

FAITH AND PRACTICE

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About Faith and Practice

On behalf of the Board of Publications of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, I am proud to introduce to you the first issue of *Faith and Practice*. We have devoted this issue to the subject of Christian baptism, and hope that you will be encouraged by and excited about what you find in the following pages.

Faith and Practice is a ministry of the Board of Publications of the ARP Church. The purpose of *Faith and Practice* is to:

- promote excellence in ministry through careful analysis of issues and practices from a Biblical and theological perspective
- stimulate the process of thoughtful reflection regarding who we are in Christ in the late 20th Century
- provide for our pastors, teachers, and lay people a forum for sharing insights and experiences in a thoughtful biblically-based fashion
- provide an environment for constructive and healthy expression of various views represented by those in our denomination

Faith and Practice is overseen by an Editorial Committee that works under the authority and oversight of the Board of Publications. Members of the committee read and critique articles, help plan future issues, and oversee the work of the Managing Editor.

The Editorial Committee consists of John Ball, John Blumenstein, Bill Evans, Jamie Hunt, Bob Ingram, Ben Johnston *ex officio*, Peter Kemeny, Ray King, Clyde McCants, Vice Chairman, Christine Probes *ex officio*, David Robinson, Mark Ross, Chairman, Randy Ruble, George Syms, Jack Whytock, and Joel Gillespie (Managing Editor).

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We invite you to make copies of articles for use in Bible study groups and Sunday School classes. We also invite all of your Sunday School classmates to subscribe.

The Managing Editor confesses that he is just learning how to do desktop publishing. Many thanks are due to Ben Johnston for his constant help and never-ending encouragement in this and every other aspect of the journal.

The "look" of the first issue of *Faith and Practice* is derived from that of *Ultimate Issues*, an excellently written quarterly journal by Dennis Prager, which the Managing Editor highly recommends to all.

Scripture references are taken from the New International Version unless otherwise designated.

Many Thanks

Many thanks are due to members of the Editorial Committee of *Faith and Practice*, as well as to Gail Griffin and others at the ARP Center for helping with so many details.

We are also appreciative of all the writers who have taken time out of busy schedules to write, discuss, and rewrite some excellent articles for our first issue.

We are grateful to all of you individuals and churches who had the confidence and courage to buy subscriptions sight unseen, and to donate generous amounts of money to see this project get off the ground. I hope you can see in this first issue the seeds of something that will be a blessing to readers for a long time.

The Managing Editor

**We wish to
extend our
warmest
thanks to all of
you who have
helped get
*Faith and Prac-
tice* off the
ground.**

My Journey With Baptism

Joel Gillespie

Baptism started being important to me in the summer of 1978. I was 20 years old and had just spent three life-changing months at L'Abri Fellowship in Greatham, England. Whether I was a Christian when I arrived at L'Abri that spring I am not sure. But what was clear as I prepared to leave was that the God of heaven and earth had done surgery on my heart, had opened up my mind to the truth of the Word, and had healed many confused emotions. I was leaving a regenerated person, a new creature in Christ. I was a follower of Jesus. "Amazing Grace" was a song I could at last sing from my heart!

I knew instinctively that I needed to seal the matter publicly. God had done a great work in me and I wanted to be marked as His before I went home to the hustle and confusion of my normal life. I wanted to be baptized. So I read all the verses in the New Testament I could find related to baptism. It seemed clear to me: I believed, and I needed to be baptized. At the time it seemed to me like immersion was the way to go. So I went to Randal Macaulay, one of the teacher/workers at English L'Abri, and told him of my desire. We talked about where to have the baptism, and thought that perhaps a nearby pool would do just fine. He asked me if I had been baptized as a child. I wasn't really sure. Besides, I wanted to be baptized now as a believer. There was not really time to press the matter.

During my last evening at L'Abri, everyone gathered for a time of praise and worship. I gave testimony to my faith in Christ, and we all headed up to the largest bathroom in the manor house. The pool had not worked out, and that night, in a very deep old bathtub, I was baptized. I remain the only person I know who was baptized in a bathtub. We sang songs of praise and thanksgiving, and off I went to London by train, and back to Columbia, S.C. on an overnight plane.

Leaving my new friends and the lovely English countryside was hard indeed. Despite the struggle of readjustment, I began the process of

starting a new life in the midst of the surroundings that had characterized my old life. I knew I was a new creature with a new identity. I thought often of my baptism. Soon I found a church home.

Two baptism issues soon rocked me. I attended a Bible study with a close friend and got to know the pastor. We met together a couple of times, and among other things discussed baptism. Soon I learned that even though I had been baptized as an adult by immersion, since I didn't believe that such was necessary for salvation (i.e. I accepted as valid the baptism of an infant), this pastor couldn't accept me as a brother-in-Christ. I was outside of the camp. Wow, baptism was a divisive issue!

Outside the Camp

I was quite shaken. Was I really outside the camp? Although I didn't really understand infant baptism, for some reason at the time I considered it to be valid. I decided his exclusivity on the matter was just wrong. So I moved on.

Then I met Ivory. Ivory was an African-American brother-in-Christ who worked in the warehouse with me. Ivory sang hymns and spiritual songs as he loaded big boxes of kitchen cabinets into the trucks. He smiled. He worked hard. He glowed with love. He exuded joy and peace. I wanted the same. He taught me that I needed to be baptized with the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, that I needed to be filled with the Spirit, and that I needed to be baptized *again* in *Jesus'* name. In other words, my water baptism had been in the wrong name, and I still awaited Holy Spirit baptism! I prayed, I asked, I begged for this sign of Spirit baptism, I tried to fake it, but nothing happened. God didn't seem to hear me. In desperation I went again to my Bible and read and studied. Although I loved Ivory as a friend and brother, and desired much of what he had, I came to believe firmly that I had already been baptized with the Holy Spirit when I had first believed in Jesus, and that my baptism in the name of

I remain the only person I know who was baptized in a bathtub.

the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was right and valid. Indeed, all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ were mine (Eph. 1:3). I took my heavy-laden heart to Jesus, and the Spirit told me I was His, and more joy came into my life. And Ivory remained a good friend.

Time went by. I graduated from college, worked a while, studied for a year at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, moved back to Columbia, married, and taught school. My wife Susan was from a Baptist background in Toronto, and we more or less embraced the Baptist view of baptism. We wanted our children to be able to experience their baptism as we had ours. Little did I understand at the time, as Mark Ross makes clear later in his article, that our conscious experience of our baptism isn't the important thing. In time, we found ourselves as members of First Presbyterian in Columbia. We joined, but we chose not to have our children baptized.

Although I had not been inclined to squabble over the validity of another person's infant baptism, infant baptism actually had never made clear sense to me because I had never really understood the covenantal nature of God's dealings with His people. I read and studied the Bible a lot, but the pieces didn't fit together well. I listened to the sermonettes during infant baptisms, but without the grid of covenant theology, it all sounded hollow.

Off to Vancouver

But soon, with the support and blessing of our church and Catawba Presbytery, Susan and I and our two kids were off to Vancouver again where I would be getting my M.Div. from Regent College. The two years passed like days, and before we knew it I was being called to be an Associate Pastor in an ARP church in Greensboro, NC. Since I was soon to be a Presbyterian minister, one can only imagine the new urgency I felt to resolve this issue. I had better get my kids baptized, and I had better do so out of conviction! But I really wasn't sure what my convictions were.

Several things happened that spring of 1989 that rearranged my thinking. The first was a tragedy that still rings in my memory. The youngest daughter of our pastor in Vancouver

was hit and killed by a car on her way to school. Ruth Codling was a beautiful six year old girl full of life and faith. Until Ruth's funeral I had never understood the corporate family nature of covenant membership. Without being able to put my finger on it exactly, I began to have what I now think of as a cultural and worldview shift, as I began to see the corporate nature of God's dealings with His people.

The second was a discussion with Dr. J. I. Packer, my advisor and theology teacher at Regent. One little thing he said made such a difference. The covenant promise that is extended to the child being baptized, and which is indeed signified by the baptism itself, is a *conditional* promise! It is the very same conditional promise extended whenever the free offer of the gospel goes forth to an unbeliever. There really is no presumption of a future salvation for the infant at all. The promise isn't a guarantee that the child will later embrace the truth, but a guarantee that if the child does embrace the truth, if he repents and believes, he will be saved.

The third thing was that I discovered O. Palmer Robertson's book *Christ and the Covenants*. The first chapter of that book did more to teach me about the nature of ancient covenants than anything I had read previously. I realized then that there was a huge cultural gap keeping us from understanding the ancient covenant relationships after which God's covenant relationship with us is patterned. There would still be lots of mental rearranging for me to do but I had come around. Thus, with conviction and honesty we decided to have our children baptized.

Our Children Are Baptized

Finally, there was the day of our children's baptism. We had approached Pastor Doug Codling with a request that our three daughters be baptized the following Sunday, shortly before we were to head off for Greensboro. He agreed to this, and we learned that there was a guest speaker lined up for that Sunday. We could not believe it as Rev. Tom Aicken announced his topics for the morning and evening messages: The Covenant of Grace, circumcision, and baptism. To this day I believe God had pre-

The covenant promise that is extended to the child being baptized, and which is indeed signified by the baptism itself, is a conditional promise!

pared those two messages just for us! It all just made sense. Suddenly I saw what it meant to receive the sign of covenant membership. The sacrament of baptism and my budding covenant theology now came together. We have transcribed and edited those wonderful messages in this the first issue of *Faith and Practice*, under the title, "The Covenant of Grace." I hope it enlightens you as it did me.

Inquiring about Baptism

Soon we were off to Greensboro. At Christ Community Church there many new converts and many people joining the church from other denominational backgrounds. We thus ran lots of Inquirers classes, and I seemed always to teach the sections in the Inquirers class on baptism and predestination. Baptism came up in discussions a lot. Many people were confused or even downright superstitious about baptism. Often a new convert would desire to be baptized, even though he had been baptized as an infant. Some questioned the validity of their Catholic baptism. Many from Baptist backgrounds thought we were thoughtless traditionalists to be baptizing babies. As I often explained, the problem was not whether I could accept them with their views on baptism; certainly I could. The real issue was whether they could live with our views, and put up with our infant baptisms!

I think my real education on the subject started then as I dealt with real people struggling to understand their own baptisms, and the baptisms of their children. Performing baptisms became one of my favorite experiences as a pastor. As I sought to teach and to minister well to those being baptized or having their children baptized, I discovered many helpful little booklets on baptism. I wish I had had then Jack Whytock's excellent review of the many booklets that are on the market today. Follow his advice and you will do well.

I have written much of the above simply to give testimony that the issue of baptism hasn't been easy for me. As a young believer, as a parent, as a pastor, as a friend, the issue has come up time and time again. The articles in this first issue of *Faith and Practice* are directed toward many of the same issues and questions many of

you have dealt with on this topic. Each of the writers of these articles is still learning, but each one's knowledge and experience has much to offer for the rest of us.

Bill Evans will try to help us understand the thorny personal and pastoral issue of rebaptism. How do we manage to teach the validity of a person's infant baptism without putting a damper on his or her enthusiasm as a new believer?

And what are we supposed to do and think when others are being baptized? Are we mere spectators in a nice event at church? How do we pray for the one being baptized? Does our past baptism have meaning in the present? How can we continue to be encouraged by our own and others' baptisms? Mark Ross's article "Improving Your Baptism" will help you think about these questions.

What about the relationship between our baptism and our ministry as believers in church and home? Is our baptism just to get on the church roll, or does God use the Holy Spirit, whose presence our baptism signifies, to prepare us for our life and service? In fact, there is an important relationship between our baptism and our being equipped by God with spiritual gifts for service and ministry. Bob Cara explores this in his article.

As I have talked about baptism with others, and officiated at baptisms of all kinds, the cultural routineness of baptism has come to concern me. Even adult baptism sometimes seems like a ticket to the status quo or a coming out into the Christian cultural establishment rather than a break with the past and the taking on of a new identity as a follower of Jesus. "Tat" Stewart gives us a glimpse of what baptism should mean to us as we receive the sign of being identified with Jesus. He does this by showing us what baptism means for a Muslim convert. Beware, you may never look at baptism the same way again!

I have learned recently that I was indeed baptized as a young child. So, now I look back upon two baptisms - one I remember, one I do not. I am glad for the experience I had at English L'Abri. That evening remains one of the highlights of my life. But now when I ask myself, "When was I really baptized?" I am more likely to ponder that time, when, as a young

Many people were confused or even downright superstitious about baptism.

toddler, by some pastor I never knew, in a church I can hardly today consider as legitimate, through parents who really didn't know why they were having me baptized, I received the water and the Trinitarian pronouncement of baptism. I am filled with wonder. I had no say in the matter of my infant baptism. For that matter, I had no say into what country I would be born, to what parents I would be born. God made all of these decisions for me. Yet that infant baptism which I passively received on that long-ago day remains as a testimony of the certainty of God's promise. I now have repented and turned to Jesus, and He has been faithful to His promise, that if I so repented and believed, He would make me His own.

Recently at Covenant Fellowship in Greensboro, where I now pastor, I had the priv-

ilege of baptizing two wonderful young teens, a brother and sister, who had come to believe in Jesus and who had not been baptized as infants. I took the opportunity that morning to preach on the subject of baptism. I want to say to all of you readers that I had great resources for that sermon. I had available to read and study most of the articles which are in this journal, and it made a big difference. I commend these articles to you, and hope you will benefit from them as much as I have.

John Blumenstein's next article on the meaning of baptism will help you with some important terms and get you grounded in the basics before you plunge into the other essays. If you desire to do a baptism word study, all the information you will need is in the last section of his essay.

Your Letters Are Welcome

The Editorial Committee of *Faith and Practice* invites your feedback. We would welcome several different kinds of letters.

How Can We Improve?

First, we ask for your input as to how we can make *Faith and Practice* a better publication. We may not be able to implement all recommendations, but we will consider all suggestions seriously. Please let us know how we can improve.

Can You Help Get the Word Out?

Second, we invite you to let us know how you can help get the word out about this new publication. Perhaps you would like to run a subscription campaign in your church. You may have ideas about how we can promote the journal better.

Clarification Needed?

Third, we invite you to interact with the authors of the various articles. If you have a

question, a follow up comment, or a challenge, we ask you to put it in writing and we will send it along to the author. We will then publish in the next issue those letters and responses that best clarify points or bring further insight to the general reader.

Ideas for Future Topics?

Fourth, you may have ideas about topics for future issues of *Faith and Practice*. Please include specific ideas about types of articles on a particular topic, as well as your reason for wanting to see an issue devoted to that topic.

Are You a Writer?

And fifth, you may desire to submit an article on some aspect of a topic of a future issue. We cannot guarantee publication, but we ask you to let us know what you would like to do, and we will work with you.

The Meaning of Baptism

John Blumenstein

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, *one baptism*; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (The Apostle Paul, addressing the Church in Ephesus).¹

After some 2,000 years of church history, can we any longer affirm with the apostle Paul that there is *one baptism* (Eph. 4:5)? What do we mean by affirming this even though the Church does not believe and act uniformly concerning baptism? Baptist Christians, for example, practice only adult baptism, whereas Presbyterians adhere to infant baptism. Should all Christians think and act alike before we can affirm that there is one baptism? Heaven forbid! This affirmation rests not upon our agreement about baptism, but upon the objective reality to which baptism bears witness, namely, what God himself has done for us in Christ. We, therefore, ought not to allow the Bible's affirmation of one baptism to be threatened by our differing beliefs and practices.

All Christians, therefore, bear a responsibility to handle their differences over baptism in a manner consistent with Paul's call "to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Perhaps rather than expending so much energy on attaining uniformity of belief and practice, we ought to expend far more on how we handle our differences over baptism. How we handle those differences might in the end prove critical to the task of resolving them.

Last summer my wife Sarah and I traveled to Romania, a predominantly Eastern Orthodox setting where rapid growth is occurring among Protestants, especially Pentecostals and Baptists. During that visit, I preached at a Pentecostal baptismal service where 35 people were to be baptized by immersion. Given that our own five children were baptized as infants, we were forced to grapple with the meaning of "one

baptism" in a place where the practice and belief differed from ours. In the sermon I emphasized common denominators of the rich yet often divisive subject of baptism, and I have decided to do likewise in this article. Perhaps by beginning with what unites us concerning baptism, we can truly appreciate the distinctives of our own particular heritage without allowing that heritage to disturb the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3). Such can indeed happen whenever we use our own beliefs and practices to exalt ourselves over others, something which Paul calls boasting in the flesh (Gal. 6:11-18).

We first consider baptism in the New Testament by defining it. Then we ask about the history of the practice, and finally we backtrack to explore more deeply several major facets of baptism in the New Testament. At the end of this article, the reader will find an appended note on Greek terms related to baptism.

What Is Baptism?

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Jesus, addressing the eleven disciples in Galilee after the crucifixion and resurrection).²

The Great Commission provides our basic starting point for defining baptism. Simply put, baptism is a ritual in which water is placed upon a person in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in order to signal that person's entry into the body of Christ, the Church. Both the use of water and the pronouncement of the Trinitarian name provide the pillars upon which the practice rests.

