



The Waters of Death and Life

Understanding and Celebrating a
Believer's Baptism



INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

☞ **The Waters of Death and Life**
*Understanding and Celebrating
a Believer's Baptism*

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Bethlehem College & Seminary
720 13th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55415
612.455.3420
info@bcsmn.edu | bcsmn.edu

Copyright © 2012, 2017 by Bethlehem College & Seminary

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, modified, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Scripture taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. Copyright © 2007 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



The Waters of Death and Life

Understanding and Celebrating a Believer's Baptism

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Table of Contents

Instructor's Introduction		
Course Syllabus		1
Lesson 1	The Deep Waters of the Baptism Debate	3
Lesson 2	Repent and Be Baptized in the Name of Jesus	11
Lesson 3	Baptism and the New Covenant People	27
Lesson 4	The Waters of Judgment and the Ark of Christ	41
Lesson 5	Under the Water and Out of the Water	55
Lesson 6	Baptism, Joy, and the Glory of God	69

Instructor's Introduction

It is our hope and prayer that God would be pleased to use this curriculum for *his* glory. Thus, the intention of this curriculum is to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. This curriculum is guided by the vision and values of Bethlehem College & Seminary which are more fully explained at bcsmn.edu. At the Bethlehem College & Seminary website, you will find the God-centered philosophy that undergirds and motivates everything we do. May God be glorified in us as we are satisfied in him alone!

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Waters of Death and Life: Understanding and Celebrating a Believer's Baptism is a six-week course advancing the truth that Christians ought to not only understand but also celebrate the doctrine of believer's baptism. The course will assert that baptism is an immersion in water for believers only and will seek to provide a biblical and theological grounding for a God-centered perspective on baptism. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining the key biblical passages regarding the issue of baptism, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper and other theologians.

🌀 OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. Students successfully completing this course should be able to:

- ▷ magnify the worth of the disciple-making God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ understand the Scriptures—especially the passages pertaining to the issue of baptism—more fully as a result of studying them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be “Bereans” (cf. Acts 17:11).
- ▷ comprehend and thoughtfully interact with five of John Piper’s sermons on the topic of baptism. To this end the student will fill out note-taking sheets for every sermon they are assigned to listen to.
- ▷ set forth a basic defense for a God-centered perspective on baptism, emphasizing how baptism relates to the glory of God.
- ▷ discuss with others the biblical vision of God-glorifying baptism and make appropriate application.

🌀 IMPLEMENTATION

As the instructor of this course, it is imperative that you are completely familiar with the curriculum. We therefore recommend that you read this entire section carefully and then skim through the rest of what is contained in this binder.

This course is designed to be taught in 6 lessons. Ideally there should be one hour of in-class instruction and approximately one hour of homework for each lesson. We urge you to establish an expectation among your students that this course will require more concentration and commitment than a typical Sunday School course would. A tone of serious and earnest study should be set by the instructor before the course even begins.

Before the first class session, you will need to decide when and where this course will be offered. Record this information on the syllabus in the box labeled “Course Information.” You may also want to include your contact information in this box. The schedule incorporated in the syllabus does not have assigned dates. Please write the intended dates for each lesson in the corresponding column or boxes. Once you have completed filling out the syllabus, photocopy it so that you may distribute one copy to each student enrolled in the course. The *Student’s Workbook* does not include a syllabus, so your students will not have a syllabus until you distribute one. Photocopying the syllabus is the only photocopying that is required of you by this curriculum.

During the first lesson, we recommend the following outline to structure your time:

Welcome / Prayer (5 min): Greet the students as they arrive. Open the lesson by exalting God in prayer.

Personal Introductions (15 min): Ask each student in the room to introduce themselves briefly by answering the following questions (and answer these questions yourself): What is your name? Can you tell the class a little about yourself and your general position with respect to baptism? Why are you enrolled in this course and what are you hoping to gain from it?

Syllabus Review (5 min): Distribute your customized course syllabus and then guide the class through it, reading each item and answering any questions that the students might have.

The Deep Waters of the Baptism Debate (30 min): Guide the class through Lesson 1, reading each section together until a question is reached. After allowing a few minutes for the students to answer each question, pause to discuss their answers. You may also choose to discuss each question immediately with the class (and not allow time for individual reflection) in the interest of time.

Lesson 1 is the only lesson you will take your students through without their prior preparation. For all subsequent lessons, students will work through

the lesson on their own before coming to class. To prepare for Lesson 1 as the instructor, you should attempt to answer the questions yourself before consulting the suggested answers (where given) in the *Instructor's Guide*.

Overview of the Next Lesson / Closing (5 min): Ensure that your students understand what is required of them in preparation for the next class session. Then thank them for coming to the class and dismiss in prayer.

Subsequent Lessons

As the instructor, you will be expected to do all the preparation for each lesson that is required of the students and more. We strongly recommend that you obtain a *Student's Workbook* and attempt to complete the homework on your own before consulting this *Instructor's Guide*. The *Instructor's Guide* provides our suggested answers. Some questions in this curriculum are open-ended and could be answered in different ways. You may find that the answers contained in this manual may not be the clearest or most accurate answers possible. Therefore, we encourage you to improve upon our answers if you can.

It is essential to understand that this *Instructor's Guide* is meant to be a resource; the real authority is God's Word.

Furthermore, we have deliberately omitted lesson outlines for Lessons 2–6. Our recommendation is for you to open the class in prayer and then immediately proceed through each day's study, discussing how the students answered the three lesson questions and reflecting on the biblical passages. You then might want to cover the sermon or discussion questions. You will notice that **the material in each lesson should provide you with much more material than you can cover in an hour of thoughtful interaction.** This is not an oversight in design, and you should not feel obligated to provide the students with answers for every question. Rather, as the instructor, your responsibility should be to focus on areas where students have questions or interest.

You will also notice that the *Instructor's Guide* has material that is not included in the *Student's Workbook* in the form of Teaching Notes. Consult these notes after thoroughly reviewing the lesson on your own, but before you meet with the class.

It is our conviction that the best teachers foster an engaging environment in the classroom. Adults learn by solving problems or by working through things that provoke curiosity or concern. Therefore, we discourage you from lecturing for the entire lesson. Although an instructor will constantly shape conversation, clarifying and correcting as needed, they will probably not talk for the majority of the lesson. This curriculum is meant to facilitate an investigation into biblical truth—an investigation that is shared by the instructor and the students. Therefore, we encourage you to adopt the posture of a “fellow-learner” who invites participation from everyone in the class.

It might surprise you how eager adults can be to share what they have learned in preparing for each lesson. Therefore, you should invite participation by asking your students to share their discoveries. Here are some of our “tips” on facilitating discussion that are engaging and helpful:

- ▶ Don't be uncomfortable with silence initially. Once the first student shares their response, others will likely to join in. If you cut the silence short by prompting the students, they are more likely to wait for you to prompt them every time.
- ▶ Affirm answers whenever possible and draw out the students by asking for clarification. Your aim is to make them feel comfortable sharing their ideas and learning, so be extremely hesitant to “shut down” a student's contribution or “trump” it with your own. This does not mean, however, that you shouldn't correct false ideas—just do it in a spirit of gentleness and love.
- ▶ Don't allow a single student or several students to dominate the discussion. Involve everyone and intentionally invite participation from those who are more reserved or hesitant.
- ▶ Labor to show the significance of their study. Emphasize the things that the students could not have learned without doing the homework.
- ▶ Avoid talking too much. The instructor should not monopolize the discussion but rather guide and shape it. If the instructor does the majority of the talking, the students will be less likely to interact and engage, and they will therefore not learn as much. Avoid constantly adding the “definitive last word.”
- ▶ The instructor should feel the freedom to linger on a topic or question if the group demonstrates interest. The instructor should also pursue digressions that are helpful and at least somewhat relevant. The instructor, however,

should attempt to cover the material. Avoid the extreme of constantly wandering off topic, but also avoid the extreme of limiting the conversation in a way that squelches curiosity or learning.

- ▷ The instructor's passion, or lack of it, is infectious. If you demonstrate little enthusiasm for the material, it is almost inevitable that your students will likewise be bored. But if you have a genuine excitement for what you are studying, and if you truly think inductive Bible study is worthwhile, your class will be impacted positively. Therefore, it is our recommendation that before you come to class, you spend adequate time working through the homework and praying so that you can overflow with genuine enthusiasm for the Bible and for God in class. This point cannot be stressed enough. Delight yourself in God and in his Word!

It may be necessary to again stress that **this curriculum is a resource**. As the instructor, you should feel the freedom to structure the class time and to discuss the material in a way that promotes the maximum learning and enjoyment of your students. Lingering on certain questions, pursuing *helpful* digressions, examining relevant portions of Scripture, adding other supplemental material, and customizing the curriculum to fit your situation are all heartily approved.

Questions or Comments?

If you still have questions after reading this introduction and surveying the curriculum, you may contact Bethlehem College & Seminary at info@bcsmn.edu. We are also eager for your comments and suggestions. Thanks!



The Waters of Death and Life

Understanding and Celebrating a Believer's Baptism

SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Waters of Death and Life: Understanding and Celebrating a Believer's Baptism is a six-week course advancing the truth that Christians ought to not only understand but also celebrate the doctrine of believer's baptism. The course will assert that baptism is an immersion in water for believers only and will seek to provide a biblical and theological grounding for a God-centered perspective on baptism. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining the key biblical passages regarding the issue of baptism, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper and other theologians.

OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. Students successfully completing this course should be able to:

- ▷ magnify the worth of the disciple-making God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ understand the Scriptures—especially the passages pertaining to the issue of baptism—more fully as a result of studying them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be “Bereans” (cf. Acts 17:11).
- ▷ comprehend and thoughtfully interact with five of John Piper’s sermons on the topic of baptism. To this end the student will fill out note-taking sheets for every sermon they are assigned to listen to.
- ▷ set forth a basic defense for a God-centered perspective on baptism, emphasizing how baptism relates to the glory of God.
- ▷ discuss with others the biblical vision of God-glorifying baptism and make appropriate application.

🔗 REQUIRED BOOK (TEXTBOOK)

- ▶ An English version of the Bible, preferably the *English Standard Version (ESV)* or *New American Standard Bible (NASB)*

Please note that in addition to inductive study of the Bible, students will be required to listen to five sermons by John Piper. This will require Internet access to the *desiringGod* website (www.desiringgod.org). See each lesson for more specific instructions.

(NOTE: *desiringGod* permits the reproduction and distribution of any of its material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of production. If you lack internet access, talk to your instructor about the possibility of receiving a CD with the sermons copied onto it.)

🔗 REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to prepare for Lessons 2–6 by completing the lesson pages in sequential order. Therefore, for each lesson students should read the Introduction and the Lesson Objectives first, then read the remainder of the lesson, answer the three questions contained therein, and listen to the assigned sermon. As students listen to the sermon, they should take notes on the corresponding sheet included in each lesson. The student may then review the discussion questions and record their own discussion question.

🔗 SCHEDULE

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title
1		The Deep Waters of the Baptism Debate
2		Repent and Be Baptized in the Name of Jesus
3		Baptism and the New Covenant People
4		The Waters of Judgment and the Ark of Christ
5		Under the Water and Out of the Water
6		Baptism, Joy, and the Glory of God

The Deep Waters of the Baptism Debate

1

§ INTRODUCTION

Baptism has been, historically speaking, a fiery issue. To our day it still divides Christians who might otherwise be in theological harmony. So why write a course that potentially is just more fuel to the fire of this debate? The words of Bethlehem Baptist Church's Elder Affirmation of Faith well express the conviction that lies behind this course:

We believe that the cause of unity in the church is best served, not by finding the lowest common denominator of doctrine, around which all can gather, but by elevating the value of truth, stating the doctrinal parameters of church or school or mission or ministry, seeking the unity that comes from the truth, and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries rather than by removing boundaries.¹

Thus it is our aim in this course both to declare our biblical convictions about baptism and to maintain our differences with other believers in a spirit of humility and charity. To that end we will respectfully contend that baptism should be applied only to those who have made a credible profession of faith.

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- articulate a Reformed expression of the doctrine of infant baptism.
- recognize key distinctions between infant baptism and believer's baptism.
- express the importance of this doctrine.

¹ The Bethlehem Baptist Elder Affirmation of Faith 15.3 (revised November 11, 2003; this document can be found at the www.bethlehem.church website).



TEACHING NOTES

Before reviewing this lesson with your students, the *Instructor's Introduction* suggests asking your students about their general position with respect to baptism. As the instructor of this course you should be sensitive to your students' current understanding of baptism and their background. This course will mainly respond to an evangelical, Reformed view of infant baptism. If your students are engaged with a Lutheran or Catholic (or other) view of baptism, however, you should adjust the class discussions accordingly. In addition to teaching what we believe is the biblical doctrine of baptism, by the end of the course you will also want to encourage any unbaptized students in your course to pursue baptism (assuming they confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior) for God-honoring reasons.

John Piper preached a four-part sermon series at Bethlehem Baptist Church in May of 1997. In the first sermon (which we would encourage you, as the instructor, to listen to as part of your preparation for this first lesson), entitled "I Baptize You with Water: The Baptism of John" (an online sermon available at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website), Piper offers four reasons for the sermon series. These four reasons, with some modification, could also serve as reasons for this Bethlehem College & Seminary curriculum:

Today we begin a brief series on the Biblical teachings concerning baptism. There are several reasons for this. One is that in almost seventeen years I have never preached a series of messages on the Biblical meaning of baptism. This is a gaping hole in our treatment of the whole message of the Bible for our time.

Another reason is that Jesus made baptism part of his ministry and part of our mission. Baptism is not man's idea. It was God's idea. It is not a denominational thing. It is a Biblical thing. . . .

Another reason for the series is that the practice of baptism was universal in the early church. It was not just for converted Jews or converted gentiles, or any one specific church. It was practiced for all converts in all the churches. . . . [Baptism] was a universal, defining experience in the early church. If we are to be in sync with the entire New Testament and the entire early church we must take baptism seriously and practice it faithfully.

Finally, there is a reason for this series that relates to our situation today at

Bethlehem. We believe that we have been remiss in not calling for a more forthright and public declaration of faith in response to the ministry of the word.

