

## ***“Improving Your Baptism”***

Various Scriptures

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**Jordan:** Good morning.

**Brave Men:** Good morning.

**Jordan:** Well, I’m happy to be back with you all. I’ll say that I’ve really enjoyed the opportunity to be up here because it’s given me a chance to get to know a lot of you a lot better than I used to, so I’ve enjoyed that. It has also given me an opportunity to study topics that I would not otherwise have studied as detailed as I would have. I’ve learned a lot through this. So I appreciate that you’ve given me the opportunity; it’s been a blessing to me. Why don’t we open with prayer before we start?

Heavenly Father, we thank You for this day that You’ve given us. We thank You that we have a chance to get together as brothers in Christ to consider Your word. We do pray that Your Spirit would bless the time that we spend together, that He would be working in our lives and in our hearts with the things that we talk about.

We do lift up Tab to You as she prepares for her surgery. We pray that You would be helping the tumor to shrink in size, that You would be giving the doctors wisdom. We know, Lord, that You are a God of providence and that You use means to bring about Your will. But You are also able to work above those means as well, and so we just continue to pray fervently for her—for Tab, for all those who love her—and if it’s Your will, Lord, that You would be helping the surgery to go well, to reduce the tumor, to rid the cancer from her.

We also thank You for the service of Bob Parker, Lord, for saints like him that You’ve brought into our lives to encourage us. We pray that You would be with his family, that You would comfort them at this time; ultimately, Lord, as he now is enjoying eternity with You, that You would be glorified in the conversations that may be had at the funeral, and that You would be encouraging all of us to be looking forward to that day as well. I pray all this in Your Son’s name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Jordan:** Okay. Well, as Don mentioned, I’ve had a theme here with my topics, which is always “Improving.” And he did a good job with all the jokes livening you up, so I may not need this first slide. But I figured that just in case you needed it, I put a fun picture in here. It’s a young baby saying, “So at church today a guy in a suit tried to drown me.” *(Laughter)* “And I kid you not: my family just stood there and took some pictures.” *(Laughter)*

And so we are going to be talking about baptism today. And the last couple times I’ve been up here I’ve laid out some ground rules at the beginning. I’m going to do that in a different way today, which is sharing with you a visual that was presented to me earlier this week at our church school class on Sunday. And this comes from a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Italian philosopher. His name is Gianbattista Vico. And what he has put here is his thoughts on the distinguishing features of different types of men.

Along the horizontal axis here we have men who display how they apply what they know. And the vertical axis is men who accumulate knowledge with how much they know. And so as you go further up you know more; as you go further to the right you

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apply what you know more. And you can see in the bottom left that the fool is someone who knows little and does little.

But we’re not just striving not to be fools; we don’t just want to be learned men, which is men who know a lot but don’t do anything with it. And on the bottom right hand side he calls “*the astute ignoramus*” what we would equvalate as someone who has street smarts. They kind of know how to act, but they don’t always know why they do what they do.

We are looking to be “*sage men*”—men with wisdom, men who allow our learning to lead to living. And if you need any further encouragement for this, I give to you Philippians 4:9, where Paul says: “*What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things.*”

This concept is going to be especially important for today’s study, because we’re doing a topic that is probably very familiar to many of you: Baptism. But we’re not necessarily looking to learn something new about Baptism, as much as we’re looking to understand how it is that we allow what we know about our baptism to change the way we live our lives. And so that’s where we’re going to start today.

And along those lines I just wanted to mention briefly where we have been in the previous two studies that I had. So in the first study when I was up here we did talk about “Improving Our Participation in The Lord’s Supper.” And the reason why that was important was because we learned that it’s possible to take The Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. So if it can be done in an unworthy manner, then it can also be done in a worthy manner. And we should be looking to see how we do that in a worthy manner.

And so the things that we thought about were: How do we better ready ourselves for taking that sacrament? How do we better receive the sacrament itself? And then how do we review our conduct afterwards?—three r’s there.

Then we also looked at “Improving Our Participation in the Lord’s Day.” Again we saw that it is possible to profane the Lord’s Day. So if it is possible to profane it, that means that it’s also possible to better hallow it. So how do we improve on how we participate in the Lord’s Day? And again we looked at better readying ourselves for that day, better resting in the day, and then revering the day, setting it aside as holy. It should be separate from the other days of the week. We should be spending the day in worship.

