

Truth Topics • Knowing what you believe and why (Part 2)

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Knowing what you believe and why. We started last week by talking about some of the essential elements of our belief and we're going to continue doing that today. We're going to talk about just our salvation today.

And I want to encourage you that the reason that I'm doing this. I mean, there's several reasons for doing this. Not the least of which is to stabilize in your hearts what you know to be true. But also to help you to be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have according to what Peter encourages us to do.

And I think there's a lot of Christians who can point to things and say yeah, I believe that. Somebody will say something about the Bible, or about Jesus, or about God in general, and a Christian might be able to say, yeah, I believe that. That's what I believe. But if someone were to challenge them, why do you believe that? Why is your hope in that? That might be more of a challenge.

That's why Peter says, be prepared always to give a reason for the hope. Not just to say, this is what my hope is in, but to say, here's why. Here's why I believe what I believe.

And that's why we've been going through this series and talking about the reliability of God's Word, and dealing with attacks on our faith, and why we dealt with the things we did last week.

And now we're continuing on with yet another truth statement that I believe is true for Christians. And we're going to look at it, and here we go. It's going to be up on the screen here for you. And this is the statement,

I believe the only way we can be forgiven is to turn from our sins and put our faith in the death of Jesus Christ as payment for our own penalty, and to receive Him as Savior and Lord. I believe that anyone who does this becomes a new creation, receiving God's indwelling Holy Spirit by which he/she is born again and made a child of God.

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That's pretty heavy, isn't it? I mean, there's a lot there. I mean, we could go on and talk about that kind of stuff for a long time. But what we're talking about here... Last week when we talked about the person of Jesus, His nature, and His work on the cross, you'll remember one of the points we made is that we believe that the cross is sufficient for our salvation. In other words, nothing else is required other than the cross. What we were talking about then was what Jesus had done on the cross for us, and we emphasized that work. Okay.

Now we're talking about the results of that work in your life. All right. This is the payoff if you will, this is what happens when an individual comes to faith. And if I had to pick 4 things from what we just read, it would be basically this with the Results of placing your FAITH in Christ are,

Results of placing FAITH in Christ...

- Forgiveness of sins
- Receiving God's Holy Spirit
- New birth in Christ
- Becoming a child of God

Forgiveness of sins, Receiving God's Holy Spirit. And that's a promise to all who come to Him. Thirdly, you receive the New birth, which is what we refer to as being born again. And that's not a term that we made up. It's one Jesus coined. And then you Become a child of God.

And we're going to talk about each one of these briefly here tonight. Let's take a look at the first one, which is, Forgiveness of sins.

Results of placing FAITH in Christ...

- **Forgiveness of sins**
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This probably has to be one of the most glorious things about coming to Jesus. And really it's the main reason people come to Jesus. I mean, there are other reasons why people might come to God initially and they might be needing Him to do a work in their marriage. And so they come to God on that basis. And frankly, that was why Sue and I originally came to the Lord. Our marriage was in desperate need of something. We didn't know what, just healing.

And as we came to Him and as we approached Him, we recognized. We were approaching a holy God. A God who deserved our worship, but more than that, a God who had taken upon Himself our penalty. And so our marriage became the catalyst that drew us to Him so that we could start finding out what this God was all about and what a relationship with Him was all about.

And if I, if you had the opportunity tonight, several of you could stand up and you could give testimony of just something that's happened in your life was a catalyst, a springboard, if you will to bring you to the Lord.

Some of you went through a physical injury. Some of you went through the death of a loved one. Maybe the death of a dream, could be many other things. Some people it's bankruptcy. Something that takes place, some traumatic, something or other that, that causes you to just begin to question why am I here? What's life all about? And so forth.

And when you did, you came to find out that this God who you are turning to, who you desire to know more about, is One who actually did the most incredible thing for you. And that is, He bore the penalty of your sin, and as a result, you now are walking in the forgiveness of your sins. And when Christians, when people get a handle on this, it's just, it's life changing.

I mean, when we really begin to grasp the idea that I'm forgiven and the weight of all of that is gone, some people come to church seeking just relief from this burden. They recognize that sin is a reality in their lives and they don't know what to do with it. And they feel condemned and they have tried all their lives to run from it. Or to numb it up or something with life, or drugs, or whatever, sex, or money, and it just didn't work. And finally, they're just like, I got to just, I got to do something. There's this burden in my life.