Please understand that this course is simply an introduction to this issue. We will not be able to cover all of the aspects of the baptism debate in detail. We do hope, however, that by studying through this course a student would gain an adequate and biblical understanding of believer's baptism. While this first lesson introduces infant baptism and believer's baptism, the following lessons will explore these positions in greater depth.



CONFESSIONAL STATEMENTS OF INFANT BAPTISM

When seeking to understand the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism (also called “paedobaptism”), it is perhaps best to examine classic, confessional statements of the doctrine. One of the most influential and enduring statements of infant baptism comes from the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 28 (XXVIII), entitled “Of Baptism”:

I. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ’s own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world.

II. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the Gospel, lawfully called thereunto.

III. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.

IV. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.

V. Although it is a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.

VI. 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 belongs unto, according to the

counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.

VII. *The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered unto any person.*²

Notice also the following question and answer taken from the Heidelberg Catechism:

Question 74: *Are infants also to be baptized?*

Answer: *Yes; for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God, and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult, they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church, and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant.*³

1. True / False:

- a. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, infants of unbelieving parents should be baptized if the parents request it.
- b. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, baptism is a certain sign that a person has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit.
- c. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, it is of no importance whether a person is baptized by immersion or by sprinkling.
- d. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, infants of believers are to be baptized according to the parallel between circumcision in the old covenant and baptism in the new covenant.

· **ANSWER.** *1a: false; 1b: false; 1c: false; 1d: true.*

Throughout this course we will be examining the biblical arguments for infant baptism and describing the view of believer's baptism in contrast to infant baptism.

2 The Westminster Confession of Faith (http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/).

3 The Heidelberg Catechism (<http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/heidelberg.html>).

CONFESSIONAL STATEMENTS OF BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (also known as the Second London Confession of Baptists) was written in response to the Westminster Confession of Faith and clearly articulated the differences between Baptists and Presbyterians on the doctrine of baptism:

I. Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him; of remission of sins; and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.

II. Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance.

III. The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, wherein the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

IV. Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance.⁴

Here is another more recent articulation of believer's baptism (also called "credobaptism") from the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith:

We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel, and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin.⁵

4 The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 (http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/baptist_1689.html).

5 The Bethlehem Baptist Elder Affirmation of Faith 12.3 (revised November 11, 2003; this document can be found at the www.bethlehem.church website).

2. List some of the key differences between infant baptism and believer's baptism according to the confessional statements reproduced thus far in this lesson. Then list some of the key similarities:

Key Differences	Key Similarities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · ANSWER. A1. <i>The proper subjects of baptism according to believer's baptism are those who have consciously repented and believed in Jesus; according to infant baptism believers and the infant children of believers should be baptized.</i> A2. <i>Those who practice infant baptism usually advocate for "pouring" or sprinkling; those who practice believer's baptism usually advocate for immersion.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · ANSWER. A1. <i>Baptism is an ordinance/sacrament of the Lord Jesus.</i> A2. <i>It is to be performed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.</i> A3. <i>It is a sign of union with Christ and the forgiveness of sin.</i> A4. <i>It signifies entry into the church (that is, the new covenant community).</i> A5. <i>Baptism, as a sign, does not cause the regeneration of the one baptized.</i>

THE IMPORTANCE OF BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

In this course, we will be arguing not only for the biblical warrant for believer's baptism, but also for its importance and significance. We believe that those who have made a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus should be baptized joyfully, even if they were "baptized" as infants. The aim of the course, therefore, is to provide students with a biblically-informed defense of believer's baptism and to motivate Christians who have not been baptized to seek to be baptized in their local church for the glory of God.

The edited volume *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (2006) is one of the best recent explanations of believer's baptism. In the introduction to this collection of essays, Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright state what they believe is one important function of believer's baptism as opposed to infant baptism:

*When churches practice infant baptism or allow into membership those who were baptized as infants, they have sundered the biblical connection between baptism and faith. . . . We believe that baptism should be reserved for believers because it preserves the testimony of the gospel by showing that only those who have repented and believed belong to the church. Only those who have exercised faith are justified. Hence, only those who have trusted in Christ should be baptized. Restricting baptism to believers only, therefore, preserves the pure witness of the gospel.*⁶

John Piper also stresses the importance of believer's baptism:

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

We are not mainly talking about religious ritual here. We are not mainly talking about church tradition here. We are mainly talking about Jesus Christ and his magnificent work of salvation in dying for our sins and rising for our justification. Talking about baptism means talking about how Jesus taught us to express our faith in Jesus and his great salvation. So don't have small thoughts as we begin. Have large thoughts. Great thoughts about great reality—Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified to bear the sins of millions and raised to give them everlasting life in the new heavens and the new earth. . . .

So baptism is important.

- *It was uncompromisingly commanded by the Lord Jesus.*
- *It was universally administered to Christians entering the early church.*
- *It was uniquely connected to conversion as an unrepeatable expression of saving faith.*⁷

6 Thomas A. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, "Introduction" in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (ed. Thomas A. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright; Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2006), 2-3.

7 John Piper, "What Is Baptism, and How Important Is It?" an online sermon at the

Mark Dever argues that believer's baptism can be neglected or misrepresented even in Baptist churches today:

*Baptism is the discarded jewel of Christian churches today—even of Baptist churches. Confusion, ignorance, prejudice, and a misplaced and distorting cultural conservatism all beset most churches today in their practice of baptism.*⁸

3. Is the right understanding and practice of baptism a “gospel issue”? If so, in what sense? If not, why not? Defend your answer.

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▷ John Piper, “I Baptize You with Water: The Baptism of John,” an online sermon at the *desiringGod* website.
- ▷ Thomas A. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, “Introduction” in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (ed. Thomas A. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright; Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2006).

desiringGod website (www.desiringgod.org). Throughout this curriculum we will only provide titles (and not the full web addresses) for online sermons and articles at the *desiringGod* website. Use the Title Index of the Resource Library to locate these resources.

8 Mark Dever, “Baptism in the Context of the Local Church” in *Believer's Baptism*, 329.

Repent and Be Baptized in the Name of Jesus

2

§ INTRODUCTION

The practice of Christian baptism in the 21st century can be traced back through the practice of the early church to the teaching of Jesus himself and ultimately to the proclamation of the coming of the kingdom of God in the ministry of John the Baptizer. As John Piper explains, John's baptism is the New Testament origin of Christian baptism:

There is a close continuity between Christian baptism and John's baptism. John began baptizing, Jesus continued baptizing, and he commanded the church to keep on with the practice—though now the act would be done in his name. So there are crucial things to learn about baptism from the baptism of John.⁹

There are also crucial things to learn from the book of Acts about the practice and meaning of baptism. Therefore, in this lesson we will begin our study of Christian baptism by looking at the baptism of John and the book of Acts. We will also consider how the new covenant sign of baptism relates to the old covenant sign of circumcision. In this lesson and the next we will argue that the key to understanding baptism is to perceive the significance of the dawning of the new age, the new covenant, and a new people who are formed in the name of Jesus.

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- state what the baptism of John teaches us about Christian baptism.
- explain the pattern of conversion and baptism in the book of Acts.
- discern the precise relationship between circumcision and baptism.

⁹ John Piper, "I Baptize You with Water," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website. Modified slightly.



As John Piper indicates in the sermon assigned for this lesson, the baptism debate must involve theological reflection on the relationship between the old and new covenants. That is why this lesson and the next lesson will invest so much effort in elucidating the precise relationship between circumcision and baptism, and between the old and new covenant communities. There will inevitably be some redundancy in these two lessons, but we consider this redundancy to be helpful at such a foundational stage in the argument.

As the instructor of the course, you will need to determine how many paedobaptist arguments to engage in the class discussion. It is our conviction that students who are being introduced to the complexities of the debate especially need to focus on understanding the arguments for believer's baptism before attempting to respond to every paedobaptist argument. If your class has some more familiarity with the issue, however, you may think it helpful to invest more of the discussion in anticipating and refuting paedobaptist interpretations of the key baptism texts.

The second discussion question raises a common argument used to defend infant baptism. Paedobaptists will point to this text in an attempt to link Peter's message to the Abrahamic covenant, arguing thereby that as infants were included in the sign of circumcision, so infants should also be included in the sign of baptism. Bruce A. Ware, "Believers' Baptism View" in *Baptism: Three Views* (ed. David F. Wright; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2009), 36-37, has a very thorough response to this argument:

The promise extends far beyond the children of believers, to all who are far off. So either the covenant of grace, now signified through the sign of baptism, should be applied to the children of believers and to all people everywhere, or it is the case that this simply is not what Peter means. Clearly what Peter means here is that the promise of receiving the indwelling Holy Spirit through repentance and faith in Christ is a promise that is just as much for your own children (as they repent of their sin and trust Christ) and for all people everywhere (as they repent of their sin and trust in Christ) as it is for you, that is, those listening to Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost. This does not suggest then that we should baptize our infants but rather that we should share the gospel with them, as we should with all who are far off, so that they learn and know that they too can receive this promised gift through repentance and faith. . . .

The last phrase of Acts 2:39, “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself,” also argues against the use of this verse to support infant baptism. The fulfillment of this promise will occur, says Peter, in all of those—all of those children of the hearers, and all of those who are far off whom God will call to himself. In other words, God will not fail to give this promised Holy Spirit to all of those whom he has elected and so will call efficaciously to himself. Hence, while the offer of this promise can rightly go to all people, including all children of believers, the fulfillment of the promise will be in the lives only of those whom God calls to himself. Not all of the children, necessarily, nor all of those who are far off, necessarily, will actually receive what is offered them in the promise. But be assured: all of those children, and all of those far off, whom God calls—all of them will receive this promised gift.

The precise relationship between “water baptism” and the “baptism in/with the Holy Spirit” is a difficult theological issue and cannot be discussed here. Whether the two are closely associated or not, one’s understanding of this issue is not directly relevant to the baptism debate. For two different perspectives on this question among those who believe that only believers should be baptized, see John Piper, “You Will Be Baptized with the Holy Spirit” (an online sermon available at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.com) website), and Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 766-773.

In presenting the teaching of the book of Acts on baptism, don’t forget to mention basic points such as the fact that baptism was to be done in the name of Jesus and that it was not “self-performed.” Compare Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009), 184-185:

The accounts of conversion in Acts ordinarily include mention of baptism. The practice of Christian baptism involved the use of water as distinct from the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and where any details are given an immersion is either implied or is consistent with what is said. The baptism was an administered act and not self-performed. It was done in the name of Jesus Christ, a characteristic that may include a confession of faith in him. The baptism was always preceded by a preaching of the gospel. That message called for faith in Jesus and repentance of sins. All the accounts of conversion involve persons of a responsible age, with no certain indication of infants or children being included.

Finally, this curriculum leaves it to the discretion of the instructor whether to discuss historical and theological problems associated with infant baptism. Schreiner and Wright, “Introduction” in *Believer’s Baptism*, 5-6, mention one such theological problem:

Moreover, paedobaptists face a problem with the Lord’s Supper that Baptists do not encounter. The Lord’s Supper is reserved for believers who have been baptized, but many Paedobaptists do not allow children to partake of the Lord’s table until the children have expressed personal faith. But such a divide between baptism and the Lord’s Supper cannot be sustained from the NT, for it is clear that those baptized participated in communion. . . . Some paedobaptists have recently responded to this inconsistently and claimed that infants and young children who are baptized may eat and drink at the Lord’s table. Such consistency is to be saluted, but an even greater problem exists on this scheme. For now unbelievers are taking of the Lord’s Supper, and clearly they are not discerning the body, and hence are eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

THE BAPTISM OF JOHN

In order to understand Christian baptism, we must first understand the baptism of John. John prepared the Jewish people for their Messiah by proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It is critical to remember that this baptism was proclaimed to those who already had the sign of the old covenant: circumcision.

As you read the following accounts of John's baptism, especially notice those words and phrases that are underlined below.

Matthew 3:1-12

¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" ⁴ Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹ I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Mark 1:4-5

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Luke 3:3, 7-18

³ And [John] went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. . . .⁷ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?”¹¹ And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.”¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?”¹³ And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.”¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ,¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”¹⁸ So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

What then is the meaning of John’s baptism and how did it relate to the old covenant sign of circumcision? Carefully read the following comments offered by John Piper:

When a Jewish person received John’s baptism, it was a radical act of individual commitment to belong to the true people of God, based on personal confession and repentance, NOT on corporate identity with Israel through birth. . . .

Jews were already God’s chosen people in an outward, ethnic sense. So this means that John’s radical call to repentance was being given to Jews who were already part of the historic people of God. These are the people John was telling to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. These were people who were part of God’s covenant and they had the sign of the covenant—at least the men did—namely, circumcision.

To these people, who were ethnic Jews, part of God's covenant people, having the sign of the covenant, circumcision, John said, in effect, "Confess your sins, repent, and signal this with baptism, because God's wrath is hanging over you like an axe over the root of a tree." . . . He called for the Jews to admit that they were sinners and needed to get right with God, and to admit that being Jews was no guarantee of being saved. In other words baptism was a sign that they were renouncing their old dependency on ethnic Jewishness and were relying wholly on the mercy of God to forgive those who confess their sins and repent.

Being born into a covenant family was no guarantee of being a child of God. Baptism is John's new sign of belonging to the true people of God, not based on Jewishness or being born into a covenant family, but based on radically personal, individual repentance and faith. Jews got baptized one by one to show that they were repenting as individuals, and joining the true people of God, the true Israel—not simply the old ethnic Israel, but the true remnant of those who personally repent and believe. Merely traditional Jews were to become true spiritual Jews through repentance—at least that was John's aim. . . .

Therefore, John's baptism is not simple continuation of circumcision. This is important because those who defend infant baptism often appeal to circumcision as the old sign of the covenant and say that baptism is the new sign. The one was given to infants and so should the other be. . . . But John infuriated the Pharisees by calling the people to renounce reliance on the sign of the covenant that they got when they were infants, and to receive another sign to show that they were not relying on Jewish birth, but on the mercy of God received by repentance and faith. A new people within Israel was being formed, and a new sign of a new covenant was being instituted. It was not a simple continuation of circumcision. It was an indictment of a misuse of circumcision as a guarantee of salvation. Circumcision was a sign of ethnic continuity; baptism was a sign of spiritual reality.