So that’s where we’ve been. And I’ve titled this slide “Means of Grace.” And the reason why I did that is because both of these topics have something on common, which is that they are considered means of grace in the covenant of grace. And I just wanted to review this quickly. So there are a couple of things I’m just going to pull from *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and *The Shorter Catechism* that talk about this.

In *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, in chapter 7 which talks about God’s covenant with man, they mention this. They say, “*Under the gospel, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.*” So that is how God exhibits to us the covenant of grace, now that Christ has come: the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments.

We also have *Westminster Shorter Catechism* question 88 which says: “*What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?*”

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And the answer here is that His ordinances: which again, which are *“the Word, sacraments and prayer, all of which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.”*

So we’ve talked about the Lord’s Supper. We’ve talked about the Lord’s Day, which is where we hear the preaching of the Word, which is where we gather together for public prayer, and in which we should spend the day in other acts of worship. We have not yet talked about Baptism, which is why I picked this topic for today, to kind of round out what has turned into a series on the means of grace and how we improve them in our lives.

And one reminder I just want to say. When we say “the means of grace,” it’s not just that these are the ordinary ways in which God saves the elect. But they are also the ways in which God feeds, nourishes, encourages, rebukes, corrects, and trains as people. They are ongoing aspects of our lives as well, not just a one-time thing for us.

And so I think that for today, when we talk about improving our baptism as it relates to these means of grace, that should include humbling ourselves to realize that we need to correct any past behaviors as we do that. And so that’s the encouragement for today.

And so with that being said, you might be asking yourself, “Improving our baptism? You had me up until this point. But I’ve already been baptized. So how do I improve that?” And I’m not going to stand here and argue that if you were sprinkled you need to go back and get dipped. I’m not going to sit here and say that if you were baptized once that you should be baptized twice or three times. That is not what I’m going to be saying.

So where does this topic of improving our baptism actually come from? And as interesting as it may be, again I’m going to come back to *The Westminster Larger Catechism*. Question 167 asks, *“How is our baptism to be improved by us?”* What a convenient question for this topic for today! (*Laughter*) And so we’re going to spend our time here.

But before we answer that question I think it’s going to be really important for us to make sure we have a solid understanding of what Baptism is and what it means before we can know how we can improve it. So that’s where we’re going to go.

And I think the best place to start is with some definitions. And the first thing that I want to spend some time defining is what a sacrament is. And I think this is a good description of the definition of what a sacrament is. This also comes from *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. It defines the sacraments as *“holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace.”* And they *“represent Christ and His benefits.”* They also *“confirm our interest in Him.”* They put *“a visible difference between those that belong to the church and the rest of the world.”* And finally *“the partakers of the sacraments solemnly engage themselves to the service of God in Christ, according to His word.”* So that’s the definition.

It’s important to note that there is *“a spiritual relation between the sign and the thing signified.”* There’s a relationship there. We’re going to talk about this and I’m going to show this to you here in just a minute.

It’s also important to note that when we say that there is *“grace exhibited in the sacraments,”* it isn’t due to the sign itself. There is nothing in the power of the sign itself that exhibits that grace. It’s only the work of the Spirit that gives that grace to you. So just being washed with water doesn’t in and of itself do anything. It is a sign of what the Spirit does, okay?

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So that’s a definition. But let’s see if we can better understand this. And a book that I was given as I was preparing for this—or not given; lent—is a book called *I Will Build My Church*. I would highly recommend this if for any reason you really like these topics. It was a selection of writings that were from a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Irish Presbyterian minister and professor. His name was Thomas Witherow. And I think he does a fantastic job of helping to show this to us.

Just a couple comments on Witherow. He was known for having written prolifically on his defense of Presbyterian beliefs. If it helps, in Presbyterian beliefs there are three core doctrines there that distinguish Presbyterianism from other branches of the faith. They include covenantal infant baptism, the rule of the church by its elders, and the keeping of the Lord’s Day as the Christian Sabbath.

A couple commentators on this book have mentioned that his work on ecclesiology is an important reminder about how church government is an important part of Christian discipleship. And when properly implemented it enables the church’s members to pursue a fruitful Christian life.

I thought this was a really helpful book. So what I’m going to do is, I’ll just read the introduction that he had to his section on Baptism. And I’ve prepared a visual diagram in your notes that you can follow along with here as we talk through this. So feel free to just listen. You can fill in the blanks on the left-hand side of the chart that’s on your page as I go here. But definitely make sure that you’re listening to this first part.

