

What is a 'baptist' church?

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[0 : 00] So, if you're just visiting, let me just explain again. We've been looking at the matter of what sort of church we are. And the relevance of this is as we go forward into new chapters of the church's work and life.

What are the things that we really want to hang on to? Obviously, things change. There's all sorts of things that are flexible. But what are the things we really want to hang on to as being our core values as a church?

And we've been looking at what sort of church we are, as we shall see. So, there are all sorts of different churches. Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, Anglican, Methodists. And what sort of church are we?

Our name in full is Calvary Evangelical Church. I don't always say the evangelical because I don't think people always understand what's meant by it. But that's our name and we'll talk about that in a moment.

And perhaps the more specific question is if what sort of church do we want to be? What sort of Christians do we aim to be? What is down deep in our determination to be God's people?

[1 : 15] What sort of Christians are we committed to being? And I'd like to get us to the point at the end of this where I persuaded you to say one thing. I want to be as a baptized Christian.

If you're not already a baptized Christian, to be a baptized Christian. So, I mentioned evangelical. And just to recap on that, evangel means gospel.

Gospel means good news. And a gospel church stands on, believes, preaches the good news of Jesus, the Christian good news.

And we looked at Paul's summary of this in his letter to the Corinthian Christians, chapter 15. And he says, this is the gospel that I preached to you by which you're saved.

If you take your stand on it, this is what you believed, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

[2 : 16] So, the gospel we see is about Jesus. It's particularly about what he's done to deal with sin, for sins.

And this is a saving action of God. And it depends on the Scriptures. And we have that, just some points there in a nutshell, which are going to develop in a moment.

We then looked at the role of the Scriptures. And we spent a Sunday morning saying that the gospel is totally intertwined with the Word of God. You can't really separate being a gospel church from being a Bible church.

And you could break it down by saying it's about Jesus. So, you've got the Gospels in the words and deeds of Jesus. Then he passed that on to the apostles and said, you go and tell people.

I'll explain it to you. You explain it to everybody else. So, the apostles went and we have the New Testament Scriptures that they either wrote or authorized.

[3 : 21] And the Scriptures that Paul was referring to when he said Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, of course, the Hebrew Scriptures, because the New Testament hadn't been written then.

So, one way or another, you include the whole Bible. And this is what we take our stand on. This is what we believe. This is where we find our faith.

This is where God speaks. This is what the Bible says God says. And you remember John Wesley saying, if there's a book that tells me how to get to heaven, give me that book.

Give me that book because this saves me. You know, in the sense of the words in it, I believe them and receive them. This is salvation. There's eternal life here.

So, give me that book. And I hope your relationship with the Bible is akin to that. That somehow or another you're saying, I couldn't live without this book.

[4 : 19] Words in it. Give me that book. And then, last week, I tried to explain this idea of being a Reformed church, meaning holding to a particular way of understanding the Gospel.

So, I think the way I would like to put it is we have the Gospel and the Reformed understanding of it is its deepest, truest, most powerful way of understanding the Gospel.

So, the Gospel says that we're sinners and Christ came to deal with sin. And the Reformed teaching actually enlarges on that and says sin is so bad that we are totally, totally stuck without Christ.

Unless the Father enables us, we cannot come. No one can come to me unless the Father draws him. Sin is that bad. And grace is that good.

Salvation by grace. It's totally by grace. It's even more by grace than you thought it was. That when you become a Christian, you think, how did I get here? Actually, God brought me every single step of the way.

[5 : 28] I didn't do a little percentage of it. He brought me all the way. He opened my heart. He opened my eyes. And 100% of the praise goes to Him.

And the Reformed understanding says what did Christ do on the cross? Did He make salvation sort of possible, vaguely probable, or did He actually achieve it? Did He so deal with human sin on the cross under the, in the context of His heavenly Father, that it would be impossible for any of His people to be lost?

He died so effectively that once He died, none of His people could possibly be lost. And that means that the future is totally secure.

Christ will raise all those people on the last day. And that is my way of explaining the Reformed teaching, the Reformed understanding. There's a lot more that you could go into, but I think that's, if you've got that, you've got the heart of it.

And it's not just a teaching from certain teachers in history. It's what the Bible says. If you read the Bible, this is how it puts it across.

