

The Saving Pledge of Baptism (1 Pet 3.13-22 Pt2)

WestminsterReformedChurch.org

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June 24, 2012

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (1 Peter 3:13-22 ESV)

Introduction

You may recall that I ended my last sermon on 1 Peter 3.13-22 at verse 18 *in the middle of a sentence*. That might not be the best place to conclude, but the reason to do so is the magnetism that pulls this sentence apart. Verses 13-17 lift verse 18 upward and verses 19-22 drag it downward in thought. What this shows is that all the ideas of the text form a unit held together by the thought of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection in verse 18. The sections on each side of verse 18 pull at it like two magnets. The first section discusses suffering for doing good, which is the context for baptism in the second section. Of course, the second section has the strong pull of the single sentence that includes 18, 19, and 20: ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

My work today will show that I am attempting to cut through some thick jungle growth with a sharp machete. **Baptism**, Peter says, **corresponds to this** (3.21, the KJV has **The like figure whereunto [even] baptism doth also now save us**). What does "this" refer to? Much has been written in answer to this question, but there is a consensus on the idea that the broad subject of the passage is baptism, somehow including the events of the days of Noah. The baptism of the OT has Christian baptism as its antitype (that is the literal word translated "correspondence"). Since the NT antitype is baptism, then in some way what occurred in the OT is a baptism. The OT baptism strongly implied is a shadow of its NT reality. So, the outline will reflect this shift from old to new in two points: 1) Christ and baptism in the time of promise and shadow (19-20) and 2) The Christian and baptism in the time of fulfillment and reality (21-22).

I. Christ and baptism in the time of promise and shadow

On the Christian side of the comparison, baptism is said to be an appeal to God for conscience clean obedience: **Baptism ...saves you...as...an appeal to God for a good conscience** (3.21). In some way, baptism saves, as we shall discuss later. So, if we emphasize Noah (and his family), how does Christian baptism correspond to his baptism? NT baptism is an obedient act that promises obedience. You can see this in the idea of *appealing* to God for a good conscience. As a prayer to God for obedience, it is a commitment to obedience from the inner man; it is a pledge of righteousness from the heart. Baptism is an act of obedience that embraces God's command and it is a word of promise about obedience. Where does obedient good behavior of a good conscience appear in the account of Noah? On this, Peter is silent. So, it is fundamentally

important to identify the active party in the days of Noah. In this context, the person who is active is clearly Christ who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. Read the sentence of 18-20 again and note that Christ is the subject of the sentence: **Christ...suffered...** (18) **he went and proclaimed** (19). Of course, the Holy Spirit is the one who made Jesus alive (v. 18, **made alive in the spirit** [i.e. Spirit]). Hence, the flesh-spirit contrast does not introduce the erroneous thought that Jesus died in body but not in spirit. Instead, His entire human make up as body and soul was subject to death and raised by the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit, Christ is the active party.

A. Let's consider the preacher of righteousness

Granted, because of the reference to Noah our thoughts immediately fix on him and Peter tells us later that Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet 2.5: **he...preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly**), but his preaching is not part of the record in the Book of Genesis (chapters 6-8). Peter tells us nothing about Noah's righteousness, faith, or obedience. Emphasis is on Christ as the preacher. Noah must be His agent. *So, we have to determine the typology from this starting point.*

Therefore, we need to pause a moment and use our machete again with some brief comments about this preaching: **he [Christ] went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,**²⁰ **because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah (19-20)?** The spirits are human beings (persons) just as the eight persons (v. 20) are literally eight souls (Heb 12.23, 9; Num 16.22; 27.16). Their disobedience goes with their imprisonment in sin because Genesis stresses their total depravity (Gen 6.5, **The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually; 8.21, the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth**). The preaching [hearlding in both 1 Pet 3.19 and 2 Pet 2.5] has the connotation of an announcement of divine triumph. In His patience, God offered the gospel in triumphal tones to the world that rejected His righteousness. Thus, it may have been a few that were saved, but their salvation was the salvation of the world as a huge step in the process of God's plan of redemption. Because this was a major historical-redemptive event, it is not surprising that there are things present of a typical nature; hence, the type to antitype unfolding that Peter describes.

B. Now consider the idea of baptism

The flood waters no doubt cue the idea of a baptism, but it is an unusual baptism. The world was baptized, but in a negative sense by the death of all disobedient people in the flood. This is clearly not believer's baptism! Noah was not baptized by the flood. Instead, he was saved *from the water* according to Genesis (7.7: **And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood**) and *through it* here in 1 Peter 3.20. Still, we can say that the judgment-baptism did save Noah from the ungodly world as the ark delivered him into a new world after the flood, but there is nothing in Noah's experience to which Christian baptism corresponds as a pledge of obedience.

Thus, our thoughts go back to the active party, to Christ to understand the typology. What He did finds its correspondence in Christian baptism, but should we connect the activity of Christ by the Spirit in the days of Noah to baptism? There are some reasons to answer affirmatively.

1) First, it makes sense for Peter to go down the baptism path because the suffering of Christ is central to the development of his thoughts (3.18): **For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.** Jesus told Peter that His suffering is a fearful baptism (Lk 12.50: **I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!**). 2) Second, our Lord's death is the high point of His suffering for He was obedient unto death, even death on the cross (Phil 2.8).

3) Third, Paul tells us that the death of Christ is His *one act of obedience* by which He saves all His people (Rom 5.18-19). The central principle in His baptism is obedience.