So Witherow notes: *“Salvation comes to us from God. His eternal purpose in regard to salvation is carried into execution by His Son and by His Spirit. The great work of the Son is to make atonement for sin by His death. The great work of the Spirit is to produce within us a new nature. From the Son we receive our title to heaven, from the Spirit our fitness for heaven. By faith in Christ we are justified; by the grace of the Spirit we are sanctified.*

*“The work of each is equally necessary to the eternal happiness of people. The same Bible that says: ‘Whoever has the Son has life’ also expressly teaches that ‘unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”*

And so what we have here in this visual is God’s plan for salvation. You can see that there is work being done by the Son and by the Spirit. They each have Their own parts in that plan for salvation. And I’ll just leave this slide up for another minute or so if you need to catch up as far as your diagram goes. But this is a visual of what I just read. And each are equally necessary, okay?

I’m going to continue reading, and I have another visual for you. So this is the plan for salvation. Does anyone need a couple more seconds for this, or did you get it?

And the two references here that summarize the Son’s work are 1 John 5:12, and for an example of the Spirit’s work is John 3:6.

Okay, the next slide. You’ll notice that this looks visually similar, and that’s intentional. And I’m going to continue reading.

*“It is a striking evidence of God’s care for the best interests of His people that He has under both dispensations appointed ordinances to be the symbols of human redemption. The work of the Son was represented to God’s people in ancient times by the lamb of the Passover, which was an emblem of Christ our Passover Lamb, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:7.”*

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**Transcriber’s Note:** 1 Corinthians 5:7, NKJV. *“For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”*

*“But it is represented to us as the Lord’s Supper. ‘For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. “The symbol of the Passover has now become the symbol of the Supper.*

*“But the great truth embodied in both ordinances, which is redemption by the blood of Christ, has always been the same.*

*“In like manner, the work of the Spirit was in ancient times shadowed forth in the rite of circumcision, which is the emblem of purification, a symbolic act that represented the sanctifying effects of the grace upon the heart. But it is exhibited to us in the ordinance of Baptism, which is a symbolic action that figures forth the removal of sin. Once again the sign has changed. But the great truth embodied in them both , which is the sanctification by the Holy Spirit, is ever the same.”*

So in summary, the Supper represents the work of Christ. Baptism represents the work of the Spirit. God says to us through the one, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”* And He says to us in the other, *“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean.”* And those last two references were Acts 16:31 and Isaiah 1:16.

So hopefully what you’re able to see in these two visuals is that the sacraments signify something. They signify God’s plan for redemption—the work of Christ, the work of the Spirit—and because of this work we have the promises of the benefits of that redemption sealed to us. So the sacraments have a meaning. They symbolize something and signify something. And I thought that reading this was hopefully helpful; I think that seeing it is even more helpful when you can see it that way. So hopefully that’s a help to you all as well.

Okay, so that’s the sacraments. Why don’t we move on now and talk specifically about Baptism and focus on Baptism?

Again let’s start with a definition. I’m going to give a few different definitions here. I think one of the best ones that is easy to digest again comes from *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*; this is question 94. It says: *“Baptism is a sacrament wherein with the washing with water, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, it does signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord’s.”*

And so I’ve summarized that here as “ingrafted into Christ,” otherwise known as we have a union with Christ; this is how some other c confessions and catechisms will refer to that. We are cleansed from sin by His blood, as partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace. And our engagement to be the Lord’s is to walk in newness of life. These are typically the three main components that a lot of definitions will give you when they define what Baptism is.

And Scripture affirms this in numerous places. These catechisms are giving this definition of Baptism from numerous places. I think a really good one that has all three of these components in one spot is Acts 2 verse 38. I’m going to read the New King James Version here. *“Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.’”* So we have the remission of sins—that cleansing—being baptized in the name of Jesus—union with Christ,—and that idea of repentance, walking in newness of life.

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Okay, so this is a good working definition. But let’s again seek to better understand what that actually means. And here I think the Heidelberg Catechism does a really good job of kind of putting this in more easy to understand terms of what this means to us.

So in the Heidelberg Catechism Question 69 asks: *“How does holy Baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?”* How is it that Baptism benefits us?

