

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 3- Luke 3:20-22** 35- The Baptism of Jesus Christ

June 28, 2009

Luke 3:20-22

Now in these two verses there are four questions that I want to try to ask and answer from this passage of Luke's Story of Salvation this morning. Four questions- that I think are very important for us to know if we are to understand what God is saying here:

1. Why does Luke record John's imprisonment *before* he records that John baptized Jesus?
2. If John's baptism was a baptism of repentance and Jesus was sinless- why did Jesus come to John to be baptized?
3. Why does Luke tell us that Jesus was praying? Why was that significant?
4. Why does Luke tell us that the Holy Ghost came in the form of a dove?

So let's go over these four questions one at a time.

1. Why does Luke record John's imprisonment *before* he records that John baptized Jesus?

Luke 3:20

Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.

This is such an odd order of events that there must be some point. The obvious answer would seem to be that Luke wants to emphasize the break between John's ministry and Jesus' ministry. For example- **Luke 3:15** shows that *some* people thought John might be the Messiah. Others could think that Jesus was one of John's disciples. So one way to keep clear in the reader's mind that a tremendous turning point in

Redemptive History came when Jesus started preaching was to mention John's imprisonment even before Jesus comes on the scene. **Luke 16:16** says,

The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

So there is a distinctive break between the period of the Law and Prophets and the period of Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom. In other words- there was a moment in time when you were sinning if you did *not* sacrifice animals, and there was a moment in time when you were sinning if you did. That break is what Luke is stressing here. John belonged to that former period- so Luke wanted to stress that break to Theophilus.

Now in **Luke 7:26–28** Jesus says John was a prophet, and more than a prophet, John was *the* preparer of His Way. And Jesus said:

26 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet.

27 This is the one about whom it is written, ‘BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.’

28 I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

So John was indeed a great prophet, but now something better than a great prophet has come. The Messiah is here and He is calling people into His kingdom- and now- the least person in the Messiah's Kingdom has a greater privilege than John ever did. So, in Luke's mind there was a great break between John's work and Jesus' Work, and the odd order of his narrative stresses this break.

Even in **Luke 3:21** I think this break is confirmed by the word "all":

Now when all the people were baptized...

This means that Jesus' baptism was not just a part of John's work, but its *climax*. We don't have to use the word "all" in **Luke 3:21** to mean that Jesus was the very last person John baptized- but it *does* mean

that John's ministry was virtually completed by the time Jesus was baptized. And this also tells us that the *coming* of Jesus also meant the *going* of John the Baptist. In **John 3:30**, the Baptist himself said:

He must increase, but I must decrease.

And this is a perfect lead in to my second question:

2. If John's baptism was a baptism of repentance and Jesus was sinless- why did Jesus come to John to be baptized?

First we need to establish that Jesus as perfectly sinless- so please turn with me and read:

2Corinthians 5:21

He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin.

So since it is true that Jesus was perfectly sinless- why then did He humble Himself to be baptized with John's baptism of repentance? Let's go over this slowly. First of all- the fact that Luke records verse 21 the way that he does shows us the distinction that Luke is making between Jesus and everybody else. Let's read **Luke 3:21** again:

Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened,

So here at the end or the climax of John's ministry- "**when all the people were baptized,**" and "**Jesus was also baptized**". So Luke is making a difference here between all the people and Jesus- showing us that both John the Baptist and Luke both saw Jesus as being unique and separate from the people. In other words- Jesus was not just one of the crowd. His coming had special significance. Second, the way Luke put his sentence together in verses 22 and 23 shows that the baptism is secondary and what happened afterwards is actually what is primary.

The baptism of the people and then of Jesus are simply introductory time clauses telling us when the last three things happened. Verse 21 begins with the phrase:

"Now when"

...or in other words after all were baptized and after Jesus was baptized and praying, *then* the *really* amazing thing happened- Heaven was opened and the Spirit came, and God the Father spoke and further identified and separated and differentiated His Son from everybody else by saying that above everyone else on the face of the earth- who are all collectively sinners- God is "well pleased" with Jesus- who is sinless.

