

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ECCLESIOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Church

One Body, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of All

UNIT 6: THE ORDINANCE OF BAPTISM

The Sign, the Subject, and the Significance

Lesson 18

BELIEVER'S BAPTISM BY IMMERSION

The Proper Subjects and Mode of Baptism

Baptism follows faith as a shadow follows light. Where genuine faith has been produced by the Spirit, baptism is the God-appointed form in which that faith publicly declares itself to the covenant community.

“And Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.”

Acts 8:37–38, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36–39; 10:47–48; 16:14–15, 31–34; Romans 6:3–4; Mark 1:9–10; Colossians 2:12

“I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

1 Timothy 3:15, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Lesson 17 established the theological foundation of the Baptist understanding of baptism: the ordinance-sacrament distinction, the positive content of what baptism is, the refutation of baptismal regeneration, and the Great Commission's baptismal mandate. This lesson turns to the two most practically specific and most ecumenically contested questions in the doctrine of baptism: who should be baptized, and in what manner? These are not abstract theological questions; they are the questions that determine what this congregation does when it gathers for a baptism, who stands at the water's edge as a candidate, and what physical form the ordinance takes. The answers have divided faithful Christians across traditions since the Reformation, and they divide them still. The Baptist is committed to engaging those divisions with both theological conviction and genuine charity.

The answer to the first question, who should be baptized?, is the distinctive that most sharply separates the Baptist tradition from the Reformed traditions that practice infant baptism. The Baptist answer is: only those who have personally professed saving faith in Jesus Christ are proper candidates for baptism. The New Testament knows no category of baptismal candidate except the personally believing, consciously repentant, publicly confessing adult or older child. The New Testament knows nothing of baptizing the unconscious infant of a believing parent before that infant has had any opportunity to personally respond to the gospel. The Baptist conviction on this point is not a minimalist restriction of the gospel's reach; it is a covenantally grounded, exegetically supported conviction about the nature of the community that the new covenant constitutes, which the series has been building toward since Lesson 6.

The answer to the second question, in what manner should baptism be administered?, is equally clear in the Baptist tradition: by immersion, with the candidate going fully under the water and coming back up out of it. The word baptizo, the physical descriptions of New Testament baptisms, the symbolic significance of the burial-and-resurrection imagery of Romans 6:3-4, and the unanimous testimony of the early church's practice all converge on immersion as the mode that most fully honors the ordinance's theological content. The Baptist's insistence on immersion is not a sentimental attachment to a denominational tradition; it is a conviction that the mode matters because the symbolism is constitutive of the meaning, and the mode most clearly expressing the burial-and-resurrection narrative is the mode that most fully serves the ordinance's character as a visible word of the gospel.

This lesson engages the paedobaptist argument with genuine respect. The Presbyterian and Reformed Anglican traditions that practice infant baptism are not traditions populated by careless or uninformed theologians; they are traditions that have produced some of the most careful and most learned theologians in the history of Protestantism, and their arguments for infant baptism deserve the most serious engagement that the Baptist can give them. The Baptist's disagreement with those arguments is a genuine theological disagreement rooted in a different reading of the covenant and a different reading of the New Testament's baptismal pattern. The lesson makes the Baptist's case clearly and argues it carefully; it does so in the recognition that the one who reads the same Scripture and comes to a different conclusion is not an enemy of the gospel but a brother in Christ with whom we share the most important things, even as we differ about the form in which the new covenant's sign should be administered.

I. THE PROPER SUBJECTS OF BAPTISM

Only Professing Believers Are Candidates

A. The New Testament's Consistent Pattern

The New Testament's consistent pattern of baptismal administration, which Lesson 17 surveyed in detail, establishes beyond reasonable exegetical dispute that the proper subjects of baptism are those who have personally professed saving faith in Jesus Christ. Every recorded baptism in the book of Acts involves the same sequence: the gospel is proclaimed, the hearer personally responds in faith and repentance, and the believer is baptized. Acts 2:41, those who received the word were baptized; Acts 8:12, when they believed Philip they were baptized; Acts 8:36-38, the Ethiopian's profession of faith immediately preceding his baptism; Acts 10:44-48, the Spirit's reception preceding Peter's authorization of baptism; Acts 16:14-15 and 31-34, the Philippian households baptized after personal faith and rejoicing; Acts 18:8, the Corinthians believing and being baptized. The pattern is universal across the book of Acts: personal faith is the precondition of baptism, not its result.

The New Testament's silence about infant baptism is one of the most exegetically significant silences in the entire canon. In a document that describes the church's first decades of life, missionary activity, and community formation, including multiple accounts of entire households coming to faith, there is not a single unambiguous example of an infant being baptized. There is not a single command addressed to believing parents to have their infants baptized. There is not a single theological argument that grounds the administration of the covenant sign to infants. There are household baptisms, which the previous lesson noted do not require the inference of infant recipients when the text attributes faith and rejoicing to the household as a whole. The silence is not incidental; in a document whose authors were intimately familiar with the practice of infant circumcision in the old covenant community and whose converts came overwhelmingly from that community, the complete absence of infant baptism from the record is a theologically significant datum.

The positive content of what baptism is, as Lesson 17 established, further confirms that the proper subjects are personally believing adults. Baptism is a public confession of personal faith (Acts 2:38); an infants cannot make a public confession of personal faith. Baptism is a declaration of union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4); this declaration presupposes a personal experience of that union through regeneration and faith. Baptism is an appeal to God for a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21); an infant has no conscience to appeal for and no awareness to ground the appeal. Baptism is entry into the visible covenant community through the public affirmation of the new covenant reality (the new birth); an infant has not yet demonstrated the new covenant reality that baptism declares. Each of these positive descriptions of what baptism is and does implicitly defines its proper recipient: the person who personally bears the reality that the ordinance declares.