And the answer is: *“Christ instituted this outward washing, and with it gave the promise that a surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly His blood and Spirit wash away the impurity of my soul, that is, all my sins.”* It’s that sign of washing, right? That’s what the sign means to us.

Question 70, which is right after that one, asks: *“What does it mean to be washed with Christ’s blood and Spirit?”* Oops, I lost the slides for a minute. There we go.

So what does it mean to be washed with Christ’s blood and Spirit? The answer is: *“To be washed in Christ’s blood means to receive forgiveness of sins from God through grace because of Christ’s blood poured out for us in His sacrifice on the cross. To be washed with His Spirit means to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ.”* And here’s what I want you to catch: *“So that more and more we become dead to sin, and lead a holy and blameless life.”*

We are now starting to get into what this means for us, and what we should be doing when we know what baptism means to us. More and more we become dead to sin and lead a holy and blameless life. Notice that there is even a sense of improvement mentioned there: more and more; we continue to improve in that sense.

And then I’ll just also mention here from the Constitution of the denomination of my church that it adds a similar idea here: that *“Baptism signifies our dying to sin and our rising to newness of life by virtue of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection.”*

And so here I think we start to understand what Baptism is, what it means to us. And because of that I think we can now hopefully turn to the question of how our baptism is to be improved by us. I’m just going to pause and ask if there are any questions so far. I realize this can be maybe a meaty topic when you start getting into definitions and catechisms and all that kind of stuff. But so far, are we kind of tracking at least?

**Ted Wood:** Jordan, I would ask how you see the difference between “signifies” and “symbolizes,” because I think in general that the Protestant understanding is that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper symbolize things versus signifying things.

**Jordan:** Yeah. I see “signify” and “symbolize” as being similar. I think “signify” or “symbolize” and “seals” are two different things.

**Ted:** Okay.

**Jordan:** You know, a good way in which this has been explained to me, even as I’ve heard it in the past, is: Imagine that you are going somewhere on vacation. And let’s say you have a destination in mind; let’s just say it’s a national park. As you’re driving to the national park, you might see a sign on the road that says, “National Park 50Miles Ahead.” That sign isn’t the national park, right?

**Ted:** Right.

**Jordan:** It’s signifying to you that there is a park further on down that road. So when I think of “signifies” or “symbolizes,” that’s what I’m thinking of. It is a visual

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representation of something else. We don't care so much about the visual representation. We didn't drive all that way to see the sign, right? The sign is pointing us toward what it is that we're looking to actually behold at the end of it. And the seal of it is just God's promise that's there, and that when you get there that these benefits are for you.

So that's how I view those. I don't know if I would say that I put a lot of thought into the semantics of “symbolized” or “signified.” But when I think of signify and seal, I think of “signify” being as a sign of something else, something greater, something that you should be looking forward to. And the sign is just the visual representation of that to us.

Okay. So as we jump into some of the components of the answer to this question, one of the things that I just wanted to highlight right off the bat—and I think I've included this on the back of your handouts—the actual answer from the Catechism. And I've included the reference notes as well, in case you would like to look up these references afterwards in your spare time to see why they're saying the things that they're saying.

But notice the very top of the answer to this question. I'll say this. Typically within the Westminster Catechisms the answers to the questions are usually a repeat of the question. So for instance, if they say, “How is it that we are to improve our baptism?”, the answer would be “We are to improve our baptism by,” and then they give you the answer.”

Notice what the answer is for this one. *“Improving our baptism is a needful and much neglected duty.”* Now I'll confess that I have not spent a ton of time reviewing and researching *The Westminster Larger Catechism* or the *Shorter Catechism; their question and answer formats. But I will say this. This stands out to me as being a different way that they respond to questions than they normally do.*

*I said that normally it's a repeat of the question and then the answer. And for this one the answer is: “The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism is.”* I think that if we were just to stop right there and say “Wow!” These divines hundreds of years ago were acknowledging then that improving our baptism is something we need to do that we often neglect. And I think that if we were just to stop there, I imagine that if any of you are like me that would be humbling in and of itself. I mean, have I ever even thought of what improving my baptism means as a concept? I didn't even know this was a concept until I started thinking a little bit about things like this a few months ago, a year ago, whatever it may be.

And so I just want to pause and mention that. I think there is something to be said right off the bat about the importance of this in our lives that's echoed here in the way they responded to this question.