So Luke's interest is different from Matthew's, who focuses on the baptism itself and poses the very question we have posed. Levi, or Matthew, tells in **Matthew 3:14& 15** how that John the Baptist actually argued with Jesus- trying to prohibit Him from being baptized by saying:

... I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?

But how did Jesus respond to John's argument and forbidding?

Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.

... Only after Jesus said this did John baptize Him. So Luke treats the baptism of Jesus simply as the occasion when God spoke to Him from heaven- while Matthew deals with the baptism itself as a problem for one who had no sins to be forgiven. And the answer that Jesus gave to John's objection is that it is "fitting" or "becoming" for Jesus to do *everything* that is right- not just hit the high points and move on.

So there was enough in John's baptism for Jesus to affirm that the event was not meaningless. *Negatively*- John's baptism of repentance meant turning from sin, and *positively* it meant trusting in God. And Jesus agreed and could affirm both the negative and positive aspects of John's baptism. Jesus himself resolved never to sin but always to turn from sin in every way, and Jesus fully committed Himself to always trust God fully.

So what Luke picks up on is that Jesus' coming to be baptized was a decisive step of commitment to begin His public Ministry. Thus, Jesus fully and consciously aligns Himself with the people who turn away from sin and who trust God, and Jesus resolves to fulfill His calling in that spirit. And all of this is recorded for us so that Luke may focus on what is really important- and that is God's Divine and Supernatural and public approval and confirmation of His Son's resolve.

3. Why does Luke tell us that Jesus was praying? Why was that significant?

Luke 3:21

Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying...

Now before we look at God's supernatural and public confirmation of Jesus in verse 22- there is one more question about verse 21: Why does Luke mention that Jesus was praying when the heavens opened and the Spirit came and God spoke? None of the other Gospel Accounts tell us this. So why does Luke mention it here? Was he just embellishing his story? Was Luke adding his own parts to the Story of Salvation to add a little zing or pizzazz to it? No, not at all. If you understand anything at all about the Bible- then you realize that every Word of Scripture is inspired and inerrant, and, therefore- this was *not* simply the thoughts of Luke, this was *not* put here simply because Luke thought it would make Jesus look better- no, this came from the Mind and Heart and Mouth of Almighty God.

What is going on is that all throughout this Gospel Account of Luke- We are going to see that the good doctor loves to picture Jesus in prayer. Luke shows Jesus praying at all the crucial turning points of Christ's Life and Ministry:

- ✓ Here at the baptism (**Luke 3:21**)
- ✓ At the selection of the twelve apostles (**Luke 6:12**)
- ✓ At Peter's confession (**Luke 9:18**)
- ✓ At the transfiguration (**Luke 9:28**)
- ✓ In Gethsemane (**Luke 22:41**)
- ✓ On the Cross (**Luke 23:34**)

Luke tells us that Jesus went repeatedly to the wilderness to pray (**Luke 5:16**) and that Jesus sometimes spent whole nights in prayer (**Luke 6:12**). The point of all this is to show Theophilus and us that even in Jesus' Life there is a powerful connection between earnest prayer and the blessings of God.

Now just what blessing was Jesus praying for after His baptism? **Luke 11:13** suggests the answer. And Luke's version is different from Matthew's:

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

So what is it that obedient children should ask from their heavenly Father? The Holy Spirit. Not that we or Jesus did not already have the Holy Spirit within us— the Bible says in **1Corinthians 6:19** that even the weakest believer is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. But there is always a correlation or a connection between our yielding to the Will of God, as recorded in Scripture, and God being honored and glorified in us. God is not fully honored in anyone who- as a daily function of his life- walks contrary to what the Bible teaches, dear friends. And the Power to walk this world in white, the ability that we have to obey God's Word, the blessing that we share with Christ in actually doing the Father's Will does not come as matter of Human will power or Human effort, but is, in fact, a Sovereign Work of the Holy Spirit inside of us.

