

A Scriptural Critique of Infant Baptism

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-194

A couple of weeks ago, I gave a message on the issue of baptism. And when I introduced that I was going to do that, I said that I wanted to give a follow-up message on the issue of infant baptism, and I'm going to do that this morning.

Now, I confess that this may seem a little more like a theological class lecture. You may feel like you've just enrolled at The Master's Seminary. That's okay. And I warn you in the back rows there, who maybe tend to wander anyway because you're so far away, hang in there. This is really, I think, a provocative and important and far-reaching issue to deal with.

Let me explain, for some of you who might not understand, there is a widespread belief in the church that babies are to be baptized. And so, soon after their birth, they are taken to the church - whether it's a Roman Catholic Church or whether it's a Presbyterian church, or whether it's a Reformed church, or a Lutheran church, an Anglican church, Episcopalian church - They are taken to the church, and they are sprinkled with water on the head. A little bit of water is dripped on their head, and that constitutes their Christian baptism. This is very widespread. This is all over the world, in fact. This is the influence of the post-Reformation European Church, and it has spread wherever that influence has gone.

Now, the result of this is that you have baptized non-Christians all over the world. They were baptized as infants with what they believed was a Christian baptism, and an initiation into the church. And an initiation into salvation. And yet they are not Christians; they have never come to personal confession of faith in Christ. And so, they were baptized, but they're non-Christians.

On the other hand, you have the same group of people who are actually not baptized at all, because that baptism is not New Testament baptism. So, there are baptized non-Christians who have really never been baptized at all in the true sense.

It is also true that many people are – particularly in that movement, many people do come to true faith in Christ. They may start by being baptized as an infant in Presbyterian or Lutheran or Reformed Church or Anglican or Episcopalian Church, or whatever church it is that does infant baptism. They are baptized as a child. They do come to true faith in Jesus Christ, but are never baptized by immersion because the church teaches that that is not appropriate.

In fact, after the Reformation, if somebody was rebaptized who was baptized as an infant, they were labeled an Anabaptist and persecuted. And it was not uncommon for that persecution to reach a fever pitch so that after the Reformation, you had Protestant people, who believed in infant baptism, persecuting people who believed in believer's baptism. It became a serious issue, even to the point where some people, who believed in adult immersion after confession of faith in Christ and were rebaptized, were killed. So, this was a heated issue. We can be glad it isn't quite that furious today,

but it is still an issue of immense importance in the church because, as I said, you have baptized non-Christians and unbaptized Christians. And in both cases you have a problem – a serious problem.

We have certainly the present largest unbaptized population of professing Christians ever. And that unbaptized population would be made up of people who were baptized as infants and don't feel they need to be baptized, and therefore they are really unbaptized in the true way. And all those other people who are hearing the gospel today through television and radio and in the sort of seeker-friendly churches where baptism is not practiced. So, you have this massive population of unbaptized, professing Christians everywhere.

Now, a few things, in the New Testament, are more unmistakable than the issue of baptism; it's just plain and simple. Jesus said, "Go and preach the gospel and baptize." And Peter said, "Repent and be baptized." It couldn't be much more clearly expressed than that. Even so, we have widespread noncompliance to this issue. Now, this is of great importance to me, because I feel, as a Christian preacher, as a Christian pastor, as a shepherd of God's flock, as somebody who's responsible to the Lord for ministry, I need to preserve what is precious to the Lord – right? – in the church.

Now, there are only two ordinances the Lord gave us – just two. He gave us baptism and the Lord's Table. And He said, "Just do these two things." They are symbols. Baptism, as we know, is a symbol depicting the death of an individual in Christ, burial, and resurrection into newness of life. The Lord's Table is a symbol of the cross, both the body of Jesus Christ symbolizing the bread and the blood of Christ symbolizing the cup. And we are enjoined to carry those out in the church. Now, this is important to me because it's part of the stewardship of responsibility that I have to discharge before the Lord. It grieves me that there are some churches, like the Quakers Church and the Friends Church, that will not practice communion. It also grieves me that there are many, many churches – many of them, thousands upon thousands of them, tens of thousands of them all over the world – that will not properly practice Christian baptism in spite of what the New Testament says. This is a matter of obedience; this is a matter of honor to the Lord. And it's of great importance to me.

Some years ago I was invited to be the president of a great educational institution here in our country. And as I was contemplating whether I wanted to leave the pastorate here at Grace church, some years ago, and go do this, the thing that stuck in my mind most was that if I was there, I wouldn't be able to discharge my calling from the Lord to lead the church. And it struck me, and I said this to the people, at the time, "I can't do this because I need to lead the people of God in the ordinances that the Lord has commanded us, because I believe He's given me to the church. And how am I going to baptize people, and how am I going to lead them to the Lord's Table in that environment."

This has always been very important to me because the Lord didn't give us that much that we would get confused about it. And He wants us to carry the responsibility out. Baptism is critically important. And I went into that two weeks ago. Baptism is critically important. It is to be understood, and it is to be practiced. Standing in the way of that understanding is a huge barrier. And that huge barrier is infant baptism. As I said, most of the mass evangelized TV/radio/stadium converts are left to themselves and maybe never even hear about baptism. They don't have any accountability for baptism; they're not under any church authority. But in addition to them, you have this huge crowd of millions of people who believe in infant baptism. And that, too, confuses the issue greatly and acts as a barrier to a true understanding of baptism and to obedience to that understanding. It's not a minor

matter. It has never been a minor matter. As I said, during the time of the Reformation, people were called heretics if they were baptized in a New Testament way by those who were infant baptizers. They were persecuted and, as I said, in some cases, executed.

Now, as years have gone on, we've gotten kind of comfortable and just sort of said, "Well, you know, they believe in infant baptism, and we don't, and they're our brothers and sisters. And that's true. And it's certainly not a reason to call them non-Christians, and it's certainly not right to call them heretics, and it's certainly not appropriate to not have fellowship with them. But it is right to truly understand what Scripture says so that they can come into obedience and compliance with the Word of God.