Okay. So that being said, there is a lot to this response as you can see on the sheet. I purposefully tried to break this up by bullets to make it a little bit easier to digest. Otherwise, you see the paragraph format. And it's very easy to get lost in a large paragraph. And the way that I broke up these bullets—and I think I've mentioned this before—was that any time there is a semicolon, I started a new line. So the way that I'm interpreting these is that semicolons are good places to pause and think about those lines. It also just so happens that in most of the cases where they have a semicolon is also where they have a Scriptural reference. So for instance, if you look at the first one where there's a letter A., those Scriptural references at the bottom are kind of where they're going back to Scripture to have that part of the answer in mind.

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Okay. So this is a long answer. We’re not going to go through every single bullet here. What I want to draw your attention to is three specific ones; for the most part the first two, and then the third from the bottom. And so having said that, the first one which I think is very interesting and helpful is that we can improve our baptism *“especially in time of temptation.”*

I’m going to give you one anecdote and four verses related to this particular part of the answer. Here’s the anecdote. It has been said that the theologian Martin Luther had come to such a strong appreciation of the effectual means offered through Baptism that in times of temptation he would take out a piece of chalk, and he would write *Baptizitus sung,*” which means “I have been baptized.”

So when he was feeling tempted, he would remind himself, “I have been baptized. I do not need to carry on with this temptation. Christ offers me a way out.” And it was not the sign that mattered to him,—going back to the sign and the thing signified,—it wasn’t the sign of baptism that he was holding onto; it was what was signified, which is Christ. He was telling himself “I am united with Christ. Christ has overcome sin. He has given me the ability to overcome sin. I have been baptized.”

And we’re all sinners. And I think that can be a helpful anecdote for us as we go through life in the times that we’re sensing temptation, to remind ourselves that we have been baptized.

Here are the four verses that go along with this. And I apologize that I did not provide these on the slide.

Hebrews 4:14-16; I’ll go ahead and read it. *“Since then we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens—Jesus, the Son of God,—let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One in every respect who has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”* I have been baptized.

Romans 6:3-6: *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”* I have been baptized.

I would also commend to you Psalm 51, which is a Psalm that probably many of you are familiar with. It is David’s confession to the Lord after his sin with Bathsheba when he was approached by Nathan the prophet. He talks a lot in that Psalm about cleansing, purification, God washing him, and that in doing this he will instruct others in the right way. That’s a great one.

And then one that maybe most people wouldn’t think about but I think is really helpful for things like this is Psalm 20 verse 7. I’m just going to go there quickly because I didn’t write down the actual verse. But this will be known to all of you when you hear it.

*“Some trust in chariots and some in horses,  
But we trust in the name of the LORD our God.”*



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And the reason why I think this is a helpful one, and one maybe not often thought about when it comes to overcoming temptation, is that I think there’s a tendency personally—and I imagine that maybe this applies to others—that we sometimes seek to find manmade ways to resist temptation. If there’s something that you know you struggle with, you may look for something out in the world that you can use. Maybe I’ll change my schedule so I don’t have to face this temptation, or I’ll do these (other) things. You’re seeking manmade interventions to resist temptations.

I know, for instance, that with men who struggle with pornography, they’ll say, “Oh, I’ll look for website blockers on my computer so I can’t get to those sites.” And something I had read was this. Why is it that we’re looking to things like that instead of looking to Christ, the One who is our Mediator? Have we been pleading with Him to help us overcome these sins, to mortify these sins and put them to death?

And it’s not just this; it’s whatever it may be that we’re struggling with in temptations. Are we trusting in chariots and horses? Or are we trusting in the true God who promises to us that He will deliver us from these sins? And so those are four verses I commend to you that I think help us see the Scriptural basis behind this part of the answer that says that we can improve our baptism, especially in a time of temptation.

And then as far as the next two points go, the next one here mentions that we can improve our baptism with *“serious and thankful consideration of its nature and ends, of the benefits sealed to us, and ultimately of what our solemn engagement is to be the Lord’s.”* And this is kind of where I’m going to come back to this point where I say, when was the last time any of us actually gave serious thought about our baptism?

I can only speak personally. I do not think about it often; I certainly had not. I was baptized as an infant. I’m 37 years old. There’s a pretty good chance that I went about 36-1/2 years before I really gave any serious thought and meditation and thankful consideration to my baptism. And I would say that if you’re anything like me, that’s probably an area for improvement for all of us.

