

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 19

THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

What Baptism Declares and Displays

Baptism is the gospel written in water — every great theme of salvation enacted in the body of a specific, named, Spirit-transformed person who belongs to the covenant community of the triune God.

“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female;

for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:27–28, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Colossians 2:12; Acts 2:38, 41

“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

The three lessons of Unit 6 have moved from foundation to application and from general to specific. Lesson 17 established what baptism is and is not, the ordinance-sacrament distinction, the positive content of the ordinance, and the case against baptismal regeneration. Lesson 18 established the proper subjects and mode, believers' baptism by immersion and the case against paedobaptism and alternative modes. This final lesson of the unit completes the series' treatment of baptism by examining its richest dimension: the full range of theological meaning that the ordinance declares and displays. Baptism is not a simple, single-declaration act; it is a theologically dense, multi-dimensional enacted proclamation of the gospel whose meaning is as rich as the salvation it declares.

The cover maxim for this lesson describes baptism as 'the gospel written in water.' This is not hyperbole; it is a theological claim that this lesson will substantiate by examining six distinct but inseparable dimensions of baptism's meaning. Baptism is a declaration of union with Christ in His death and resurrection, the gospel's central narrative enacted in the candidate's body. It is a declaration of cleansing, the forgiveness of sins symbolized by the washing of water. It is a declaration of new identity, the break with the old life and the beginning of the new, depicted in the imagery of clothing oneself with Christ. It is a declaration of church membership, entry into the visible covenant community of the redeemed. It is an act of obedience, the first and most public form of the disciple's submission to Christ's command. And it is a proclamation of the gospel itself, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ enacted before the watching congregation and the watching world.

Each of these dimensions of meaning is grounded in a specific New Testament text, and each contributes something distinctive to the full theology of baptism that a single text alone cannot supply. The six dimensions are not competing accounts of baptism's meaning but complementary facets of a single rich ordinance, each illuminating an aspect of the gospel that the other facets do not fully capture. The congregation that understands all six dimensions of baptism's meaning is a congregation that has grasped the full depth of the ordinance it practices, and that is equipped to celebrate every baptism with the full theological weight and the full pastoral joy that the gospel written in water deserves.

A note on the structure of this lesson: it differs from Lessons 17 and 18 in that it is organized primarily around the content of the baptismal meaning rather than around contested debates. Lessons 17 and 18 were primarily apologetic, defending the Baptist position against alternative understandings and arguing for specific conclusions in contested theological debates. This lesson is primarily constructive, building up a positive, comprehensive, text-grounded theology of what baptism means and why it matters. The argumentative energy of the unit's first two lessons gives way, in this final lesson, to the doxological energy of a community that has understood what the ordinance it celebrates actually declares about the God who ordered it, the Savior who accomplished what it proclaims, and the Spirit who produced the new birth it signifies.

I. BAPTISM AS A DECLARATION OF UNION WITH CHRIST

Buried and Raised with the Lord

A. Romans 6:3-4 in Full Theological Depth

The most theologically comprehensive description of baptism's meaning in the entire New Testament is Paul's exposition in Romans 6:3-4, and it deserves the most sustained attention of any single passage in this lesson: '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 passage appears in the context of Paul's answer to the antinomian question: 'Shall we continue in sin so that grace may increase?' (verse 1). His answer is grounded in the baptized believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection. The very question betrays a failure to understand what happened to the believer in conversion and what baptism declares about it.

The phrase 'baptized into Christ Jesus' (verse 3) describes a union that is both spiritual and covenantal: the believer is united to the person of Christ Jesus, and the baptism that declares this union is performed into His name, into the person and authority of the One whose death and resurrection are the ground of the believer's new existence. The phrase 'baptized into His death' extends the union to its most specific content: the believer's union is specifically union with Christ in the historical event of His death. This is not a metaphorical description of a vaguely spiritual affiliation; it is the claim that the believer's personal history has been genuinely incorporated into the history of Christ's own death, that what happened to Him on the cross is the event by which the believer's old self has been definitively put to death. The baptism declares this definitive death of the old self by physically enacting the burial that death produces.

Verse 4's 'we have been buried with Him through baptism into death' is the central declaration: burial. The candidate going under the water is enacting the burial of the old life, the decisive ending, the permanent sealing, the irreversible burial of the self that was enslaved to sin. And the candidate coming up out of the water is enacting the resurrection: '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 'newness of life' that baptism declares is not a moral improvement program but a genuine ontological newness, the life of the resurrected Christ made available to the believer through the Spirit's regenerating work. Baptism declares that this new life has begun: the old is buried, the new has emerged. The ordinance enacts, in the body of the specific person going into and coming out of the water, the most foundational narrative of the entire gospel: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ applied to the life of a specific person who belongs to Him.

B. The Implications of Union with Christ for the Baptized Life

Paul's use of the baptism declaration in Romans 6 is not merely theological exposition for its own sake; it is the theological ground of a moral and spiritual imperative. Romans 6:11-12 draws the direct implication: 'Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts.' The baptized believer has been declared, in the most public, physical, and covenant-significant form available to a human being, to be dead to sin and alive to God. The baptism is not merely a past event to be remembered; it is a present identity to be inhabited. The person who was baptized into Christ's

death is now expected to live as one who has died to sin, because the baptism has declared that this is precisely what has happened to him.

The connection between baptism and the Christian life is one of the most practically significant aspects of the ordinance's meaning for the congregation's ongoing formation. When Paul wants to ground the Christian's obligation to resist sin in the most fundamental available theological reality, he reaches for baptism. When he wants to establish the impossibility of continuing in sin for the genuinely converted person, he reaches for baptism. Baptism is not merely the entry ceremony into the covenant community; it is the defining declaration of a new identity that shapes every subsequent day of the baptized person's life. The congregation that understands its baptism in these terms, as the public declaration of a death and resurrection that has genuinely occurred, that is definitively permanent, and that is daily to be inhabited and expressed, has the theological foundation for the progressive sanctification that the Christian life requires.

