

Baptism And The Local Church
June 9, 2019

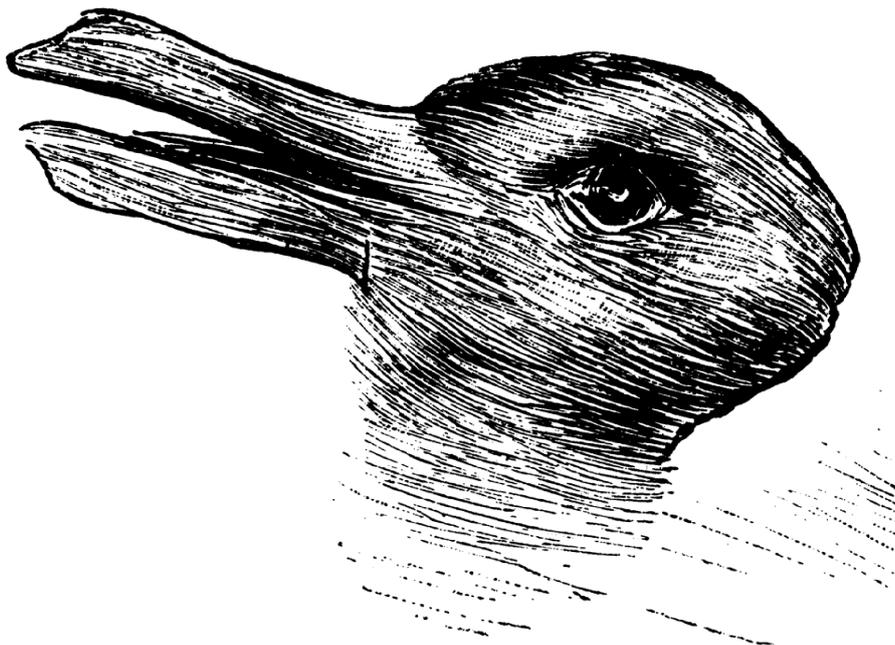
BAPTISM AND



I have come to believe that in some degree – theological truth is viewed through the eye of the beholder.

What do I mean?

What do you see?



Some of you see a rabbit, some see a duck – some see both.

Or this:



Some of you see an old hag, some a beautiful young woman – some see both.

What about when you look into the waters of baptism?

Some of you see:

A believer immersed in the waters of baptism.

Others:

See an infant sprinkled in a baptismal ceremony.

And:

Some see both.

These are quite different.

Surely there has to be a way to be more definitive on the issue?

This morning – I want to walk you through my thinking on this.

Consider these men:

Ligon Duncan, RC Sproule and Kevin DeYoung.

These are men I respect greatly have learned much from – yet for years I struggled with how such brilliant men could be ... infant baptists.

I simply could not understand how such intelligent, theologically sound men could hold a view that seemed so Scripturally weak to me.

I looked at the Scriptures and all I saw – beginning to end was – believer's baptism.

I was – and truth be told still am – absolutely convinced that if you gave a brilliant godly angel the Bible and nothing else – and said – what does the Bible teach about baptism? – he would say – duh – believer's baptism.

But I could not get past the fact that if a man of the caliber of Kevin DeYoung were here this morning – I know he would say he was absolutely convinced that if you gave a brilliant godly angel the Bible and nothing else – and said – what does the Bible teach about baptism? – he would say – duh – infant baptism.

For a long time this puzzled me.

But truth be told baptism is not the only area of ministry mystery I struggled with.

There are many other men I greatly respect and admire who have influenced my ministry.

Among them are:

John Piper, Mark Dever and John MacArthur – Baptists one and all. So where could we possibly disagree?

However, as much as I respect and admire these men – there are things about their ministry and teaching that I struggle to agree with them.

For example – I am not on the same page as Piper in terms of his position on spiritual gifts or with some parts of Dever's understanding of the church or MacArthur's pre-tribulational rapture.

I am not at all saying they are necessarily wrong. I am saying I struggle to understand how they arrived at their position.

Here is the conclusion I have come to over the years.

We all have blindspots.

I know some of you think you don't – believe me you absolutely do – I have them – and so do you.