B. The Paedobaptist Argument Stated

The paedobaptist argument for infant baptism is not a superficial traditionalism but a carefully constructed theological argument from the structure of the biblical covenants. The argument in its most rigorous form runs as follows: God's covenant of grace is one covenant, administered in different forms across the two Testaments. Under the old administration, the covenant sign (circumcision) was administered to infants born into covenant families, including those who could not yet personally profess faith. The covenant sign sealed the covenant

promise to the covenant community's members, including those who had not yet personally received the promise through faith. Under the new administration, the covenant sign has changed (from circumcision to baptism) but the covenant of grace is the same. Therefore, just as infants of covenant families received the covenant sign (circumcision) under the old administration, infants of covenant families should receive the covenant sign (baptism) under the new administration. To deny baptism to the infants of covenant families is to deny them what the covenant's own structure entitles them to.

This argument is developed with full systematic rigor in the Westminster Confession (Chapter 28) and in the works of major Reformed theologians including Calvin, Owen, Turretin, and Hodge. It rests on two foundational convictions: the unity of the covenant of grace across both Testaments, and the analogy between circumcision and baptism as the respective covenant signs of the old and new administrations. The argument from Colossians 2:11-12 is particularly significant for the paedobaptist: Paul describes baptism as 'the circumcision of Christ' and as 'the circumcision made without hands,' suggesting that baptism is the new covenant counterpart to the old covenant's circumcision. If circumcision was administered to infants, and if baptism is the new covenant's circumcision, then baptism should also be administered to infants of covenant families.

The paedobaptist argument is not merely institutional traditionalism; it is a serious, Scripture-based theological argument that deserves genuine engagement rather than dismissal. The Baptist who has not seriously wrestled with the best version of the paedobaptist case, who dismisses it as obviously wrong without engaging its exegetical and theological substance, has not done justice to the genuine difficulty of the question or to the seriousness of the traditions that hold it. The Baptist answer to the paedobaptist argument is a genuine theological disagreement grounded in a different reading of the covenant's structure and a different understanding of the new covenant's distinctive characteristics. That answer is the subject of the next section.

II. THE BAPTIST RESPONSE TO PAEDOBAPTISM

The Newness of the New Covenant Determines the Sign

A. Four Exegetical Arguments Against Infant Baptism

The Baptist response to the paedobaptist argument engages it at each of its key premises. The first and most foundational argument is that there is no explicit command or clear example of infant baptism in the New Testament. The paedobaptist argument is, at its foundation, a theological inference from the covenant's structure, a conclusion derived from the analogy between circumcision and baptism rather than from an explicit New Testament instruction. The Baptist tradition's regulative approach to the administration of the ordinances requires explicit dominical or apostolic authorization for the church's practice. The New Testament provides explicit authorization for believers' baptism (Matthew 28:19, in the context of making disciples; Acts 2:38, 41, in the context of those who received the word). It provides no explicit authorization for infant baptism. The silence is exegetically significant, and the argument from the covenant's structure is a theological inference that the Baptist does not find sufficiently compelling to override the explicit pattern of the New Testament's baptismal practice.

The second argument is that the paedobaptist analogy between circumcision and baptism conflates the old and new covenants in precisely the way that the Progressive Covenantal hermeneutic that this series has consistently employed argues against. The new covenant, as Jeremiah 31:31-34 defines it, is explicitly distinguished from the

Mosaic covenant by its most characteristic feature: all its members shall know the Lord personally, from the least to the greatest. The old covenant community was a mixed population of genuine believers and nominal covenant-keepers; the new covenant community, by definition, is the community of those who personally know the Lord. The covenant sign of the new covenant should therefore be administered to those who personally bear the new covenant's defining characteristic, personal, Spirit-wrought knowledge of God, rather than on the same genealogical basis as the old covenant's sign.

The third argument engages the Colossians 2:11-12 text that the paedobaptist uses to establish the circumcision-baptism analogy. Paul's comparison of baptism to circumcision in Colossians 2 is not an argument that baptism should be administered on the same genealogical basis as circumcision; it is a theological argument about what baptism accomplishes for those who receive it in faith. Paul is not providing a precedent for infant baptism; he is explaining the spiritual significance of believers' baptism by analogy with what circumcision signified in the old covenant. The analogy is typological (baptism as the fulfillment of what circumcision prefigured), not administrative (baptism should be administered to the same recipients as circumcision). The Baptist reads the circumcision-baptism analogy as an argument about the meaning of baptism for believers, not as an argument about the eligibility of infants for baptism.

B. The New Covenant's Newness as the Decisive Argument

The fourth and most fundamental argument against infant baptism is the one that this series has been building throughout its covenantal theology: the new covenant's defining characteristic, the universal personal knowledge of God among all its members, is precisely the characteristic that distinguishes the new covenant's membership from the old covenant's genealogical mixed membership. This is not merely a theological abstraction; it is the specific feature of Jeremiah 31:34 that the author of Hebrews quotes as the ground of the old covenant's obsolescence (Hebrews 8:6-13). The new covenant is better precisely because its members all know the Lord, not because they have received the covenant sign, not because they were born into covenant families, but because the Spirit has written the law on their hearts and given them direct, personal knowledge of God.

If the new covenant's defining characteristic is that all its members know the Lord personally, then the community constituted by the new covenant should consist, as far as human discernment allows, of those who demonstrate that they possess this personal knowledge. The administration of the covenant sign to infants who cannot yet demonstrate personal knowledge of God is to administer the sign of the new covenant on old covenant principles, on the genealogical, household-inclusion basis of the old covenant rather than on the personal-faith, regenerate-membership basis of the new. The Baptist is not simply making an argument about baptism in isolation; he is making an argument about the nature of the new covenant community itself, and the baptismal practice follows necessarily from the covenantal conviction.

The Baptist also notes that the paedobaptist argument from covenant continuity, while capturing a genuine truth about the unity of God's redemptive purposes across both Testaments, fails to account adequately for the genuine newness of the new covenant that the New Testament's own authors consistently emphasize. Paul's argument in Galatians 3-4 is not that the new covenant is a continuation of the old covenant's administrative structure; it is that Christ is the fulfillment of the old covenant's promises, and that the community constituted by union with Christ is defined by a radical newness, neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, that transcends the old covenant's ethnic and genealogical structure. The one new humanity of Ephesians 2:15 is not the old covenant community expanded to include Gentiles; it is the new eschatological community in which the

old covenant's distinctions have been abolished and all are one in Christ. The baptism administered to this new community should correspond to its newness, not replicate the administrative pattern of the community it has superseded.

