

**The Faith We Confess:**  
*A Series of Sermons on the Core Doctrines of the Christian Faith*  
**One Baptism for the Remission of Sins: “The Sign and Seal of our Faith”**

“The Pope is baptized, Hitler is baptized, Stalin is baptized- what difference does it make?”

Karl Barth, a famous Swiss Christian theologian, said that during World War II in his argument against infant baptism. It was a keen analysis of European culture at that time. Each of these men was baptized into the Christian faith as infants yet it made no difference in their lives.

Stalin was a godless, atheistic communist who rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ and who exterminated as many Jews as Hitler did, along with anyone else who did not support his brutal atheism. Adolph Hitler tried to take over Europe and create the perfect Arian race by gassing the Jews and anyone else who might be deemed a threat to the gene pool. The Pope was baptized as an infant yet he had been swept off his feet by German nationalism and sold his soul to the devil by remaining complicit during the war. He failed to speak out against Hitler and Jesus said if you lukewarm (passive and indifferent to the things of the faith) then I will spew you out of my mouth.

I do not agree with Barth on infant baptism. I support it. But I do agree with the reason he gave in his criticism against it. What Barth was seeing in the lives of all these people in Europe who had been baptized as infants was that it was not making a difference in their lives. The church had turned the sacrament into some sort of nice little cultural “rite of passage” that one experienced when one was born. It was a “cute” religious thing to do. We do it because that’s what we have always done. We do it because that’s what our parents did. We do it so everyone in the church can “goo-goo” and “gah-gah” over the little baby. We do it because we think baptism guarantees our ticket to heaven.

Barth saw through all of this religious and cultural sophistry and named it for what it for what it was. A sham. Europe had been baptized into cultural Christianity yet she produced no fruit, or bad fruit. As it concerned the things of Christ the lives of these three men signified a continent that was as barren as a dry leaf in a parched dessert.

Today we are on that part of the creed that says “We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins;” therefore we are going to talk about the meaning of baptism for the Christian.

We are not going to talk about the mode of baptism, i.e. sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. Nor are we going to talk about to whom it is to be administered to, i.e. infants, adults, or both. As it concerns these matters there are varying views throughout “the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church” to which good Christians hold. Rather today we are going to talk about what is most

important as it concerns baptism. We are going to talk about what it means, or ought to mean to the church.

I have subtitled this message on baptism, *“One Baptism for the Remission of Sins: The Sign and Seal of our Faith.”*

### **Baptism: Our Sign that Points Us to the One Who Saves Us**

The first thing that we have to understand about baptism in order to understand its meaning is we have to understand that it is a sign. That is to say that baptism does not save us it only signifies the one who saves us, namely Jesus Christ.

We are saved (made right with God) by Jesus Christ and his death on the cross (in our place) for the forgiveness of our sins, through faith in him. Christ alone saves and our salvation becomes real in our lives when we embrace him by genuine, sincere, and heartfelt faith.

In the book of Acts a jailor asked Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?” Their reply to the man was, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved- you and your household.”

The jailor and his family believed and that is what saved them. After they believed they were baptized.

The baptism did not save the jailor it only signified the one who did save him-Jesus.

In his letter to the Romans Paul wrote “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified (made right before God), and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” (10:9-10)

John the beloved apostle wrote in his gospel the most famous words in all the NT, John 3:16.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever believes in him shall never perish but have everlasting life.”

Some of us may need to hear this today.

Some of us may have been baptized but we have totally missed the gospel. Some of us might think that because we have been baptized, because we go to church, Sunday School, and circle, and are in the choir, or on this committee or that committee, that we are saved. None of this saves us. Only Jesus Christ saves us and our salvation becomes real only when we trust in him and his work on the cross for us sinners. We are justified before God by faith in Christ alone; our baptism is only meant to signify that reality. Baptism functions as an outward sign of what has happened to us inwardly when we commit ourselves to Jesus.

Baptism is like a wedding ring. The ring is not what got us married. What got us married were the vows of commitment that we made to one another on our wedding days. The ring only functions as an outward sign of those vows of commitment that the husband and wife made to each other. Likewise it is the same way with baptism and our marriage commitment to Jesus.

Baptism not only functions as an outward sign in our lives in our lives it is also meant to function as a seal.

### **Baptism: Our Seal that Points Us to the One Who Keeps us**

This is wonderful imagery to reflect upon as it concerns baptism. When I think about a seal I think about two things. First, I think about a presidential seal, or some other type of stamp from some important person or company, and what that seal does for the recipient who receives it. What it does is it conveys to the recipient that what they have in their hands is the real deal. If you get a letter from the president and it has his presidential seal on it then you know that you have the real thing and not a fake. A seal serves as genuine proof.

