

GROWTH RESOURCES

WHY BAPTISM IS IMPORTANT

(Col 2:8) See to it that no one carries you off as spoil or makes you yourselves captive by his so-called philosophy and intellectualism and vain deceit (idle fancies and plain nonsense), following human tradition (men's ideas of the material rather than the spiritual world), just crude notions following the rudimentary and elemental teachings of the universe and disregarding (the teaching of) Christ (the Messiah). (Col 2:9) For in Him the whole fullness of Deity (the Godhead) continues to dwell in bodily form (giving complete expression of the divine nature). (Col 2:10) And you are in Him, made full and having come to fullness of life [in Christ you too are filled with the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and reach full spiritual stature]. And He is the Head of all rule and authority [of every angelic principality and power]. (Col 2:11) In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, but in a [spiritual] circumcision [performed by] Christ by stripping off the body of the flesh (the whole corrupt, carnal nature with its passions and lusts). (Col 2:12) [Thus you were circumcised when] you were buried with Him in [your] baptism, in which you were also raised with Him [to a new life] through [your] faith in the working of God [as displayed] when He raised Him up from the dead. (Col 2:13) And you who were dead in trespasses and in the circumcision of your flesh (your sensuality, your sinful carnal nature), [God] brought to life together with [Christ], having [freely] forgiven us all our transgressions. (Col 2:14) Having cancelled and blotted out and wiped away the handwriting of the note (bond) with its legal decrees and demands which was in force and stood against us (hostile to us). This [note with its regulations, decrees, and demands] He set aside and cleared completely out of our way by nailing it to [His] cross. (Col 2:15) [God] disarmed the principalities and powers that were ranged against us and made a bold display and public example of them, in triumphing over them in Him and in it (the cross).

WE FOCUS ON THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

- The tone and the truth that I want to set first and foremost—is that baptism gets its meaning and its importance from the
 - death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in our place and for our sins, and
 - from his triumph over death in the resurrection that
 - guarantees our new and everlasting life.
- Baptism has meaning and importance only because the death and resurrection of Jesus are infinitely important for our rescue from the wrath of God and our everlasting joy in his glorious presence. That's the note that must be struck first.

We are not mainly talking about *religious ritual* here. We are not mainly talking about *church tradition* here. We are mainly talking about Jesus Christ and his magnificent work of salvation in dying for our sins and rising for our justification.

- Talking about baptism means talking about how Jesus taught us to express our faith in Jesus and his great salvation.

So don't have small thoughts as we begin. Have large thoughts. Great thoughts about great reality—

- Jesus Christ, the Son of God,
- crucified to bear the sins of millions and
- raised to give them everlasting life in the new heavens and the new earth.

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT BAPTISM

We believe that baptism is

- an ordinance of the Lord
- by which those who have repented and come to faith
- express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection,
- by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God,

- and an emblem of burial and cleansing,
- signifying death to the old life of unbelief,
- and purification from the pollution of sin.

1. BAPTISM IS AN ORDINANCE OF THE LORD

What I mean by this is that the Lord Jesus commanded it – He ordained it – in a way that would make it an ongoing practice of the church. We find this most explicitly in *(Matthew 28:19-20) Go then and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matt 28:20) Teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you all the days (perpetually, uniformly, and one every occasion), to the [very] close and consummation of the age. “Amen (so let it be).*

- “Make disciples” is the main verb: “Having gone, make disciples of all nations.”
- The defining participles are “baptizing them” and “teaching them”.
- So the church is commanded to do this for all disciples.
- Making disciples of all nations includes baptizing them.
- And the time frame is defined by the promise of Christ’s help in verse 20: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The promise of help is for as long as this age lasts.
- So the command He promises to help us with is as long as this age lasts.
- So baptism is a command, and ordinance, of the Lord Jesus to be performed in making disciples until Christ returns at the end of the age.

2. BAPTISM EXPRESS UNION WITH CHRIST

The clearest teaching on this is in *(Romans 6:3-4) Are you ignorant of the fact that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? (V.4) We were buried therefore with Him by the baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious [power] of the Father, so we too might [habitually] live and behave in newness of life.*

- In the wider context of Romans, I think it would be a mistake to say that water-baptism is the means of our being united to Christ.
 - In Romans, faith is the means by which we are united to Christ and justified.
 - But we show this faith—we say this faith and signify this faith and symbolize this faith—with the act of baptism.
 - Faith unites to Christ; baptism symbolizes the union.
- An analogy would be saying, “With this ring I thee wed.” When we say that we don’t mean that the ring or the putting of the ring on the finger is what makes us married. No, it shows the covenant and symbolizes the covenant, but the covenant-making vows make the marriage. So it is with faith and baptism.
- So similarly Paul is saying, “With this baptism you are united to Christ.” And the point we are focusing on here is that
 - we are united to him in his death and burial and resurrection.
 - “We 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.”
- So the imagery of baptism is death, burial, and resurrection. Christ was buried and raised to new life.
- In baptism, by faith, we are united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.
- Baptism dramatically portrays what happened spiritually when you received Christ:
 - Your old self of unbelief and rebellion and idolatry died, and
 - a new you of faith and submission and treasuring Christ came into being.
 - That’s what you confess to the world and to heaven when you are baptized.