Theological blindspots – practical blindspots – ministry blindspots.

In issues like baptism and spiritual gifts – heaven may reveal that the blindspot is mine.

But, here is the issue with blindspots – you don't know they are there.

One of the things I have had to come to grips with is that every single one of my heroes of the faith have blindspots – some are glaring.

Theologically, family, ministry, sin.

John Wesley the founder of Methodism was a great man – but a terrible husband. His marriage to Mary was atrocious. After 20 years of bitter fighting and breakups he finally said – “I did not forsake her, I did not dismiss her, I will not recall her.” He just left her once and for all.

George Whitefield is perhaps the best-known evangelist in church history. He is also one of my ministry heroes. As a young Christian – his biography was the second one I read and it deeply impacted me.

So I was quite surprised last week when my attention was taken by this article on the *For The Church* website.

It was titled – *Was George Whitefield a Christian?*

I was like – yeah of course he was!

Then I read this article and my heart sunk – again.

Early in his ministry George Whitefield spoke out strongly against the institution of slavery.

But later he came to accept slavery, owned slaves and even advocated to get the state of Georgia to allow slavery.

Many are now arguing – how could a man who does this be a Christian?

I read this article and thought – wow – another one of my heroes has a huge blindspot.

And I learned Whitefield was far from alone among my theological heroes who had a blindspot in regard to slavery.

I am still convinced he was a true Christian and did many amazing things for the Kingdom – but like every one of us – he had his flaws.

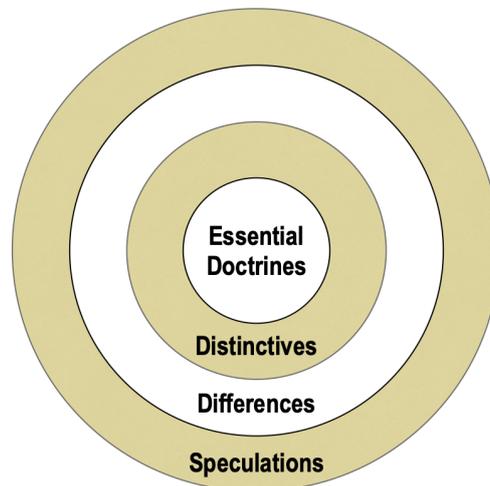
It is so hard for us to be objective about certain areas of our life.

As the years have passed – my view of baptism has not changed – in fact it has only solidified – but my understanding of why men and women hold the positions they do has changed.

We all like to think we are impartial and unbiased theologians – Bereans who come to the Scriptures and examine them objectively and impassionately.

Unfortunately, it just doesn't happen in a fallen world.

Our sin, our pride, our theological presuppositions, the families we grow up in, the teaching we marinate in – these things all make us biased.



My understanding is that God supernaturally intervenes to reveal to us the truth about the essential doctrines like salvation by faith and the deity of Christ. 1 Corinthians 2 makes this clear.

You cannot have a blindspot here or you are not a Christian – so God makes those truths clear.

But, in other areas – areas not essential to salvation – true Christians disagree.

Our biases and blindspots cause us to come to differing positions.

For example – church membership. Pretty much every major confession, denomination and theologian are clear – Christians need to join a church as members.

But there have always been and will be some outliers who read the Bible and say – no – I just don't see it.

Why is it like this?

God could have given us detailed explanations on issues like baptism, divorce, membership, end times – that are just as clear as what He gave us regarding salvation by faith. He could have had the Holy Spirit bring true Christians to the same position on these areas through supernatural enlightenment.

He did not.

I have come to think He choose not to do this so that we find out unity in Christ, His gospel and the cross – not in more peripheral areas of theology.

But notice, that the significance of our disagreements varies. The further out you go – the less significant.

The exact sequence of events in the end times is interesting to debate – but doesn't affect practical issues in the church too much.

But one of the teachings that needs to be a distinctive of a church – because it is of considerable importance – is baptism.

Your view of baptism affects among other things your view of the nature of the church and who is in the church.

That is why baptism is so tied to the question of church membership.

But because of blindspots, fallen minds, biases – very wise, godly, learned men and women have disagreed on baptism.