Colossians 2:12 returns to the burial-and-resurrection theme of Romans 6:3-4 with a subtle but important addition: 'having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.' The addition is the phrase 'through faith in the working of God.' The baptismal resurrection to new life is received through faith, it is not a mechanical consequence of the water, but the fruit of genuine faith in the God whose working raised Christ from the dead. This addition confirms the Baptist's insistence that the grace of baptism operates through faith, not apart from it: the burial and resurrection that baptism enacts are genuine spiritual realities in the life of the one who receives the ordinance in faith, precisely because faith is the instrument through which the working of God, the same working that raised Christ from the dead, accomplishes the believer's spiritual resurrection to new life.

II. BAPTISM AS A DECLARATION OF CLEANSING

The Washing of Water and the Blood of Christ

A. *Acts 22:16 and the Symbolism of Washing*

The second dimension of baptism's meaning is the declaration of cleansing: the washing of water symbolizes the spiritual cleansing from sin already accomplished by the blood of Christ and the work of the Spirit. Acts 22:16 is the primary text: Paul's account of Ananias' instruction to him on the road to Damascus: 'Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.' The command to 'wash away your sins' is the baptismal action; the accompanying condition is 'calling on His name', the personal appeal to Christ that grounds the washing. The washing of sins is not accomplished by the water itself but by the 'calling on His name' that the water visibly enacts. The baptism is the public, covenant-significant form of the believer's appeal to Christ for the forgiveness of sins, an appeal that the water symbolizes and seals but does not itself accomplish.

The washing imagery of baptism connects the ordinance to a rich biblical tradition of water as the symbol of purification and new life. The priestly washings of the Mosaic law (Exodus 30:19-21; Leviticus 8:6), the prophetic promises of spiritual cleansing by water and Spirit (Ezekiel 36:25-26), and the apocalyptic vision of the great multitude who 'have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Revelation 7:14) all contribute to the baptismal symbolism of washing. The water of baptism stands in the tradition of these purification images as the visible enactment of the spiritual washing that the blood of Christ accomplishes and

that the Spirit applies. The one going into the water is enacting the spiritual reality of Ezekiel 36:25, 'Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols', in the specific New Testament form that Christ appointed for its covenant declaration.

The cleansing declaration of baptism has important pastoral implications for the congregation's ongoing life. The member who understands her baptism as a declaration of washing knows something about her standing before God that the daily experience of ongoing sin can obscure: she has been washed. The blood of Christ has cleansed her from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7). The Spirit's regenerating work has produced a new heart that has been declared clean in the most public and most covenant-significant form available to her. When the daily experience of indwelling sin threatens to overwhelm the believer's assurance, the memory of baptism can be a powerful anchor: 'I have been baptized. I have publicly declared, in the presence of God and the covenant community, that Christ's blood has washed me clean. That declaration is not revoked by my continued struggles with sin; it is the foundation on which the ongoing battle is fought.' The baptism is not a license for sin, Romans 6:11-12 forecloses that misreading immediately, but it is a permanent declaration of the cleansing that grounds the ongoing pursuit of holiness.

B. The Water, the Blood, and the Spirit

The cleansing declaration of baptism must be carefully related to the specific New Testament account of what actually accomplishes the cleansing it declares. The water of baptism does not cleanse sin; the blood of Christ cleanses sin. The ordinance declares the cleansing; the atoning work of Christ accomplishes it. First John 1:7 states the ground with crystalline precision: 'the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.' Hebrews 9:14 describes the mechanism: 'how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?' The conscience, the seat of the awareness of guilt that Acts 22:16's 'washing away your sins' addresses, is cleansed by Christ's blood, applied by the Spirit. The water of baptism is the visible, enacted declaration of this cleansing, not its instrument.

The relationship between the water, the blood, and the Spirit in baptism is one of the deepest theological themes in the doctrine of the ordinance. First John 5:6-8, a notoriously difficult passage, addresses the relationship between water, blood, and Spirit as the three witnesses to the truth of Christ: 'This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.' The three witnesses confirm the identity and the saving significance of Jesus Christ: the water of His baptism, the blood of His death, and the Spirit's ongoing testimony through the community of the redeemed. The baptism of the believer, in the tradition of Christ's own baptism, is administered with water as the visible declaration of the cleansing accomplished by His blood and applied by His Spirit. Water, blood, and Spirit are inseparable in the full theology of Christian baptism.

III. BAPTISM AS A DECLARATION OF NEW IDENTITY

Clothed with Christ, One in Christ

A. Galatians 3:27 and the Clothing Metaphor

The third dimension of baptism's meaning is the declaration of new identity: the break with the old life and the beginning of the new, depicted in the strikingly concrete imagery of Galatians 3:27, 'For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.' The clothing metaphor is among the most vivid and most theologically rich images for the new identity that conversion produces. To be clothed with Christ is to have Christ as the defining reality of one's public identity, the garment that covers the old self, that determines how the baptized person is perceived and known, and that constitutes her primary social and covenantal identity before God and the covenant community.

The metaphor functions at several levels simultaneously. At the most immediate level, it is a description of what happens in the act of baptism: the person who emerges from the water is clothed with Christ in the sense that she has publicly put on the identity of a follower of Jesus Christ, and that identity is now as publicly visible as a garment. At the deeper theological level, the clothing metaphor describes the believer's union with Christ in the most intimate possible terms: not merely association with Christ, not merely alignment with Christ's values and purposes, but the kind of thoroughgoing identification that a garment represents, Christ as the covering that defines the person's entire appearance and identity before God and the world. At the covenantal level, the clothing metaphor connects to the covenant community that the baptism establishes: the baptized person is clothed with the same Christ as every other member of the covenant community, and this common clothing is the ground of the radical social equality that verse 28 describes: neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The social implications of the new identity declaration are among the most practically significant aspects of baptism's meaning for the life of the covenant community. The baptism declares that the candidate's primary identity is no longer determined by ethnicity, social status, gender, or any other human category but by union with Christ, the same union that every other member of the covenant community shares. The diversity of the covenant community, which was one of the themes of the catholicity discussion in Lesson 8, is grounded precisely in this baptismal reality: all who have been baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with the same Christ, and the community constituted by this common clothing transcends every human distinction. The congregation that understands its baptism in these terms is a congregation that has the theological foundation for the radical, gospel-produced, identity-transcending community that the New Testament's vision of the church describes.

