

THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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Baptism: The Sign of Initiation

By Rev. Sean McCann

In 2008 my wife gave birth to our second daughter while we were living in Costa Rica. She was born in late October, so I had the herculean task before me of obtaining a US passport on foreign soil in record time so as to make it home for Christmas. The crux of my quest was this: to convince a sovereign nation to issue a piece of paper that certified the reality of my daughter's citizenship. The paper did not make her a citizen, but it was a sign of her true citizenship. After six weeks we received our prize, and so, with that hot-off-the-press passport in hand brining assurance to my anxious heart, we made it through customs and home for Christmas.

As we turn in our study of the Sacraments to consider baptism, it is helpful to remember that baptism is not primarily a sign that we give to God of our faith, but is rather like a passport from God, saying "Here is my sign to you that I have decided to identify you with me." It is God – not us – who signifies his gospel through such a simple yet powerful sign. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines baptism as "a sacrament, wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our engrafting into Christ, and parking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's." (WSC Q94) That definition can be broken into two parts: the nature and the meaning of baptism.

The Nature of Baptism

The first and most basic element of baptism is that it is to be done with water alone. While this may seem obvious today, there have been times in the history of the church when other elements like oil or salt were added to the waters of baptism. What is less obvious within the church today is how to apply the waters of baptism: should the individual be fully immersed in water, or is it proper to pour or sprinkle them with water? The Greek word for baptism means "washing" and is used at times in Scripture for activities with little water (see Mark 7:14). We also see examples of baptisms occurring with

either too many people (Acts 2:41) or too little time (Acts 16:33) to have likely been done by immersion. But perhaps the most compelling reason for baptism by sprinkling or pouring is that this mode best symbolizing the gospel realities of forgiveness from sin (Heb 9:19-22) and newness of life (Heb 10:22). However, since the amount of water used in baptism is of secondary importance, we do not deny the validity of baptism by immersion as practiced by many of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and likely experienced by a number of you!

The other element of great importance in the nature of baptism is that it is done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, following our Lord's instructions in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19). This aspect is far less controversial, though it does mean that orthodox evangelicals do not consider those baptisms performed by churches that deny certain aspects of the Trinity in be true baptisms.

The Significance of Baptism

Now that we're clear on what baptism is, we turn to what it means. The Short Catechism lists three truths signified in the act of baptism:

I. Baptism Signifies Our Engrafting into Christ. In Romans Paul describes the Gentiles as a wild olive shoot that has been "grafted in" and shares in the nourishing root of the olive tree." (Rom 11:17). The grafting process involves uniting a branch to a living vine in such a way that the branch takes root and begins to draw life from the vine (John 15:1-11). Baptism then is the sign and seal of the union of the Christian (the branch) to the vine (Jesus Christ).

Two practical matters flow from this first point. First of all, since baptism signifies union with Christ, it follows that this must include union with Christ' body, the church (Eph 4:4-6). For this reason baptism has historically been practiced as an element of worship and is

January-February

Upcoming Events

For more information about any of these events, refer to our website (www.covenantreformed.net), or the church office (828-253-6578; crpchq@gmail.com).

The Lord's Supper

Please prepare your hearts in advance to take of the sacrament together.

During Morning Worship: January 6, 20
During Evening Worship: February 3, 17

Elder Groups:

January 6, following morning worship.

Congregational Meeting:

January 6, following morning worship, we will vote for church officers for the coming year.

Church Officer Installation:

January 6, during evening worship, we will install our new church officers.

Chris Brown Installation

January 20, 6:00 p.m.

Veterans' Restoration Quarters Meals:

DATES??

Weekly Events

Sunday:

Opening Exercises	9:30 am	
Sunday School	9:45 am	
Morning Worship	11:00 am	
Evening Worship	6:00 pm	Except for 1st Sundays

Wednesday Evenings:

Supper	6:00 pm
Bible Study/Prayer	6:45 pm

Bible Study

For Men:

Men's Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
ROMEOS	8:00 am	Every Thursday
<i>(Retired Old Men Eating Out)</i>		
at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge		
Norm Bomer's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

For Women:

Carol Belz's Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
Fellowship Hall	10:30 am	Every Wednesday
Debbie Cate's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

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understood as a necessary sign for inclusion in the visible church. Second, since the children of God are only united with him once, the sacrament of baptism is only to be administered once. We do not rebaptize our children when they reach the age of discretion because they are not rejoining the church. Rather, by virtue of their public confession of faith they continue as members of the body of Christ to which they had already been joined.

