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Lesson 3: The Profession of Faith and Baptism

“Therefore we are buried with Him by Baptism into death; that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Romans 6: 4

Goal: To embrace and fulfill our covenant relationship with God and one another.

Objective: To understand the significance of baptism as an outward expression of our profession of faith.

Introduction:

“If thou shalt confess (profess) with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Romans 10:9

As we continue our study of the church covenant, an early American tradition is brought to mind. The “Mourner’s Bench” was one of the symbols identified with the profession of faith in the early African American churches of the south. After “unsaved” mourners sat on the bench for a period of time, eventually they had to stand before the congregation and publicly say that “I believe in Jesus Christ and want to be baptized.” This was their public profession of faith and belief in Jesus Christ and expression of their desire to be saved.

Our Profession of faith is an eternal transaction that takes place from earth to heaven.

Whether it was on the mourner’s bench or not, our initial profession of faith led us to receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. This profession is more than mere words, it is life.¹ It becomes a divine transaction between the confessor and Christ. Our profession of faith is an eternal transaction that takes place from earth to heaven. With the mouth confession is made unto salvation. By our own volition and profession of saving faith, we come unto Christ and into a community of believers. Baptism is a public profession of our faith. It is our public declaration of our life as a member of the covenant community under Jesus Christ.

“In obedience to the Great Command to the head of this church and upon your profession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Ghost.”

These words, which precede the baptism of every candidate, point to the connection between the act of baptism and one’s profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As we

¹ J. Winston Pearce. “We Covenant Together”. *Journey through the Church Covenant*. Broadman Press. Nashville, TN, 1968, 25.

construct deeper understanding of our church covenant, we want to illuminate the fact that baptism is an ordinance that points to a deeper truth that forms the foundation for life in the covenant community—the profession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are familiar with the theological reference, that “Baptism is an outward expression of an inward change.” The saying assumes a common understanding of the inward change. How many different thoughts and opinions could be offered if this question was posed to several faithful believers? There would be several explanations that would acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit. Some may define it as the conviction one experiences through the Word of God. Our Profession of Faith acknowledges the faith that God gives and initiates the desire for candidates to demonstrate their willingness to trust God’s Word by publicly submitting to the ordinance of baptism.

The profession of our faith also demonstrates our collective desire to grow in our knowledge of His divine nature and to be nourished by God’s Word.

Philip opened up the Word of God to the Ethiopian Eunuch who immediately received Jesus as Lord. As they passed a small body of water, the new believer exclaimed, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” Philip’s only condition was that he believe with all his heart that Jesus was the Son of God who was able to save him from his sins. [Acts 8:36-37]. Without hesitation, he professed his faith; “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” This same profession of faith is the conscious declaration that is acknowledged during the baptism received by believers today.

Would anyone connect these words to our *corporate* response to the inward change that precedes baptism? *The Profession of Faith* is a response of acceptance of an inward change. It is an affirmative response to the altar call or the invitation to discipleship and it acknowledges our experience as a family of believers. The profession of our faith also demonstrates our *collective* desire to grow in knowledge of God’s divine nature and to be nourished by His Word. It further qualifies our collective surrender to the will and Word of God and represents our intention to actively support and honor the significance of the believer’s baptism. If the profession of faith and the ceremony of baptism honor the relationship we share in Christ and with each other, then, it also affirms our responsibility to intentionally support each other as we grow in grace, obedience, and holiness as a church family. What implications might our corporate profession of faith have for our daily behavior in the life of our church?

Baptism is a public expression of one’s profession of faith.

Baptism constitutes the believer’s public profession of faith. Baptism does not produce faith and a new heart, or through any magical power convert the soul; it is a signal that the Holy Spirit, alone, has changed our hearts, revealed to us our utter sinfulness, and separation from God. It is through our profession of faith in Jesus Christ that we identify ourselves with him. Baptism points to Christ in His humiliation, death, and resurrection. “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in the newness of life.” [Rom. 6:4]. By baptism, the believer is saying to the world that I have been changed through the power of God’s grace. I identify with Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection through faith, and I yield my life to God and set myself apart from the world to serve Him. Baptism is an act of obedience and brings the candidate into a more intimate, exclusive and faithful fellowship with the Lord. Everyone who receives the ordinance of

baptism professes his faith in the merits of Christ's death as the grounds of his own hope and salvation.

Baptism, as a spiritual act, points to the deeper meaning of our salvation.

The act of baptism is spiritual. It demonstrates the believer's union with Christ through a public profession of faith. The mode of baptism is not the essential act for salvation. Salvation must occur before baptism and it is when one believes and receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When we are baptized we are united with Christ and buried into death with Him. The meaning of the word baptism in the Greek (*baptizo*) is to dip or immerse. We were immersed or buried with Christ spiritually and his death became our death and His life our life. We are not the same; our old life has died and we are dead to sin but alive and new in Christ. Galatians 2: 20 states, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who lives but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith and the Son of God."*

Baptism also portrays a newness of life in Christ and it expresses our faith in the work of God to raise Jesus Christ from the dead.² [Col 2:12] We have not only died with Christ but we were also resurrected with him. This produces new character and principles in our lives. Where sin once reigned in our old lives, righteousness now rules in our new lives. We now have the newness of life by faith in the glory and through the working of God. Our baptism reveals that we were united to Christ through this death, burial, and resurrection and experienced the new life by trusting in His finished work.