The time has come, after all these years since the Reformation, to strip off these remnants of Catholicism that never got dwelt with during the Reformation and have been perpetuated and returned to the simple New Testament design. And I want to address that with you this morning.

Now, there are five reasons why I reject infant baptism – five reasons. And I'm telling you, folks, I can't get all that I want to say out this morning, so you're only going to get, I hope, the best of what's here. But these are very important points.

Point number one, and this ought to end the argument, infant baptism is not in Scripture. Infant baptism is not in Scripture. And against that statement there is no evidence. There is no refuting of that statement. Scripture nowhere advocates infant baptism; it nowhere mentions infant baptism; it doesn't exist in the Bible. There is no example of it; there is no comment on it; it's not there. It is therefore impossible to prove that infant baptism is valid from the New Testament. It's impossible to support it from the New Testament or, for that matter, from the Old Testament.

German theologian Schleiermacher wrote, "All traces of infant baptism which have been asserted to be found in the New Testament must first be inserted there." He's right. A host of German and front-ranked theologues and scholars of the Church of England – the Church of England, the Anglican Church, which believes in infant baptism – a host of their scholars have united to affirm not only the absence of infant baptism from the New Testament but from apostolic and post-apostolic times. It isn't in the New Testament, and it didn't exist in the earliest church. They believe it arose around the second or third century.

A Lutheran professor, Kurt Aland, after intensive study of infant baptism, says there is no definite proof of the practice until after the third century. And he says, "This cannot be contested."

A Catholic professor of theology, Haggelbacher, writes, "This controversy has shown that it is not possible to bring in absolute proof of infant baptism by basing one's argument on the Bible." Good.

B. B. Warfield, who is no mean theologian, was an astute and really a great, great theologian, who again influenced my life in my seminary days. B. B. Warfield affirmed – he was, by the way, an advocate of infant baptism, but he affirmed the absence of infant baptism from the Bible.

Among the Calvinists, among the reformed people, there is a very important principle which many of them like to use; it's called the regulative principle. And it says this, "If Scripture doesn't command it, it is forbidden." Now, if they would just stick with that, they'd be all right. If Scripture doesn't

command it, it cannot be introduced into the church as normative. The theme of the Reformation, of course, *sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus* – that is “faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone.” Also *sola scriptura*, Scripture alone. The theme, the great byword of the Reformation was Scripture only, Scripture only, Scripture, Scripture, Scripture. And yet, if you go to Scripture, you cannot find one single, solitary word about infant baptism; it’s not in the Bible. It still is defended, however, amazingly, and still practiced as if it was biblical. It’s really amazing. I can understand how people within the Protestant Church can disagree about an interpretation of scripture; I really find it very hard for myself to understand how they can argue about something that isn’t in the Bible as over against what is.

It’s one thing to say, “Well, I understand that passage this way, and you understand it that way,” or, “I understand that doctrine this way, and you understand it that way.” It’s another thing to say, “I believe what’s in the Bible,” and, “I believe what’s outside the Bible.” That’s a completely different issue. But that, in fact, is what we have.

Now, I would expect Roman Catholicism to engage in that practice, because Roman Catholicism has two sources of authority. On the one hand they have the Bible; on the other hand – and it’s as empty as my right hand – they have tradition. You see where the weight is. But in the Catholic system, there is what is called tradition. It is known as tradition or the magisterium, and it is the accumulation of materials outside the Bible that bear equal authority with the Scripture.

Now, we’re not surprised, then, that the Roman Catholic system, because they believe that the Catholic Church is the unique recipient of post-biblical revelation – that is to say God has given His word to the Church beyond the Bible and, therefore, it carries equal weight with Scripture. We’re not surprised that a system that believes there is extrabiblical material that has equal weight with Scripture would come up with infant baptism and make it an absolute in their system. Not surprising. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church asserts that it is the only recipient of revelation beyond the Bible. Not only is it the only recipient of revelation, but it is the only and infallible interpreter of all revelation, both traditional and biblical.

So, when we know that Roman Catholics baptize babies, that fits into their magisterium. But when you come to Reformation pp who say, “Scripture only, scripture only,” and they had a Reformation, and they basically dumped tradition, and they dumped the magisterium, and they said, “It’s the Bible, it’s the Bible, it’s the Bible,” how come they hung onto infant baptism? It’s not there. It’s not there. It’s a relic of popery.

Now, we would understand the church history would be Rome’s hermeneutic. “Hermeneutic” is a word that has to do with an interpretation. We would understand that history can interpret the Bible for Rome, but history can’t interpret the Bible for us. It doesn’t matter to a Bible interpreter what history has done, what some counsel said, what some pope said. It doesn’t matter what some visionary said.

The way you interpret Scripture is not by something outside of it, but by what is in it. Right? The Bible is its own interpreter. You’d use normal historical, grammatical interpretation. You’d take the words as they are; you interpret the Scripture with the Scripture. You don’t need tradition; you don’t need the magisterium of some religious system. Church history can be Rome’s hermeneutic. In other words, they interpret the Bible from their tradition, but it has never been the hermeneutic of the reformed. It has never been our hermeneutic to say, “Well, I don’t know what that means, so let me

consult some pope.” The Jews did that in the Old Testament. They said, “Well, we’re not sure what this means. So, let’s ask Rabbi So-and-so. If you don’t know what the Bible means, you don’t go to somebody who has infallible revelation as to its meaning. You dig into the text to discern it. God does not interpret Scripture through history. God does not interpret Scripture through tradition, through rites or ceremonies or doctrines that are true simply because some religious system says they’re true. Only an honest interpretation of Scripture in which you exegete the text itself can yield the meaning of that Scripture. Reading traditional history back into the Bible is not a legitimate way to interpret it. History is no hermeneutic.

Now, it is also true that Scripture – they’ll bring this up – it is – they’ll say this, “Yes, it’s not in the Bible, but it’s also true that Scripture nowhere forbids infant baptism.” Now, if I can get into a debate, and we’re going to debate that point, I think I can win. You’re telling me that it’s okay because it’s not there? It should be an ordinance of the church because it’s not there? Do you realize how much is not there? You can make an ordinance out of everything that’s not there.