Again this sacrament is a sign to us; it signifies something. We should be thankful to God for what it signifies. And we should be thinking about that occasionally, reminding ourselves that we’ve been washed.

There is something that I want to mention here; it comes from John Calvin on this note. This is in Calvin’s *Institutes*. He says: *“Throughout all life, whenever pious folk are troubled by a consciousness of their faults, they may venture to remind themselves of their baptism: that from it they may be confirmed in assurance of that perpetual cleansing we have in Christ’s blood.”*

Our baptism is a great thing for us to be mindful of, to be thankful for. And I think we can improve our baptism by spending more time thinking about it and giving thanks to God for it.

**Ted:** Jordan?

**Jordan:** Yes?

**Ted:** I think the reason that probably most of us don’t think about it is because Baptism has been historically replaced more by the time I made a decision for Christ, or the time I accepted Christ, or the time I got saved. So it’s more like a personal intimate experience with Christ, versus a sacrament within the body of Christ itself.

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**Jordan:** Yeah. I’m glad you mentioned that, because you reminded me of two things that I wanted to say that I forgot to mention earlier. And the first one is, there’s a common misconception with Baptism held in certain branches of the faith more than others, that Baptism saves you. There are a lot of people who will say, if someone is dying, “Quick! Let’s baptize him!” Or “Hey, I’ve baptized my infant son, so he’s good to go. He’s been baptized; I don’t have to worry about him.”

There’s this tendency to think that it’s the sign that has some magical power to save you. And again, it’s not the sign that does it. It’s the work of the Spirit, a promise held out to you. But it still requires faith in Jesus. It still requires what we need (in order) to be saved: faith and repentance. You can’t be baptized with your life in a way that doesn’t place saving faith in Jesus and not repenting of your sins, and thinking that you’re saved. That’s a common misconception.

So I think you’re right. A lot of people tend to think that this is something we do to be saved. And once we’ve done it, we’re good to go; we’ve checked the box. It’s that same kind of mindset we talked about with the Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s Day. It’s a “check the box” exercise we do as Christians; it’s not really something that has meaning. So that’s one thing I wanted to mention; I appreciate you bringing it up.

The second thing I wanted to mention—and I was thinking about this as well,—is kind of to your point. Why don’t we think about our baptism? I think what you mentioned is spot on. I think another reason is that we have a very low level of sin.

**Ted:** A low level of what?

**Jordan:** Sin.

**Ted:** We have a low level of sin?

**Jordan:** A low view of sin; sorry.

**Ted:** Oh. Because I have a very high level.

**Jordan:** Yeah. (*Laughter*) No, but here’s what I mean by that. I don’t think we really think about how heinous our sins are.

**Ted:** No.

**Jordan:** We talk about Baptism being a sign of washing, right?—that idea of washing you clean. I don’t think we realize how dirty we are, and how in need of washing we are, and how thankful we should be before the washing that we have received. I think that because we have a low view of sin—its heinousness, its filthiness—we don’t think with as much gratitude about how great it is that we have been washed from that. I think that’s another reason for why we don’t spend much time thinking about our baptism and what it really means.

**Ted:** And we have a low view of sin because we have a low view of God’s perfection and holiness; it really starts there.

**Jordan:** Yes, correct.

**Ted:** Can I go on from there? I don’t want to ruin—

**Jordan:** We’ve got time; go ahead.

**Ted:** I had an interesting conversation with a fellow who came by selling pest control, and we got to talking. If I’ve told the story, forgive me for the repetition. And he said, “I lived in Utah, Idaho and Oregon.”

And I said, “Oh, are you a Mormon?”, because those are big Mormon states.

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And he said, “Yes.” He was. He was a nice young man. And I didn’t want to miss an opportunity to witness to him. And I said to him, “One thing I understand about the Mormon faith is that they have a very low view of God’s perfection and of our sinfulness.” And I said to him, “It says in Genesis 6:5 that *‘the thoughts of man’s heart were only evil continually,’* all the time.” I said, “Would that describe you?”

And he was shocked. He reeled back; he was shocked. “Oh, no!”

And I said, “Well, it describes me.” And he stepped away from me, as if I had told him that I was an ax murderer. So I think that was his attitude as a Mormon. And that also affects a lot of attitudes, that we’re not really that bad, because God is really not that holy. So that’s just my thought.