And they come and they realize that the gospel message is all about forgiveness. And that God sent His Son to die for them on the cross. And when they get ahold of that, and when they realize that it's gone, the burden is lifted. And it literally changes the entire landscape of their view of life and the future. And they begin to talk about this great weight that has been lifted from their lives.

Forgiveness is one of the most amazing promises, and you know what? It's something that God prophesied hundreds of years before Christ was even born. Let me show you a prophecy from Jeremiah 31 where God says, and this is concerning the new covenant.

Forgiveness of sins

Jeremiah 31:34b (ESV)

“For, I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sins no more.”

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Isn't that an amazing promise? God says, I'm not even going to remember your sins. I think it was Corrie Ten Boom who used to have this word picture she would use of the sea. She called it the sea of forgetfulness. God would cast our sins into the sea of forgetfulness and He placed a sign there that says no fishing allowed. In other words, don't go back and dredge up all these things which God has chosen to forget as it relates to your sin. What a wonderful promise that is.

And then Acts chapter 3. This is a great verse where Peter speaks to a crowd and says,

Forgiveness of sins

Acts 3:19 (ESV)

“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out...”

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There's another interesting sort of a verbal word picture of the whole idea of just the forgiveness of sins, them being blotted out. Your sins are blotted out as if they were they've been written down, as if they've been recorded all this time in a book. Can you imagine the book that holds all of your sins? Mine would be like a 10 volume encyclopedia in small print and yet when we come to Christ, they're blotted out. They're erased. What an amazing reality that is. Forgiveness of sins is the first incredible benefit of coming to Christ.

Next, as we look at the next, we see that it's,

Receiving God's Holy Spirit

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John records for us the very first time the Holy Spirit was given to believers. And you'll remember it took place on the evening of the resurrection when Jesus was with them. It says,

Receiving God's Holy Spirit

John 20:22 (ESV)

And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

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This is, again, is the very first time that the Holy Spirit came to indwell. This is confusing to some people. They wonder about what was the relationship of the Holy Spirit to people in the Old Testament? and did people receive the indwelling presence of God's Spirit in the Old Testament? The answer is no, they did not. And some people will follow that up with, well why? Why didn't they well? It's because the vessel had not yet been cleansed see, and you are the vessel. People are the vessel.

We receive God's Holy Spirit to come live inside of us, but that couldn't happen until the vessel had been cleansed. In the old Testament, the Holy Spirit had two relationships to people. He was either with them, or with and upon them.

In other words, the Holy Spirit came upon to empower in the Old Testament, just like He does in the new. And the Holy Spirit was **with** people, but the Holy Spirit was not **in** people before Jesus's death, burial and resurrection. You never, you don't read about the Spirit coming in to indwell, very much with. In fact, very powerfully with some people in the Old Testament, but not, in that particular sense.

This is that time from John 20, where Jesus said for the very first time, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" And then you'll remember also, Paul writing in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 saying,

Receiving God's Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 3:16 (ESV)

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

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This is why we believe, this is why we believe that the Holy Spirit is in us because the Bible is full of these promises that say, this is the way it is. There are no sacred buildings today, except for you.

In the old Testament, there was the temple in Jerusalem and God's Spirit was dwelling there in the Holy of Holies in a very unique sort of a way, but the temple got destroyed. And then we come to the point of the new Testament, and instead of building a new physical building called the temple, God began to fill people. That's the new temple of the Holy spirit.

And it's a wonderful sort of a reality, but as you can well imagine, there are many implications with the Holy spirit coming to live inside of a believer. I mean, think about that. The Holy Spirit comes to live inside of you. Isn't that a strange thought? I mean, isn't that a strange idea? We tend to take it for granted and yet when you stop and think about what are the implications of God taking up residence inside you? It's a mind blower.

You have to know that there are, there's going to be changes in your life. There's going to be changes inside you, inside the way, about the way you think, or the way you act, the way you talk. Not all at once, but we begin to see those changes of the Spirit coming to live inside.

The next thing that we're talking about as it relates to the results of placing our faith in Christ, is the new birth that we have in Jesus.

Results of placing FAITH in Christ...

- **Forgiveness of sins**
- Receiving God's Holy Spirit
- **New birth in Christ**
- Becoming a child of God

We're going to read this passage from John chapter 3 here on the screen. It says,

New birth in Christ

John 3:1-8 (ESV)

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

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New birth in Christ

John 3:1-8 (ESV)

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

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New birth in Christ

John 3:1-8 (ESV)

Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

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New birth in Christ

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Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

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What is this new birth that we're talking about? Well, Jesus describes it here as birth by the Spirit and that's what's happening. When you come to Christ and you receive the forgiveness that He makes available to you through the cross, the Spirit comes to indwell, and you are born again.