B. The Old Self Buried, the New Self Risen

The new identity declaration of Galatians 3:27 connects directly to the burial-and-resurrection declaration of Romans 6:3-4. The person who has been baptized into Christ's death has also clothed herself with Christ's resurrection life: the old identity, the identity defined by sin, by the flesh, by the structures of the old age, has been buried, and the new identity, the identity defined by union with Christ, by the Spirit's transforming work, by participation in the resurrection life of the new creation, has emerged from the water. The two declarations are

the same declaration viewed from two different angles: from the angle of what has ended (burial of the old self) and from the angle of what has begun (clothing with the new self in Christ).

The new identity declaration has important implications for the baptized person's ongoing relationship to the community she has entered. She is no longer defined by her pre-baptismal identity, not by her ethnic heritage, not by her social status, not by her history of sin, not by the categories by which the surrounding culture would classify and evaluate her. She is defined by her union with Christ and her membership in the covenant community that His blood has purchased. This is why the reception of the baptized person into the covenant community through the right hand of fellowship is not merely a social welcome but a covenantal affirmation: the community is saying that it recognizes in her the identity that baptism declares. She is clothed with Christ. She is one of them. The categories that might have defined her before are irrelevant to her identity here; what matters here is what her baptism has declared, that she belongs to Jesus Christ, and that through Him she belongs to the covenant community.

The new identity declaration of baptism also has eschatological dimensions that are frequently underappreciated. The person who has clothed herself with Christ has clothed herself with the One who is the firstfruits of the resurrection, the One in whose person the new creation has already begun. The baptized person's new identity is not merely a present social reality; it is the eschatological identity of the person who has been united to the Lord of the new creation and who will, at His return, be fully clothed in the resurrection glory that the baptism has declared in advance. The 'newness of life' of Romans 6:4 is the anticipation in the present of the eschatological newness that awaits the whole creation at the consummation; and the baptism that declares this newness is the covenant community's regular, enacted testimony that the new creation has already begun in the person of everyone who has been united to Christ by faith and declared in the waters of baptism.

IV. BAPTISM AS DECLARATION OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The Ordinance of Entry into the Visible Covenant Community

A. *The Inseparability of Baptism and Membership in the New Testament*

The fourth dimension of baptism's meaning, its declaration of church membership, was examined in some detail in Lesson 18's closing section, but it deserves its own treatment here as a positive theological theme rather than merely an implication of the apostolic sequence. Baptism is not merely an individual spiritual declaration; it is an inherently ecclesial act. It is performed by the covenant community on a new member, in the presence of the covenant community, as the public act of the covenant community's reception of a new member into its fellowship. The baptism enacts, in the most visible and most covenant-significant form available, the reality that Acts 2:41 describes as 'being added to the community', the formal incorporation of the personally believing convert into the visible body of Christ.

The ecclesial character of baptism is rooted in the Trinitarian name in which it is administered. To be baptized into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is to be received into the community that belongs to the triune God, the community that the Father has chosen, the Son has purchased, and the Spirit indwells. The baptism is the moment at which the individual's personal faith and personal new birth find their communal expression and

their communal confirmation: the covenant community gathered around the water is the visible expression of the new covenant community into which the baptized person is being received, and the baptism is the act by which that reception is publicly enacted. Baptism is, in this sense, the most ecclesologically dense act in the church's regular life, the moment at which the individual's private spiritual reality becomes the community's public covenantal act.

The inseparability of baptism and membership in the apostolic pattern, examined in Lesson 18 through Acts 2:41, is confirmed by the New Testament's consistent presentation of the baptized community as the specific, defined, identifiable covenant community of the local church. The letters of the New Testament are addressed to baptized communities; the governance instructions of the New Testament presuppose baptized members under elder oversight; the discipline process of Matthew 18 presupposes baptized members with a defined inside and outside. Baptism is not one spiritual practice among several in the Christian life; it is the foundational act through which the individual enters the covenant community and becomes subject to all the covenantal obligations and privileges that membership entails. Lesson 10's comprehensive account of church membership begins, at its deepest level, with baptism as the act that constitutes the covenant community and defines its boundaries.

B. Acts 2:38 and the Baptismal Entrance

Peter's call in Acts 2:38, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit', presents baptism as the public, covenant-enacted expression of the repentance that he has just called for. The sequence Peter describes is the sequence of entering the new covenant community: repentance (the internal, Spirit-produced turning from sin and toward God), baptism (the external, public, covenant-enacted declaration of that repentance), forgiveness (the covenantal benefit that the repentance and baptism declare), and the Holy Spirit (the covenant promise fulfilled in the life of the new community member). The baptism in Peter's instruction is not the cause of the forgiveness or the Spirit; it is the covenant form in which the repentance that receives them is publicly enacted and the community membership that they inaugurate is publicly constituted.

The ecclesiological significance of the Acts 2:38 instruction is that it establishes baptism as the entry point into the new covenant community established at Pentecost, the community that is described in verse 42 as devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. The person who has repented and been baptized in accordance with Peter's instruction has entered a specific community with specific practices, specific leadership, specific ordinances, and specific mutual obligations. Baptism is not the door into a vague spiritual status; it is the door into a specific covenanted community with all the accountability, all the privilege, and all the covenant faithfulness that belonging to that community requires. The 'one baptism' of Ephesians 4:5 is not merely a theological abstraction; it is the one enacted entry into the one body of the one Lord that constitutes the covenant community of the redeemed.

The practical consequence for the congregation's understanding of its own life is that every baptism is the community's own act as much as it is the candidate's act. When the elders baptize a new believer, they are acting on behalf of the covenant community that has examined and affirmed the candidate's profession; when the congregation witnesses the baptism, it is participating in the public enactment of its own growth; and when the congregation extends the right hand of fellowship to the newly baptized member, it is making the covenant commitment that membership entails, to preach the Word to this person, to administer the ordinances, to provide

pastoral care, to pursue in discipline if necessary, and to bear the burdens of this specific, named, newly received member of the body of Christ. The baptism is the moment at which all of this begins.