John's baptism was a sign of personal, individual repentance, not a sign of birth into a covenant family. It is hard to overstate how radical this was in John's day. The Jews already had a sign of the covenant: circumcision. John came calling for repentance and offering a new sign: baptism.¹⁰

¹⁰ John Piper, "I Baptize You with Water," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website. Modified slightly.

The Gospel accounts of the baptism of John are the first of many biblical passages which teach the “newness” of the new covenant and the new covenant people of God. Read the following passage in the Gospel of John, thinking about how it might relate to the baptism of John.

John 1:11-13

¹¹ [Jesus, the true light] came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

1. Does John 1:11-13 express the significance of Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:4-5; and Luke 3:3, 7-18? If so, how? If not, why not?

· **ANSWER.** *John 1:11-13 testifies to the same reality that John the Baptizer is proclaiming—that God is forming a new family, based not on ethnicity but on repentance, the forgiveness of sins, and belief in Jesus. The old covenant people of Israel were, in one sense, already the “children of God” because they were the physical descendants of Abraham. But with the coming of God’s kingdom and the restoration promised in the book of Isaiah, the sign of circumcision is being superseded by baptism, because the old covenant of the flesh is being superseded by a new covenant of faith and repentance.*

BAPTISM IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Following Jesus’ own baptism, Jesus’ disciples begin to baptize also (John 4:2). After Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, his disciples continue to call for a baptism of repentance, only now they urge people to be baptized in the name of Jesus. The book of Acts is filled with accounts of baptism, which we will now study.

Acts 2:37-41

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”³⁸ And Peter said to them, “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.

³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off,

everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 8:5-6, 12, 14-16

⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. . . .¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. . .

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John,¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 8:35-38

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”³⁷ ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Acts 9:17-20

¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

Acts 10:44-48

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared,⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold water for

baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Acts 19:1-6

¹ And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. ² And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism."⁴ And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

2. In the passages above, underline all of those things that are described in conjunction with baptism. In other words, underline the things associated with baptism in the book of Acts. What does your underlining suggest to you about baptism in the early Christian church?

- **ANSWER.** *These six passages (as well as the "household baptism" passages we will look at in the next lesson) establish a clear connection in the book of Acts between hearing the gospel preached, repentance, faith, confession, receiving the Holy Spirit, and baptism. In other words, baptism is always linked in Acts with conversion (or the call of God or spiritual sight). Although some of those who heard the word would undoubtedly have had infant children, infant baptism is never mentioned, and there are no instructions given by the apostles for the baptism of infants, even while speaking to the Gentiles. All of this suggests that the new covenant sign of baptism is different from the old covenant sign of circumcision. While circumcision marked out a special, ethnic people, baptism marks out believers from all peoples who have repented and believed in Jesus.*

Robert Stein reflects on this pattern we have observed in Acts:

From what we have seen in Acts with respect to becoming a Christian, we can come to the following conclusion:

In the experience of becoming a Christian, five integrally related components took place at the same time, usually on the same day: repentance, faith, confession, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and baptism.

The interrelatedness of these five components is shown by their appearance together in various accounts in Acts.¹¹

According to Acts, baptism is a component in a person's conversion experience, and this would therefore imply that baptizing infants would be inappropriate because they are incapable of the repentance, faith, and confession that are necessary to conversion.

Another argument from the book of Acts against the view that baptism simply replaces circumcision is that it was never presented in this way by the apostles. Notice, however, an argument made by Richard L. Pratt Jr.:

As Gentiles began to fill the early church, the perpetuation of circumcision among Christians came into question. Jesus apparently never taught on this question, leaving it to his apostles to determine the course of the church. At the council at Jerusalem (Acts 15), the Christian apostles determined that circumcision would no longer be required of NT believers, and that baptism alone would suffice as the initiatory rite for the Christian church.¹²

In writing that the council of Jerusalem determined that "baptism alone would suffice as the initiatory rite for the Christian church," Pratt makes a telling mistake. In fact, Acts 15 never mentions baptism at all, although we would expect baptism to be mentioned at the Jerusalem council if baptism indeed simply replaced circumcision.

Notice Schreiner's discussion of this point in relation to the book of Galatians:

If Paul adopted the view customary in paedobaptist circles, we would expect him to say that circumcision is no longer required because baptism has replaced circumcision as the covenantal sign. Paul does not prosecute such an argument

¹¹ Robert H. Stein, "Baptism in Luke-Acts" in *Believer's Baptism*, 52.

¹² Richard L. Pratt Jr., "Reformed View: Baptism as a Sacrament of the Covenant" in *Understanding Four Views on Baptism* (ed. John H. Armstrong; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), 66-67.

in Galatians or anywhere else in his letters, nor, incidentally, did the early church advance such an argument during the apostolic council of Acts 15. It would seem that the simplest argument Paul could make in Galatians would be as follows: “Of course, circumcision is not required, dear Galatians, because you all know that baptism has replaced circumcision as the initiation rite for the people of God.”¹³

So it appears that there is no evidence of a single infant being baptized in the New Testament—not in the ministry of John as recorded in the Gospels, nor in the ministry of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts. Infant baptism is never mentioned or implied by the Apostle Paul or any other writer of the New Testament.

The complete absence of infant baptism continues also into the early history of the Christian church. Though historical arguments are not foundational to the position this curriculum is putting forward, they certainly must be considered. Everett Ferguson’s massive treatment of the historical evidence arrives at the following conclusion:

There is general agreement that there is no firm evidence for infant baptism before the latter part of the second century. This fact does not mean that it did not occur, but it does mean that supporters of the practice have a considerable chronological gap to account for. Many replace the historical silence by appeal to theological or sociological considerations. . . .

The most plausible explanation for the origin of infant baptism is found in the emergency baptism of sick children expected to die soon so that they would be assured of entrance into the kingdom of heaven. There was a slow extension of baptizing babies as a precautionary measure. It was generally accepted, but questions continued to be raised about its propriety into the fifth century. It became the usual practice in the fifth and sixth centuries.¹⁴

13 Thomas R. Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers” in *Believer’s Baptism*, 90.

14 Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009), 856, 857.

BURIED AND RAISED IN BAPTISM THROUGH FAITH

Though as Baptists we consider the biblical silence concerning infant baptism to be a substantial problem for those who advocate for infant baptism, our position does not finally rest on what is omitted by Scripture, no matter how significant that might be. Believer's baptism is rather grounded by what we consider to be a proper understanding of the relationship between baptism and circumcision.

In addition to the passages describing the baptism of John (reproduced above), the clearest biblical passage that relates to circumcision and baptism is probably Colossians 2:8-15. We will examine this passage now, and the sermon that is assigned as part of this lesson will also expound upon this text.

Colossians 2:8-15

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Commenting on Colossians 2:11-12, Bryan Chapell writes,

These words remind us that salvation comes through faith, and also that the rite of circumcision that once signified the benefits of Abraham's covenant has been replaced by baptism.

Since the covenant [of faith] remains but the sign changes, New Testament believers would naturally expect to apply the new sign of the covenant to themselves and their children as the old sign was applied. Since the old sign was applied to children prior to their ability to express personal faith, there would be no barrier to applying

*the new sign prior to a child's personal profession of faith in Christ.*¹⁵

3. How would you respond to Chapell's reading of Colossians 2:11-12? Does baptism replace circumcision so that both signs might be legitimately applied to infants?

· **ANSWER.** *We would argue that Chapell has drawn a false equation between circumcision and baptism. The circumcision described in Col 2:11 is not the physical circumcision that was applied to males under the old covenant. It is rather a circumcision "made without hands," that is, a spiritual circumcision or circumcision of the heart. Christian baptism is associated with this inward circumcision. The circumcision made without hands, like the realities to which baptism points, is a reality experienced through faith. Therefore, far from highlighting the continuity between circumcision and baptism as covenant signs, Col 2:8-15 testifies to the new covenant realities signified in baptism which are only made possible by the work of Jesus in the life of the believer.*

Those who defend infant baptism will often argue that physical circumcision in the Old Testament, when applied to infants, pointed forward to their need for spiritual circumcision. Here is one recent expression of that view:

*In the OT, physical circumcision pointed to the need for inward spiritual circumcision; in the NT, physical washing in baptism points to the need for inward spiritual washing. The parallels are between two outward acts and the inward realities they represent.*¹⁶

In response to this, a Baptist will contend that the Paedobaptist has over-spiritualized the significance of circumcision in the Old Testament. Circumcision was for Israel a sign of their ethnic identity as descendants of Abraham. It first and foremost signified membership in God's chosen ethnic people.

¹⁵ Bryan Chapell, *Why Do We Baptize Infants?* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2006), 14.

¹⁶ Richard L. Pratt Jr., "A Reformed Response" in *Understanding Four Views on Baptism*, 45-46.

Even if circumcision, however, did function as a *prospective sign*, pointing *forward* to the need for a circumcision of the heart, all of the New Testament evidence conceives of baptism as a *retrospective sign*, pointing *backward* to the reality in the heart of the believer that has already happened. It is simply not true that the New Testament ever indicates that baptism should point forward to the (future) need of spiritual washing.

This is especially clear in Colossians 2:8-15 in which baptism functions as a sign of being buried and raised with Christ—and that *through faith*. Although baptism does point to the “objective” dimension of Christ’s work, it also points to a “subjective” reality.

Baptism, however, is not only an event in which the objective nature of Christ’s saving work is applied to his people. It is also conjoined with the subjective appropriation of such salvation. Paul adds in v. 12 that the effectiveness of Christ’s work is accessed through faith. It is difficult to see, then, how infants can fit with what Paul says since they cannot exercise faith.¹⁷

It can be seen, then, that Colossians 2:11-12 does not link physical circumcision to baptism, but the circumcision made without hands to baptism, as Schreiner explains:

Paul does not establish a connection between physical circumcision and baptism, but spiritual circumcision and baptism. Indeed, he disavows emphatically any salvific efficacy in physical circumcision. A common problem in Israel is that people were physically circumcised but uncircumcised in heart. What is necessary to belong to the redeemed people of God is a spiritual circumcision of the heart, which is promised in the new covenant work of God. Physical circumcision made one a member of Israel as God’s theocratic people, but it did not ensure that one was regenerate. Hence, the need for the spiritual circumcision of the heart. The sign of the new covenant—baptism—is remarkably different, for those who are baptized have already undergone a spiritual change when they were buried and raised with Christ. . . . The typological antecedent to baptism, then, is not physical circumcision but spiritual circumcision.¹⁸

This idea will be developed further in the sermon assigned below.

¹⁷ Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles,” 77.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. Is the New Testament's total silence on infant baptism strong evidence for either position in the baptism debate? Explain.

2. Are Peter's words in Acts 2:39 ("For the promise is for you and for your children . . .") a compelling argument for infant baptism? Defend your answer.



A SERMON ABOUT BAPTISM

Listen to the sermon "**Buried and Raised in Baptism Through Faith**" by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the *desiringGod* website (www.desiringgod.org).



YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▷ John Piper, “I Baptize You with Water,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website.
- ▷ Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Baptism in the Gospels” in *Believer’s Baptism*.
- ▷ Robert H. Stein, “Baptism in Luke-Acts” in *Believer’s Baptism*.
- ▷ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers” in *Believer’s Baptism*.
- ▷ Bruce A. Ware, “Believers’ Baptism View” in *Baptism: Three Views* (ed. David F. Wright; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2009).
- ▷ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009), chapters 4-8, 10, and 55.

Buried and Raised in Baptism Through Faith

JOHN PIPER, 1997

How Piper chose baptism texts for his sermon series

“We have to tackle the issue at the level of theological reflection on that kind of _____ between circumcision and baptism.”

Colossians 2:8-15

Heidelberg Catechism, Question 74

Gospel timbers: what God has done for us

1.

2.

Gospel timbers: what God has done in us

1.

2.

A key question: “What sort of _____ is being spoken about in verse 11?”

“Without hands”: a spiritual circumcision

“Verse 12 draws a parallel between that spiritual circumcision made without hands and _____.”

Discontinuity between circumcision and baptism

A key phrase: “through faith”

“Baptism is a dying and rising with Christ through _____.”

Baptism and the New Covenant People

3

§ INTRODUCTION

At the core of the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism is a particular understanding of the covenant(s). This covenantal understanding is so strong for many advocates of infant baptism that they read the New Testament's total silence on infant baptism to be actually an argument for (and not against) their position. Here is another statement from Bryan Chapell:

Just as advocates of infant baptism must deal with the absence of an identified infant's being baptized in the New Testament, so also must opponents of infant baptism face the absence of a specific command to deny children the covenant sign and seal. . . . The apostles took great care to emphasize the continuation of the Abrahamic covenant for New Testament believers. Throughout the two-thousand-year history of this covenant before the apostolic church began, the people of God had administered the covenant sign to their children. It seems highly probable that if the apostles had changed that practice, the change would have been recorded in the New Testament, either by example or precept.¹⁹

This kind of reasoning leads Stephen Wellum to assert that Baptists must respond to Reformed covenant theology in order to argue their case effectively:

At the heart of the advocacy and defense of the evangelical Reformed doctrine of infant baptism is the argument that it is an implication drawn from the comprehensive theological category of the "covenant of grace," a category which, it is claimed, unites the Scriptures and without which the Bible cannot be understood correctly. In many ways, all other arguments for infant baptism are secondary to this overall line of reasoning. If one can establish the basic continuity of the "covenant of grace" across the canon, then it is the belief of most paedobaptists that their doctrine is biblically and theologically demonstrated. It does not seem to bother them that in the NT there is no express command to baptize infants and no record of any clear case of infant

19 Bryan Chapell, *Why Do We Baptize Infants?* 15-16.

*baptism. Rather, as John Murray admits, “the evidence for infant baptism falls into the category of good and necessary inference” and ultimately this inference is rooted and grounded in a specific covenantal argument. . . . Ultimately, if Baptists want to argue cogently against the paedobaptist viewpoint and for a believer’s baptism, we must, in the end, respond to this covenantal argument.*²⁰

Though this course is only an introduction to the baptism debate and offers only a basic defense for believer’s baptism, we will attempt to respond to Reformed covenant theology in this lesson as it pertains to a doctrine of baptism.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ explain how the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 is relevant to this debate.
- ▷ respond to a common Reformed interpretation of Romans 4:11 while grasping the broader continuity and discontinuity between the old and new covenant communities.
- ▷ demonstrate how the household baptisms in the book of Acts confirm the pattern of conversion and baptism that was seen in the previous lesson.