Why do we use water? Consistent with water's universal association with bathing and cleansing, we use it to signify purification from

After some 2,000 years of church history, can we any longer affirm with the apostle Paul that there is one baptism?

sin. The water reminds us that our salvation comes through the cleansing death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' own "baptism" into death along with His resurrection from the dead cleanses us from our iniquity and cancels the debt incurred by our sin against God and against our fellow man. Baptism is something we receive from another. That baptism is thus received passively emphasizes all the more that it is God's initiative that underlies baptism.³

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Why are we baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? First, calling upon the name of the One in whom we are baptized reinforces the true significance of the water, safeguarding against tendencies to invest the water with magical powers or to detach it from divine activity. Second, the pronouncement of the divine name evokes the story of redemption in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work in concert. Third, the pronouncement of the divine name also tangibly places upon us God's redemptive stamp of ownership, reminding us of our new identity in Christ and the responsibilities associated with it. The pronouncement of the divine name sets us upon a path by which the divine image, shattered by Adam's sin, comes to be restored. Baptism thus calls us to a way of life consistent with God's original intent for humanity and revealed now in the person and work of Christ.

Baptism, therefore, initiates us into God's family, emphasizing both the forgiveness of sins accomplished by Jesus' sacrificial ministry, and our responsibility to live in a manner consistent with what God has done in Christ. These are the twin pillars upon which baptism rests—cleansing water to remind us of God's initiative to accomplish our great salvation, and the pronouncement of the Trinitarian name to remind us of our new identity and the new way of life to which that identity calls us.

Why Do We Baptize?

A definitive history of the origin of Christian baptism has yet to be written, and this article certainly will not answer the many diffi-

cult questions which would be posed by such an undertaking. For example, did baptism simply arise out of the rite of circumcision, in effect replacing that rite?⁴ Does the ancient practice of baptizing converts to Judaism provide any historical precedents for Christian baptism?⁵ Do the purification rites practiced by either the Pharisees or the Essenes in the first century A.D. play into the history of Christian baptism?⁶ Scholars have in no way resolved these thorny historical questions. Ultimately we must be content with the New Testament's own witness to the history of baptism.

John's Baptism as Forerunner

What then does the New Testament tell us about that history and, in turn, about why we practice baptism? Simply put, the New Testament identifies the baptismal activity of John the Baptist as the earliest historical antecedent for Christian baptism (Matt. 3:1-17 and parallels). Although John's baptism is not to be equated with Christian baptism, it nonetheless sets in motion a progression leading to Christian baptism.⁷ John's practice heavily emphasizes repentance and the forgiveness of sins, preparing people for the ministry of Jesus, at the outset of which Jesus submits to John's baptism as a sign of His own submission to the will of God the Father. Then, at the end of His ministry, Jesus commands his followers to disciple the nations, which includes baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Subsequently, we find the early Church, in the book of Acts and elsewhere, obeying Jesus' command to baptize the nations (Acts 2:38; 10:47f.; 1 Cor. 1:14-16; etc.). The ministry of John the Baptist thus sets in motion a progression which culminates in the practice of Christian baptism commanded by Jesus and carried out by the apostles.

Why then do we Christians practice baptism? Because Jesus has commanded us to so do. At its very core, baptism involves submission to the kingdom of God, especially as that kingdom has been proclaimed by and established through Jesus Christ. Jesus, however, does not call us to obey the command in ignorance. We now backtrack to explore more deeply several major facets of baptism in the New Testament.

Why then do we Christians practice baptism? Because Jesus has commanded us to so do.

A Closer Look at Baptism

Both the richness of the subject and the bias of the interpreter pose tremendous challenges to anyone presuming to summarize what the New Testament says about baptism.⁸ As stated at the outset, I have decided to emphasize basic common denominators among Christians on the subject of baptism. Furthermore, I have placed a great deal of weight upon the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. I nonetheless appreciate those who would approach the subject differently by placing more weight on the writings of the Apostle Paul.⁹

Submission to the Will of God

As we have already seen, baptism constitutes an act of submission to the will of God. Jesus' submission to God the Father through baptism lays the foundation for our own submission:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:13-17, NIV; cf. Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34).

Jesus here sets the tone for later Christian baptism by submitting to John's baptism as a sign of obedience to God the Father. The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus, and God the Father immediately affirms Jesus to be the Son of God. Then, led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Jesus faces a dramatic test to his obedience (Matt. 4:1-11 and parallels). The baptism of Jesus, taken in context, suggests strong correlations between the rite of baptism and submission to the will of God. Later on, Luke bluntly describes the rejection of John's baptism as a

rejection of the very purposes of God:

All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, *because they had not been baptized by John*¹⁰ (Luke 7:29-30).

After the resurrection Jesus commissions his followers to disciple the nations, which includes baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:16-20). Then in the book of Acts the followers of Christ carry out the command and people respond in obedience to the gospel. The submission to God's rule displayed by Jesus' own baptism sets the tone for Christian baptism later in the New Testament.¹¹

New Identity and New Community

Baptism visibly marks our entry into a new community of people, something which cannot be separated from our experience of a new identity as followers of Jesus. Once again we return to the ministry of John the Baptist. Here we find the seeds for associating baptism with new identity and, in turn, with new community. John's baptism, accompanied by the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins, calls for the necessity of a radical re-orientation of identity, even to the point of crisis or judgment:

And do not think you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Matt. 3:9-10; cf. Luke 3:7-9).

Christian baptism, with its emphasis upon baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, likewise signifies radical new identity. The baptized person, whatever his or her name, becomes identified with the very

Baptism visibly marks our entry into a new community of people.

name of God and is consequently initiated into the new community created by Him and presided over by His Son Jesus Christ, namely, the Church or body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

Identification with Jesus Christ in His Death and Resurrection

The rite of baptism closely identifies a person with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. Once again we find the seeds already sown in the Gospels. In response to the request from James and John to be granted privileged positions at Jesus' right and left, Jesus says,

You don't know what you are asking . . . Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? . . . You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared (Mark 10:38-40, cf. Luke 12:50).

We see here that Jesus uses baptism terminology to refer to his death, laying the foundation for Paul's own close association in Rom. 6 between the rite of baptism and Jesus' death. Indeed, the Gospels present the suffering and death of Christ as a picture of discipleship. The death of Christ provides the model for Christian ethics, pointing to the perfect embodiment of undivided love for God and unselfish love for neighbor. The resurrection then empowers us to live out such a model. In Rom. 6, Paul, writing after the resurrection and having experienced its power firsthand, closely correlates baptism with the death and resurrection of Christ:

What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new

life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection (Rom. 6:1-5).

Union with Christ, though not yet complete, sufficiently sets the ethical tone for the Christian life and provides the basis for its empowerment (Rom. 6:8-14). That union for Paul ultimately cannot be separated from the radical new identity which manifests itself in a Christian lifestyle empowered by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26).

Purification from Sin and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

Water rituals in general tend to signify purification or cleansing, and baptism, in particular, signifies purification from sin accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and accompanied by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Once again the seeds are sown in John the Baptist's ministry when John declares,

He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:11; cf. Luke 3:16-17).

Such fire and judgment are rich with imagery associated with purification. An explicit emphasis upon baptism as signifying purification from sin occurs later in the New Testament, sometimes accompanied by an emphasis upon the outpouring of the Holy Spirit:

And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name (Acts 22:16).

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11; cf. Titus 3:5; Eph. 5:26).

. . . let us draw near to God with a sincere

We see that Jesus uses baptism terminology to refer to his death.

heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water (Heb. 10:22).

Two additional passages emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit in association with purification from sin (1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5). All of these presuppose the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as foundational. Furthermore, purification from sin and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are not to be divorced from a lifestyle consistent with that purification and actually empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Baptism graphically pictures the story of salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus and challenges us to follow in our Master's footsteps. By submitting to the rite of baptism, we submit to God Himself and proclaim undivided loyalty to His gracious rule. Also, we acknowledge the new identity which is ours in Christ and become members of a new community called the Church, over which Christ is the head. Furthermore, we unabashedly identify ourselves and our families with Christ himself in his crucifixion and resurrection, without which we could not pass from the dominion of sin to the rule of heaven. Finally, purified from sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, informed by God's Word, and expectantly awaiting the return of our exalted Lord, we pledge to walk in a manner consistent with the precious gift of baptism.

An Appended Note on Greek Terms

Seven Greek words, three verbs and four nouns, refer to baptism in the New Testament. The following list categorizes these words according to common root and meaning:

The root *baptizo*

1. *baptizo* (verb, pronounced bap-tid-zoh)—Found in the Gospels (43 times, "times" hereafter designated as "x"), Acts (21x), Rom. (2x), 1 Cor. (10x), and Gal. (1x) for a total of 77 occurrences with 75 related to baptism. Generally rendered with some form of the English verb

"baptize."

2. *baptisma/baptismos* (nouns, pronounced bap-tiz-ma/bap-tiz-mos)—Found in the Gospels (11x), Acts (6x), Rom. (1x), Eph. (1x), Col. (1x), Heb. (2x), and 1 Pet. (1x) for a total of 23 occurrences with a total of 20 related to baptism.¹² Generally rendered with the English noun "baptism."

3. *baptistes* (noun, pronounced bap-tis-tais)—Found only in the Gospels for a total of 12 occurrences, all descriptive of the ministry of John "the Baptist."¹³

The root *luo*

1. *luo/apoluo*¹⁴ (verbs, pronounced lou-oh/a-po-lou-oh)—Found in John (1x), Acts (3x), 1 Cor. (1x), Heb. (1x), and 2 Pet. (1x) for a total of 7 occurrences with only 3 related to baptism.¹⁵ In these 3 instances it is rendered with an emphasis upon "washing" or "bathing."¹⁶

2. *lutron* (noun, pronounced lou-tron)—Found only in Eph. (1x) and Titus (1x), both of which relate to baptism.¹⁷ Rendered with an emphasis upon "washing" or "bathing" (cf. *louro* above).

Based upon a statistical analysis of these words, several conclusions emerge. First, the heaviest concentration of references to baptism occurs in the Gospels and Acts. Second, almost all of the references in the Gospels involve John the Baptist, whose baptismal activity foreshadows Christian baptism.¹⁸ Third, most of the references in Acts involve the actual practice of Christian baptism, and a smattering of references involve John the Baptist. Fourth, outside the Gospels and Acts, one finds the heaviest concentration of references to baptism in the Pauline Epistles: Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Titus. Finally, outside of Paul, one finds just a smattering of references in Hebrews and 1 Peter.¹⁹

Interpreters sometimes appeal to the basic meaning of the verb *baptizo* ("to dip," "to immerse") in order to settle questions related to the proper mode of baptism. Such appeals fail to take into account this verb's semantic range which allows for any one of the following depending upon context: total immersion, partial immersion, pouring, or sprinkling.²⁰ But to complicate matters even further, whenever the

New Testament uses the verb *baptizo*, the various contexts do not provide sufficient information to determine the precise mode. Appeals to the basic meaning of *baptizo*, therefore, do not ultimately settle the question of mode, much less the related question of infant baptism.

Endnotes

¹Eph. 4:3-5.

²Matt. 28:18-20.

³See n. 11 below.

⁴Baptism did eventually supersede circumcision in the early church, but this is different from saying that baptism simply arose out of circumcision. Here we can rely upon Paul for a proper understanding of the historical relationship between the two rites. In Galatians Paul in effect argues that baptism has superseded circumcision, but not in such a way that the rite of circumcision is made to account for the rite of baptism. Instead, Paul prefers always to emphasize the larger redemptive-historical realities to which each rite attests, and these rites in effect become ways of talking about the transition from one era in redemptive history characterized by a barrier between Jew and Gentile to the new era inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ whereby that barrier has been abolished (see Gal. 3:27-29; Eph. 2:11-4:6; etc.). The New Testament nonetheless uses circumcision to enrich our understanding and practice of baptism (Col. 2:11-12) as it likewise uses other Old Testament points of reference (e.g. Noah and the ark in 1 Pet. 3:18-21).

⁵The evidence proves inconclusive, especially given what little knowledge is available about the widespread practice of Jewish proselyte baptism during and prior to the first century A.D. Did the widespread practice of Jewish proselyte baptism even precede Christian baptism in the first place? See *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:583b, 585b.

⁶Again, the evidence is inconclusive, especially given the tremendous dissimilarities between these rites and Christian baptism. Such purification rites were perpetually self-administered, whereas baptism was administered by another person and only once. See *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp. 56-57, and *New In-*

ternational Dictionary of New Testament Theology, 1:144.

⁷But see John 3:25-4:3 and Acts 18:24-19:7, passages emphasizing a clear distinction between the baptism practiced by John and what we call "Christian" baptism. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance preparing people for Jesus' full public ministry. Christian baptism, on the other hand, presupposes the culmination of that ministry in the crucifixion and the resurrection. The Gospels and Acts nonetheless present the ministry of John the Baptist as a critical moment in the unfolding of redemptive history which leads ultimately to Christian baptism (Matt. 17:10-13; Acts 1:22; 10:37; etc.). Furthermore, the Trinitarian correlations between Jesus' baptism by John and Jesus' command that his disciples baptize the nations are striking. Jesus, after the resurrection, commands his disciples to baptize in the name of *the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*; on the occasion of Jesus' own baptism by John, *the Holy Spirit* descends upon Jesus and God *the Father* affirms Jesus to be *His Son*. John Calvin goes so far as to equate John's baptism with Christian baptism. See Calvin's *A Harmony of the Gospels* (Matt. 3:1ff. and parallels) and his commentary on John (Jn. 1:25ff.). Cf. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:585b-86a.

⁸I am indebted to Michael Green's *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 152-56, for a very helpful review of baptismal beliefs and practices in the early church.

⁹Although this investigation does not make any assumptions about the conscious awareness of the person being baptized, it does assume that baptism is being practiced somehow in conjunction with the covenant community. In the case of either infant baptism or adult baptism, therefore, community involvement and responsibility are assumed (see 1 Cor. 12:13).

¹⁰Jesus himself upholds the importance of John's baptism when he challenges the religious leaders with a question about the divine origin of John's baptism (Matt. 21:25; Mark 11:30; Luke 20:4).

¹¹Even the grammar and basic usage of the Greek verb *baptizo* indirectly emphasizes the aspect of submission. In reference to baptism, the verb *baptizo* appears in the passive voice roughly 60% of the time, with the grammatical

subject always being baptized by someone else. In these instances, therefore, baptism is not presented as something which one does to or for oneself, like bathing, purification rituals, and the like (e.g., Mark 7:4; Luke 11:38). On the contrary, one always submits to the performance of the rite by another person (see *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1:537, 540). The other 40% of the time the verb *baptizo* appears almost always in contexts where one can take for granted that the rite is not self-administered. Even in the one New Testament instance where the verb *baptizo* appears in a form suggestive of self-administering the rite (Acts 22:16, Greek's peculiar middle voice), humility and submission dominate. The verb appears here in the imperative mood (the mood of command), and Paul is recounting his conversion and consequent submission to God through obedience to the instructions of Ananias.

¹²The three exceptions are Mark 7:4; Heb. 6:2; 9:10, which all relate to ritual purifications or ablutions. Cf. n. 6 above on *baptizo*. The other 20 occurrences, all involving baptism, are: Matt. 3:7; 21:25; Mark 1:4; 10:38, 39; 11:30; Luke 3:3; 7:29; 12:50; 20:4; Acts 1:22; 10:37; 13:24; 18:25; 19:3,4; Rom. 6:4; Eph. 4:5; Col.

2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21.

¹³Matt. 3:1; 11:11, 12; 14:2, 8; 16:14; 17:13; Mark 6:25; 8:28; Luke 7:20, 33; 9:19.

Luke 3:3; 7:29; 12:50; 20:4; Acts 1:22; 10:37; 13:24; 18:25; 19:3, 4; Rom. 6:4; Eph. 4:5; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21.

¹⁴*apolouo* is a compound of the preposition *apo* and the verb *louo*. In New Testament usage the compound form *apolouo* refers to baptism twice (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11), and the simple form *louo* refers to baptism once (Heb. 10:22). Given this infrequency of occurrence in reference to baptism, it is difficult to determine nuances of difference between the two words.

¹⁵Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; Heb. 10:22.

¹⁶Cf. the instances in John 13:10; Acts 9:37; 16:33; 2 Pet. 2:22, which do not refer to baptism.

¹⁷Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5.

¹⁸Matt. 28:19 is the one direct reference to Christian baptism per se (cf. Mark 16:16 in the so-called longer ending of Mark).

¹⁹The following writings do not contain any clear references to baptism: 2 Cor.; Phil.; 1 & 2 Thess.; 1 & 2 Tim.; Phlm.; Jas.; 1, 2, & 3 John; Jude; Rev.

²⁰*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:583.