4) Fourth, we can hardly forget that Christ was active in Old Testament times in obedience to the Father in accord with the eternal covenant of redemption (the *pactum salutis*). In the days of Noah, the obedience of Christ came into head to head conflict with sin and rejection, but He announced the gospel of salvation in the ark of safety, and He enabled the obedience of Noah by which the world was saved in the remnant of eight persons. Peter describes this obedience as a type of Christian baptism. We can therefore take the preaching of Jesus in the days of Noah to be His obedience in both act and word that saved the world in the OT. His act and word obedience that saves is the type to which Christian baptism as obedience in act and word corresponds.

5) Finally, our Lord's triumphal announcement of a new world through a saving baptism expressed in type and anticipation His commitment to the baptism of suffering to save the world. In preaching triumph through the flood, Jesus promised to experience the overwhelming judgment of God to bring disobedient sinners safely through the Day of Judgment to become the redeemed world of glory. His obedience and His pledge of obedience to a flood-judgment-baptism has the qualities of a baptism that saves. The theology here is huge!

Thus, Christian baptism corresponds to the obedience of Christ in the days of the flood. Accordingly, Christian baptism saves you as an act of obedience in correspondence to how Christ's baptismal obedience saved the old world. Emphasis is on the word of Jesus (preaching in the context of evil people). His word was obedience in action that promised His ultimate act of obedience. Peter says this looked forward to Christian baptism that also saves by word as obedience in action, commitment, and self-surrender to God.

II. Christian baptism in the time of fulfillment and reality

Now, we should address two things about Christian water baptism: the meaning of the saving pledge of baptism, and the power of the saving pledge of baptism.

A. The meaning of the saving pledge of baptism

There is a negative and positive side to baptism: **Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience** (3.21). Negatively speaking, water baptism does not save as a literal and outward washing. There is no power in the water; there is no holy water in any fount of the church. Of course, it is an outward washing ritual, but that is not where its meaning lies; literal water has meaning by God's command that calls for obedience. It saves, Peter says, as an appeal to God for a good conscience and thus for obedience. The commitment is to gentleness and respect from a good conscience with focus on Christ. This is a pledge of a holy life.

By this obedient act and commitment to good behavior, you save yourself from the evil generation around you in the fallen and corrupt world, as Noah was saved from his evil generation. You save yourself from the corruption of sin and sins consequences here and now. It is like saying to someone: by doing this you will save yourself from much grief and from much trouble. Compare this with obedience to the fifth commandment by children: when they obey their parents, they save themselves from being hit by a car or from losing a leg hopping box cars. The law protects; obedience is the way of blessing and a full life. Of course, the fifth commandment has the promise of long life as it serves the believer's good and God's glory according His knowledge, wisdom, and grace.

Furthermore, we should accent the point that protection from being hit by a car has the higher reference of protection from the judgment of God for it is His judgment, in part and in anticipation, that we experience in the consequences of disobedience in daily life. Therefore, God's judgment in these consequences of daily life anticipates the Day of Judgment that leads the way to the coming new world. There will be a saved world made up of a remnant from the fallen human family. The little flock of eight will become the world. Blessing now and yet to come in the Day of Judgment is for you by the surrender of your self wholly to God for obedience, which is core in the appeal of baptism as a commitment to obey the Lord in a fallen world, even though that obedience may lead to suffering for doing good.

B. The power of the saving pledge of baptism

The power is resurrection power. Consider how Christ's death in the baptism of suffering is presupposed in His resurrection exaltation: ²¹ **Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,** ²² **who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him** (3.21-22). He is now universal sovereign and Sabbath King.

His baptism was foreshadowed in His obedience in conflict with evil in the days of Noah. The ultimate pattern for His action in the OT and for Christian baptism is His baptism of suffering in death on the cross. When the shift from promise to fulfillment, from type to antitype, occurs, the archetype becomes clear and the full triumph in the resurrection comes into view. It is by the power of the resurrection that God gives us the new birth from the darkness of our death in sin (1 Pet 1.3). It is by power of the resurrection that we step forward in the free act of obedience in baptism that opens a door to a new found freedom, and it is the power of the resurrection that upholds us on the path of obedience all our days.

Therefore, the true obedience of a Christian in baptism is the fruit of his union with Christ in His death and resurrection. When a Christian obeys in baptism from the heart, His baptism is in the Spirit (1 Cor 12.3, 13) and through the resurrection (1 Pet 3.21). Accordingly, the obedience of faith and repentance in baptism saves in the sense that it is a means through which Jesus saves. *Christian baptismal obedience is efficaciously enabled obedience.* Moreover, as such, it promises the obedience of the pledge that the Christian makes. Truly, the believer will obey by the grace of God and should be aware of that fact from the very beginning. If so, he will say in baptism: I commit myself to obedience by the grace of God (as we sing "my life in sovereign hands"). There is no self-salvation here and no dependence on ourselves. Thus, baptism, as our pledge of obedience, is God's promise of efficacious grace that enables the very obedience of baptism and the freedom of Christian obedience that follows baptism from here to eternity.

Conclusions

1) Even in the horrific evil of men and consequent judgment of the flood, God promised the redemption of the world through Christ. Sin abounds but grace abounds more exceedingly.

2) It is the saving power of grace that enables you to pledge a holy life of discipleship and it is grace, God's amazing grace, that will enable you to make progress in good behavior step by step all the way to glory. Be encouraged to renew your covenant of baptism because Jesus endured the punishment of a world of judgment-deserving sinners for you, to bring you to God!

May we fall down before the majesty of God who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead even as He chose us in the sanctification of the Spirit for obedience (1 Pet 1.1-3); may we acknowledge our sin and former bondage in sin's imprisonment; may the Holy Spirit teach us to wonder at the sacrifice of Christ for us in His baptism of suffering and may He thus enable us to live out our pledge of baptism, even if we must suffer for doing good; to the glory of the triune God, amen.