This morning I want to talk about baptism and the local church – in particular membership.

Please hear me. I am not foolish enough to think my one brief sermon will settle a debate that the greatest minds in church history have failed to agree on – **nor is that my goal.**

I already know I am biased concerning baptism – and so are you.

My goal this morning is to give all of us an appreciation for the two main views of baptism – to realise we all have blindspots in these areas – to recognize where our church stands on this matter – why we have the policies we do – and what it means for you.

Why am I doing this?

Two weeks ago in our journey through 1 Corinthians we dealt with the passage that in my opinion is one of the strongest dealing with the issue of Church Membership.

The Elders suggested that as a follow-up – I should present a sermon on baptism and what it means for the local church and in particular membership. Thank you men.

And why this week? – because next week is baptism class.

So if you are visiting with us this morning – this is not a typical week – it is more theological than we are used to – so please bear with us.

My point today is this:

Baptism portrays the gospel – so we need to get it right.

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A problem I find is that many Christians on either side of this issue don't really understand baptism and the theology behind it.

Many have said that you don't understand a position until you can explain the opposing position in such a way that the other side would listen to your presentation and say – yes that is what I believe – you got it.

I find that in regard to baptism – many don't know the theology behind their position at all well let alone that of the other side.

Ask most Baptists why they are Baptists and they will say something like this:

Well, every baptism in the New Testament was of a believer. It pictures our death and resurrection with Jesus. Jesus commanded it. And hey – we've got Spurgeon.

Ask most paedobaptists why they are paedobaptists and they will say something like:

Well, whole households were baptised in the New Testament. It pictures our participation in the Covenant of Grace. Jesus commanded it. And hey – we've got Calvin.

But ask both of them – why do you think so many hold the other position and they will look at you blankly.

They have no clue why godly people hold to a position that seems so wrong to them.

We need to understand each other better.

So, let me give you a crash course on the theology of baptism.

There are three main views regarding who should be baptised.

I say main views – because there are a plethora of views – no one should be baptized, baptism for the dead. I'm not going there.

The **first** main view is:

Believer's Baptism.

This is often also called – **Credobaptism**

Credo comes from the Latin word for creed – which means – I believe.

You are baptized **after** you believe.

This view is held by most Baptist, Brethren, Church of Christ, Pentecostal and many independent churches.

It understands that God's intent for baptism includes only those who have personally professed faith.

A **second** view:

Infant Baptism

This is often called – **Paedobaptism**

Paedo comes from the Greek word for child – it is where we get paediatrician – a doctor for children.

This view is held by most Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist and some independent churches.

It doesn't mean they only baptize children.

Those who hold this view understand that God's intent for baptism includes both those who have professed faith and infants of believers.

There is a **third** view:

Both Baptisms.

These churches would say that this is an incredibly difficult area that has become overly divisive.

They would argue that baptism itself is important – but **not** the subjects **nor** mode of baptism.

So as a sign of our unity they allow each parent or person to decide the subjects and mode of baptism for themselves.

Fred and Mary want little Jack baptized – fine.

Liam and Jenny want little Dianne to come to faith first – fine.

Don't make baptism an issue.

For most of church history this has been a minor view – often found in Britain but often held elsewhere.

Today, this view is being held by a rapidly growing number of churches worldwide.

When we planted this church – I did not know one church in Brisbane that held this view.

Today I can name dozens at least.

On one level I have many sympathies with this growing movement.

However, I don't believe it is the wisest way for a church to go for a number of reasons.

It moves the decision for determining the best Scriptural view from the leaders to members who often are not equipped to grasp the theology involved.

It can be confusing to those in the church seeing two forms of baptism as to what baptism actually means.

It does not present any consistent view of what baptism is and it fails to come to grips with some of the practical ramifications.

We believe that it is a wiser course for churches to choose one of the other views – teach on it – outline the ramifications of their position – and publicly and consistently practice it.

So I just want to focus on the two main positions.

I also want to point out – that there are many believer's baptist and infant baptist views.

For example – among believer's baptists – some branches of the Church of Christ believe that the act of baptism actually regenerates or saves you. Some branches of independent Baptists teach that a baptism is only valid if the you can trace your baptismal lineage back to John the Baptist. Some branches of Anabaptists believe the only proper mode of baptism is three times forward.