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The Covenant Of Grace

Tom Aicken

What is the Covenant of Grace? The Covenant of Grace is an agreement. This is perhaps the simplest way of speaking about it. The Covenant of Grace is an agreement that was made way back in eternity between the Persons of the Triune God, an agreement between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an agreement that God made with Himself long before anything was created, that the Son of God would come into the world in due time, not just at any time, but at the right time, and offer Himself upon the cross to save His people from their sins.

This agreement is the basis of the frequently repeated promise that we find in the Scriptures all the way from Genesis to Revelation: "I will be your God, and you will be my people." There are many hundreds of promises that God has made to His people throughout the ages, but this is the particular promise of blessing that embraces them all.

Now it is important for us to understand that the Lord could not be our God and we could not be His people but for the fact that Jesus came and lived among us. He came and lived a perfect life. He was obedient even to death upon the cross. And there on the cross He made a perfect atonement for our sins. We could not just decide on our own to be the people of God. We could not be received by God with favor and know His peace except for the fact that Jesus was offered at Calvary. And that is what the Covenant of Grace is all about. It focuses on the fact that God agreed within Himself before the foundation of the world that in due time Jesus should come. And whatever favor God shows to men, it is as a result of this decision and commitment on God's part.

Let us go back to the Old Testament and see how this eternal covenant between the Persons of the Godhead works itself out in human history. Particularly, let us go back to the time of Abram, whom we will refer to as "Abraham" throughout this article.

Now Abraham was 75 years old and living in the land of Haran when God first called him.

We learn this in Gen. 12, and right from that time God made four things clear to his servant: first, God would make Abraham into a great nation; second, He would bless Abraham, and then make him to be a blessing to others; third, He would protect Abraham and Abraham's descendants; and fourth, He would bless all peoples on earth through Abraham. The last promise is particularly significant because it ties Abraham, through Noah, all the way back to the promise made to Adam.

The Coming Deliverer

What had been the promise to Adam? It was that someone would come from among Eve's offspring and crush the serpent's head. In other words, God would send a deliverer, someone who would defeat Satan and redeem God's people from sin and condemnation. But when would that deliverer come? Generations came and went. The stage was further set for the coming deliverer by the promise made to Noah, but still, there was no clear evidence of his coming until this promise was made to Abraham in Gen. 12: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

In Gen. 15, God added another installment to His promise to Abraham. Abraham wondered how God was going to do what He had said, especially since it rested on Abraham having children, and here he was already an old man without any children of his own. So God promised that He would indeed give children to Abraham, that Abraham's offspring would spread over every generation to the end of time, and that they would be as many as the stars in the heavens. Of course, we must not think that their offspring were to be Jews only. They would be Jews and also a vast multitude of Gentiles (see Gal. 3:26-29). Do you see what happens? The fulfillment of God's promise of blessing is always far richer and much better than what we understood the promise to be in the first place.

There is something else we find in Gen. 15.

The Lord could not be our God and we could not be His people but for the fact that Jesus came and lived among us.

Abraham also wondered how he would gain possession of the land that God had promised to give to him. So, on that day God made a covenant with Abraham, a promise sealed in blood, to assure him that the land really would be his (verses 17-21). Once again, though, we must be careful not to limit our understanding of the blessing. The fulfillment of the promise is better than what we first understood the promise to be. Jesus will take possession of all the earth (Psa. 2:8), and He assures us that the meek, His co-heirs, will also take possession of all the earth (Matt. 5:5). This little bit of real estate in the Middle East, then, is not all there is for God's people to look forward to as their inheritance. It is but a down payment and pledge of the blessing which is yet to come in all its fullness (see Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16).

The Covenant Confirmed

It is not until we come to Gen. 17 that we see the Covenant of Grace more fully explained and more clearly confirmed. In all this there is not very much which is new; in fact, there is nothing which had not been there at least in seed form in the earlier revelations. What is new is Abraham's obligation. In verses 9-14, God explains what Abraham himself must now do. In fact, part of the explanation of the nature of the covenant is found in the sign that God uses to confirm the covenant, namely, circumcision. As we come to understand the true significance of circumcision, and why it was appropriate as a sign of God's covenant with Abraham, we can begin to understand more about the covenant itself:

Then God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you' (Gen. 17:9-11).

There it is. Circumcision was to be the sign of the covenant between God and His people,

the sign that spoke of all the things God had promised to do. Any other sign might have been given, but this was the sign that God gave, the sign that He saw to be appropriate for all that He was promising. Circumcision was an appropriate sign in at least three ways.

First, circumcision was a ritual that involved the shedding of blood, and like all the blood rituals of the Old Testament it pointed to the connection between death and forgiveness, and thus served to foreshadow the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Individually and collectively, the blood rituals said to the people, "You need forgiveness. You need cleansing. You need the One whom God will send, and by whom all nations will be blessed. You need the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Second, circumcision was appropriate as a covenant sign because the cutting away of the foreskin was symbolic of the need for regeneration. It spoke of how the sinful nature had to be removed if one was to have peace with God and inherit His blessing. On this point so many Jews went astray in their thinking. They thought that if they had the sign of God's covenant upon them, they were God's children and were therefore eternally secure. We call this view of things "presumptive regeneration," and it is a most pernicious doctrine. Unbelieving Jews often held to this heresy, and they taught it to others, even into New Testament times. Many professing Christians hold to this view today. However, circumcision as a sign of the covenant spoke in fact of how the people first had to be cleansed of their sins, and only then could they be received as God's children and heirs.

This is brought out in Jer. 4:4: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done, burn with no one to quench it." Certainly, this text does not give any place to presumptive regeneration. One must be circumcised in heart, and not in flesh only, or he is still in his sin and under the wrath and curse of God!

Thus, circumcision was an Old Testament symbol of regeneration, a symbol of that inner cleansing which God required and without which no man could see the kingdom of God. Circumcision said to the people, "You need a

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***Do not expect
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new heart. Do not presume or take anything for granted. You cannot approach God in your sin."

Third, circumcision was appropriate as a covenant sign in that it was given not only to adults when they first came to believe, but to their children as well. Just as the promise of God extended to many generations to come, circumcision as a sign established covenantal continuity between these generations. "For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner — those who are not your offspring; whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant." From the beginning, as one can clearly see, God was never interested in some kind of ethnic purity. Circumcision was not meant as an ethnic badge. No, circumcision was for both Jews and Gentiles. It was given to all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, and it was given to their children. It was given to the children before they became believers, and it was recognized that many of them might not ever become believers (as in the case of Ishmael), but it was given to them anyway because this was God's command.

Circumcision as a sign, as a "visual sermon," spoke to children growing up in believing homes, and it spoke to their parents. Circumcision as a sign pointed the child to his need of cleansing. It did not bring the cleansing which was signified. It "preached" the need of cleansing. It pointed the way. When I came into Vancouver today, I saw a number of signs along the road telling me that Vancouver was ahead. I knew when I saw the signs that if I kept following the signs and doing as they said, I would eventually get here. There were many other people coming along the road, many others who saw the signs, but they wanted to go to some other place. They did not want to come to Vancouver. Now the signs to Vancouver said the same thing to me as they said to them, but they wanted something else. This is what circumcision was. Circumcision spoke to the children growing up in a believing home and said, in effect, "You need everything that this symbol represents. Do not think that because you

have the sign, you have the blessing itself. Do not think that just because you have the sign that says 'to Vancouver' that you have already arrived. The sign tells you it is right ahead. The sign is not the blessing itself. You need a new heart; you need the Savior. Do not expect to get to heaven on the coattails of your parents. It doesn't work that way. Just as your parents had to believe in order to be saved, you need to believe in order to be saved. God has no grandchildren."

Hope for Parents

To the parents, circumcision said that there was real hope, not only for them, but also for their children, and for the generations to come. God would bless the children for the sake of their believing parents, and all those in their household who came to trust in the Lord would surely be received to glory. The promise, remember, was "to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." The latter part of that promise, that is, "and the God of your descendants after you," was not just a meaningless appendage. It was not that the blessing would stop at the first generation and go no further. No, as a parent believed and was saved, so he could hope that if his children believed they too would be saved, and so it would be for the children of their children throughout their generations. Of course, if a child did not believe he would not be saved, and that also was God's promise. The point is that the blessings of God spilled over into the succeeding generations.

Not a Limited Time Offer

The free offer of the gospel was for parents, their children, and all whom the Lord would be pleased to bring under the message of the truth. God did not say, "This offer is just too wonderful and too extravagant on My part to extend indefinitely. I will therefore make it a limited time offer, good just for now, and I am not sure when I might be able to offer it again." No, department stores and car dealerships give limited time offers, but God shows His covenant mercy to a thousand generations (Ex. 20:6). The free offer of the gospel had been in

place since Adam, and it would be in place to the end of time: "Believe in the Lord and you will be saved. That goes for you, and it goes for your house."

Circumcision was therefore an appropriate sign of the old covenant because, since children received it, and since it marked the reproductive organ, it represented the hope that parents could have for their children and their children's children: "But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and His righteousness with their children's children, with those who keep His covenant and remember to obey His precepts" (Psa. 103:17-18).

Females Covered Too

Since circumcision was applied to the male reproductive organ, of course only the males could be circumcised. But it must not be thought that this left females out of the covenant. Circumcision was only the sign of God's covenant blessing; it was not the blessing itself. Females received the blessing, as did all who were circumcised in heart, even though they did not and could not receive the outward sign. For that matter, it would have served the women no useful purpose to receive the sign. Every male child who was born was to be the head of another household that would come in the next generation. Like Adam who represents all his posterity in creation, and like Christ who represents all who are His in the recreation, so the head of every house represented everybody in his house, male and female. Therefore, in the circumcision of all the male children, everybody was covered.

Circumcision marked and sealed the unsearchable riches of Christ for those whom God had chosen to be His own from eternity. Yet, there was also a dark side to all this. If anyone was willfully rebellious, refusing to be circumcised and refusing to submit himself to the rite of circumcision as commanded by God, he was to be treated as a covenant breaker (Gen. 17:14). The females *could not* receive the sign of the blessing, and that was all right, but anyone who *would not* receive the sign would not receive the blessing either. These people were to be put out of the camp; they were to be denied the privileges of those who were in the

covenant community.

We can see then that the Jews were to take the sign of circumcision very seriously. It was not to be neglected nor treated lightly. In Gen. 17:3-8, the part that begins, "As for me...", God says in effect, "I take my part seriously." And in Gen. 17:9-14, the part that begins "As for you...", God says in the same way, "I want you to take your part just as seriously." God's people have not always received the ordinances of the Lord with understanding and due respect, nor has the Church always administered them properly, but Abraham did and this is an example for us all. "On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, *as God told him*" (verse 23).

Abraham understood that circumcision pointed ahead in time, for him and his house, to the coming of Messiah. He understood that circumcision pointed ahead to the offering up of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, just as the sacrifices did. And he understood that neither he nor any man could have peace with God and receive His eternal blessing apart from this one offering up of Christ, the spotless Lamb of God. Jesus said, "Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56).

Sprinkling Clean Water

Let us now move over into the New Testament and see what has happened to circumcision. We find, as we might expect, that all of the blood rituals pointing ahead to Christ and His sacrifice on the cross are removed. By this time, indeed, Christ had come. He had been offered up. To continue the blood rituals, including circumcision, would have been to say that He had not yet come, and that we were still waiting for Him. As bad as it was to neglect circumcision under the old covenant, it would have been even worse to continue it under the new covenant, if by so doing we meant to imply that Christ had not yet come. So then, we are not surprised at all that circumcision has been removed in the New Testament as a sign of God's eternal covenant. The question is, however, what has replaced it? What sign does God

As bad as it was to neglect circumcision under the old covenant, it would have been even worse to continue it under the new covenant.

It is important to point out that in the New Testament there is no essential change in the covenant that was made with Abraham.

give His people now to tell us of His covenant, to show the redemption Christ has accomplished and the obligation we have to serve Him?

It is important to point out that in the New Testament there is no essential change in the covenant that was made with Abraham, although the benefits have increased because Christ has been offered up and believers have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. Had there been a change in the covenant itself we may be sure that God would have told us about it. We search the New Testament Scriptures in vain to find any change in God's eternal covenant or any reduction in the blessings promised to Abraham. Rather, we see over and over that the New Testament blessings are understood in light of and in fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. We see this in the gospels, in Acts, in the epistles. We see that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, which is specifically promised by the prophet Joel, is in fact the means by which God extends His covenant outward to the nations, and thus fulfills His promise to bring blessing to the nations through Abraham, and through Abraham's seed, the coming Messiah. As we read in Gal. 3:14, "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."

The Day of Pentecost

Now come with me to the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter has been preaching, and, as he reaches a certain point in the sermon, he says, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." What a ton of bricks to unload on these devout Jews who had come from afar all the way to Jerusalem to show their devotion to the Lord! Suddenly they recognized their sin. They have been longing for and waiting for Messiah. Now they realize that He has come to them, but they have not received Him. Rather, they have nailed Him to a cross. They have crucified the Lord of glory! Standing there listening to Peter, they are cut to the heart. Desperately they cry out to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

These Jewish men and women are in effect asking for a word from God. They are looking

for mercy, but they know that they do not deserve it and they can hardly imagine that they should ever be forgiven. They are thinking, "Where do we go from here? What can we possibly do about this guilt which is upon us? Is there any hope of mercy for us?" And what they are told coming into the New Testament church is much the same as what any outsider would have been told in the Old Testament coming with his family to live in Israel. Peter replies to their plea, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Peter's Reply Examined

Let us examine the parts of Peter's answer carefully. First, the people are told to repent. Repentance was required as much under the old covenant as it is under the new. Second, they are told to be baptized. In the Old Testament, those who repented and embraced the God of Abraham received the sign of circumcision. Now, however, in place of circumcision, there is baptism. In order to show that baptism has replaced circumcision as a covenant sign, Peter tells the people that this is for the forgiveness of their sins, which is of course just what circumcision had represented earlier. In order to show that baptism speaks of a new and improved covenant, the same but better, he tells them that they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It must be remembered, of course, that the ritual of baptism would not provide forgiveness for these people; it simply represented the forgiveness that would be theirs as they repented and turned to Jesus. Baptism would not give them the Spirit, but it represented the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

The third thing the people are told by Peter is that the promise spoken of by the prophet Joel is also for them: "The promise is for you and your children." What about the promise that had been made to Abraham, the promise "to be your God and the God of your descendants after you"? That promise you will notice has not changed one bit. What we see happening in Acts 2 is the fulfillment of the promises

given to Abraham in Gen. 12-17. And as we saw in Gen. 17, so we see again in Acts 2, that the free offer of the gospel is not for a limited time. It is for believers, for their children, for their children's children, and for all whom the Lord is pleased to call to the very end of time, so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom. 10:13).

An Added Dimension

This matter deserves our close attention. What we find at Pentecost is far from any structural change or diminished blessing in the covenant given to Abraham. The fact that the covenant has now been sealed by the blood of Christ gives it an added dimension, but it does not destroy what had already been set in place. Circumcision in all it represented was an appropriate sign for God's people before the coming of Messiah, and baptism is appropriate after Messiah's coming. Baptism points backward to the finished work of Christ; circumcision pointed forward. In both cases the promise is for generations to come, for the children and the children's children. Both represent spiritual realities. Both "preach" the promise of the gospel in simple form. Both point the way to what is needed to be in right relationship with God. And just as circumcision was applied to children of believers, so we would expect the same of baptism. Had there been a change in the pattern of applying the covenant sign to children, we would have expected a clear word on the matter. The silence of the New Testament witness here is deafening.

Household Baptisms

If baptism is "the circumcision done by Christ," as the apostle Paul says in Col. 2:11-12, and if the principle of applying the covenant sign to children of believers still applies, then we can expect to find in the New Testament household baptisms, just as in Genesis where we saw where Abraham *and his house* were circumcised. That is in fact what we do find. There are five household baptisms recorded in the New Testament. They were the houses of Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailer, Crispus, and Stephanus. Some would tell us that there were no infants in those

houses, but we do not know that. It is up to those who insist that baptism has not replaced circumcision, or that God has withdrawn the blessings of the Old Testament, to prove that there were no infants in those houses.

As we move into the New Testament, what we find is not that God has subtracted benefits but that He has added them. In some cases the benefits have been expanded. The sign of the covenant is now given to females, for instance, which was impossible in the Old Testament. As Paul entered Philippi, and preached to the women gathered at the river, we read that "one of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home." Lydia believed; we do not know about her house. And yet, she was baptized and so, too, was her house. Was Lydia a single parent? Was she married to an unbeliever? Again, we do not know these things. Yet, as a believer herself, she was entitled to have the sign of the covenant, not only on her but on her children.

Good News for Single Moms

Today's single mothers especially should appreciate this. We have a growing number of women in our society who find themselves having to raise their children alone. They are divorced, perhaps, or their husbands have simply walked out on them. These women face a mammoth and frightening task. What happens if, as with Lydia, they come under the sound of the gospel and are saved? Does the Bible hold out any comfort to them in their circumstances? Yes, indeed! It is the comfort of the covenant of grace. Both they and their children stand in a covenantal relationship with the Lord. In a most significant way, in other words, they are not raising their children alone.