So the child of God who loves God, and who desires to follow after God, and who desires to bear good fruit, and who hungers and thirsts after Righteousness, and who wants to live his life utterly abandoned to bringing God glory, and who hates his own sin, and who struggles on a daily basis to humbly submit to the Authority of God's Word- does these things and has these attributes only because God the Holy Ghost has empowered him and enabled him and strengthened him to live counter intuitively against his flesh and to walk counter to the culture and to live in rebellion to the lusts of the flesh and to fight against the natural impulses of his old nature to do what is right in his own eyes. And for any man who was born in sin and shapened in iniquity to want this and to actually do this is nothing less than a miracle.

So we have a great need to daily give ourselves to God the Holy Spirit and to yield to His guidance and to surrender to His Will- because He only does what He sees the Father do. We really do not need more of the Holy Spirit- because the Bible says that we have been given the spirit without measure the very second we were saved- but what we do need to do and what we do need to pray about and what we do need to struggle and wrestle with is that we give more of ourselves to God- every day!

Jesus was praying for a manifestation of the Holy Spirit to confirm his Messiahship to the people and that God's Favor would be upon Him as He set out on His public ministry. And God answered Jesus' prayer- which leads us to the fourth question.

4. Why does Luke tell us that the Holy Ghost came in the form of a dove?

Luke 3:22

And the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”

Here God answers Jesus' prayer by sending His Spirit in a visible form and then declaring verbally His full delight in His Son:

You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.

Now this was the highest and the best and the most valuable recommendation and commendation that could ever be given to anyone in ministry. God the Father was pleased *in* Jesus. Not just pleased *with* Jesus, not just satisfied with some of what Jesus did- but God was fully pleased with Jesus- *personally*. Now this statement could not possibly be given to anyone other than Jesus because we all sin. And in our sin-we do not please the Lord. But this statement is given to only Jesus- not to John; not to anyone else- but only to Jesus- because only Jesus was perfectly in continuously righteous before God.

And this also goes back to the truth that the only way that any of us can ever hope to please the Lord is if we are in Jesus. Since God is pleased with Jesus- God will be pleased with us- if and only if we are fully in Jesus Christ. But whatever stands outside of Jesus- will never

please God and will be burned up at the last day. Every word that is spoken outside of Jesus, every action, every thought, and every work that is the product of human ingenuity and human reasoning and human will power will never be able to please God. Only that which is done in Jesus Christ and in His Name or in His Authority and for His Glory will ever be able to please God.

Now the word "dove" occurs on Jesus' Lips only one time in the Gospels, namely, **Matthew 10:16** which says:

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

Now from this verse we can see that to Jesus- the dove suggests purity, meekness, and innocence. The dove was not majestic like the eagle, or fierce like the hawk, or flamboyant like the cardinal. It was a simple, common, innocent kind of bird that **Leviticus 12:8** and **Luke 2:24** says that poor people could afford to offer as a sacrifice. So this was a directive to Jesus from the Father. God the Spirit with which God the Father anoints God the Son is not for ostentation or for show or for earthly battle. So what did God the Father give the Holy Spirit to God the Son for?

The answer comes from **Isaiah 42:1–4**. Let's turn there. This text is relevant because this is where the Words of God the Father came from which followed His giving of the Spirit to Jesus:

Isaiah 42:1-4

1 Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.

2 “He will not cry out or raise *His voice*, Nor make His voice heard in the street.

3 “A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice.

4 “He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.”

Now the beauty of this picture is that this servant of God that Isaiah prophesies about- some 700 years before this moment- has the

power and ability to bring forth "**justice to the nations**"- meaning that *this* Servant is different from every other servant in Israel because *this* Servant has jurisdiction over the whole world- not just in Israel.

But even though this Servant has that kind of Authority- Isaiah tells us in verse 3:

A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice.

In other words- this Servant- Who rules over the whole earth- will not use His great Power to "break a bruised reed or quench a dimly burning wick." That is, *this* Servant will be tender with the weak and failing. He will, in fact, be dove-like, not hawk-like.