I mean just use your imagination and figure out where that could go. That’s nothing. That’s nothing but an argument from silence which is no argument at all. It provides no basis for acceptance, certainly no basis for a mandate for infant baptism as some kind of ubiquitous, divinely ordained ordinance that all children of believers or all children of church members ought to engage in. The fact that it’s not there proves absolutely nothing except it proves that it’s not valid. It certainly doesn’t prove anything on its behalf. To justify that sprinkling of babies should be done because it’s not forbidden in Scripture is to standardize what’s not in the Bible as if it were standard for the church. It’s to imprint with divine authority something that men invent, too open the way to any ritual, any ceremony, any teaching – any anything – that isn’t forbidden specifically in Scripture.

In fact, at the time of the Reformation - we all associate - Martin Luther – you know, the monk who saw the truth of the gospel by faith in grace and confronted the Roman Catholic Church – went up one day and, you know, nailed his thesis on the door in Wittenberg there, in the 1500s. And this was a big moment. He was calling the church to take a good, hard look at, of course, selling indulgences. They were telling people that you could get forgiveness of your sins if you paid enough money to the church. And you could buy an indulgence. In other words, you could buy forgiveness. He didn’t like that. And we don’t blame him for that.

Then he went from there to understanding justification by faith. And Martin Luther said that – you know? – “The only way you’re redeemed is through faith and grace.” And we all understand that, and that’s what gave birth to the Reformation. And Luther went so far as to say that it has to come out of the Bible. Luther really fought the Catholic system. Let me quote what he said, “The church needs to rid itself of all false glories that torture Scripture by inserting personal ideas into the Scripture which lend to it their own sense. No,” he said, “Scripture, Scripture, Scripture for me. Constrain, press, compel me with God’s Word.” End quote. That’s Martin Luther. And Martin Luther, he wasn’t just some stumbling, bumbling local monk. He was a brilliant doctor of theology. Martin Luther was one of the brightest theologians in the entire Catholic Church at the time. And he was saying it’s Scripture, Scripture, Scripture for him.

Well, there is nothing in the Scripture about infant baptism. And in a minute I’ll tell you what happened to Luther in the transition from what he just said to eventually capitulating to do infant baptisms.

Another thing the baby baptizers use for support is they try to go to Matthew 18, where Jesus said, in verse 3, "Except you become as a little child, you can't enter the kingdom." Well, that's not talking about babies; that's talking about believers. You have to like a little child to get into the kingdom.

What does that mean? Well, if you're going to come into God's kingdom, you don't come with the record of all your great achievements; you haven't got any. A little child has no achievements. Right? A little child has accomplished nothing, done nothing. They are not productive; have you noticed? They don't do anything; they just have to have things done to them all the time. They don't achieve anything, accomplish anything; they don't make any contribution at all except just the sheer joy of their presence. And that's what the Lord is saying. You come into the kingdom without any achievements, without any accomplishments, without any curriculum vitae, without having achieved anything or accomplished anything. You come in naked and bare and stripped and needy. That's how you come.

And He's talking to the religious leaders, and He's talking to the disciples and saying, "Don't expect that somehow all the stuff you've achieved is going to get you into the kingdom." Remember the apostle Paul? Philippians 3, "You know, I was of the circumcision, circumcised the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, of the people of Israel – you know, zealous as to the Law," went through the whole deal. And he said at the end, "It's manure." Right? It's manure. I can't bring that list of achievements. That's all Jesus is saying.

In Matthew 19 and Mark 10, you remember Jesus said to the disciples, "Let the little children come to Me." You remember the little children came to Him? That's another scripture they liked to use. And it says, "Let the little children come to Me. Don't forbid them, for such is the kingdom of heaven." And Jesus gathered up the little children there in Matthew 19. Both record it. And He blessed them.

Well, in the first place, how could that advocate infant baptism there? He didn't baptize them. He didn't baptize them. That's no evidence of anything about baptism. He just picked up some little children and said, "God has a special care for these little ones who are too young to either reject the truth or accept the truth. God has a special care for them, and He pulled them into His arms and demonstrated that special care by blessing them. They weren't necessarily the children of believing parents. We don't even know who their parents were. For all we know, some of them could have been Gentile kids, and they might have been uncircumcised pagans. The idea that you baptize all these infants of believing parents or of church member parents, based up that scripture is just beyond connection. Jesus didn't baptize them. Jesus didn't cause them to be baptized. He didn't suggest that they should be baptized. He didn't say anything about their parents, whether they were believing or non-believing parents. All He said was, by what He did, children are precious to God; He takes care of them; He blesses them. That's all.

Then the people who believe in infant baptisms try to advocate it from two books: Acts and 1 Corinthians. In Acts and 1 Corinthians, you have five mentions of a household. And they say, "Well, in a household you must have babies. And it says that households were baptized; therefore babies were baptized."

Well, certainly that's an inference; it doesn't say that. There's never an incident of a baby being baptized in any of those households. It never identifies them. And "households" simply mean – it could mean family, it could mean servants who were a part of that household. They suggest that some babies were baptized in those households as an act of solidarity. And the father, they say,

served as a surrogate for the faith of the children. Surrogate faith? What is that? You mean I could believe, and my child is saved by my faith? That's not what the New Testament teaches. That's a severe challenge to individual salvation, as well as an insertion into the text, because no babies are ever mentioned, and no babies are ever mentioned being baptized.

Look at these five; I'll just run them by you quickly. Cornelius' house, Acts 10. The gospel was preached by Peter; Cornelius heard it. And it says, "They all heard the Word; they believed it; the Spirit fell; they were all baptized. All heard, all believed. The Spirit came on all; they were all baptized.

In the jailer's house, in Acts 16, is the next one. The Philippian jailer. Paul, you remember, gave them the gospel. It says, "All heard the gospel. All were baptized."