Surely, this is the meaning of 1 Cor. 7:14: "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy." The children of a believer (whether believing father or

Both "preach" the promise of the gospel in simple form. Both point the way to what is needed to be in right relationship with God.

mother) are in the covenant, and are therefore considered holy (i.e. separated from the world unto the Lord for His special care and protection). These children may not be believers themselves, but they are in God's gracious covenant. They will be blessed of God for their parents' sake. They will be given access to, and the advantages of, a godly upbringing. And God's promise is to them, it is signified and guaranteed in their baptism, that if they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ they will be saved.

Baptism, like the rainbow, is God's visual signature added to the verbal promise to authenticate what is promised.

God Has Increased His Mercies

So as we move into the New Testament, where is the evidence that God has withdrawn His goodness and mercy promised to Abraham? Do we have less now than our forefathers in the wilderness? God forbid! What we find is that God has not decreased but increased His mercies to us.

Are you a child of a believer who has also become a believer? Perhaps you were baptized as an infant. You have greater cause now than ever before to rejoice in your baptism, and I hope that you will. As a believer, Martin Luther rejoiced in his infant baptism. Luther rejoiced when he first believed in Christ, for he knew that his baptism assured him that if he believed then he would be saved. Is this not the promise of the gospel? Baptism, like the rainbow, is God's visual signature added to the verbal promise to authenticate what is promised. The devil could send ten thousand accusers as far as Luther was concerned, and it would not make the slightest bit of difference because God had spoken and guaranteed through his baptism, that if he would believe, he would indeed be saved!

Were You Baptized as an Infant?

Are you a child of a believer, but you are not yet a believer yourself? Perhaps you were baptized as an infant, too. I plead with you not to ignore your baptism; listen carefully to what it is telling you. It is not telling you that you are God's child and thus eternally secure. Do not fall for the error of presumptive regeneration. Neither is your baptism telling you that if your parents earnestly trained you according

to the word of God, God will honor them by giving you grace to believe. No, faith does not come from proper training but from God's electing love. What, then, is your baptism telling you? It is saying very simply and clearly, "You need Jesus Christ. No one comes to the Father but by Him. You need a new heart, a clean heart. You cannot approach God in your sin. You need all the spiritual blessings your baptism signifies. Do not expect to get to heaven on the coattails of your parents. God has no grandchildren. You must repent and you must believe. Whoever believes in the Son of God has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Perhaps you are a parent, or a parent-to-be, and you are wondering, should I have my children baptized?" If you are an unbeliever, the answer is "no." I hope you understand that baptism is not a magical charm which serves to win God's favor for your children in spite of the fact that you are still in your sin. If, however, you are a believer, yes, you should have your children baptized. Baptism is not a magic charm for them either, but they are entitled to this sign of the covenant. It does not guarantee them salvation, but it points them to Christ, and it encourages you to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It challenges you by prayer, precept, example, and by every word of encouragement you have opportunity to give, to raise them in the fear of the Lord.

As we have our children baptized, may God enable us to see what a marvelous privilege He has bestowed on our children by including them in His covenant of grace. And may He impress upon us this challenge to raise them to His glory.

Improving Your Baptism

Mark E. Ross

The title for this article will probably be puzzling to some readers, and perhaps misleading to others. *Improving your baptism*—What is being said here? Is this an article about new and creative ways of conducting a baptism? No, it is not.

The title for this essay comes from Q. 167 of the Larger Catechism: *How is our baptism to be improved by us?* Before we look at the answer given, let us ponder the meaning of the question. The word *improve* comes into our language from Old French where it came from two words meaning “into + profit.” The idea was of something being turned for a profit, or, as we might say, turned to one’s advantage. We still use the word this way when we speak of improvements being made on a piece of property. The idea is that the property is enhanced, made more valuable or usable, by the improvements on it. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary cites a 1632 statement concerning property deeded to John Winthrop to the effect that the deed shall become void “if the...said John Winthrop shall...suffer the island to lie waste, and not improve the same.” In other words, the property was given to Mr. Winthrop with the express condition that he make good use of the land and not neglect it.

I dare say that a similar demand is placed on those who receive the precious mark of baptism: they are to make good use of it and not neglect it. But how is this to be done? The answer given to our question in the Larger Catechism addresses this very issue, teaching us how to make the most of our baptism as a remarkable gift from God.

Far too few of us have ever thought about making good use of our baptism. For most of us, baptism is a thing of the past. We look upon it as something important which needed to be done, but now that it is done, we are finished with it. Whatever meaning it had—and most of us are not very clear on that—it had for the time in which it was given. When we are present at the baptism of others, and if we are thinking at all about baptism, we think about what baptism

means *to them*. The idea that we ourselves are to receive a benefit by observing another’s baptism and meditating upon our own normally does not occur to us.

If we attach the significance of baptism just to the moment when the baptism occurs, it becomes very difficult for us to understand what is accomplished by the baptism of infants. “Wouldn’t it be much better,” we ask, “to wait until the children are more aware of what is going on in baptism?” Those who were baptized as adults sometimes vividly recall with great affection the feelings they had when they were baptized. This memory heightens for them the significance of their baptism, and they want this benefit to be given to their children. But to do this is to shift the significance of baptism away from what it means to what we felt or were conscious of when we were baptized. It makes “improving” our baptism an effort to recall the feelings we had at our baptism. This is moving away from what God intends for us.

How then are we to improve our baptism? Consider now the answer which the Larger Catechism gives on how we are to improve our baptism:

The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and

Far too few of us have ever thought about making good use of our baptism.

by endeavouring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.

That is a mouthful. We will do well to take it bit by bit. To do this, I shall take the liberty of breaking down this very long statement into several statements, adding words where necessary to make a complete statement of a phrase and to make clear what is being said. *Italics* will mark the additions that I make. These several statements will be designated as Part 1, Part 2, etc.

Improving our baptism not only reminds us of our great duty to resist temptation, it can also gives us strength to do so.

A Needed but Neglected Benefit

Part 1: The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others.

The catechism tells us that improving our baptism is something both needful and neglected. That it is certainly neglected will become very clear once we realize what it is we are supposed to be doing when we "improve" our baptism. Why is it needful?

Remembering that baptism is a sacrament will help us to understand why it is needful or necessary for us to improve our baptism. Qs. 162 and 163 of the Larger Catechism tell us what a sacrament is and why sacraments are important to us. Sacraments are outward signs of spiritual things. Among the benefits we can receive from them are the strengthening and increase of our faith and all other spiritual graces (for example, hope, love, perseverance, etc.). To neglect a sacrament is to neglect that which will strengthen and increase our faith and spiritual development. Our catechism teaches that the benefits we derive from baptism are not received automatically just by being baptized. Our baptism must be "improved" or we will not receive from our baptism what we should.

In addition, we are told that this improvement must take place our whole life long. It is

not something we can work at for a while and then put it aside as complete. We must do it regularly throughout our life. Again and again we are to meditate upon our baptism and put it to good use, so that we might grow in grace.

The Best Times for Making Improvements

Two particular times in our life are singled out as times when we should seek to make good use of our baptism: times of temptation, and times when we are present at the baptism of others.

How can our baptism help us with temptation? We must remember that our baptism marks us out as belonging to God. We are not our own. We belong to Another. The mark of our Owner is put upon us; His name—the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Just as the children born to us or adopted by us take on our names, so we in baptism take on the name of God because He incorporates us into His covenant people. As members of His covenant family, He bestows on us both privileges and responsibilities. When we are tempted, our baptism reminds us of the grace extended to us in being made members of His covenant people. With this privilege we also remember the duties we owe to God, namely, our lifelong obedience. The Shorter Catechism states that our baptism signifies "our engagement to be the Lord's" (Q. 94). The Larger Catechism makes it even stronger: "...to be wholly and only the Lord's" (Q. 165). Remembering our baptism reminds us that we are those who have "given up their names to Christ" (Larger Catechism, Q. 167). Improving our baptism makes this a vivid reality to us.

Improving our baptism not only *reminds* us of our great duty to resist temptation, it can also *gives us strength* to do so. Our baptism signifies to us that those who repent and believe are united with Christ. As Paul explains in Romans 6, those who are united to Christ are united with Him in His death and in His resurrection. If we are united with him in his death, then we have died to sin and sin no longer has dominion over us. Our baptism tells us that we can resist sin's temptations because of our union with Christ. Sometimes we allow ourselves to

think that we cannot resist, that the temptation is too strong. Our baptism tells us that we are wrong in thinking this way. If we are united with Christ in His resurrection, then the same power which brought our Lord Jesus Christ from the grave will also give life to our mortal bodies (Rom 8:11), enabling us to walk after Christ in obedience and faith.

When we are present at the baptism of others, we are to remember our own baptism and all that it means. Too often, however, observing the baptism of others turns out to be more an experience of sentimentalism than spiritual meditation. We watch to see if the baby is crying or smiling. We look at the proud expression of the parents if the baby is smiling, or the dismay on their faces if the baby screams. We are not consciously meditating on what baptism means to us as Christians, nor are we prayerfully with faith seeking the benefits signified and sealed to us in baptism. By not "improving" our baptism, we reduce it to sentimental value only, thereby missing out on the spiritual grace set before us.

Certainly we should be praying for the one being baptized, when we are present at the baptism of another. But we are also to be praying for ourselves, meditating upon our baptism and all that it means to us.

Thoughtful and Thankful Meditation Is Required

Part 2: *Our baptism is to be improved, or turned to our advantage*, by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein.

Improving our baptism requires thought. We must think about our baptism and all that it means. We can't do that unless we know what our baptism means. Here our Confession of Faith and catechisms can be of great help to us. We should study these documents and follow up the Scripture references they cite in support of the doctrines stated. Our doctrinal standards were never intended to stand alone. They stand upon the Scriptures. They summarize for us

what the Scriptures teach, and they guide into the places of Scripture where certain doctrines are taught. Improving our baptism is a part of meditating upon God's Word day and night (Ps. 1). By studying, understanding, recalling and reflecting on the meaning of baptism, we are beginning the process of improving our baptism.

Begin with Humility and Self-Examination

Part 3: *Improving our baptism is done* by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements (or obligations).

As baptism speaks to us about the forgiveness of sins through Christ, it is reminding us of the fact of sin in our lives. Were it not for our sins, Christ would not have had to die for us. We should be humbled by this. We are further humbled when we recall that even now we still sin, and often fall short of what God requires of us. Improving our baptism requires that we think about our sins, lament them, confess them to God, and renew our repentance to turn from them all.

Many people avoid this kind of self-examination and confession because they find it so negative and depressing. "Accent the positive," they say, "forget about your sins." There is some truth to be found in this, but not enough for wholesome spiritual growth. It is one thing to forget past sins. It is quite another to ignore present ones. Our call is to examine our life in the light of God's Word, and to ask His help in prayer to show us if there be any wicked way in us. Finding such things in our lives, we should ask God to forgive and to purify our lives that we may hereafter seek after righteousness.

Standing on the Promises

Part 4: *Improving our baptism is done* by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament.

We must always remember that baptism was instituted by Christ. It is not something that

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Baptism seals this promise to us by standing as God's own mark guaranteeing that which He has promised.

the church has invented. It is a visible sign instituted by Christ to testify of great truths. Among these is the full pardon of sin made possible by the death of Christ to all who repent and believe. Baptism *seals* this promise to us by standing as God's own mark guaranteeing that which He has promised.

God made a promise to Abraham that his reward would be very great, and that he would surely have a son and many descendants to follow (Gen. 15:1-5). Abraham believed God (v. 6), but he needed help with his unbelief (v. 8). That is, he had faith, but it was weak. He needed reassurance of what he believed. So God made a covenant with Abraham, and gave him a sign to assure him of God's complete faithfulness to all that He had promised (Gen. 15:9-21). This was done in a way very familiar to Abraham even if strange to us. Animals were cut in two, with one side laid opposite the other. Then in the night God appeared to Abraham by means of a smoking pot and a flaming torch which passed between the pieces of the slain animals. In this way God was pledging faithfulness to His promise. The meaning of the ceremony was that if God would fail to keep His promise, then He should be killed in the same way that these animals were killed. Thus God's own life serves as the guarantee of His promise. God's promise is that He will die if He does not fulfill His covenant promise. As it is impossible for God to die, so it is impossible for God to fail in the keeping of His promise. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

By this visible and most dramatic event God had given to Abraham tangible evidence of the promises He had made to him, and of His commitment to fulfill all that He had promised. If in future days Abraham would be tempted to doubt God's promises, he could recall what he had seen, and reflect upon what it meant. By doing so, he would strengthen his faith in God's promises.

So it is with baptism. Our Lord Jesus has given baptism to us to serve as a seal for all His promises to us. It is like a notary's seal guaranteeing the authenticity of a document. It is tangible evidence for the truth of what He has accomplished for us by His death and resurrection, and what He has promised to us. It is His sign to us. Knowing this and meditating on it at

the time when baptism is administered helps to strengthen our assurance in what God has promised to us in Christ.

Drawing Strength from Our Union with Christ

Part 5: Improving our baptism is done by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of (or putting to death our) sin, or quickening of grace (i.e. reviving our spiritual life).

One of the most important meanings of baptism is that it tells us about our union with Christ. Baptism assures us that those who repent and believe are baptized into or united with Christ spiritually. In other words, there is a vital, spiritual union formed between Christ and the believer. In this union there is power for overcoming sin, and increasing our spiritual commitment. As Paul teaches in Romans 8, those who belong to Christ have Christ living in them by the Spirit. Consequently, there is within them the very same power which brought Jesus up from the dead. That same power can revive us to strive more earnestly after righteousness and against sin and temptation. Baptism is a visible reminder of this important truth.

Living as Members of God's Covenant Family

Part 6: Improving our baptism is done by endeavouring to live by faith, so as to have our conversation (i.e. conduct) in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ, and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.

Baptism tells us about many things which believers possess because of Christ in them. It also speaks about all that we owe to God. Abraham's circumcision did the same for him. It reminded Abraham of his duty to walk before God in a blameless life (Gen. 17:1-14). That

mark in Abraham's flesh was like an engagement ring on a woman's finger. It spoke of a promise, but it also imposed an obligation. The one who wears the ring has received the promise of marriage, but she must hereafter live as one who is promised to another. So the one who receives baptism must also live as one who belongs to another. We must remember that we are not our own. We cannot choose our own way in life; it is our duty to find out our Master's will.

Baptism and Child Rearing

This point has immense value in raising our children. A Christian parent should not neglect to emphasize the obligations connected with baptism when instructing a baptized child in conduct. When young Johnny wants to do things contrary to God's law, things which perhaps his friends are free to do, he should be reminded that he is not just any child. He is a child of God's covenant, and very special privileges belong to him. Yet there are also special obligations which go with these privileges. Baptism marks us out as belonging to God; therefore we must live as those who belong to God, and live as He wants us to live.

The idea is not to turn baptism into a club with which we can beat our children. It is, however, to point out that our status as members of God's covenant family is a rich privilege, to which we must gratefully respond with conduct respecting our God.

A Sign of Ownership

As we watch the name of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—placed upon the name of a covenant child in baptism, we are to realize that in this ceremony God has claimed ownership of this child. He has taken what He owns and incorporated him/her into a family of people to whom He has given precious and magnificent promises. Baptism thus marks the placing of God's name on us. It says that we must hereafter live as those who belong to God, as those who have received much, and therefore as those from whom much is required. Privilege brings responsibility. Baptism reminds us of both. Improving our baptism makes all these

things more real and more dear to us.

Getting Ready to Improve Your Baptism

As you approach the next baptism in your church, determine that you will improve your baptism. Read your Confession of Faith, chapters XXVII and XXVIII, and the Larger Catechism, Qs. 161-167, and take some notes. Also, take some notes from this article. If possible, put your notes on a paper or small card that will fit in your Bible, and take it with you to church. Then as the baptism proceeds, review what baptism means. Q. 165 of the Larger Catechism will especially help you. Think of the spiritual significance of what is happening. Think of what it means to the one being baptized. Think of what it means to you, and to all others who have previously been baptized. Remember that this sacrament is instituted by God and is full of meaning and blessing. Then rejoice in all that is given to us in baptism, and pledge yourself anew to all that is required of you in baptism. Remember what you owe to God for all He has pledged to you. Remember what you owe to others, who like you have been incorporated into God's covenant people.

If you will do so, you will surely "improve" your baptism. It will no longer be something forgotten and neglected, but will be to you a source of renewing grace by which you might grow to be all that Christ calls you to be.

A Christian parent should not neglect to emphasize the obligations connected with baptism when instructing a baptized child in conduct.

Play Hard, Play To Win: A Baptism Testimony

Bob Hovey

I remember my own baptism vividly. I also remember the baptism of my infant son. We were baptized on the same day, April 5, 1987, by John Kimmons at Christ Community Church. Along with the day of my conversion a month earlier, my baptism day was a glorious day for me.

At 6'8" tall, getting down on the floor is a process involving great cracking of joints, and reminders of years spent pounding gym floors with tender knees. But the kneeling for baptism was worth it, for I knelt before a great history of saints.