²⁰ Stephen J. Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants” in *Believer’s Baptism*, 97, 98.



As stated in the introduction, this course cannot provide a full and thorough response to infant baptism or the concept of the covenant of grace. See the Additional Resources list for more detailed responses. We do agree with Stephen Wellum, though, that the phrase “covenant of grace” often assumes a particular understanding of redemptive history and therefore the theology the term represents should not be assumed in the conversation. It might be helpful, even, to stop using the term altogether. Stephen J. Wellum, in “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants” in *Believer’s Baptism*, 125, says:

In order to make headway in the baptismal divide and think biblically regarding the relationships between the covenants, we should place a moratorium on “covenant of grace” as a category when speaking of the biblical covenants and the relationships between them. In its place, let us speak of the one plan of God or the eternal purposes of God centered in Jesus Christ, for that is what the language of the “covenant of grace” is seeking to underscore. But when it comes to thinking of the “covenant,” let us speak in the plural and then unpack the relationships between the biblical covenants vis-à-vis the overall eternal plan of God centered in Jesus Christ. We may then think more accurately about how the one plan of God, tied to the promises of God first given in Gen 3:15, is progressively revealed in history through the biblical covenants. To continue to speak of one “covenant of grace” too often leads to a flattening of Scripture; indeed, it results in a reductionism which has the tendency of fitting Scripture into our theological system rather than the other way around.

In our judgment, the most productive use of class time may be focusing on Jeremiah 31 and the visual representations of the Paedobaptist and Baptist View, since this difference seems to lie at the heart of the debate. You might decide, however, that the lesson material and sermon cover this topic adequately. You could then use the class time to address other concerns or issues.

Another common paedobaptist text not addressed specifically in this lesson is 1 Cor 7:14 which reads as follows (in context):

1 Corinthians 7:10-17

¹⁰ *To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does, she should remain unmarried*

or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.¹² To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.¹⁶ For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?¹⁷ Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

In our view, paedobaptist arguments based on 1 Cor 7:14 are entirely dependent on other texts and concepts. Therefore, in addressing paedobaptist covenantal theology and household baptism texts, we feel as if we have adequately removed the necessary assumptions that a paedobaptist reading of 1 Cor 7:14 requires. If your students are still troubled by this text, however, you might want to introduce the following baptist rejoinders to the paedobaptist reading of this verse.

Thomas R. Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers” in *Believer’s Baptism*, 95, 96:

First Corinthians 7:14 cannot be rightly interpreted as a defense of infant baptism. When Paul says that the children are “holy” through a believing parent, he does not mean that they are believers or part of the covenant. In the same verse he says that the unbelieving husband or wife “is sanctified” through the believing spouse. But no one would argue that, therefore, the unbelieving spouse should be baptized or included in the covenant people even though they are “sanctified.” . . . So too, infants of believers are not “saved,” but they are “holy.” I would suggest that this means that the possibility of their salvation is enhanced simply because they have believing parents.

Bruce A. Ware, “Believers’ Baptism View” in *Baptism: Three Views* (ed. David F. Wright; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2009), 38-39:

In responding to the use of this text in support of infant baptism, it should be observed first that the text says nothing about baptism, infant or otherwise. A huge

theological leap is being made here from the stated “holiness” of these children to implying their place in the new covenant and then further implying the legitimacy of their infant baptism. So much is assumed in this argument that can be challenged. As the text stands, there simply is no direct statement about baptism.

Bruce A. Ware, “Believers’ Baptism View” in *Baptism: Three Views* (ed. David F. Wright; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2009), 39:

Paul is admonishing the believing spouse in a marriage not to leave or divorce when his or her spouse is an unbeliever (1 Cor 7:12-13). To support this admonition, he then states in 1 Corinthians 7:14 that the unbelieving spouse is “made holy” by the ongoing presence in the home of the believer.

Clearly, Paul is not saying that this unbelieving spouse is saved because he or she is married to a believer. Nor is he saying that the unbelieving spouse is part of the new covenant. Rather he is simply saying that the presence of the believer in the home causes any unbeliever in the home, whether a spouse or children, to be “set apart” to gospel witness and to the possibility of salvation due to that witness, which would come to an end if the believing spouse were to leave.

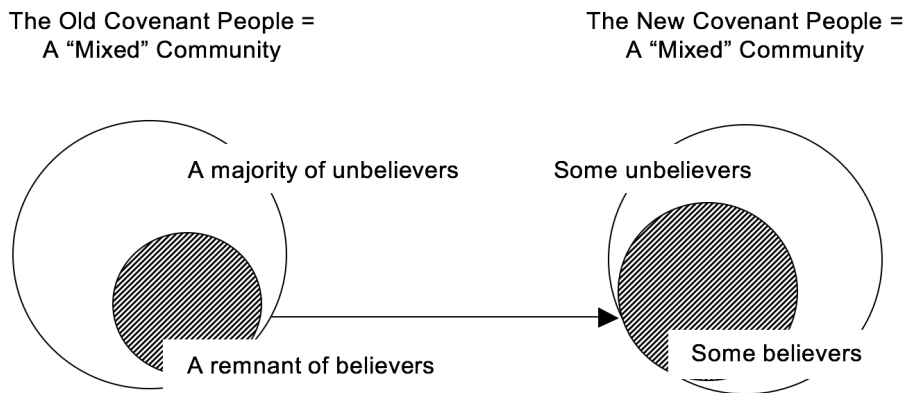
Though this lesson is the last focused examination of the relationship between the old and new covenants, remember to reinforce the arguments presented in this lesson when you discuss the biblical texts presented in subsequent lessons.



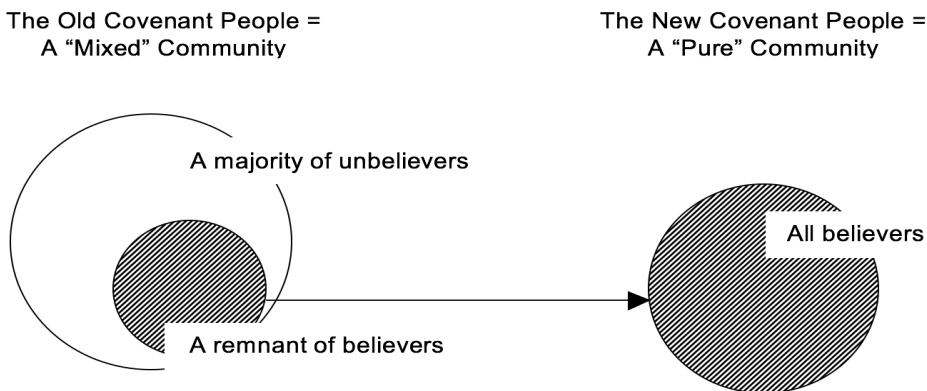
NOT LIKE THE COVENANT I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS

One of the central differences between Baptists and Paedobaptists is in how they view the relationship between Israel and the church—that is, between the old covenant people and the new covenant people. Are both the old and new covenant people “mixed” communities, composed of both believers and unbelievers (the infant baptism view)? Or is the new covenant people a “pure” community composed only of those who believe (the believer’s baptism view)? These two different options for relating the old covenant people and the new covenant people are represented visually below:

The Paedobaptist View



The Baptist View



There is only one passage in the entire Old Testament in which the “new” covenant is explicitly promised. This passage is therefore of vital interest to the baptism debate. Read it carefully.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

1. How is the new covenant different from the old covenant? Be specific and support your answer with verse references. Also, how is the new covenant community different from the old covenant community? What does this important passage contribute to an understanding of baptism?

• **ANSWER.** *According to Jeremiah, the new covenant will be different from the old covenant in that the old covenant people broke the old covenant (v. 32), but God will forgive the new covenant people (v. 34) and write the law on their heart (v. 33) so that they will not break the new covenant. Consequently, though there was need among the old covenant people for evangelism (because not everyone knew the Lord; v. 34), there will be no need for evangelism within the new covenant community because everyone will know the Lord (v. 34). The contrasts between the old and new covenants made in this passage indicate that infants of Christian parents are not part of the new covenant community until they might personally believe, and so it is not appropriate to baptize them as a sign of their inclusion in the new covenant community as paedobaptists suggest. Jer 31:31-34 clearly supports the visual representation of the Baptist view, above.*

Another way to perceive the crucial difference in how some Baptists and some Paedobaptists understand the relationship between the covenants is to ask the

question, “Is the Christian church the continuation of Israel as a whole or is it the continuation only of the faithful remnant within Israel?” A Paedobaptist would assert the former while a Baptist would assert the latter.

Stephen Wellum, whom we quoted in this lesson’s introduction, has some further reflections on the fundamental theological differences between Paedobaptists and Baptists. You might want to refer to the two visual representations presented above as you read this excerpt:

How one understands the nature and structure of the new covenant vis-à-vis the previous biblical covenants takes us to the heart of the baptismal divide. In arguing for the continuity of the covenant community across the ages, paedobaptists argue that the new covenant community (church) is essentially the same as the old (Israel) in that both communities are “mixed” entities. As in Israel, so in the church, there is a distinction between the locus of the covenant community and the elect (remnant), with circumcision, and now baptism, being the sign of entrance into the former. That is why the covenantal signs may be applied in exactly the same way, even to those who have not yet exercised saving faith.

Baptists, on the other hand, disagree with this understanding of the nature of the new covenant community. Credobaptist theology, at least the view I will defend, argues for more redemptive-historical discontinuity between Israel and the church, especially in regard to the nature of the church. No doubt there is only one people of God throughout the ages; that is not in dispute. However, in the OT promise of the new covenant (Jer 31:29-34) and its fulfillment in Christ (see Luke 22:20; Heb 8-10), the nature of the covenant communities are not the same, which entails a difference in the meaning and application of the covenant sign. Specifically, the change is found in the shift from a mixed community to that of a regenerate community with the crucial implication that under the new covenant, the covenant sign must only be applied to those who are in that covenant, namely, believers.²¹

Earlier in his essay, Wellum stated his central critique of the covenantal argument for infant baptism. His critique of infant baptism is a critique that this curriculum shares:

Central to my critique of the covenantal argument for infant baptism is that it fails to understand correctly the proper relationships between the biblical covenants and the degree of continuity and discontinuity between them. Paedobaptists rightly

21 Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” 137-138.

emphasize the unity and continuity of God's salvific plan across the ages. They fail to do justice, however, to the progressive nature of God's revelation, especially in regard to the biblical covenants, the covenant community, and the covenant signs. In the end, this leads them to misunderstand the proper degree of discontinuity inaugurated by Christ's coming and to which the OT points, namely, the arrival of the promised new covenant age.²²

INFANT BAPTISM IN ROMANS 4:11?

Although this curriculum will not be able to address every paedobaptist argument or interpretation, the common paedobaptist reading of Romans 4:11 is especially important because of its relation to the covenantal argument discussed above.

Here is Romans 4:11 in its immediate context:

Romans 4:9-12

⁹ Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, ¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

2. If you are unfamiliar with how Paedobaptists sometimes argue for infant baptism based on Romans 4:11, attempt to anticipate how they might argue and record your thoughts below. If you are familiar with the paedobaptist argument from Romans 4:11, state it as clearly as you can in the space below. (Hint: If you need help, read the quotation from Schreiner below refuting the paedobaptist argument and reconstruct the paedobaptist argument from that.)

· **ANSWER.** *To provide this answer we will quote from Cornelis P. Venema,*

²² Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," 125.

“Covenant Theology and Baptism” in The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism (ed. Gregg Strawbridge; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2003), 221, 222, 224: “The apostle Paul teaches in Romans that circumcision was for Abraham a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith. . . . The spiritual blessings represented by circumcision in the old covenant are now represented by baptism in the new covenant. . . . Formerly, believers and their children were circumcised.” The unexpressed conclusion is that if circumcision was the sign and seal of the righteousness of faith in the Old Testament and was applied to infants, then baptism should likewise be applied to children of believing parents today.

The fundamental flaw in this argument is that Paul does not speak of circumcision in general as a seal here. Rather, he argues that circumcision is the seal of Abraham’s righteousness by faith. The text does not teach that circumcision in general is a seal, so that it functions as a defense of applying baptism before faith. What Paul emphasizes in Rom 4:9-12 is that circumcision is not necessary for salvation since Abraham believed and was right with God before he was circumcised. Circumcision in Romans 4 is a seal, ratification, or authentication of a faith and righteousness Abraham already had. How such an argument supports infant baptism is mystifying since faith precedes circumcision; it does not follow it. Circumcision functions as a seal because it documents and ratifies a faith and therefore a right-standing with God that already exists. If this verse is introduced into the debate on infant baptism, it clearly supports the Baptist view.”²³

Finally, a typical Paedobaptist response to Baptists is that the visible Christian church is undeniably a mixed community. Even in the New Testament there were some who were a part of the church and then later proved to be unbelievers.

While this is true, we would respond that the visible Christian church is not identical to the new covenant community, although it should be. When someone professes to be a Christian and later walks away from the faith, this does not prove that the new covenant community is mixed but that the apostate was never part of the new covenant community. A profound inconsistency that paedobaptists must acknowledge is positing that some within the new covenant community can be legitimate members of that community without enjoying its defining characteristics: forgiveness of sins and the law written on the heart.

²³ Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles,” 87.

Also notice comments by Schreiner and Wright:

The church of Jesus Christ is not a mixed community of believers and unbelievers. It consists of those who have confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Paedobaptists often say that Baptists do not escape from the charge of a mixed community since some of those who claim to be converted do not truly belong to the people of God. It is true, of course, that some of those who claim to believe are subsequently revealed to be inauthentic. Nevertheless, a profound difference still exists between Baptists and Paedobaptists, for Baptists do not allow anyone into the church without trying to discern whether the person is truly saved, whereas Paedobaptists knowingly include some who do not believe into the covenant community.²⁴

WHAT ABOUT HOUSEHOLD BAPTISMS?

In our survey of baptism texts in the book of Acts, we deliberately omitted those texts which mentioned the baptism of households. Sometimes paedobaptists cite these texts as evidence that infants entered the new covenant through the faith of their parents (and God's promise) just as they entered the old covenant by virtue of their parents.

In the passages below we have underlined those references to households and families. We have double-underlined references to baptism.