III. THE PROPER MODE OF BAPTISM

Immersion as the Form Mandated by Meaning

A. The Lexical Evidence

The proper mode of baptism is immersion, the complete submersion of the candidate's body in water, and the case for immersion rests on four converging lines of evidence: the lexical meaning of the Greek word baptizo, the symbolism of the burial-and-resurrection imagery of Romans 6:3-4, the descriptive details of New Testament baptisms, and the testimony of the early church's practice. The lexical case is foundational: if the word baptizo means immerse rather than sprinkle or pour, then the other evidence for immersion is simply the faithful fulfillment of the word's meaning in the life of the community. The debate about the mode of baptism is, at one level, a debate about lexicography.

The Greek word baptizo is derived from the verb bapto, meaning to dip, plunge, or immerse. The standard Greek lexicon (Liddell-Scott-Jones) defines baptizo as 'to dip, plunge; to be overwhelmed.' The word is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and in secular Greek literature in contexts that clearly require immersion: Naaman dipping in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:14, where the Septuagint uses forms of bapto and baptizo); the description of a ship being overwhelmed by water; the dyeing of cloth, which requires the cloth to be submerged in the dye. None of these uses is compatible with sprinkling or pouring; all of them require submersion. The lexical evidence for the word's primary meaning is clear: baptizo means to immerse, to plunge, to submerge, not to sprinkle or to pour.

The argument that baptizo underwent a semantic shift in the New Testament period, that by the time of the apostles, the word could mean simply 'to wash' or 'to apply water' in any form, is exegetically questionable. The New Testament's own descriptive language for baptism, which the next section will examine, is consistent with immersion as the mode. And the early church's unanimous practice of immersion, which the following section will note, is consistent with a community that understood the word they were using to mean what its lexical history implies. The claim that the New Testament community practiced baptism in a form inconsistent with the lexical meaning of the word they used for it requires the implausible assumption that the entire community misunderstood the word's meaning.

B. The Symbolism, the Descriptive Details, and the Early Church

The theological symbolism of Romans 6:3-4 is the most important argument for immersion as the mode required by the ordinance's meaning: 'Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.' The imagery is unmistakable: burial and resurrection. The candidate is buried with Christ (going under the water) and raised with Christ (coming up out of the water). This imagery does not merely suggest immersion; it requires it.

The sprinkling of a few drops of water on an infant's head does not enact the burial-and-resurrection narrative. The pouring of water over a person's head does not enact the burial-and-resurrection narrative. Only the physical act of the candidate's body going fully under the water and coming back up out of it enacts the narrative that Paul describes as the theological content of the baptismal act.

The descriptive details of New Testament baptisms provide additional evidence for immersion. Mark 1:9-10 describes Jesus' baptism by John: 'In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening.' The 'coming up out of the water' presupposes having been in the water, not merely having had water applied to the head. Acts 8:38-39 describes the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism: 'And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.' Both Philip and the eunuch 'went down into the water' and both 'came up out of the water', language that most naturally describes immersion. The language of John 3:23 also contributes: 'John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.' The reason for choosing a location with 'much water' is most naturally explained by the practice of immersion, which requires a body of water sufficient to submerge a person.

The testimony of the early church's practice is the final corroborating evidence for immersion. The Didache (c. A.D. 100), one of the earliest non-canonical Christian documents, instructs: 'Baptize into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living water. But if you have no living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot in cold, in warm. But if you have neither, pour out water three times upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.' The significant feature of this instruction is not that it permits pouring in extraordinary circumstances, it does, but that immersion is so clearly the assumed norm that an alternative must be explicitly authorized for exceptional cases. The instruction to pour only when immersion is genuinely impossible assumes that immersion is the church's ordinary and expected practice, not one option among several. The early church's baptismal imagery, the baptisteries whose archaeological remains show full-body immersion as the design assumption, and the witness of church fathers like Tertullian and Chrysostom all confirm that immersion was the early church's normative mode.

IV. THE BIBLICAL CASE FOR BELIEVER'S BAPTISM SUMMARIZED

Four Lines of Evidence Converging on the Same Conclusion

A. The Convergence of the Evidence

The Baptist case for believers' baptism, baptism administered to personally professing believers only, rests on four converging lines of evidence that, taken together, constitute one of the most well-supported convictions in the Baptist theological tradition. The first line of evidence is the consistent New Testament pattern: in every recorded baptism in the book of Acts and in every theological description of baptism in the epistles, the baptism is preceded by personal faith and administered to the personally believing. The pattern is unbroken, universal, and present at every stage of the apostolic mission and every cultural context in which the gospel was proclaimed. This pattern

is not one piece of evidence among several; it is the primary datum against which every other piece of evidence must be assessed.

The second line of evidence is the silence about infant baptism in the entire New Testament. This silence is not the absence of a marginal practice; it is the complete absence of any record, any command, any theological argument, or any apostolic instruction regarding the baptism of infants. In a document that extensively addresses the questions of circumcision, the covenant, the relationship of Jew and Gentile, and the proper constitution of the new covenant community, all of which would naturally occasion some discussion of whether the infants of believing parents should receive the covenant sign, the silence is remarkable. It is the silence not of a practice taken for granted but of a practice not yet in view.

The third line of evidence is the theological content of baptism itself, which presupposes personal faith as a precondition of meaningfully receiving the ordinance. Each of the positive descriptions of what baptism is and does, a public confession of personal faith, a declaration of union with Christ in His death and resurrection, an appeal to God for a good conscience, an entry into the visible covenant community on the basis of the new covenant reality, presupposes a candidate who personally bears the faith and the new birth that the ordinance declares. The administration of baptism to one who does not yet bear these realities is the administration of a declaration whose content is absent in the one to whom it is made, a sign without its signified.