On the infant baptist side – the way Anglicans and Lutherans come to their position is quite different from the way Presbyterians do.

And even among Presbyterians – there is not one monolithic view of infant baptism.

Years ago I was at a minster's meeting up at Mount Tamborine – when it became clear I was the only Baptist among a group of Presbyterian ministers.

We were getting to know each other when one of the men began to give me a hard time about how I could possibly be Reformed and a Baptist.

I was young and not particularly humble about my Baptist position – so I told them – because the Baptist position is not only biblical it is only coherent position – because about the only thing you men agree on is that it is infants who should be baptized – I doubt you agree on anything else.

Well that stirred things up and we got into it. Now I have to say – these were very godly men – and while I knew some of the areas to poke – if there had been a few other Baptists there – they would have had a few areas of disagreement among us to poke at.

But, I had done enough reading to ask – then tell me – who here thinks a baptized infant is regenerate – born again?

About a third of them said yes. These ones then began turning on the others who said no – but the Westminster Confession says they are regenerate - - yeah but it doesn't use regenerate the way we do - - it is speaking of future regeneration when they have faith - - no it means now.

I asked – do you believe there is a relationship between baptism and faith – all said yes.

I asked whose faith? I got – the child's future faith – but some also mentioned the child's unconscious faith, the parent's faith and even the church's faith. Some of them really did not like the other's answers.

I then asked – does baptism actually apply grace to the child – most said yes – some said I don't think so – others said it depends what you mean.

I asked – since a child can receive baptism shouldn't it then receive the other sacrament – communion – about a third said yes – two-thirds said absolutely no.

That one really set the cat among the pigeons.

At that point one of the older men stepped in and said – I think we need to stop here.

Look, don't get me wrong – Baptists are most certainly not monolithic in their view either. You need to know our position has its weak spots as well. A good Presbyterian could show some inconsistencies and difficulties with our position.

We all need a dose of humility here.

So, I have restricted myself to what are the two views that in my humble and admittedly biased opinion – are the most biblically defensible positions – the Reformed Baptist and Reformed paedobaptist views – and to save many arguments – I want to briefly look at the two most articulate expressions of these positions.

In regard to believer's baptism – I am talking about the position articulated in the *1689 London Baptist Confession*.

In regard to infant baptism – I am talking about the position articulated in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

We believe these are two of the most significant documents outside of Scripture the church owns. You need to read these documents.

And yet – many believer's baptists feel a bit uneasy about a few of the ways the 1689 expresses things and many infant baptists feel a bit uneasy about a few of the ways the Westminster Confession expresses things.

That said – they are the best place to find tested expressions of these positions.

If you read these confessions – in most areas they agree almost word for word.

They express truths held by men and women who agree in almost every area of significance.

And even in regard to baptism – both camps are in total agreement about a number of areas.

Areas of Agreement

- *That baptism is an important doctrine.*

The Westminster Confession says that it is a great sin to neglect baptism. Baptists agree.

It is not an unimportant issue we can ignore or gloss over. It is a command of Christ.

- *That baptism does not convey salvation.*

You don't get saved by being baptised or by being baptised correctly.

While believer's and infant baptists both cannot be right – no one is suggesting only the ones that get it right are in heaven.

You are saved by getting the gospel right not by getting baptism right.

In fact a focus on baptism – can actually cause the gospel to be emptied of its effect.

It is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:14–17:

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say you were baptized in my name. I did, in fact, baptize the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't recall if I baptized anyone else. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ will not be emptied of its effect.

- *That baptism should precede membership.*

Both views realise the Bible is clear that baptism should precede membership. Neither side will allow unbaptized Christians into membership.

So if we agree on so much – does it really matter?

Yes it does.

There are significant **Areas of Disagreement**

The first area of disagreement has to do with: **What baptism is:**

Notice a couple of significant differences in the way they define baptism.

The Westminster Confession calls baptism a **sacrament** – the 1689 calls it an **ordinance**.

What is the difference?

In the Roman Catholic Church a sacrament was thought to actually convey grace.

