

Chapter 2: The Revealing of Jesus

John 1:19–34

In the last chapter, we discussed the notion that the Gospel of John is written not so much to give a verbatim, purely sequential repetition of the facts, but that John the Evangelist shaped his Gospel to convey to us the themes that he wants to highlight from the life of Jesus. John makes no secret of the fact that his Gospel has not exhausted everything that might be written about Jesus (John 21:25), but he tells us that what he writes, he writes specifically with the goal “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). Nothing is fabricated, but the Evangelist chooses what he writes, and how he writes it, with a clear purpose in mind. Toward that end, John opened his Gospel in John 1:1–18 with a clear identification of Jesus of Nazareth as God.

In that prologue, John the Evangelist also introduced us to another figure: John the Baptist (John 1:6–8, 15). In some ways, the verses about the Baptist¹ might have seemed out of place, but the Evangelist included them for a reason. Namely, the Baptist serves as the first witness to Jesus by identifying him to the wider world. For this reason, the Evangelist considers the Baptist’s testimony to be essential even in the prologue, and the first story we take up after the prologue explains this significance. In John 1:19–34, we read about the subservient, ministerial mission of John the Baptist to herald the coming of the one who baptizes with the Spirit (John 1:33), who is himself the Son of God (John 1:34).

Inquiry of the Jews (John 1:19–23)

Every Gospel includes something about the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1–17; Mark 1:2–8; Luke 1:5–25, 41–44, 57–80; 3:1–22), and each of the other Gospels include more information about John’s preaching and baptizing ministry than the Gospel of John. Instead, John’s Gospel leaves the Synoptic Gospels to describe the nature of the ministry of the John the Baptist, and John the Evangelist actually begins at the point where the Baptist’s ministry had become sufficiently successful so as to attract a good deal of notoriety. At this point, the Jewish religious leaders attempt to address the growing reputation of the Baptist quietly before he begins to attract the attention of the Romans, who frequently investigated false prophets during those days.²

“Who are you?”

When the priests and Levites sent from Jerusalem ask John the Baptist, “Who are you?” (John 1:19), John’s denial is “unusually emphatic.” We read that “He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ’” (John 1:20). Note that the Baptist’s confession is recorded in four ways: twice that he confessed, once that he “did not deny,” and another time to state plainly, “I am not the Christ.” Why should the Evangelist land so insistently on this point? In fact, there is some

evidence in the New Testament that a group of people in Ephesus (the city where John the Evangelist most likely wrote this Gospel) had begun to style themselves as the followers of John, baptized “into John’s baptism” (John 19:3). William Hendriksen writes, “In all likelihood they had actually been baptized into the name of John. Hence, they were rebaptized, this time ‘into the name of the Lord Jesus’ (Acts 19:5).”⁴ The Baptist’s unusually emphatic denial that he is the Christ, then, would make quite a bit of sense if some people had been brought to repentance through the ministry of John the Baptist, but somehow ended up believing that the Baptist was the Christ. Whatever the reason may have been, John the Evangelist considers it of the utmost importance that the first thing we read in his Gospel after the prologue is that John the Baptist is *not* the Christ.

Next, the religious leaders ask John whether he is Elijah, and John again replies that he is not (John 1:21). This response from John is a bit puzzling, since Jesus himself later identifies John the Baptist as Elijah (Matt. 17:12–13). In the sense that the Baptist came in “the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17), accomplishing the ministry that Malachi had prophesied that Elijah would do when he returned (Mal. 4:5–6; cf. Luke 1:16–17), John the Baptist did indeed come as though he were Elijah.⁵ Nevertheless, the Baptist was not literally Elijah. Leon Morris writes:

But the Jews remembered that Elijah had left the earth in a chariot of fire without passing through death (2 Kings 2:11), and they expected that in due course the identical figure would reappear. John was not Elijah in this sense, and he had no option but to deny that he was.⁶

John’s testimony about himself does not contradict what Jesus says in Matthew 17:12. Instead, the two pieces of testimony work together to help us identify that John the Baptist fulfills the prophecy from Malachi 4, but that John the Baptist is, in fact, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5–17), and not a reappearance of the Old Testament prophet who has returned from heaven.

