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# **Title: The Entrance into Community - Baptism**

**Texts: Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 2:38-41; Romans 6:1-4**

*Speaker: Pastor Chad Bresson*

**Introduction** Last week, you heard from this pulpit that I was considered at one time to be quote: “some kind of heretic”. Tonight, at the conclusion of this sermon, some of you may find yourself in agreement with that assessment. :-)

This may be among the most difficult subjects we tackle in this pulpit. There are any number of reasons for this. While baptism is explicitly taught and expounded in scripture, there’s also an element of vagueness in regards to its practice in the church. Thus, the history of baptism in the church is characterized by two thousand years of arguments and divisions in the church. And, because the baptism experience is intensely personal, it can be intensely emotional. Yet the Bible considers baptism so important, we should not and can not shy away from proclaiming those Biblical truths concerning baptism. We will not be reticent in forming a biblically informed conviction about baptism here at the Chapel.

And at the outset, because of what I’ve just stated, I appeal to you to pay attention and listen closely. Some of you may hear what I say tonight to be affirming those historic errors over against which we have confessed our faith and in which we have covenanted together. Let me assure you before you hear it, that what you think you heard isn’t what you heard.

There are two realities playing into the possibility of being misheard: the first is that those historic errors, whether it be Roman Catholic, Anglican, Church of Christ, or Presbyterian, are based on a grain of truth. Too often, I believe the case we make from the biblical text for our position is overstated in the sense that many of these errors are outright dismissed as if they had nothing to do with the Bible. Too often I have heard, in the context of this baptism discussion, one of our own baptist friends say: “where do they find that in the Bible?” or “what Bible are they reading?” There’s no small sense of befuddlement when such Baptists are eventually confronted by those who can and do defend their error from the scriptures. We do not want to make this mistake.

The second reality provides the background and context for the first... and that is... much of what we have come to believe about baptism and how we read our scriptures is tainted by an overreaction to those grave errors. To quote Colin Smith, the Evangelical Free Church pastor who was mentored in the same Scottish church as Allistair Begg, quote -- “in reacting against the errors of churches that have taught that baptism saves you, we run into the opposite danger of emptying baptism of all its meaning and significance... in our concern to make clear that baptism does not save us, we’ve become in danger of saying that baptism doesn’t do anything for us.” Endquote. So, in a sense, we live in a state of denial. Many of the large churches around us here either have large segments of their congregations who claim to be Christians and yet are not baptized, or have many who are baptized with no appreciation for its significance to their church life. The approach to

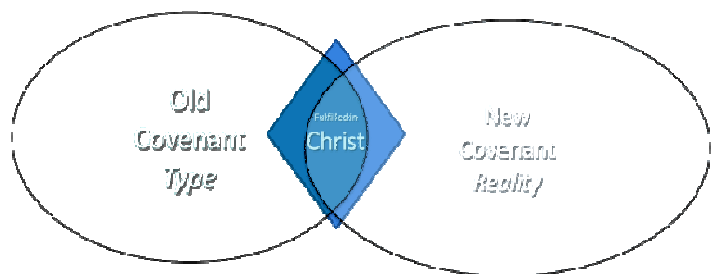
baptism is nonchalant. Our approach, because of what the scriptures say about baptism, cannot be likewise.

With those two things in mind, let me say from the very outset that I affirm and we here at the Chapel affirm salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And there's nothing I'm going to say tonight that will deny those truths. There is no magic in the act of baptism. It is faith alone through which we appropriate those benefits of salvation that have been procured for us by Christ. There is no regenerating power in the baptismal tub. The waters of baptism do not unite us to Christ. It is the resurrected Christ who, by His Spirit, regenerates us and unites us to himself. So, whatever we say about baptism, let us make sure that we are clear that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Hopefully, this does not sound like a disclaimer. It is not meant to be so. In fact, baptism, rightly understood, speaks to this salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. More on that in a minute.

Before we jump into our thoughts on baptism, I thought it would be good to quickly review a couple of graphics that Pastor Greg presented to us last week, in helping us understand the relationship between Old Covenant types and New Covenant realities. Seeing these again this week will help us better understand Baptism and its relationship to the Old Covenant types and shadows. This is important because most of the erroneous beliefs about baptism exist because there has been incorrect thinking about the connection between baptism and the Old Covenant.