In chapter 18, it was in the house of Crispus. All believed; all were baptized. The other two occur in 1 Corinthians. The other two are the account of Lydia and Stephanas. Lydia's in the book of Acts. But in the case of Lydia, it's the same thing. We must understand the same thing must have occurred. They heard; they believed; they were baptized. Stephanas, they heard; they believed; they were baptized. I mean it's all basically the same pattern. They all hear the gospel; they all believe; they all receive the Spirit; they all are baptized. That excludes infants, because infants can't hear and believe. The household, then, is defined. It is defined as those capable of hearing, understanding, believing. That's the definition of the household.

In the Stephanas household, which is in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, "All who were baptized" - it says, "All who were baptized were devoted to the ministry of the saints." Babies can't be devoted to the ministry of the saints. It says, "All who were baptized were helping in the spiritual work of the church." It's impossible for infants.

In the case of Lydia, in Acts, her heart was opened when she heard the gospel. The gospel was preached, and her heart was opened, it says. And so, we understood she heard the gospel; she believed. Others must have heard the gospel; their hearts were open, and they believed, and they were baptized.

And by the way, to assume there were children in the house is maybe stretching it since apparently shepherd had no husband. She apparently was a single person. And John 4, in verse 53, it says about a nobleman - you know? - whom Jesus talked with and He healed his son. It says about that "He himself believed and his whole household." He himself believed and his whole household. They all believed. Household belief, then household baptism. Where there's no faith; there's no baptism.

In Act 2:38 - let me show you this - turn in your Bible for a minute to Acts 2:38. Here is another scripture which they use to defend infant baptism. Acts 2:38, Peter is closing the sermon on the Day of Pentecost, and he says in verse 38, "Repent, let each of you be baptized." So, we see the sequence, "Repent, be baptized." Then in verse - "And you'll receive forgiveness, and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Then in verse 39, "For the promise," he says, "is for you and your" - what? - "children."

"Oh," they say, "see? The promise here for the children. This is an important scripture, 'Repent and be baptized, and the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the

Lord our God shall call to Himself.”

Now, they see “your children” as an allusion to the baptism of children. And, of course, that’s a stretch. There’s nothing about baptism of children here whatsoever. But what is being said here? Do you understand what’s being said? He’s talking to some Jews. Okay? And they’re gathered around him; it’s the Day of Pentecost, and they’re in the city of Jerusalem. And he said, “Look, I’m saying to you, ‘Repent, come to faith in Christ, be baptized in His name. You’ll receive the forgiveness of your sins; you’ll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and this promise is not only for you, but it’s for your children.’” Now how obvious is that? What is he saying? He’s saying, “This isn’t isolated to the crowd today; this is for anybody who comes into the future. Right? This is for your children, and your children’s children, and your children’s children’s children. He’s simply saying, “This promise goes on and on and on. And for all who are afar off, it’s for Gentiles, too.”

So, he’s saying, “For your children, Jews in the future, and for Gentiles as well in the future.” Anybody – anybody who repents of sin, anybody who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, anybody who receives the forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit, that promise is fulfilled to anybody, whether they’re Jew or Gentile. That’s all he’s saying here; there’s nothing about babies here. The children He’s speaking about are the offspring of the crowd there. This is for all future generations to be called to the same salvation promises and the same salvation blessings.

Now, one other scripture they use is 1 Corinthians 7, and I’ll show you this one, and then I’ll make some more general comments. 1 Corinthians chapter 7, verses 12 to 14 is another scripture they like to use. And again, it doesn’t say anything about baptism at all; none of them do. But this is where they have to go if they’re going to find a biblical foundation.

Now, he’s talking to people in various marital situations here. And in verse 12, he says, “Look, this is something I’m going to say to you; it’s not a direct quote of Jesus. It’s still inspired, and it’s from God, but it’s not directly quoted from Jesus.” He’s been saying some things that come right out of the instruction of Jesus, but he says, “I’m saying this; this isn’t quoting the Lord here.” But here’s the principle. If any brother has a wife who’s an unbeliever – okay? – you’ve got an unconverted wife. Your wife’s not a Christian, and she wants to live with you. She doesn’t want to separate. She’s not a Christian; she doesn’t believe, but she wants to be with you, then you shouldn’t send her away. You shouldn’t send her away. That means divorce. It’s the word for divorce in the Greek. Don’t divorce her.

See, the idea was Christians were coming to Christ, and they were saying, “Wow, you know, I don’t want to be unequally yoked with an unbeliever.” He just goes through saying that in chapter 6, “You know, you don’t want to be connected up with anybody who’s sinful. So, maybe you’re married to an unbeliever, and you don’t want to continue that relationship; you want to marry a Christian. Well, look, if that unbeliever wants to stay, you keep that marriage together.” The next verse says it in the reverse. “The woman has an unbelieving husband and consents to live with her, don’t send him away.” So, stay in that marriage even though you have an unconverted spouse. Why? Verse 14, “The unbelieving husband is sanctified.” What does that mean? Set apart. Set apart to what? To blessing.

What happens to that unbeliever is by being married to a believer, he gets the spillover of God’s work in your life. He gets the spillover of God’s blessing. God is so kind, and God is so gracious, for the sake of that unbeliever, God would like him to just hang around so he can enjoy the blessings that

God pours out on you.

And then he winds it up at the end of verse 14 and says the same is true with children. If you separate, then you've got a problem of the children; otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. The word means separate. What happens is you've separated your children from blessing. If you'll keep that home together, even with an unconverted husband or an unconverted wife, the blessing that God pours on the believer is going to spill on the husband or wife, and it's going to spill on the children. It doesn't mean that the child is a believer; it doesn't mean that the child is in the covenant community; it doesn't mean the child should – where's baptism? It isn't here.

Very simple principle. It's good to keep a marriage together if an unbeliever is willing to stay there, because then blessing will come down on that unbeliever and down on those children. And who knows but what that blessing can lead them to faith. No mention of baptism. Absolutely none. Just don't get separated and divorced if it's not necessary. So unbelievers and children can enjoy the spillover of God's blessing on the believer in that marriage.

