

Children of God, what is the Gospel? The Gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord, and he was crowned king of Heaven and Earth when he died forgive you of your sins, and to take sin away from you as well, and thus give you eternal life. But how is it that Jesus's death 2000 years ago affects me today?

The Scriptures teach that we receive eternal life that Jesus won for us, when we believe in the testimony of God concerning Jesus Christ. What is the Gospel? Simply put - John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life."

Belief, faith in Jesus Christ and his death on the cross for you is how you have the gift of eternal life.

Now when John talks about all that in this next section, he talks about using three key words - water, blood, and Spirit. And he says that these three are witnesses to the eternal life that comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

Let us look at V. 6 - 8: **<sup>6</sup>This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. <sup>7</sup>For there are three that testify: <sup>8</sup>the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.**

What is John getting at here? First, John is talking about the life and ministry and death of Jesus. But he talks about this in such a way that he reduces it all down to three main symbols. The Water, the Blood, and the Spirit. His baptism, his death, and His giving of the Spirit.

But These words and symbols carry meaning from earlier on in the Bible. So that when Water, Blood, and Spirit show up in Jesus life, they already

have a whole symbolic history attached to them in the rest of the story of the Bible. What do I mean?

Spirit and Water echoes back to creation, when in Gen. 1:2 the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.

Likewise during the flood, Noah sent for the a dove to see if the flood had subsided yet, and the dove comes back with an olive branch. The imagery of the dove flying, or hovering over the waters, is symbolic of the Spirit hovering over the water at the creation of the world. Thus this image of the Spirit and Water together tell us of creation and new creation.

And connected to that is the promise of the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36 when a person is born again and made a new creation in Christ, God says He will wash them clean with water and put His Spirit within them. Thus, Jesus himself said that unless a person is born of water and the spirit they cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

So Jesus is the New Creation and anyone who is in Jesus is likewise made a new creation. Jesus is like a New Noah, the head of a new humanity, who rescues us from the wrath of God against sin.

Spirit and Water are present in those narratives. But what of the blood? Maybe not identifiable at first, but these three elements are actually a reference to Passover – we have the Blood of the Passover Lamb, and then the Spirit glory cloud that led the children of Israel through the Water of the Red Sea.

So God's testimony in this is that Jesus is a new Moses, leading a new Passover and a new Exodus.

And so, by adding the Blood to the Spirit and the Water, John is letting us know that the New Creation comes not just by Water and Spirit, but also by the Blood of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now as I said, when John says that Jesus came by water and the blood – this is a reference to Christ’s two baptisms – his Water baptism at the beginning of his ministry, and his Blood baptism at the end of his ministry when he was crucified.

At Jesus’ water baptism there the presence of water, of course, but there is also the Spirit. The Spirit, in the form of a dove, like during the time of the flood, rested upon Jesus. Along with receiving the Spirit, Jesus was also blessed with the Father’s heavenly affirmation that he was his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased.

And just a side note, we are supposed to understand by faith that the same kind of thing happen in our baptisms as well. Jesus comes into the world as our savior – through water and Spirit and a Fatherly blessing from Heaven.

And similarly, this is the way our children partake of the salvation that is in Jesus, through the waters of baptism, the receiving of the Spirit of God, and with the Father’s blessing and approval. And just Jesus’ water baptism was meant to prepare him for a life long fight against sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to prepare him for his death, which is his blood baptism, the same is true for us.

Christ’s Blood baptism was on the cross at the end of his earthly ministry. In Mark 10:38 Jesus relates the two - the baptism of water and the baptism of blood together and says – “are you able to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized with?” – referring to his crucifixion.

So, at Christ’s water baptism the Spirit, like in the story of the flood, alighted upon Jesus in the form a dove. So we have water and spirit there.

And at his blood baptism on the cross we have the testimony of John that water and blood poured forth from Jesus side. This was so important to John that he said,

“He who saw it has born witness – his testimony is true, and he knows he is telling the truth – that you may also believe.” (John 19:35)

John seeing the water and the blood coming forth from Jesus side, and him testifying about it is meant to be a sign to lead you to faith in Christ. The water and the blood.

What else does the water and blood signify? Firstly, that Jesus is the New Adam from whom comes the New Eve from His side – the Church.

He is also the New Eden from where the spring of the four headwaters flow out to the four corners of the earth, bringing life and blessings wherever it goes.

He is the new rock in the wilderness, which, once it is struck, gives life giving water to the Israelites in the wilderness.

He is the New Glorified Temple of Ezekiel, from whence flows forth a river of living water from the threshold of the Temple, and that waters the ground and brings the dead to life and waters the trees of life that bring healing to the nations.

Jesus is all this because from his side flowed blood and water. The life of Jesus is not just confined to himself; and this is important, because it answers the question I asked at the beginning: how is it that Jesus’s death 2000 years ago affects me today?

He way that it affects you today is by the fact that His life flows out from Him to us. Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well and said, “Whoever drinks of this water (referring to the water of Jacob’s well) will be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Jesus could give people this water directly when he was with them. But after he ascended into Heaven, He sent the Spirit to continue to testify about Jesus and to satisfy people's spiritual thirst by giving the life of Jesus to people.