[6 : 47] And I was trying to persuade us last week that this is a greatly strengthening way of understanding the Scriptures. There's real depth here to help us the way we need help.

And it's awe-inspiring. And if you begin to think of what this says about the work of Christ and the grace of God and the plan of God, it moves us to worship and to adoration and to wonder and praise.

So that's what we did before. Any of that sound familiar? Yeah, okay, good, right. And the fourth bit that I'm coming to on this fourth of this series is the Baptist bit.

So Evangelical Reformed Baptist Church, what's the Baptist bit about? So there's some water, which I'm going to say you can be splashed into or splashes on top of you.

I think that's the understanding of baptism in the Bible. That in itself is a statement that I'm not stopping to prove, but I think it's just a lot of water and it can splash onto you or you can be splashed into it.

[7 : 57] Baptism, and that's my little picture for baptism. So notice what I've said here. Evangelical Reformed Baptist Church.

And I think that to me that the order is significant. Number one, we're a gospel church. That's absolutely central. Number two, we're a Reformed church.

That is the particular understanding that we have. And number three, we're a Baptist church. And I would hold them in that order, actually.

So I'll explain in a moment. Baptism is a true thing. It's a commanded thing. But not everything, when push comes to shove, is of the same importance.

And I think the theologians call it the same dogmatic rank, meaning this is more important than this. They're all important, but if push comes to shove, that's more important than this and so on and so on.

[9 : 00] And so I would say when it comes to Baptist, there's a horses for courses thing, meaning that if we're appointing elders, I think we need to be exactly agreed on baptism.

I think that to be a church member, we don't necessarily have to be completely in agreement on baptism. But it's the question, how much agreement is needed for how much we're trying to do?

Certainly, except as a Christian, somebody who has a different understanding of baptism. And here's the historical fact that fellow Christians do differ over the mode and the correct subjects of baptism.

So John Wesley, sorry, I'm sorry. People would disagree over reformedness and people would disagree over baptism. And the question is really, how much are we trying to do together? And does baptism, if we disagree with baptism, does that become a problem? So just as a matter of fact, we are members of the Sussex Gospel Partnership. We pray for churches in the Sussex Gospel Partnership.

[10:22] Many of us went to a conference with members of the Sussex Gospel Partnership. And I have really valuable relationships with guys in the Sussex Gospel Partnership.

We had somebody from the Sussex Gospel Partnership came and spoke at our weekend away, however many years ago it was, when Mark came. I can't remember. I can't remember years anymore. But many of these people do not have the same view on baptism.

So many of the guys in the Sussex Gospel Partnership are Anglicans and would have a different view of baptism. Oh, well, let's just go back. Have I said everything I wanted to say there?

Yeah. And I perhaps should also say that the vast majority of people who take the Reformed understanding of salvation do not take the baptistry on baptism.

So most of the great teachers of the Reformed understanding are infant Baptists.

[11:30] So there we are. That's the way it is. So that's why I say we have to put these in order of importance. So what I'd like to look at this morning is, number one, Christ and baptism.

And I've got quite a lot to say on that. Number two, Christians and baptism. And number three, church and baptism. Baptism. And to be perfectly honest, for my last sermon of this series, I think I could go back and do it a bit better, actually.

But anyway, let's not say that. Baptism is a big subject. And it has many layers of meaning. So I think the word for that is polyvalent.

So if you want to drop that into your conversation over lunch and see if anybody understands what on earth you're talking about. Many layers of meaning. Historically, there's been a big division over this, which is what I was saying earlier.

Many of the traditional churches would hold to the baptism of babies, which is called pedo-baptism, because pedo means child.

[12:37] And most Christians in the Reformed churches follow infant baptism, which I got ahead of myself. I'm talking here about the baptism of believers. And that includes children, if they are believing children.

And that is usually referred to as credo-baptism, because credo means faith. And another piece of vocabulary, back when this was controversial, people who were baptized as adults sometimes got called anabaptists, because the anna means re or again, so baptized again.

And if you read the history of that, those people get called anabaptists, and I won't go into that. So, are you, have I exhausted you already?

You're going to have to work on this this morning. Are you ready to do that? So, sort of perk up. So I'm going to say this about Christ and baptism. I'm going to say these things.

Outward signs of God's work already existed. Baptism already existed. John the Baptist and Jesus instituted Christian baptism. So I hope that's not making it too complicated.