## Relationship – Old and New Covenants

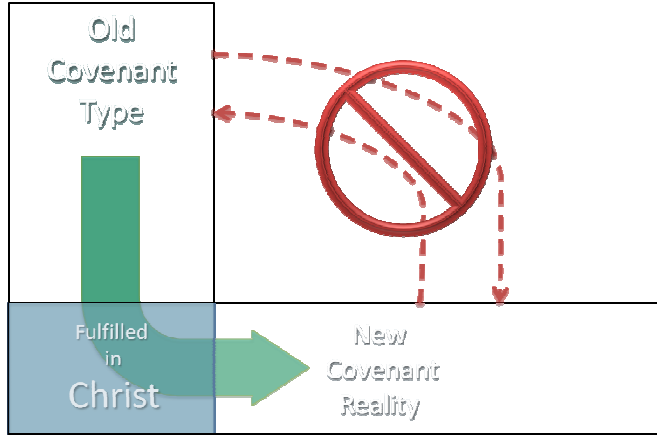
Remember, this is how the Bible presents the account of the redemptive story, from Genesis to Revelation. Not only is this how the Bible presents the redemptive story, this is how the Bible speaks of history.



The first circle represents the Old Covenant type or symbol as it is explained by the Bible or as it unfolds in history. Then, Christ appears on the world stage of history and fulfills those symbols and types. Christ is that fundamental bridge between the Old Covenant and New Covenant. He is the ultimate anti-type or fulfillment of all of the Old Testament shadows. It is Christ who is the substance and reality of all that the Old Covenant shadowed and portrayed. Now, as history continues to unfold, the New Covenant church continues the fulfillment of the Old Testament shadows in Christ. The church exists in the reality of the antitype, toward which those things in the Old Covenant were pointing to.

## Flow – Old and New Covenants

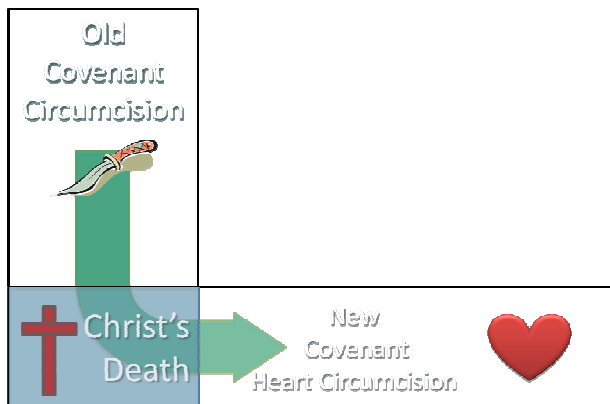
The second graphic is also helpful in understanding the unfolding of revelation and history in the Bible. This shows the flow from type and shadow to antitype and reality through Christ.



Remember how Pastor Greg pointed out the errors of jumping back and forth between the Old Covenant types and New Covenant realities without going through Christ’s fulfillment. “You can’t get there from here” is an apt way of describing all sorts of errors that plague the way we understand the scriptures. We want to go through Christ in understanding the Old Testament types from a New Covenant perspective. We do not want to move back and forth between the Old and New Covenants in making one to one correlations without understanding Christ’s fulfillment of all of the types. This becomes important when we begin talking about baptism, especially when we compare how we understand the scriptures over against the way some of our Presbyterian friends understand baptism. I’m going to highlight this second “flow” graphic this evening as we think about baptism’s relationship to the Old Testament, especially in the area of baptism as entrance into the New Covenant community.

## Flow – Circumcision to Heart Circumcision

By way of reminder, let’s look at the graphic as Pastor Greg applied it in his excellent sermon on circumcision.



The Old Covenant type was circumcision. Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. Circumcision identified the people of Israel and set them apart from other nations. Circumcision was the external mark God placed on his people in identifying them as his own. It was circumcision that formed the external foundation for the community of God's people. Then, Christ appears on the scene, where he himself undergoes circumcision on the cross for his people (Colossians 2:11), who are then marked with circumcised hearts as the community where Christ dwells. This is the flow of redemptive history: circumcision, Christ's circumcision, circumcised hearts (not just concerning circumcision and heart circumcision; this applies to all of the types and antitypes in the Old and New Testaments).