Then, John also denies that he is “the Prophet”—that is, the Prophet whom Moses had foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.” With that, the religious leaders were out of options to identify who a man such as John the Baptist could be to attract such a following, but without being the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet. So, they press him further, saying, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” (John 1:22). John responds by quoting Isaiah 40:3: “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” (John 1:23).

John, then, is not the Christ, but he identifies himself as the one who would prepare the way of the Lord, according to the prophecies of Isaiah. This prophecy frames the ministry of John the Baptist exclusively in terms of his orientation toward the coming Lord. He does not exist for himself or by himself, but the Baptist comes exclusively to bear witness to the coming of the Lord. For this reason, he has preached and baptized with a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins, for without such preparation, the world will be incapable of receiving the coming Lord.⁷ The Baptist is *not* the Christ, but his ministry is inextricably connected to the coming of the Christ.

Christ-Centered Ministry

In our day, the phrases “Christ-centered” or “gospel-centered” have become buzzwords so that they have largely lost their meaning and significance. John the Baptist, however, offers us an insight

into what it looks like to minister in such a way as to be wholly subservient. Sometimes, our pride eagerly attaches our work to a cause not exclusively to advance the cause, but, to some degree or another, because we sense an opportunity to advance ourselves through that cause. John the Baptist, on the other hand, exists exclusively for the sake of Christ. We never read of John the Baptist asking for *anything* in return for his early ministry in preparing the way for the coming of Christ, and, in fact, the Evangelist will tell us more about John's humility in John 3:30, when the Baptist resolves, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Earlier, we explored the idea that the Baptist's emphatic denial of being the Christ may be tied to groups of people who seem to have baptized one another into the name of John rather than into the name of Christ. There is, however, another possibility why John the Evangelist goes to such great lengths to emphasize the Baptist's humility. Where the Baptist was content to sink into the background once that Christ becomes central, John the Evangelist has a different story. John the Evangelist, remember is John the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, whose mother had approached Jesus asking that her sons, James and John, might sit at the right and left hand of Jesus in his kingdom. Although the Gospel of John doesn't record this story, the Matthew and Mark do (Matt. 20:20–28; Mark 10:35–45). The sons of Zebedee originally wanted Jesus to increase so that they might increase with him, but in contrast, John the Baptist wants Jesus to increase only *because Jesus is worthy of infinite increase*.

Do we toss around terms like "Christ-centered" because we recognize an opportunity for our own advancement in and through the rise of that tribe, or do we long for Jesus to be exalted as central purely because he is worthy? Let us pray that we would abandon the mindset of the younger John of Zebedee—arrogant ambition for the sake of self-promotion—and instead take up the mindset of John the Baptist—humble self-denial for the sake of Christ's promotion.

The Baptism of John (John 1:24–28)

The Baptist's response raises an obvious question: "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" (John 1:25). While the religious leaders and the Baptist have very different perspectives on many issues, both sides understand that the act of baptizing implies authority. For this reason, through the history of the Christian church, baptism has never been administered lightly, but by rightly ordained ministers who baptize according to the authority of Jesus Christ as officers in the church. No one baptizes on their own authority, but only on Christ's. Accordingly, the Baptist begins to explain the fact that his baptism is not from his own authority, but is connected with the coming of the one who *does* have authority. John says, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie" (John 1:26–27).