Now, it's not a physical thing. Jesus said to Nicodemus, listen, the flesh gives birth to flesh, but that's all it can do. It is the Spirit that must give birth to the spirit and that is that process by which you are born again. Peter talks about this 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 3. He says blessed,

New birth in Christ

1 Peter 1:3 (ESV)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Here we are talking about the new birth and the results of the indwelling presence of the Spirit, all the promises that go along with that.

Finally, we come to the last result of putting our faith in Christ which is,

Results of placing FAITH in Christ...

- **Forgiveness of sins**
- Receiving God's Holy Spirit
- New birth in Christ
- **Becoming a child of God**

Becoming a child of God. This is one of those interesting benefits that I think probably a lot of us don't think that much about. Sometimes people will bring it up to us. We often don't think about it. And there's even some misunderstanding about it, particularly in the world. There's even a song that talks about, that we're all God's children and that sort of thing.

The fact of the matter is, we are not all God's children from the standpoint of everyone in the world. And that's something that people in the world might find a little bit challenging to maybe believe.

The fact of the matter is, becoming a child of God is something that happens when we come to Christ and that's what's told us in John chapter 1. Look at this passage. It says,

Becoming a Child of God

John 1:11-12 (ESV)

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

He came to his own, (and that's speaking of the Jews. In other words, Jesus appeared to the Jews) and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

Notice what it takes to become a child of God. It is to those who receive Him, to those who believe on His name. And we've mentioned what it means before, to believe on someone's name. It means to believe everything he's said about himself. The name encompasses every claim that the individual has made. So it's believing everything about Jesus. When you receive Him as your Savior, you become through the Spirit, a child of God. He makes you a child of God.

And, of course, there are some pretty incredible things that go along with that. Paul talks about them in Romans, chapter 8. Look at this.

Becoming a Child of God

Romans 8:16-17 (ESV)

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Now that the Spirit has come to live inside of you and I, He bears witness. What does it mean to bear witness? It means to testify or just to speak. The Spirit who now lives within you by faith is speaking to you, and what is He saying? You're a child of God. That's what He says. The Spirit bears witness that you are a child of God.

And then Paul goes on to talk about the implications. If you're children, well, guess what? Then you're an heir. You're heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. That's a pretty amazing benefit. And we don't have time to go into it all. And frankly if we could really grasp the depth of what that means, I dare say

none of us in this room would be able to stay seated for very long. We would be up jumping around, hooping and hollering, and probably making fools of ourselves, because we had come to terms with the fact that, wow, I'm an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. I mean, truly, it is an amazing thought.

And the only reason we're not jumping up right now and hooping and hollering is because we really don't have a sense of what it, the depth of what it means because He hasn't even revealed it to us yet. All we've received, the Bible says, is we've received a down payment. And a down payment is just a small, a little earnest agreement of what is to come.

The Holy Spirit is that down payment and that's glorious and it's wonderful and it's great but there's this whole thing that's coming down the pike. And we're all just sitting around going, yeah, that's really cool. I wonder what that's all about because we don't know. I mean, we all we know is we're joined heirs with Christ and that means that there's an inheritance that awaits you.

I mean, think about that for a while. We get all excited when there's a human inheritance. Imagine, imagine somebody getting a letter in the mail saying something, you had some long lost uncle you never knew or didn't even meet. And he left you money and property. You'd be blown out of the water. You'd be like, you're kidding me? And you probably dance a jig right there. Just like, wow, this is amazing. Well, anything that you can receive from a human being is going to go away. And besides, when you die, you can't take it with you. But this, what we're talking about here in Romans, is an eternal inheritance. Yeah, so anyway.

Now we're going to move on to our last truth claim. And that is, we've dealt with here,

Tonight's Truth Claims

- Salvation by Faith
- The Indwelling Spirit
- **Water Baptism**

Salvation by faith. We talked about The Indwelling Spirit. Now we're going to deal with the issue of Water Baptism. And here's the truth claim that goes along with it.

I believe in water baptism by immersion— not for salvation but because of salvation— to fulfill the command of Christ.

I believe in water baptism by immersion— not for salvation but because of salvation— to fulfill the command of Christ.