V. BAPTISM AS AN ACT OF OBEDIENCE

The First Public Submission to Christ's Lordship

A. Obedience as a Dimension of Baptism's Meaning

The fifth dimension of baptism's meaning is the one most practically immediate and most personally costly for many who have come to faith: baptism is an act of obedience to Christ's explicit command, the first and most public form of the new believer's submission to the Lordship of the One who has saved her. Matthew 28:19's 'baptizing them' is not a suggestion or an optional enhancement of the disciple-making process; it is a command embedded in the Great Commission's mandate, authorized by the one to whom 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given.' The person who has genuinely come to faith in Jesus Christ has come to faith in a Lord who commands baptism, and the refusal to be baptized, however motivated, however sincere the faith that accompanies the refusal, is a refusal of one of the Lord's most specific and most publicly verifiable commands.

The obedience dimension of baptism's meaning connects the ordinance to the larger biblical theology of discipleship that the Great Commission itself describes. Matthew 28:19-20 presents the disciple-making commission as involving both baptizing and teaching to observe all that Christ commanded. The 'teaching to observe all that I commanded you' is the whole-life discipleship program; the baptism is the public, covenant-enacted declaration that the disciple has submitted to the Lordship of the One whose commands she is committing to observe. The baptism is the first observation of the Lord's commands, the first act of obedience performed as an expression of the new disciple's commitment to the whole-life obedience that genuine discipleship requires. It is the inaugural act of the obedient life that the Great Commission envisions.

The pastoral significance of the obedience dimension is its capacity to address the contemporary evangelical tendency to separate genuine faith from public covenant declaration. The person who says 'I believe in Jesus but I don't need to be baptized' has, in effect, claimed to have genuine faith while refusing one of the most basic acts of obedience that genuine faith produces. James' argument, 'faith without works is dead' (James 2:26), applies here with particular force: a faith that refuses the first and most basic public act of obedience to the Lord's command is a faith whose genuineness should be honestly examined. Not because baptism saves, Lesson 17 argued extensively that it does not, but because genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ characteristically produces the desire to obey His commands, and the genuine disciple who has not been baptized has not yet obeyed the Lord's most specific, most public, and most publicly verifiable command. The pastoral invitation to baptism is, at this level, simply the invitation to do what genuine faith in a commanding Lord naturally produces.

B. Obedience, Faith, and the Public Declaration of Lordship

The obedience dimension of baptism is also the dimension most directly connected to the public declaration of faith that the ordinance enacts. When the candidate is baptized, she is not merely going through a religious ceremony; she is making the most public statement available to her that Jesus Christ is her Lord, more public than a verbal confession in a worship service, because a verbal confession is heard by those present and then passes,

while the baptism is a visible, physical, covenant-enacted act performed before witnesses and sealed by the community's formal reception of the new member. The baptism is the public declaration that bridges the private reality of personal faith and the public reality of covenant community membership: it takes what has been true privately, the personal faith, the Spirit's regenerating work, the new identity in Christ, and makes it publicly, covenantally, irrevocably true in the life of the covenant community.

The Philippian jailer's baptism in Acts 16:33 illustrates the obedience-and-Lordship dimension with particular vividness. This is a man who, hours earlier, was about to kill himself in despair; a man who had no prior knowledge of Jesus Christ; a man who has just experienced an earthquake, the loosing of prisoners, and a dramatic divine intervention in the middle of the night. He asks: 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' Paul and Silas tell him: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' He and his household believe. And that same night, 'immediately' (verse 33), they are baptized. The urgency of the baptism reflects the urgency of the obedience: the Lord who has saved this man commands baptism, and the man who has genuinely received the Lord will not delay in obeying His command. The night is dark and the hour is late, but the obedience cannot wait for a more convenient occasion. This is what the obedience dimension of baptism looks like at its most immediate and most vivid.

VI. BAPTISM AS A PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

The Visible Sermon Without Words

A. The Enacted Proclamation

The sixth and most comprehensive dimension of baptism's meaning is the one that comprehends all the others: baptism is a proclamation of the gospel itself. Every baptism is a sermon without words, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ enacted in the body of a specific, named person before the watching congregation and the watching world. When the candidate descends into the water, the gospel's most fundamental narrative is performed: the death of the old self, the burial of the sinful life, the decisive ending of what was. When the candidate ascends from the water, the gospel's most glorious reality is enacted: the resurrection to new life, the emergence of the new creation, the beginning of the life that Christ's own resurrection has inaugurated and guaranteed. The baptism is not a symbol of this narrative in the sense that a picture is a symbol of a reality elsewhere; it is the gospel performed in the body of a person whose own history has been incorporated into the history of Christ's death and resurrection.

Paul's description of baptism as 'proclaiming the Lord's death' (the language he uses for the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:26) is not his only claim that the ordinances are forms of gospel proclamation; it reflects a broader conviction that the church's covenant acts are not merely interior spiritual events but public declarations to the watching world of the realities that the gospel announces. Every baptism declares to all who witness it: death and sin have been definitively defeated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the Spirit of the risen Lord is still producing new birth in specifically named people who have personally encountered the living God; the community gathered around the water is the community of those who have been raised to new life in the One who conquered death; and the promise of the gospel, that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved, is a promise that is

still being kept, in the life of the person now ascending from the water, in the community now receiving her with the right hand of fellowship.

The proclamatory character of baptism gives the ordinance a significance for the church's evangelistic mission that is frequently underestimated. The watching world, if it is present when a congregation celebrates a baptism, is witnessing the gospel's most visually immediate and most physically enacted form of proclamation. The baptism is not merely an internal covenant act of the covenant community; it is the community's most direct visible testimony to the watching world that the gospel of Jesus Christ is still producing the new birth in the lives of specifically named, specifically known people who have been genuinely transformed by the power of God. The congregation that invites the unconverted to witness its baptisms is providing those witnesses with a form of gospel encounter that no verbal explanation alone can supply, the visible, physical, enacted proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the body of someone the witnesses know by name.

B. First Peter 3:21 Revisited

The most theologically dense statement about baptism's relationship to salvation, 1 Peter 3:21, brings together several of the dimensions examined in this lesson in a way that rewards close reading in light of the lesson's broader analysis: 'Baptism now saves you, not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.' Lesson 17 examined this verse in the context of the refutation of baptismal regeneration; this lesson's examination focuses on the positive theological claim the verse makes about baptism's genuine saving significance.

