

**Please turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 2. A couple of weeks ago we considered the sacraments in a general way. We considered what the sacraments are, that they are means of grace given to us by the Lord, and that they are necessary components in the life of a Christian. This morning we move from the general to the specific as we take up the first of the two sacraments. Give now your attention to the reading of God's most holy Word from Colossians chapter 2 beginning at 10.**

**\*Read Colossians 2:10-12\***

**\*Pray\***

**When we come to consider the sacrament of baptism we must be sure that we are not imposing upon it traditions or teachings that are contrary to the Word of God. There are some who claim the title of Christian but completely neglect this sacrament as something which is spiritual and not a physical sign placed upon the one receiving baptism. There are those who view baptism as merely symbolic, emphasizing the sign aspect of the sacrament but completely ignoring the seal aspect of it. Then there are those overemphasize the seal aspect by insisting that the sacrament infuses the recipient with those things sealed unto him, thus making the sacrament the operative work where by salvation comes. This is the error known as sacerdotalism. We must remember that the sacraments are sensible signs and seals of the covenant of grace. To overemphasize one aspect of the sacrament to the neglect of the other is to put ourselves in grave danger of falling into many grievous errors. So what do we confess about baptism? What is it that we believe, according to Scripture, baptism is? Our Confession of Faith states, "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his**

**Church until the end of the world.” This morning we will consider the theme that baptism is a sign of our entrance into the covenant people of God and a seal of our union with Christ. We will consider this under three heads: first, entrance into the the covenant people of God; next, the washing away of our sins; and finally, the call to a new life.**

**So first let us consider that baptism is the sign and seal of our entrance into the covenant people of God. Here we see the direct connection made between the Old Covenant sacrament of circumcision and the New Covenant sacrament of baptism. Under the Old Covenant the people of God were to be circumcised as a mark of separation from the heathen nations. This was instituted in Genesis 17, “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.” This was the initiatory rite into the covenant people. Anyone who was already part of the people of God, which was Abraham and his family at this point, was to be circumcised to show that they belonged to the Lord. All who were born into this covenant people of God were to have this sign placed upon them as well. And even those of the heathen nations who were converted to the true religion were given the sign of circumcision because they had now entered into the covenant family.**

**But this bloody sign of circumcision was one which pointed towards the greater reality that was to come in Christ. It pointed toward the circumcision made without hands, the circumcision of**

**the heart. Many will say that this is what is fulfilled in the New Covenant, and to an extent they would be correct, but they often neglect to realize that this was something presently true of the Old Covenant people of God as well. Deuteronomy 30:6, “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.” Jeremiah 4:4, “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.” Here in Colossians we see that the Old Covenant people of God were circumcised in the heart by their faith in Christ Jesus, and that now the New Covenant people of God have their hearts circumcised in the same way. “In whom [that is, in Christ] also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ...” Calvin writes that Paul “proves that the circumcision of Moses is not merely unnecessary, but is opposed to Christ, because it destroys the spiritual circumcision of Christ. For circumcision was given to the Fathers that it might be the figure of a thing that was absent: those, therefore, who retain that figure after Christ’s advent, deny the accomplishment of what it prefigures.”**

**So now there is no longer the command of the people of God to be circumcised, but instead that Old Covenant sign has been replaced by baptism. In Christ you have received the circumcision that is without hands having been buried with Him in baptism. Baptism is the New Covenant sign and seal of initiation into the covenant people of God just as circumcision was of old. It is where the Christian life begins insofar as it is when and where we are initiated into the visible covenant community, whether as adult converts or whether as covenant children, and where our relationship to Christ and His church is formally acknowledged. It is Christian baptism that separates you from the unbelieving world around you. It is Christian baptism that marks you as being part of the visible Church. It is Christian baptism that declares to all who**

see that Jehovah is your God and you are His. I remember reading a great account of Martin Luther who, during times of great temptation, would grab a piece of chalk and write on his table, *Baptizatus sum* (I have been baptized). It was not the sign and seal that mattered most to him then, but what was signified and sealed. He belonged to Christ. In this world you will face great times of temptation. You will face great times of doubt. There will be times when you question your faith and question your standing before the Lord. Let the truth of what you baptism signifies be a comfort to you in those moments, not that it is your baptism that saves you or puts you in right standing with God, but that it is a sign and seal that you belong to Him. You belong to Christ. You are part of the covenant people of God.

