

Baptism - A sign of Grace

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WP-20000, Memphis Theological Seminary
Dr. Lin Hudson
Class Notes of Bill Snodgrass
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God is the center of all things and is the prime mover, moving all things toward a future that is hopeful for unity and peace. Jesus is the manifestation of God in human form.

Most arguments around baptism come down to:

1. How to do it.
2. Does it have any power?

These arguments come from a perspective of humanity as the primary actor in baptism, not God.

Mark1:1-14

John the Baptist – proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
Metanoia (Greek) – to turn completely and fully. Turn away from – turn toward such that you can see differently.

By turning away from the first century lifestyle, they were getting free of being unclean, outcast, and rejected. They were being baptized into

Jesus was baptized by John.

A turning point, whereby he fully embraced his ministry. No longer a carpenter.

The Spirit descended upon Jesus.

The sky tore apart... The "heavens" were no longer separate from earth—the coming together of God into mankind (incarnation) symbolized.

God said, "This is my son..." A public expression of God's love for the Son.

Jesus proclaimed the good news of God, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Story of Jesus—Kerygma—the sacred story of Jesus.

Jesus came preaching.

Jesus lived a new reality.

Jesus was put to death by established powers.

Jesus was resurrected from the dead by the power of God.

Jesus called to witnesses to form a new ordered community of faith, continuing the new reality of God in the world.

Jewish Roots—Before Jesus, God had a relationship with the Hebrew, and between them was the covenant of circumcision as a sign of the relationship.

Circumcision – membership in the covenant relationship with God.

A permanent inclusion into the covenant.

A person was Jewish if born to a Jewish woman. Circumcision extended the covenant to all members of the male's family.

Baptism for purification.

Jewish rites of purification included baptism. One rite was the cleansing ritual of emersion performed on "unclean" gentiles. (Tebilah)

Purity had to be maintained, as it was easy to become unclean. Therefore, purification was required. Emersion was required.

Often at special festivals or to enter the temple.

Proselyte baptism was practiced. Preferred "living" water—water that was moving, as in a stream.

Baptism was carried on before the adoption by the early Christian church.

Early Church Understandings

Imitation of Christ's own baptism. (Mark 1: 9-11):

9At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10**As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. **11**And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Baptism for repentance and forgiveness, starting anew. (Acts 2:37-39)

37When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

38Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39**The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Note the similar language in this case and in Christ's baptism.

V 39 is similar to Jewish tradition in that the promise extends to family (e.g. children and all...)

United with Christ in death, and raised to new life. (Romans 6:3-4)

3Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4**We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Likening baptism to Jesus' suffering, resurrection, and death.

Born of the Spirit. (John 3: 1-20, 22-27)

1Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. **2**He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

3In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.^[a]"

4"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

5Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. **6**Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^[b] gives birth to spirit. **7**You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You^[c] must be born again.' **8**The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

9"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

10"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"

11I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. **12**I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? **13**No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.^[d] **14**Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **15**that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.^[e]

16"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,^[f] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **17**For God did not send his

Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **18**Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.^[g] **19**This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. **20**Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. **21**But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."^[h]

There is a sense that those born into the Jewish race are endowed with all the rights of the Hebrew nation. Born of water includes both natural birth, but also the baptism of purification into the Jewish heritage.

Likewise, being born of the Spirit, endows people with all the rights of God's promises.

22After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. **23**Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. **24**(This was before John was put in prison.) **25**An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew^[i] over the matter of ceremonial washing. **26**They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." **27**To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.

Liberation into the New Ordered Reality. (Galatians 3: 27-28)

27for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **28**There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Perhaps "clothed with Christ" applies to vestment—white robes worn after baptism.

Baptism into Christ makes all liberated and equal.

Theological Developments

The Apostolic Tradition (215) written by Hippolytus. Source of early Christian liturgies. Description of catechumens was the most detailed at the time. They had to give up Idols, killing. They were examined carefully to see if they were worthy to take up the life of a Christian.

After 3 years of training and examination, on Easter Eve, (night of Jesus' passing over from death to life), the gathered by the font, interviewed, stripped of their old clothes. They were then immersed, and raised into new white clothes.

They were blessed, and given water (to clean the inside) milk and honey (entrance to promised land) and then communion.

They had to be sponsored by someone. Lifestyles were examined closely.

Some sources included giving them candles (light to the world)

The week following, they wore their white robes and often gathered with others who were baptized.

Huge lifestyle change—often, being identified with Christian church was a choice into persecution.