Peter says baptism saves. He immediately qualifies what kind of saving he means: not the physical washing (not the removal of dirt from the flesh, a clear disavowal of the water itself as the saving mechanism), but an appeal to God for a good conscience. The Greek word translated 'appeal' (*eperotema*) can also mean 'pledge' or 'commitment', the believer's covenantal pledge to God, the formal declaration of the new covenant commitment that the baptism enacts. The saving is accomplished 'through the resurrection of Jesus Christ', the resurrection is the ground, not the water; the water is the appeal, the pledge, the enacted declaration of the faith that receives the salvation grounded in the resurrection. Baptism saves, on Peter's account, in the sense that it is the covenant form in which the faith that receives salvation publicly declares itself, seals itself, and formally commits itself to the community and to the God who has saved.

The 'appeal to God for a good conscience' connects 1 Peter 3:21 directly to Acts 22:16's 'wash away your sins, calling on His name.' Both texts present baptism as the covenant form of the believer's personal appeal to God, the public, enacted, irreversible declaration of the faith that calls on the name of the Lord. The conscience that is appealed for in 1 Peter 3:21 is the same conscience whose dead works are cleansed by Christ's blood in Hebrews 9:14. The cleansing of conscience, the resolution of the awareness of guilt that sin produces, is accomplished by Christ's blood, declared in the appeal of baptism, and sealed by the Spirit's testimony that the new covenant's defining promise has been fulfilled in the baptized person: their sins have been forgiven, the law has been written on their hearts, and they now personally know the Lord whose covenant they have publicly entered. The gospel written in water is complete.

VII. THE INTEGRATED THEOLOGY OF BAPTISM

Unit 6 in Retrospect and the Path to Unit 7

A. *The Six Dimensions as One Declaration*

This lesson has examined six distinct but inseparable dimensions of baptism's meaning: union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4), cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16), new identity in Christ (Galatians 3:27), entry into the covenant community (Acts 2:38-41), obedience to Christ's command (Matthew 28:19), and proclamation of the gospel (the visible sermon enacted in the water). These six dimensions are not competing accounts of the same ordinance, each of which must be ranked against the others to determine which is most fundamental. They are the six facets of a single jewel, complementary angles of vision on the same rich, multi-dimensional, gospel-dense act. Each dimension illuminates aspects of the gospel that the others do not fully capture; together they constitute the full theology of what baptism declares and displays.

The integration of the six dimensions is itself theologically significant. The union with Christ that Romans 6:3-4 describes is the same union that produces the new identity of Galatians 3:27; the cleansing of Acts 22:16 is the same cleansing that is declared in the ordinance of entry into the community of Acts 2:38; the obedience of the baptized believer to Christ's command is the public form of the same faith that receives the cleansing and enters the new identity; and the proclamation of the gospel that the baptism enacts is the proclamation of the same death and resurrection that is the ground of the union, the cleansing, the new identity, and the community entry that the other dimensions describe. Baptism is the gospel written in water because the gospel itself is a single, unified, multi-dimensional reality, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and its application to the life of every person who receives it by faith, and the ordinance of baptism is the enacted declaration of that entire reality in the body of the specifically believing, specifically named, specifically Spirit-transformed person who goes into the water and comes back up out of it in the Trinitarian name.

The pastoral consequence of holding all six dimensions together is a congregation that receives every baptism with the theological seriousness and the pastoral joy that the full theology of the ordinance requires. The baptism is not a brief ceremony to be efficiently dispatched at the end of a Sunday service; it is the community's most comprehensive enacted proclamation of the gospel, performed in the body of a person whose specific story of transformation the community knows and celebrates. The preparation of candidates, the gathering of the congregation, the administration of the ordinance, the reception of the new member through the right hand of fellowship, and the celebration that follows are all part of the community's full engagement with the gospel written in water, the most physically immediate, most covenant-significant, most personally enacted proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the congregation performs in its regular life.

B. *The Path to Unit 7*

Unit 6's three lessons have provided the most comprehensive treatment of baptism available in this series: the foundational theology of what baptism is and is not (Lesson 17), the specific arguments for believers' baptism by immersion (Lesson 18), and the rich multi-dimensional theology of what baptism declares and displays (this lesson). Together the three lessons constitute a complete Baptist theology of baptism that is both theologically rigorous and pastorally practical, grounded in careful exegesis of the New Testament's baptismal texts, connected to the broader covenantal theology that the series has been developing since Lesson 6, and applied to the specific life of the congregation that practices the ordinance with theological seriousness.

Unit 7 turns to the second ordinance that Christ has appointed for the life of the new covenant community: the Lord's Supper. The transition from baptism to the Lord's Supper is the transition from the ordinance of entry to the ordinance of renewal, from the once-for-all public declaration of the new believer's covenant entry to the regular, ongoing, community-wide renewal of the covenant that the Lord's Supper provides. If baptism is the gospel written in water at the beginning of the covenant life, the Lord's Supper is the gospel proclaimed in bread and cup throughout the covenant life, the regular, enacted reminder that the community's existence is grounded in the death of the One who gave His body and blood as the foundation of the new covenant, and the regular anticipation of the eschatological feast at which the whole community will sit at the table of the returning Lord.

The connection between the two ordinances is not merely sequential but theological: both enact the gospel, both declare the new covenant's realities, and both are administered within the governance structure that Unit 5 established. The congregation that understands baptism and the Lord's Supper in their full theological depth, as the two enacted proclamations of the gospel that Christ has appointed for the regular and visible expression of the covenant community's identity and mission, is a congregation whose entire corporate life is shaped by the gospel in its most visible and most covenant-significant forms. To these two ordinances, the gospel written in water and the gospel proclaimed in bread and cup, belongs the full theological weight that Christ's own institution assigns to them, and the pastoral celebration that the covenant community of the redeemed owes to the Lord who appointed them for exactly this purpose.

“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.”

