

BAPTISM

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND, BASIS AND BENEFITS



I am deeply indebted to Dr. Bryan Chapell's booklet "Why Do We Baptize Infants?" for the basic structure of these messages on baptism. My notes rely heavily on his excellent outline found there.

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Romans 6:3-5

³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Don't You Know?

Paul begins this text with a rhetorical question, "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" Paul is responding to the question posed in previous verses: "If grace covers sin, more sin means more grace right? So shouldn't we sin more?" Paul's response is grace doesn't just change what we do, it changes who we are. We're given a new identity in Christ. And we should **know** this. Do you?

In the following verses, Paul keeps at it, "We know, we know, we know..." 1) We know our old self was crucified so that we'd no longer be enslaved to sin, 2) We know that since Christ was raised from the dead, death has no dominion over Him. 3) We know if we are united with Him in a death like His, we'll certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. Paul is saying there are objective truths believers **ought to know**.

But how can we know? What does Paul point to as assurance that these truths are reliable? **Baptism**. Can you see it? If you're conflicted in knowing who you are in Christ, Paul says consider your baptism, because it stands to bear witness to the immovable realities of God's grace. No sacrament actually transmits the grace of salvation. But like a lag bolt in a mountain face, it assures us that we are anchored to sturdy truths.

Part 3: The Benefits of Covenant Baptism

TEXT: ROMANS 6:3-5 (ESV)

My Wooden Box of Truth:

In my office I keep a small wooden box containing some items of personal value. Among them, I've got one of my brother's dog tags, the silver promise ring I gave Lisa in college, a smooth stone from the brook of Elah and the plastic hospital bracelet I was given when our first child was born. The bracelet reads, "Boy, Ramsey Lisa, 1/26/00, room 2130, #A55584, Father." As I think about how to express the benefits of baptism for the believer, perhaps this bracelet can help. Like baptism, it is simple—even a bit pedestrian in appearance. But what it says is of inestimable worth because it marks my new reality and verifies my identity, confirming certain unalterable truths.

Benefit #1- Marking My New Reality:

That hospital bracelet marks a new reality. In room 2130 of St. John's Mercy Hospital in Creve Coeur, Missouri, on January 26, 2000, my wife Lisa gave birth to a son, our son Christopher. I became a father. This event really happened and I've got proof.

Do you ever feel like you're always starting back at zero; like every day you've got to strive to take hold of something that lets you know you have purpose and worth? Beloved, baptism speaks to how we're to regard ourselves, not in some pie-in-the-sky sentimental sort of way. Baptism doesn't flutter around this universe as some warm hope floating on an unpredictable breeze for you to snatch out of the air when you're feeling down, if you can catch it. Baptism objects to this, "Don't you **KNOW** baptism says you've been united with Christ, and belong to Him and nothing can snatch you from His hand? Don't you?"

How does Baptism mark our new reality? **As a ceremonial washing**, it assures us we're forgiven. Baptism is a pledge that we're pardoned in Christ. And since it is once-and-for-all, baptism insists we need no further cleansing to be acceptable before God. **As a ceremonial pouring**, baptism marks the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—which reminds us that God has not left us alone, but has given us help in growing in spiritual maturity. It marks our formal entry into God's family on earth, the church. It marks being admitted into a state of favor before God. And it marks our being an heir of the Kingdom of God.

That bracelet is a tangible expression of a much greater reality. I have a son now. I am a father. And I will be from that day forward, by the grace of God. And I hold on to it in case my confidence is shaken, in case I doubt my worthiness, and for when, God forbid, distance may come between me and my son. I belong to him and he belongs to me. That is my new reality.

A WORD FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN: Of what benefit is baptism to parents who have their children baptized? 1) When a parent has their child baptized, they demonstrate all they have is devoted to the Lord Jesus, even their precious children. 2) In doing so, they publicly proclaim their own faith in God, and that they will follow Him in the raising of their child. 3) When they do this, the entire church is encouraged to follow in their example, trusting in God's covenant grace alone to save us. And they covenant with them to teach this child about Christ.

In baptism, God reminds us His grace isn't based on our merit, but on His mercy. So in times of pride or shame as parents, we're called back to the reality of the necessity and provision of grace—and to claim them for ourselves and for our children.

What benefit is baptism to that child who doesn't remember it? They're given a godly example of what devotion to God looks like as their parents explain how they've entrusted them to the Lord. They grow up in a home where God is honored and feared, and they have the promise of their church to support their parents in caring for them. This means for them they are learning about the world as they're learning about its Maker.