So when God the Father anoints God the Son with God the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove- Father is directing Son to use His Power in meekness and tenderness and love. Which Jesus does. Matthew records that dove-like meekness in **Matthew 11:28-30**:

28 Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

In other words- I have the Spirit of a dove not a hawk. And Jesus says in **Luke 4:18**:

18 THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,

19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor"— to the bruised reeds of the world and to the smoldering wicks. To these "poor" Jesus the great Servant of the Lord comes - having all authority in Heaven and earth, and yet He comes with his dove-like Spirit and heals and fans into flame that which is ready to die.

So, in summary, what Luke is doing in **Luke 3:21&22** is setting Jesus' ministry off from John's and demonstrating that He alone has God's fullest approval and blessing, and revealing the kind of Ministry He will have—namely, a dove-like ministry.

Now there's no way that we can look at the Baptism of Jesus Christ without also looking at the meaning and the importance of baptism in general. And the tone that I want to strike immediately into your hearts this morning 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 my friends, only because the Death and the 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 tone that I want to convey to you first.

Now because that is true- we are not mainly talking about a religious ritual when we speak of baptism. We are not mainly talking about a 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. Therefore- talking about baptism means talking about how Jesus taught us to express our faith in Jesus and His great Salvation. I say all of this so that you will not have small thoughts about baptism as we begin. I want you to have large thoughts about baptism; great thoughts, high thoughts.

I want you to have great thoughts about a 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.

To answer the question, "*What is baptism and how important is it*"? I want to read to you from the first draft of a Document that I am laboring over right now which, Lord willing, will be added to the Covenant of Peace Doctrinal Statement as the Elder Board approves of it. This says:

We believe and teach that Baptism is an Ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to Faith in Jesus Christ express their union with Christ in His Death and Resurrection, by being publicly 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, the true Israel,

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

This statement consists of six parts that come straight from the Bible:

1. Baptism is a Command and an Ongoing Ordinance of the Lord
2. Baptism is an Outward Expression of an Internal Union With Jesus Christ
3. Baptism is a Public Event
4. Baptism is by Immersion
5. Baptism is in the Authority of the Trinity
6. Baptism is only for Believers

So let's take the six parts of this statement and look at the Biblical basis for each one of them.

1. Baptism Is an Ordinance of the Lord

First, “**We believe and teach** that Baptism is an Ordinance of the Lord . . .” Now what we mean by that is that the Lord Jesus commanded Baptism- He ordained it—in a way that would make it an *ongoing* practice of the Christian Church. We find the Biblical Foundation for this statement most explicitly in **Matthew 28:19&20** where the Lord Himself said:

**19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

Here, Jesus said, “**Go**”, “**Teach**”, and “**Baptize**”. So by including baptism in the Great Commission- Jesus was teaching us that baptism was not something that only John the Baptist did, or something that only Jesus carried out, or something that only the Apostles were to do- but that baptism was part and parcel to the ongoing ministry of the Church to the nations. In other words- you do not have Biblical Christianity without having baptism as major part of the ongoing ministry of the Church alongside “going” and “teaching”.

Now, to "make disciples" is the main verb here. In the original Greek- this verse actually says: "Having gone, *make disciples* of all nations." The defining participles that are connected with making disciples are "baptizing" them and "teaching" them. So the Church is commanded to do this for all disciples. Making disciples of all nations includes both teaching and baptizing them.

And the time frame of just how long we are to do this is defined by the Promise of Christ's help at the end of verse 20:

... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

So the Promise of help is for as long as this age lasts. So the Command to go and to teach and to baptize that Jesus promises to help us with- is as long as this age lasts.

So by this we can rightly conclude that baptism is a Command and an Ordinance of the Lord Jesus to be performed by the Church on an ongoing basis in making disciples until Christ returns at the end of the age.

2. Baptism is an Outward Expression of an Internal Union with Jesus Christ

Second, we believe and teach that baptism "expresses union with Jesus Christ in His Death and Resurrection." And the clearest teaching on this is **Romans 6:3&4**, where the Apostle Paul said:

3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Now as you read this passage- be careful that you do not conclude that water-baptism is the *means* of our being united to Jesus Christ- because that is not at all what Paul is teaching here. The Bible is crystal clear about this my beloved- that Faith and Faith alone is the *means* by which we are united to Jesus Christ and Justified. Nobody is saved because they are baptized- nobody.