Water Baptism and the Authority of Jesus

To understand the John the Baptist's intent, it is important first to understand that baptism already existed when he began his ministry. Converts to Judaism were baptized, and some groups (such as the Qumran community) baptized themselves daily to prepare themselves for the end-time, which they believed to be imminent.⁸ Still, John's baptism was different. To start, the other baptisms were self-administered, so that candidates baptized themselves, whereas John administered baptism to

those who came to him.⁹

Still, John's baptism explicitly rejected the notion that *John* possessed the authority in himself. Rather, John baptized in anticipation of the coming of the one, "the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." On the significance of this statement, Leon Morris writes:

Loosing the sandal was the task of a slave; a disciple could not be expected to perform it. To get the full impact of this we must bear in mind that disciples did do many services for their teachers. Teachers in ancient Palestine were not paid (it would be a terrible thing to ask for money for teaching Scripture!). But in partial compensation disciples were in the habit of performing small services for their rabbis instead. But they had to draw the line somewhere, and menial tasks like loosing the sandal thong came under this heading. There is a rabbinic saying (in its present form dating from c. A.D. 250, but probably much older): "Every service which a slave performs for his master shall a disciple do for his teacher except the loosing of his sandal-thong." John selects the very task that the rabbinic saying stresses as too menial for any disciple, and declares himself unworthy to perform it. He is unworthy of the most menial of tasks for the one who was to come after him. Humility could scarcely take a lower place.¹⁰

Far from baptizing in an attempt to usurp authority for himself, the baptism of John was based on the authority of someone else. This baptism was provisional, dependent, and forward-looking in anticipation of the one whose coming the Baptist awaited. As William Hendriksen writes, "All John can do is administer the sign (water); the Messiah—he alone—can bestow the thing signified (the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit)."¹¹ More than that, this one coming, John the Baptist insists, was "among" the people at that very moment—not necessarily in the crowd gathered there that day, but the Baptist seems to understand that the coming one was already in the world, and that the Holy Spirit-baptizer's introduction was quickly approaching.¹²

The Humility of Ministry

As with the previous line of questioning, John the Baptist has an opportunity to make much of himself and his own role in the coming of Jesus into the world. The baptism he administers is, in some way, connected to the ministry of Jesus, and the Baptist has the opportunity here to point that out. But instead of lifting himself up, John the Baptist contrasts the relative insignificance of the baptism he administers with the significance of the coming one. John's work is important, but it is nothing compared to Jesus.

Although Christian ministry carries authority, the authority does not belong to the minister, but to God. Our work is to proclaim Christ through the preaching of God's word and the sacraments, which are the means by which Christ rules his kingdom through his Spirit. The ministry of word and sacrament carry genuine authority and power as Christ's appointed means by which he rescues souls from the kingdom of darkness, so we must fight all the harder against any thought that the power resides in us.

"Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:29–34)

Still, up to this point, the Baptist has not explained exactly how his ministry connects with the

coming authority of Christ. His words reflect an understanding that what he does has some value and importance, but as of yet, he has not clarified the way that his ministry of preaching and baptizing does indeed make straight the way of the Lord (John 1:23). In this section, however, the Baptist will make that connection plain when he publicly identifies Jesus as the one he had been awaiting.

“Behold, the Lamb of God!”

The next day, when the Baptist sees Jesus coming toward him, he says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Here, the Baptist not only identifies Jesus and explains *what* Jesus came into the world to accomplish (taking away the sin of the world), but he also reveals here *how* Jesus would accomplish this mission: as the Lamb of God. As many commentators note, this expression has become so familiar to Christians that we have largely come to understand it outside of its context here in the Gospel of John. Instead, we interpret this phrase exclusively as a reference to the sacrificial death that Jesus will die on the cross to bear the sin of the world. Is this, though, what the Baptist means here?

To understand the significance of these words in context, we must first ask what John the Baptist means by calling Jesus the “Lamb of God.” There are many possibilities in the Old Testament, from the story when Abraham promised Isaac that God would provide “another lamb” (Gen. 22:8), to the Passover lamb, to the lambs slaughtered in the daily sacrificial offering, to the “lamb” mentioned in Isaiah 53:7.¹³ Indeed, the Old Testament contains no shortage of laws, stories, and prophecies featuring lambs, but once we try to identify a single referent behind John’s expression, we quickly find ourselves in the impossible task of prioritizing one typological lamb from the Old Testament above all the others. Instead, it is better to recognize that the whole reason for the Old Testament’s abundance of examples of the “lamb” theme has anticipated precisely this moment, the moment when the ultimate Lamb of God would be revealed in Israel. All of these shadows are now fulfilled in Christ, who is the reality toward which all of them had always pointed.¹⁴ And indeed, one of the main themes of John’s Gospel is to identify the way in which Jesus completely fulfills the shadows of the Old Testament: “Jesus is the Lamb, as he is also the temple (2:19) and as the rituals of the great festivals in Jerusalem and the meaning of the sabbath find their fulfillment in him.”¹⁵