II. Baptism Signifies Our Partaking of the Benefits of the Covenant of Grace. A branch cannot live on its own, for apart from the vine it will wither and die. Therefore the unique process of engrafting means no less than salvation for the branch. To stay with the agriculturally analogy, the branch cannot survive without the live-giving sap that flows from the vine and reanimates the branch unto life. For the Christian, this infusion of life takes place through regeneration and remission of sin.

The first benefit of which we partake in the Covenant of Grace is regeneration, which is famously pictured by Jesus as being “born again” (Jn 3:5). In regeneration, God removes our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh (Ez 36:26), that is, a new heart that is enabled by the Holy Spirit to believe in Jesus and have eternal life (Jn 3:15). Paul relates this to baptism when he writes: “he saved us...by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). Closely related to this is a second benefit of the Covenant of Grace: the remission of sin. The idea of remission is that of forgiveness, literally to “send away.” Peter instructed the converts at Pentecost to repent and

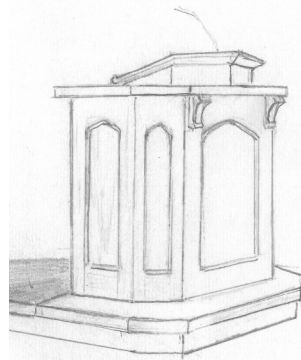
be baptized “for the forgiveness of your sins.” Therefore the washing of baptism signifies that the filth and stench of our condemning sin has been sent away and we stand cleansed and purified before our holy God (Rev 1:5).

III. Baptism Signifies Our Engagement to be the Lord’s. As so many of you know, I am a Duke basketball fan. (In a church full of Tarheels, this is no small admission!) This fandom was never a choice: I was born in Duke Hospital, my father is a professor at Duke, and as an infant I was carried into games on my parents’ laps. Before I could walk or speak, I was engaged to cheer for Duke. One might say my blood runs Duke blue, or rather that I was baptized into the Duke family.

I use this silly illustration to highlight the final significance of baptism as “an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord’s” (WLC Q.165). Sports fans (short for “fanatics”) are immensely loyal and dedicated people, but this commitment amounts to nothing when compared to the Christian’s devotion to Jesus Christ. In baptism we are set apart for God and so ruled by him that “we too might walk in newness of life.” (Rom 6:4)

There is much more to say about baptism, and in the coming months I plan to address the baptism of covenant children, the role of faith in baptism, and how we are called to improve our baptism. But for now let us all give thanks for the heavenly passport we have received from God and look to God through it for assurance and strength to follow him.

The Sacred Desk



As I begin to look ahead to another year of preaching I am excited to note that we will begin the new year with two installation services. In the first service we will ordain and install our newly elected ruling elders and deacons, and in the second we will install our new Assistant Pastor, Chris Brown. Each service will have a main sermon focusing on the theme of ministry, followed by a charge to the officer, and then a charge to the congregation or Session. (Most pastors’ kids have been to enough of these services to nickname them “the service with three sermons”!) I am looking forward to preaching the officer installation service as I’ve done the past few years. For Pastor Chris’ installation with have the joy of welcoming Chris’ father, the Rev. Ron Brown to our pulpit. Rev. Brown is the Senior Pastor at First Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Panama City, Fl. He previously served in Chattanooga, TN, and Crystal River, FL, as well as RUF campus min-

ister at Covenant College and Florida State University.

Special services in the life of the church tend to have a bolstering affect on those involved. When we witness the sacrament of baptism, we are encouraged to look back on our own baptism to stir up our faith. When we attend weddings we are reminded of our own vows and spurred on to strengthen the bonds of our marriage. In a similar way, elders and deacons experience these same feelings at an installation services. During the service we are reminded of our vows – both before God and before the congregation we are called to serve – and prompted to reflect on our faithfulness in keeping them. The sermon and charges remind us of the nature of our calling and the service we render our King. And the hymns and the prayers retell of God’s unique love and role for his church, and beseech his aid for those he has called to serve her. As a pastor, I always leave these services with an abiding gratitude for God’s gracious call on my life and a renewed strength to return to the task at hand.

If it is not your habit to attend evening worship, I highly encourage you to join your church family as we gather on these two evenings in January to set apart these servants to their work and celebrate with them God’s high calling on their lives.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
Jan. 6	Acts 15:1-35	
Jan. 13	Acts 15:36-16:10	Church Officer Installation
Jan. 20	Acts 16:11-40	Chris Brown Installation
Jan. 27	Acts 17:1-15	1 Samuel 9
Feb. 3	Acts 17:16-34	
Feb. 10	Acts 18:1-28	1 Samuel 10
Feb. 17	Acts 19:1-20	1 Samuel 11
Feb. 24	Acts 19:21-41	1 Samuel 12

Plans for the New Year

By Rev. Chris Brown

What should I be doing this year as a Christian? I began asking myself this question last year, after reading John Calvin’s small work, *A Little Book on the Christian Life*.