Romans 6:3–4, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Romans 6:3-4	Paul's foundational exposition of baptism's meaning: 'all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death... we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that... we too might walk in newness of life.' The burial-and-resurrection imagery establishes baptism as the enacted proclamation of the gospel's central narrative applied to the believer's own history. The theological ground of Paul's argument against antinomianism: the baptized person has been declared dead to sin and alive to God.
Union with Christ	The most fundamental description of the believer's relationship to Jesus Christ: a genuine, personal, spiritual incorporation into the person of Christ through the Spirit's regenerating work and the believer's faith. Declared in baptism (Romans 6:3-4: 'baptized into Christ Jesus... into His death'), sealed by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13: 'in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body'), and the ground of every other gospel benefit. The baptism is the public, covenant-enacted declaration of this union.
Acts 22:16	Paul's account of Ananias' instruction at his conversion: 'Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.' Establishes baptism as the covenant form of the believer's personal appeal to Christ for the forgiveness of sins. The washing symbolizes the spiritual cleansing accomplished by Christ's blood; the 'calling on His name' is the faith that grounds the washing. The water does not wash away sins; Christ's blood does.
Galatians 3:27	Paul's description of baptism as the public declaration of new identity: 'all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.' The clothing metaphor presents Christ as the defining reality of the baptized person's public identity, covering the old self, constituting the new, and grounding the radical social equality of verse 28 ('neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female').
New Identity	The third dimension of baptism's meaning: the decisive break with the old life and the beginning of the new, symbolized by the clothing imagery of Galatians 3:27. The new identity is not a moral improvement of the old but a genuinely new ontological reality, the life of the resurrected Christ available to the believer through the Spirit's regenerating work. The baptism declares that the old identity (defined by sin, ethnicity, social status) has been buried and the new identity (defined by union with Christ) has emerged.
Covenant Entry	The fourth dimension of baptism's meaning: formal incorporation into the visible covenant community of the local church. Grounded in Acts 2:38-41's three-stage sequence (receiving the word, baptism, addition to the community). Baptism is not a private spiritual event but an inherently ecclesial act, performed by the covenant community, in the presence of the covenant community, as the public enactment of the community's reception of a new member. The 'one baptism' of Ephesians 4:5 is the enacted entry into the 'one body' of the one Lord.
Obedience	The fifth dimension of baptism's meaning: the first and most public act of the new believer's submission to Christ's explicit command. Grounded in Matthew 28:19's 'baptizing them' as a command embedded in the Great Commission and authorized by the one to whom 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given.' The obedience dimension addresses the contemporary tendency to separate genuine faith from public covenant declaration: genuine faith in a commanding Lord naturally produces the desire to obey His commands, including the most specific and most publicly verifiable command of baptism.
Gospel Proclamation	The sixth and most comprehensive dimension of baptism's meaning: the enacted proclamation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the body of a specific person before the watching congregation and the watching world. Every baptism is a 'visible

	sermon', the gospel performed in the physical medium of water and a human body. Connects the ordinance to the church's evangelistic mission: the watching world present at a baptism witnesses the gospel's most physically immediate and most visually compelling form of proclamation.
1 Peter 3:21	Peter's theologically dense statement about baptism's saving significance: 'baptism now saves you, not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.' Baptism saves as the covenant form of the believer's personal appeal to God, the public, enacted declaration of the faith that receives the salvation grounded in Christ's resurrection. Not an instrument of saving grace (the water does not save) but the enacted declaration of the faith that calls on the Lord whose resurrection is the ground of salvation.
Eperotema	The Greek word in 1 Peter 3:21 translated 'appeal' (NASB) or 'pledge' (NIV). Can mean either the question/appeal of a petitioner or the pledge/commitment of a covenant partner. Both meanings are theologically appropriate in the baptismal context: the baptism is simultaneously the believer's appeal to God for a good conscience (the petition of one who calls on the Lord's name) and the believer's covenant pledge to God (the formal commitment of the new covenant member). Together these meanings capture baptism as both the declaration of the faith that calls on Christ and the covenant commitment that the baptism formally enacts.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that baptism is the gospel written in water, that the six dimensions of its meaning together constitute a comprehensive, enacted proclamation of the entire gospel, from the union with Christ in His death and resurrection through the cleansing of sin, the new identity, the covenant entry, the obedience, and the gospel proclamation that comprehends them all. This conviction liberates the congregation from any tendency to treat baptism as a merely symbolic or purely institutional act; the ordinance is as theologically rich as the salvation it declares, and its celebration should reflect that richness.

We must believe that the six dimensions of baptism's meaning are not merely abstract theological categories but realities that are directly relevant to the ongoing Christian life of every baptized member of the congregation. The union with Christ declared in baptism is the theological ground of the daily battle against sin (Romans 6:11-12). The cleansing declared in baptism is the anchor of assurance when the experience of ongoing sin threatens to overwhelm the conscience. The new identity declared in baptism is the ground of the radical, gospel-produced community of Galatians 3:28. The covenant entry declared in baptism is the beginning of all the covenantal obligations and privileges that Lessons 10-12 described. The obedience enacted in baptism is the inaugural act of the whole-life discipleship that the Great Commission envisions. The gospel proclaimed in baptism is the regular reminder that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the foundation of everything.

We must believe that the ordinance of baptism, faithfully understood and faithfully practiced, is one of the richest regular spiritual resources available to the congregation, not only for the candidates who receive it but for the members who witness and celebrate it. Every baptism renews the congregation's own covenant commitment, proclaims the gospel in its most visually immediate form, and demonstrates the Spirit's ongoing work of new birth in the specific community gathered around the water. The congregation that receives every baptism with the full theological weight of the six dimensions is a congregation that is regularly formed by the gospel in one of its most powerful enacted expressions.

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

We should feel a renewed personal significance in our own baptism. Many members of this congregation were baptized years or decades ago, and the memory of the event may have faded to the status of a religious milestone without clear ongoing significance. This lesson is an invitation to recover the full theological weight of what happened in the water: a public declaration of union with Christ in His death and resurrection; a covenant appeal for the cleansing of a guilty conscience; the public clothing of a new identity in Christ that supersedes every other identity category; the formal entry into the covenant community that has watched over our souls; the obedience to the Lord's command; and the proclamation of the gospel's central narrative in our own body. This did not happen to someone else; it happened to us. And the realities it declared are still true.