[13:48] Let's do this together. Please turn to Genesis chapter 1. Signs. Let's look at outward signs of God's work.

Outward signs of God's work. That's what we're talking to the boys and girls. Signs. So, Genesis 1.14.

Genesis 1.14. Says. Genesis 1.14. Says.

And God said, Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night and let them serve as signs to mark seasons, days, and years.

Okay, did you see the word signs in that sentence? And the signs are what? Stars and sun and moon.

[14:46] And they show something. So God puts signs into creation. They mark up seasons and days and years and festivals and feasts.

It's the same word used for the Jewish festivals and feasts. So here are signs. Now just think about this. What do these signs say? They say, I can see Orion in the night sky.

Christmas is coming. The moon has changed yet again. Another month has gone past. When I can no longer see Orion in the night sky, spring is coming.

It says something to me. It reminds me. It sort of plugs me into reality, if you like. So there's one thing. Let's go to Genesis 9.13.

Genesis 9.13. This is the flood. Genesis 9.13.

[15:56] If I take verse 12. This is the sign of the covenant I am making between you and every living creature. A covenant for all generations to come. I have set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.

Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all creatures of every kind on the earth. So what's the sign in this case? The rainbow.

Who is it a sign for? For God. And what does he do when he sees the sign? He remembers.

That's what it says, isn't it? When I see the sign, have I got that right? I will remember my covenant.

That's interesting, isn't it? It's not a sign for us. It's a sign for God.

[17:01] So God uses signs. And they remind him of things. Now, do you actually think God had really forgotten? I think the answer is no. But he puts it this way for our blessing, for our understanding.

And I think the way it works is this. I think that if we think God has forgotten, we think God's forgotten. And we see the rainbow, we say, ah, no, he can't have forgotten because the rainbow will remind him.

He won't forget because he sees the rainbow. And I can just notice that that's what he's doing.

Does that make sense? That it is, there's the rainbow, it reminds God.

So we are to understand when we wonder whether God has forgotten. We see the rainbow, ah, God's going to be reminded. It's a little bit when I hear, oh, no, I won't go on to that.

Okay, Genesis 17, 11. Genesis 17, 11. So here is quite an important one. We've got ourselves into the way of thinking about signs a little bit. 17, 11.

[18:17] Now this is circumcision. Abraham and his children. Genesis 17. There's a big chapter on, that has a lot to do with circumcision, a lot to do with covenant.

And in 17, 11, it says, you are to undergo circumcision and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

For the generations to come, every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner, those who are not your offspring.

Whoever is born in your household or bought with your money must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who has not been circumcised in the flesh will be cut off from his people.

He has broken my covenant. So there's my visual for circumcision. Now what's going on here? This is a promise made to Abraham and there is a covenant.

[19:25] Covenant is really a relationship embedded in words. And it includes promises that God makes to Abraham or Abraham is now called and responses that are expected from Abraham if he's really engaging in this covenant.

So chapter 17, verse 1, I am God Almighty. Walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you. I will greatly increase your numbers. There's promise and there's a responsive engagement which means he'll walk before God and be blameless.

And the promise includes posterity, descendants, nations. It says in verse 6, I will make nations of you and kings from you. It includes land.

It includes circumcised descendants. And the particular people who he says are to be baptized, circumcised, are eight-year-old males.

Okay, let's just think about this. Does the eight-year-old males, eight-day-old males, thank you, eight-day-old, are they conscious of what's happening particularly?

[20:44] No. Do they have faith particularly? No. So what's this circumcision doing? It's a sign. And it seems to me that it's a sign that's given to them, whether, you know, it's just a gift.

It's how it is for them. It's not a sign of something within them because they haven't changed, they haven't repented, they haven't had faith. It's just a sort of a promise laid on them.

This is what you're born into. These are the promises you're born into. This is the covenant you're born into. And that's it. That's circumcision.

Now, from what we've looked at thus far, signs, outward things, are part of the way that God works. Although signs are outward, they're not the main thing, but they're a vital part of God's way of doing things. And in this case, it's a vital part of God reassuring His people.

[21 : 55] God saying something to them. Okay. So, little look of signs that already existed. Jesus lived in that situation where signs already existed.

Jesus was circumcised. Baptism already existed for people and things. If you look in Mark 7, verse 4, I looked up the translation.