Acts 11:13-18

¹³ "And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' ¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" ¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Acts 16:13-15

¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women

²⁴ Schreiner and Wright, "Introduction," 3.

who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

Acts 16:29-34

²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Acts 18:7-8

⁷ And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

Here is the kind of argument that paedobaptists typically make from these passages:

*Some assume that entire households were baptized in the New Testament because everyone in them believed the gospel. While this is not impossible, it is unlikely that all those households consisted only of those who were old enough to make an intelligent faith commitment.*²⁵

3. How would you respond to this argument? Do the household baptisms described in Acts provide a precedent for infant baptism today? Again, cite specific verses in your answer. It might also help to look at your

²⁵ Bryan Chapell, *Why Do We Baptize Infants?* 14. For a thorough response to Chapell’s interpretation of Acts 16, see Bruce A. Ware, “Believers’ Baptism View” in *Baptism: Three Views* (ed. David F. Wright; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2009), 30-33.

answer to Question 2 in the previous lesson to put these instances of baptism into their broader context in the book of Acts.

- **ANSWER.** *As in the passages from Acts presented in the previous lesson, these passages consistently associated baptism with the hearing of the preached word, the opening of the heart, belief in Jesus, and salvation. Specifically, Cornelius' household, relatives, and friends (see Acts 10:24) who heard the word (Acts 10:44) received the Holy Spirit and were baptized. When the Jews in Judea heard Peter's report they interpret what happened as the Lord granting repentance that leads to life (Acts 11:18). Infants would not be capable of hearing the word (with understanding) or exhibiting repentance, and therefore the text presents no support for infant baptism and indeed stands against it. Likewise, Paul and Silas preach the word to the Philippian jailer's household (16:32) and they rejoice in his salvation (16:34)—activities in which infants could not participate. Acts 18:8 explicitly mentions the belief of Crispus' household. Only Acts 16:15 is silent about whether Lydia's house believed or not. Therefore, far from suggesting that infants were baptized, these household baptism texts in Acts consistently suggest that those who were baptized were baptized because they heard the preached word also and believed. Furthermore, according to paedobaptist reasoning, Acts 16:31 would prove too much: not only would the jailer's faith as the representative of the household necessitate the baptism of the entire household, but his individual belief would also guarantee the salvation of the entire household!*

Frequently paedobaptists make no distinction between the terms "children" and "infants/babies." To have children in one's family, however, does not mean that one has infants! Thus the argument that the households of Lydia and Crispus must have included children and that their baptism is an example of "infant" baptism is a non sequitur [that is, it does not follow].²⁶

26 Stein, "Baptism in Luke-Acts," 62.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. What practical differences might arise in a local church from viewing the new covenant community as either a “mixed” community or a “pure” community? In other words, how would the differences in understanding between the visual representations of the Paedobaptist view and Baptist view affect theology or practice within the church?

2. In your mind, what is the strongest paedobaptist argument that you have encountered (either through this course or elsewhere)?

A SERMON ABOUT BAPTISM

Listen to the sermon “**How Do Circumcision and Baptism Correspond?**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringgod.org) website (www.desiringgod.org).

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1978).
- ▷ Stephen J. Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants” in *Believer’s Baptism*.
- ▷ Bruce A. Ware, “Believers’ Baptism View” in *Baptism: Three Views*.
- ▷ John Piper, “Infant Baptism and the New Covenant Community,” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website.
- ▷ John Piper, “Brothers, Magnify the Meaning of Baptism,” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website.
- ▷ John Piper, “How Old Is Infant Baptism,” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website.

How Do Circumcision and Baptism Correspond?

JOHN PIPER, 1999

Romans 4:9-12

Why don't Baptists baptize the infant children of believers?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Why does the Reformed tradition endorse infant baptism?

Verse 11: A linchpin for infant baptism?

Piper's answer:

“The main problem with this argument is a wrong assumption about the _____ between the people of God in the Old Testament and the people of God today.”

Romans 9:6-8

“Is the church today a continuation of the larger, mixed group of ethnic, religious, national Israel, or is the church the continuation of the _____, and the true Israel?”

Galatians 4:22-23, 28

“The church is not a _____ of Israel; it is an _____ on Israel.”

An enticement:

The Waters of Judgement and the Ark of Christ

4

INTRODUCTION

In the previous two lessons, we have mounted a case for believer's baptism as opposed to infant baptism. We have presented arguments, counterarguments, historical evidence, theological paradigms, and biblical interpretations in defense of our position. In the debate, however, it is vital to remember that the doctrine of baptism is something to celebrate and not merely dispute. Baptism, in our view, should be an expression of discipleship and of worship. Therefore, it is fitting and important to heed the following extended quote from John Piper about controversy, especially as it pertains to the baptism debate:

Doctrinal controversy is essential and deadly. . . . Controversy is essential where precious truth is rejected or distorted. And controversy is deadly where disputation about truth dominates exultation in truth. . . .

So the preservation and transmission of precious truth from person to person and generation and generation may require controversy where truth is rejected or distorted. But controversy is also deadly because it feels threatening and so it tends to stir up defensiveness and anger. It's deadly also because it focuses on the reasons for truth rather than the reality behind truth, and so tends to replace exultation in the truth with disputation about the truth. This is deadly because thinking rightly about truth is not an end in itself; it's a means toward the goal of love and worship.

So controversy is essential in this fallen world, and controversy is deadly in a fallen world. We must do it and we must tremble to do it. A wise counselor for us in this is John Owen . . . He counsels us like this concerning doctrinal controversy:

"When the heart is cast indeed into the mould of the doctrine that the mind

embraceth—when the evidence and necessity of the truth abides in us—when not the sense of the words only is in our heads, but the sense of the thing abides in our hearts—when we have communion with God in the doctrine we contend for—then shall we be garrisoned by the grace of God against all the assaults of men.”

I think that was the key to Owen’s life and ministry: he didn’t just contend for doctrine; he loved and fellowshiped with the God behind the doctrine. The key phrase is this one: “When we have communion with God in the doctrine we contend for—then shall we be garrisoned by the grace of God against all the assaults of men.” In other words, we must not let disputation replace contemplation and exultation. . . .

The Bible itself is a great help in this because it teaches about baptism, for example, in contexts that are so rich with good news that it makes it relatively easy to exult as we deal with this practice of baptism. In fact, baptism itself is meant, like the Lord’s Supper, to point to realities that are so great and so wonderful that over all the controversy, we must hear the music of God’s glorious goodness and grace.²⁷

The central passage this lesson will examine is 1 Peter 3:17–4:2, and it is a gospel gem. We will concentrate mostly on those verses that directly pertain to baptism (3:20–21), but we must remember that the passage speaks of the one who died for sins “that he might bring us to God” (3:18), and we must have sweet communion with him.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ explain how baptism leads to unity and the implications of this for the baptism debate.
- ▷ describe the meaning of baptism from 1 Peter 3:21.
- ▷ answer paedobaptist responses to the biblical argumentation presented in this lesson.

²⁷ John Piper, “What Is Baptism and Does It Save?” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website. The citation of Owen comes from Owen’s preface to *The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated* (1655).



The extended quotation in the introduction could serve as a prompt for you, as the instructor, to exhort your students to assume the posture of a worshipper as they study this contended doctrine of baptism. Since this course aims to promote not only an understanding of baptism but also a celebration of it, the exhortation in the introduction is a necessary part of the course. You may choose to discuss with your students the possible dangers in strongly arguing for a position in the baptism debate.

You will notice that the sermon assigned for this lesson addresses the broader context of 1 Peter 3:20-21 and only concentrates on the issue of baptism for a short time. We judged this to be beneficial to the students because it may suggest practical applications of baptism and may alert the students to the consequences of being baptized in many parts of the world. Hopefully the sermon, combined with the focused study of 1 Peter 3:20-21 in the lesson and the accompanying quotations of secondary literature, will be adequate for presenting the meaning of the passage.

The third lesson question and first discussion question are especially important if your class has some more familiarity with the baptism debate and may be struggling with the persuasiveness of the infant baptism view. You might invest part of the class discussion in addressing other paedobaptist arguments not covered by this lesson. Be aware, however, that the next lesson will concentrate primarily on the mode of baptism and the important text of Romans 6:1-7.



UNITY THROUGH BAPTISM

In this lesson and the next we will further explore the meaning and “mode” of baptism. By speaking of the “mode” of baptism, theologians are referring to the manner in which baptism is performed—usually sprinkling, pouring (sometimes called “affusion”), or immersion. As a symbolic act, the meaning and mode of baptism are intimately connected.

Before we consider the central passage of this lesson, let’s first read three references to baptism in the Pauline Epistles in which Paul connects baptism to unity. These passages might offer indirect evidence as to the meaning and proper subjects of baptism. The first passage to read is 1 Corinthians 12:12-13:

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

What is noteworthy here is that baptism is again connected to conversion, which is the pattern we already observed in the book of Acts. Schreiner offers some comments on this passage:

Paul is almost certainly speaking of the time of conversion here, for Jesus immerses in the Spirit so that his people are incorporated in the body of Christ. The second half of v. 13 expresses the same reality. At conversion, believers drink of one Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is the mark of induction into the people of God, and hence Jesus’ work of baptizing with the Spirit occurs at the threshold of the Christian life.²⁸

If Paul connects baptism to conversion, incorporation into the body of Christ, and the “drinking” of the Spirit, then it would seem as if baptism should only be applied to those who give evidence of a genuine conversion. The same kind of logic is probably also present in Ephesians 4:4-6:

²⁸ Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles,” 72.

Ephesians 4:4-6

⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

The “one baptism” most likely refers to the internal reality of having been baptized into (identified with) the “one Lord” by means of the “one faith” mentioned in this verse. . . . There is unity in the one Lord in whom believers place their one faith expressed in one baptism signifying their identification in his death and resurrection.²⁹

Finally, perhaps the most striking passage that speaks of baptism and unity is Galatians 3:25-27:

Galatians 3:25-27

²⁵ *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

1. According to these three passages (above), what is associated with baptism? Do these verses present a challenge to the doctrine of infant baptism? If so, how? If not, why not?

· **ANSWER.** *The first two passages associate baptism with conversion, incorporation into the body of Christ, the “drinking” of the Spirit, and faith. This suggests that Christian unity in the church is built upon a common experience (and not just promise) of salvation. Gal 3:27 explicitly states that all who have been baptized have put on Christ. How could this be said of infants baptized within the Galatian church (or any church)? Baptism and the putting on of Christ is Paul’s support (notice the word “for” at the beginning of v. 27) for the idea that the Galatian Christians are all sons of God—and that through faith. In sum, unless one holds to baptismal regeneration, it would seem that none of these passages are consistent with infant baptism.*

Another passage that is similar to Galatians 3:25-27 is Romans 6:3-4. Paul writes

²⁹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 518.

to a church that he has never personally visited, but he can assume that all of those who have been baptized have been baptized into the death of Christ. Since there certainly would have been infants in a church as well-established as the Roman church was when Paul wrote to them, how would this passage apply to infants if they had been baptized?

Romans 6:3-4

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

We will look at Romans 6 in more detail in the next lesson.

HOW BAPTISM SAVES

1 Peter 3:20-21 are two very important verses in the baptism debate because they describe through analogy what baptism is and how baptism saves. We will study the broader context of these two verses in the passage below. The sermon assigned for this lesson will seek to provide a general orientation to this passage as well as address some of the difficult issues involved in interpreting this passage.

1 Peter 3:17-4:2

¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. ^{4:1} Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in

the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

2. According to Peter, how does baptism save a person?

· **ANSWER.** *Peter himself provides a qualification for his statement “baptism now saves you”—a statement which could be open to misunderstanding without his qualification. Peter writes that baptism does not save “as a removal of dirt from the body”—that is, it does not save as an external rite. Rather baptism saves insofar as it is a symbolically-portrayed appeal to God for a good conscience. The “appeal” for a good conscience could be understood as a plea for forgiveness and cleansing and grace. Read in this way, 1 Peter 3:21 does not contradict what Peter says earlier in the letter—that salvation is “by the power of God through faith” (1:5).*

Though this course is primarily directed toward answering an evangelical, Reformed paedobaptist position, we should note at this point that there is no biblical evidence for the view of “baptismal regeneration.” According to this view, a baptism performed within the church by an ordained official causes the one who is baptized to be born again; God’s regenerating grace is mediated through the baptism. Sometimes proponents of this view will cite Mark 16:16 in defense of their view: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” But this verse is poor evidence for baptismal regeneration on two counts: first, belief is clearly joined with baptism in the verse; second, the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament do not include Mark 16:9–20, and it is therefore likely a later addition to the Bible.

Here are some related comments Schreiner has made regarding 1 Peter 3:21:

[Baptism] does not save mechanically or externally as if there are magical properties in the water. Peter comments that the mere removal of dirt from the body does not bring salvation, demonstrating that the water itself does not save. Baptism is only saving if there is an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, baptism saves only because it is anchored to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.³⁰

John Piper offers some additional thoughts on what baptism is according to 1 Peter 3:21:

30 Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles,” 70.

What is baptism? Baptism is a symbolic expression of the heart's "appeal to God." Baptism is a calling on God. It is a way of saying to God with our whole body, "I trust you to take me into Christ like Noah was taken into the ark, and to make Jesus the substitute for my sins and to bring me through these waters of death and judgment into new and everlasting life through the resurrection of Jesus my Lord."

This is what God is calling you to do. You do not save yourself. God saves you through the work of Christ. But you receive that salvation through calling on the name of the Lord, by trusting him. And it is God's will all over the world and in every culture—no matter how simple or how sophisticated—that this appeal to God be expressed in baptism. "Lord, I am entering the ark of Christ! Save me as I pass through the waters of death!"³¹

Likewise, Schreiner and Wayne Grudem offer further insight into this passage. Read their ideas carefully as 1 Peter 3:20-21 is undoubtedly one of the most important New Testament texts for a doctrine of baptism.