**Jordan:** Yeah, that’s great. We recently went through a series at our church in Habakkuk. I don’t know if I mentioned this before at all. But there’s a verse here which was eye-opening (no pun intended.) Habakkuk 1:13, speaking of God, says: “*You who are of purer eyes than to see evil, and cannot look at wrong*”: that idea of purity. And that was kind of the point that our preacher at the time was mentioning, okay?—the comment that we have a low view of sin. We don’t think about our sin the way that God thinks about our sin.

**Ted:** Amen.

**Jordan:** Okay. So the last item on here about ways that we can be improving our baptism is “*drawing strength for the mortifying of sin and the quickening of grace.*” And here again I’m going to pull a comment from John Calvin. So he mentions: “*Through Baptism Christ makes us sharers in His death, that we may be engrafted in it. And just as the twig draws substance and nourishment from the root to which it is grafted, so those who receive Baptism with right faith, truly feeling the effective working of Christ’s death and the mortification of their flesh, together with the working of His resurrection and the vivification of the Spirit.*” So that’s putting to death and bringing to life, the idea that we have been ingrafted into Christ.

It makes sense and the visual helps. The twig draws substance and nourishment from the fruit. We’ve all heard about the vine and the branches, and so forth. That means something though; it’s not just a fun saying. It has meaning. And the meaning for us is that we can put off the old man and put on the new man.

This really is what I had prepared for today. I know we spent a lot of the time talking about definitions and things like that. But I think all that is important when we get to this part, because without that it makes it hard to understand why it is that we need to improve. And I think it helps us to better understand how we can improve. So before we close, are there any other questions or comments about today’s topic? Don?

**Don Maurer:** Jordan, what would be in your view the correct interpretation of 1 Peter 3—

**Ted:** 21.

**Don:** 21; thank you. Peter talks about Baptism, relating it to Christ and His work. But it says: “*In the same way Baptism saves you.*” Now I think I know what I would say. But those who believe in baptismal regeneration would point to that verse and say, “Baptism saves you; how can you say it doesn’t?”

**Jordan:** Sure. Well, I’ll tell you what: I’ll give you my brief thoughts on that. And then I’ll let you let us know what your thoughts are on that, if that’s okay.

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**Don:** Sure.

**Jordan:** So my brief thoughts on that are: 1. I did not spend a lot of time studying that verse in preparation for this, so I feel ill-equipped to give you an answer. But my overall answer would be that I think that when we’re interpreting Scripture we need to use all of Scripture to interpret itself. And for passages that may be less clear than others we need to use those that are more clear to help us interpret them.

So I would just say that I think that when we’re thinking about verses like that which may seem to be in contradiction to others, we need to view the whole counsel of God as far as how we interpret that. But that being said, what is your interpretation of that verse?

**Don:** Well, you’re right. I think that what Peter says after the verse is very important. He says: *“Not as a removal of dirt from the body,”*—in other words, it’s not the actual sign or action of baptism that saves you, not like the power of the water or something, *“but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.”* In other words, he compares Baptism to Noah’s ark and the waters of the Flood. The ark was the means of escape, of salvation. And so Baptism is a pledge; it’s a sign, it’s a seal. It’s not the water—

**Jordan:** It’s the thing signified.

**Don:** Right. So that’s what I would say.

**Jordan:** Yup. Thank you. Yes?

**David Miller:** Those who teach salvation by baptism also teach that baptism is only valid within their own denomination.

**Jordan:** Mm-hmm.

**David:** Or using terms and words such as in the name of Jesus, not in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. I had an uncle who was like that. He died not too long ago. I believe he was probably saved, not because he believed in salvation by Baptism, but because he was a strong Christian and completely submissive—

**Jordan:** Yeah. That reminds me; some of you have heard this story. There was a Catholic priest who got into trouble in the news recently, because apparently when he had performed baptisms for thousands of people, he didn’t use the right words. He said something like “Holy Spirit” as opposed to “Holy Ghost,” or something like that. And so they invalidated all of those baptisms.

**David:** He said “We baptize you,” instead of “I baptize you.”

**Jordan:** Oh, that’s what it was. But you know, I think that if you were to go through *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and the Shorter and Larger Catechisms, they expressly state things like that. “We reject that there is any power in the person himself who does it; it’s the work of the Spirit.”

We reject that you have to be baptized to be saved. For instance they’ll point to the thief on the cross next to Jesus as an example for that. And that just goes back to the idea that Baptism itself isn’t the thing that saves you. It’s a sign of what saves you, which is Christ’s blood and the work of the Spirit in your life. Yes?