We should feel a pastoral desire for every baptism in this congregation to be the richest possible enacted proclamation of the gospel that the circumstances allow. Not the most elaborate, the most theatrical, or the most aesthetically impressive, but the most theologically substantive, the most clearly grounded in the six dimensions of meaning that this lesson has examined, and the most corporately engaged by the congregation that witnesses it. The baptism that is poorly prepared, briefly administered, and casually celebrated is a baptism that is wasting

the gospel's most visually immediate form of proclamation. The baptism that is carefully prepared, reverently administered, and joyfully celebrated is a baptism that is honoring the full theological weight of the ordinance Christ appointed.

The theology of baptism should shape the congregation's understanding of itself. We are a people publicly identified with Christ in His death and resurrection, cleansed by His blood, united to His covenant community, submitted to His Lordship, and called to bear witness to His gospel. Baptism is the public declaration of this new identity, and a church that lives in light of its baptism understands both who it is and what Christ has called it to be.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Read Romans 6:1-14 this week as a meditation on your own baptism. Verses 1-11 are the theological exposition; verses 12-14 are the practical application. As you read, substitute 'I' for 'we' and 'me' for 'us': 'I have been baptized into Christ Jesus and into His death... I have been buried with Him through baptism into death... I am to consider myself dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.' Let the passage speak to you as the baptized person you are, not merely as a theological exposition of what baptism means in the abstract. Bring one specific insight from this meditation to the next study session.
- Write a brief personal reflection, one or two paragraphs, on the meaning of your own baptism, incorporating at least three of the six dimensions examined in this lesson. The goal is not theological comprehensiveness but personal ownership: what does it mean to you that you have been declared united to Christ, cleansed, clothed in a new identity, entered into this covenant community, obedient to your Lord, and a proclaimer of the gospel? Share the reflection with a fellow member or an elder as a way of renewing the covenant significance of the ordinance you have received.
- Prepare for the next Lord's Supper observance in this congregation by specifically connecting the two ordinances in your preparation: you have been baptized (once, as the declaration of your covenant entry); you are about to receive the Supper (regularly, as the renewal of the covenant that your baptism established). The Supper is the ongoing covenant meal of the baptized community; the baptism is the entry that admits you to the Table. Holding both ordinances together in your understanding of the congregation's covenant life is one of the most important dimensions of the ecclesiology that this series has been building.
- Identify one person in your life whose journey to baptism you can specifically pray for and practically support: someone who is preparing for baptism, someone who has recently come to faith but has not yet been baptized, or someone who is considering the claims of the gospel and moving toward faith. Pray for them by name this week, asking the Spirit to confirm in them the faith that baptism will declare, and commit to one specific act of encouragement in their journey toward the water.
- As a concluding exercise for Unit 6, write a one-paragraph description of what a faithful, joyful, theologically rich baptism celebration looks like in this congregation, what elements should be present (the candidate's testimony, the congregation's gathering, the pastor's explanation, the mode, the reception), what theological content should be communicated (which of the six dimensions should be explicitly named), and what spirit should characterize the occasion (solemnity, joy, gospel proclamation). Bring the paragraph to an elder as a constructive contribution to the congregation's ongoing reflection on its baptism practice.

Key Texts: *Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Colossians 2:12; Acts 2:38, 41*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- When you were baptized (or when you have witnessed baptisms in this congregation), which dimension of the ordinance's meaning was most clearly communicated and most personally significant? Which of the six dimensions examined in this lesson was least present in your understanding at the time? How has this lesson changed or deepened the way you understand the baptism you have received?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Romans 6:1-11 carefully. What is the question Paul poses in verse 1, and why is the question a misunderstanding of the gospel? How does Paul use baptism in his answer (verses 3-4)? What are the three stages of the baptismal narrative in verse 3-4 (baptized into His death, buried with Him, raised to newness of life)? What does the purpose clause of verse 4 ('so that... we too might walk in newness of life') specify about the goal of the baptismal declaration? How does verse 11 draw the practical application from the theological declaration?
- Read Galatians 3:26-29. What is the basis of 'sonship' in verse 26 ('sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus')? What metaphor does Paul use in verse 27 for the baptized person's relationship to Christ? What social distinctions does verse 28 declare to be irrelevant within the community defined by this baptism? How does verse 29 connect the baptized community to the Abrahamic promise? What does this passage suggest about the social and community-forming implications of baptism's new identity declaration?
- Read Acts 22:6-16. What was the context of Paul's baptism (his Damascus road encounter, described in verses 6-11)? What did Ananias say to him in verse 16? What two elements are combined in Ananias' instruction ('be baptized' and 'calling on His name')? What does the phrase 'wash away your sins' mean in light of what we know about the Baptist's understanding of baptism (that the water does not accomplish the washing)?
- Read 1 Peter 3:18-22. What is the context in which Peter discusses baptism (verses 18-20)? What does Peter say about baptism in verse 21? What does he say baptism is NOT (verse 21a)? What does he say baptism IS (verse 21b)? What does he identify as the ground of the saving (verse 21c: 'through the resurrection of Jesus Christ')? How does verse 22 (Christ's exaltation) connect to the saving power attributed to baptism in verse 21?
- Read Colossians 2:11-13. What does Paul describe as 'a circumcision made without hands' (verse 11)? What imagery does verse 12 use to describe baptism (buried and raised up)? What does the phrase 'through faith in the working of God' in verse 12 specify about how the resurrection dimension of baptism is received? How does verse 13 describe the condition from which the baptized person has been raised?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson presents six distinct but inseparable dimensions of baptism's meaning. Do you find this multi-dimensional analysis helpful, or does it create confusion by multiplying the significance of a single act? Is there a 'primary' dimension of baptism's meaning from which the others are derived, or are all six genuinely coordinate? How would you decide which dimensions are most fundamental if you had to rank them?
- Paul uses baptism in Romans 6 to establish the theological impossibility of continuing in sin for the genuinely converted person. How does the baptismal declaration accomplish this argumentative purpose? Is Paul's

argument that the person who has been baptized cannot continue in sin, or that the person who has been genuinely converted (and whose conversion is declared in baptism) cannot continue in sin without contradicting the fundamental reality that the baptism declared? How does this distinction affect the pastoral application of the passage?