Well, the full counsel of God is either expressly set forth in Scripture – listen carefully – it's either expressly set forth in Scripture, or it can be necessarily, compellingly, and validly deduced by good and logical consequence. I'll say that again. The full counsel of God is either expressly set forth in Scripture or can be necessarily, compellingly, and validly deduced by good and logical consequence.

In other words, it's either there explicitly, or it's there implicitly, and you can easily draw it out, like the doctrine of the Trinity, for example. But this issue of infant baptism just isn't there in any way, shape, or form. And it is not necessarily, compellingly, and validly deduced by good and logical consequence. It's just not there.

Second reason is really the other side of the issue. I don't believe in infant baptism because infant baptism is not Christian baptism. What is in the Bible is Christian baptism. And I already dealt with this two weeks ago. I'm just going to comment on it briefly. Christian baptism is this: somebody believes as an adult; they repent of their sin; they confess Jesus as Lord; they acknowledge Him as Savior; they are saved; then they are baptized. That is New Testament Christian baptism. It's definitive; its meaning is clear; its mode is inescapable.

The word *baptō*, *baptizō* means to immerse or submerge. Every single time it is used in the book of Acts, it is talking about the immersion of a believer. Even John Calvin said – quote – “The word ‘baptize’ means to immerse, and it is certain that immersion,” he says, “was the practice of the early church.” Of course. That's what the word means. They had a different word for sprinkle; it was the word *rantidzō*.

This ordinance was very clearly designed by God. When a person believes, here's a public way to confess their faith: put them down in the water and bring them out. Why? Because it's a symbol of their death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. Remember we went through that two weeks ago. It is a picture, an object lesson, a symbol, a visual analogy of a spiritual truth. Clearly unmistakable. You know, the distinctive – if you were to go through everything to the core of the Christian faith, it would be this: I am in Christ, and Christ is in me. Right? That's it. I'm in Christ. It's the great doctrine of imputation. My sin's imputed to Him; His righteousness imputed to me. God treats Him as if He lived my life, and He died on the cross, bearing my sins. God treats me as if I lived His life. God sees me

perfectly righteous and takes me into His glorious heaven. It's that I'm in Christ, and Christ is in me. "I was buried with Him in baptism" - Romans 6 says - "and I have risen to walk in newness of life." Galatians 2:20, "I'm crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live." Galatians 3:27, "We were baptized into Christ." Colossians 2:12 and 13, same thing.

Baptism pictures the fact that by the divine power of God, when you come to faith in Christ, you're joined with Christ, and you die in Him. Your old life dies at the cross with Him, and you rise in His resurrection to walk in newness of life. And that is symbolized in immersion very obviously. We are literally immersed into Christ, into His death, into His burial, and into His resurrection. And now we are joined with Him in one life. That's why the Bible can say, "Go and make disciples, baptizing them," because baptizing was synonymous with evangelizing, synonymous with saving faith. They were inseparable. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. Baptism became really the expression – the word used to define salvation. They were inseparable.

We know what New Testament baptism is; it's a person repenting, believing, embracing Christ. Spiritually they therefore are united with Christ, and that is symbolized as they go down into water and rise. Their old life dies, and they rise in newness of life with Christ. I think the church needs to get back into this understanding of baptism.

The fact that the church doesn't do this is tragic. It needs to be restored. I'm going to give you some reasons why it needs to be restored. One, in our day, an open, public, solemn confession of the crucified/risen Lord is necessary. And all who experience the reality of the power of the risen Savior should give this public testimony to His glory.

Secondly, by biblical baptism in the New Testament manner, believers give a witness also to careful obedience to Scripture in which nothing can be treated as unimportant. We say, when we're baptized, "Yes, the Bible says it, and I'm doing it. And therefore, you tell people you're not only joined with Christ, but you are obedience to Him.

Thirdly, by biblical baptism, believers testify – and this is crucial – to a redeemed church. I'll say more about that later. By biblical baptism, believers testify to a redeemed church. The point there, just as a hint, is you've got all kinds of people who are infant baptized, who at the time of their infant baptism were supposedly ushered into the church. They have nothing to do with the church now; what are they? They're a part of an unredeemed church, confused by infant baptism.

Fourthly, by biblical baptism, believers give fundamental rejection of all human regulations through which clear, biblical teaching has been obscured or curtailed or supplemented. I mean baptism becomes an apologetic for the truth and a denunciation for error.

And number five, by biblical baptism, the church signifies a public renunciation of the nominal and mass Christianity of our day. We make it real and personal in believer's baptism.

Finally, in biblical baptism, the church calls for the reintroduction and practice of biblical New Testament church order and discipline. Those are reasons why it's so very important.

Now, the Great Commission makes it very, very clear. For Jesus, the order was very clear. You preach the gospel, they believe, they're baptized, and they obey. That's it.

Do you know in 1955, the Anglican Church, which baptizes babies, the Anglican Church did a study on baptism. This is what it says – 1955 report – “Every expression, in the New Testament, concerning the rights of baptism, assumes that the convert receives them with living faith and a renunciation of his old former life.” That’s right. “It is clear,” it says, “that the New Testament doctrine of baptism is established with reference to the baptism of adults. Adults with living faith.” That’s New Testament baptism. But where in the world does this infant thing come from then? It’s not in the Bible. Christian baptism is in the Bible, and it’s very clear what it is. It’s the immersion of people who have believed as adults.

Third point, why reject infant baptism? It is not a replacement sign for the Abrahamic sign of circumcision. Now don’t get too carried away here; this isn’t going to be as complicated as you think. Infant baptism is not a replacement sign for the Abrahamic sign of circumcision.

Now, let me give you the bottom line. Infant baptism says this – this is their – this is the theology of it. The old covenant sign was a baby circumcised. That introduced them into the covenant. So, we need a parallel. The parallel sign is baby baptism. That’s in the new covenant, and that introduces them into the new covenant. Sounds good. In the old covenant, they had a circumcision which introduced them to the covenant community. In the new covenant, we have a baby baptism which introduces the infant into the covenant community. That’s the logic.