Presbyterians don't hold to that. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* defines a sacrament as "a holy ordinance instituted by Christ; wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, **and applied to believers.**"

But, it is that last part that Baptists have trouble with – that baptism actually *applies* something – so they generally call baptism an ordinance not a sacrament.

Once this difference was significant. Today this difference may or may not be significant depending on how you understand it.

But here is what is of greater significance.

Westminster Confession

Baptism is a ... sign and seal of the covenant of grace.

1689 Baptist

Baptism is a ... sign of his fellowship with him, in his death and resurrection.



Here we find what probably lies at the heart of the matter.

Signs point to something. Signs are associated with what they represent.

Everyone agrees baptism is a sign. Everyone agrees you are meant to see the gospel in this sign.

Where the disagreement comes is in exactly what the sign of baptism signifies.

Infant baptists maintain it is a sign of our participation in the Covenant of Grace.

Baptists maintain that it is a sign that displays our participation in Christ's death and resurrection.

Now, the Baptist view is one many find to be easier to understand so I will deal with that first.

Baptists love Romans 6. I love it. It explains our position well. Romans 6:3–5:

Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection.

Here we see that baptism is supposed to be a picture of salvation. We go down into the water as a symbol of our dying with Christ – and we come up out of the water as a symbol that we will rise again as Christ rose again.

Faith unites us with Christ in His death and resurrection.

This is why believer's baptists insist that the only proper mode of baptism is full immersion – you go down under the water to picture dying and then come out of it to picture rising.

As well, the root word – *baptizo* – is generally accepted as primarily meaning *immerse* – with two possible exceptions every use of baptise in the New Testament means immerse.

In John 3:23 we find John baptised in Aenon because there was plenty of water there. If he was sprinkling or pouring – he would not need a lot of water.

The description of Jesus coming up out of the water after baptism (Matthew 3:16) and the Ethiopian Eunuch going down into the water and coming up out of the water after baptism (Acts 8:38-39) reinforce the idea of immersion and coming out of water as the proper mode of baptism.

Now for most people this picture of dying and rising is something we can get our heads around.

The infant baptist view of the sign of baptism is not as easy to picture.

Notice that they maintain baptism was **not** designed to picture our dying and rising – **instead** it was meant to be a picture – to be a sign and a seal – of our partaking in the benefits of the Covenant of Grace.

Most Baptists and if truth be told – many infant baptists – aren't sure what this means.

Most cannot tell you what the Covenant of Grace is let alone how baptism pictures it.

So let me see if I can explain it.

In infant baptist theology, baptism is a declaration that God saves and if the one baptised has faith then they are saved because of God's gracious covenant.

One aspect of salvation is described in Titus 3:5–6:

He saved us ... through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Infant baptists view baptism as a picture that the Holy Spirit will come to regenerate and renew the one baptised – so they maintain that the proper mode of baptism should be sprinkling or pouring.

Pouring water on an infant – is a promise that if that infant later has true faith – God will pour the Holy Spirit on them and wash their sins away. And this promise is based on the Covenant of Grace.

I know that unless you grew up in a church that teaches on the Covenant of Grace – you might scratch your head and wonder about it – because the fact is that it is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible.

But I need to say that doesn't mean it isn't true – the Trinity is not mentioned in the Bible.

It is a way – a good way of systematising the promises of God.

They believe that God instituted a covenant – based on grace – whereby He promised He would save His chosen people.

COVENANT OF GRACE

OLD COVENANT

NEW COVENANT

Sign - Circumcision

Sign - Baptism

This one Covenant of Grace had two administrations – Old Covenant and New Covenant.

Under the Old Covenant – the sign that you were a part of the promises that flowed from the Covenant of Grace – was circumcision.

Under the New Covenant – new covenant means new sign – it is now baptism.

So baptism becomes a sign not necessarily of something that has happened – but is a sign that if the one baptised has faith – they will receive the benefits of the Covenant of Grace.

Now, for most Christians who have not grown up hearing about the Covenant of Grace – that sounds like a fancy way to twist Scripture and allow for infant baptism.

For those that grew up hearing about this – it sounds biblical, logical and perfectly correct.