In it, Calvin asks us to consider something: why did God make me a believer in Jesus? If we understand God’s goal, then we can understand our own smaller goals for the year. He argues, “The goal of God’s work in us is to bring our lives into harmony and agreement with His own righteousness, and so to manifest to ourselves and others our identity as His adopted children.” This means that the goal of the Christian this year is to be righteous like God is righteous. Wow! What a goal!

But before God calls us to be righteous, He calls us to be His children. He gives us complete forgiveness and perfection in Jesus when we trust Him. But, Jesus doesn’t leave us there. He tells us to “seek first God’s Kingdom and His righteousness.”

So Calvin gives us three things to focus on as we make the pursuit of righteousness our yearly goals: the way to begin is to deny yourself.

In my house we now watch tons of princess movies. In the movie *Frozen*, a princess’s act of self-denial ends up saving her sister, herself, and a whole kingdom. When an evil prince swings down his sword to try to kill the Queen, the Queen’s sister tries to stop the sword with her hand. By doing this, she breaks the sword, and frees the whole land from an oppressive winter. This is what self-denial is like in our lives. It might seem irrational. But it is life. If we die to our own selfish desires, and live to God’s desires, then we will bear lots of fruit.

Second, the way to continue to pursue righteousness is to suffer the cross. Jesus’ cross was wrath-bearing for others. Our cross is purifying for ourselves. Suffering for Christians is like stone being chipped away from an emerald. Originally, all the world saw was the coal, but as we encounter trouble, God uses it to chip away the darkness so that everyone can see the new natures He has given us.

Lastly, the way to thrive in the Christian life is to ponder the future. Think about all of the things that God promises will happen: Jesus will return and judge the world. The dead will be raised, and given resurrection bodies. There will be a new heavens and new earth. Those who trust in Jesus will rule with him as kings and judge angels. We will see Jesus and praise Him forever and ever.

Now the daily question is: am I making my plans based off of these truths, or am I trying to make my life here and now? It is easy to to make our plans as if this life is all we have. We plan our lives in an attempt to get comfort and ease right now. But God calls all who trust Him to seek His righteousness by denying ourselves, by taking up the cross, and by pondering the future.

Caring for One Another

by Rev. Chris Brown



Book Review Caring for One Another: 8 Ways to Cultivate Meaningful Relationships, by Ed Welch .

Ed Welch’s 2018 release, *Caring for One Another*, is a brief but powerful little book for small groups. It is designed to be read during the small group meeting itself, and includes helpful questions at the end of each chapter.

Content-wise, the book is not a remarkable feat of theological precision, rather it is meant to provoke readers to discuss their personal

problems together. A few sections of the book do contain Welch’s interesting explanation of human nature, but these illustrations are used primarily to make us consider how we relate to each other as Christians.

Welch begins the book with a discussion about humility. So often our relationships are not based on humble, patient, thoughtful care for each other, but on pride. We store up nuggets of “he-did-that” or “she-did-that” data, and form a judgement against our fellow believers. Instead, Welch suggests that we first aim for a humble approach by considering our own need for salvation and sanctification in Jesus. If we are needy, then so are our brothers and sisters.

He next points out that humility leads to prayer. Humility leads us not only to pray for others, but to share our needs, and to ask for prayer. Those of you involved in the prayer meeting know what it takes to not just pray aloud, but even to share a genuine need. Pride gets in the way of prayer because it makes us unwilling to show others that we need help. It takes a willingness to view ourselves the right way—as needy people—and a certain trust to verbally express our needs because we expose ourselves to the possible judgement of others.

He makes humility the core of all Christian relationships, which we build upon as we get to know each other better. But Welch rightly points out that our relationships don’t develop without work. We must not just intend to be humble towards each other, but seek to move towards one another by taking the initiative. So what if so-and-so has dropped the ball before, and forgotten about that meeting? We take the initiative as Christians to meet and talk and pray.

Lastly, Welch details the different ways we can move towards each other: by seeking to know each other’s hearts, by talking about suffering and sin together, and finally he talks about prayer once more. Overall, Welch’s book is a useful, memorable, and thought-provoking little book that could begin important conversations in our Church.