The significance of heart circumcision as the New Covenant reality of Old Covenant circumcision cannot be overstated, especially as we consider baptism. Many of you may know friends, pastors, and theologians (especially in the Reformed community) who teach that baptism is the new covenant fulfillment of circumcision. But the Bible doesn't not present baptism as the direct antitype or fulfillment of circumcision. It is heart circumcision, the baptism of the Spirit, or regeneration, that is the fulfillment of circumcision in the New Covenant. The sign of the New Covenant is the heart that has been washed by the Spirit in regeneration, or heart circumcision, that marks God's new nation. Keep this in mind as we consider baptism's function as entrance into community.

Having noted that heart circumcision is the intended goal in redemptive history of Old Covenant circumcision, we will come back to a connection between baptism and circumcision in a moment.

## What is baptism?

First, we must consider the question of "what is baptism?" We must have a full picture of baptism in order to think about baptism as entrance into the community. It is not our intent to greatly detail baptism's significance this evening, but I do want to mention these things because they are interconnected with the question of baptism as entrance into Christ's New Covenant community. I've included scripture references which you can look up later if you desire to study this further.

**Baptism is grounded in Christ's baptism.** We are baptized because Christ was baptized. Not only did Christ's baptism reveal Christ to be the messiah, but it signaled the beginning of a new ministry, bringing a new kingdom with a new people. In Christ's baptism, he identified himself with His people (Matthew 3:11-15).

**Baptism is the gospel in picture form (Matthew 28:18-20).** Baptism, as a picture of the gospel, transcends language and culture. What is proclaimed in baptism is at the very heart of our Christian faith. Because baptism is the gospel in picture form, baptism is a grace from Christ whereby he encourages and sustains His people (1 Peter 3:20-21).

**Baptism is objective (Romans 6:3).** Baptism is something that happens to you. Our overemphasis on baptism as a "step of obedience" has reduced baptism to a human work, and glosses over the fact that Christ initiates the baptism through the Body of Christ.

**Baptism is an identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-4).** Baptism signifies that I have died. My old man has been put to death. And baptism signifies, not only that death, the new creation in Christ. The old has been put off. The new has been put on. Christ died and rose again on my behalf so that I might die and rise again as a new creation. Baptism signifies, then, what Christ has done for me on the cross and in his resurrection. We testify to Christ's death and resurrection and identify ourselves with those realities when we submit ourselves to baptism.

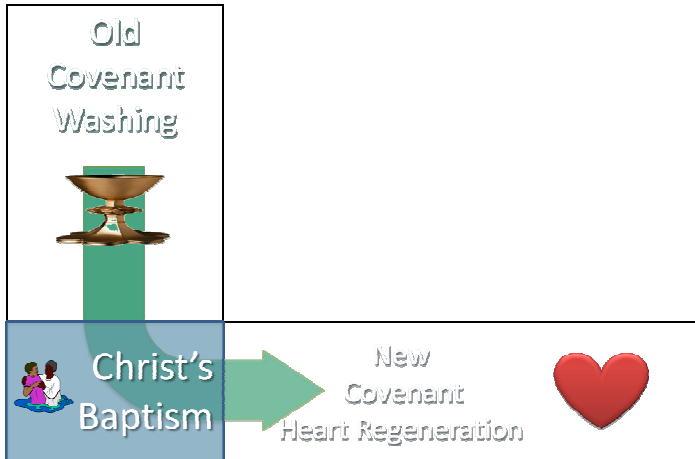
**Baptism is a washing (Acts 22:16; Hebrews 10:22).** Throughout the New Testament, time and again, baptism is closely linked with repentance. "Repent and be baptized" was the message of John the Baptist, and it was the message of the apostles in the book of Acts. Baptism signifies that Christ has washed us with the regenerative washing of the Spirit and has cleansed us from our sins (Titus 3:5).

It is here, in the washing, that baptism finds itself the New Covenant reality of the Old Covenant type. Baptism is the anti-type or fulfillment of the ceremonial washing in the tabernacle's bronze wash basin (Exodus 30:17-21). Aaron and his sons were to wash themselves with water before "drawing near to the altar" to make sacrifice for sins. This signified the need to be cleansed from sin before coming into God's presence, which cannot stand sin. God's holy character stands in judgment of our sin and those who would come into his presence must be washed of their sin and given a righteousness or else they would die. And Israel, in the bronze wash basin at the front of the tabernacle, is given a picture, of what is required to enter God's holy presence. Thus, the bronze wash basin was a symbol to Aaron and the people of God's forgiveness in the washing of the soul from sin.

