want to say that it causes regeneration like RCC, nor that it symbolizes regeneration in the infant that has already occurred
 - ii. We must conclude that for them it symbolizes possible or probable regeneration/salvation in the future of the infant

- iii. The problem is that the NT simply never represents baptism like this in any way
 - ii. Believers
 - 1. Baptism in the NT is always spoken of as being a sign of having been born again, cleansed from sin, and beginning the new Christian life
 - a. It simply does not talk about baptism in any other way
 - b. Nor are there any clear cases of one being baptized before exercising faith
 - 2. This is why we believe that baptism is to be administered on those who have given a believable profession of faith
 - a. An infant simply is not able to do this
 - b. But note, it is not called 'adult baptism' but 'believers' because we do believe that young children can and do come to true saving faith
 - d. What is the mode of baptism?
 - i. Affusion (pouring) / Aspersions (sprinkling) / Immersion
 - ii. Put simply, immersion seems to be the preferred method of baptism, but other methods are not wrong to perform when necessary
 - iii. Based on:
 - 1. Greek word 'baptizo' typically means 'to dip/plunge under water'
 - 2. Cases where it seems clear that one has gone into and come out of the water: Jesus' baptism, Peter and Ethiopian eunuch
 - 3. It is most representative of what baptism represents as said in Rom. 6
 - iv. Surely there were cases in Scripture where enough water for immersion was not available when a baptism took place, and the same is true today.
 - 1. Other forms are valid, but immersion is preferred
 - e. Baptism is a symbolic ceremony in the life of a believer that has professed faith as a testimony before a body of believers to represent the washing away of sins and their new life in Christ as a part of his kingdom, the church.
 - f. Whatever mode, baptism is of great importance... why?
3. Why is Baptism Important for Us?
 - a. In ancient Rome, a Roman soldier would perform what ancient Roman historian Tacitus called **the sacramentum**.
 - i. This was a pledge of allegiance the soldier gave to the emperor.
 - ii. Early church father Tertullian (born mid 2nd century) contrasted the Roman sacramentum with baptism which he dubbed the Christian sacramentum.
 - iii. When a believer in ancient Rome was baptized into Christ, becoming a part of his kingdom, the church, it was an act of sedition against the Roman empire
 - 1. It was proclaiming to all that your allegiance was no longer to an earthly empire but to a heavenly one
 - iv. In many places of the world, baptism, like in ancient Rome, is still an act of sedition/rebellion that can result in your death
 - v. We are privileged that this is not the case for us, and we should not take for granted the importance of baptism in the life of the church.

b. Baptism has spiritual significance for the individual and the church.

- c. While Baptism has no power in and of itself, it is not a *mere* symbol
- i. Must not react so strongly to RCC belief that we say there is no spiritual benefit that comes with baptism
 - ii. Let's look again at Colossians 2:12 when you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.
 - iii. While there is no magical property to baptism, this verse certainly implies that when one has true faith accompanying a baptism, God is working in the life of that believer
 1. Increasing their faith
 2. Reinforcing knowledge that power of sin is dead
 3. Increasing experience of new resurrection life
 - iv. Not only that, but the body of believers there to witness the baptism are also encouraged and inspired by the Holy Spirit in these same things as they watch

v. Think of singing songs together in church

- d. Baptism is a communal experience of a new Exodus
- i. Not only does God work in our hearts when faith accompanies baptism, we also experience a new Exodus in our lives
 - ii. 1 Cor. 10:1-4
 1. Now I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.
 - iii. Just as God's people went through the waters of the Red Sea, entering as slaves and exiting as a free people,
 1. we enter the waters of baptism slaves to sin and this world and rise free from sin and part of God's kingdom, his church
 2. 1 Cor. 12:12-13
 - a. For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink.
 - iv. God's people went through the waters way back when he set them free from Egypt, and so many Christians before us have gone through the waters of baptism symbolizing their new life in Christ before us
 1. So as we go through the waters of baptism, we experience the power of that symbol and come out as a part of the body
 - v. The Christian experience is never simply an individual experience, it is always part of a body of believers as we bear one another's burdens, rejoice with one another, weep with one another.

1. Baptism is the beginning of this as we all rejoice just like the Philippian jailer who, as Acts 16 says, “rejoiced with his entire household because he believed”

e. If you have not been baptized, you should!

4. Conclusion

- a. Why is baptism such a powerful symbol?
- b. Recall that Romans 6 says we were baptized into Jesus, into his death
- c. Matthew 3:13-17
 - i. Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?” Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John allowed him to be baptized.
- d. John resisted bc his baptism as Mark 1:4 says was “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”
 - i. Jesus was without sin. But notice what Jesus says
 - ii. What does he mean by fulfill all righteousness?
- e. The answer is In John 1:29 “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”
 - i. While Jesus was sinless, he identified with all the sin of the world.
 - ii. His baptism is his first step toward the cross where he wouldn’t just be humbled to the point of being associated with the sin of us all in baptism, but would literally take on the sin of the world
 - iii. And in dying for our sin, would fulfill all righteousness, allowing us to take on his righteousness and be right with God
 - iv. 2 Cor. 5:21
 1. He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

f. Baptism is powerful because in Jesus our sins are dead and we are made new.

- g. We have a new life to live in Christ, so do not become stuck in the wilderness like the people of Israel after they passed through the waters of the Red Sea
 - i. When we pass through the waters of baptism, we must leave behind our old life and take hold of the new life we are given

h. Remember what your baptism means.

- i. And because of Jesus, you have the Spirit in you just as he, and the Father calls you his son or daughter just like he did Jesus

Supporting Scriptures:

- Commands to Baptize: Matt. 28:19, 3:2, 6; Acts 2:38, 22:16
- Explanation/Illustrations: 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Peter 3:21; Titus 3:5; Colossians 2:11-12 (circumcision replaced by baptism); Mark 16:16; John 3:5 (Ez. 36:25-27)
- Belief w/ no baptism mentioned: Luke 23:43; Acts 3:17-26, 16:30-31; Romans 10:9-13
- People Baptized when saved: Acts 2:41, 8:12, 36-38, 18:8, 19:1-7, 22:16
- Households Baptized when saved: Acts 10:48, 11:14, 16:15,31-34, 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16
- Misc. Children: Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:16-17; Matt. 18:6, 19:14, 1 John 2:14
- Covenantal passages: Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39; Rom. 4:13-18; Heb. 6:13-18; Gal. 3:13-18
 - With Children: Deut. 29:10-13
- No more circumcision: Acts 15:1-2, 21:21; Gal. 2:3-5, 5:2-6, 6:12-15
- Mode of baptism: John 3:23; Mark 1:10; Acts 8:36-39

References:

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- Wayne Grudem – Systematic Theology
- Millard Erikson – Christian Theology
- John Frame – Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology
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- Vern Poythress – Baptism of Jesus: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-baptism-of-jesus/>