

Baptism's Redemptive Thread

Galatians 3:23-29

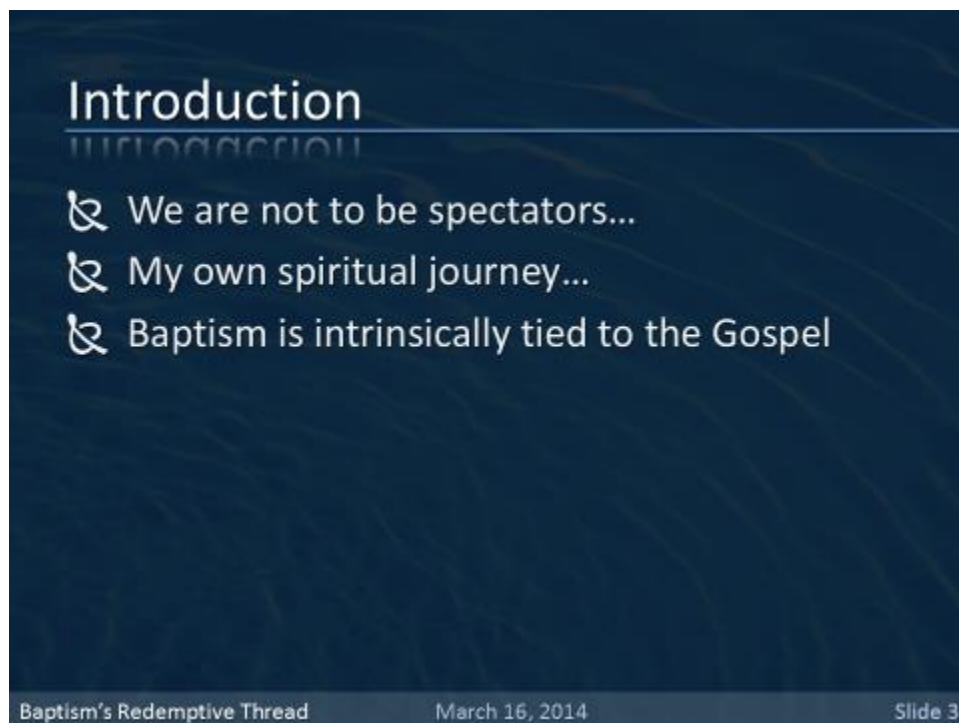
Speaker: Pastor Mark Schindler

Mar. 16, 2014 PM

① [Slide 1. - Title]



① [Slide 2. - Introduction]



This evening I would like to take you on a quick trip through scripture to see the scarlet thread of redemption that God has weaved into the ordinance of baptism. While we do not have much time tonight, I hope that our time in God's Word helps us to better understand both the simple beauty of baptism and the richness of this wonderful event that belongs to the church. Like the Lord's Table, believer's baptism was given to the church by God and is a sacred and significant occasion we are commanded to follow. But its significance is not limited to the individual. Its purpose and impact extends to the local church. **We are not to be spectators of what we have witnessed here tonight.** We are to be participants in it. Recalling and rejoicing in the Gospel story pictured in each baptism and soberly understanding our commitment to love and serve those who have been identified as being in Christ and belonging to the church.

My own spiritual journey began in a first-generation Christian home. By God's grace I was taught well and prayed the sinner's prayer before I was five. As I was graduating from high-school I realized that it was probably a good idea to be baptized before I went off to college. And so that summer I was baptized in the cold waters of a Wisconsin lake. But looking back, I see a young man who was going through the motions and putting his hope of salvation in a prayer he could not remember praying. There was no change of heart. No desire to live for Christ. Like a man making preparations for a long journey, I was simply checking off what I thought needed to be done before I left home.

Thankfully, during my college years the tension between serving myself and serving Christ came to a very real spiritual crossroad. I began to see myself as trying to straddle a spiritual fence, so to speak. I treasured earthly pleasures but wanted to keep up spiritual appearances. I had been fooling myself into thinking that I could keep one foot in the world and the other in the church. But even in those years of rebellion, God was working on my heart and at the age of 20 in my college dorm, I finally submitted to God's will in my life and trusted Him alone for salvation. It wasn't until many years later while reading MacArthur's [The Gospel According to Jesus](#), that I realized my baptism had been a sham and I needed to be baptized as a believer. And so as an adult, I received a believer's baptism here at the Chapel.