- The lesson describes 1 Peter 3:21 as presenting baptism as 'the covenant form of the believer's personal appeal to God.' The Greek word *eperotema* can mean either 'appeal' or 'pledge/commitment.' How does each meaning change the understanding of what baptism is doing in Peter's account? Are the two meanings genuinely compatible with the Baptist understanding of baptism as an ordinance operating through faith?
- The lesson argues that the six dimensions of baptism's meaning together constitute 'the gospel written in water.' Is this a helpful way of summarizing the ordinance's significance, or does it risk over-claiming what baptism accomplishes? If baptism is 'the gospel written in water,' what is the Lord's Supper? How do the two ordinances relate to one another in their proclamatory character?
- The lesson connects the obedience dimension of baptism (submission to Christ's explicit command) to the question of the genuineness of faith. The person who claims genuine faith in Jesus Christ but indefinitely refuses baptism is a person whose faith's genuineness should be 'honestly examined.' Is this a fair and adequate pastoral response to the contemporary evangelical tendency to separate faith from baptism? What other reasons might a genuine believer have for deferring baptism, and how should those reasons be pastorally addressed?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the congregation's own ongoing life should be shaped by its baptismal identity, the awareness that every member has been publicly declared united to Christ, cleansed, clothed in a new identity, entered into the covenant community, obedient to the Lord, and a proclaimer of the gospel. How would a congregation whose members lived in continuous awareness of their baptismal identity look and behave differently from a congregation whose members have largely forgotten what their baptism declared? What is the most significant single way that this congregation's life would change if it more fully inhabited its baptismal identity?
- The lesson proposes that every baptism celebrated in the congregation is an opportunity for the whole community to renew its own covenant commitment, re-engage with the gospel's central narrative, and celebrate the Spirit's ongoing work of new birth. What specific elements of the congregation's baptism practice would most strengthen this communal, covenant-renewal dimension of the ordinance? What would need to change in the preparation, the administration, or the celebration to make every baptism the kind of community-forming, gospel-proclaiming event that the six dimensions of its meaning make it?
- The lesson closes by looking forward to the Lord's Supper in Unit 7, noting the connection between baptism (entry) and the Supper (ongoing renewal). How does understanding the Lord's Supper as the 'ongoing covenant renewal' complement the baptism's character as the 'covenant entry'? When you next receive the Supper, how might the memory of your baptism, specifically the declaration of union with Christ, cleansing, new identity, and covenant entry that it enacted, enrich your reception of the bread and cup?
- If you were to write a brief (two-paragraph) explanation of what baptism means to you personally, incorporating the six dimensions of this lesson, what would you write? Practice articulating the full theology of baptism in language accessible to a new believer preparing for the ordinance, not a theological treatise but a warm, personal, gospel-centered account of what the water declares. This is the kind of explanation that every member of this congregation should be able to give.

Prayer Focus

Begin by reading Romans 6:3-4 aloud one more time, slowly: '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.' Pause after each clause. Baptized into Christ Jesus. Into His death. Buried. Raised. Walk in newness of life. These are not theological categories to be analyzed; they are the realities that define the present existence of every person in this room who has been baptized. You have been incorporated into the death of Jesus Christ. His death is your death, the death of your old self, the burial of your sin, the definitive ending of the life that was enslaved to what Christ came to defeat. And you have been raised with Him to walk in newness of life. His resurrection is your resurrection, the emergence of a new self, the beginning of a new life, the anticipation of the eschatological newness that will be fully realized when He comes. Let that reality, your reality, shape every prayer that follows.

Pray in gratitude for your own baptism, however long ago it occurred, however much or little you understood it at the time. Give thanks that the declaration it made is still true, that you are still united to Christ, still cleansed by His blood, still clothed with the new identity of one who belongs to Him, still a member of the covenant community that His Spirit has gathered, still obedient to the command of the Lord who saved you. The water is long dried; the declaration is permanent. Give thanks for the specific people who were present at your baptism, the pastor who administered it, the elders and members who witnessed it, the family and friends who celebrated it. Give thanks for the congregation into which you were received by the right hand of fellowship, and for the community that has watched over your soul in the years since.

Pray for those in this congregation and in the wider community who are approaching baptism, who are standing at the edge of the water, who have professed faith, who are preparing to make the most public covenant declaration of their lives. Pray that they would understand, as fully as the Spirit can enable in the time available, what the water will declare about them: that they are united to Christ in His death and resurrection, that their sins have been washed away by His blood, that they have been clothed with a new identity that transcends every other category by which they have been known, that they are entering a covenant community of mutual obligation and mutual love, that they are submitting to the Lordship of the One who commands the ordinance, and that they are proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ before the watching congregation and the watching world. Pray that they would go into the water in full awareness of what the water will declare.

Pray for the congregation's engagement with the doctrine of baptism as Unit 6 comes to its close. Pray that the three lessons, the foundational theology, the proper subjects and mode, and the full range of meaning, have produced not merely theological knowledge but a deepened theological formation: a congregation that knows more fully what it means that it is a congregation of baptized people, that practices the ordinance with more intentionality and more joy, and that celebrates every baptism with the full weight of what the gospel written in water declares. Pray that the doctrine of baptism, studied carefully and received gratefully, would produce the kind of gospel vitality in this community that it was always intended to produce: a community that preaches the gospel, that produces new births through the Spirit's sovereign work, that receives new members through the covenant sign of believers' baptism, and that celebrates every addition to the community as one more evidence

that the promise of Acts 2:39 is still being kept, 'For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.'

Close with the anticipation of Unit 7. The gospel that is written in water at the entry will be proclaimed in bread and cup throughout the covenant life. The ordinance of baptism and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper are the two enacted proclamations of the gospel that Christ has given His church, the two visible words that accompany the audible word of preaching in the full ministry of the means of grace. Give thanks for both: for the baptism that publicly declared the beginning of the new covenant life, and for the Supper that regularly renews the covenant that the baptism established. To the God who appointed both, who works through both, and who is glorified in both, to Him alone be the glory, in this church and in Christ Jesus, to all generations forever and ever.

“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: Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Colossians 2:12; Acts 2:38, 41

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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