God's blessings upon me since I have been saved could fill volumes of books. One of the blessings that comes to mind as I consider my baptism is the blessing of history, the blessing of being part of a great tradition, a great team. When I was saved I was called by the Lord into the invisible church. But on that April 5th, 1987, my son and I were entered onto the roll of the visible church, a wonderful historic privilege.

When I played basketball at High Point College, I represented the college everywhere I went. I wore her uniform and was identified with her to everyone who saw me. What I did and what I said reflected on her as well as on me. I felt a great responsibility not to embarrass my school and my team.

What a Team!

But now on baptism day, I was becoming part of a team that dated back thousands of years, a team which had had innumerable great players. I did not know the names of the Hall of Famers then, but I do now. They include, among others, Abraham (center), Moses (power forward), David (small forward), Augustine (shooting guard), Luther (point guard), and Calvin (6th man/super-sub). These and

many more had given their lives so that I could have a church in which to kneel. I felt responsible to them, as well as to the Lord, not to mess up, not to embarrass Christianity as many had done before. The ball is passed at baptism. The very real game of life carries on.

And to Your Children After You...

My son joined the visible church with me that day. No, he didn't go before the church in his own power, but then, neither did I. I carried him up the same way Christ carried me. You might say that to my son my big arms were "irresistible." Today my son has himself believed in Jesus, and has become my brother in the Lord as well as my son.

"Hey, that's my name on the Roster of Life, and my son's. I can't make out the others, but it looks like there will be more Hoveys coming in the next generation, and the next."

The sign and seal of the covenant is truly a precious thing to be a part of, to administer, to receive, to pass on. It should cause us to remember all those who have gone before us in the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. One day, God willing, I hope to baptize the children of my own congregation, and maybe even my own grandchildren. When I do I will whisper in their ears, "Play hard. Play to win."

Bob Hovey is currently finishing up his third and final year at Reformed Seminary in Orlando, and has been called to be Pastor of Huntersville ARP church in Huntersville, North Carolina.

**You might say
that to my son
my big arms
were "irresist-
ible."**

Baptism and Ministry Gifts

Robert J. Cara

Repent and be baptized . . . and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

When I was a ruling elder in the early 1980's, there was a growing emphasis in evangelical churches on ministry or spiritual gifts. Seeing the appropriateness and value of this emphasis, I even recommended this topic for one of our annual church retreats. Typical questions asked of the retreat leaders included: How many gifts are there? What are my spiritual gifts? What about "charismatic" gifts? I expected these questions, but there was one common question that astounded me: Do you mean everyone has gifts to be used for ministry?

Many who asked this surprising question were not recent converts. I was perplexed that despite the growing interest in spiritual gifts, there were many who still did not understand themselves as having been gifted for ministry. Was it not true that a Christian's sense of direction and purpose would be significantly skewed if he were not convinced that he had been given ministry gifts?

Thankfully, since the early 1980's, there has been continued interest in ministry gifts throughout the evangelical world. One way to ensure that appropriate emphasis is placed on spiritual gifts in our churches is to return to a full-orbed understanding of baptism.

Yes, there are many wonderful facets to the meaning of baptism, many of which have been drawn out in other articles in this issue of *Faith and Practice*. I have been asked to focus on one particularly neglected dimension of this great sacrament, that is, that baptism signifies ministry gifts. My hope is that as we reflect upon our own baptism and the baptisms of others, we will be further compelled to seek the Holy Spirit's empowerment for ministry in the body and in the world.

The apostle Paul has much to say about spiritual gifts in his letters (e.g., Rom. 12, Eph. 4, 1 Cor. 12-14). In this article, however, I will be looking at the relation between ministry

gifts, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. My argument is that baptism signifies, among other things, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and thus signifies two of the same things which the gift of the Spirit signifies, i.e., admission into the new covenant family of God, and giftedness for ministry.

May God encourage the Church to understand that the sacrament of baptism is a sign of His promise and intent to grant ministry gifts to all who trust in Christ and receive the Holy Spirit.

Baptism, Tongues, and Covenant Admission

As one opens the pages of the book of Acts, one is soon aware that a new world is dawning. The long-awaited time when God would pour out His Spirit upon His people is at hand. The Messianic age of the Spirit is just around the corner. Jesus, Son of God, Savior of sinners, has been raised from the dead, and has appeared to many. On one occasion, just before His ascension, while He is eating with His disciples, Jesus gives this command, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4b-5). And Peter, at the end of his Pentecost sermon, after the first great endowment of this promised gift has been poured out, pleads with his audience, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39).

The general relationship in the book of Acts between baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit is evident from the beginning. But it is not so easy to say that in Acts people believed, were baptized, and then subsequently received the promised Spirit. There is in fact no neat for-

Do you mean everyone has gifts to be used for ministry?

mula. Remember, Acts is a narrative account of the beginning of a new age. This is a momentous time in history. The old covenant is giving way to the new covenant. The message of Jesus is spreading, and people from many nations are repenting and turning to Jesus. It is an exciting, and in some ways, a confusing time. Thus in Acts there are many interwoven and interconnected themes: the spreading of the word of God, the outpouring of the Spirit, the birth of the new covenant people of God, and the Gentile mission. Tied into these major themes we find baptism, miraculous gifts of the Spirit, and wonderful conversions of people to the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

One of the signs of the Spirit's presence in this period is the gift of speaking in foreign languages, or "tongues." I said earlier that the gift of the Spirit signifies among other things admission into the new covenant family of God. If we had lived then we would not have been sure just who could be a part of this family. Up to this time the people of God had consisted mostly of Israelites. But suddenly non-Jews who are not circumcised are believing in Jesus. And God in His mercy shows the early church through a very visible and audible sign that yes, the covenant family is growing way beyond the old boundaries.

Before looking at the tongues events in more detail, let me say that the gift of the Holy Spirit, baptism, tongues, and conversion are related in Acts, but the relationship is not always clear. There is no consistent pattern.¹ There are several instances when many are baptized with no mention of speaking in tongues (2:41, 8:38-39, 9:18, 16:15, 16:33); several times conversion is mentioned or implied, but there is no mention of the Holy Spirit (8:36-39, 13:48, 16:34); and sometimes conversion is mentioned but baptism is not (2:3, 4:4, 6:7, 9:42, 11:21-24, 13:48, 14:1, 14:21, 17:34). The relationship in time between one receiving the Holy Spirit and being baptized differs: sometimes the Holy Spirit comes before baptism (10:47); sometimes the Holy Spirit comes at approximately the same time (2:38); and sometimes the Holy Spirit comes after baptism (8:15, 19:6). In some instances men and women are filled with the Holy Spirit at conversion (2:38) and at other times they are filled on special occasions for a par-

ticular task (4:8, 7:55, 13:9, etc.).

Even though the pattern is not perfectly clear, we can nevertheless discern much about the purpose of tongues in Acts. Speaking in tongues only occurs in four situations in Acts: on the day of Pentecost (2:3-4, 11); when Peter and John visit the Samaritan converts (8:15-18, the presence of tongues being implied if not mentioned outright); at the conversion of Cornelius and friends (10:46); and as the Ephesian disciples of John the Baptist receive the Holy Spirit (19:6). In all four events, tongues is considered as part of the gift of the Holy Spirit. But what connects these four events? All four of the events involve important new groups that are added to the Church.

New Groups Added

On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-12) we see the first occurrence of tongues in Acts. This watershed event also marks the important beginning of the new covenant change that involved a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It also involved both Palestinian and Hellenistic Jews.

The second tongues occurrence is in Samaria (8:9-25). The Samaritans (partially Jewish, also see 11:19) are converted and baptized but have not yet received the Holy Spirit. Subsequently, the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit when representative apostles, Peter and John, come from Jerusalem and place their hands on the new converts. This fits well with Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Therefore, even those "hated" Samaritans are to be included in the new covenant church!

The third time in Acts when we find people speaking in tongues involves Peter and the Gentile convert, Cornelius. The entire episode is crucial to the growth and development of the church in Acts, as the story is repeated or referred to several times (10:1-48, 11:1-18, 15:7-11). The key theme in these sections is that *Gentiles* are now part of the family of God. As he appears before the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, Peter bases his argument for the inclusion of the Gentiles on the evidence of their having

***Remember,
Acts is a narra-
tive account of
the beginning
of a new age.***

received the Holy Spirit, which is itself evidenced by their speaking in tongues, "So if God gave them (Gentiles) the same gift as he gave us (Jewish Christians), who was I to think that I could oppose God?" Please note the emphasis of Peter's argument: speaking in tongues proves that the new church should include the Gentiles. In this new era, as Peter argues in both Acts 11 and 15, God is including the Gentiles in the covenant community. Therefore, again, a new major group, non-Jews, is being included in the family of God.

The fourth tongues event revolves around the disciples of John the Baptist who had not yet heard the full Christian message (Acts 19:1-7). This time it is Paul who is the church's representative, clarifying the relationship between John the Baptist's disciples and the church. Due to the new realities based on Christ's death and resurrection, the followers of John are now to transfer into the church and not exist as a separate entity.

Clearly, the primary purpose of the gift of tongues in Acts is to show all that these groups are to be included in the new covenant community. Tongues is used by God as an outward visible sign that the various groups have indeed received the Holy Spirit. And it is the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit that signified membership into the new covenant community.

The Purpose Of Tongues In Acts

It is important to draw out the purpose of tongues in the book of Acts. The main burden of this article is to show that baptism signifies the gift of the Spirit, as well the promise of the ministry gifts that the Spirit brings. But one could think from reading Acts, that if baptism is a sign of the promise of the gift of the Spirit, then one should certainly expect to receive the same "extra" sign of this promised gift that was received by so many in Acts. But this isn't the best way to think about tongues in Acts. Tongues and baptism in Acts actually have a similar function.

Think of it this way. In Acts, both baptism and tongues are outward signs signifying the gift of the Holy Spirit, which itself is the evidence of admission into the new covenant com-

munity. Normally, or in most cases, baptism is the symbol that one is part of God's covenant family, and has received the gift of the Holy Spirit.² However, when a new group is included, a group that might be regarded with some suspicion, tongues occurs with baptism. Tongues is a miraculous visible/audible event and, as such, it further ensures the acceptance of a particular group into the new church. Baptism itself shows this but tongues adds emphasis to the idea at crucial new stages in God's plan of salvation. In our day, with the nature of the new covenant community so much better understood in the New Testament Scriptures, tongues is not needed to function in this way, as an above-and-beyond sign of inclusion in God's covenant family.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Tongues was a clear manifestation of the Spirit's presence in the early church. But was this the only evidence that the Spirit was active and being poured out? Certainly not. But how does the gift of the Holy Spirit relate to the overall emphasis of the book of Acts? Haenchen, a famous German scholar, boldly says that "the real subject of Acts is the word of God and its growth."³ Although this may be overstating the case, it is correct to say that the spreading of the word of God is a key theme in Acts. There are six main summary verses in Acts which summarize the growth of the church and three of them include phrase "the word of God." There are also five other secondary summary verses that also include "the word of God."⁴ If one analyzes these summary verses, an obvious parallel exists between the expanding church and the "word of God." For example: "But the word of God grew and increased" (Acts 12:24), and "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (Acts 19:20). This emphasis on the spreading word of God is also shown in the theme verse of the book, Acts 1:8. Here the connection is made between the Holy Spirit, witnessing, and the spreading of the word of God to the ends of the earth: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

However, when a new group is included, a group that might be regarded with some suspicion, tongues occurs with baptism.

What enables the church to witness? It is none other than the Holy Spirit gifting individuals to proclaim the word of God.

What enables the church to witness? It is none other than the Holy Spirit gifting individuals to proclaim the word of God. The Messianic Age that started when Christ came to earth continues due to the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁵ Following the Pentecost event Peter says, "In the last days,"⁶ God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people, your sons and your daughters will prophesy" (2:17; cf Joel 2:28).⁷ Luke tells us later that many believers were "filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God" (4:31).⁸ Indeed, in Acts, the primary purpose for post-conversion "fillings" of the Holy Spirit is to proclaim Christ (4:8, 4:31, 5:32, 6:10, 7:55, 9:17-20).

Proclaiming the Word In Power

Therefore, the gift of the Holy Spirit empowers the proclaiming of the word of God, which in turn is what the Spirit uses in expanding the church in the new covenant era. Marshall states, "It therefore seems likely that Luke especially understood the gift of the Holy Spirit as equipping the church for mission."⁹

Understanding the purpose of the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts helps explain the relationship between the conversion of an individual by the power of the Holy Spirit which is required in every salvation age for every person, and the special gift of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant age. One needs to make a distinction between these two¹⁰. This distinction helps us understand why the Samaritans were converted even though they had not yet received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:4-17). They had received the Holy Spirit in the sense of conversion but had not received the new "last days" gift of the Holy Spirit which included the new ministry gifts. All true believers in the OT required the Holy Spirit for conversion but few had any Spirit ministry gifts. This distinction matches very well with Paul who also differentiates between the possession of the Spirit (Rom 8:1-17) and the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12; Eph 4:1-16).

What gifts did the Holy Spirit give in Acts? Many distinguish between the miraculous sign and ministry gifts and the non-miraculous ministry gifts.¹¹ The miraculous gifts include tongues, prophecy and the various wonderful

healings/miracles which occurred through the Holy Spirit (e.g., 5:12-16, 19:11). The non-miraculous ministry gifts in Acts are, as we have seen, primarily related to proclaiming the Word. Other gifts mentioned in Acts include the ability to be a deacon, elder, or encourager (6:3, 11:24, 20:28). It is noted that these other gifts are also related in Acts to the expanding of the church. But one must remember that Acts does not say everything that can be said about the earliest churches. We also see glimpses into localized churches in the epistles of Paul and other New Testament writers. There we see the full range of ministry gifts brought by the Spirit to the new covenant church, all of which are to be used in building up and expanding the church. The Spirit, which is Himself a gift, brings gifts, gifts for ministry which build the church.

Baptism and Ministry Gifts

I have noted earlier that baptism in Acts is strongly tied to the gift of the promised Holy Spirit. As we have seen, Jesus says in referring to the upcoming Pentecost, "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). Then, on Pentecost, Peter quotes from Joel 2:28: "I will pour out my Spirit..." (Acts 2:17), and then tells the people, "Repent and be baptized, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Following Peter's sermon, "Those who accepted his message were baptized" (Acts 2:41). Therefore, baptism is closely tied to the reception of the "poured out" Holy Spirit. This is perhaps most clearly seen after the house of Cornelius receives the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 10:

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he or-

dered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days (Acts 10:44-48).

Baptism thus symbolizes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and all the blessings and gifts which come with that outpouring. As baptism signifies the promise of the Spirit, it signifies the promised gifts which the Spirit brings. My baptism tells me that as I have repented and embraced Jesus, I have received the promised Holy Spirit, and all the blessings that the Spirit brings, including gifts for the upbuilding of the church! Indeed, I could say that if I have been baptized as a sign of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, my baptism tells me that I have responsibility to exercise those gifts which the Spirit has given to me.

Am I The Last Christian?

The empowering Spirit whose promised presence baptism signifies is an active Spirit. He brings new life and He empowers for ministry. How does the Spirit work in power? It is through the people of God proclaiming the Word and exercising their gifts in and through the body. For me to fail to exercise ministry gifts would be to deny the active presence of the Spirit, which would be to deny the significance of my baptism. This would be like suggesting that I am the last person God intends to see baptized. This would be ludicrous. My baptism says I have been equipped to expand and build the church by the empowering of the Spirit, and that I indeed must do.

Baptism and Ministry Gifts In Reformed Creeds

If one looks at the Westminster Confession or any other historic Protestant creed, the ministry gifts aspect of baptism is not emphasized.¹² To be sure, it is implicitly included. For example, WCF 27.1 says that the sacraments "represent Christ and his benefits." Certainly ministry gifts are included in the benefits which Christ brings. Consequently, we need to make explicit another aspect of baptism—that ministry gifts through the power of the Holy Spirit

are endowed to all who are Christians.

Conclusion

God has gifted everyone with various abilities to minister in His kingdom through the power of the Holy Spirit. A prime opportunity to emphasize this is available during the sacrament of baptism.

In Acts, the gift of the Holy Spirit emphasizes admission into the new covenant family, and the presence of ministry gifts. Since baptism itself signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit, it also signifies these two aspects of the gift of the Spirit. The Reformed tradition has always emphasized the admission aspect of baptism, and needs to stress in a better way the ministry gifts which are also signified by baptism.

Two items were noted which should help you steer clear of problems when studying the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts: First, tongues, which is sometimes accompanied the gift of the Holy Spirit, is given to emphasize the admission of new groups into the newly formed NT Church. Second, the gift of the Holy Spirit often does not merely signify or emphasize conversion, but instead emphasizes that God is bestowing ministry gifts.