Truth is it would take multiple sermons to test the theology behind this. The amount of texts dealing with covenants, salvation, signs and the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant is astounding.

I know this sermon is rapidly becoming a theology lecture – so, let me simply say this. There are some believer's baptists who hold to a Covenant of Grace and some who do not. Since we do not see baptism as a sign of our participation in the Covenant of Grace – we can either hold to a Covenant of Grace or not. It does not affect our view of baptism.

But if you are a Reformed infant baptist – you **have** to hold to it – infant baptism makes no sense and has no theological underpinning without it.

What this means is that if you noble Bereans actually study the Scriptures and you determine that the Covenant of Grace is not the best way to understand God's plan of salvation – then you really should be a Baptist. We welcome you ... warmly.

Where is our church at in this?

We have a number of members who are convinced of the validity of the Covenant of Grace – because it is a good and time tested position – and we have no issue with that.

However, in general our leadership do not find postulating the existence of such a covenant to be the best way to understand the saving plan of God.

We find the Abrahamic covenant to be the one Scripture speaks of as the way God enacts His grace in both the Old and New Testaments.

I am sure I just lost 80% of you – so if you want to understand our position please read the excellent book *Kingdom through Covenant* by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum. Excellent book.

I will add these brief comments. We find no evidence that baptism is the sign that replaced circumcision.

If baptism did replace circumcision as the sign of the covenant – surely that would be made clear somewhere in the New Testament.

For example in Acts 15 the Jerusalem Council were debating whether Gentile believers should receive circumcision or not.

Surely, that would be the place to say – why are we having this debate? – we are now under the New Covenant – the people of God receive baptism not circumcision debate over. That does not occur.

The closest you can find is Colossians 2 – but there baptism is linked **not** with physical circumcision but with heart circumcision – with faith and repentance. I believe it fits a Baptist position much better.

Basically, the infant baptist linkage between baptism and circumcision requires a number of theological leaps that we find missing from the Bible.

As well, among the things that makes the New Covenant new – is that God is calling out a new people – a people of faith drawn from every tribe and tongue and nation.

Jeremiah 31:34 speaks of the New Covenant and says that:

For they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them.

The new people of the New Covenant **all** know God. They are **all** believers. That did not happen under the Old Covenant which included children. That is why baptism is so intrinsically linked with faith.

Again and again we read – they believed and they were baptised.

What is the significance of this?

How you understand the nature of baptism affects **who receives baptism**:

Westminster Confession

1689 Baptist

Infant Baptism

The visible Church ... consists of all those ... that profess true religion, and their children.

Baptism is ... for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible Church.

Believer's Baptism

All persons ... professing the faith of the gospel ... may be called visible saints.

Those who do actually profess repentance ... faith ... and obedience ... are the only proper subjects of this ordinance.



Infant baptists teach that the church began in the Old Testament – probably in the wilderness and that:

The visible Church ... consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, **and** their children.

The church consists not just of believers – but their children as well.

Baptism then is a sign that both parents **and** children are admitted into the visible church. Since children were seen as a part of Israel and children received circumcision – they should be seen as part of the church – and receive baptism.

Believer's baptists maintain no – that fails to understand the newness of the church.

The church began at Pentecost – all in the church are now to be believers – and this is reflected through immersion – dying and rising.

The church is made up exclusively of those who profess faith, repentance and obedience – these are things an infant cannot do.

Our understanding is that the Scriptures indicate only believers are part of the church.

Only believers die and rise with Christ – so only believers are baptised.

We maintain that the fact that the church is called to holiness and commanded to practice discipline on those acting as unbelievers shows this to be the correct position.

I hope you can see these are different views of the church.

Related to this is the question of household baptisms.

A number of times Scripture speaks of whole households being baptised. Were there infants there? Scripture simply doesn't say.

What Scripture does say in most of the references is that all of those in the household believed and then they were baptised.

But honestly, you can't be definitive either way.

I know I may have lost you so let me summarise this.

Believer's baptists immerse believers in water – those who have expressed faith – as a sign that displays their union with Christ's death and resurrection.

Infant baptists pour or sprinkle water – on infants of believers **or** on adults who come to faith – as a sign that God will keep His promise and will pour out His Holy Spirit on them if they have faith.