Next, what does the Baptist mean by saying that Jesus, the Lamb of God, “takes away the sin of the world”? From a Christian perspective, we automatically interpret this as referring to the atonement that Jesus provided through his death on the cross. Carson observes, though, that judgment rather than sacrifice may have been the Baptist’s intention:

...the impression gleaned from the Synoptics is that he thought of the Messiah as one who would come in terrible judgment and clean up sin in Israel. In this light, what John the Baptist meant by ‘who takes away the sin of the world’ may have had more to do with judgment and destruction than with expiatory sacrifice. Certainly the verb *airō* normally means ‘remove’, ‘take away’, not ‘bear away in atoning death’ or the like (for which the more common verb is *anapherō*...).¹⁶

In fact, we have no way of knowing what was going through the Baptist’s mind when he uttered these words. Moreover, we do not even have the Baptist’s original words, which would have been

uttered in Aramaic, since the Evangelist has translated them here into Greek—not to mention the fact that our own Bible translators have, in turn, put these words in English, so that we are three steps removed from what the Baptist uttered.

For this reason, we need to pay sufficient attention to the ambiguity that the Evangelist captures here in his record of this story. John the Evangelist writes masterful Greek, so if he had wanted to convey a more narrow meaning of “takes away” to force us to interpret this in terms of expiation he could have. And, by the same token, if the Evangelist had wanted to use a word that could *not* be interpreted in terms of expiation, he could have done that too. Carson continues, writing,

But this does not necessarily mean that John the Evangelist limited himself to this understanding of ‘Lamb of God’. Just as John insists that Caiaphas the high priest spoke better than he knew (11:49–52), so it is easy to suppose that the Evangelist understood the Baptist to be doing the same thing. It is not that he thought the Baptist wrong; rather, as a post-resurrection Christian John could grasp a fuller picture than was possible for the Baptist. In particular he understood a great deal more about the significance of the Messiah’s sacrificial death. It is hard to imagine that he could use an expression such as ‘Lamb of God’ without thinking of the atoning sacrifice of his resurrected and ascended Saviour.¹⁷

This fits well with the picture of John the Baptist given in Matthew 11:2–19 and Luke 7:18–35, where the Baptist, frustrated with the apparent lack of progress in “taking away sin,” asks whether Jesus is, indeed, the Christ. He may not have understood what he was declaring about Jesus, but John the Evangelist recognizes in these words a prophetic truth that expanded beyond the Baptist’s immediate intentions.

Water Baptism vs. Spirit Baptism

The Baptist continues his identification of Jesus, declaring, “This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel” (John 1:30–31). When the Baptist explains that he himself “did not know him,” this does not necessarily mean that the Baptist was not acquainted with Jesus, but rather that he did not have a full insight into the nature of Jesus as the one whom the Baptist had been sent to announce.¹⁸ He may have known him, but he did not *know* him. His baptismal ministry, then, has been the means by which he could come to *know* the Christ in the way that he lacked.

And indeed, it was during the baptism of Jesus that John came to recognize Jesus as the one whom he awaited, the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit:

And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit,’ and I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:32–34)

Intriguingly, the Gospel of John does not explicitly state that the Baptist here baptized Jesus. The Synoptics tell us that information (Matt. 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22), and John the

Evangelist assumes what they have written, so that the description of the Spirit's descending upon Jesus matches what the Synoptics attribute to the baptism of Jesus. By observing that the Spirit not only descended upon Jesus, but also *remained* on him, the Baptist testifies to a sharp departure from the way in which God gives his people his Spirit in the Old Testament, when the Holy Spirit came upon prophets, priests, and kings for the accomplishment of their mission, but then sometimes departed from them due to sin (1 Sam. 16:14; Ps. 51:11).¹⁹ Because the Holy Spirit remains with Jesus, Jesus in turn becomes the one who “baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”