Every Christian should regularly hear that each one is gifted for some type of ministry. Baptism signifies this giftedness. I recommend that in performing baptisms, pastors make explicit this connection between baptism and ministry gifts. One could have a sermon on specific ministry gifts at the same worship service in which a baptism is performed. During the baptism itself, saying something to the effect of the following would be appropriate:

This sacrament signifies Crystal's admission into our covenant community and the promise of her being gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry among us and in the world. It is a responsibility and privilege for both Crystal and our congregation that Crystal's gifts be encouraged, nurtured and used for the glory of God. The Bible has said, "Repent and be baptized, and you will receive the *gift* of the Holy Spirit!"

My baptism says I have been equipped to expand and build the church by the empowering of the Spirit, and that I indeed must do.

The age of the Spirit inaugurated in Acts continues to this day. The gift of the Spirit is still being poured out. The growing emphasis on spiritual gifts in evangelical churches the past twenty years has had a positive impact on the church, and indeed has been long overdue. Let us continue to encourage every-member gift ministry by restoring this meaning to baptism.

Endnotes

¹I. H. Marshall says it well: "It is a notorious problem that Luke's statements about the relation of the Spirit to baptism are incapable of being worked into one single pattern." (*Luke: Historian and Theologian* enlarged ed.; (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), p. 198.

²G. R. Beasley-Murray also notes that baptism in Acts has the nuance of incorporation into the church. He states, "The outward act of confession and dedication to Jesus as Lord [at one's baptism] has as its corollary identification with the people who acknowledge Him as Messiah. This desire of the baptized to number himself with the people who invoke the Name of Jesus is answered by his graciously being incorporated in baptism into the community of those who inherit the Kingdom" (*Baptism in the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 104.

³Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 49. Marshall states, "In the book of Acts a central place is occupied by the preaching of His [Jesus'] disciples. . . . The content of the apostolic preaching is designated as 'the word of God'" (*Luke: Historian and Theologian*, pp. 159-60).

⁴The three main summary verses with "the word of God" are Acts 6:7, 12:24, 19:20 and the remaining three are 9:31, 16:5 and 28:30-31. The secondary summary verses with "the word of God" are Acts 8:25, 11:1, 13:49, 18:11, 19:10.

⁵H. Koester states, "The reader is given to understand that everything that will be described in the Book of Acts is the eschatological work of the Spirit in the world. The time of the church is the time of the Holy Spirit" (*Introduction to the New Testament: Vol. 2: History of Literature of Early Christianity*, (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), p. 319.

⁶In quoting from Joel 2:28 Peter changes/

interprets "after this" to "in the last days" reflecting his view that he (and us) are in the final stage of redemptive history.

⁷In context "prophecy" refers to the proclaiming with tongues (other languages?) the wonders of God (Acts 1:11). It is difficult to tell whether Peter refers to "official prophecy" (e.g., Agabus and Philip's daughters) or a general speaking about the revealed mysteries of Christ (cf. Jer. 31:34). I opt for the latter.

⁸In Acts, it is more than Apostles who speak the "word of God." Included are deacons (8:14), prophets (16:6), evangelists (8:14), "all" (4:31), "many others" (15:35), scattered Jews (8:4, 11:29), and Timothy (16:6). Given the above, it should not be forgotten that a strong sense of authorization for speaking the word of God does exist in Acts (6:4, 13:49, 19:20).

⁹Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, p. 200.

¹⁰J. Calvin similarly distinguishes between the "Spirit of regeneration" and the Spirit of "special gifts." *The Acts of the Apostles*: pp. 14-28 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 148.

¹¹I do not like the terms "miraculous" and "non-miraculous" because God controls everything. Hence, even my ability to breath is totally controlled by God and in a certain sense, miraculous. However, I gave in to common parlance.

¹²Interestingly however, in a major new Roman Catholic publication, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, connection is made between baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit and also justification (*sic*).

Baptism: Moment of Truth

Ashton T. Stewart, Jr.

Ali was raised in a remote village in Iran by very devout Muslim parents and his earliest memories were full of images of his father saying his prayers five times a day. His father would often scold him for not memorizing his Koran. His mother, also a devout Muslim, would whisper verses from the Koran into his ear before he would drift off to sleep at night. He would never forget the pride he felt in his heart when his father went to Mecca and became a "Haji." It seemed that whole village gave their family a new level of respect. The family often spoke of God and the inevitability of His divine will. When pain and suffering came in the death of his little sister there was much mourning and wailing; but all agreed it was God's sovereign will that she be taken. Ali often wondered about God. What was God like?

Later on when he became more aware of the world beyond his home, he was struck by the hypocrisy of many of the Muslim leaders. He was critical of the way the Mullahs, the religious leaders, would take large sums of money from people to pray for them. "Why should people have to pay for someone to pray for them?" he mused. Ali seemed to have more questions than answers.

Overcome by Rage

His world, however, was even more greatly shaken during his teen years by an earthquake that killed his parents. Now he found himself totally alone. He felt overcome by rage every time his relatives and friends passively tried to comfort him by saying, "It was the will of God." He had no peace.

Then one night by chance he was playing with the radio dial of his short-wave radio. He first heard some beautiful soothing Persian music and then a very comforting voice began to talk about God. His first impulse was to change the station, but something seemed to hold his attention. He listened with fascination to the explanation of the Gospel. Ali was deeply

touched by the message of God's love. He was a lonely man, so night after night he tuned in to the radio to hear about Jesus.

One night the radio program had been particularly moving, and Ali began to wonder if there really was something to all this talk about Jesus as the world's Savior. He could not deny that he felt a stirring in his heart that he had never felt before. So with a sincere desire to know the truth he prayed, "Jesus, if you are God's son show yourself to me. I know I am a sinner and I need a savior." As soon as this request was made, a peace such as he had never before experienced flooded his heart. In all his years of praying he had never felt the presence of God as he did that night. He knew Jesus was the Son of God and he wanted to be His follower. But now he seemed to have more questions than before and only wished there was someone to talk to about his experience.

It seemed a miracle to Ali that the next evening the soothing voice on the radio talked about how once you trust Jesus Christ as your Savior you need to be baptized. The announcer explained to him that Jesus commanded his followers to be baptized as a symbol of their dying and rising with Him. He then read from Acts 2:38: "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Baptism was necessary as a sign for all the world to see that one was now a follower of Jesus and a part of the body of Christ. These words sent a shiver of fear up Ali's spine. He had heard that people who leave Islam are apostate and deserve to be put to death. He knew that Muslims so feared baptism that they would not leave their children with Christians, dreading that they would secretly baptize them. How could he ever tell anyone about what had happened late at night in his little room? How could he ever face his neighbors and family if he were to be baptized? In his despondency he started paging through the little New Testament that the radio ministry had sent him. Then, just as if God had heard the cry of his heart, his eyes fell on these words:

He knew that Muslims so feared baptism that they would not leave their children with Christians, dreading that they would secretly baptize them.

"But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (Matt. 10:33). That night Ali could not sleep. He tossed and turned as many questions and doubts swept over his troubled mind. What did he really believe? What should he do now?

Understanding Ali's Dilemma

Ali's story illustrates for the Western Christian reader some of the trials associated with a Muslim convert's understanding and acceptance of baptism. There was no doubt that Ali had had a genuine experience of grace through the Gospel, but he was paralyzed by a deeply ingrained sense of being a part of a community that embraced certain doctrines and beliefs; therefore, he did not feel free to make a decision on his own. He could not conceive of going against the powerful grip his culture and society had on him. It is not uncommon for Muslims to feel this way. When rightly understood by a Muslim, Islam is a total system of life, and the call of Christ to deny all and take up the cross and follow Him seems impossible. The cost seems too great, and many have confessed Christ secretly but have been unable to confess Him publicly.

At this point we shall explore more thoroughly just why a Muslim convert shrinks from Christian baptism. The most obvious reason is the sense of communal identity which he has. In the West we see ourselves as individuals with freedom to make our own decisions. We must understand what the Muslim community understands when one of their own gets baptized. Greg Livingstone, author of *Planting Churches in Muslim Cities*, paraphrases Phil Parshall when he states that when a Muslim is baptized he is openly "... declaring himself a traitor to Islamic social structures, political and legal systems, economic patterns and worst of all the religion of his fathers has been profaned and desecrated." Not only has he denied his own sacred tradition, but he has aligned himself with the unclean Christian world. According to Parshall, "He has now become a worshipper of three gods, a follower of a corrupt religious book, an eater of pork, a drinker of wine and member of an alien society of warmongers and adulterers." If this is the way the Muslim commu-

nity perceives the Muslim convert, what would be its reaction when it discovers a convert in its midst? No doubt Ali had spent considerable time thinking about that.

Kenneth Cragg in *The Call of the Minaret* gives a considerable amount of space to discussing the Muslim's view of conversion. In short, the Muslim welcomes all others to convert to Islam but denies the right of a Muslim to convert to another faith. Cragg concludes, "Looked at from this side Islam is a faith which no adherent is free to leave." Later on he reiterates the penalties for leaving Islam: "Though the harsh penalties of the old Muslim law of apostasy, disinheritance, and death have been legally suspended or nullified in most areas, public attitudes, economic or commercial sanctions, and social ostracism continue to be potent adversaries of actual freedom." Cragg wrote these words in 1956, and in many parts of the world Islam does indeed carry out the penalties of death for conversion to Christianity.

In January 1994, Rev. Mehdi Dibaj, an Assembly of God pastor in Iran who had converted to Christianity when he was 17 years old, was tried in the Islamic courts of Iran and sentenced to be executed. It was only the outcry of the world Christian community that stayed his execution. In the summer of that same year, Dibaj's body was found in a remote park in Tehran where he had been brutally murdered. Converts' fear of what might happen to them is real in Iran and in many Islamic countries.

What Really Is the Truth?

There is one more struggle that haunts the Muslim convert as he considers baptism: What really is the truth? It becomes very clear to the convert that there are very serious differences between the teachings of the Bible and the Koran. There is not room here even to give a cursory overview of the many differences that exist. The Muslim convert finds himself with his feet in two camps. He has experienced the grace of God's love through His Son, but he can't really let go of his beliefs in Mohammed and the prophets. The famous story of Dr. Saeed of Kurdistan tells of how Dr. Saeed was an Islamic "mullah" giving the call to prayer five

When a Muslim is baptized he is openly declaring himself a traitor.

times a day from the minaret of the local mosque even though in his heart he believed in Jesus Christ.

This double-mindedness sooner or later comes to a head. One convert revealed that he could not live with the tension any longer, so he simply prayed, "God show me which is the truth." He claimed that the the next day he had total peace and never went back to his Muslim "Namaz," or prayers.

Baptism the Watershed Experience

For a Muslim convert baptism is the watershed experience. On this side of baptism he can explore Christianity safely with little fear. But once he presents himself for baptism he has crossed over, and there is no turning back. How have Christians working among Muslims aided Muslim converts over this watershed?

One classic approach has been by the masters of contextualization who have wanted to do away with the rite of baptism altogether. They argue that since baptism causes the convert so much abuse it should be replaced with something else. Dr. William Miller was confronted with this type of thinking as far back as the 1920's in Iran. He writes in *My Persian Pilgrimage*:

Some missionaries in other lands who have faced a similar situation have proposed that open confession and baptism should not be required of Muslims. Let them remain in the Muslim community, and be known as Muslims, and let their devotion to Christ and his teachings be expressed in the quality of their lives. It has been my experience that these young men in our school who stated their opinion that Christianity was true, but who did not have the courage to openly profess faith in Christ, in later years did nothing to advance the cause of Christ in Persia. As it was difficult in the time of Jesus for Jews to confess him openly as Messiah and Lord, so it is difficult for Moslems and others to do so today. But the messengers of Christ in their desire to

draw many to him have no right to make the way any easier than he did. He called men and women to take up the cross, confess him before others, and follow him, "the Crucified." We can do no less.

The temptation to ease the fear for a Muslim convert must be overcome. In fact, it is the very act of baptism that will give him the confidence to become more truly a follower of Christ. Western Christians schooled in the Reformed tradition put great stock in a person's verbal confession. But in an Islamic culture where one is taught that lying is permissible in some cases to save one's life or reputation, confession carries little weight. What the Muslim-convert church wants to see is readiness for baptism. Baptism is not administered as soon as there is a confession. However, pains are taken to teach and train the new convert in the basic doctrines of the faith. The other converts want to see the new convert's behavior over time to be certain of his sincerity. Sometimes months will elapse before the elders will sense that the new convert is ready to be baptized.

Dr. Miller discovered in his years of experience that baptism can be the very crisis point that solidifies in the convert's mind that he really is a Christian. After baptizing several new converts in the village of Gunabad, Dr. Miller writes, "I believed that the Holy Spirit might use baptism to strengthen their faith and hold them to Christ, when they would be alone."

The Big Day, A New Identity

Since baptism is so pivotal for the Muslim convert, he usually takes his baptism day very seriously. He will wear his best clothes, invite his family and friends and want pictures taken of the event. He will thereafter speak of it as the day he became a believer. This does not mean he does not understand the theological reality that he was saved by grace but that now he has crossed over publicly from his identity as a Muslim to that of being a Christian. It is very important that there be a very warm and affirming body of believers to welcome him, since he has put the world, his family, and his religious worldview behind him and has died to self and become a disciple of Jesus the

What the Muslim-convert church wants to see is readiness for baptism.

Do we view baptism as a means by which we turn away from the American dream of material prosperity, abandon our culture's relativistic value system, and enthrone Christ over our sensually driven lives?

Christ.

All of these factors were in one way or another troubling Ali. Could he give up his world for the sake of Christ? Was he man enough to face the persecution that would inevitably come? How could he be certain about which of the books were really true? He needed a Christian friend who would be sensitive to his struggle. He needed someone to show him that God is faithful to all who entrust their souls to Him. He needed someone to open the Scriptures for him and teach him.

Implications for Us?

In conclusion, what are the lessons we in the Western church can learn from the Muslim convert's perspective of baptism? The first lesson for us is to be better prepared to minister to Muslims. Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in America. There are over five hundred Islamic centers in North America, and by the year 2000 the Muslim religion will be the third largest religion in our country. We must be better prepared to witness to Muslims and to take the time to prepare them adequately for baptism. There must be a more Biblical understanding of what Christian community means and a willingness to invest ourselves in caring relationships with Muslim converts.

The second lesson for us to learn is what baptism has come to mean in our Western churches. The Muslim's confession is made in the context of a hostile environment. He must come forward and identify with Christ at the cost of his life. He must burn his bridges behind him and embrace Christ and his new family of faith. But what happens when we baptize people in the West? Do we see our culture as a hostile environment in which we must live distinctly different lives or has our culture so invaded the church that the distinctives of Biblical Christianity have become blurred? Do we view baptism as a means by which we turn away from the American dream of material prosperity, abandon our culture's relativistic value system and enthrone Christ over our sensually driven lives? Does baptism mean that we are taking up the cross of Christ, dying to self and wholeheartedly pursuing the cause of the kingdom of God? When was baptism explained in

such terms to a new members' class? It is too often presented as a "feel-good" formality that has become little more than a rite of passage into church membership. How far we have slipped from Biblical Christianity and from the instructions of the One who invited us to come and die in following Him, the One who warned us that if we follow Him the world will hate us, not embrace us. The Muslim experiences this reality every day. Oh, that we in the West could understand it as well!

Rebaptism

William B. Evans

"The sacrament of baptism is but once to be administered to any person" (WCF 28.7).

Bob was baptized as an infant. After a period of teenage rebellion, Bob comes to a vibrant faith in Christ and joins an ARP church. During his interview with the session Bob asks to be rebaptized as a sign of his faith in Jesus.

Peggy, a victim of childhood physical abuse, comes to faith as an adult and is baptized by a minister who is later forced to leave the ministry after being convicted of child abuse. Upon joining an ARP church she requests rebaptism, contending that her earlier baptism could not have "taken" because it was administered by someone she considers especially sinful.

Ray was raised a devout Roman Catholic but came to a Reformed understanding of Scripture during his college years. Ray then joins a Presbyterian church and eventually serves as an elder. After a job transfer Ray and his family join another Presbyterian church. When the session discovers that Ray was baptized as a Roman Catholic, it demands that he be rebaptized. But Ray is grateful for many aspects of his Roman Catholic upbringing, and he considers his baptism to be valid.

Such hypothetical (though not unrealistic) situations require careful pastoral and theological reflection. This article examines the rebaptism issue from historical, theological, and pastoral perspectives in order to identify principles useful to pastors and sessions as they deal with difficult situations such as these.