You know what? Those two things just don’t go together ever in the Bible. It’s a nice thought; it just isn’t biblical. Scripture never makes that connection. There’s not a verse they can point to; there’s not a passage they can point to either by explicit terms or by implicit. There is not one place in the Bible where baptism is ever connected to circumcision. Period, paragraph. No place. So, any connection is purely manufactured. So, without scriptural support, without scriptural connection, they infer that baby baptism is the new covenant equivalent of old covenant circumcision.

Now, let me make a very simple few statements so you’ll understand just exactly what the difference is. It’s true, in the Old Testament, little boys, on the eighth day after their birth, were circumcised. Girls weren’t; so, that poses a real problem in paralleling the new covenant since girls can come into the new covenant, too. But little boys were circumcised the eighth day.

Now, that introduced them – listen carefully – that introduced them into an earthly, temporal community of people. That introduced them into the nation Israel, as it were. It was physical and it was temporal. That’s what it was.

In the new covenant, there is no physical community. We don’t have a nation; we don’t have a land; we aren’t a duly constituted people ruled over. We don’t have an order of priests; we don’t have a king. We are a spiritual community. There’s a big, big difference.

Circumcision was the sign of ethnic identity. It was the physical participation in the temporal features of the Abrahamic covenant. Listen carefully; it didn’t have any spiritual implications at all. None. Because most of the people who were circumcised, the vast majority of Israelites who were circumcised went to hell. Do you understand that? They rejected the true and living God. They worshiped idols. Right? That’s the history of Israel.

In the present, most of the Jewish people who are circumcised will perish without the knowledge of God. In the future, two-thirds, it says, of the nation Israel will be purged out and judged eternally by God, and He'll save a third and bring them into His kingdom. The vast majority of Jews will perish without the knowledge of God.

Not all Israel is Israel. And what did God say? Circumcise your hearts. You see, the spiritual promises and realities that God offered Israel didn't come to them by any rite or ceremony or ritual. All circumcision did was mark them out as a part of the nation Israel. They entered into the physical participation, the ethnic identity, the temporal features of the nation Israel that was under blessing promised by God to Abraham. It was an earthly blessing, not salvation.

That's why Paul said, "I was circumcised the eighth day, and that's manure. That did nothing for me savingly. I was on my way to hell, and I had been circumcised" – Philippians 3. A person born in Israel, of Abrahamic seed, was physically related to temporal, external privileges, nothing more.

Now, you come into the New Testament and the new covenant. This is dramatically different. There is no physical participation; there is no temporal, earthly feature attached to this. We don't have a land; we don't have a place. Under the old administration, the Abrahamic covenant during the Mosaic era, you entered the earthly, natural covenantal community by birth and by circumcision. You took the sign of that people. But there was a small remnant in Israel that really believed, wasn't there? And they entered into the special spiritual blessings.

But in the new covenant, there are only those who believe. There are only those who have come by repentance and faith. That's not the same at all. There is absolutely no connection. All in the new covenant are believers. All in the new covenant know God.

Now, if the early church – if the early church thought that baptism was a replacement – baby baptism was a replacement for circumcision, why isn't that in the New Testament? And then why did the Judaizers, who were going around telling everybody they had to be circumcised, why didn't Paul say to them, "Hey, you guys; that's over. Baptism has taken its place." We don't circumcise babies; we baptize them. He could have put an end to the whole Judaizing deal with just one comment. And why would they go into the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and have this big, long debate about what do we do about the circumcision? What do we do? Why didn't somebody just get up and say, "Oh nah, nah, nah; that's out, and absolutely baptism's taking its place"? It never said. Nobody ever says that.

The Abrahamic covenant had a unique feature: circumcision. All that meant was you identified with the nation of Israel. Circumcision had a second benefit: it was physically beneficial up until very modern times. The Jewish women had the lowest rate of cervical cancer of any people in the world because circumcision does help prevent the passing on of certain diseases. And God knew that that would be a preservative in His people, and He wanted to preserve His people Israel because of His ultimate purpose for them.

Also, it was a sign of how desperately they needed to be cleansed on the inside; it was symbolic of that. But the point was it just introduced you into the nation; it didn't save you. There was no parallel to this in the New Testament. There's nothing that sort of ushers you into some earthly group. There's just the believers, and they're all in the new covenant.

You see, Jeremiah 31:34 – Jeremiah in 31 is talking about the new covenant. Listen to what he says. Here's the character of the new covenant, the very different from Israel under the old. Here's what he says. This is the most salient feature of the new covenant. Here it is, Jeremiah 31:34, "They shall all know Me." That's the difference. Under the old covenant, they didn't all know God. They didn't know Him.

Remember when Jesus came, He said, "If you knew My Father, you'd know Me," didn't He? "You don't know My Father; you don't know Me." In the new covenant, they all know God. You're not even in the new covenant unless you know God. And the only way to know God is through Christ. That means that all those who are members of the new covenant community know God savingly. Membership in the new covenant is limited to those who have been saved.

Jeremiah is making a dramatic statement here. He's saying, "I know under the old covenant there were lots of folks who had the sign of the covenant. There were lots of folks in the covenant community who didn't know God. But in the new covenant, everybody in it is going to know God. That's distinctive. That's conclusive. Circumcision was never a spiritual sign of anything. Baptism is a spiritual sign of true inclusion in new covenant salvation by grace through faith.

Well, let me give you a fourth reason. I reject infant baptism because infant baptism is not consistent with the nature of the church. I hinted at this earlier. Infant baptism is not consistent with the nature of the church. This opens up, proverbially, Pandora's Box. There is so much chaos at this point, it begs discussion. It's just impossible to solve the problem unless you go back to rejecting infant baptism.