It is in this Spirit baptism that we see the way in which John's water baptism corresponds to the ministry of Jesus. While John baptizes in water, only Jesus is capable of baptizing in the Holy Spirit. The Baptist has accomplished his ministry merely by applying the sign of baptism, but Jesus will apply the reality to which the sign points. Jesus, then, is the “possessor and dispenser of the reality to which John with his water baptism only pointed,” not simply through giving the Holy Spirit, but through giving the Holy Spirit through Jesus' lifelong ministry of becoming the sacrificial Lamb of God in order to take away the sin of the world.²⁰ The Baptist's ministry pointed to the fullness of what Jesus will accomplish in his life, death, and resurrection, regardless of how much the Baptist understood while he was preaching and baptizing in the wilderness.

Note, then, that the Baptist is entrusted with a ministry of word and sacrament, by which he reveals Jesus to the world. He not only proclaims that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), but he also testifies his prophetic vision of seeing the Spirit descend and remain upon Jesus, the sign by which God had promised to reveal the Spirit baptizer who was to come. Furthermore, John's baptism not only symbolized the work that the Spirit baptizer would do, but it also became the means in which the Holy Spirit came to descend and remain upon Jesus.

In every way, the preaching and baptism of John announced, identified, expounded, and proclaimed Jesus, which means that the preaching and baptism of John accomplishes the exact same function as our ministry of preaching and baptizing today under the new covenant. Through preaching and baptizing, God actually identifies Jesus Christ in the gospel to his people; however, the work of the minister to preach and to baptize accomplishes nothing on its own, but is fully dependent upon the reality of the Spirit-baptizing work of Jesus to open our eyes to believe through the preaching of the gospel and to cleanse us of our sin through the washing of regeneration (Tit. 3:5).²¹ The word preached and the sign of baptism together point to the reality of Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected for us as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Our ministry—like John the Baptist's—is purely *ministerial*. That is, we act on behalf of someone else (namely, Jesus), dependent upon his power to make our ministry effective. All faithful Christian ministry depends exclusively on God's power, and not at all on the minister himself.

The only difference comes in the way that John the Baptist plays a unique role in “bearing witness” (John 1:34) to something that he saw with his own eyes. Today, we depend on the testimony of the eyewitnesses as recorded in Scripture—not only John the Baptist's, but also John the Evangelist's, as well as that of the other New Testament writers who were “eyewitnesses of [Jesus'] majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16). We proclaim not a new word about Jesus, but the word of those who were specially positioned to behold and to testify to Jesus, his life, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension. Our job is not to replicate that role, but to proclaim Christ from their testimony.

“The Next Day...”

Herman Ridderbos observes an important facet to the way in which the Evangelist structures this narrative over the course of three days. On the first day in John 1:19–28, John the Baptist’s ministry is entirely forward-looking as he, like all the Old Testament prophets before him, bear witness to the coming of the Christ into the world. On the next day (John 1:29), the Baptist actually identifies Jesus in his midst, proclaims him to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and baptizes him (implied in the Gospel of John) to identify him as the Son of God. But then, on the very next day (John 1:35ff), the Baptist begins to decrease (John 3:30) by referring his own disciples to begin following Jesus:

At the same time this casts light on the peculiar and significant structure evidenced in the witness of John, which is once more continued in vs. 36, specifically in the way this witness is distributed over three days (cf. vss. 29 and 35) so that the whole of it acquires a clear salvation-historical meaning. The conversation with the Jews is on the first day. On the third day John directs his disciples toward Jesus. So the middle day—with John face-to-face with Jesus as he walks toward him, without any input from others and at the apex of John’s mission as it were—marks the division between the old and the new, between what is past and what is to come. What lies behind John and belongs to “yesterday” is the ministry in the temple with the “continual” daily offering of the lamb, a ministry performed by priests and Levites and limited to the sanctuary of Israel. What lies behind is also the law given through Moses, with its interpreters and scribes. What is to come on the new day is that which God, in his Son, now and once for all time, puts in place, and not only for Israel’s sin but for the whole world’s sin.²²

All that was old—that is, all that anticipated *this* moment in salvation history—has now come and gone. All the shadows, all the types, all the prefigured glimpses of who the Messiah would be have now converged on a single man: Jesus of Nazareth, the one on whom the Spirit of God has descended and remained according to the eyewitness testimony of John the Baptist.