B. The New Covenant Foundation as the Summary Argument

The fourth and most fundamental line of evidence is the new covenant's own definition of its membership. This is the argument that the series has developed most fully and that represents the deepest level of the Baptist theological conviction about baptism. Jeremiah 31:34's promise that all members of the new covenant community shall know the Lord personally is not a description of the new covenant's eschatological ideal; it is a description of the new covenant community's defining characteristic in the present age, as the author of Hebrews confirms in his application of the passage to the church's present covenant reality (Hebrews 8:6-13). The community constituted by the new covenant is the community of those who personally know the Lord, and the covenant sign of the new covenant should be administered to those who give credible evidence of possessing this personal knowledge.

The summary argument, then, is not merely that the New Testament's pattern supports believers' baptism or that the theological content of baptism presupposes personal faith, though both of these are true and important. The deepest summary argument is that the new covenant's own constitution requires a community of the personally regenerate, and that the covenant sign of entry into that community should correspond to the community's defining characteristic. The Baptist administers baptism to believers only because the Baptist believes the new covenant community consists of believers only, and this conviction about the new covenant community is itself grounded in the most extended and most authoritative account of the new covenant's distinctive characteristics in all of Scripture. This is not a Baptist peculiarity; it is the covenantal conclusion of a consistent reading of the whole Bible's testimony about the nature of the covenant that the church inhabits.

One additional argument that the Baptist finds compelling is the argument from the integrity of the covenant signs. In the old covenant, the administration of circumcision to infants was appropriate because the old covenant was constituted on a genealogical, household-inclusion basis; the infants of covenant families were genuinely covenant members in the old covenant's sense, and the covenant sign was appropriately administered to them as

such. But the new covenant is not constituted on a genealogical basis; it is constituted on the basis of personal faith and Spirit-wrought regeneration. The administration of the new covenant's sign to those who are not yet covenant members in the new covenant's sense is not a generous inclusion of the covenant's household; it is a categorical confusion between the sign and the reality, and between the old covenant's membership principle and the new covenant's. The Baptist's insistence on believers' baptism is, at its core, an insistence on the integrity of the new covenant's sign, that the sign should correspond to the covenant it represents, and that the covenant it represents is the new covenant, not the old.

V. THE CASE FOR IMMERSION SUMMARIZED

The Mode That Most Fully Honors the Ordinance

A. *Why the Mode Matters*

Some Christians, including some who are broadly sympathetic to believers' baptism, have questioned whether the mode of baptism is a matter of theological significance. The argument runs: what matters is the spiritual reality that baptism declares, not the physical form in which the declaration is made. If baptism declares union with Christ, cleansing from sin, and entry into the covenant community, does it matter whether the candidate is immersed, sprinkled, or poured upon? Is the Baptist's insistence on immersion a case of majoring in a minor?

The Baptist's answer is that the mode matters precisely because the physical form of the ordinance is constitutive of its theological meaning. Baptism is a visible word, an enacted proclamation of the gospel. The specific physical form that Christ appointed for this proclamation, going under the water and coming up out of it, enacts the specific gospel narrative that is baptism's theological content: death, burial, and resurrection. When Paul explains the meaning of baptism in Romans 6:3-4, the metaphors he employs are burial (going under) and resurrection (coming up). These metaphors are not ornamental; they are the theological content of the ordinance. The mode of immersion enacts these metaphors with a physicality and a completeness that sprinkling and pouring cannot achieve. To replace immersion with a less physically comprehensive mode is not merely to change an administrative detail; it is to diminish the enacted gospel proclamation that is the ordinance's most fundamental character as a visible word.

The insistence on immersion is also an insistence on the faithfulness of the church's administration of the ordinances to Christ's own institution. The regulative principle, which this series has consistently applied to the church's governance and worship, applies with equal force to the administration of the ordinances: the church should administer the ordinances in the form that Christ appointed and that the apostolic record describes, not in forms that human convention, historical accident, or pastoral convenience might suggest as alternatives. The consistent evidence, lexical, symbolic, descriptive, and historical, points to immersion as the mode that the apostolic community practiced and that the New Testament's own language describes. The church that administers baptism by sprinkling or pouring, however sincerely motivated, is departing from the apostolic pattern in a way that the Baptist tradition has consistently and rightly identified as a departure from the church's proper administration of Christ's ordinance.

B. *Addressing the Alternatives*

The practice of baptism by sprinkling (aspersion) became increasingly common in the Western church beginning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, replacing immersion as the dominant mode in many contexts for practical reasons (ease of administration, especially in colder climates) and theological reasons (if the water's application is what matters rather than the physical act of submersion, the mode is unimportant). The argument for aspersion typically appeals to the symbolic significance of water as cleansing and to Old Testament sprinkling rituals (Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 9:13-14) as precedents for the New Testament's use of water in baptism. The Baptist response is that the Old Testament sprinkling rituals are types that are fulfilled in Christ's blood and the Spirit's work, not prescriptions for the mode of the New Testament's baptismal ordinance; and that the New Testament's own descriptive language for baptism, going into the water, coming up out of the water, burial, resurrection, is entirely inconsistent with the application of a few drops of water to the head.

The practice of baptism by pouring (affusion) is sometimes defended on the grounds that the Pentecost narrative describes the Spirit as being 'poured out' (Acts 2:17-18), and that baptism as a seal of the Spirit's gift might therefore appropriately take the form of pouring water over the candidate. The Baptist response is that the mode of the Spirit's giving does not determine the mode of the water ordinance that accompanies the Spirit's giving; these are two different acts with two different physical referents, and the symbolism of the Spirit's 'pouring' has no direct implication for the administration of the water ordinance. The New Testament describes the Spirit as coming upon, falling upon, being poured out, and indwelling believers, a variety of metaphors for the Spirit's work that are not intended as prescriptions for the mode of water baptism.

The charitable acknowledgment that closes the Baptist's engagement with the mode question is genuine: many sincere, faithful, gospel-centered Christians have been baptized by sprinkling or pouring and regard themselves as genuinely baptized. The Baptist's insistence on immersion is not a judgment on the sincerity of their faith or a denial of their standing before God; it is a conviction about the form in which the ordinance is most faithfully administered, grounded in lexicography, symbolism, narrative description, and historical testimony. The Baptist congregation that practices believers' baptism by immersion is not claiming a superior form of Christianity; it is claiming a more faithful form of the administration of the specific ordinance that Christ appointed for the visible proclamation of the gospel in the body of the believing community.