David picks up on this bronze basin and the need for washing in Psalm 51 when he says "wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin... wash me and I shall be whiter than snow... create in me a \*clean\* heart". Don't think for a minute that Moses or David didn't understand the need for cleansed hearts in heart circumcision.

This bronze basin finds its fulfillment in Christ's cleansing us of our sin. And it is pictured in baptism. As we heard in Hebrews 10:22 this morning, before we can draw near to the Holy of Holies in the New Temple, Jesus Christ, we must first be washed and made clean. Baptism proclaims that this is precisely what has happened to the recipient in Christ's death. We are the recipients of Christ's washing. It is his blood that washes white as snow. We are the recipients of Christ's circumcision and Titus 3:5 tells us that we have been washed in regeneration. We have been made clean; therefore we can come boldly into God's presence (Hebrews 4:16, 10:19). Baptism is proclaiming this washing from Christ through faith, and it is on that basis, the recipient of baptism enters the visible community of believers, the temple of the New Covenant, the church.

So, when we take a look at the "flow of redemptive history" graphic we looked at earlier, and plug in baptism, what we see is the ceremonial washing of the Old Covenant, being fulfilled through Christ's washing and cleansing, with heart baptism as the New Covenant reality.



The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us. It is Christ's death, foreshadowed in his own baptism, that washes whiter than snow.

Again, this is important because those who insist that baptism is the New Covenant fulfillment of circumcision have missed not only the significance of heart circumcision in the New Covenant, but also have missed the significance of washing in baptism.

**Baptism means to be placed into or to be plunged into (Mark 10:39).** We speak of baptism this way. You know what I mean when I say my garage conversion this week was a baptism of fire in the construction business. Christ asked Peter if he was able to drink the cup that Christ was to drink or whether he was able to be baptized with the baptism he was facing in his suffering and death. Christ was plunged into suffering. This understanding of baptism becomes significant when we consider what the Bible has to say about baptism as an entrance into the Body of Christ.

**Baptism is the outward expression of an inward reality (Romans 6:1-4; Ephesians 4:5; Titus 3:5).** Baptism is not regeneration. But it does express that Christ, through his Spirit, has inwardly regenerated the recipient. Those who are baptized are signifying that they inwardly have been partakers in the life-giving baptism of the Spirit.

Something we rarely consider (though it was a significant part of John's baptism in the Jordan), **baptism is a vow with implications concerning judgment (1 Cor. 10:1-6; 1 Peter 3:20-21).** The watery grave of Noah's flood and the Red Sea collapsing over the Egyptian soldiers typified God's judgment of sin. This is closely connected with baptism being an identification with Christ's death and burial. In submitting to the judgmental waters of baptism, the church signifies what awaits those who apostasize or forsake the gospel. The recipient is saying, "this is what will happen to me if I forsake the church body, and in the words of Hebrews 10:26, "go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of truth". This is baptism's warning. Thus, baptism is both gracious and judicial in its proclamation.

And finally, **baptism is the means by which Christ places His people into the visible Body of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:38-41; Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:27).** Because baptism is entrance into the community of believers, baptism is the means by which one is declared to be a Christian. Notice the Bible has no distinction between be-

ing in the visible Body of Christ and being declared to be a Christian. The text handles the two as one and the same.

Again, this is a significant point to be made in the evangelical context in which we find ourselves. What is it that has replaced baptism as the declaration to be a Christian? The altar call. Coming down the aisle. The raised hand. The sinner's prayer. Throwing another twig on the bonfire during the 27<sup>th</sup> round of "it only takes a spark". "Step to the mic" testimony time. Yet none of these methods of declaring oneself to be a Christian is found in the Bible. We have churches filled with people calling themselves Christians based on any one of the above, but have not been baptized, which *is* the biblical and divinely ordained mechanism for declaring oneself to be a believer. This problem of shifting to another kind of faith declaration, I believe, is the result of understating the significance of baptism and overreacting to major errors concerning baptism.

