

Baptism into God's Family

Introduction

The sermon begins with a simple but profound question: *What is baptism?* The catechism gives a classic definition: baptism is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” In other words, there is both something we see (the application of water) and something God is doing beneath the surface (grace at work in the heart). Baptism is not a bare ritual or empty symbol—it is a holy mystery in which God meets His people.

I. The Nature of Baptism

A. The Outward and Visible Sign

The outward sign in baptism is straightforward: water is applied in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This can be by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. Often with infants, there are tears or sometimes even a smile, but either way, the physical act is visible to all. It is not merely a performance or an empty ritual; it is God's chosen sign to mark entrance into His covenant family.

B. The Inward and Spiritual Grace

Yet baptism is not simply about water on the forehead. Beneath the surface, God is at work. The inward grace of baptism can be summarized in three ways: First, baptism is the initiation rite into God's holy family, the Church, where the baptized person is welcomed as a member of Christ's body. Second, it is a participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus, meaning the baptized person shares in Christ's saving work. Third, through baptism, God grants the benefits of Christ's work, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

II. Scriptural Foundations for Baptism's Grace

A. Union with Christ in His Death and Resurrection

Paul makes this connection explicit in Romans 6:1–4. He teaches that those who are baptized are buried with Christ into death so that, just as He was raised, they too may walk in newness of life. Similarly, in Colossians 2:11–12, Paul compares baptism to a kind of burial in which the old

self is laid down and the new self is raised with Christ. Baptism, then, is not merely symbolic; it is God's means of uniting us to Christ's death and resurrection.

B. Baptism and Salvation

Peter adds another perspective in 1 Peter 3:21: "Baptism 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." Baptism is not a bath for external cleanliness but a spiritual act where the conscience is cleansed by God's grace. Salvation is not in the water itself but in what God does through it, namely, uniting the believer to Christ's saving resurrection.

C. Fulfillment of Old Covenant Promises

This promise of grace through baptism fulfills what God had foretold in the Old Testament. In Jeremiah 31, God promised a new covenant, unlike the old one that Israel broke. In this covenant, God would write His law on the hearts of His people by giving them His Spirit. Baptism marks the entry into this new covenant, where believers receive the indwelling Spirit as a foretaste of the full redemption that will come when Christ returns. Even now, though we struggle with sin, baptism assures us of God's Spirit at work within us, giving us new desires to love and obey Him.

III. Addressing Objections

A. Is Baptism Magic?

Some worry that this teaching makes baptism sound like a magical act that saves apart from faith. The Bible, however, holds both together: faith in Jesus saves, and baptism is the ordinary means by which God applies that salvation. Jesus Himself taught Nicodemus in John 3 that one must be born of "water and the Spirit" to enter the kingdom of God. The Spirit, Jesus explained, is like the wind—free, sovereign, and uncontrollable. He may indwell someone before, during, or after baptism, but God has promised to meet us in this act. Baptism is not magic, nor is it optional; it is the ordinary way God incorporates believers into His covenant family.

B. How Much Water is Necessary?

Another objection concerns the amount of water: should baptism be by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling? The Greek word *baptizo* in the New Testament period could mean immerse, pour, or sprinkle. While immersion was often preferred in the early church, pouring and sprinkling were also valid forms and have been practiced since apostolic times. The mode of water is secondary to the reality it signifies: union with Christ and entrance into His covenant. Thus, whether in a sanctuary with sprinkling or at the beach with immersion, baptism is valid when done in the name of the Trinity.

IV. Who Can Be Baptized?

A. Adult Converts

It is clear from the book of Acts that adult converts must be baptized. When Peter preached at Pentecost and the crowd asked what they should do, he told them, “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Baptism was the sign of entering the new covenant for those who believed in Jesus.

B. Children of Believers

But baptism is not only for adult converts. The children of believers are also rightful recipients of this sign. This follows the biblical pattern of covenant. In Genesis 15, God made a covenant with Abraham, promising land, descendants, and blessing. The sign of circumcision was given not only to Abraham but also to his children. Likewise, when Peter preached at Pentecost, he declared, “The promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off” (Acts 2:39). The continuity of covenant signs means that children of believers are to be included in God’s covenant family and marked with baptism. While there are differences between the old and new covenants—circumcision replaced by baptism, dietary laws fulfilled in Christ, Gentiles fully included—there is no evidence of the early church withholding baptism from children of believers. That controversy only arose centuries later.

V. Life After Baptism: Expectations and Responsibilities

A. For All Baptized Believers

Baptism is not a “get out of hell free” card or a certificate to keep in one’s back pocket. It brings with it responsibilities. Those baptized are called to active participation in the Christian community, just as family members are expected to contribute to the household. They are to make worship a priority, gathering weekly to renew the covenant and remember their baptismal promises. They are to live lives of repentance, continually dying to sin and growing in holiness. They are to develop habits of prayer and Scripture study, proclaim their faith to others, and live in such a way that Christ is visible through them. Baptized believers are also called to love and serve both God and neighbor, using their spiritual gifts for the good of the church and seeking justice and peace in the world.

B. For Baptized Children

For children baptized in infancy, parents bear a special responsibility. They are to raise their children in the faith, praying with them, reading Scripture to them, and constantly reminding

them of their identity as heirs of God's promises. Baptism for children is like a pair of shoes that are too big; they must grow into the faith that has been given to them. Even if they do not fully understand it for many years, the call is for parents to nurture them into the reality of their baptism until it becomes their own living faith.

Conclusion

Baptism is God's gift and command. It is initiation into His family, participation in Christ's death and resurrection, and the bestowal of the Spirit and forgiveness of sins. It is not a magical ritual, but neither is it an empty symbol. It is the place where God has promised to meet His people. Those who are baptized are called to live out their baptism daily—in faith, repentance, worship, community, service, and witness. Parents are called to help their children grow into the promises of baptism. And the whole church is reminded that baptism points us not to what we have done, but to what Christ has done for us.