Historical Survey

The rebaptism question was posed early in the church's history, and has continued to arise.¹ In the second and third centuries, the church was confronted by heretical and schismatic groups that baptized their members. Some, such as the Gnostics, denied basic truths of the faith. Others, such as the Novatians, sepa-

rated from the catholic (i.e., universal) church for reasons of purity. Early in the fourth century the church decided that a baptism consistent with the Trinitarian faith of the church (i.e., water baptism performed by one adhering to the doctrine of the Trinity, and administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) was valid even if performed by an otherwise heretical or schismatic group.²

The rebaptism question was again raised by the Donatists, a schismatic group in fourth-century North Africa. The Donatists alleged that a certain bishop was guilty of collaboration with persecuting Roman authorities. Therefore, they reasoned, all sacramental actions by the bishop (e.g., ordinations and baptisms) were invalid. In short, the Donatists argued that baptismal validity depends on the personal worthiness of the priest performing the sacrament. The Donatists were opposed by St. Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa, who asserted that the validity of the sacrament does not depend on the personal merit of the minister because he is but the imperfect representative of Christ. In actuality, it is not the minister or priest who baptizes, but Christ Himself.³

Controversy over rebaptism erupted again during the Protestant Reformation. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli agreed with Augustine and the historic position of the church regarding Trinitarian baptism, as did their successors in both the Lutheran and Reformed communions.⁴ But more radical reformers associated with the "Anabaptist" movement insisted that converts from Rome be rebaptized. The Anabaptists rejected both Roman Catholic and mainstream Protestant baptism because it was administered to infants. Noting the close New Testament relationship between baptism and faith, and also that Scripture did not explicitly command the baptism of infants, Anabaptists argued that baptism is a sign of faith and an act of obedience which presupposes the active faith of the recipient.⁵ This argument, of course, is pressed endlessly in baptistic churches today. Such churches assert that a conversion experi-

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ence and conscious acceptance of Christ are required for baptism.

Another controversy over rebaptism occurred in the American Old School Presbyterian Church during the 1840's. Anti-Roman Catholic sentiment was fierce, and the General Assembly was asked to declare Roman Catholic baptism invalid. A majority of the Assembly delegates believed that Rome's denial of the doctrine of justification by faith alone was in effect a repudiation of the gospel message, and the Assembly voted to reject Roman Catholic baptism. This decision was vigorously opposed by Charles Hodge of Princeton Seminary, who noted the unprecedented nature of the decision. Hodge argued that, while manifestly imperfect, the Roman Church is a genuine church of Jesus Christ.⁶ The substance of the 1845 decision was reiterated by the General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1871 and again by a committee report of the 1983 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America which was not adopted. The classical view of Augustine, Calvin, and Hodge was affirmed by the 1981 Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod.

Baptism in Another Name

Other reasons for rebaptism stem from the manner in which the ceremony of baptism is performed. A modern problem facing Reformed churches involves cases where baptism was not administered in the name "of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." In view here are situations where a concern for "non-sexist" language has led some in more liberal religious circles to revise the baptismal formula. In place of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," substitutions have been proposed; among the more popular are "Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer" and "Parent, Child, Spirit."⁷ The objection to such substitutes is that they either fail to denote personal distinctions within the Godhead (suggesting the Sabellian heresy) or they have other heretical implications (if God is "Mother" then the God-world relationship will be construed along the lines of a birthing process, implying pantheism or panentheism).

From this survey it is evident that the question of "rebaptism" is not a simple matter. A

number of crucial questions arise out of the preceding survey. First, what is baptism? Both Donatists and Anabaptists argued that they were not "rebaptizing" at all, since what was rejected was not really baptism in the first place. Second, what is the relationship of internal religious experience to the sacrament of baptism? Is baptism a sign of an individual's faith? Third, what external form must the sacrament of baptism take? Fourth, what constitutes a "true church," and what doctrines must a church affirm for its baptism to be valid?

Biblical-Theological Reflection

What exactly is baptism, and what does it signify? The Presbyterian and Reformed tradition has rightly insisted on the close relation between the sacraments and the covenant—the sacraments are "signs and seals of the covenant of grace" (WCF 27.1). This confessional language emerges directly from Scripture itself, where circumcision is described as a "sign of the covenant" and a "seal of the righteousness that he [Abraham] had by faith" (Gen. 17:11; Rom. 4:11). The application of these terms to baptism follows from the clear spiritual parallels between circumcision and baptism. Both symbolize repentance (Jer. 4:4; Acts 2:38), regeneration (Deut. 30:6; Col. 2:12), and spiritual cleansing (Is. 52:1; Eph. 5:26). Furthermore, baptism is identified as a "circumcision" done by Christ Himself in Col. 2:11-12.

The covenant relationship must not, however, be viewed as a merely legal arrangement between God and human beings (similar to a modern contract). When the covenant is viewed in this way, legalism almost inevitably results, with disastrous consequences for the church. Rather, the covenant relationship is one of profound communion between God and human beings.⁸

The covenantal divine-human relationship comes to fullest expression in Jesus Christ—the God-Man and Mediator of the covenant (John 1:14; 1 Tim. 2:5). As a sinless human being, Christ kept the terms of the covenant for us (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). As a perfect sacrifice for sin, Jesus bore the penalty of the covenant curses (Gal. 3:13; Heb. 9:14-15). This divine-human communion is realized in the life of the

Christian through spiritual union with Christ, in whom we are justified, sanctified, adopted as God's children, and glorified.

The New Testament sacraments reflect this Christ-centered character of covenant communion—they symbolize first and foremost the union of the believer with Christ. The Lord's Supper signifies the "new covenant in his blood" (1 Cor. 11:25; cf. Mark 14:24), and it is Christ Himself who baptizes Christians into union with Him and His death and resurrection (Col. 2:11-12). As a sign and seal of the covenant promises, baptism finds its focus in Christ, the One in whom all God's covenant promises receive their resounding "Yes" (2 Cor. 1:20).⁹

Baptism and Faith

But what about the relationship between baptism and faith? While a close relationship between faith and baptism is evident in Scripture (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:12; 18:8), we should not conclude that baptism is merely a sign of faith. Notice that in Gen. 17:11 circumcision is commanded by God as "a sign of the covenant" between God and Abraham.¹⁰ Furthermore, in Rom. 4:11 Abraham's circumcision is described as a "seal of the righteousness which he had by faith." Again, the emphasis is upon the content of God's covenant promise (the righteousness that was to come through the greater Seed of Abraham—Jesus Christ), and not on Abraham's response of faith. Baptism, therefore, is not a sign of faith. Rather, it signifies God's covenant promises to the believer and applies or "seals" those covenant promises and benefits to the believer.¹¹

Baptism also constitutes initiation into the church as the Body of Christ, the covenant community, and the sphere of divine salvation (Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27). The Nicene Creed rightly asserts that there is "one holy, catholic, and apostolic church." There is but one body of Christ, and Paul explicitly ties the singularity of baptism to this glorious unity of the church in Christ in Eph. 4:4-6: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all

and in all."¹²

Thus we see that baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant promises to the believer, and that these covenant promises find their substance and realization in Jesus Christ, who is Himself the content of the covenant. Furthermore, Jesus Christ Himself baptizes the Christian into union with Himself and into the covenant community. In short, baptism is the once-for-all initiation of the Christian into union with Christ and into the church as the body of Christ and covenant community.

The external form of the sacrament is specified in the New Testament. In Matt. 28:19 Jesus tells His disciples, "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." In obedience to this Great Commission, the church has historically insisted on baptism with water in the triune Name. Insistence upon the triune form also stems from the fact that deviations from this form usually signal deviations from orthodox Trinitarian doctrine.¹³

The question remains, what about baptisms performed by groups with which we have doctrinal disagreements? As we have seen, Trinitarian orthodoxy was the historic test of baptismal validity. Only since 1845 have some Presbyterian churches in this country rejected certain Trinitarian baptisms outright, generally on grounds that the Roman Catholic rejection of justification by faith alone is a departure from fundamental and necessary Christian belief. We must remember, however, that the church's understanding of biblical doctrine has often been imperfect. For example, despite St. Paul's teachings on this point, the doctrine of justification by faith alone was largely obscured until the Protestant Reformation.¹⁴ Do we conclude from this that the church ceased to exist between the death of Paul and the Reformation? Of course not! Such a suggestion contradicts Christ's promise in Matt. 16:18, and it ignores the fact that the rich doctrinal heritage of the early and medieval church was transmitted to the Reformers and to us by the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁵ When speaking of a "true church" we should recognize that there are degrees of adherence to the truth. We Presbyterians maintain that the system of doctrine enshrined in the Westminster Standards faithfully summa-

While a close relationship between faith and baptism is evident in Scripture, we should not conclude that baptism is merely a sign of faith.

rizes the teaching of Scripture, but we also recognize that the church must always be reforming itself in obedience to God's Word. There are sound theological and historical reasons, then, for continuing the classical Christian practice of requiring adherence to the Trinitarian orthodoxy as the only test of baptismal validity.

Ecclesial Application

The theology of baptism suggests that rebaptism in instances where a valid baptism has already occurred runs counter to the symbolic nature of the sacrament itself. The confessional prohibition on rebaptism is well-founded and ought to be observed. But here, of course, pastoral considerations must not be ignored. Pastors and elders do not wish to squelch the zeal of new church members and converts and the temptation to grant requests for rebaptism is sometimes strong. The irony here is that in acceding to such requests the pastor or session squanders a tremendous pastoral opportunity to teach about the true significance of baptism and the grace we have in Jesus Christ. Also, the rebaptism of some will inevitably cause others to doubt the validity of their infant baptism. Geoffrey Bromiley phrases it well:

In view of the biblical significance of baptism, churches should not give, and their members should not expect or request, a repetition of baptism when some first or new experience of the work or gifts of the Holy Spirit is enjoyed. Instead, they should be taught more effectively the meaning of the baptism they have as a sign and seal of the saving work of God, and thereby be led to see in any new experience the fulfillment of this work and of baptism as its sign. God is one, the covenant is one, and the work of God is one. So, too, baptism is one. There may be many experiences as we enter into God and his work, but there cannot be many baptisms, only a richer identification with that which baptism signifies.

How can this baptismal teaching be applied in the church today? It should go without saying that requests for rebaptism must be met with tact and sympathy. Individuals request rebaptism because they want to do the right

thing. Our pastoral goal should be to add maturity and understanding to that nascent faith and zeal.

Look again at the cases mentioned at the beginning of this article. Bob's situation is doubtless the most common and probably the least complicated to address. As we have seen, baptism does not signify our experience of faith. While our spiritual lives tend to be episodic, with ups and downs, God is at work in His people throughout their lives, and His saving plan is certain from all eternity (Eph. 1:3-6). Baptism signifies and seals God's promises to us in Jesus Christ, and thus baptism is relevant to the entirety of our Christian lives. As Bob begins to realize that God's dealings with him did not begin with his conversion experience, he will be better able to appreciate and to build upon, or "improve" his infant baptism.

The example of Peggy is more difficult. On one level it is crucial for her to recognize that baptism is ultimately an act of Christ Himself, not of the fallible minister who presides. But in such a case, where deep personal pain is involved, an understanding of the deeper significance of baptism can also be of great comfort. Baptism signifies incorporation and adoption into the family of God—in baptism we have a heavenly Father who will not abuse us or let us down, a Father who is utterly dependable. In an age of family disintegration, the biblical teaching regarding the church as the family of God needs to be emphasized anew.

When the Church Says So

Ray's predicament differs from the previous two in that here the demand for rebaptism comes from church authorities. Certainly Ray should not acquiesce to an unreasonable demand—he clearly has the Westminster Confession on his side. But if the elders are themselves teachable, and Ray is sensitive to the concerns of the session, there is an opportunity for all to come to a deeper understanding of baptism. Situations like this remind us of the general office that all church members share—the responsibility to instruct and admonish one another (Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:24).

Finally, a word of encouragement is in or-

There cannot be many baptisms, only a richer identification with that which baptism signifies.

der. Although past experience involving arguments over infant baptism may make us uneasy about confronting the rebaptism question, there is a better way. The unanimous testimony of the pastors interviewed for this article was that when the biblical and confessional case against rebaptism is presented well and with personal sensitivity, God's people do respond positively. Let's view each occasion for discussion as an opportunity to build up the people of God and to magnify the grace of God in Jesus Christ to which baptism points.

Endnotes

¹For a brief historical survey of the period until 1845, see Charles Hodge, "The General Assembly," *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 16 (1845):445-448. For the period 1845 to the present, see "Report of the Study Committee on Questions Relating to the Validity of Certain Baptisms," in Minutes of the Eleventh General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1983), pp. 302-311.

²See Hodge, "General Assembly," p. 446.

³On the Donatists, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952). See Augustine's anti-Donatist writings in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st ser., 4:369-651.

⁴For Reformed affirmations of Roman Catholic baptism, see John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.15.14-18; Francis Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: John D. Lowe, 1857), III:346-349. The Reformed confessional statements regarding rebaptism (Westminster Confession 28.7; Second Helvetic Confession, ch. 20; Belgic Confession, art. 34) must therefore be interpreted as inclusive of Roman Catholic baptism. Until 1845 the Reformed tradition universally affirmed the validity of Roman Catholic baptism.

⁵To their credit, the Anabaptists (e.g., the Hutterites and Mennonites) reacted strongly against the religious nominalism resulting from the medieval notion of "Christendom"—the equation of church and nation. As Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, baptism became virtually a mark of citizenship, and rebaptism became a capital of-

fense under the Code of Justinian (AD 529). That the Anabaptist renunciation of infant baptism was seen as a repudiation of the existing social and political order accounts in large measure for the horrible persecutions to which they were subjected by both Roman Catholics and other Protestants.

⁶See Charles Hodge, "General Assembly," pp. 444-471; "Essays in the Presbyterian by Theophilus on the Question: Is Baptism in the Church of Rome Valid?" *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 18/3 (July 1846):320-344. On the popular anti-catholicism of the period, see Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York: Rinehart, 1952).

⁷See, e.g., Ruth C. Duck, *Gender and the Name of God: The Trinitarian Baptismal Formula* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991). See also footnote 13 below.

⁸A point emphasized by John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace* (London: Tyndale Press, 1954), p. 20.

⁹On this see John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), pp. 1-5.

¹⁰While the faith of Abraham is certainly lauded in Scripture (Rom. 4:12, 16; Heb. 11:8-17), it is intriguing to note that the circumcision command in Genesis is bracketed by events that scarcely highlight the strength of Abraham's faith (Gen. 16:1-4; 17:17-18). Overall, the biblical emphasis falls less on the initial act of faith and more on the ongoing life of faith and on the struggle to persevere (e.g., Phil. 3:7-14).

¹¹The baptism of helpless infants is a peculiarly appropriate illustration of God's initiative in saving helpless sinners. Helpful treatments of infant baptism include Pierre Ch. Marcel, *The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, trans. by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1953); Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Children of Promise: The Case for Baptizing Infants* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); John Murray, *Christian Baptism*, pp. 45-82.

¹²This raises the question of baptismal efficacy (what does baptism do?). Several brief comments may be made. First, the NT view of baptism appears to be "realistic" rather than merely symbolic—the sacrament is presented as actu-

ally communicating the spiritual reality it signifies (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:11-13; 1 Pet. 3:21). Second, the NT writers closely associate faith, repentance, and the work of the Holy Spirit with water baptism (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 2:11-12). Baptism, then, is used by the Holy Spirit as a real means of spiritual grace to the believer. Thus the Westminster Confession (28.6) affirms: "The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time." On the close relationship of water and Holy Spirit baptism, see Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 255-267.

¹³The status of scriptural terms for God such as "Father" and "Son" requires some discussion. Against those who view such terms as humanly constructed metaphors assigned to God (as if the notion of human fatherhood were simply projected onto God), orthodox theology recognizes the revelational and normative character of these names. As Athanasius of Alexandria argued against the heretic Arius, it is not that God is simply like a human father, but that human fatherhood exists as a created analogy to the archetypal divine fatherhood (Eph. 3:15 NIV/NRSV margins). See Athanasius, "Discourses Against the Arians," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., 4:319-320. See also Thomas F. Torrance, "The Christian Apprehension of God the Father," in *Speaking the Christian God*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), pp. 120-143. Because retention of the Trinitarian baptismal form does not guarantee adherence to Trinitarian doctrine (e.g., Mormon baptism), Protestants have historically required actual adherence to Trinitarian doctrine.

¹⁴See Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), II:2: "the doctrines of justification associated with the Reformed and Lutheran churches . . . represent a radically new interpretation of the Pauline concept of 'imputed

righteousness' set within an Augustinian soteriological framework."

¹⁵Some argue that Roman Catholic baptism only became invalid after the anathemas against Protestant doctrine were promulgated by the Council of Trent (AD 1545-63). This rather formal argument fails to convince because the idea of human works as earning merit (and thus justification) before God was characteristic of Western Christian theology from the time of Tertullian on (c. AD 200).

Note that Protestant distortions of the doctrine of justification can be as destructive as Roman Catholic legalism. In their zeal to defend the doctrine of justification by faith, dispensational evangelicals such as Zane Hodges and Charles Ryrie argue that once a person believes and is justified, that person need not manifest any fruits of obedience and can even cease entirely to believe in Christ and still be saved. See Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What It Means to Believe in Jesus Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), p. 141. Such antinomianism is in stark tension with the biblical witness (John 15:5-8; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The Baker's Dozen

Jack C. Whytock

There continues to be much written to help the modern reader understand the sacrament of baptism. Here is a listing of twelve booklets that are available today, all of which have merit. Wanting to make it a baker's dozen, I added one "freebie." Before you rush to the baker's dozen list to see if your favorite has been included, I want to alert you as to what is contained in this dozen.