## Baptism as an entrance

Let's look at baptism as an entrance into the community a little more closely for the remainder of our time. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 28 beginning with verse 16. This passage has for better or for worse been labeled "The Great Commission". I'm not a big fan of that label for this passage for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that there is more going on here in this text than just evangelism, which is usually the context in which this passage is cited. But for our topic this evening let's look closely at what Jesus says about baptism. This is what God's word proclaims to us:

<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Much could be said about this passage and its relationship to the church. Our task this evening is to note what it is telling us about baptism. It is proclaiming to us at least two things that are interlocked with each other. The first is this... note what Christ says about *how* the apostles and vicariously, the church, are to baptize: "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". The preposition "in" has the force of "into". We baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because in becoming disciples, we have been placed into (spiritually baptized) fellowship with the Trinity, specifically, we have been placed into Christ. This reality is noted in a passage Pastor Greg mentioned last week, where Paul says Colossians 2:11-12:

<sup>11</sup> In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, <sup>12</sup> 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."

Then Colossians 3:1-3:

“<sup>1</sup> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

In our circumcision made without hands we have been placed into Christ. Notice he is talking about heart circumcision. We have been united to Christ by virtue of His death and resurrection on our behalf. The life of this church, Clearcreek Chapel, is a life that is forever hidden in and united to Christ. His death became the death of our corporate old man. Christ’s resurrection became our regeneration and our new life in the new creation that we celebrate every time we meet.

Water baptism externally and visibly speaks to the reality of this inner heart circumcision, the inner work of the baptism of the Spirit, that unites us to Christ. When we are plunged into the water, we declare and we speak to being plunged into Christ and his death where the old man, the old self, died in judgment. Water baptism speaks to this internal reality. Baptism declares that we have been united to Christ by faith and are now part of the New Creation.

Romans 6:1ff:

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> 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.”

Why is it we are to no longer live in sin? Because in having our hearts circumcised by Christ’s circumcision on the cross, our old man died. And how is it that we keep each other accountable to no longer live in sin? Because in our water baptism, we declared that we have died with Christ to sin. The old man is buried. Our sins have been washed. We are alive as a new creation to live the life more abundantly given to us by He who was resurrected on our behalf.

And in Romans 6, already we’ve begun to touch on the outworking of being placed or plunged into Christ via the inner work of the Holy Spirit. Because we have received the inner baptism of the Spirit, because we have been plunged into Christ, we have been placed into Christ’s Body, his visible representation on earth. That brings us to a second point being made by Christ in Matthew 28 with the apostles, a point often overlooked and neglected. Let us read it again beginning with verse 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, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

When we ask (which is something we do from time to time as we analyze and consider our various ministries), “what does it mean to ‘make disciples’”, where is the first place we tend to look in that passage? “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded

you.” After all, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” fits well with our idea of evangelism and discipleship. But is that all there is to “making disciples” in this passage? Better yet, is that the first definition Christ gives of “making disciples” in this passage? If we look closely we find it is not all there is, and in fact, it is not the first definition of making disciples that Christ offers. How is it that disciples are made? By “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. To make disciples is to baptize and teach. And the reverse is true... to be baptized is to be made a disciple. Baptism places us among the number of Christ’s disciples. We are not used to reading this passage this way, but this is precisely how Acts describes the message of these very same apostles.

Turn to Acts 2:32:

“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. <sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out (notice the baptismal, washing language here, the baptism of the Spirit of Pentecost) this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. <sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, <sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.’ <sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Peter here is talking about Christ’s ascension to His heavenly throne. Even as the Spirit is baptizing the new church at Pentecost, Christ has ascended to take his rightful place to rule and reign over all things from heaven) <sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized (there’s the repentance language associated with baptism) every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ (there’s a reference to the Matthew 28 passage of baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit) for the forgiveness of your sins (there’s the reference to baptism’s ‘washing’ language), and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (this gift is the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which Peter has been explaining... Peter’s audience are those who have not yet participated in this baptism of Pentecost. The one time Spirit baptism of the church at Pentecost can be experienced by those who acknowledge Jesus and Lord and Christ, repent, and are baptized. Here we see the link between Holy Spirit baptism on the inside being signified by the water baptism on the outside. We have, here in Acts 2 and the beginning of the New Covenant, the converging of the internal and the external. Spirit baptism is being offered to those who don’t have it, and we have water baptism which signifies their participation in the baptism of the Spirit). Verse 39: For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” <sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

Don’t miss the significance of this last verse. There were added to the visible church that day, through repentance and baptism, about three thousand souls. Christ adds to his

visible church those who repent and are baptized, and in doing so, sets them apart from “this crooked generation”. It is through repentance and baptism that Christ gathers his people into his corporate body, the church. To be added to the church, as we see here in the book of Acts, is to be baptized in repentance and to be baptized in repentance is to be added to the church. And this pattern continues throughout the rest of the book of Acts: repent and be baptized, and the Lord adds to His church.