There it sits. I thought about this for quite a while I was studying this out. Some of you might be wondering what this particular claim is even doing here. I mean, it's isn't that like saying, I believe in communion or something like that? Well, the reason that this statement appears here is not so much about water baptism itself is, but is here because of how it relates to salvation. That's why it's here.

You see the issue isn't so much water baptism by immersion, versus water baptism by sprinkling, or water baptism by, I don't know, a water balloon. That's not the issue. That's not the question here.

The issue, the real question is what role does water baptism play in our salvation. And this is a question that has plagued Christians for many, many years, and it has been a real problem. I get a lot of questions via email from people asking about water baptism and its significance and its benefit. I even had an interesting twist on the question that came, I don't know, maybe 6 months ago or so.

A guy wrote me. He doesn't attend our fellowship but a guy wrote me after reading something I wrote on water baptism from a blog post and just said, can you give me scriptures that prove that we don't have to be baptized to be saved. Which was a completely different way of turning the question on its ear. And it is a pretty, it was a pretty challenging thing to answer.

But the reason we make this statement right here that you see on the screen is to essentially combat the idea and fairly, somewhat popular belief that water baptism is in fact a requirement of salvation and being saved.

Now I want you to follow this for just a moment while I put a couple of things on the screen for you. First of all,

The process of being saved, and transformed into a Child of God is referred to as “regeneration.”

The process of being saved, and transformed into a Child of God is referred to as “regeneration.”

All right, I want you just to follow that for just a moment. Let me give you a scripture that actually uses that word. Titus 3.

Titus 3:5-6 (ESV)

*...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, **by the washing of regeneration** and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*

*...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, (in other words, not by our good deeds) but according to his own mercy, (and I highlighted this) **by the washing of regeneration** and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*

So you see the two points I'm making so far. First of all, when you get saved, another word for that is regeneration. You're regenerated. Almost like regenerating a dead car battery, bringing it back to life. You were brought to life except that you were born again, all right? And that is regeneration and Paul writing to Titus refers to this idea of the washing of regeneration.

Now look at the next thought.

Therefore, the belief that water baptism is essential (meaning, without it, a person CANNOT be saved) is referred to as:

BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

Therefore, the belief that water baptism is essential (meaning, without it, a person CANNOT be saved) is referred to (therefore) as: Baptismal regeneration.

Now you have the name for what this doctrine, or this idea, is called. So if somebody says to you, I believe that you must be baptized in order to be saved, and if you're not baptized, you're not saved. That is called baptismal regeneration. You now know what it's referred to as. And that's not a biblical term, but it's a term that we've given to the teaching that water baptism is essential for salvation.

Now, proponents of baptismal regeneration... You might say, well, I mean, there's got to be reasons why people believe it. Well, there are, and frankly, it's the same, they're looking at the same scriptures that you and I are looking at. And yet they're coming to the conclusion with those same Scriptures that, you must be baptized in water in order to be saved.

They're not reading another Bible. That's what makes this such a challenging idea to address. Because it'd be one thing if they were looking at different, a different Bible, if they had a different, different pages, and different words, and

that sort of thing. But they're looking at the same Bible that you look at and they're coming away with the conclusion that if you're not dunked in water, you're not going to heaven. Simple as that. Baptism is required. Right?

And one of the reasons for that is that you will notice, and I've noticed this over the years, proponents of what we call Baptismal Regeneration, tend to see formulas in God's Word. Formulas that need to be followed. Formulas that need to be recognized and followed. And there are several passages which baptismal regenerists use to prove their point, that they believe baptism is required. But one of the passages that I've been hit with many times throughout the years, it's very popular. It's Acts 2:38. I'll put it up on the screen for you. And it basically says this. This is Peter speaking to the multitude on the day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:38 (ESV)

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

And Peter said to them, "Repent (which means to turn from your sin) and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Now I will grant you, if this is the only verse we've got to work on, or you might couple this with a few others that sound very much like, baptism is a requirement, we probably would come to that conclusion.

But again, this is seen as a formula. And the formula is repent, and the next step is be baptized, and then the next step is you receive forgiveness, and then the final step is, receive the Holy Spirit. And they will tell you that if you don't do it in that order. And some of the churches that teach Baptismal Regeneration also have a tag that they put on it and say, you must also be baptized in the name of Jesus. And that's because that's what's listed in that verse.