But even though that is true- it is also true that we *show* this faith, we *say* this faith, we *signify* this faith, we give *proof* of this faith, and we *symbolize* this faith- with the act of baptism. Faith unites us to Christ and baptism *symbolizes* that union.

And we do that all the time. For example- when the young couple says to each other, "*With this ring I thee wed,*" we don't mean that the ring or the putting of the ring on the finger is what makes us married. No, the ring is only the *outward* sign of the mysterious Covenant of Marriage. It is the covenant-making vows along with the supernatural miracle of the Holy Spirit that makes the marriage. So it is with faith and baptism.

So what Paul is saying in **Romans 6** is, "*With this baptism you are united to Christ.*" And the point that we are focusing on in Baptism is that we are not just unite to Christ is a generic sense of that union- and neither are we saying that we are united to Christ in any way that we desire to look at it. But very narrowly and very precisely we are saying that in Baptism- we are united to Jesus Christ- in His Death, Burial, and Resurrection. That is how we are united to Jesus Christ.

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

So the imagery of baptism is always the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ- not anything else. Christ was buried and raised to new life.

So in baptism- by faith- we are united with Jesus Christ in His Death, Burial, and Resurrection. Baptism outwardly and dramatically portrays what happened internally and spiritually when we received Christ as Savior:

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 believers and unbelievers and angels and God and everybody else when you are baptized.

3. Baptism Is a Public Event

The third part of this statement is that we believe and teach that baptism should be a public event. Now I fully realize that in some places of the world where Christianity is illegal to schedule a public baptism would be to assure that everybody gets arrested and killed. So by "public" I do not mean that we have to risk being captured or killed.

What I mean by a "public event" is that baptism is not based upon hidden or secret oaths, or that it consists of secret meetings or special revelation that is not given to the rest of the Church. And, in particular, I seek to weed out the ancient mysticism of the Gnostics and also put a clear distinction between Christianity and Free Masonry.

I also mean that baptism should be the very same for everybody for all time. I believe with every fiber of my being that we are baptizing people the exact same way that John and the Apostles baptized people 2,000 years ago.

Every occasion of baptism in the Bible was done openly, outdoors, in full view of the world- with no secret rituals or hidden agendas.

4. Baptism is by Immersion

Fourth, we believe and teach that this expression of union with Christ in His Death and Resurrection happens "by being immersed in water." The clearest Scriptural evidence for this is, again, the words of **Romans 6:3&4** which describes the act of baptism as both a burial and a rising from the dead. This is most naturally understood to mean that you are buried under water and then come out from the water to signify rising from the grave.

Now as I have mentioned in earlier messages- the word *baptism* in Greek means: *to dip or to 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. For example- please turn and read with me **The Acts 8:37&38**:

37 And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Now here- the Ethiopian eunuch comes to faith while riding with Philip in his chariot and he says, *“See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”* Philip agrees and verse 38 says,

he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Now the fact that both “went down into the water” makes most sense if they were going down into the water to immerse him- not to sprinkle him. Similarly it says in **John 3:23**:

John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and *people* were coming and were being baptized.

The Apostle John said that John the Baptist was baptizing near to Salim for the express reason that the water was plentiful there. Now if you are sprinkling people or even pouring water over their head- you don't need much water- you would just need a jar.

So there is really very little dispute among serious Bible students that baptism was conducted in the Bible by complete immersion. And the reason that they did this was to signify his burial and resurrection with Jesus.

5. Baptism Is in the Authority of the Trinity

Fifth, baptism means doing this immersing in the Name, or the Authority, of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. That's what Jesus said in **Matthew 28:19**:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and 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 to make it true and real in what it says about His Work in Redemption. There is no Salvation without the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

When we do something in God's Name or in the Name of Jesus- we are doing that thing with God's approval, or under God's Authority and with His express permission and blessing. God has Sovereignly approved of baptism and Christ ordained it- therefore, baptism must be carried out under the banner of the Triunity of the one true living God.