The waters of the flood deluged the ancient world and were the agent of death. Similarly, baptism, which was by immersion during the time of the New Testament, occurs when one is plunged under the water. Anyone who is submerged under water dies. Submersion under the water represents death, as Paul suggested in Rom 6:3-5. Jesus described his upcoming death in terms of baptism, indicating that submersion under the water aptly portrays death. Just as the chaotic waters of the flood were the agent of destruction, so too the waters of baptism are waters of destruction. In New Testament theology, however, believers survive the death-dealing baptismal waters because they are baptized with Christ. They are rescued from death through his resurrection.³²

Baptism corresponds to escaping through water in that the water of baptism is in some ways a counterpart to the waters of the flood. For if, as is nearly certain, baptism when Peter wrote was by immersion (going completely under the water—note how incongruous the mention of "removal of dirt from the body" would be

31 John Piper, "What Is Baptism and Does It Save?" an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

32 Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (The New American Commentary 37; Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 193-194.

if Peter thought that only a few drops of water were sprinkled on the head), then going down into the waters of baptism was a vivid symbol of going down into the grave in death.

The water of baptism is like waters of judgment—similar to the waters of the flood, and showing clearly what we deserve for our sins. Coming up out of the waters of baptism corresponds to being kept safe through the waters of the flood, the waters of God’s judgment on sin, and emerging to live in “newness of life.” Baptism thus shows us clearly that in one sense we have “died” and “been raised” again, but in another sense we emerge from the waters knowing that we are still alive and have passed through the waters of God’s judgment unharmed. As Noah fled into the ark, so we flee to Christ, and in him we escape judgment.³³

POSSIBLE PAEDOBAPTIST RESPONSES

It is shocking, but nevertheless revealing, that in a recent 310-page defense of infant baptism, the edited volume *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, there is only one reference to 1 Peter 3:17–4:2 in the entire book. On page 124 it reads, “Peter joins baptism with the concept of cleansing in 1 Peter 3:21.”³⁴ That is the sum total of the book’s discussion of 1 Peter 3:17–4:2. Likewise, there are only three passing references to Galatians 3:27 in the book, and none of them address how this verse fits with infant baptism. In fact, one of the three references in the book to Galatians 3:27 says, “Paul again expresses the concept of union, this time using the covering of clothing to picture union. So to be baptized into Christ brings one into union with him.”³⁵

Reformed Paedobaptists, therefore, seem to base their position mostly on theological constructs involving their understanding of the covenant(s) rather than on particular New Testament texts.

What would Reformed Paedobaptists say in response to some of the interpretations of texts offered in this lesson? They would not say that a

33 Wayne A. Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter* (The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 17; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992), 162-163.

34 Joseph Pipa, “The Mode of Baptism” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (ed. Gregg Strawbridge; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2003), 124.

35 *Ibid*, 119.

straightforward reading of these passages demands a view of baptismal regeneration (a view which does at least maintain some measure of consistency). Rather, they would probably offer one of the following three responses:

1. The baptisms described in Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21, etc. convey the meaning of adult baptism but do not convey the meaning of infant baptism. These letters were written to first-generation Christians, so we should not be surprised that Paul and Peter assume that their audiences would be baptized as adults.
2. When infants are baptized, the symbolic rite expresses what God promises to do if that infant believes, and it does not express what has already happened in the life of that infant. In other words, when applied to infants, the sign of baptism functions prospectively.
3. There is a real sense in which a baptized infant is joined to Christ and incorporated into the new covenant community. An infant therefore enjoys the blessings of the new covenant and will continue to do so until they might choose to abandon the faith and thereby incur the covenantal curses that the New Testament warns about.

3. Choose one of these possible responses (listed above) and answer it as best as you can. Record your answer below and try to incorporate Scripture in your answer.

· **ANSWER.** *Student answers to this question will vary. In brief, one could answer the first response by arguing that positing a meaning for infant baptism other than the meaning of the baptisms of the New Testament lacks any biblical support and relies totally on theological constructs (which we have labored to undermine). One could answer the second response by again arguing that there is no indication whatsoever that baptism ever functioned as a prospective sign in the New Testament. Again, this argument is based on a particular understanding of how circumcision and baptism relate. Finally, one could answer the third response by questioning how infants could enjoy the benefits of the new covenant (forgiveness of sins and having the law written on their hearts) and then fall away. This third response either distorts the nature of the new covenant or necessitates a repudiation of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints!*

Reformed Paedobaptists stress the “objective” realities to which baptism points. But we would argue that they neglect the real (and not merely potential) “subjective” realities of baptism:

Yes, baptism is a sign of faith, but it is in addition a sign of what that faith is trusting in! For Baptists, then, the objective and the subjective are combined, whereas for Paedobaptists, in the baptism of infants, the objective is acknowledged by those witnessing the baptism while the subjective affirmation and embrace, which alone gives living expression to what Christ has truly accomplished, is absent altogether. Here then is a real hollowness Paedobaptism affirms the reality of Christ’s work, in principle, but sees no application or experience of it in the life of the one baptized. For Baptists, the reality (objective) is linked with experience (subjective), and only the combination does justice to that of which baptism truly is a sign—forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ that is real and has really been received by faith!³⁶

36 Bruce A. Ware, “Concluding Response” in *Baptism: Three Views*, 73.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. What paedobaptist responses have you heard, if any, to baptistic interpretations of texts like Galatians 3:27 and 1 Peter 3:21? How might you answer those responses?

2. Is it fair to claim that infant baptism is based more on theological constructs than on particular New Testament texts? Defend your answer.

A SERMON ABOUT BAPTISM

Listen to the sermon “**Strengthened to Suffer: Christ, Noah, and Baptism**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the desiringGod website (www.desiringgod.org).

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

•••••  ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ John Piper, “What Is Baptism and How Important Is It?” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website.
- ▷ John Piper, “What Is Baptism and Does It Save?” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website.
- ▷ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers” in *Believer’s Baptism*.
- ▷ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, chapters 9 and 11.
- ▷ John Piper, “Lutheran, Episcopal and Catholic Views of Infant Baptism,” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website.

Strengthened to Suffer: Christ, Noah, and Baptism

JOHN PIPER, 1994

1 Peter 3:18-22

The connection to what precedes and follows:

Suffering for Christians is normal.

Five ways this text strengthens us for suffering:

1.

2.

1.

2.

3.

4.

3.

1.

2.

3.

4.

“[Baptism] saves insofar as it is an _____ to God for a good conscience . . . that is, a _____ offered up to God for cleansing.”

“Baptism stands . . . as a constant witness and reminder that the judgment is _____.”

5.

Under the Water and Out of the Water

5

🔗 INTRODUCTION

Many American churches today celebrate the Lord's Supper by eating pieces of crackers and drinking little cups of grape juice instead of eating bread and drinking wine. Some of these same churches would nevertheless insist that baptism must be performed by immersion in water and not by any other method. If someone can eat a cracker instead of bread (by faith), why can't someone be baptized by sprinkling or pouring, instead of by immersion? Isn't the person's heart the only important thing? Why is the outward form of baptism significant?

In this lesson, we will argue that the Bible teaches baptism by immersion in water. Four kinds of evidence will be considered:

1. linguistic evidence involving the meaning of the Greek word *baptizō*;
2. textual evidence from passages in the New Testament describing baptisms;
3. theological evidence drawn from the meaning of baptism and the realities it signifies; and
4. historical/archaeological evidence relating to how ancient baptisms were performed.

Each stream of evidence will flow into our conclusion that immersion was the method in which baptisms were performed by John, Jesus' disciples, the early church, and the first generations of Christians. Therefore, based on historical precedent and for theological reasons, we will argue that Christians should practice baptism by immersion today.

We will also argue that the method of baptism *is* significant (though perhaps not as significant as the issue of the proper subjects of baptism). Sprinkling, pouring, and immersion symbolize related, but differing, realities in the Christian life. If we desire to give God glory in baptism, we must understand what baptism signifies.

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ summarize the linguistic and textual evidence for baptism by immersion.
- ▷ explain what spiritual realities baptism symbolizes and why immersion is the method of baptism that best represents these realities.
- ▷ answer a common paedobaptist maneuver of separating water baptism from “spiritual baptism”.



The class discussion of this lesson could go in several different directions, depending on the interests and concerns of your students. Remember to emphasize, however, the intimate connection between the meaning and mode of baptism.

With regard to the problem raised in the introduction, we would say that crackers and grape juice can still represent the realities that bread and wine represent: the body and blood of Jesus. The problem with substituting sprinkling or pouring for immersion is that all three methods represent different (though related) spiritual realities.

In addition to identification with Christ in his death and resurrection (clearly suggested by the significance of baptizing in the name of Jesus), the washing away of sins is probably a secondary spiritual reality symbolized in baptism. This secondary association is probably most clearly made in Paul's recounting of his conversion experience:

Acts 22:16

¹⁶ And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

This secondary association, it should be noted, is complementary to baptism's primary symbolic association, since identification with Christ in his death does achieve the forgiveness and "washing away" of sins. For a very thorough discussion of Old Testament and Jewish washing rituals, which would have been akin to immersions and may have influenced John's baptism and Christian baptism, see the fourth chapter of Ferguson's book as listed in the Additional Resources.

It is possible that Hebrews 10:22 is an indirect reference to baptism. If this is so, it is noteworthy that baptism would be clearly distinguished from sprinkling here (though, again, related).

Hebrews 10:19, 22

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Paedobaptists often cite 1 Corinthians 10:2, arguing in effect that “Certainly someone cannot be ‘immersed’ into Moses. How can someone be immersed into a person? Therefore, *baptizō* can’t always mean ‘to immerse.’”

1 Corinthians 10:1-4

¹ For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

Another verse cited in this regard is Romans 6:3 in which the Christian is baptized into Christ. To this line of argumentation, it must first be stated that inserting the word “sprinkled” into these verses won’t work either. But this kind of analysis has missed the point. In these examples, the *metaphorical extension* of the meaning “immerse” is present. Suppose, for instance, that someone describes their friend as “immersed in Shakespeare.” Is this a nonsensical use of language? No, what is meant is that this person’s friend is so engrossed in the reading of Shakespeare that it can figuratively be said that he or she is “immersed” in him. The same kind of metaphorical extension is possible with the word *baptizō*. The basic meaning “plunge” or “immerse” is retained, but it is being metaphorically applied to describe Israel’s relationship to Moses or the Christian’s relationship to Jesus’ death. In 1 Corinthians itself, the metaphorical extension of the word’s literal meaning is already suggested by the literal use of the term earlier in the letter (see 1 Corinthians 1:12-17).

There are at least two additional problems for understanding sprinkling or pouring as the biblical mode of baptism. Those who pour or sprinkle must address the question of why another Greek word was not chosen if baptism was performed by sprinkling or pouring. The Greek word *rantizō* clearly means “to sprinkle” (see Hebrews 9:19), and the word *ekheō* can mean “pour out” (see Acts 2:17), so why didn’t the authors choose one of these words to describe baptism if baptism was indeed by sprinkling or pouring?

Secondly, consider a passage from the Didache, a Christian document that some date as early as AD 50 and most date sometime within the first century:

Didache 7:1-3 (translated by Kirsopp Lake in the Loeb Classical Library)

Concerning baptism, baptize thus: Having first rehearsed all these things, “baptize, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” in running water; but if thou hast no running water, baptize in other water, and if

thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water three times on the head “in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

This passage implies that pouring was only used as an exception and as a last resort! Ferguson’s book has much more historical evidence to this effect.

If your students are wondering if a baptismal pool that is one meter deep is deep enough for immersion, you might mention that according to a recent study by Nikola Koepke and Joerg Baten, the average height for both males and females in the Mediterranean region from the first to fifth centuries was approximately 168 centimeters—that is, about 5 feet and 6 inches (see page 44 of their study, available online at <http://www.eco.rug.nl/~jacobs/jjdownload/Workshop14May-Koepke.pdf>). Therefore, a baptismal pool that was one meter deep [3 feet, 3 inches] would come up to approximately the waist of the average ancient person. This would probably be the ideal depth for immersing new converts easily and quickly, and many Baptists today use baptismal pools of similar depths.

In the sermon assigned for this lesson, John Piper compares the symbol of baptism to the symbol of a wedding ring. If your students are helped by this comparison, you might also want to share with them the following reflections by Robert H. Stein, “Baptism in Luke-Acts” in *Believer’s Baptism*, 57-58:

The analogy of marriage, used in various places in the NT with respect to the Christian faith, provides a helpful comparison for understanding what is involved in becoming a Christian according to the Book of Acts. Becoming married involves a number of components that are intimately interrelated and belong together. These usually include: the saying of vows; the giving and receiving of rings; the pronouncement of marriage by the minister; the signing of the marriage license by the minister and witnesses; and the sexual consummation. If asked “Which component actually resulted in becoming married?” how should one answer this question? Was it when you said your vows? Was it when you gave and received a ring? Was it when the minister pronounced you husband and wife? Was it when the marriage license was filled in and signed by the minister and witnesses? Was it when the sexual consummation of the marriage took place? The answer is that all of these were involved in becoming married. One cannot isolate them from one another. In the normal experience of marriage all of these are involved, and all of them take place together, that is, on the same day. It was not a single component that changed two single individuals into a married couple. It was all of the above. In a similar way, one does not become a Christian in Acts at the minute of faith, or the instant of repentance, or the time of confession, or the moment of baptism, or

the point in time when God gave his Spirit. These were not separated in time as in the present day but occurred together, that is, on the same day, and thus “the need to pinpoint exactly when conversion took place and also to identify the normative sequence for the constituent elements of conversion-initiation are obviated.”



THE WORD “BAPTIZE” AND BAPTISMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Inevitably, the controversy about the proper mode of baptism swirls around the meaning of the Greek word *baptizō*, which is simply transliterated into English as “baptize.” If one looks up this word in BDAG (the standard lexicon for ancient Greek), one would find the following definitions: wash, purify, plunge, and dip. It must be said that Liddell and Scott (another classic Greek lexicon) has similar definitions. In neither lexicon, nor in Kittel (a ten-volume compendium of word studies), does one ever find that *baptizō* has the meaning “sprinkle” or “pour.” Therefore, from the start, the case for baptism by sprinkling or pouring seems to plead the improbable.

Nevertheless, there are still those who argue that *baptizō* can have the meaning of “sprinkle” or “pour.” Such a debate quickly moves into a technical realm in which a person must consider the ancient evidence for themselves. Perhaps the most recent and exhaustive study of the word can now be found in Everett Ferguson’s 22-page study of the word *baptizō* in Classical and Hellenistic Greek in his book *Baptism in the Early Church*. Ferguson concludes,

*Baptizō meant to dip, usually a thorough submerging, but it also meant to overwhelm and so could be used whether the object was placed in an element (which was more common) or was overwhelmed by it (often in metaphorical usages). . . . As will be seen, Christian sources maintained the basic meaning of the word. Pouring and sprinkling were distinct actions that were represented by different verbs, and this usage too continued in Christian sources. When the latter speak of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit or the sprinkling of blood, they do not use baptizō for these actions.*³⁷

Although those who do not have the ability to translate Greek or do not have easy access to the ancient sources might not be able to enter into the more technical aspects of this debate, there is also textual evidence from the New

³⁷ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 59.