That amazing transition from trusting my own works to trusting Christ, from rebellion to submission, from spiritual death to spiritual life that baptism declares is one of the first steps of obedience for a true believer. **You see, baptism is intrinsically tied to the Gospel.** It cannot be separated from work of Christ on the cross. Baptism definitively captures the essence of God's eternal redemptive plan for all His people in the microcosm of a single believer's life in the span of a just few minutes. So let's ask the Lord to help us see His glory as we reflect baptism as we see it in His word this evening.

[opening prayer]

① [Slide 3. Our Immediate Context]

The Immediate Context

- ⌘ Gal. 3:6-14 – Promise (Abraham)
- ⌘ Gal. 3:15-22 – Law (Moses)
- ⌘ Gal. 3:23-25 – Faith (Christ)
- ⌘ Gal. 3:26-27 – Sons of God in Christ
- ⌘ Gal. 3:28-4:7 – Faith (Heirs)
- ⌘ Gal. 4:8-20 – Law (Not Slaves)
- ⌘ Gal. 4:21-31 – Promise (Free)

Source: The New American Commentary: Galatians

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Before we get to our passage this evening, I want to review the greater context in which we find it. Verses 23 through 29 of Chapter 3 fall around the central point of Paul's larger argument, which starts with the flow of God's redemptive story from Abraham to Christ. It then ends by neatly stepping back through the same themes to explain their significance in light of Christ as a response to the error false teachers had brought into the Galatian church.

Paul begins in verses 6 through 14 of Chapter 3 by reminding the Galatians that the promise God made to Abraham pointed to Christ and was not for Israel alone. On the cross Christ saved us from Adam's curse that both Jew and Gentile might live by faith. In verses 15 to 22, we see that the law of the Mosaic covenant did not annul or cancel God's promise to Abraham. Rather it was given to make men aware of their sin and given to Israel as a temporary measure until the coming of Abraham's offspring (singular), who is Christ. In contrast, the law was a harsh master that had no power to redeem or convey righteousness. The law condemned us. The law showed us our hopelessness. Even so, the law prepared us for the promise of redemption and grace through faith in the Son of Promise.

In verses 23 to 25, Paul reflects on how the law leads us to Christ. The law was harsh. Or as verse 24 puts it, a tough disciplinarian. Our failure to keep the law draws us to faith in Christ that we may be redeemed. There is no other way to be free from the condemnation under the law. In seeing our failure and sin we run to the Promised One who kept and fulfilled the law.

And then we come to verses 26 and 27 which are at the center of Paul's argument. We take part in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham as Sons of God. We are saved not out of keeping the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. Through faith we are true sons and no longer need the law to watch over us. Moreover, we have been baptized into Christ. The word baptism here is

referring to the ordinance of baptism by which true believers are identified as belonging to and having put on Christ. One of my commentaries notes, **“It is not accidental that baptism stands at the very intersection where the historical and corporate character of salvation is brought into closest relation to the personal and confessional dimensions of new life in Christ.”**

In the latter half of his argument, Paul traces back through each theme; faith, law, and promise. But his argument changes to reflecting on the implications of these truths and countering the error that certain Judaizers had brought to the Galatian church. First, he reminds them that they are now heirs according to promise. God sent Christ to redeem those under the law to make us heirs through spiritual adoption. Second, Paul reminds them that they are no longer slaves under the law. And he warns them not to return or turn back to living under the law. Through faith in Christ they now live under grace and the law holds no power over them. Third, he illustrates through Sara and Hagar that as children of promise they are free. Redemption flows through God’s promise. As heirs in Christ, why would they now go back and identify themselves with those under slavery and bondage of the law. They are to live as those who have been freed and redeemed through faith in the one offspring promised to Abraham who would bless all men.

[Slide 4. Galatians 3:23-29]

With this review of Paul’s argument we now narrow in on the central portion of this passage. As we look at baptism in this context, it is important that we see it in its redemptive light. Paul places baptism in the center of his argument and at the end of recounting God’s redemptive work in history. Please follow along as I read verses 23 through 29 of Galatians 3. And while we will be reading all of these verses, my message will be focused primarily on verses 26 and 27.