Notes

1. For the sake of clarity, I will frequently refer to John the Baptist as “the Baptist” and John the Evangelist as “the Evangelist” through the rest of this chapter.

2. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 433.

3. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 23.

4. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 32–33.

5. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 94.

6. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 118–19.

7. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 66.

8. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 145.

9. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 145.

10. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 124.

11. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 96.

12. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 68.

13. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 127–30.

14. “But why is it necessary to make a choice? Were not all of these types fulfilled in Christ, and was not he the Antitype to whom they all pointed (cf. 1 Peter 1:19; 2:22)?” (Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 98.)

15. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 74.

16. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 150.

17. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 150.

18. “The Baptist means to say, ‘I did not know him any more than you did.’ The verb οἶδα (here ᾔδειν, pluperfect with meaning of the imperfect) indicates a mental process. It refers to a knowledge by intuition or by reflection, as distinguished from γινώσκω which refers to a knowledge by observation or experience. It is, of course, possible that John, a man from Judah, had not become closely acquainted with Jesus, who had spent most of his time in Galilee. Nevertheless, it is clear from the context (verse 33) that the reference here is to something higher than mere physical acquaintance: the Baptist confesses that it had to be revealed to him from above that this Jesus is the Christ. In that sense he had not known him.” (Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 99.)

19. “Importantly, the Baptist testifies that the spirit did not merely descend on Jesus, but remained on him, a sign of Jesus’ divine anointing. For although in OT times the Holy Spirit came upon certain individuals for the purpose of temporary enablement for a particular task, it was prophesied that the messianic age would involve the renewal of Israel through the power of God’s Spirit (Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 36:26–27; 37:14; cf. Jub. 1:23), and that the Messiah would be full of the Spirit at all times (Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1; cf. Luke 4:18...).” (Köstenberger, *John*, 70.)

20. “Whereas John baptized with water, the coming one baptizes with the Holy Spirit as the possessor and dispenser of the reality to which John with his water baptism only pointed. And because the baptism with the Spirit is the fulfillment of what John did with water, the redemptive significance of the Spirit is revealed above all in its cleansing, sin-removing power, and thus the proclamation in vs. 29 is also rooted in the revelation that was granted to John.” (Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 77.)

21. “It is a foolish mistake, however, into which some people have been led, of supposing that John’s baptism was different from ours; for John does not argue here about the advantage and usefulness of his baptism, but merely compares his own person with the person of Christ. In like manner, if we were inquiring, at the present day, what part belongs to us, and what belongs to Christ, in baptism, we must acknowledge that Christ alone performs what baptism figuratively represents, and that we have nothing beyond the bare administration of the sign. There is a twofold way of speaking in Scripture about the sacraments; for sometimes it tells us that they are the laver of regeneration, (Titus 3:5;) that by them our sins are washed away, (1 Peter 3:21;) that we are in-grafted into the body of Christ, that our old man is crucified, and that we rise again to newness of life, (Romans 6:4, 5, 6;) and, in those cases, Scripture joins the power of Christ with the ministry of man; as, indeed, man is nothing else than the hand of Christ. Such modes of expression show, not what man can of himself accomplish, but what Christ performs by man, and by the sign, as his instruments. But as there is a strong tendency to fall into superstition, and as men, through the pride which is natural to them, take from God the honor due to him, and basely appropriate it to themselves; so Scripture, in order to restrain this blasphemous arrogance, sometimes distinguishes ministers from Christ, as in this passage, that we may learn that ministers are nothing and can do nothing.” (Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 61. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.vii.vi.html>>)

22. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 78.