Baptism demonstrates that we embrace God's intention for us--to live under the full control of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is an outward expression representing our willingness to embrace God's intention for us, which is to live under the full control of the Holy Spirit. It demonstrates a commitment to surrender to God's desire for our lives. Our commitment requires knowledge of the Word of God to nourish our spiritual journey as we *rise and walk in the newness of life!* This walk of faith is God-given. God's ways exceed anything we could possibly ask, think or imagine. God gave us minds capable of trusting and embracing the magnitude of His love revealed in His Word. Without this revelation, it is unnatural for our human minds to fully surrender to an unfamiliar purpose. God's ways are infinite and divine.

Our personal life experiences and attachments with the things of life can hinder the degree to which we come under the full control of the Holy Spirit. To come under the full control of the Holy Spirit does not make us puppets. God does not impose Himself on us. He gives us a choice to accept His divine plan for our lives. *"For we know that our old self was crucified with him, so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him."* [Romans 6: 6-8] We have hope, however, because Jesus modeled that we can live a life of obedience and that the indwelling Holy Spirit empowers us to do so. As we grow confidently in this walk of faith, Proverbs 3: 5-6 becomes a reality:

*"Trust in God with all thine heart; and lean not unto thy own understanding.
In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."*

² Piper, John. "What Baptism Portrays - Romans 5:20-6:4." *What is Baptism? Audio Cassette, 1997.*

Everyone who receives the ordinance of baptism professes his faith in the merits of Christ's death as the grounds of his own hope and salvation.

Because we have identified with Christ in His death we have confidence that we can be obedient to God's Word. The believer's death with Christ to sin's ruling power indicates that we are free from the shackles of sin and its power. We understand that obedience calls us to commit our lives to the precepts of God's Holy Word. Our faith in God initiates a confidence and growing trust that He who has begun a good work in us can actualize it.³

Summary

I. Baptism is a public expression of one's profession of faith.

- A. The Holy Spirit **revealed our sinfulness** and separation from God.
- B. After believing the Gospel message in our hearts **we professed** that Jesus Christ died for us and was raised from the dead to save us.
- C. **Baptism** is the believer saying to the world that they have been changed through the power of God's grace.
- D. Now we **identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection**.

II. Baptism, as a spiritual act, points to the deeper meaning of our salvation.

- A. We are **united with Christ**.
- B. Baptism is a Greek word (*baptizo*) meaning to **dip or immerse**.
- C. We are now dead to sin but **alive and new in Christ**. (He lives in us)
 - 1. We have a **new character**.
 - 2. We have **new principles**

III. Baptism demonstrates that we embrace God's intention for us—to live under the full control of the Holy Spirit.

- A. We have a **commitment to surrender** to God's desires for our lives.
- B. We live **under the control of the Holy Spirit**.
 - 1. We need to **study God's Word**.
 - 2. We need to **obey God's Word**.
 - 3. We begin to **walk by faith**.

The Holy Spirit revealed to us that we were sinners headed for eternal damnation. We realized that only God could save us. We accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and professed that God sent His only Son to die for our sins. We know He was resurrected and we have hope. His Holy Spirit lives in us now. We were obedient to God and showed the world that by being baptized that we are new creatures. We were

crucified with Christ and no longer are slaves to sin. We depend on the Holy Spirit to guide and teach us as we study God's Word and walk by faith.

In the Baptist church, only two ordinances are observed: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. An ordinance is a ceremony that the Lord has prescribed and charged the church to observe. These ordinances hold great significance and meaning for the sincere Christian, but do not of themselves impart divine grace or Christian character to those who receive them.

³ Clark, Wayne C. *The Meaning of Church Membership*, Judson Press, 1976. 52-58

Questions for Class Dialogue & Study

1. Examine each of the Scriptural passages and discuss what they reveal about baptism as an act of a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ.
 - a. Matthew 28: 18-20
 - b. Romans 6: 3-11
 - c. Galatians 5: 24-25

2. Journal Questions (*Personal Study and Application*)
 - a. What are some of your beliefs about baptism?
 - b. Have you been baptized? If so, examine your own experience, what significance does it hold for you and your walk with Christ and other believers?
 - c. If you have not been baptized and you profess a saving faith in Jesus Christ, why haven't you been baptized? What stands in your way? Consider going to the Pastor or an associate minister to receive prayer and counsel on this matter.
 - d. Reflect on your participation in the life of the Church. Honoring that we are united through our collective profession of faith in Christ means that we have a responsibility to help each other grow in grace. In what ways does your participation in the life of our church demonstrate your willingness and commitment to support our growth together as the body of Christ?

Closing Prayer