VI. CHARITABLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND FIRM CONVICTION

The Posture That Belongs to This Debate

A. Brothers in Disagreement

The baptism debate is among the most persistent and most practically significant disagreements in Protestant Christianity. It is a debate that affects who can receive communion at which tables, which members of a church hold full voting rights, whether a person baptized as an infant needs to be rebaptized to join a Baptist congregation, and how two congregations of different baptismal convictions relate to one another in the broader Christian community. These are not trivial institutional questions; they are the practical expressions of genuinely different theological convictions about the nature of the new covenant community and the basis on which its sign should be administered.

The posture that this series commends for engaging these disagreements is the posture that has characterized the Baptist tradition at its best: firm conviction combined with genuine charity. The firm conviction: believers' baptism by immersion is the most faithful available reading of the New Testament's baptismal pattern, the most consistent with the new covenant's own definition of its membership, and the most faithful to the lexical and symbolic content of the ordinance's mode. This conviction is not held as a mere preference; it is held as a theological commitment that this ministry is prepared to advocate, defend, and practice with full seriousness. The genuine charity: the Reformed Presbyterian elder who baptizes his infant child is not an enemy of the gospel but a brother in Christ who reads the same Scripture and comes to a different conclusion about the covenant's structure and the administration of its sign. His tradition has produced many of the greatest theologians in the history of Protestantism, his congregation preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ with faithfulness, and his disagreement with the Baptist on baptism does not negate the unity of the Spirit that the apostolic faith creates.

The specific pastoral questions that arise from the baptism debate in a Baptist congregation, whether to rebaptize someone who was baptized as an infant before personal faith; whether to receive as a member someone who holds paedobaptist convictions but has not been baptized as a believer; how to engage the paedobaptist family member or friend with both conviction and grace, are questions that require pastoral wisdom, theological clarity, and genuine charity in equal measure. The series does not adjudicate all of these questions in this lesson, but it provides the theological foundation from which they can be answered: believers' baptism by immersion is the ordinance that this congregation practices, the ordinance whose theological grounding the series has argued for with care, and the ordinance that this congregation will continue to celebrate with the fullness of theological seriousness and corporate joy that the visible word of the gospel deserves.

B. Baptism as Joyful, Public, Corporate Celebration

The final practical word about baptism in the Baptist tradition is this: every baptism is an occasion for joy. The candidate who descends into the water and ascends from it is enacting the most theologically significant event in human history, death, burial, and resurrection, in the body of a specific, named, Spirit-transformed person. The congregation that witnesses this enactment is witnessing the gospel in its most physically immediate form, proclaimed in the body of a fellow member whose transformation they have observed and whose covenant they are about to share. The watching world, if it has been invited into the congregation's gathering for the baptism, is witnessing a demonstration of the gospel's power to produce genuine new life in genuinely specific people who have been genuinely transformed by the Spirit of the living God.

The Baptist tradition at its best celebrates baptism with the combination of solemnity and joy that the occasion warrants: the solemnity of a covenant being made in the presence of God and the covenant community; the joy of a new life being publicly celebrated, a new member being received, and the gospel being proclaimed in its most enacted and most immediate form. The baptismal service is not an addendum to the regular worship service; it is one of the congregation's most significant acts of corporate worship, and it deserves the preparation, the planning, and the theological investment that a significant act of worship requires. The candidate should be well-prepared, the congregation should be fully present and fully engaged, the administration should be conducted with pastoral care and theological clarity, and the celebration should convey the combination of weight and gladness that the ordinance's significance deserves.

The connection between baptism and the congregation's evangelistic mission is direct and practical. The baptism that the congregation celebrates is the fruit of the gospel proclamation that the Great Commission mandates; it

is the visible evidence that the Spirit is still producing the new birth in response to the proclamation of the word. The congregation that has not celebrated a baptism in years is a congregation that should ask itself hard questions about its evangelistic engagement and its gospel proclamation. The congregation that regularly celebrates the baptism of new believers is a congregation that is living out the Great Commission in its most visible and most covenant-significant form, making disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the Trinitarian name and teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded. To this joyful, public, corporate celebration of the ordinance that Christ appointed, every baptism brings its unique testimony of the gospel's power and the Spirit's sovereign work.

VII. BAPTISM AND THE COVENANT COMMUNITY

The Ordinance That Constitutes the Visible Church

A. Baptism and Membership

The connection between baptism and church membership is one of the clearest and most practically significant features of the New Testament's baptismal theology. Acts 2:41 presents the three-stage sequence of receiving the word, being baptized, and being added to the community as a single, unified event in the life of the apostolic church. The one who receives the gospel in faith is baptized; the one who is baptized is added to the covenant community. There is no category in the New Testament for the person who has received the gospel in faith but has not been baptized and has not been added to the covenant community. The Baptist tradition's insistence that church membership should normally follow baptism without significant delay is not an institutional formality; it is the application of the apostolic pattern to the contemporary congregation's practice.

The ecclesiological significance of baptism as the entry into the visible covenant community means that baptism and regenerate church membership are two dimensions of the same reality: the Spirit's sovereign work of regeneration and faith, publicly declared in the covenant sign of baptism and communally affirmed in the formal reception of the new member. The congregation that has already been established as the regenerate-membership covenant community by the theology of Unit 4 is the congregation that receives new members through exactly this process: the gospel proclaimed, the Spirit working regeneration and faith, the new believer making a credible profession of that faith, the congregation affirming the profession and administering the covenant sign, and the new member being formally received into the covenant community through the ordinance of entry that Christ appointed for exactly this purpose.

The pastoral practice of connecting baptism and membership as closely as the apostolic pattern envisions, receiving candidates for baptism through the same examination process as candidates for membership, baptizing them in the gathered assembly as the congregation's corporate act of reception, and formally welcoming them into the covenant community immediately upon their baptism, is the most faithful contemporary expression of the apostolic sequence. The congregation that separates baptism from membership, treating baptism as a personal spiritual event and membership as a separate institutional step to be taken later, has broken the apostolic sequence in a way that impoverishes both the ordinance and the membership. Baptism is membership's public beginning; membership is baptism's continuing context. They belong together, and the congregation that holds them together is the congregation that practices the ordinance with the fullness of its ecclesiological significance.