Please note – these are different understandings of baptism.

They both picture the gospel – but in different ways.

One pictures salvation and what has occurred.

One pictures promise and what may have occurred or is yet to occur.

It is why we feel that allowing both forms of baptism in a church is confusing.

It confuses the nature of the church and what baptism pictures.

Finally, I want to comment on **the relationship between baptism and salvation**.

Notice both say baptism is a sign of our salvation and our promise to walk in newness of life.

But – infant baptists know that a baptised child is not truly saved until they have faith and will not walk in newness of life without faith. So they add:

Westminster Confession

1689 Baptist

Infant Baptism

Baptism is ... a sign and seal ... 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.

The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered.

Believer's Baptism

Baptism is ... a sign ... of his being ingrafted into him; of remission of sins; and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.



The efficacy of baptism is **not** tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered.

In other words what baptism pictures only comes into effect when the promise is joined with faith.

If they are a believer – it has already occurred – if they are a child – it will happen years later when they have real faith.

Baptists struggle with this because in our view when Scripture links faith and baptism it consistently says – believe and be baptised – repent and be baptised.

Never do we hear – be baptised and then years later when you believe you will receive the promise.

I know this is strenuously denied by paedobaptists – but I find no other way of viewing this – if you allow infants to partake of the sign (even as a special category) in effect it creates *two* different baptisms.

- a. Adult baptism – where the sign of baptism **follows** personal faith
- b. Infant baptism – where the sign of baptism **precedes** personal faith

I have personally attended some Presbyterian churches where they have expressly said there are two forms of baptism – infant and adult – before faith and after faith.

We find the problems with this to be many.

- We find no Scriptures that refer to baptism as a sign of what will later occur.
- We wonder how this makes a baptised child different to an unbaptised child of a believer?

Since Richard and Jacki did not baptise little Evie – did she miss out on something – is she spiritually disadvantaged?

This promise of salvation through faith is surely for all – not just for the baptised children of believers.

So is something conferred at baptism – is some benefit bestowed? Is there anything efficacious about the act of baptism itself? Does baptism convey some benefit of grace that an unbaptised infant does not possess?

Many in the paedobaptist camp would seem to answer yes. I find no Scripture to support this.

- We maintain this often creates the need for some paedobaptists to design a new ceremony – without Scriptural warrant – the act of **confirmation**. Confirming the presence of saving faith – which many paedobaptists then require before the benefits of membership and communion. (Again we know many paedobaptists do not do this).

Look, I know full well I will not have persuaded many of you who disagree with me on baptism.

But that was not my point. I wish I could do that in one sermon but our blindspots, our theological framework – these are strong.

Fifteen years ago this would have been my point:

Hey infant baptists – get biblical and get baptised.

Now my point is a bit different. I want the infant baptists here to know – believer's baptism is a solid, biblical, defensible view every bit as rigorous in its theology as infant baptism.

You are not joining a church weak in its theology or understanding.

So let me tell you why I hold to believer's baptism:

1. I believe that the clearest reading of Scripture favours baptism in water following a profession of faith.
2. Paedobaptism seems to us to create two separate baptisms.
3. The first 150 years of church history exclusively describe believer's baptism.
4. Scripture pictures baptism as representing – the death of the old self and our union with Christ's resurrection. The descriptions of the act of baptism and the word itself favour immersion as the correct mode.
5. While there are many clear examples of believer's being baptised there are no unambiguous examples of infants being baptised over the decades of New Testament history.
6. Paedobaptism requires a particular understanding of the church. We do not concur with this view of the church.

7. Paedobaptism relies heavily on a particular understanding of the Covenant of Grace that we do not find to be the clearest articulation of the covenants and the signs.
8. Paedobaptism requires that the New Covenant not be new but merely a renewal of the Old Covenant.
9. We find paedobaptism to often be inconsistent in its application of principles – for example in regard to communion.
10. Paedobaptism requires making infants a special case in regard to areas such as baptism and membership.

Those are my cards on the table. If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck – it must be a duck.

Well maybe.

Baptism sure looks like a duck to me – a full immersion of believer's only – duck.

