

Leaders:

This week's sermon is on baptism. The Psalm and the video somewhat relate but you will need to choose whether to spend time on the Psalm or on the whole issue of baptism. Personally I would spend less time on the Psalm and more time on baptism.

Baptism is one of those theological concepts that we believe deeply about. Jim's sermon hits this head on basically calling us to get over the controversy likening it to the legalism of the Pharisees.

I have included questions in this study that might lead into that controversy. Here is your challenge. To have a discussion that will lead to understanding no matter what side someone is on while not having an argument that one answer or one side is correct.

So when I ask about counseling a new Christian about baptism what I am hoping your group will be able to do is both explain the significance of baptism and:  
...For the Christian baptized as a child, allow them to be rededicated, but to explain that because baptism is an "it is God who is responsible for your baptism, God loved you first."

...For someone who as never been baptized, this is a sign of being completely washed clean in Jesus. The Holy Spirit does the work, so one can be dunked or sprinkled.

For those who have not grown up in the infant baptism tradition, it is helpful to note that the stress in infant baptism is inclusion (no one is excluded from the family of God), and on grace (it is not our acceptance of God, but God who accepts us).

Again, we might disagree with each other; the important thing is to understand each tradition in order that we might help non-Christians, or new Christians understand.

Personally I was baptized as a child; I went through a stage when I believed in "believer baptism" (being baptized on one's adult profession of faith). When a friend of mine had her child dedicated I wanted to kidnap the child and take him to be baptized because I felt he really was not a full member of the community only a half member. At that point I began to again appreciate infant baptism. Looking back on my own life, I have discovered that my commitment to Jesus grew in various stages. At 5 I had a really good concept of God and at 8 a real desire to be obedient to Him. If I had not already been baptized these might have been ideal times to be baptized, but in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade when I joined the church through a communicant's class, I really had lots of questions. If I had been baptized then with all my questions the baptism would not have been very meaningful. And if I had been baptized earlier, I would still have wanted to be rebaptized (my spell check does not even accept this as a word) when I was in college. I share all this to make the point that this is not an easy cut and dry discussion. What is significant is that we have ways to allow our children to celebrate the steps of faith they take and to allow adults who come back to the faith a means to celebrate their renewed commitments. For many communion is a celebration of our oneness and commitment to Jesus, a time each time we receive it, to remember our baptism.

See the notes below on the Presbyterian Book of Order on Baptism. This outline helps one understand the “reformed” view of baptism. I re-print it only because it is easy to cut and paste and give you some background and maybe to help you answer some questions that might come up.

## Baptism

Baptism is the sign and seal of incorporation into Christ. Jesus through his own baptism identified himself with sinners in order to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus in his own baptism was attested Son by the Father and was anointed with the Holy Spirit to undertake the way of the servant manifested in his sufferings, death, and resurrection. Jesus the risen Lord assured his followers of his continuing presence and power and commissioned them “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19, NRSV). The disciples were empowered by the outpouring of the Spirit to undertake a life of service and to be an inclusive worshiping community, sharing life in which love, justice, and mercy abounded.

In Baptism, we participate in Jesus’ death and resurrection. In Baptism, we die to what separates us from God and are raised to newness of life in Christ. Baptism points us back to the grace of God expressed in Jesus Christ, who died for us and who was raised for us. Baptism points us forward to that same Christ who will fulfill God’s purpose in God’s promised future.

In Baptism, the Holy Spirit binds the Church in covenant to its Creator and Lord. The water of Baptism symbolizes the waters of Creation, of the Flood, and of the Exodus from Egypt. Thus, the water of Baptism links us to the goodness of God’s creation and to the grace of God’s covenants with Noah and Israel. Prophets of Israel, amidst the failure of their own generation to honor God’s covenant, called for justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream. (Amos 5:24) They envisioned a fresh expression of God’s grace and of creation’s goodness—a new covenant accompanied by the sprinkling of cleansing water. In his ministry, Jesus offered the gift of living water. So, Baptism is the sign and seal of God’s grace and covenant in Christ.

As circumcision was the sign and symbol of inclusion in God’s grace and covenant with Israel, so Baptism is the sign and symbol of inclusion in God’s grace and covenant with the Church. As an identifying mark, Baptism signifies

- a. the faithfulness of God,
- b. the washing away of sin,
- c. rebirth,
- d. putting on the fresh garment of Christ,
- e. being sealed by God's Spirit,
- f. adoption into the covenant family of the Church,
- g. resurrection and illumination in Christ.

The body of Christ is one, and Baptism is the bond of unity in Christ. As they are united with Christ through faith, Baptism unites the people of God with each other and with the church of every time and place. Barriers of race, gender, status, and age are to be transcended. Barriers of nationality, history, and practice are to be overcome.