Testament itself to consider. Inspect the following verses which describe baptisms in the first century AD:

Matthew 3:5-6 (see also Mark 1:5)

⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Matthew 3:16

¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water . . .

Mark 1:9-10

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water . . .

John 3:23

²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized . . .

Acts 8:35-38

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” ³⁷ ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

1. Do these passages imply anything about the mode of baptism? Underline words and phrases to support your answer and record your thoughts below.

· **ANSWER.** Although this textual evidence is not definitive, it does suggest baptism by immersion. First, the river Jordan would have been deep enough to accommodate immersions and it seems that its depth had some biblical-theological significance (see Josh 3). Second, the language of “going down into the water” and “coming up out of the water” suggests water that is at least waist-deep. Third, the fact that “plentiful” water was required for baptism suggests immersion since not a lot of water is needed for sprinkling

or pouring. Finally, the story of the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism again suggests that a substantial amount of water would have been needed for his baptism.

Here are some additional reflections on this the textual evidence from the Gospels presented above:

From the description of John's baptism in the Gospels it seems reasonably clear that this involved immersion. The description of this taking place "in the river Jordan" (Mark 1:5/Matt 3:6) and that Jesus after his baptism "came up out of the water" (Mark 1:10/Matt 3:16) all suggest immersion. The description of John baptizing at Aenon near Salim "because water was plentiful there" (John 3:23) also implies immersion, for one does not need a plentiful supply of water for the mode of sprinkling. The explanation of this as involving affusion or pouring of water while standing in the Jordan at Aenon is also unconvincing.³⁸

And here are Stein's comments on Acts 8:

In the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, "See, here is water!" (8:36) would be an unusual comment unless being baptized involved immersion. One needs only a small cup of water to baptize by sprinkling, and that much water the eunuch would certainly have had with him as he traveled by chariot in the desert.³⁹

Thus, the textual evidence in combination with the linguistic evidence already provides a strong case for baptism by immersion in water.

WHAT IMMERSION SYMBOLIZES

Maybe even more important than the linguistic and textual evidence, however, is the theological evidence. As we have already seen, Colossians 2:12 associates baptism with being "buried" with Christ and with being "raised" with him.

³⁸ Stein, "Baptism in Luke-Acts," 60. Stein also notes that "very few groups that practice the mode of sprinkling or affusion do so while the person being baptized is standing waist deep in water" (60).

³⁹ *Ibid*, 60-61.

The same associations are made in Romans 6, another crucial text in forming a doctrine of baptism. Study the following passage carefully:

Romans 6:1-7

¹ *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*

² *By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* ³ *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* ⁴ *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* ⁵ *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.* ⁶ *We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.* ⁷ *For one who has died has been set free from sin.*

There are a couple things to notice in this text. First, baptism is connected again to conversion:

Paul refers to baptism in Romans 6 and Colossians 2 because baptism recalls the conversion of the readers from the old life to the new. The grace of God secured their freedom from the power of sin at conversion, and the simplest and easiest way to recall the readers' conversion is to speak of their baptism. ⁴⁰

As we saw in the previous lesson, the question of verse 3, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” expects a positive answer, and therefore it would seem that the baptism of every Christian in Rome was an expression of their conversion from death to life. It is difficult to see, then, how any infants could have been baptized with this understanding of the meaning of baptism. The following thoughts on what baptism “expresses” and “testifies” are written by a Paedobaptist:

Baptism expresses our regeneration and conversion. . . . Our baptism testifies to us of union with Christ, because we have truly died with him and been raised with him. . . .

With this language [in Romans 6:5-6], Paul teaches the absolute, transforming nature of regeneration. At regeneration, what Christ did for us covenantally

⁴⁰ Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles,” 75.

*becomes ours in reality, and we die to sin. When God regenerates us, we die; our old nature dies totally and completely.*⁴¹

The author of these thoughts, however, does not explain in his essay how the baptism of infants could “express” their regeneration, in which what Christ did for them covenantally becomes theirs *in reality*; nor does he explain how infants’ baptism could “testify” to their union with Christ in which they have truly died with him and have been raised with him. If a Paedobaptist holds this view of Romans 6, then it would seem that they must accept the possibility of infant regeneration.

Notice also the spiritual realities in the passage that are symbolized by baptism.

2. Why might immersion in water symbolize the spiritual realities described in Romans 6:1-7 better than sprinkling or pouring?

· **ANSWER.** *As proponents of sprinkling and pouring admit, sprinkling water represents the sprinkling of water or blood in the old covenant, which was conjoined with cleansing from sin; pouring water on top of the head might symbolize receiving the Holy Spirit from heaven. While these spiritual realities are related to baptism, Col 2 and Rom 6 tie baptism more closely to identification with Christ in his death and resurrection. Immersion best represents this reality as Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles,” 82, explains: “Baptism pictures death because submersion under water kills. The waters represent the flood of God’s judgment on account of sin (see 1 Pet 3:20-21), and hence even Jesus himself, as Mark 10:38-39 explains, underwent a baptism in which he absorbed God’s wrath on the cross for the sake of his people. Submersion under the water in baptism—which is in Jesus’ name—indicates that the persons baptized have experienced God’s judgment in Christ. That is, since they are incorporated in Christ, he has borne the judgment they deserved.” Coming out of the water, likewise, represents emerging from death to new life.*

41 Pipa, “The Mode of Baptism,” 122.

WATERLESS BAPTISMS?

At this point, some paedobaptists will contend that Romans 6 does not refer to a “water baptism” at all. By disassociating Romans 6 from water baptism, paedobaptists might sidestep the force of the interpretation of Romans 6 presented here. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones offers an example of this view:

To argue that the Apostle has water baptism in his mind in any shape or form here [in Romans 6:3] is to give a prominence to baptism that the Apostle Paul never gives to it. . . .

The Apostle in several other places deals with this question of our union with Christ. There is for instance Ephesians 2 verses 4-6, where he teaches that, having been quickened, we are risen with Christ, and seated with Him in the heavenly places. But he does not mention baptism at all at that point. Those parallel passages surely throw light on the interpretation of this passage. . . .

The conclusion therefore at which I arrive is that baptism by water is not in the mind of the Apostle at all in these two verses; instead it is the baptism that is wrought by the Spirit.⁴²

In response, Baptists often argue that water baptism cannot be separated so easily from Spirit baptism. As Schreiner writes,

Those who restrict the reference to Spirit baptism in Romans 6 truncate the baptismal message, for separating water baptism and Spirit baptism introduces a false dichotomy into the Pauline argument. Paul does not drive a wedge between Spirit baptism and water baptism, as if the former is what really matters and the latter is superfluous. Such a viewpoint may suffer from reading the text through modern experiences in which water baptism often occurs significantly before or after conversion. . . . Those who see a reference only to Spirit baptism and exclude water baptism put asunder what God meant to be joined together.⁴³

42 D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6: The New Man* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1972), 34-35, 36.

43 Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles,” 74-75.

3. Who do you find more persuasive on this issue: Martyn Lloyd-Jones or Thomas Schreiner? Explain and defend your view.

- **ANSWER.** *Student answers to this question will vary. This curriculum is obviously representing Schreiner's perspective. For Lloyd-Jones's concern that our interpretation of Romans 6:3 gives too much prominence to water baptism, see the sermon that is assigned for this lesson. We believe that Lloyd-Jones has misunderstood the nature of the symbolic language employed here. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that Paul could have pointed to a common experience of baptism in the Roman church without any reference to water baptism. As we have seen from Acts and other books, baptism was an integral part of the conversion experience in the early church. If so much theological weight is resting on a distinction between water baptism and "Spirit baptism," why didn't Paul make that distinction clear? Finally, what symbolic meaning would baptism carry if it didn't represent the spiritual realities of a so-called Spirit baptism?*

The final stream of evidence to consider is the historical and archaeological evidence, which Everett Ferguson again summarizes for us. See his book for a detailed and documented defense of these conclusions:

The dimensions of the [ancient baptismal] fonts are generally not under one meter [3.28 feet] but not over three meters [9.84 feet]. . . .

The predominant number of baptismal fonts permitted immersion, and many were so large as to defy any reason for their existence other than for immersion. . . .

The Christian literary sources, backed by secular word usage and Jewish religious immersions, give an overwhelming support for full immersion as the normal action. Exceptions in cases of a lack of water and especially of sickbed baptism were made.

Submersion was undoubtedly the case for the fourth and fifth centuries in the Greek East and only slightly less certain for the Latin West. Was this a change from an earlier practice, a selection out of options previously available, or a continuation of the practice of the first three centuries? It is the contention of this study that the last interpretation best accords with the available facts. Unless one has preconceived ideas about how immersion would be performed, the literary, art, and archaeological evidence supports this conclusion. The express statements

in the literary sources, supported by other hints, the depictions in art, and the very presence of specifically built baptismal fonts, along with their size and shape, indicate that the normal procedure was for the administrator with his head on the baptizand's head to bend the upper part of the body forward and dip the head under the water. . . .

The only viable alternative interpretation of the evidence that would account for the fonts is a partial immersion in which the baptismal candidate stood in water and the administrator poured water over the upper part of the body, but this is largely conjectural. This interpretation is not really supported by paintings and sculpture and with little (and that dubious) literary support. A pouring or sprinkling did occur in two special circumstances: a lack of water and (more often) sickbed or deathbed conversions. Both were treated as exceptional, second choice, and undesirable alternatives.⁴⁴

44 Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 857.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. How important is the mode of baptism?

2. If a person has been “baptized” by sprinkling or pouring as a believer, should that person be immersed?

A SERMON ABOUT BAPTISM

Listen to the sermon “**United with Christ in Death and Life, Part 2**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringgod.org) website (www.desiringgod.org).

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

•••••  **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ John Piper, “What Baptism Portrays,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website.
- ▷ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, chapter 4.
- ▷ John Piper, “Thoughts on Baptism,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website.
- ▷ Greg Gilbert, “Dunk, Dunk, Sploosh,” an online blog post at the [9Marks](#) website (www.9marks.org).

United with Christ in Death and Life, Part 2

JOHN PIPER, 2000

Romans 6:1-7

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

What do we learn about baptism in this text?

1.

“Baptism was universally practiced and the understanding of it was the first thing you found out in your Christian life The life of Romans 6 is built on the _____ of baptism.”

2.

“In the New Testament, people were immersed. That's the way baptism was performed. That's what it meant. And a fourth argument, besides those three—the meaning of the word, the fact that there was lots of water (there had to be), the fact that they went down into the water—is this _____ of chapter 6, verses 3 and 4.”

3.

“[Baptism] signifies our death with Christ, which was _____ historically . . . and then was _____ to me experientially through faith as I became united with Jesus Christ and then was _____, symbolized in baptism.”

Is baptism a symbol or instrument?

1.

2.

“Faith has such a prominent, decisive, effective role in uniting me to Christ that to say that baptism is the _____ by which I am united to Jesus I think is contrary to the wider Pauline and New Testament teaching.”

Application

Baptism, Joy, and the Glory of God

6

§ INTRODUCTION

This curriculum, as a publication of Bethlehem College & Seminary, shares that institution's commitment to a God-centered vision of reality that is expressed in Christian Hedonism:

Essential to the foundation of Bethlehem College and Seminary is the truth that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. God's self-exaltation and our everlasting joy are not at odds. They happen together. His worth is magnified when we treasure him above all things. Our joy in him reflects his glory. The great quest of Bethlehem College and Seminary is for minds and hearts to see and savor the glory of Christ in all things, and spread that experience to the world.⁴⁵

John Piper further explains what is meant by the term “Christian Hedonism”:

If you must, forgive me for the label. But don't miss the truth because you don't like my tag. My shortest summary of it is: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. Or: The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever. Does Christian Hedonism make a god out of pleasure? No. It says that we all make a god out of what we take most pleasure in. . . .

By Christian Hedonism, I do not mean that our happiness is the highest good. I mean that pursuing the highest good will always result in our greatest happiness in the end. But almost all Christians believe this. Christian Hedonism says more, namely, that we should pursue happiness, and pursue it with all our might. The

⁴⁵ Excerpt taken from the Core Values page of the Bethlehem College & Seminary website: www.bcsmn.edu.

*desire to be happy is a proper motive for every good deed . . .*⁴⁶

The question that this lesson will explore is how the doctrine and practice of believer's baptism that we've been studying in this course relates to Christian Hedonism. Furthermore, we will consider reasons why believers should desire to be baptized. The course will end with an appeal to the entire church to magnify the meaning of baptism.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ explain how baptism is related to Christian discipleship.
- ▷ assess the importance of baptism relative to the gospel itself.
- ▷ explain why baptism should be viewed from the perspective of Christian Hedonism.

46 John Piper, "Christian Hedonism," an online article at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.com) website.



Since this is the last lesson of the course, it might be appropriate to spend about 15 minutes at the end of class either discussing any remaining questions or discussing ways in which the students' view of baptism has changed over the semester. Either of these options might help draw things together in their minds and give them a sense of closure.

You might also want to discuss many of the practical questions concerning baptism that could not be covered during the course. One of the biggest questions for many is whether they should be “rebaptized.” In general, we would *discourage* people from getting baptized a second time if their first baptism was performed by immersion and there is the possibility that they were a believer at the time (even if they didn't fully understand what their baptism signified). In general, we would *encourage* people to get baptized if they were “baptized” as an infant. A more difficult question to answer is whether a person should be baptized by immersion if they have been baptized as a believer by sprinkling or pouring. To address this question, consider the following testimony from someone who was baptized in Bethlehem Baptist Church even though he was “baptized” by sprinkling in a Reformed Presbyterian church (PCA church) as a believer at the age of 11:

You, or someone you know, may be considering a “second baptism”—which is not the term our Baptist friends would use, but may be an expression that captures your own thinking on the issue. If you are in this position, I would like to offer you my own story and some of my reflections on this difficult decision. In no way do I make my experience or decision normative for you—I believe that you must seek a clear conscience before God for yourself—but it is my hope that God may use something I write in this testimony to spur your thinking. For although I cannot say that it is sin not to be baptized again in your situation, I can say that whatever is not from faith is sin. So, whether you choose to be baptized (like I did) or choose not to, may your decision be based on solid, biblical convictions, and on the peace of a conscience submitted to God.