But I know for some – it looks like a rabbit and runs like a rabbit – it must be a rabbit – a sprinkle a kid with water – rabbit.

Kevin DeYoung would have his 10 points of why he is an infant baptist that would be very strong.

I know that I may get to heaven and when the blindspots fall from my eyes I may say – wow – OK – totally missed the mark in that area and that – it may even be that in regard to baptism I was wrong.

But today – I can't imagine that happening and neither can any of the other pastors and Elders in this church.

So, what does all this mean for you this morning if you have been baptised as an infant?

If this sermon swayed you to say – actually – believer's baptism is a stronger view than I thought – in fact I think that is what Scripture teaches – great – be baptised and become a member.

Even if it is hard, even if it will offend family, even if it has been many years since you were saved – we encourage you if you come to that conviction – do it.

However, if you are still convinced of infant baptism – great – become a member.

You are our brother, our sister in Christ – become a member. This church takes theology seriously – while we don't agree on the theology behind infant baptism – we understand it and we respect it.

In the membership process – articulate your view – even if you can't give a full orb ed outline of covenant theology or the church – that is fine. We do not expect you to give us a full throated defence of the Covenant of Grace.

Chances are you actually have a better idea of why you hold your position than many Baptists.

As long as you have truly grappled with the text and you are happy that is how you see the Scriptures – we are satisfied with that – become a member.

Now because baptism is one of our distinctives – and leaders have to hold our distinctives – you won't be able to become a Deacon or an Elder – but we love you – you are one of us – join us.

We want to declare in every practical way – this is **not** a salvation issue – **nor** ultimately even a membership issue.

If you have been baptised as an infant and are so confused you don't know what to do – please – don't do nothing.

Don't stay in the limbo of non-member. Study this issue and make a choice. Get off the fence. Pick the position you feel is strongest and join us.

If you were baptised by sprinkling or pouring – as a believer – that is fine. We think mode is important – but not enough to require rebaptism.

So, all of us need to make the best choice we can and become a member. If you were baptised as an infant – fine. Either get baptised as a believer and become a member or let us know you are a convinced infant baptist – and become a member.

I know you have blindspots – I know I have blindspots – but I want us to declare – nothing is more important than what unites us – the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

If there any here this morning have not trusted Christ – you might wonder about a sermon where Christians disagree on something like baptism.

I pray that the one thing you did hear this morning is this – Jesus saves.

While we may disagree on some areas of baptism – what we agree on is that it paints a picture of the gospel.

We are sinners who cannot save ourselves. We have offended a holy God and we cannot do anything to pay for that offence. We need the holiness and righteous that only Jesus can provide through His death on the cross.

Faith in the promise of God to save His people unites us with Jesus in His death and resurrection.

That is what baptism points to. And ultimately that is what truly matters.

Baptism And The Local Church

June 9, 2019

Main Point: Baptism portrays the gospel – so we need to get it right.

General Questions:

1. Why do very godly, theologically sound men and women disagree on areas like baptism, divorce, end times?

2. In 1 Corinthians 1:14–17 Paul says:

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say you were baptized in my name. I did, in fact, baptize the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't recall if I baptized anyone else. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ will not be emptied of its effect.

What can we learn from this about not emphasising one position on baptism too heavily?

3. How would you describe the believer's baptist position?

4. How would you describe the infant baptist position?

5. What are the differences practically and how important are they?

6. Should a church have a set position on baptism or allow both views on baptism? Why?

7. In regard to infant baptism – what does it mean when they say – baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace? What is the covenant of grace? How does baptism picture it?

8. In regard to believer's baptism – what does it mean when they say – baptism is a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death and resurrection? How does baptism picture it?

9. Does the mode of baptism matter? Immersion, sprinkling or pouring. How does the mode match the sign in the two views?

10. What are the strongest arguments in favour of believer's and infant baptism?

Application Questions:

1. How strongly do you hold your view of baptism?
2. Could you articulate the opposing view well?
3. If you can't decide on your baptism view – how should you proceed? Why is it important to make a decision?
4. How should a church handle the diverse views baptism raises?
5. Can you articulate GBC's position on baptism and membership? Do you agree with it or not?