Baptism not only places the name of Christ on those who undergo it, but also seals the promise of God to them with the authority of God himself, much like a king signing a royal decree and then affixing his seal to it, imprinting it with his signet ring. One of those great promises of God that is sealed in baptism is the washing away of our sins. When you improve upon your baptism by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, when it is made effectual in your heart by the operation of the Spirit, then what is sealed in baptism is rightly and truly sealed unto you. In this circumcision without hands, the circumcision of the heart, the Spirit of God cleanses you by “putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” What a great promise and reality this is that if you are in Christ your sins have been washed away. Just as the waters of baptism being poured out give visible representation of cleansing of the body, so too has the blood of Christ Jesus washed over you, His blood was poured out for the remission of your sins, and you have been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. This is what the word baptism means, a washing with water. This concept of have water sprinkled upon or poured out on a believer symbolizing the washing away of sins is not some new concept either, but was foretold in the Old Testament. Ezekiel 36:25 states, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and

from all your idols, will I cleanse you.” Paul makes the same case for Christian water baptism when recounting his testimony in Acts 22:16, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” This cleansing from sins and being made in right standing with God is shown forth to you in the imagery of baptism, but it is Christ’s blood applied to you and not the water which truly does wash away your sins. The active cleansing agent is always and only the blood of Christ; baptism is never and in no possible respect the purifying element. This must never be forgotten nor confused. The outward washing with water symbolizes the “washing” of the soul in the blood of Christ. Baptism is not that washing, but it is a sign of the “washing of regeneration” (Tit. 3:5).

And so Paul uses this imagery of being buried with Christ in baptism. It’s not to show the mode by which one is to be baptized as some argue. It is to represent the dying of the old man, the dying of the body of sin, and him being put in the grave. The old man has been destroyed by death in Christ. That is why you can say with the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:1-2, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” There is no condemnation for you if you are in Christ Jesus because your sins have been washed away, they have been put to death nailed to the cross of Christ. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” That is what is signified and sealed in baptism. That is the blessing that the Spirit applies to each and every one of you have been brought out of darkness and into Christ’s marvelous light. Your sins have been washed away. The old man has been put to death and no longer has dominion over you. You have made free from the law of sin and death and are now counted as righteous before the Lord. Remember that. Rest in that. This sign is given as an assurance that your sins have been forgiven. I know many people

who were raised in very legalistic churches that taught you could lose your salvation. They told me that they had this great fear that they would die in their sleep and not enter glory because they had little confidence in the fact that their sins are forgiven. Friends, the devil will use this as a means to shake your faith and cause you to doubt and despair. Do as Martin Luther did and remind yourself of your baptism and what has been signified and sealed in it. Remind yourself that your sins have been washed away and nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Remember the words of the psalmist in Psalm 103:11-12, "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

But perhaps you are sitting here today and you have received that sign of baptism but have never received the thing signified which is Christ Jesus and union with Him. Perhaps you have received the seal of the sacrament but that seal has not been applied to you in the heart by the working of the Holy Spirit putting to death the old man. If that is you then the call to you this day is make good on your baptism, to lay hold of the promises that have been given unto you in receiving that sacrament, and to rest in Christ Jesus. See the wickedness of your sins, how you have committed high treason against the King of kings, and that what awaits you is eternal punishment for your crimes against the Lord of glory. Feel the immense weight of your sin and recognize that there is nothing you can do to wash them away. There is no action you can take to cleanse your soul from the stain of sin. Then see the Lord Jesus Christ whose blood was poured out for the remission of sins and run to Him. Turn to Him. Put your trust in Him. He is the only means of salvation. There is other name under heaven whereby men must be saved. Confess your sins unto the Lord and plead forgiveness for them, and He will forgive you of your sins for He is faithful and just to do so. Hear the call of the Gospel, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Take hold of the thing

**signified. Lay hold of the promises sealed in your baptism. Embrace Christ Jesus this day, putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, putting to death the old man so the is buried in the grave and has no more dominion over you. Repent and believe the Gospel.**