3. BAPTISM IS IMMERSION IN WATER

- Third, we believe this expression of union with Christ in death and resurrection happens *“by being immersed in water.”*
- The clearest evidence for this are the words of **Romans 6:3-4** describe the act of **baptism as burial and rising from the dead.**
- This is most naturally understood to mean that **you are buried under water and then come out of from the water to signify rising from the grave.**
- The word *baptism* in Greek means *dip* or *immerse*. And most scholars agree that **this is the way the early church practiced baptism.** Only much later does the practice of sprinkling or pouring emerge, as far as we can tell from the evidence.
- **There are a few other pointers to immersion besides the meaning of the word and the imagery of death and burial.** In *(Acts 8:37-38)*, the Ethiopian eunuch comes to faith while riding with Philip in his chariot and says, *“See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”* Philip agrees and it says, *“He commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.”*
 - That they **“went down into the water”** makes most sense if they were going down to immerse him, not to sprinkle him. Similarly it says in *(John 3:23)*, *“John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, for there was an abundance of water there.”* You don’t need plentiful water if you are simply sprinkling. You just need a jar.
- So there is really very little dispute that this was the way the early church baptized. They did it by immersing the new believer in water to signify his burial and resurrection with Jesus.

4. BAPTISM IS IN THE TRINITARIAN NAME

Baptism means **doing this immersing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.** That’s what Jesus said in *(Matthew 28:19)*: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

- This means that not just any immersing is baptism. **There is a holy appeal to God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to be present in this act and make it true and real in what it says about their work in redemption.**
- **There is no salvation without the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**
- **When we call on their name, we depend upon them and honor them and say that this act is because of them and by them and for them.**

5. BAPTISM IS FOR BELIEVERS ONLY

- Baptism is an expression of faith and therefore only for believers.
- **“We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which *those who have repented and come to faith* express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection.”**

- So our understanding of the New Testament is that the **meaning of baptism** includes the fact that **it is an expression of the faith of the one being baptized.**
- **It is not something that an unbeliever can do. It is not something than an infant can do. That is why we don't baptize infants.**

(Colossians 2:11-12) In him [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ [so Paul speaks of circumcision in "made-without-hands" terms. Circumcision today has meaning for the Christian, not as a physical act, but as a spiritual act of Christ in which he cuts away the old sinful body and makes us new. It is virtually synonymous with the new birth. Then he speaks of baptism], having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

- So the image of spiritual circumcision is closely connected with the image of baptism: "You were circumcised . . . having been baptized . . ." The old "body of flesh" was cut away in conversion; you died and rose again in baptism.

THE ARGUMENT FOR INFANT BAPTISM

It's probably right, therefore, to say that baptism has replaced circumcision as the mark of being part of the people of God.

- In the Old Testament men were circumcised to signify membership in the old-covenant people of God, and
- in the New Testament men *and women* are baptized to signify membership in the new-covenant people of God.

That has led many Christians to assume that, since circumcision was given to the male children of the people of the old covenant, therefore baptism should be given to the male and female children of the people of the new covenant. That's the gist/essence of the argument.

WHY IT DOES NOT WORK

- But textually and covenantally, it doesn't work. Look carefully at "*Colossians 2:12. . . having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith . . .*"
- The words *through faith* are all important on this issue. Paul says that when you come up out of the water signifying being raised with Christ this is happening *through faith*. Verse 12: ". . . in which [baptism] you were also raised with him *through faith*."
- Baptism as a drama of death and resurrection with Christ gets its meaning from the faith that it expresses.
- In baptism you are "raised with him *through faith*."

THROUGH FAITH!

- Paul shows the same way of thinking about baptism and faith in

(Galatians 3:26-27) "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

- We become sons of God through faith and no other way. Then he says, "for"—connecting this way of becoming sons of God with baptism—"for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."
- That explanation with the word *for* only makes sense if baptism is understood as an acting out of faith. *Gal 3:26-27*

- Or to turn it around: **Since you were baptized into Christ, therefore we know that in Christ you are all sons of God through faith. Why? Because that is what baptism means: You were baptized into Christ by faith.**
- **Baptism without faith was inconceivable to Paul.**

NEW-COVENANT MEMBERSHIP BY SPIRITUAL BIRTH

- **So when the shift happened in redemptive history from the old covenant to the new covenant and from circumcision to baptism, there was a shift from an ethnic focus on Israel and only males being given the sign of membership in the people, to a spiritual focus on the church of all nations with both male and female being given the sign of membership in the people, namely, baptism.**
- **Membership in the new-covenant people of God is not by physical birth, but by spiritual birth. That new birth happens by the word of God, the Gospel.** *(1 Peter 1:23-25) You have been regenerated (born again), not from a mortal origin (seed, sperm), but from one that is immortal by the ever living and lasting Word of God. (V.24) For all flesh (mankind) is like grass, and all its glory (honour) like (the) flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower drops off. (v.25) But the Word of the Lord (divine instruction, the Gospel) endures forever. And this Word is the good news which was preached to you).*
- **Therefore, the church should be composed not of the believers and their infants, but believers only. And the sign of membership in the new covenant people is not a sign for infants but a sign for believers.**

MEMBERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

- **So we can see how the meaning of baptism is woven together also with membership in the people of God.**
- **And since the local church is an expression of that people, baptism is closely connected to membership in the local church.** To become a full member of the church you have to be baptized. It is not about religion or rituals, but about becoming part of the body of Christ through your faith.
- **In the New Testament, being a Christian, being baptized, belonging to the new-covenant people of God, and being a member of a local church were linked together.** If you tried to pull one of those out (not a Christian, or not baptized, or not in the new-covenant people, or not a member of local church), it would have made no sense. They all belonged together.

SO BAPTISM IS IMPORTANT

- It was **uncompromisingly commanded** by the Lord Jesus.
- It was **universally administered** to Christians entering the early church.
- It was **uniquely connected** to conversion as an **unrepeatable** expression of saving faith.



If you would like to speak to someone about your situation, we would love to help you and pray with you. Please contact the El Shaddai FGC Offices or you can email us at info@taniab.co.za