Here's what I mean. You have, for example, in the Roman Catholic Church, millions and millions and millions of people who were baptized. At their baptism, it was stated that this baptism ushered them into the kingdom of heaven. Are they part of the church? Is the church responsible for these people? Are we responsible to shepherd these people who don't believe? The vast majority of those people, obviously, have no knowledge of God, no knowledge of Jesus Christ. Millions of them have no connection to the church whatsoever. They go about living their lives. Are they a part of the church? Are we responsible to shepherd these people? Should we discipline them?

You see, what happens is paedobaptism destroys the redeemed church idea. It just completely assaults the idea that this is a redeemed community of people who have come to personal faith in Jesus Christ. Now you've got something that's so vast and so ubiquitous that it's impossible even to define, let alone deal with. It confuses the visible church with the invisible church. And such confusion is not helpful. If people, when they're baptized as babies – whether it's in an Anglican church or Episcopalian or a Presbyterian church or a Lutheran church or whatever it is – if that includes them in salvation in the kingdom of God and in the church, and they go on to live dissolute lives of sin and just carry on just like the pagans that they are, are they really a part of the church? What in the world is the church then? Is the church not redeemed?

You see, infant baptism perpetuates the same thing it did in Israel. You had a whole bunch of circumcised kids who didn't know God. Now we have a whole bunch of baptized babies who don't know God either, if we're going to carry that over, we get the same result. The true church, however, unlike Israel – Israel was a nation of people – earthly people. The true church is a nation of believers. Whether somebody was baptized as a baby, whether they were confirmed at the age of 12 or not, if they don't know – if they don't know God personally through faith in Jesus Christ, they do not belong to the redeemed church.

But there's this huge confusion about what is the church. Infant baptism just totally throws this into chaos, because the world is full of these baby baptized adults who range everywhere from the hypocritically religious, through the indifferent, to the blasphemous. They're not in the church. They can't be included in the church. And if infant baptism saved them, then salvation doesn't change anybody.

You say, "Well, why is it in there then?"

Let me give it to you. Infant baptism is a holdover from absolutist state church systems in Europe. I'll give you a little history here. Here's what happens: Catholicism reigns till the 1500s. In the 1500s comes the Reformation. Catholicism built its power this way. Back in the fourth century, Constantine takes over, 325. He makes Christianity the state religion. He starts to persecute the people who aren't Christians. This is kind of a switch. It feels good for the Christians for a while, but pretty soon it's serious. He decides that this – the greatest way to have power over the people is to have religious power over the people. So, he makes Christianity the state religion in the Holy Roman Empire. He starts calling it the Holy Roman Empire from about 325 on. And then he determines that we have to include everybody within the purview of the Roman system, everybody in their vast world kingdom has to be included under this great power. So, we've got to baptize everybody. And that's where infant baptism is introduced in about the third century or fourth century.

In comes infant baptism. Infant baptism serves the power of the government very well, because now everybody's automatically in the kingdom of heaven which is the same as the government. Everybody is now in the church; therefore, the government has power over them all. It creates national solidarity. It allows the church and the government to be one, the church and the military to be one, the church and the body politic to be one. And so, they can use the big club of God on everybody's head.

So, now God is ruling through the Roman Empire. Everybody's a baptized convert. Everybody's a baptized part of this thing, and you get this massive, monolithic, great kingdom that perpetuates itself for a thousand years. You know, that's remarkable. The great Babylonian kingdom, the first world empire lasted 200. The Medo-Persian lasted 200 – these world kingdoms. Then the Greek kingdom came along, the third world kingdom, and it lasted 200. But the Roman system lasted a thousand years, actually more than a thousand years, and they did it because they had this monolithic religious structure, and infant baptism was the key to it, because everybody was baptized into the system, and therefore, God was their authority as wielded to the power of the system. And the Roman church took that power.

So, what happens is the Reformation comes, and all of a sudden the Protestants pull out, and there are these little sort of weak groups of Christian people, and they feel overpowered. The Reformation starts to gain some momentum, gain some ground. Larger numbers of people join in the Reformation, and they want some power. How are they going to get it? How are they going to unify their people? How are they going to have a state that has the power that can counteract the Roman state? You have a state – a government that's Catholic like France. What's Germany going to do to stand against France? They don't have the solidarity. So, they decide, "Well, we'll have a state church here, and we'll baptize everybody as infants."

So, you have a Reformation state church developed so that it has the political clout and the solidarity internally to stand against the power of France which is Roman Catholic. And that's how they began to work that infant baptism, because of its political power. It's a holdover from absolutist state powers. The absolute church system national sovereign church power. And with it came, by necessity, the persecution of people who didn't buy it. The people who didn't buy it said, "We don't believe it. We don't believe the Bible teaches infant baptism. We reject that. We believe in believer's baptism. And they called them Anabaptists, and they persecuted them. The state church denied the right of conscience to the individual and to the community, denied the right of freedom, the right of thought. The government was going to control everything to create the solidarity that would give them a base of power to stand militarily and politically against the Catholic states. So, you had state Christendom – Catholic state Christendom; old Protestant, Lutheran, Reformed state Christendom.

Now, at the beginning, Luther had a lofty idealism. He was against it. He contended for a Christianity of churches that would embrace freedom, Christianity of churches that would renounce force and live only by the Word and the Spirit he said. He said that the Scripture is the only standard for all issues of personal life. We're going to stand with the Scripture. Luther says this – quote – "I say that God wants no compulsory service. I say it a hundred thousand times, God wants no compulsory service. No one can or ought to be compelled to believe. For the soul of man is an eternal thing above all that is temporal. Therefore, only by an eternal word must it be governed and grasped. Boy, he's right on, isn't he? Just the Word, just the Word. Neither the pope nor a bishop nor any other man has a right to decree a single syllable concerning a Christian man apart from his consent. All that comes in the spirit of tyranny," he said.