And so you can see that it's a formulaic sort of a view of passages. You've got to do it in just this way. If you're baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that's not good enough. According to some people, you must be baptized in the name of Jesus and preferably in our church. That's usually one of the other things that is inferred, and then later on confirmed, if you tell him, well, thanks, I'll go get baptized somewhere else. Well, you better stick around here and let us do it because we got this thing dialed in and if you really want to be saved, you better do this thing right.

The problem with that though as far as seeing a formula of these things is with scaling these things down to a formula, is that there are dozens, literally dozens of other verses in the New Testament that speak of our salvation as the result of faith and faith alone. I mean, literally dozens of passages that say, believe on the Lord and you will be saved. And there's no mention of water baptism or frankly, anything else for matter. And if baptism were in fact necessary for salvation, then all of those other verses would in fact be incomplete. They would not give you the full Gospel.

And there were times when it was even preached, and you can read those messages in the New Testament, where they made no mention of water baptism as the means of salvation when they were preaching Jesus to people. And of course there's other issues with that as well. I mean, you got the situation of the believers at the house of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10 that you have to grapple with as well. Here you have Peter preaching to a house jam packed full of Gentiles. He's sharing the Gospel. Jesus died for you on the cross, da, da, da, and suddenly, the Holy Spirit falls on these people. And Peter looks at his companions and he says, guys, check this out. They've received the Holy Spirit just like us. In other words, they put their faith in Jesus, they were born again, and everybody could see it.

And then, it was then that Peter said, well, can anybody give me a reason why these people shouldn't be baptized then, since they're already saved. They, God has shown his stamp of approval and they've received the Holy Spirit. And they were like, no, I can't think of any reason so they took them all out and baptized him, which is a very appropriate thing to do at that particular point.

But here's the point of all this receiving salvation is not a process. It's not a formula and there isn't a recipe that you have to follow to a specific detailed sort of a way. It is simply believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. The one who trusts in God will not be put to shame. The one who trusts in the Lord will not be put to shame.

What is water baptism then if it's not essential for salvation? Well, let's put a statement here about that.

Water baptism is first and foremost an act of obedience.

It is a way of publicly identifying with Jesus Christ in his death, burial and resurrection.

It is a RESPONSE to salvation, and the fact that Jesus identified with sinful man by dying in our place on the cross.

Water baptism is first and foremost an act of obedience because Jesus told His disciples, go to all nations, to preach the Gospel and so forth. Make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He told them to go out and do that. We know that it's an act of obedience on our part to do that.

Secondly, it's a way of publicly identifying with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. And that in itself is a response to salvation. And the fact that Jesus identified with sinful man by dying in our place on the cross.

When a believer comes to realize Jesus identified with him or her by going to the cross, it's a powerful sort of an idea. Jesus identified Himself with sinful man, with me. And now I get the privilege of identifying myself with Him. That's a very powerful thing.

Sometimes people will ask, why did Jesus submit to water baptism Himself? Well, remember something about the water baptism He submitted to. That was John's baptism. That wasn't Christian baptism. John's baptism was what? It was a baptism of repentance and he was called to prepare sinful Israel to receive their Messiah.

Jesus came, I can imagine what that was like for John. I mean, that must've been pretty mind blowing to see Jesus walking down into the water. And we know that John even objected to the whole process. He said to Jesus listen, I need to be baptized by You and yet you come to me? And Jesus said, it's okay, we need to do this. Let's fulfill all righteousness.

What was Jesus doing? He was identifying. He was identifying with you and me. He didn't walk into the waters of baptism because He had any sin to repent from. He walked into the waters of baptism because that was where you and I should have been. And then He went to the cross and died, not because He had any sin to pay for, but because He died for you. He was identifying with you and me who should have been on that cross you see.

So there's this powerful identification going on from the beginning of Jesus's ministry to the point where you and I accept what He did on the cross and embrace it. And then we have this incredible opportunity to identify with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. And of course, water baptism is that beautiful picture.

We take somebody back down into the water, death, burial. And then coming up out of the water, resurrection and cleansing is thrown in there just as another little picture. But water baptism is an amazing picture of our salvation and we do it because we're saved, not to get saved.

And so going back to that original statement, we say, I believe in water baptism by immersion, not for salvation, but because of salvation. Because I'm saved, I am, I'm going to be baptized or I will be baptized in water.

We have looked at our salvation. We have looked at the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit. We've looked at the implications of what the Spirit comes to do in our lives.

We've looked at water baptism specifically as it relates to water, or excuse me, salvation and what role it plays or doesn't play in that salvation.