*“23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, **26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.** 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”*

① [Slide 5. Identifying With Christ]

Identifying With Christ (Gal. 3:26)

Chr[I]ist

M[Christ]e

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As true sons of Abraham, we have come to have faith in Christ. We have moved from condemnation to redemption through the saving work of Christ on the cross. The first redemptive thread we see is that our identity in Christ is seen in the fullness of our union with Him. Verse 26 says, “**for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith**”. Notice that this verse starts with the word “for”; connecting our position as true sons the God’s work in redemptive history. We are no longer cursed; no longer in bondage to sin, and no longer under God’s wrath. Through faith, we are now sons of God.

Thinking of this personally, I am now **in Christ**. By faith I am joined with Him and share in the redemption that Christ accomplished on the cross. Every believer has been joined with the Heir of Promise and joins in the benefits and blessings secured by Jesus our Redeemer. We are now the true sons of God. Who we are has fundamentally changed. We fully participate and have union with Christ and His sacrifice upon the cross. We are covered by His righteousness. The wrath we deserved was poured out upon Him. And as the Gospel of John puts it, we now abide in Christ. It is a union and identity that are permanent for the believer and can never be shaken. We are entirely His. We are completely and securely, in Christ.

Our identity with Christ is complete. So that not only am I in Christ, but through the Holy Spirit, Christ is **in me**. And as the body of Christ, we are in Him and He is in us. We are fully permeated with His identity. We fully participate in the reality of the promise God gave to Abraham. We are true heirs with Christ to all the blessings He has secured for us. We are now free to live in obedience; no longer under the bondage of sin. We now live by the grace secured for us in Christ’s death. And we are fully assured of the hope in God’s promise to bring us home to glory. This is what it means to be in Christ.

Baptism then serves as a visible and important declaration that a person is now identified with Christ. This new identity is seen in the fullness of its illustration of redemption through the waters of baptism. Paul continues in verse 27 connecting baptism with those who have put on Christ. The symbolism of believers' baptism is as deep as it is simple. It is a picture in spiritual high definition. A rich metaphor or illustration that helps us understand the nature of our redemption. For the individual, it is a declaration of their faith in Christ and a commitment to Him and His body before the gathered church. It is an outward proclamation of the inward spiritual transformation that has taken place. And for the church, it is the formal identification of a person having saving faith and a commitment to love and serve them.

① [Slide 6. Putting On Christ]

Putting on Christ (Gal. 3:27)

Off: Iniquity/Sin
On: Righteousness

Off: Death
On: Life

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The second verse at the center of this passage is verse 27. Paul writes, ***“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*** Baptism not only marks the change in a person’s identity, but it is a redemptive image of the believer putting on all that Christ accomplished on the cross. It pictures for us the redemptive work of God in cleansing and redeeming a people for His name’s sake. For the individual, it is an early evidence of faith applied in their life as they give testimony to their conversion and the power of the Gospel to change blind and sinful hearts. And it is their willful submission to Christ to follow and obey Him through the waters of baptism.

Remember that the Judaizers were teaching the Galatians that in addition to faith, they must still abide by the law; including the rite of circumcision. Paul refuted this by reminding them that they live by faith and are under grace. There is nothing that needs to be added to faith in Christ. Baptism, not circumcision, is now the means of identifying those who belong to the people of God. Not in the sense of baptizing infants into a covenant community, but in identifying those who have come to trust in Christ and now belong to the church. You see baptism declares that God’s redemptive work has been applied to the believer. For them the law has been fulfilled and

the price for their sin has been paid in full. Those who are baptized into Christ are giving an illustration of all that He has done on their behalf.

The language Paul uses here of “putting on” is found in Ephesians and other of his writings. Baptism is to symbolically be a picture of the believer putting on Christ. Putting on Christ illustrates that the believer is now covered by or clothed in Christ. We not only identify with Christ, but we participate in all that he has done. We have exchanged His righteousness for our iniquity and sin. We have exchanged death and an eternity in hell for life and an eternity in the glory of His presence.