B. Looking Forward to Lesson 19

This lesson has established the two most practically specific aspects of the Baptist doctrine of baptism: the proper subjects (personally professing believers only) and the proper mode (immersion). Lesson 19 will complete the unit's treatment of baptism by examining the full range of what baptism declares and displays: union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4, examined in full theological depth), cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16 on the symbolic washing), new identity in Christ (Galatians 3:27 on being clothed with Christ), and the relationship between the ordinance and the Spirit's regenerating work (1 Peter 3:21 revisited in the context of the ordinance's full theological significance). Together the three lessons of Unit 6 constitute a comprehensive Baptist theology of baptism that is both theologically rigorous and pastorally practical.

The pastoral challenge that this lesson closes with is the most immediate one: if you are a member of this congregation who has never been baptized as a believing adult, this lesson is an invitation to take the step without unnecessary delay. Not because baptism saves you, Lesson 17 argued at length that it does not, but because the Lord who saved you commands it, because the apostolic community practiced it with urgency and joy, because the covenant community into which you have been received by faith is the community that publicly celebrates its new members' faith through the ordinance of entry that Christ appointed, and because the declaration that baptism makes, that you have died with Christ and been raised to new life, that you have put on Christ, that you belong to the new covenant community as a personally converted, personally believing, personally committed member, is a declaration that your life has already made privately and that the ordinance is calling you to make publicly, before the watching community and the watching world, in the Trinitarian name of the God who created you, redeemed you, and called you to Himself.

“And Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.”

Acts 8:37–38, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Believers' Baptism	The Baptist conviction that baptism is properly administered only to those who have personally professed saving faith in Jesus Christ. Grounded in: (1) the NT's consistent faith-then-baptism pattern; (2) the silence about infant baptism in the NT; (3) the theological content of baptism presupposing personal faith; and (4) the new covenant's defining characteristic that all its members know the Lord personally (Jeremiah 31:34). Distinguished from paedobaptism (infant baptism) by the insistence that the covenant sign correspond to the covenant reality.
Paedobaptism	The practice of administering baptism to the infants of believing parents, held by Reformed, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican, and many other traditions. The primary theological argument: the covenant of grace is one covenant across both Testaments; circumcision was administered to infants of covenant families under the old administration; baptism as the new covenant counterpart to circumcision should also be administered to infants of covenant families. The Baptist response: this argument fails to account for the new covenant's genuinely new membership principle.
Immersion (Baptizo)	The mode of baptism: the complete submersion of the candidate's body in water. Supported by: (1) the lexical meaning of baptizo (to dip, plunge, immerse, Liddell-Scott-Jones); (2) the burial-and-resurrection symbolism of Romans 6:3-4, which requires going under and coming up; (3) the descriptive language of NT baptisms ('went down into the water,' 'coming up out of the water', Acts 8:38-39; Mark 1:10); and (4) the early church's normative practice as evidenced by the Didache, archaeological remains, and patristic testimony.
Aspersion	The mode of baptism by sprinkling water on the candidate's head. Became increasingly common in the Western church from the twelfth century onward. Not the dominant practice of the early church, which practiced immersion as the norm. The Baptist objects: the descriptive language of NT baptisms is inconsistent with sprinkling; the burial-and-resurrection symbolism of Romans 6:3-4 requires immersion; and the lexical meaning of baptizo does not support sprinkling as an equivalent mode.
Affusion	The mode of baptism by pouring water over the candidate's head. Sometimes defended by appeal to the Spirit's being 'poured out' at Pentecost (Acts 2:17). The Baptist response: the mode of the Spirit's giving does not determine the mode of the water ordinance; and the descriptive language of NT baptisms and the burial-and-resurrection symbolism of Romans 6:3-4 both support immersion rather than pouring as the mode that most fully honors the ordinance's theological content.
Covenant Sign	The visible symbol that marks membership in the covenant community. In the old covenant, the covenant sign was circumcision, administered to male infants of covenant families. In the new covenant, the covenant sign is baptism. The paedobaptist argues that the administration should be the same (infants of covenant families); the Baptist argues that the administration should correspond to the new covenant's genuinely new membership principle (personal faith and regeneration, not genealogical descent).
Colossians 2:11-12	Paul's description of baptism as 'the circumcision of Christ': 'in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God.' The paedobaptist uses this passage to argue that baptism is the new covenant's counterpart to circumcision and should therefore be administered to infants. The Baptist responds: Paul is explaining the theological significance of believers' baptism by analogy with circumcision, not prescribing the same administrative basis for baptism as for circumcision.

Didache	An early Christian document (c. A.D. 100) providing instructions for Christian practice, including baptism. Its baptismal instruction assumes immersion as the norm ('baptize into living water') and authorizes pouring only when immersion is 'impossible.' The document is significant as evidence that immersion was the early church's normative practice, not one option among several, and that pouring was understood as an exceptional accommodation to circumstances that precluded immersion.
Jeremiah 31:34	The key text from the new covenant promise establishing the Baptist's most fundamental argument for believers' baptism: 'They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.' The new covenant community is defined by the universal personal knowledge of God among all its members. The covenant sign of the new covenant should therefore be administered to those who demonstrate this personal knowledge, personally professing believers, not to infants who have not yet manifested it.
Acts 2:41	The paradigmatic text for the apostolic baptismal sequence: 'Then those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.' The three-stage sequence, receiving the word (personal faith), baptism (covenant sign), addition to the community (church membership), is the New Testament's normative pattern. The connection between baptism and church membership in this verse is direct: baptism is the act through which the personally believing convert is formally received into the visible covenant community.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that believers' baptism by immersion is not a Baptist cultural tradition or a denominational preference but a theologically grounded conviction about the administration of the new covenant's covenant sign. The convergence of four lines of evidence, the NT's consistent faith-then-baptism pattern, the silence about infant baptism in the NT, the theological content of baptism presupposing personal faith, and the new covenant's defining characteristic of universal personal knowledge of God, constitutes a compelling case for believers' baptism that is not merely a matter of institutional loyalty but of genuine theological conviction grounded in careful exegesis.