The criteria for a work being included in this list is three-fold: the work is still in print (there are many excellent works but many of these can only be obtained through used book dealers); the work is in fundamental agreement with the teaching on baptism in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms; and the work is written in a manner which is accessible to the ministry needs of the people in a local congregation. All of the selections in the baker's dozen are clearly rooted in Scripture and demonstrate that the Reformed and Presbyterian understanding and practice of baptism is Scriptural and not merely traditional.

Each of the included works hones in on some particular aspect of baptism. At the risk of being simplistic, I have divided the baker's dozen into two groups. Group One deals with the broader aspects of baptism such as mode, meaning, history, and subjects. Group Two concentrates more on the baptism of children. Brief comments on each of these aids follow below.

GROUP ONE: Mode and Subjects

Group One includes seven authors: Adams, Leahy, Marston, Murray, Schaeffer, Vos, and Ward. Leahy's *Biblical Baptism* has been particularly well received by my congregation. It is written with humility and avoids technical language. Although this booklet is longer than some of the others, many have found it useful for study in an adult Bible class. Each of the seven chapters ends with questions for review and could lend itself to a small-group dis-

cussion. Leahy commences with very readable discussion on the church in the Old Testament and the child in the church. Subsequent chapters include the meaning of baptism, the subject of baptism, the mode of baptism, objections to infant baptism, conclusions, and further Scriptures to consider. The booklet is attractively put together with a contemporary cover and has three prints included for illustrative purposes. Leahy is Irish, a Reformed Presbyterian pastor, and a professor at the Reformed Theological College, Belfast. He writes with the heart of a pastor and is very much in the theological tradition of William Cunningham.

Murray's *Christian Baptism* and Ward's *Baptism in Scripture and History* are somewhat more specialized and technical. However, I have had people ask many of the very same questions about the history of baptism which Ward attempts to answer. I was disappointed that Ward did not make any reference to the new Baptist work coming out of South Africa by Strander and Louw. I do not see these booklets being widely used in a church school setting, but would recommend their availability in a church library as a resource for the more serious student of the subject.

Four More with Merit

The remaining four booklets by Schaeffer, Marston, Vos, and Adams all have merit. Both Marston's *Biblical Baptism* and Schaeffer's *Baptism* have been widely used by many pastors and elders. They are of equal length and look at the mode, meaning, and subjects of baptism. Schaeffer's booklet is written in a typical Schaeffer manner, not that of a cautious academic.

Vos' and Adams' very readable booklets are each around fifty pages in length. Adams organizes *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism* into several chapters whereas Vos simply makes two sections, "The Subjects" and "the Mode." For two dollars a copy, Vos' work could easily be

Each of the included works hones in on some particular aspect of baptism.

placed in a church literature rack.

GROUP TWO: Infant Baptism

I have lumped into this category booklets by the following authors: Bloomfield, Feddes, Hanko, VanDyk, Sartelle, and West. All of these works focus on the question of whether or not children of believers should be baptized. Sartelle's *Infant Baptism* and West's *The Covenant Baptism of Infants* have both been put to the test in my own congregation with good results. Sartelle's approach again is clear, straightforward, and free of technical jargon. If one is unfamiliar with it, I would mention that the introduction paints a well-known problem and situation, the abuse of the ritual of infant baptism. Then the text looks at circumcision in the Old Testament, then baptism, the new covenant sign, and moves into a good discussion of the family in both Testaments. Chapter 6, "Responsibilities of The Covenant Home," though brief, is a very helpful resource to share with parents before a baptism service. His "Questions Answered" and "Questions to Consider" chapters go a long way to responding to many popular objections. West's book, *The Covenant Baptism of Infants (Second Edition)* has received high commendations from various individuals. West's work is longer than Sartelle's and centers on the Lord's covenant with His people. Again, it is not extremely technical, nor is the argumentation hard to follow. Like Sartelle, West concludes with five pages of "Answering Some Questions."

Hanko's *We and Our Children* is the largest work in the baker's dozen and I would not recommend it for mass distribution. I included it because some may want to make a more in-depth and detailed study of the subject. Henko is writing in response to *Children of Abraham*, by the Reformed Baptist writer David Kingdom, and this colors the tone and style of the book.

The last three are booklets of 12 to 24 pages in length. Bloomfield's work is not widely known in North America but is popular in Australia. It is good, but for the price, Sartelle covers much of the same ground. VanDyk's booklet is likewise well done for its size. It

could be used to facilitate discussion in that it also concludes with a series of questions. Reference in the text is made to the Heidelberg Catechism. Finally, Feddes' *The Covenant Connection* is excellent for use in helping parents see their duty to nurture the souls of their children. It does not offer a defense or explanation of infant baptism, but is an excellent aid in pastoral work and in preparing parents for the baptism of a child.

In conclusion, all the works mentioned are good and relatively contemporary. Pastors, do not forget some of the classics in systematic theology that are on your shelf. Some of these provide good things to share with inquiring minds. I bring again to your attention James Bannerman's *The Church of Christ, Vol. 2*, with almost 100 pages on baptism, or Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, or John Calvin's *Institutes, Book IV*, or R.C. Sproul's *Essential Truths of the Christian Religion*. Read the relevant sections in these works and you will be better prepared for discipling your flock.

Baptism Booklets Listed

The following list includes works which are in print and are available from the addresses assigned. The prices are accurate as of the printing of this article. Some of these aids may be available from other suppliers, but the addresses given are for those who have guaranteed us that they will stock these aids in 1995. This list is compiled alphabetically and all prices are in U.S. dollars or British pounds.

GROUP ONE: Mode & Subjects

1. Jay E. Adams, *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975) pp.56. Order direct from: P & R Direct, PO Box 109, Phillipsburg, NJ 08865 or FAX: 908-859-2390, \$4.99.
2. Frederick S. Leahy, *Biblical Baptism* (Belfast: Cameron Press, 1992) pp.55. Order direct from: Evangelical Book Shop, 15 College Square East, Belfast, BT1 6DD, N. Ireland, \$2.50.
3. George W. Marston, *Biblical Baptism*,

Pastors, do not forget some of the classics in systematic theology that are on your shelf.

(Philadelphia: Great Commission) pp.21. Order direct from: Great Commission Publications, 7001 Peachtree Industrial Blvd., Suite 120, Norcross, GA 30092-3652 or 1-800-695-3387, \$.95.

4. John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980) pp.90. Order direct from: P & R Direct, PO Box 109, Phillipsburg, NJ 08865 or FAX: 908-859-2390, \$5.99.

5. Francis A. Schaeffer, *Baptism* (Wilmington: Trimark, 1976) pp.25. Order direct from: Trimark Publishing Company, 184 Quigley Blvd., Wilmington, DE 19850 or Tel. 301-322-2143, \$2.00.

6. J.G. Vos, *Baptism Its Subjects and Modes* (Pittsburgh: R.P.C.N.A., n.d.) pp.48. Order direct from: Crown and Covenant Publications, 7408 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15208-2531 or FAX: 412-731-8861, \$2.00.

7. Rowland S. Ward, *Baptism in Scripture and History* (Brunswick, Australia: Globe, 1991) pp.75. Order direct from: Crown and Covenant Publications, 7408 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15208-2531 or FAX: 412-731-8861, \$7.00.

GROUP TWO: Infant Baptism

1. Peter Bloomfield, *Covenant Baptism* (Brisbane: Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, 1986) pp.12. Order direct from: Crown and Covenant Publications, 7408 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15208-2531 or FAX: 412-731-8861, \$7.00.

2. David Feddes, *The Covenant Connection* (Back to God Hour) pp.15. Distributed by The Back to God Hour, 6555 W. College Dr., Palos Heights, IL 60463. Free or a small donation.

3. Herman Hanko, *We and Our Children: the Reformed Doctrine of Infant Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing, 1981) pp.123. Order direct from: Reformed Free Publishing Association, PO Box 2006, Grand Rapids, MI 49501, \$5.95.

4. John P. Sartelle, *Infant Baptism: What Christian Parents Should Know* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985) pp.28. Order direct from: P & R Direct, PO Box 109, Phillipsburg, NJ 08865 or FAX: 908-859-2390, \$2.50.

5. Wilbert M. VanDyk, *The Baptism of Children* (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1985) pp.24. Order direct from: CRC Publications, 2850 Kalamazoo SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560-0001, or 1-800-263-4252, \$1.25.

6. Jim West, *The Covenant Baptism of Infants* (Second Edition, Palo Cedro: Christian Worldview, 1994) pp.42. Order direct from Christian Worldview Ministries, PO Box 603, Palo Cedro, CA 96073-0603, \$3.50.

Study Guide

The Editorial Committee commends *Faith and Practice* for private and group study. To help facilitate the study process, we offer some suggestions and helps.

First, at the level of general private study, we suggest that the reader take advantage of cited Scripture references in the articles. Look them up, read them, be encouraged by them, and decide whether you think the authors have drawn out proper implications and conclusions from the Scripture references. In Section II below, we refer you to some Scriptures that you may want to read before you study a particular article. Some of the articles are more conducive to this approach, and we have just included those in this section. In Section III we have several discussion/thought questions that may help you sort through the personal and theological issues that are being raised in each article.

Second, for the person who wants to do a detailed word and context study of baptism, Section I will guide you in stepwise fashion through the last section and footnotes of John Blumenstein's article.

Third, the leader of a Bible study or Sunday School class could ask members to read articles either in the order as they appear in the journal, or in some other chosen order. At the beginning of the class or session the leader could summarize the main point of the article, and then guide the class through a discussion using questions like those in Section III.

SECTION I: Word Study

The best way to understand the New Testament meaning of the words translated in English as "baptize," "baptism," etc., is to read the verses and contexts where these words actually appear. To do this refer to John Blumenstein's article, page 11, the section entitled "An Appended Note On Greek Terms." Read that section, along with endnotes 19 and 22. Then you should read each of the verses that contain words translated by some form of "baptism." Lists of these verses are found in endnotes 18, 20, 21, 23, 24, and 25. As you read, list each verse in a notebook, and jot down any thoughts about the meaning of the word in its context. Does the usage say anything about how or when baptism is to be performed? Does it give you any insight into the general meaning of the Greek term translated by the form of the English word "baptism" in that particular verse? After reading all of these verses, what general conclusions can you draw about the meaning of the word "baptism?"

SECTION II: Background Scriptures for Particular Articles

The Meaning of Baptism

John Blumenstein bases his analysis of the meaning of baptism on passages in the gospels referring to John's baptism. You can read over the accounts of John's ministry in Luke 3:1-22, and refer to accounts in the other gospels: Matt. 3:1-17, Mark 1:1-11, and John 1:19-28. Some other background verses to read would be Luke 7:29-30, Mark 18:38-40, Matt. 28:19, and Rom. 6:1-5.

The Covenant of Grace

Read the passages in Genesis where God's covenant with Abraham is drawn out in detail, particularly Gen. 12:1-3, Gen. 15:1-16, and Gen. 17:1-27. To see how circumcision is further described in the OT, read Jer. 4:4; Deut. 10:16; Deut. 30:6. To see how circumcision is described in the NT, read Rom. 2:25-29 and Col. 2:9-12. To see how the new covenant sign of Baptism is presented in Acts, read Acts 2:38-39.

Baptism and Ministry Gifts

To get a sense of the new situation in Acts, read Acts 1:4-9, and then 2:1-39. For manifestations of tongues in Acts, read 2:1-39, 10:39-48, and 19:1-7. To see the relation between the Holy Spirit and the spread of the word of God, read Acts 2:17, 4:31, 5:32, and 9:17-20.

SECTION III: Discussion/Thought Questions

My Journey With Baptism

How has the issue of baptism come up in your life? Have you ever had situations like those described in this article?

What are some of the questions you have had about baptism?

How might you see the various articles in this issue of *Faith and Practice* as dealing with some of those questions?

The Meaning of Baptism

Discuss ways you have known baptism to be a divisive issue amongst Christians. What do you think Paul meant when he said that there was "one baptism?" Can you think of ways believers can have unity in Christ amidst diversity of opinion on baptism, without giving up concern for baptism altogether?

If you had to define baptism in just a few words, how would you define it?

What is the significance of the water in Christian baptism?

What is the significance in being baptized "in the name" of someone?

Jesus had no sin, and yet he submitted to John's baptism. Why? What does this say to us about why we are baptized?

What does (or should) my baptism say about who I am as a person, where I belong, and with what community I should be identified? Do you actually ever think of your own baptism in this way, as saying something about who you are?

What is the connection between the rite of baptism and Jesus' death (Mark 10:38, Rom. 6:1-5)? What do you think it means to say that we have been "baptized with Christ?" What does this "baptism with Christ" say about how we should live?

The Covenant Of Grace

Can you explain how circumcision and baptism as covenant signs are similar and different?

What do we mean when we call baptism a "visual sermon?" Aren't verbal sermons good enough? What is the advantage of having the gospel communicated in different ways?

What does Tom Aicken mean by describing circumcision as a "pointer?" To what does it point? To what does baptism point?

What is the spiritual meaning of circumcision?

You might hear someone say, "You can't apply the sign of a spiritual reality to a child who probably hasn't experienced that reality." Based on Tom Aicken's discussion of circumcision, how would you respond?

What are some examples in Scripture of the fulfillment of a promise being greater than what you may have expected? How do the promises to Abraham find fulfillment in the new covenant? What about the promise of the land? What about the promise that through Abraham's seed the nations would be blessed?

Do you think of it as a good thing to be the recipient of a conditional promise? Can you think of any conditional promises in other parts of life that you are glad to have heard about?

What is the promise referred to by Peter in Acts 2:38? When Peter says, "this promise is for you and for your children after you," is this a conditional promise? If so, what is the condition? If the promise is conditional, why can we then have hope for our children? Has God given any indications that He will in fact keep building up His family generation after generation?

Why would circumcision no longer be a good sign of God's covenant relationship with His people?

Nowhere in the New Testament is there a commandment to baptize children, and the only folks we know with certainty who were commanded to be baptized were adults who had repented and believed. Yet, nowhere in the New Testament is there a rescission of the principle that the sign of the covenant is to be applied to children. So why do we baptize children of believers?

Improving Your Baptism

When was the last time you actually thought of your own baptism and what it means?

What do you tend to think of when you witness another person being baptized? Do these thoughts differ according to whether the one being baptized is an infant or an adult?

Can you explain how our baptism can be of encouragement to us when we face temptation? What is the connection between our past baptism and our present spiritual growth?

How is it that baptism can cause us to think of sin in our lives, and what does it say to us about how to deal with that sin? Does this give insight to what we mean when we say that baptism is a "means of grace?"

What does it mean to say that our baptism is a "seal?" What is being sealed? How can the seal aspect of baptism be of encouragement to us? How is our baptism like the appearance of God to Abraham in Gen. 15?

What are some ways parents can take advantage of their children's baptism as they teach and raise their children? How might you speak to your child about his baptism as he is growing up?

Do you think it is true that it is not our conscious experience of our baptism that is of primary importance? Why or why not?

Baptism and Ministry Gifts

Why was the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 such a crucial day in the history of salvation?

What does the promise in Acts 2:38 have to do with the Holy Spirit?

Do you believe the gift of the Spirit is still being poured out today?

Why is baptism an appropriate sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit?

It is too easy to think of spiritual gifts as something some people and some churches are "into." Do you think it is right to say that the exercise of spiritual gifts for the upbuilding and growth of the church is one of the crucial aspects of having received the gift of the Holy Spirit?

If our baptism signifies that we have been gifted by God for ministry, what is it saying to God when we fail to seek to exercise spiritual gifts?

What are some of the ways baptism could be used as an encouragement to spiritual gift ministry?

Baptism: Moment of Truth

Imagine what would be involved in becoming a Hare Krishna, cutting your hair, changing your clothing style, becoming deeply involved in all the Hare Krishna activities. How would your family and friends feel? How would this involve a break with and repudiation of your life up to that point? As hard as that would be, why would becoming a Hare Krishna in America be easier than being baptized as a Christian in a Muslim culture?

Do you think that if you were in Ali's shoes it would have been harder for you to decide to follow Jesus?

Why do you think that Muslims don't take a verbal profession of faith in Jesus as seriously as the decision to be baptized?

Why do you think baptism just doesn't carry the weight with us in Western society as it should?

Why is it hard for us in Western churches to think of baptism as signifying that we have taken on a new identity?

Given the great difficulties posed by baptism for a Muslim believer, do you think you would be tempted to counsel a Muslim convert in a Muslim country not to be baptized? What would be the danger of such counsel?

Rebaptism

Have you ever known anyone who wanted to be baptized even though he may have been baptized before? Can you remember the reason he wanted to be baptized again? What would be some of the reasons you could sympathize with such a desire, and what can you see as some of the pitfalls of granting requests for rebaptism?

Do you agree or disagree with the proposition that baptism is not primarily a sign of a person's faith? How does one's view of the meaning of baptism effect how one views the issue of rebaptism?

What would be your counsel for each of the people described at the beginning of Bill Evan's article?

How would you summarize the historic debate amongst Protestants about Roman Catholic baptism? Do you agree or disagree that Catholic baptism should be considered as legitimate baptism? Why or why not?