Baptism enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's redeeming grace offered to all people. Baptism is God's gift of grace and also God's summons to respond to that grace. Baptism calls to repentance, to faithfulness, and to discipleship. Baptism gives the church its identity and commissions the church for ministry to the world.

God's faithfulness signified in Baptism is constant and sure, even when human faithfulness to God is not. Baptism is received only once. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to the moment when it is administered, for Baptism signifies the beginning of life in Christ, not its completion. God's grace works steadily, calling to repentance and newness of life. God's faithfulness needs no renewal.

Human faithfulness to God needs repeated renewal. Baptism calls for decision at every subsequent stage of life's way, both for those whose Baptism attends their profession of faith and for those who are nurtured from childhood within the family of faith.

a. Both believers and their children are included in God's covenant love. Children of believers are to be baptized without undue delay, but without undue haste. Baptism, whether administered to those who profess their faith or to those presented for Baptism as children, is one and the same Sacrament.

b. The Baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith.

c. The Baptism of those who enter the covenant upon their own profession of faith witnesses to the truth that God's gift of grace calls for fulfillment in a response of faithfulness.

Baptism is received only once. There are many times in worship, however, when believers acknowledge the grace of God continually at work. As they participate in the celebration of another's Baptism, as they experience the sustaining nurture of the Lord's Supper, and as they reaffirm the commitments made at

Baptism, they confess their ongoing need of God's grace and pledge anew their obedience to God's covenant in Christ.

As there is one body, there is one Baptism. (Eph. 4:4–6) The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognizes all Baptisms with water in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit administered by other Christian churches.

a. For reasons of order, Baptism shall be authorized by the session, administered by a minister of the Word and Sacrament, or commissioned lay pastor when invited by the session and authorized by the presbytery, and accompanied by the reading and proclaiming of the Word. (G-11.0103p; W-3.3602–.3608) Baptism is celebrated in a service of public worship. Extraordinary circumstances may call for the administration of Baptism apart from the worship of the whole congregation. In such cases care should be taken that (1) the congregation be represented by one or more members of the session; (2) a proper understanding of the meaning of the Sacrament offered by the minister; (3) the session be consulted when possible; (4) the Baptism be reported by the officiating minister and recorded by the session.

b. A governing body may also authorize the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism by chaplains or other ministers serving in hospitals, prisons, schools, or other institutions where the governing body has an authorized ministry or an institutional witness, by chaplains ministering to members of the armed forces and their families, and by ministers engaged in new church development under the jurisdiction of the governing body. In all such cases of Baptism, the minister of the Word and Sacrament shall take responsibility that the newly baptized person is enrolled as a member of a particular church. Such enrollment may be arranged in advance in consultation with the session of the church, or the governing body may provide that any such newly baptized member shall be enrolled in absentia as a member of a particular church designated by the governing body and under its jurisdiction or upon the roll held by the governing body until a new church is organized.

The session's responsibilities for Baptism are

a. encouraging parents to present their children for Baptism, reminding them that children of believers are to be baptized without undue haste, but without undue delay, and authorizing the Baptism of those presented; (W-2.3014)

b. admitting to Baptism children of believers, after appropriate instruction and discussion with the parent(s) or one(s) rightly exercising parental responsibility, acquainting them with the significance of what God is doing in this act, and with the special responsibilities on parents and

congregations for nurturing the baptized person in the Christian life;

c. admitting to Baptism, after appropriate instruction and examination, those not yet baptized who come making public their personal profession of faith;

d. placing all baptized persons on the appropriate roll as members of the congregation;

e. making certain that those baptized are nurtured in understanding the meaning of Baptism, of the Lord's Supper, and of their interrelation, and that they are surrounded by Christian encouragement and support. (G-10.0102b, d, e; G-10.0302; W-2.3011)

The congregation as a whole, on behalf of the Church universal, assumes responsibility for nurturing the baptized person in the Christian life. In exercising this ministry, the session may designate certain members of the congregation as representatives of the church charged with special responsibility for nurture. For any person who is being baptized, sponsor(s) may be appointed by the session in consultation with those desiring Baptism for themselves or for their children and given the specific role of nurturing the baptized person. (W-6.2001; W-6.2005)

When a child is being presented for Baptism, ordinarily the parent(s) or one(s) rightly exercising parental responsibility shall be an active member of the congregation. Those presenting children for Baptism shall promise to provide nurture and guidance within the community of faith until the child is ready to make a personal profession of faith and assume the responsibility of active church membership. (W-4.2002; W-4.2003) The session may also consider a request for the baptism of a child from a Christian parent who is an active member of another congregation. If the session approves such a request, it shall consult with the governing body of the other congregation and shall notify them when the Sacrament has been administered.