When I think of a seal I also think of something like tape that is wrapped around a box and what that tape does is it keeps everything in the box from falling out and it keeps everything that is outside the box from coming in to damage it. The seal serves as a protector and guarantee that what is in that box will be protected.

Now as it concerns baptism, our baptism is meant to function as a seal in our lives. Because our baptism points us to the one who has saved us, Jesus, it is meant to remind us that Christ's work in our lives is the real deal. Jesus is authentic and he is authentically working in our lives if we have sincerely trusted in him. Our conversion and our salvation is not a farce, a copy, or counterfeit. It is the real thing. Jesus is the real thing and our baptism is meant to function as a seal, reminding us that the real thing (Jesus) has gotten hold of our lives and will not let us go.

Our baptism also functions like a seal of tape on that box. It is meant to remind us that not only is Christ working in our lives in a real and authentic way, but he is also going to finish his work of redemption and salvation in our lives. His death for our sins will not be in vain. He will protect us, he will keep us, and he will see us through all the way to the end.

Like that tape wrapped around that box he will keep us together, he will not let our relationship come undone and spill out of that box, and he will most certainly protect us from all of the junk on the outside that could rob us of our salvation and destroy us. He is our good shepherd. He is our protector. Jesus Christ is our seal. Our baptism is meant to constantly remind us that "He who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil 1:6)

Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant Reformation, was in many ways a tormented man. Secular psychologists today would label him as a delusional religious "nut case" because he

talked to the devil and threw things at him when he felt he was under spiritual attack. Whether those encounters with Satan were real or perceived is not the point, the main thing is that when Luther was being oppressed and attacked he would remember his baptism and he would often encourage his people to remember their own baptisms so that they too would know that the one who had promised to not lose any of his sheep, nor let the devil snatch their lives out of the hands of the Father, would keep them in the fold during their time of trial as well.

The word here for us to today is remember your baptism because your baptism too will point you to Jesus and his work on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins and his promise to never forsake you in your time of trial. Your baptism is meant to function as a seal, a guarantee if you will, that you are Christ's child forever if you have trusted in him. He died for you, he saved you, and he will not let you go if you have trusted in him. His death on the cross for you will not be in vain.

Thus far we have talked about what our baptism **does** for us. Our baptisms function as a sign that points us to the one who has saved us- Jesus. It reminds us of the grace of God in our lives. Our baptisms also function as a seal that reminds us that our salvation is authentic and it is secure in the hands of God. Our lives are sealed in Christ. It is a done deal.

Now I want for us to briefly talk about what we are to **do** for our baptism. What I am about to say will bring us back full circle to the beginning of the message and it is the key for a proper understanding of our baptisms.

### **Baptism and the Necessity of Repentance**

Baptism fundamentally has to do with repentance. Baptism signifies the forgiveness of sins and the new life that we have in Christ (water cleanses and it gives life) but we cannot talk about those things without talking about the amended life, the changed life, the life of repentance. Repentance is the inevitable fruit of the forgiveness of sins and our new life in Christ.

Every time you read about baptism in the New Testament you will also read about the idea of repentance in some way, shape or form or fashion.

When Jesus gave his great commission at the end of the gospels he told his disciples to go into the world and **baptize** in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teach the people to **obey** everything thing I have commanded you.

In our text from Acts Peter said, "**Repent** and be **baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins."

In our text from Colossians Paul makes an analogy between circumcision in the OT and baptism in the NT and in doing so he talks about "**putting off** the old sinful nature" and being "**buried** with Christ in **baptism**," meaning that we are to die to sin.

In our gospel reading John the Baptist had harsh words for the Pharisees and Sadducees who had come out to see him baptizing in the Jordan because they were not interested in repentance. John told them that their religious heritage meant nothing because they did not care about repentance. “Big deal if Abraham is your father, God can raise up a child of Abraham from a rock if he wants to.”

The way that might translate for us today is big deal if you were baptized in the church, whether as an infant or as an adult, because it means nothing if your heart is not right and if Christ has not changed your life. If there is no genuine repentance then God will level your tree with one swing of an ax. Any tree (life) that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

The problem with Hitler, Stalin, and the Pope was that their baptisms were invalidated because they had not repented of their sins. They were not following Jesus Christ.

Jesus said if you love me then you will keep my commands.

May God grant us the grace to love and serve Jesus Christ with “all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength” and to not make a mockery of our baptisms by failing to live lives of genuine repentance unto God.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.