You know what? That was right. Luther was right. By 1527, it caved in. And he turned back to the state church, and he allowed for infant baptism and the state church. And the state church grew into great power and buried the true church. And the Reformation began to disappear. And there was no real building of New Testament churches because they were persecuted. They were seen as "nonconformists," as they were called in England. They were threatening the state church. Infant baptism, see, saved the state church and served them well as it had the Roman Catholic Church, because it initiated everybody into that solidarity and allowed them to wield the God club over everyone.

And they even did battle against each other. Sometimes Protestants against Protestants. The state church was a great tree, far reaching with its branches, but rotten to the core and fruitless and intolerant of the true church.

And so, in Europe today, true Christianity is very, very, very small. It was buried not only under Catholicism in, say, France, but just completely buried under Protestantism in Martin Luther's own country of Germany. That's why they developed infant baptism. Not because it's in the New Testament; it is a relic of popery, drawn in to serve the Protestant churches politically. A state church and a biblical Christianity are and always will be completely opposed to each other. The true church is not of this world and doesn't incorporate the unconverted.

I'll tell you, one of the strategies that Hitler had – I've told you this in the past – Hitler knew the power of bringing everybody under the state church. So, he literally swallowed up the state church of Germany. Adolf Hitler did, and it capitulated completely to him, and anybody who didn't capitulate was put into prison and executed. And guys like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who stood for the true church against the state church, went to a concentration camp and eventually was executed in the

concentration camp. That's a Protestant Church environment that Hitler literally took over and used for his own power. That's how apostate that system had become. And any true surviving Christian, in the midst of that, was fuel for the fires in the furnaces of Hitler's concentration camps.

"There is no connection, no divine connection between the true church and any state power. The true church, Jesus said, is not of this world, and it doesn't incorporate the unconverted. Infant baptism serves the state church well. It horribly confuses the true church. And neither Luther nor even Melancthon – two great reformers – opposed the assault on the Anabaptists and others who rejected the national church. They even said that anybody who rebaptizes is infested with heresy. That's what was said in those days.

Strasbourg reformer Matthias Zell said, "He who confesses Christ as his own Lord and Savior shall, in spite of anything else, share our table, and I will also share with him in heaven." He was right. But he was going against the grain.

Infant baptism, mass communion, which you see in the Roman Church and in some Protestant environments – infant baptism and mass communion efface the contrast between the believer and the unbeliever, between the church and the world. So, we have to reject those kinds of things. As the nature of the church became corrupted, so the ordinance of baptism became corrupted. Well, I think you get the point.

One last point and I'll let you go. Infant baptism is not consistent with the gospel. It's not consistent with the gospel. Maybe this is the most important point of all.

You say, "What in the world happens when a baby's baptized?"

So, I read you the Heidelberg Catechism. Now, this is the great German catechism that defines the meaning of infant baptism. This is what it says, "Yes, for they" – speaking of children – "as well as the old people, appertain to the covenant of God and His church, and in the blood of Christ the redemption from sins, and the Holy Spirit who works faith, and it's promised not less than to the older." So, they're really saying, in the Heidelberg Catechism, that children enter the covenant of God – His church – receive the benefit of the blood of Christ, the redemption from sin, the Holy Spirit, and faith.

"Therefore shall they also, through baptism, as the sign of the covenant, be incorporated into the Christian church, be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as, in the Old Testament, took place by circumcision, in the place of which, in the New Testament, baptism is appointed."

See that connection? That illegitimate connection? But they are actually saying, "They're in the church." They're in the church.

Now, they go further than that. Luther finally affirmed, because he said, "Salvation's by faith."

They say, "Well, how can the baby be saved if he doesn't have faith?"

And so, Luther finally affirmed the infant does have faith. He does have faith. He said, "Children are

to be baptized. They must be able to believe; they must have faith.” Luther said, “It’s not the vicarious faith of the godparents or the church.” He rejected that. “It is the children themselves who believe,” Luther said.

Someone says, “How is that possible?”

“The Holy Spirit helps them to believe,” he says. “The Holy Spirit comes to the child in the holy baptism, by this bath of regeneration He has richly poured out upon us.” This is a bath of regeneration in which the Holy Spirit comes and gives faith to an infant? Some even called it unconscious faith. Some called it surrogate faith. In any case, it is not what the gospel is about, which is personal faith. Right?

The great mark of the Reformation was salvation by faith alone, accompanied by personal repentance. A baby can’t do that. A baby doesn’t have any faith. A baby doesn’t have any part in baptism. It’s no different than circumcision. A baby didn’t have any part in circumcision. In fact, if you asked him, he’d probably vote against it.

Baptizing a baby has no spiritual meaning to that baby. And they got into a confounded viewpoint that somehow faith and grace and salvation and regeneration and entrance into the church is all dumped into that little baby at the point of which water’s dumped on his head. Nothing to do with the gospel of faith. That’s why we have to call it into question.

I wrote down 25 quotes or so out of reformers that answer the question, “What happens at a baby baptism.”

“Baptism” – it says – one of them says – “declares the inward, regenerative operation of the Holy Spirit.” Wow. “Signifies the regeneration ministry of the Holy Spirit. Infant children of believers are rightful heirs of the covenant. It is the witness and attestation to their salvation.”

This produced all kinds of confusion as to the doctrine of justification by faith. Only a person old enough to understand can believe. Right? Well, there’s more, but I think you get the message. Let’s pray.

Father, as we contemplate these things, some may think this is just an academic exercise. The truth of the matter is we’re struggling to call Your church to true understanding of Your Word so that we might be obedient as You have called us to be.

Lord, thank You for the clarity of Your Word. We love many of these dear folks who continue to advocate this. We esteem them very highly for many of the great things that they do in the kingdom, for much of their great insight into the Word, but we are baffled by the fact that they cling to something which we believe is a dishonor to You, and that they do not advocate a proper believer’s baptism, in the way that You have designed it, in order to be a testimony of our unity with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection and thus exalt the cross and the open tomb.

Lord, work in Your church and maybe use this message and others who can call Your church to reexamine these things, to come back to the truth so simply, straightforwardly set forth in Your Scriptures, and make us to be obedient to these things. We thank You in Christ’s name, Amen.

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