PERHAPS: <http://www.bombaxo.com/hippolytus.html>

Constantine's edict in 313 lifted restriction on Christian assembly and worship.
Eased the need for secrecy, but continued to be observed on Easter Eve.

Augustine's theology of original sin.
Said that we are all born as sinners inherent as a result of being descended from our sinner parents.

Since forgiveness is from God and through baptism, infants need be baptized.
God through this act moves people toward righteousness, said Augustine.

Medieval Understandings

Move toward theology of salvation from original sin, promising eternal life.

Move away from baptism on Easter/Pentecost.

11th Century: move toward baptizing infants immediately after birth.
Aquinas said in 13th century that baptism created a sacramental seal that set one on the path toward salvation.

Move toward private baptisms.

Reformation Understandings

Luther – God has bound Godself in a covenant (a mutual relationship—two-way relationship) with us, as a result of baptism.

Fonts were moved from the entrance of the church to the front of the church as a reminder of one's baptism.

(Aside: We live in a tension between being a sinner and being made righteous, both at the same time.)

Anabaptists – Believers receive the purification—a rite of entrance into a pure community.

Did not immerse. Poured water.

Zwingli—compared baptism to the covenant of God with Israel.

Switzerland at the time of Luther. Thought the sacrament was a symbol of spiritual change. It marked a person into a community of faith. It was a public expression of status as one who is part of a community of faith. It was not in any way a part of receiving salvation.

Calvin—a visible word, making God's will visible.

40 years after Zwingli, also in Switzerland (Geneva). Faith was brought through the word. Baptism, said Calvin, was an effective means of communicating the gospel of Christ. It preaches the gospel through visible expression. Sacraments are an outgrowth of the word, and a visible representation of the word.

Five Theological Meanings

Participation in Christ's Death and Resurrection.

To not fear death, since we are already resurrected in Christ, changes everything.

Conversion, Pardoning, and Cleansing.

There is a need for us to be forgiven. For the old to be cast aside.

The Gift of the Spirit.

Incorporation into the Body of Christ

The Sign of the Kingdom.

Participation in Christ's Death and Resurrection

Human nature and the social realities to which persons belong are buried with Christ.

Power of sin is broken. Baptized persons are no longer captives to sin, but are free.

Persons are raised to new nature and social reality by the power of Christ's resurrection.

Conversion, Pardoning, and Cleansing

Confession of Sin

Conversion of heart.

Given a new ethical orientation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Gift of the Spirit

Anointing and promise of the Holy Spirit.

Empowering and uniting of community.

Marking the Christian as a son or daughter of God.

Nurturing the life of faith.

Incorporation into the Body of Christ

A sign and seal of our common discipleship.

Unites us into a common faith in Christ.

A sign of healing of broken relationships and reconciliation into oneness.

Overcoming of divisions.

Sign of the Kingdom

A dynamic which embraces the whole of life through gifts of faith, hope, and love.

Extends to all nations.

Anticipates the day when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord

Baptismal Liturgies

Acts of worship that seek to signify the reality of God that is known in the event that we call Baptism.

Formalize the encounter between God and humans.

Water, an essential element of life, grounds our relationship with God in the very basic elements of earthly existence.

Use theological language to express the divine reality.

Baptismal liturgies will have some or all of the following parts:

Presentation

- Scriptural statements of baptism
- Theological explanation of baptism
- Presentation of candidates for baptism by elders, sponsors, parents, or self.
- Questions for adults and parents or guardians.

Profession of Faith

- Renunciations—questions that call for the public renunciation of evil and sin
- Professions of Faith—statements of faith commitments.
- The Baptismal Creed—public affirmation of the faith of the whole church
- Commitments to participation in the body of Christ, the Church

Thanksgiving Over the Water

- Prayer thanking God for whom God is and what God has done.
- Reciting the story of God's actions through water
- Prayer for the Holy Spirit (epiclesis)
- Doxology

The Baptism

- The physical act of sprinkling or pouring with water, or dipping in water while reciting the name of the Triune God.

Laying on of Hands

- Laying hands on newly baptized by any baptized Christian
- Pronouncement of a blessing, the sealing of the Holy Spirit.
- Marking the sign of the cross on the forehead. Oil may be used.

Welcome

- Announcement that each baptized person is received into the household of God.
- Response of the gathered community.
 - Verbal welcoming
 - Physical gesture of welcome

Passing of the Peace

Benediction

The Liturgy of Baptism

Presentation
Profession of Faith
Thanksgiving Over the Water
The Baptism
Laying on of Hands
Welcome
Passing of the Peace
Benediction