Consider this picture:

“Jesus is filled with the Spirit at His baptism, but an anointed Savior who does not release that Spirit to us does not give life, especially if he disappears from the scene, as Jesus does. If we are going to have the life, the Spirit, who is the Lord and Giver of Life, he is going to have to be released to us. That is what happened on the cross. Before Jesus was struck with a spear and his side flowed with blood and water, John says he “gave up” the Spirit, using a verb that can mean “to hand over” (John 19:30; *paradidomi*). John says Jesus lost the Spirit, a metaphor for death, but the wording suggests a passing-on of the Spirit. In his death Jesus gave over the Spirit, and the centurion standing by immediately proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God, an imperial King. On the cross, as blood and water flowed from Jesus' side, so did the Spirit. The Spirit burst out of the Spirit-filled Messiah.”<sup>1</sup>

So, when John says that the Spirit and the water and the blood testify and agree, He is saying that what Christ accomplished in His two baptisms, the Spirit pours forth His Life, His eternal life to us. That is the ministry of the Spirit, to wash us clean with the blood and the water. The Spirit applies the death of Christ to those who believe, so that by faith we would have eternal life.

## SACRAMENTS

But we also know that this life giving water and cleansing blood of Jesus is made effectual to our salvation in the sacraments – in the waters of baptism and the blood of the supper. In the waters of baptism and in the cup of the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Leithart, *Behind the Veil*, 174

New Covenant in His blood is where and how the Spirit testifies to the eternal life that is in Jesus.

Now, we should not think that when the Spirit of God regenerates us so that we believe in Jesus, that this is at odds with the sacraments. Some mistakenly place the sacraments into the category of good works that we do. We are not saved by works and so God's grace is never to be found in the sacrament, they say. We only need faith in Christ.

But the sacraments are not good works we do, they are tokens and pledges of God's promises to give us eternal life in Jesus, and when rightly used, that is, by believing in God's promises, the sacraments are effectual means of salvation.

The Baptismal Water and the Wine of the Supper are testimonies of God's love toward us *in Christ*. His love for us in Jesus Christ and His death for us cleanses us of our sins. And we receive these blessings of forgiveness and eternal life by faith in Jesus.

But Christ has so united himself to the water of baptism and the wine and blood of the covenant in the supper in such a mysterious way that his life, which is our salvation and eternal life, is given to us from Jesus, by the Spirit, through the washing with water and the cleansing draught of the blood. His love and life for us is confirmed and made effectual to us by these external signs, which continually call us to faith in the Son of God and they confirm to us the promise of God in Jesus – eternal life.

This is the Spirit's testimony concerning the Son of God. Believe it. Do not disregard it, for this is the testimony of God.

John continues and says:

<sup>9</sup> If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. <sup>10</sup> Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.

Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. <sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

This is really important as we consider the nature of the testimony of God to us in the sacraments. The law of God says that every matter shall be established by the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses. Whenever 2 or 3 people agree on something, if they are of good reputation and of sound mind, people tend to believe the authority that comes from them.

Well, if people accept the testimony of men on the basis of 3 witnesses, how much more should we accept the testimony of God, who never lies, when he gives us 3 witnesses?

When we talk about the testimony of the Holy Spirit, some people tend to only think about how the Spirit work testifies internally in the heart of man. And I know that he does do that. He has done it in my life, and no doubt he has done it in yours. But we need to also see that God testifies to us by the Holy Spirit in the objective outward and external means of grace in the sacraments.

And so the reason we partake of the sacraments is because we believe God's testimony. The reason we are baptized and we baptize our children is because God made promises. The reason we receive the Lord's Supper and give it to our baptized children is because God made promises. Partaking of the sacraments is receiving and believing God's testimony about Jesus.

Now I know we have some folks here who do not partake of the sacraments. And I am not trying to make you feel bad or anything like that, I am just trying to help you along the way in your journey and understanding.

If we refuse to receive the sacraments, then it is my position, that you are refusing to receive the testimony of God concerning His Son. If we do not receive the testimony of God concerning His Son, which is confirmed to us in the Water and the Blood, then we are essentially calling God a liar, and saying that His testimony about Jesus and eternal life is not true. Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say unto you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.”

The Church all throughout history has acknowledged that Jesus is using this idea of eating his flesh and drinking his blood as a metaphor for faith. But they also understood that the way we show that we have that faith in by partaking of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. These two are not at odds with each other. God gives us the eternal life of Jesus by the Spirit through the sacraments. We wash and eat and drink by faith.

This is why the Westminster Shorter Catechism, for example, teaches that the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption, are:

A. his ordinances, especially the Word, Sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

Q. 91. How do the Sacraments become effectual means of salvation?

A. The Sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, (there is no eternal life in the water itself, or the bread or the wine) or in him that doth administer them (neither is their life in the minister); but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.”

So this is why we make such a big deal about the sacraments here at CTR. When you partake of the sacraments you are believing God’s testimony

about the eternal life that is found in Jesus Christ, and that eternal life is confirmed and sealed to you by the Spirit in the sacraments.

This is where Jesus Christ has promised to be found now in the Church - in His Spirit who uses the water and the blood to bring about our new creation and eternal life in Christ.

This is why Peter can say in Acts 2 on Pentecost - “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of the Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” Because the Spirit and forgiveness of sins are given in the water of baptism. God said it, I believe That settles it.

And Jesus Christ himself is the one we have true communion and fellowship with when we drink the cup, for Paul says, The cup of blessing that we bless is it not a communion - koinonia, fellowship, in the blood of Christ?

So be comforted today people of God, for God continues to testify to the message that eternal life is found in Jesus Christ. And the Spirit testifies to you of this great truth in the word of God, Yes, but God always confirms his message by the testimony of two or three witness. And So the Spirit confirms that God’s promises of His Word about Jesus are true when he testified also in the water of baptism and the blood of the Supper.

And the water and the blood, and the Spirit are one, and these three agree - and this is the testimony - that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. Amen.