We must believe that the mode of baptism, immersion, matters because the physical form of the ordinance is constitutive of its theological meaning. The burial-and-resurrection imagery of Romans 6:3-4, the lexical meaning of baptizo, and the descriptive language of NT baptisms all converge on immersion as the mode that most fully honors the ordinance's character as an enacted proclamation of the gospel. This is not a case of majoring in a minor; it is a case of insisting that the form of the ordinance correspond to the theology the ordinance enacts.

We must believe that those who hold paedobaptist convictions or practice alternative modes with sincere conviction are not enemies of the gospel but brothers in Christ with whom we share the apostolic deposit at its center. The Baptist's disagreement with the paedobaptist is a genuine theological disagreement about the covenant's structure and the administration of its sign, a disagreement to be engaged with both theological conviction and genuine charity, not with the polemical contempt that has sometimes characterized this debate in the history of the traditions.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

We should feel a renewed appreciation for the act of baptism itself, for the moment when a specifically named person, whose specific story of conversion the congregation knows, descends into the water and ascends from it in the declaration that she has died with Christ and been raised with Him. This is not a ceremony to be efficiently administered; it is one of the most theologically significant acts that this congregation performs, and it deserves the theological seriousness, the pastoral preparation, and the corporate joy that the visible word of the gospel deserves.

We should feel a genuine desire for every member of this congregation who has not been baptized as a believing adult to take the step without unnecessary delay. The pastoral heart of this lesson is not primarily the polemical argument against paedobaptism, though that argument is genuine and necessary, but the invitation to every unbaptized believer to do the first thing that genuine discipleship requires: to declare publicly, in the body, before the covenant community and the watching world, that she has died with Christ and been raised to new life in Him.

We should desire for every baptism in this congregation to be celebrated as the corporate, public, theologically rich event that the New Testament envisions: a full congregation gathered, a candidate well-prepared and clearly confessing, a joyful celebration of the gospel's most visually immediate and physically enacted proclamation. The recovery of baptism as a central, celebrated, theologically significant act of the congregation's corporate worship is one of the most practically important dimensions of the ordinance's renewal in the contemporary church.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Read Acts 8:26-39 this week as the NT's most detailed account of a baptism: the proclamation (Philip's exposition of Isaiah 53 as gospel), the personal faith (the eunuch's profession in verse 37), the immediate baptism (verses 38-39), and the joy that follows. Note how each element of the Baptist understanding of baptism is present in this single narrative. What does the eunuch's eagerness, 'What prevents me from being baptized?', say about the NT's expectation of an urgent, joyful, undeferred response to the gospel's baptismal mandate?
- If you are a member of this congregation who has been baptized by sprinkling or pouring in another tradition and who has not been immersed as a believing adult, engage honestly with the theological argument for immersion that this lesson has made. Not with the goal of feeling spiritually insecure about your standing before God, Christ's blood has secured that, but with the goal of discerning whether the faithfulness of the administration matters and whether the most faithful form of the ordinance is worth pursuing. Speak with an elder or the pastor about what you find in that engagement.
- Examine the way this congregation currently prepares baptism candidates. Is the preparation process substantive enough to establish the credibility of the profession being made? Is it joyful and welcoming enough to convey the corporate celebration that the ordinance deserves? Is the baptism itself administered in a public, corporate context that gives it the visibility and the congregational participation that its character as a visible word requires? Identify one specific improvement to the congregation's baptism preparation or administration and bring it as a recommendation to an elder.
- Pray for one specific person in your life who is not yet a believer, by name, with specific knowledge of their story and their barriers to faith, that the Spirit would bring them to the repentance and faith that precede baptism in the apostolic pattern. The Great Commission's baptismal mandate is not only an instruction about the ordinance; it is a vision of the evangelistic mission that produces the ordinance's occasions. The prayer for the unconverted to believe is the prayer for the next baptism.
- Read the paedobaptist argument for infant baptism in its most sympathetic form, perhaps from a brief statement by a thoughtful Reformed pastor, and engage it honestly with the Baptist response that this lesson has articulated. Identify the strongest argument on the paedobaptist side and the most adequate Baptist response to it. Bring your assessment to the next study session as a contribution to the group's theological engagement with the most practically significant disagreement in the Protestant baptism debate.

Key Texts: Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36–39; 10:47–48; 16:14–15, 31–34; Romans 6:3–4; Mark 1:9–10; Colossians 2:12

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before engaging the paedobaptist argument in this lesson, what was your understanding of why believers' baptism by immersion is the correct practice? Was it primarily a conviction grounded in theological argument, or was it primarily an inherited tradition? Has this lesson strengthened, refined, or complicated your existing conviction?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Acts 8:26-39. What did Philip preach (verse 35)? What question did the eunuch ask (verse 36)? What did Philip require of him before baptism (verse 37)? What did the eunuch confess? What physical movements are described in the baptism of verse 38? What does 'went down into the water' and 'came up out of the water' suggest about the mode? What happened immediately after the baptism (verse 39)?
- Read Mark 1:9-11. Where was Jesus baptized? What language does Mark use to describe Jesus' emergence from the water (verse 10: 'coming up out of the water')? How does this language support the case for immersion as the mode? What happened immediately after Jesus' baptism, and what does this suggest about the baptism's significance as a formal, public, covenant act?
- Read Colossians 2:11-12. What analogy does Paul draw between circumcision and baptism? What does he mean by 'circumcision made without hands' (verse 11)? What physical imagery does Paul use to describe baptism in verse 12 ('buried with Him in baptism... raised up with Him through faith')? How does the burial-and-resurrection imagery of this verse support the case for immersion?
- Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. What does verse 34's promise, 'they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them', specify about the new covenant community's defining characteristic? How does this characteristic differ from the old covenant community's makeup? What implication does this difference have for who should receive the new covenant's covenant sign?
- Read Acts 16:29-34. What did the jailer ask in verse 30? What did Paul and Silas tell him in verse 31? What happened next (verses 32-33)? What does verse 34 attribute to the household ('he rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household')? How does verse 34's attribution of both rejoicing and believing to the whole household affect the paedobaptist use of this passage to support infant baptism?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson presents the Baptist response to the paedobaptist argument as resting most fundamentally on the new covenant's defining characteristic (Jeremiah 31:34's 'they will all know Me'). Is this the most persuasive form of the Baptist argument, or are there other elements of the response that you find more compelling? How does this covenantal argument differ from a more narrowly exegetical argument about NT baptismal practice?
- The lesson acknowledges that the paedobaptist argument is 'carefully constructed' and grounded in serious theological reflection. What is the strongest single argument the paedobaptist can make for infant baptism? If you were to present the paedobaptist case at its most persuasive, what would you say? And what is the Baptist's most adequate response to that strongest argument?
- The lesson argues that the mode of baptism matters because 'the physical form of the ordinance is constitutive of its theological meaning.' Is this argument compelling? Could a paedobaptist who practices