The connection between being identified as a Christian and baptism is so strong, let us not miss what Paul says in Romans 6. Let’s go back and read that text again...beginning with the end of verse 2:

“How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”

There is something Paul is saying here that we can hurriedly skip over and miss. What assumption is Paul making in the beginning of verse 3? Paul is assuming that his audience has been baptized. One can extrapolate this assumption out for the entire chapter by drawing parallels between what Paul says about baptism and what Paul says about the Christian life. Who is it that has died to sin? Those who have also been baptized. Who is it that is “walking in newness of life”? Those who have been baptized. (Who is Paul talking to? Paul is talking to people who have been baptized, people who call themselves Christians.) Who is it that is being instructed to “not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness”? Those who have been baptized into

Christ. Now, before we go one here, don’t mishear me. I’m not suggesting cause and effect here. I’m not stating that they have died to sin because they have been water baptized. I’m noting that Paul is drawing a parallel. I’m merely noting that the audience of the entire chapter is one and the same as the audience of verse 3.

Another passage where Paul makes this same kind of assumption is in Galatians 3... beginning with verse 26:

“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith (don’t miss the significance of ‘faith’ here... this paragraph is primarily about ‘faith’). <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Who is it that are “all sons of God through faith”? They are one and the same as those who have been “baptized into Christ”. Who is it that are “all one in Christ Jesus”? They are one and the same as those who have been “baptized into Christ”. Paul again is drawing parallels between his audience and the Christian life, and in doing so, throws in the fact of their baptism. Again, I’m not speaking to cause and effect. Do not hear me making that kind of connection here. I’m merely noting Paul’s assumption that those who have been baptized into Christ are also all of these other things. This audience, an audience that isn’t merely one singular local church, has been baptized; they are those who call themselves Christians.

## Implications

All this to say that the idea of someone calling themselves a Christian, “someone claiming to have newness of life” outside of being baptized into Christ and his Body is a foreign concept to Paul, the apostles, and the New Testament text. Baptized believers do not constitute a subset of Christianity in the New Testament. I note this because it has become popular today for the postmodern church to disdain the label “Christian”, because of all sorts of so-called ‘baggage’ it carries in the culture. Rather, our postmodern evangelicals would prefer to label themselves as “followers of Jesus”. “I’m not a Christian. I’m a follower of Jesus.” While it is true that we are followers of Jesus, what pray tell, does the text tell us is true about a disciple of Christ? The follower of Jesus has been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body, the visible church. That is what Matthew 28, Acts 2, Romans 6, Galatians 3, and Colossians 2 are telling us.

And this speaks to another reality of this disciple-making baptism into Christ’s Body... while we baptize individual members upon their confession of faith and repentance, baptism, from its very inception as an ordinance of the church in the New Testament, is thoroughly corporate in its demeanor. There are no legitimate private baptisms. Why? Because the spiritual reality to which baptism speaks, the inner circumcision of the heart, the Holy Spirit baptism of regeneration, places us into the Body of Christ, even as it places us into Christ. This is not something that is done in isolation.

## Baptism as an entrance

There is one more passage we want to look at this evening in this regard. 1 Corinthians 12 beginning with verse 12. This is what God’s Word proclaims to us:

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit (notice this language is virtually identical to the language of Galatians 3:26-28, and Ephesians 4:4-5, two passages that speak of water baptism). <sup>14</sup> For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

At the heart of this familiar passage on the church functioning as the body of Christ is Holy Spirit baptism. Paul says, “For in one Spirit we were plunged into, placed into one body.” He’s speaking of the baptism of the Spirit. As we’ve already pointed out, it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit in regeneration that unites us to Christ. In this spiritual baptism, this circumcision made without hands, we are placed into Christ’s body. It is only

as we have been inwardly washed that we can function as members of the corporate manifestation of Christ on earth as his hands and feet. This matter of being placed into Christ and his body is not primarily about the individual members, but about Christ and His body. And again, note that this baptism, this Holy Spirit baptism, is something that is not subjective. It is an objective reality. It is a work of Christ by His Spirit that is done to us. God is the initiator and author of this baptism. He is the One who is initiating, he is the One who baptizing us into His body, through this inward, spiritual baptism.