Consider the Evidence for Believer's Baptism by Immersion

The first and obvious step in considering a “second baptism” is to consider the biblical evidence for the baptism of believers (alone) by immersion. It is critical for

you to become personally persuaded of this truth before being baptized. Your public confession ought to speak of the worth of Christ, and therefore it is first necessary to understand what it is that you are doing, and to be clear about why you are doing it. Baptism ought to be a public declaration of faith in the God who unites sinners to the death of his Son, and then raises them to new life. The Lord is not honored when someone turns one of his holy ordinances into a pragmatic hoop to be jumped through on the way to membership. If baptism becomes a man-made obstacle barring your entrance into something you see as more valuable, such as the approval of men or even church membership, then you unwittingly have made a mockery of an occasion God has ordained for the public display of his glory.

So I suggest that you study God's Word to see what it says about baptism, even if you tentatively agree with the doctrine of believer's baptism by immersion. This will only strengthen your conviction in what you are doing, and enrich your testimony.

Consider the Nature of Your Previous Baptism

If you have become convinced that believer's baptism by immersion was the practice of the early church and is the teaching of Scripture, then next I recommend that you consider the nature of your previous baptism. One of the long-standing hesitations I had in being baptized again is that I thought this would completely invalidate my first baptism, which I considered to be a God-honoring, positive step in my Christian walk.

The way in which I am viewing baptism now, is that to be baptized again doesn't negate the previous work of God in your life. Rather, it affirms his continued work. That is, to be baptized as a believer by immersion isn't a repudiation of a step of obedience that you made (or your parents made), acting from convictions and a desire to honor God. Furthermore, being baptized again doesn't blemish past grace you may have received in a different church or tradition. I am incredibly grateful to God for blessing me in the church in which I was raised. It was in this church that I first learned about God's greatness and goodness, and these early years were formative for character and theology in ways beyond comprehension, I'm sure.

But if, after studying the issue, you become convinced that baptism is a sign for professing believers alone, and by immersion, then it seems as if you are forced to concede that your "first" baptism was in some way defective. I believe that God covers the faltering steps of his children with mercy, and so if believer's baptism by immersion is in fact true, I don't think that God is ultimately displeased with

those who are baptized by other means. But you must admit, as I did, that your first baptism, though understandable, is defective in that it does not conform to the teaching of Jesus and his apostles.

Consider What a Second Baptism Could Be

If you are tracking with me up to this point, you realize that you (or someone you know) are in a somewhat undesirable position. How is it “biblical” to be baptized again, if there is clearly no biblical precedent for such an event? Furthermore, if you have been baptized as a believer, as I was, how can you be baptized years (or decades) after an initial profession of faith? Baptism was performed in the early church at the first cry of faith coming from a new creature in Christ.

These things are troubling, and it must be admitted up front that the Bible does not speak directly to this issue, because it was not a problem in the first century. This, then, is my thought process: If I believe that my first baptism was in some way defective because my biblical convictions about baptism have matured or been newly formed, I am now responsible for this new understanding. For me, that implied that I must be baptized again in light of what I know now to be true. I view my “second” baptism as a “finishing” or “completion” of what God had started thirteen years prior, and I asked him in those waters to look in mercy, through time, at my two baptisms and view them as one, complete act of obedience.

But I do not wish to speak of a second baptism merely as an “act of obedience,” as if it were a cold, sterile, formal correction of something I’d done that was incomplete. Rather, I rejoiced at the opportunity to praise God for what he had done in my life and how he had been growing my faith and my understanding. A second baptism is a legitimate occasion in which to give God public praise for his work in your life. Moreover, if baptism symbolizes being united to Christ in his death and resurrection, I wanted to give him praise for that specific work that he did in my life. I didn’t want to rob Christ of any of the glory that is due him in his mighty work of saving this sinner.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, I want to emphasize that you must wrestle with the Lord yourself about this decision. Seeking counsel and reading literature can be helpful. But in the end, this decision must come from a heart that is submitted to God and a conscience that is clear before him (just as with those who enter baptism for the

first time).

My actual experience of baptism in Bethlehem Baptist Church was full of joy. And I believe that the Lord was pleased by this step of faith that I chose to take. Several people came to me and thanked me for the encouragement that my testimony brought them. All of this to say that I am glad I was baptized again, and I hope that if you choose this path, that you will likewise be blessed by God and exalt his grace.

It was a struggle for me to come to this sense of peace, and I imagine that if you are reading this testimony, you might be experiencing some of the same tension I felt. Those who counseled and prayed for me were gentle and loving, and I pray that I too have been gentle, and helpful, in what I have written here. May the Lord bless you, give you peace, and direct your steps!

Please note that it is outside the scope of this course to address the difficult issue of how church membership should relate to baptism. There is a difference of opinion on this question within Bethlehem Baptist Church and within the wider “Reformed Baptist” community.

John Piper does believe that a local church should admit into membership those believers who have been baptized as infants and view that baptism as legitimate. See the many resources listed under “Baptism & Church Membership” in the Topic Index of the Resource Library at the [desiringGod](#) website. For a quick introduction to the two basic positions on this issue, see Piper’s “Response to Grudem on Baptism and Church Membership,” posted on the [desiringGod](#) blog, and the corresponding response by Grudem that is also posted on the blog.



BAPTISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

We have observed throughout this course the ways in which baptism is tied to conversion. It is evident that as the disciples preached the gospel and as the early church expanded, converts were baptized. The basis for the disciples' practice of baptism is recounted in the ending of Matthew's Gospel, commonly known as "the Great Commission." Look at this passage:

Matthew 28:18-20 (full version)

¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

What if, though, Jesus' command to the disciples read in a different way?

Matthew 28:18-20 (modified version)

¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

1. Underline the phrase in the full version of Matthew 28:18-20 that is omitted in the modified version. What would be lost if this phrase was omitted from the Bible? In other words, what does this phrase's inclusion indicate about Christian discipleship?
- **ANSWER.** *The grammar of Matt 28:19-20 indicates that the making of Christian disciples is accomplished through two tasks: baptism and teaching. In other words, teaching people to observe all the commandments of Jesus and baptizing them in the Triune name are both integral to discipleship. As John Piper writes in What Jesus Demands from the World (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2006), 345, "Part of becoming a disciple or a follower of Jesus is being baptized. This is the outward mark of the inward*

change that has happened to bring one under the lordship of Jesus as a forgiven sinner. . . . Already in John's baptism we see how it functioned to distinguish true believers from mere descendants of believers. Now Jesus chooses this sign as the mark of his own followers in his absence. When they are converted from unbelief to belief, they are to be baptized. That is, they are to demonstrate in their obedience to this command that they are truly his."

Matthew 28:19-20 also implies that only believers (and not infants) should be baptized:

Jesus' command to his followers to make disciples of all nations and to baptize and teach them clearly presupposes that the recipients of baptism and teaching are of sufficient age and maturity that they can consciously choose to be baptized and be instructed in the principles of the Christian faith. . . .

The study of the references to baptism in the Gospels yields the following major implications for the Christian understanding of baptism. First, the rite of baptism is designed for believers who have repented of their sin and have put their faith in God and in his Christ. Believer's baptism is presupposed by both John's baptism and the Matthean "Great Commission" passage. . . . Second, baptism is an essential part of Christian discipleship. This is clear from the Matthean "Great Commission" passage, where disciple-making is said to consist of baptizing converts and of teaching them to obey the commands of Jesus.⁴⁷

PERFORMING BAPTISMS AND PREACHING THE GOSPEL

Throughout this course, we have stressed the importance of baptism. Since it seems from the New Testament that every believer was immediately baptized, the apostles would probably be puzzled by the situation in America today in which so many people confess Christ and yet are not baptized. Schreiner offers a sober warning:

Those who view baptism casually or as insignificant veer away from Paul, for as Schnackenburg says, "Paul would not understand it if anyone refused to be

47 Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Baptism in the Gospels" in *Believer's Baptism*, 24, 33.

baptized; to him such an attitude would no longer be genuine faith.”⁴⁸

And yet we do not want to put *too* much emphasis on baptism. Consider the following passage:

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

2. Why did Paul write that Christ did not send him to baptize (1:17)? Does 1 Corinthians 1:17 imply that baptism is of little significance?

- **ANSWER.** *This question will be answered thoroughly in one of the sermons assigned for this lesson, “Christ Did Not Send Me to Baptize.” Therefore, we will only say, in brief, that the rite of baptism was of great importance to Paul but of lesser significance when compared to the preaching of the gospel.*

CHRISTIAN HEDONISM AND BAPTISM

In motivating Christians to be baptized, sometimes people will say that it should be done in obedience to Christ’s command. This is true, but if this is the only thing that is said or even the primary motive given for baptism, then it is our conviction that baptism will soon be viewed merely as a Christian duty. Baptism is the duty of every Christian, but it should also be a *delight*. Christian Hedonists

⁴⁸ Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles,” 80.

will not only teach baptism and encourage baptism, they will also celebrate baptism, rejoice over it, and enthusiastically worship God in it.

Consider the following two encouragements for the practice of baptism. Notice the motivations presented for baptism and the tone of their words:

The great nineteenth-century English Baptist pastor, Andrew Fuller, said that “the sign, when rightly used, leads to the thing signified.” That is surely the desire of all true Christians with baptism—that it would lead us to Christ, who for us and for our salvation came, was crucified, buried, and raised again for our justification. This is signified in baptism. This is the point. It is our job to hold up the picture that Christ left us in order to draw our minds to this reality. We do this in obedience to his personal command and so bring him the honor that is his due.⁴⁹

First, the practice of credo-baptism has the potential of providing a young Christian a wonderful and sacred opportunity to certify personally and testify publicly of his own identity, now, as a follower of Christ. How rich and meaningful believers’ baptism is! . . .

Second, the practice of credobaptism grounds the regenerate membership of the church. . . . Of course believers’ baptism is no guarantee that every church member is truly saved, to be sure. But at least in principle and by structure and design, a church that adheres to believers’ baptism . . . seeks to maintain a fully regenerate church membership. This practice, then, will only enhance the health and well-being of local churches. For the honor of Christ, for the obedience of his people, for the witness of Christ before a watching world, and for the health and purity of the church, let us commit ourselves to seek afresh to know and follow Scripture’s teaching on the nature and practice of baptism.⁵⁰

3. According to these quotations and by your own brainstorming, list as many reasons as you can think of for why God is glorified in a believer’s baptism:

· **ANSWER.** *Student answers will vary. Though not claiming to be exhaustive we might say that God is glorified in a believer’s baptism because . . .*

1. *baptism may be a means God uses to lead us to Christ.*
2. *baptism pictures Christ’s great work of redemption.*

49 Dever, “Baptism in the Context of the Local Church,” 352.

50 Ware, “Believers’ Baptism View,” 49, 50.

3. *baptism is an act of obedience to God's command.*
4. *baptism may provide an opportunity for public testimony.*
5. *baptism may promote and maintain a "regenerate church membership."*
6. *baptism is a witness to unbelievers of God's offer of forgiveness and new life in Christ.*
7. *baptism reminds people within the church of their new identity in Christ.*
8. *baptism may encourage God's people to be bold in their witness, especially in contexts in which baptism could bring persecution.*
9. *baptism signals a person's clean break from Satan and false religions.*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ John Piper, “United with Christ in Death and Life, Part 3,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website.
- ▷ John Piper, “For Talitha at Her Baptism,” an online poem at the [desiringGod](#) website.
- ▷ John Piper, “Was I really baptized if the person who baptized me turned out not to be a believer?” an online question and answer at the [desiringGod](#) website.

A Celebration of Baptism

JOHN PIPER, 1982

Acts 2:36-42

The origin and meaning of Christian baptism:

Reasons against infant baptism:

“That’s what we understand by baptism and it is something to _____. And my prayer is that every person here will, with the kids, rekindle your love to God and all that he’s done for you that has been symbolized in baptism and that you’ll reawaken those baptismal vows that you made.”

Christ Did Not Send Me to Baptize

JOHN PIPER, 1980

1 Corinthians 1:17 is surprising.

Four questions:

1.

2.

3.

“The preaching of the gospel is primary, and the work of Christ on the cross is vastly more important than the work of any man in _____.”

4.

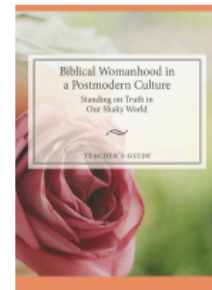
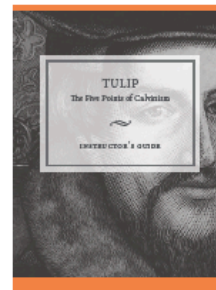
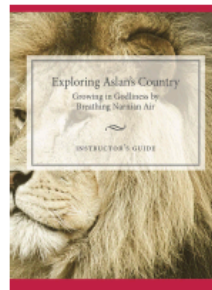
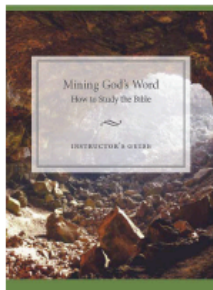
“Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Jesus (Matthew 28:19, 20). And for that very reason it should never divert our attention away from Christ onto a man. It should express our desire to rely on Christ alone for salvation and to _____ only in him.”

The Waters of Death and Life

Understanding and Celebrating a Believer's Baptism

The Waters of Death and Life: Understanding and Celebrating a Believer's Baptism is a six-week course advancing the truth that Christians ought to not only understand but also celebrate the doctrine of believer's baptism. The course will assert that baptism is an immersion in water for believers only, and will seek to provide a biblical and theological grounding for a God-centered perspective on baptism. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining the key biblical passages regarding the issue of baptism, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper and other theologians.

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM BETHLEHEM COLLEGE & SEMINARY



 Bethlehem

Education in Serious Joy

Bethlehem College & Seminary | bcsmn.edu | info@bcsmn.edu



JOHN PIPER, CHANCELLOR

Spreading a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ by equipping local churches with God-centered, theologically sound resources.