The exchange of putting on also implies a putting off. And so we are also saying that we have put off or put away our previous way of life. The ceremonial rite of baptism practiced by John the Baptist, Christ, and the early church was meant to demonstrate that a radical change had taken place. Rising out of baptismal waters symbolizes that we are leaving behind our identity with sin and rebellion having exchanged them for Christ’s righteousness. It says to all, because I have identified myself with Christ, I will walk and live as who I now am. Christ’s righteousness is gladly now my own. I am putting off selfishness and putting on selflessness. I am putting off pursuing comfort and ease and putting on service and suffering wherever God may lead me.

The waters of baptism also provide us the image of putting on the cleansing and the washing of Christ’s blood. The significance of water to cleanse is a redemptive theme throughout all of scripture. We see the cleansing of water first in Noah’s flood to wash away a corrupt and evil people. We see several forms of ceremonial washing with water required of the priests in order for them to be sanctified to enter the tabernacle and temple. We remember Jesus washing the disciples’ feet in John 13. And when Peter resists, Jesus says, **“The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean.”**

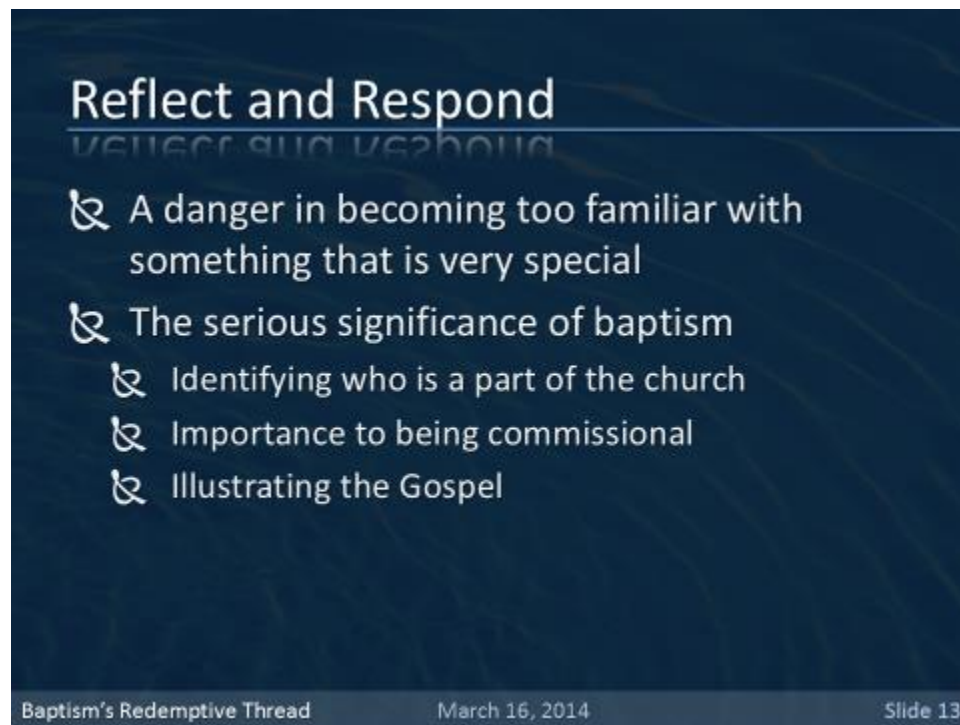
Similarly, the waters of baptism represent our need for cleansing. Without the shedding of Christ’s blood there is no forgiveness of sin. Our hearts are defiled and wicked. Without the blood Christ spilled on the cross we would be without hope. Baptism reminds of us that we have been washed by the power of Christ’s blood. Not that it is baptism that saves or provides the cleansing. But the water of baptism pictures our need for cleansing and the sacrifice Christ made to save us. In instructing husbands to love their wives, Paul writes of this to the Ephesians in Chapter 5 where he says, **“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”** This is the imagery of the redemptive work of Christ we are to see in baptism.