While we experience the regeneration individually, it is through that regeneration we are corporately made into a New Creation, the church. Through Spirit baptism, individual members are brought into relationship with Christ and His Body. The reception of the Spirit and being united to Christ is not something we experience on our own in isolation, but in fellowship with the church visible and historical. Regeneration, the washing of our inward hearts, is a community affair.

What's interesting about this particular passage is that the baptism language of verse 13, which speaks of the baptism of the Spirit, is virtually to baptism language in Galatians 3 and Ephesians 4 which speak of water baptism. 1 Corinthians 12, then, while it is explicitly speaking of an inner reality, the baptism of the Spirit, has immense implications for water baptism. Given what we've read elsewhere (Romans 6, Galatians 3, Ephesians 4, Colossians 2) about water baptism placing us into the visible body, Paul understands the water baptism to be representing or signifying the inner and broader spiritual reality. Thus, even in this passage where Spirit baptism is highlighted, there are implications for water baptism. Just as Spirit baptism in regeneration is a community event, uniting the circumcised heart to Christ and to his body, water baptism is first and foremost a community event, signifying entrance into the visible fellowship of believers. Like Spirit baptism, water baptism is not a private matter, but unites the recipient to the rest of Christ's body in visible Koinonia, or Christian fellowship. It is through water baptism (Acts 2) Christ adds to his church and in doing so, lavishes on the community many members who exercise their various spiritual gifts to the benefit of Christ's Body.

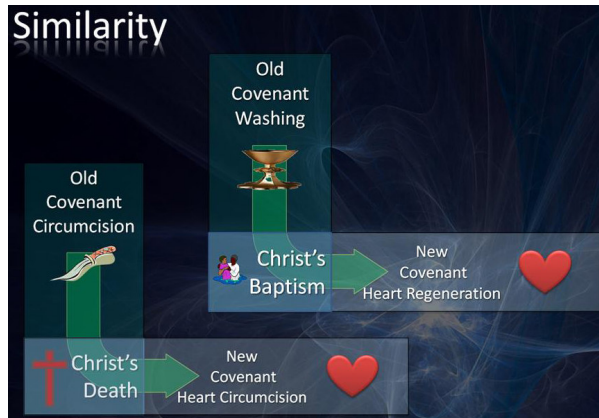
## **What about circumcision?**

There is still the question of circumcision hanging over this discussion. What about circumcision? What do we make of the fact that circumcision in the Old Covenant was entrance into the community of the people of God? If baptism functions in the same role in the New Covenant, is not there a connection? Some of our Baptist friends would suggest that there is no connection whatsoever. But, I do not believe this denial to be helpful, considering not only the obvious similarity in function, but also the fact that the passage in Colossians 2 we've considered both this week and last week is speaking of circumcision and baptism in the same paragraph.

Circumcision was the line of demarcation between God's people and the rest of pagan history. In circumcision, one entered the visible community of God's people. Baptism, as it is presented in the New Testament, places one in the community of God's people, and visibly marks off God's people from the rest of the world, or as Peter exhorted the Pentecost crowd, "this crooked generation". Circumcision placed the recipient into

God's visible people. Baptism places the recipient into God's visible people. There are some similarities. What do we make of them? The similarities are there, I believe, because typology, at some level, is involved.

Let's go back to the flow of redemptive history graphic one final time tonight. We've already considered the shadows of circumcision and the ceremonial washing. There is a third, I think would be helpful.



Considering all of the passages that speak of baptism in the New Testament and considering baptism's function in placing the recipient into the visible Body of Christ, we see baptism bringing together these two types, washing and circumcision, together in one visible act. Therefore, I think it is possible to speak of baptism as a New Covenant antitype reality for circumcision only in this respect (and hear me closely): the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is that ALL of the New Covenant members have circumcised hearts. As Pastor Greg pointed out last week, heart circumcision \*is\* the New Covenant antitype, the fulfillment, of circumcision. Water baptism visibly proclaims the inward circumcision of the heart. Thus, water baptism, by extension -- and extension only -- of the inward circumcision, may be said to be a fulfillment of Old Covenant circumcision in that it is an entrance into the community of God's people. The water baptism recipient, as far as we can determine, has a circumcised heart. Those circumcised in the Old Covenant, did not. Thus, one cannot equate what is going on with circumcision in the Old Covenant and what is going with baptism in the New Covenant as a one-to-one correlation as if they are virtually the same. This is what many of our Presbyterian brethren like to do... and as we said earlier in looking at the graphic of the flow of redemptive history, "you can't get there from here". They are making that bridge between the Old Covenant and New Covenant without considering Christ's fulfillment of the types. If we begin to do as our brethren do, we are not following the flow of revelation and redemptive history.