sprinkling argue that the symbolism of cleansing (water applied to the head) is equally constitutive of baptism's meaning as the burial-and-resurrection symbolism? How would the Baptist respond to that alternative symbolism argument?

- The Didache's instruction to use pouring only when immersion is 'impossible' has been cited in this lesson as evidence that immersion was the early church's normative practice. How strong is this argument from the Didache? Does the early document's permission of pouring in exceptional circumstances undermine the Baptist's case for immersion as the only legitimate mode, or does it actually reinforce it by treating pouring as an exception rather than a norm?
- The lesson connects baptism and church membership as a single unified event in the apostolic pattern (Acts 2:41). What are the specific practical consequences of maintaining this connection for the congregation's life: its membership process, its baptism preparation, its reception of new members? What is the theological argument for keeping baptism and membership connected, and what risks arise when they are separated?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the NT's urgency about baptism, the same day, the same hour, 'What prevents me?', is a genuine model for the contemporary congregation's approach. Does this congregation's current practice of baptism preparation reflect this urgency, or has institutional prudence slowed the process to a point where the apostolic joy and urgency are suppressed? What is the right balance between the legitimate concern for the integrity of the profession and the apostolic pattern of joyful, undeferred obedience?
- Some members of this congregation may have family members or close friends who have been baptized as infants and who regard themselves as genuinely baptized. How should a member engage that person about baptism with both theological conviction and genuine pastoral sensitivity? What does it look like to maintain the Baptist conviction firmly while relating to the paedobaptist as a brother or sister in Christ rather than as an opponent?
- The lesson argues that every baptism is an occasion for joy, a corporate celebration of the gospel's power to produce new life in specifically named, specifically known people. When was the last baptism in this congregation? How was it celebrated? What would it look like for the next baptism to be celebrated with the fullness of corporate, theological, gospel-proclaiming joy that the ordinance deserves?
- If you were asked to explain to a new believer who had never been to a Baptist church before what believer's baptism by immersion means and why it matters, what would you say? Practice articulating the theological case in two or three paragraphs that are both theologically accurate and accessible to someone without prior theological formation. Bring your articulation to the next study session.

Prayer Focus

Begin by reading Acts 8:36-38 aloud: 'And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized? And Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.' Pause on the eunuch's question: 'What prevents me from being baptized?' It is the question of a man who has just encountered the gospel in the exposition of Isaiah 53, who has understood it personally and received it personally, and who sees the water and immediately wants to declare his faith in the most public and most covenant-significant form available to him. He doesn't say 'I need to think about it' or 'I need to wait for the right time.' He says: there is water. I believe. What prevents me? Let that question shape the prayers that follow.

Pray for those in this congregation and in the broader community around it who have heard the gospel and believed but who have not yet taken the step of baptism. Pray for the specific circumstances that may be preventing them, fear of public declaration, family pressure, misunderstanding of what the ordinance means, or simply the inertia of a decision deferred. Pray that the Spirit would work in each of these specific people the urgency and the joy that Philip's explanation of the gospel produced in the Ethiopian eunuch, and that the question 'What prevents me?' would rise in their hearts as a genuine and answered question: nothing prevents you. You believe. The water is here.

Pray for the elders and pastor as they prepare baptism candidates: that they would have the wisdom to examine professions with pastoral care and theological depth, the courage to engage the hard questions that genuine preparation requires, and the joy of presenting well-prepared candidates to the congregation for the covenant celebration of their baptism. Pray for the candidates themselves: that the preparation process would deepen their understanding of what they are about to do, confirm the genuineness of the faith they are professing, and produce in them the combination of seriousness and gladness that the ordinance deserves.

Pray for the congregation's engagement with the doctrine of baptism as it has been set out in these two lessons. Pray that the members would receive the theological argument for believers' baptism by immersion with the Berean eagerness that Acts 17:11 commends, examining the Scriptures to see whether these things are so, bringing their genuine questions and genuine convictions into contact with the argument the series makes, and growing in the depth of their understanding of the ordinance they have received. Pray for those whose own baptism history is complicated, who were baptized as infants, or in a different mode, or without adequate understanding of what they were doing, that the Spirit would give them clarity about what faithful discipleship requires in their specific situation and the courage to act on that clarity.

Close by giving thanks for the ordinance of baptism itself, for the wisdom and the grace of the Lord who appointed this specific, physical, bodily, communal, public form for the declaration of the new covenant's most fundamental realities. The Lord did not leave His church to invent its own forms for the declaration of the gospel; He gave it the visible word of baptism, as surely as He gave it the audible word of preaching and the covenantal meal of the Lord's Supper. Every believer who has gone into the water in the Trinitarian name and come up out of it as a member of the covenant community is a participant in the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5, the one sign of the one covenant of the one Lord who is the Head of the one body. To Him alone be the glory.

“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Ephesians 3:20–21, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36–39; 10:47–48; 16:14–15, 31–34; Romans 6:3–4; Mark 1:9–10; Colossians 2:12

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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