**If you have done this, if you have trust in Christ Jesus alone for salvation, if your sins have been washed away by the blood of the Lamb as is symbolized in the washing of the water of baptism, then there is a response required on your part. What has been sealed unto you in baptism is the call to a new life. “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” The old man, the man of sin, the body of death, was put into the grave nevermore to be seen, but you have been raised with Christ Jesus through faith and are no longer that old man but have been made new. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” The old man is dead, passed away and buried, and you are now a new creature, all things are become new. You have been ingrafted into Christ and partake of every spiritual blessing that is found in union with Him. Your baptism is a real and tangible reminder of your being justified in Christ and your need to walk in Him. Matthew Henry writes, “The thing signified by our baptism is that we are buried with Christ, as baptism is the seal of the covenant and an obligation to our dying to sin; and that we are raised with Christ, as it is a seal and obligation to our living to righteousness, or newness of life. God in baptism engages to be to us a God, and we become engaged to be his people, and by his grace to die to sin and to live to righteousness, or put off the old man and put on the new.” This is your duty if you are in Christ, to walk in the paths of righteousness which you have been placed on by virtue of being united to Him. Romans 6:4, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”**

**You must remember your baptism. Not in just a mental recollection of the time you were baptized. No, you are to remember in an active way, in the same way you are to remember the Sabbath. As the Larger Catechism says, you are to improve your baptism. “The needful but much neglected duty of improving our Baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others, by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of the Baptism and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that Sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.” The things signified in baptism should be brought to mind and impressed upon your hearts every time you see the sacrament administered or hear teaching on it. Let it be ever present in your mind, influencing how you go about your daily life. Let it change your actions and desires and speech. Let the reality of what you have been sealed with shape every aspect of your life and being. You cannot claim the promises of the Lord and yet go on living as though there has been no change. There is a holiness without which no man will see the Lord. Remember what we heard just last week in our thanksgiving sermon from just a few verses above our text today, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.”**

**Your baptism is efficacious. Those things signified and sealed in baptism have truly been signified and sealed unto you if you have been washed in the waters of baptism. The question is, will they be efficacious unto your blessing, or will they be efficacious unto your**



**cursing? When someone receives a diploma upon graduation, the diploma certifies that he has completed the course of instruction as recognized by the faculty and board of the institution granting the degree. If a person forges a diploma or has misrepresented himself to the institution, the certificate does not make him qualified in the field it represents. It would be a serious crime and offense to the institution to make such a false claim. Similarly, someone who wrongly receives a sacrament offends God and does not bring the blessings promised upon himself. Instead he calls down the wrath of God upon himself for his false claim. If you have been brought into the covenant people of God by virtue of your baptism then you will prove yourself to be one of two things, either a covenant keeper or a covenant breaker. To those who embrace the covenant by faith in Christ Jesus, every blessing promised in the covenant is yours. But to those who reject the covenant, every curse of the covenant will be placed upon you in that last great day, and what was to be a blessing to you will now be used as testimony against you before the throne of God. If you have truly been united to Christ, if you have truly received Him, if the old man is buried in the grave, then walk in the newness of life that you have been called to by the sealing of this covenant in the waters of baptism.**

**Brothers and sisters, baptism is a great and glorious gift that the Lord has given to His people for our benefit. Do not think it is just the sprinkling or pouring of water and that is it. There is so much to this great mystery, this sacrament, which you must lay hold of. Let it be a comfort to your soul. Let it be a reminder that you are Christ's and He is yours. Whenever your enemies (the world, the flesh, and the devil) tells you that you are anything other than who you are in Christ, be comforted to know that the Holy Spirit's seal of you, of your life being hidden with God in Christ, of being seated in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus our Lord, is confirmed both in the Word and in the sign and seal that the sacrament is. Your baptism is a sign and seal to you that you are no longer your own, but belong, body and soul, to your faithful Savior Jesus Christ, and you receive the testimony of our baptism in faith. Believe that for**

**which your baptism stands. It is not a bare sign, but also a seal of the grace that has brought you safe thus far and surely will lead you home. This sacrament truly is of divine grace and a sign and seal of His good-will towards you and the covenant that He has made with you. Baptism, by sealing this covenant to us, sustains, nourishes, confirms, and increases our faith.**