So when we baptize in the Name of the Father and in the Name of the Son and in the Name of the Holy Ghost- we are calling on God's Name and we are showing our complete dependence on Him and we give Honor to Him and say that this public act is because of Him and for His Glory.

6. Baptism Is for Believers Only

Sixth, baptism is an expression of faith, and, therefore, only for believers. The key part of that statement says: *"We believe and teach that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith in Jesus Christ 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. So by default that means that baptism is not something that an unbeliever can do. And that also means that it is not something that an infant can do. And that is why we do not baptize infants.

Now there are several passages that have had the greatest influence on me over the years in persuading me of believer's baptism. One of the most important is **Colossians 2:11&12:**

**11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;
12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.**

Here, 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 Jesus cuts away the old sinful body and makes us new. It is virtually synonymous with the new birth. Then Paul speaks of baptism as being,

... buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

So the image of spiritual circumcision is closely connected with the image of baptism: **"You are circumcised . . . buried with him in baptism"**. So the old "body of flesh" was "cut away" or circumcised in conversion, and you died to sin and rose again in baptism to live by Jesus Christ.

So we can rightly conclude that New Covenant Baptism has replaced Old Covenant Circumcision as being the outward sign of believers being in Covenant relationship with God.

You see, under the Old Testament- only the men were circumcised to signify membership in the family of God. But in the New Testament- both men *and women* are baptized to signify membership in the new-household of faith. So the connection between Old Covenant Circumcision and New Covenant Baptism is clear.

And this has led many people to wrongly assume that, since circumcision was given to the male children of the people of the old covenant when the child was eight days old- that, therefore, baptism should now be given to both male and female children of the people of the new covenant when they are eight days old. That's the logic of their argument. And that argument is logical.

But here is why that argument will not work. Look again carefully at **Colossians 2:12**:

... having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Now notice the phrase, **"through the faith"**. Paul teaches here that we are risen with Jesus **"through the faith"** of the operation of God- who raised Christ from the dead. The point that the Apostle Paul is making here is that the only way that we can be risen with Christ is by us having faith in the operation of God.

In other words- we must trust or we must have faith that the ways of God in baptism is so great and powerful that we will be raised with Jesus- even as we are raised up out of the water. And the catalyst for that Promise to be real in our lives is that we believe it or that we have faith in it.

So those who are baptized must be able to or have the cognizant ability to trust in the Promise that just as God raised up Christ- God will also raise us up, and infants simply cannot do that. Young infants who are eight days old do not possess the ability to trust in the Promise of God that is given in baptism, and, so, therefore, the main purpose of baptism- which is for the one being baptized to trust in the Promise that just as God raised up Christ- God will also raise us up cannot be accomplished if infants were baptized.

So we can rightly conclude that by baptizing infants- the very *purpose* of baptism is defeated. Baptism is an outward and public and dramatic display of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it gets its *meaning* from the faith that it expresses in the one being baptized. So if infants are baptized- that meaning is lost because infants cannot demonstrate faith.

Through Faith!

Now the Apostle Paul shows this same way of connecting baptism and faith in **Galatians 3:26&27**:

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

The Bible is clear- we become sons of God through faith and no other way. But then Paul connects this way of becoming sons of God with baptism by saying:

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

That explanation- that begins with the word "for" only makes sense if baptism is understood as an acting out of the faith in the previous verse. So this passage actually reads:

"Since you were baptized into Christ, therefore we know that in Christ you are all sons of God through faith."

Now why is this? Because that is what baptism means:

You were baptized into Christ by faith.

So baptism without faith was inconceivable to Paul, and should also be inconceivable to us.

So, in summary- the Baptism of Jesus underscores forever the great importance that we have in following our Lord into the waters of baptism- not for Salvation- but as a humble and loving response to already being saved by the glorious finished Work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's come and pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.