In similarity and in function, baptism can be said, in one sense, to be a fulfillment of Old Covenant circumcision.

**Conclusion** What does this mean for our community?

First, **baptism, not the altar call or sinner's prayer, is THE entrance into the visible community of Christ's people.** There may be those among us who have demonstrated and confessed faith in Christ and yet have not been baptized. There is no mechanism in

the New Testament for considering such a person to be part of the visible community of believers outside of baptism. May we be challenged to take what the Bible says about baptism as the entrance into visible Christianity seriously.

Second, **Clearcreek Chapel is a baptized community.** We are a people who have been united to Christ in Spirit baptism, and have been united to each other visibly through water baptism. In baptizing us, Christ has marked us off from the rest of the world for the purpose of being his representative on earth, His body. This is not an individual ordinance. Our baptism ties us to each other, making us accountable to one another, and it is in this context that our one anothering is strengthened, encouraged, and sustained.

Third, **let's not overreact to the errors** by underemphasizing baptism's importance to our community life. May we repent if we have done so. Let us not fall prey to the systemic "dumbing down" of baptism in our evangelical culture.

Fourth, let's not miss the fact that **Christ adds to his visible church via baptism.** Baptism is a visible reminder that Christ is gathering to himself a people for the glory of his own name. We rejoiced greatly to see those baptized in June. Do we pray, do we work, do we expend energy, do we give great effort that baptism becomes a monthly or even weekly occurrence? Are we about the business of "making disciples", baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching those disciples all of Christ's commands, including the one about prizing him above all else?

Fifth, **baptism proclaims the gospel in picture form.** Let us prize, even as we observe the baptism of those who are joining Christ's Body here at the Chapel, this picture of the gospel. Let us prize the picture of Christ's death, burial and resurrection for us. Christ, through his Spirit, has washed us and has forgiven us and has united us to Himself, placing us in fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In uniting us to himself, Christ has saved us from the watery grave judgment that awaits those who are outside of that fellowship.

Sixth, **baptism is an objective reminder of what Christ has done for us** in washing us of our sin and giving us new life in the regeneration of His Spirit. And this is one of the important functions of baptism, even for those of us who were baptized a long time ago. While our feelings about our forgiveness, our union with Christ, new creation and new life are subjective, while our faith may falter, Christ doesn't falter. Christ doesn't fail us. Baptism is a reminder of what Christ has objectively done to and for us in placing us in His Body. Baptism reminds us that our old man has died in Christ, we are a new creation in Christ, and there will come a day when our faith will not fail. We will trade these corruptible bodies for the incorruptible. We will see him face to face. And when we come up out of this water, we are reminded of what awaits us in the New Heavens and New Earth. Baptism doesn't save us, but it does point to our salvation. Even as others are baptized into the visible Body of Christ, we, again and again, (just as we do in the Lord's Table) are reminded of Christ has done for us on our behalf and His glory that awaits us.

Last, even as it proclaims Christ's death, it also proclaims our death with him and our raising up to new life with Him. If we have died to sin, and if this is an entrance into the community, as we say we have done in baptism, then **we must be a people who are marked by lives that die to each other.** Again, baptism is not something that occurs in

isolation. We cannot baptize ourselves. Christ, in his providence (the way he has ordained and orchestrated things to be) has inwardly baptized us. He has given us a visible picture, a visible mechanism, whereby he is gathering people to himself. Through this picture He places us into visible community through His church. We have been gathered together with others who like us no longer have the old man. Our old man, corporately, has died. So, we must die to each other. This is a new creation. Our baptism unites us. Every week we gather as a baptized people to celebrate the new creation. And as we do so, our community will be marked in consideration for one another, a preference for one another, a dying to one another because our old man has died and we have been raised in baptism to walk in newness of life.