In English, it says wash or dip or something like that. But actually, in the original, it says baptize. So, the Jewish people were baptizing cups, pitchers, kettles, and they also baptized their hands to wash them.

So, there was something going on there already. And I guess the idea of doing this to cups and pitchers and kettles is that they're dirty and you need to wash them.

So, here's a baptism which washes dirt away. Okay? So, I'm just trying to build this up like doing a jigsaw puzzle and putting the bits around the edges and getting towards the middle.

[23 : 06] Baptism existed via John the Baptist. Let's look at this baptism. Luke, chapter 3, verse 3. Luke, Luke, Luke, Luke, so again, Jesus is in this context of John's baptism.

He went into all the country around Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is John's baptism.

And I think we can be pretty sure that it involved a lot of water because there's one place where it said they needed a lot of water. So, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Just to think about what that's saying. So, this is different to circumcision because it's not done to babies, is it? He was preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and people went to be baptized by John.

So, they're not babies. Yeah? It's not something done to them whether they know about it or not. This is something they voluntarily do. They go to be baptized.

[24 : 25] So, it's not like circumcision in that sense. There's something going on inside which is being marked outwardly. Presumably, they went to be baptized because they felt there was something that wasn't right and needed to be put right and they wanted to show it and do it.

So, I'm going to say maybe this washing, the idea here is of washing away sin and being made ready somehow. It's a baptism of repentance so they're turning to the Lord and I would say this particular repentance is turning in readiness for something to come, being ready for the Lord to come.

So, John is baptizing them. Do you want to be ready for the Lord to come? Do you want to get your life right before the Lord comes? Yes, okay, baptize. And it is a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. So, they're being baptized for forgiveness of sins and if they'd said to John the Baptist, how do we be forgiven? And John would say, I don't know, that's going to happen, hasn't happened yet, but if you want to look forward to that, be baptized.

So, it's a sort of looking forward baptism and Jesus himself was baptized in this way. That's a remarkable thing, isn't it? So, of these people looking forward to the coming of the Messiah and lining up saying, we need to be washed, Jesus stood in the line as well.

[25 : 52] Jesus himself was baptized in this way. There's some shortcomings to John's baptism, which I'll say in a moment. But I'll just stop and say this. If Jesus was baptized with John's baptism, I don't think there should be a problem with Christians being baptized with Christian baptism.

If Jesus himself was prepared to be baptized, I don't think there should be a problem with Christians being baptized with Christian baptism.

Because sometimes people can get hung up on this and they can say, well, I've had faith. Why should I be baptized? That's just an outward thing. It's not really very spiritual. I think that can't be right because Jesus was baptized.

I'm not going to say he only did it, he was just outward and unspiritual. He was baptized. So I would like to reconnect our thinking and say, if that was good enough for Jesus, it ought to be good enough for us, shouldn't it?

If you've become a Christian, you should be baptized. You know, by and large, it's just as simple as that. And I'm just going to wind back to John the Baptist's baptism because there's a sense in which, at this point in the Gospels, this is the thing to do, but then later on, it's not the thing to do. [27 : 24] John's baptism is not where it's at, and it's inadequate. there's something that's not quite enough about it. And in John chapter 1 verse 32, there's a comparison between John's baptism and what Jesus does, and there is a link between the water being plunged in water and the Holy Spirit and being plunged in the Holy Spirit.

And it works like this. John 1 32, John gave this testimony, I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Jesus. I would not have known him except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, the man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God. So there's a baptism in water and it gets compared with what Jesus does. Sorry, there's a John's baptism in water and it gets compared with what Jesus does which is a baptism in the Holy Spirit.

I'm just going to mention that. I think it's a bit of a subtle connection but it is there and you find the same connection in Acts chapter 19 where Peter reflects on John's baptism compared with receiving the Holy Spirit.

I'm not going to stop on that. Let's go to what Jesus said. So we've got signs and outward signs of things. we've got the use of water to cleanse and we've got the use of water voluntarily to say something about repentance and faith and Jesus now institutes Christian baptism for his disciples.

[29 : 14] Let's look at Matthew 28 19. Matthew 28 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

When they saw him they worshipped him but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. And these are Jesus' as Matthew puts it his sort of final commissioning words to his disciples.

This is what you are going to do. This is the new deal. So you go and you make disciples and you go into all nations and you make disciples and as you make them you baptize them.