Lastly, we have the imagery of putting on Christ’s death and resurrection in baptism. Paul writes to the Romans in Chapter 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.”**

Here is perhaps the strongest redemptive symbolism of what we put on in Christ through the waters of baptism. Going down into the waters we show that we participate with Christ in His death. We are buried with him and have died to sin and the flesh. We are raised out of the water picturing our participation in a new life in Christ. The old is left behind and what emerges out of that death is a new person.

And just as Christ rose to a new body, we are raised to a new spiritual self, a new life, which will one day be fulfilled in a new spiritual body in glory. Just as Christ rose from the grave, we participate in His victory over death and we glory in the truth that death no longer holds any power over us. And if we are united in Christ and participate with Him in His death, so shall we participate with Him in His resurrection into the newness of life. A life given to us through faith in the Promised seed of Abraham by the grace of God to His true children.

① [Slide 7. - Reflect and Respond]



The slide features a dark blue background with white text. At the top, the title "Reflect and Respond" is displayed in a large, bold font. Below the title, there is a list of five bullet points, each preceded by a white icon of a crossed hammer and sickle. The text of the slide is as follows:

- Reflect and Respond
- A danger in becoming too familiar with something that is very special
- The serious significance of baptism
 - Identifying who is a part of the church
 - Importance to being missional
 - Illustrating the Gospel

At the bottom of the slide, there is a dark blue footer bar containing the text "Baptism's Redemptive Thread" on the left, "March 16, 2014" in the center, and "Slide 13" on the right.

So for many of you, much of this has been a review. But the danger in becoming too familiar with something is that you can take what is very special for granted. Like the air we breathe, each breath goes unnoticed and yet it provides us the oxygen that is essential for life. Our Lord gave us the ordinance of Baptism to provide a regular and powerful picture of the Gospel. And I would say to you that we can never be reminded too often of the Gospel. Like the air we breathe, the Gospel is essential for spiritual life. And as we participate in baptism, it is a time for great rejoicing and celebration over the miracle of spiritual life that God has brought about in the life of a believer. And it is a celebration of the redemptive story of our God from Adam, to Abraham, to Moses, and culminated in the life and death of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

I believe that one of the distinctives of the Chapel is our holding a high view of baptism. That is, we make much of its significance in both the life of the believer and in the context of our

community as the body of Christ. To borrow from a phrase Russ often uses, we are to be serious about our joy and the importance of baptism. As we conclude this evening, I would like to reflect on three significant facets of baptism that we are to take seriously.

First, baptism is the only means scripture provides by which a person declares their faith and identifies with Christ as a believer. Additionally, it is the only biblical mechanism through which the local church recognizes those who are of the household of faith and adds them to their number. This is a solemn and serious responsibility. It is the focal point through which the responsibilities and commitments to live in community under Christ come together. And from a practical standpoint, it is also necessary for membership at the Chapel as an essential requirement to function within and under the blessing of the church.

Second, baptism is of essential importance in fulfilling the great commission of Matthew 28. The call to the church to baptize and make disciples is not to be taken lightly. The clear message of the Gospel is to be proclaimed to the lost and those who respond in faith are to be baptized. This is the clear kingdom responsibility given to the church until Christ returns. Each baptism and each person is a picture of the Gospel and is evidence of God fulfilling this commissional work through His people.

And third, baptism is of significant importance as a powerful reminder of the work of Christ to redeem people from every nation and fulfill all his promises through a new covenant. Baptism is to be a celebration! It is to be a time of joy as we participate and respond to all that baptism represents. It should stir our hearts as we reflect on our own conversion and the goodness of our Lord to save us from our own sin and rebellion against God. In baptism, we celebrate the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord.

Perhaps this message is landing on someone who has been thinking about getting baptized. Don't let fear hold you back. If you are truly a child of God, scripture calls you to be baptized. Seriously consider this call and publically proclaim your faith in Christ through the waters of baptism. For those who are baptized believers, do you hold baptism high and joyous regard? What is it that keeps us from being filled to overflowing as we gather together to celebrate the miracle of new life in baptism? What might compete with the joy of seeing the redemptive work of God in the baptismal waters? Who does not want to fan the flames of their own passion for the Gospel as it illustrated in such a wonderful way? Let us pray that God would deepen our love for Him and the church as we grow in understanding and appreciation of all that God has given us in the ordinance of baptism.

Let's close in prayer.

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