**Roger Myers:** In that 1 Peter verse the *Reformation Study Bible* has a note. (*Unclear: something about the sign versus the thing signified.*)

**Jordan:** Yeah. For us it’s true; right. Yes?

**Ted:** You know, we’re fast to jump on the Catholics, saying that they say that Baptism saves you. You have a lot of Catholic priests who would say that’s not exactly right, but

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that’s another subject. Yet we’re not so quick to jump on those who say that Baptism is simply my public testimony that I’ve accepted Christ.

**Jordan:** That’s a great point; it’s not merely that.

**Ted:** When we do baptisms at our Presbyterian church, the pastor always makes a point of saying, “This baptism is about what God is doing, not what the person is doing.” I think a greater threat than the Catholic view is the threat of saying that Baptism is simply a time when I’m giving my personal testimony.

**Jordan:** Yes.

**Ted:** So Luther and the Anglicans and the other more historic faiths always claimed that Baptism had a supernatural power to it, as it is a sacrament as well. It wasn’t just a sign; there was more to it. Calvin saw it as being part of the heavenly banquet, being lifted up to Christ.

**Paul Sedlock:** What comes to the back of my mind is that like you had mentioned, I was baptized when I was a baby. It seems like you still have to kind of activate that that action. Obviously there are people who are baptized as infants, and so they have no recollection about that. I just wanted to see what your thoughts are on that score, because I kind of feel like we’re talking about how we can improve our baptism. But being baptized actually wasn’t my choice; it was my parents’ choice.

**Jordan:** Yes.

**Paul:** So I think that’s important.

**Jordan:** Yeah. Oh boy, we could spend a lot of time on this one. I think it’s important to note that God is a covenant God, and He works in a covenant way for His covenant people. And on this slide I wanted to make sure that I drew this connection: that baptism is replacing the sign of circumcision. Some in the same way you could argue, “Hey, I didn’t choose to be circumcised.”

If you look through Scripture, a lot of the references to circumcision aren’t necessarily about the physical act, but of the circumcising of the heart. And God speaks numerous times to the Israelites about “You have not circumcised your heart,” right? “I want people who will do that.”

There’s a great verse in Deuteronomy: chapter 30 verse 6. *“And the LORD your God will circumcise your hearts, and the hearts of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and that you may live.”*

So again, first of all, there are two concepts here. 1. *God is a covenant God.* “Yours and your offspring.” I think that in 1 Corinthians we see Paul saying that the child of only one believing spouse is still considered holy.

And 2. *The sign itself isn’t the thing,* right? It’s the sign of something else. But what really matters is the circumcision of the heart.

**Paul:** That’s what I thought. So being an infant, you’re getting the sign; you’re a part of that.

**Jordan:** Sure.

**Paul:** But you really don’t have a choice at that point.

**Jordan:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Late, you have to kind of accept it.

**Jordan:** You have to grow into that.

**Paul:** Yeah.

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**Jordan:** At our church, when we baptize infants, there are vows that the parents take before that which say, “Do you promise to raise the child to know the Lord, to constantly pray for them, to teach them to read the Bible, to teach them to obey the Word?”—things like that. There’s that sense of what Jeff has mentioned before: becoming what you already are.

Now you aren’t already it yet, right? It’s just a sign. There’s that coming into it. And because God is a covenant God, it’s the obligation of parents who believe to baptize their children, to put that sign on them and to raise them in the way of the Lord.

All right. I’m going to pray for us. I’m a little bit over. I think I’ve mentioned this before. I picked a prayer from *The Valley of Vision*. Many of you have heard of this before. It’s a collection of Puritan prayers. So some of this is prepared, but we’re still praying to God sincerely in this way. So pray with me.

Heavenly Father, *“teach us to know that grace precedes, accompanies and follows our salvation, that it sustains the redeemed soul, that not one link of its chain can ever break. Through Calvary’s cross wave upon wave of grace reaches us, deals with our sin, washes us clean, renews our hearts, strengthens our will, draws out our affection, kindles a flame in our soul, and rules throughout our inner man. How great are our privileges in Christ Jesus!”*

We give You thanks, Lord, for our baptism, for what it signifies, and the benefits sealed to us through it, and the work of Christ through the Spirit. Help us to improve our baptism as we walk in newness of life, united to Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen. (*Applause*)