So that's a normal thing for Christians to be baptized Christians. And they're baptized through Christ according to Christ's institution in a Trinitarian baptism.

[30 : 41] Baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. So there's a proper new covenant New Testament thing going on there.

And I just say that's what Jesus says. That's him instituting Christian baptism for Christian disciples and in a sense that's what he said.

That's it. if you're a believer be baptized. So that was the long first section. So just two short sections now.

So Christians and baptism. Are all the Christians in the Bible baptized? And the answer is no. Because the thief on the cross wasn't baptized was he?

And he was a believer. So I think this shows us you don't have to be baptized to be a genuine believer and to go to heaven. But those who believed on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 were baptized.

[31 : 53] ! And this is exactly what Peter says. So they say what should we do? This is a good question isn't it? So we want to respond to Christ we want to have his blessings we need his forgiveness what should we do?

And Peter says 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 and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit the promise is for you for your children and all who are far off for all whom the Lord our God will call.

So what does he say? says this is what you do. You repent you are baptized you turn to the Lord you show it in baptism you receive forgiveness and this you receive washing wash away your sins name of the Lord as you go through the waters of baptism you change your status from being unbaptized outside of Christ to being baptized into Christ and it's a sign then of believing and of washing and of belonging so baptized Christians show their faith in the Lord they have their sins

washed away which is shown by this sign and they belong to Christ and his people save yourself from this crooked generation and that day were added to their number 3000 and they were added as they went through as they went through the waters of baptism so Christians and baptism I'm just going to touch on the fact that Paul assumes that every Christian can look back on their baptism and in Romans 6 he has quite an important argument about this about what it is to be a Christian and he says in Romans 6 verse 2 don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death we were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father we too may live a new life so there's the candidate for baptism are baptized into the death of Christ and come out as it were raised with Christ and living a new life we were buried with Christ through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father we too may live a new life so there's quite a rich depiction there through baptism and it so are we saying something to God or is God saying something to us sometimes with signs God says something to us doesn't he and I think this is often overlooked by Baptists God is saying something to us in baptism he's saying this is who you are you are baptized you died with Christ your old life is gone you're not the person you used to be you were buried with him in baptism you've come out of the water you're a new person the old has gone the new has come you're not who you were don't think you were don't act as if you are you're not that person you died with Christ you're raised with him you have new life in you you belong to

[35 : 42] Jesus Christ all the promises of him are attached to you now that's what God says to us whoops just go back an understanding of who God says we are what Christ has done for us and how we are to live so I'm just looking at this subject of baptism but it's helpful for us isn't it if you're a baptized Christian when Satan comes to disturb us and mess us about say you're just what you were before you say no I'm baptized God has told me that I'm not who I used to be God has told me that my life is now new in Christ so Satan push off I'm baptized I think this is enormously helpful baptism is God among other things God speaking to us and reassuring!

us reminding us so the church and baptism so this is very quickly the church is the community of Jesus Christ the church is the community of those who have been baptized with Christian baptism it's the sort of external mark of that they've all professed Christ in the appointed way and it's something that is saying something to people saying something to God and it's God saying something to us has all those dimensions to it it says we're saying I'm in it says it in a very distinctive way doesn't it unmistakable all this Christian stuff I'm in are you in is that you you say I'm in I'm in for this I'm up for this count me in yeah all the baptized people have the reassuring sign of Christ given by God to them and God says to you you're mine I'm with you all the benefits of Jesus Christ are yours because you're baptized into Christ that's reassuring isn't it and the baptized community we say to one another we're all in this together we all pass through the same waters we're all baptized into Christ and we are a body we are a group we're a community we're a family we stand by one another we stick up for one another we stand together we pray for one another we go forward together these are my people these baptized people in this baptized church we belong to each other and when we talk about the church we don't say them we say us the words we use are actually quite important the church is us it isn't them it's us because we're all we all went through the waters together and in baptism we pass through the same waters and we're headed for the same destination is that right we came the same way and we're headed for the same home we're looking forward to seeing the same saviour we're looking forward to the same heaven we're looking forward to the same glory we have the same hope and we press on together by God's grace and sooner or later we expect to see one another there is that right well may it be so amen that's me finished let's sing together come praise and glorify our God and just think about the grace of salvation of salvation which is shown in baptism of