But above all (and I want to say this clearly because things like this are not said nearly enough), because God is a covenant God whose promises extend throughout the generations, the expected, most ordinary journey of a baptized child growing up with believing parents is that they will come to faith. In other words, the broadest and most effective method of evangelism in the Bible is the home. God instructs parents to talk with their children about God when they walk, when they lay down at night and when they rise. ^(Deut 6:7)

And our expectation should be that God means to call them to Himself through it. Some might say, "Isn't this presuming upon the Lord?" My answer is, You bet it is! But not in the way we presume on people. We're presuming God is a God of means and purpose—and that He instructs us to tell our kids about Him because He wants them to know Him. And we presume His word is true that says even faith is a gift—and so He must give that too. I'm not just saying we *can* presume on God to save our kids. I'm saying we *MUST!* They'll find Him no other way. So then, the tender question here is, What if your child appears to be rejecting the faith? What if you fear you have too?

Benefit #2- Verifying My Identity:

This bracelet also verifies my identity. The hospital wants to make sure that Christ leaves with his real parents. So what does the bracelet say to verify he's with me? I'll tell you what it doesn't say. It doesn't say, "See if they have the same eyes." Or "Only this boy's real dad would love him as much as this man does." What it says is "A55584." Lisa wore one as well, and Chris wore one on his wrist and on his ankle. All four said "A55584."

Baptism carries the same benefit as that bracelet, which doesn't demand that I articulate the depth of my love for my son. It's not subjective. Since I wear bracelet A55584, the hospital staff knows who I am, the father of Boy Ramsey. What is striking about this is how brutally **OBJECTIVE** it is. I don't have to show myself worthy to be Chris's dad. I just have to match with his numbers. The numbers verify that I am who I say I am.

It may sound like I'm suggesting you get a free ticket to heaven so long as you're baptized. No. I'm saying baptism is verification for the true believer that they are a child of God. When Chris was born, God had not made me a good or wise father. But He had made me a father. Baptism doesn't verify that we **deserve** grace or that we're completely victorious over sin or that we've proven personal piety. In other words, baptism does not identify us as being particularly **skilled** at living the Christian life.

What it does is objectively identify us as belonging to God. Can you see the benefit of this? How many times have you failed morally or broke faith with your responsibility before God? How many times have you returned to some familiar sin after swearing it off for the millionth time and wondered to yourself, "Who am I kidding? How could God maintain a love for me?"

Martin Luther, who struggled intensely with such thoughts, saw this as a direct fight against the devil. When he felt accusations mount against the genuineness of his faith, he'd shake his fist at the ceiling and this is what he'd say: "I have been baptized! I have been baptized!" He was on to something. He knew he couldn't appeal to his performance to reassure his standing with God. So he appealed to his baptism. He wasn't the only one, either.

John Calvin said believers, "whenever they are troubled by a consciousness of their faults, may venture to remind themselves of their baptism, that from it they may be confirmed in assurance of that sole and perpetual cleansing we have in Christ's blood." We can't prove we belong to God by subjectively by pointing to our good works or wisdom. An **objective reality**—a barren cross, an empty tomb, a risen Savior and a God-given faith in that Savior to cleanse us—that's what gives believers our identity. Baptism **insists** if Christ's blood has cleansed us, we are clean.

Baptism as a Force to Reckon With:

Baptism, then, carries weight as a force to be reckoned with, and the believer has a solemn responsibility to do just that—to remember your baptism; to examine, meditate on and defer to what your baptism tells you is true. Why, because **baptism stands as a witness for you**. It points to the saving work of Christ and the irrevocable promise of grace for the child of God. And it begs this question: how does the credibility of **this** witness stand up to the others testifying against you?

Baptism is a seal and as a seal, like the notary stamp, baptism is more for the benefit of the recipient of the promises than for the giver. I don't believe baptism has some secret meaning in the mind of God that is incomprehensible to mankind. He means for it to be infused with meaning for us. He means for us to return to this moment in our hearts as long as we live—to remember we needed to be cleansed, and we were... that we were orphans needing to be claimed and adopted into a family where we were made sons and daughters. And we were!

At your baptism, a lag bolt was drilled deep into the face of the mountain of evidence testifying on your behalf. Lash yourself to it. Know that its anchor holds. "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." ^(Eph 1:4) Baptism insists God's faithfulness to you rests upon **His** covenant promise to **take and keep** a people as His own in an everlasting way, and to reconcile them to Himself through the life, death and resurrection of His only Son Jesus Christ who lived and died in your place. You cannot break that.

This is tremendously comforting. Baptism insists you are who God says you are. So parents, as your children struggle to find themselves in their faith, know it has never been up to them to hold on to God. He holds on to them. He is patient, loving, and good. Take comfort in this because He does the same for you. It's why when we baptize children we ask the parents, "Do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation, as you do for your own?" Don't you know only He can do this? Don't you?

Our Father knows us well. He knows we're prone to believe the genuineness of our faith hinges on how faithful we're feeling at the moment. He knows we tend to believe the weight of our salvation rests on our shoulders, and we're buckling under that burden. So He mounts our defense, built on the objective fact that in Christ our sins are washed away and by His grace we're adopted into His family. And our baptism is entered into evidence, which we behold and then have to confess, "Christ is not my prosecutor. He is my defense. I have been baptized!"