

BAPTISM

1. What are the sacraments?

- Definition: a rite or ceremony instituted by Jesus for the Church to observe as a means and/or visible sign of grace. A classic definition derived from St. Augustine is “a visible sign of an invisible grace.” The English word “sacrament” is from the Latin *sacramentum*, which means to make holy, or to consecrate.
- Debate over whether sacraments (1) inherently and effectively convey grace to anyone who participates in them no matter what their attitude is (the Roman Catholic view) or (2) whether they only do so when practiced in sincerity and faith or (3) whether they are merely symbolic actions that do not convey any special grace beyond the natural spiritual benefit of memorializing the spiritual truth they symbolize. Some church traditions (especially Baptists) use the term “ordinances” instead of “sacraments” to distinguish their view from the Catholic view. Both are fine terms and can be used interchangeably, though they tend to emphasize different aspects of these rites, instituted by Jesus (ordinances) or conveyance of grace (sacraments).
 - FCC disagrees with view 1, teaches view 2, and allows for view 3.
 - Symbol & Mystery – In our view, there is symbolic meaning, but it is more than that; there is something spiritual and intangible that really takes place. This is where mystery comes in.
- There is much that could be thought of as “sacramental” about the Christian life. But the sacraments are set apart as ceremonies instituted by Jesus that all believers are to participate in. Some church traditions recognize 7 sacraments. But there are only two ceremonies that Jesus instituted for all believers: Baptism and Communion (the Lord’s Supper). In this lesson, we look at baptism.
 - Even though baptism is ideally undergone only once, it is edifying to recall the meaning of baptism because of its great importance for the Christian life and the richness of its meaning.

2. What is Baptism?

- Matthew 28:18-20
- Baptism is a ritual immersion in (or washing with) water that serves as the formal initiation into the New Covenant and as a sign and seal of New Covenant membership/salvation for those who believe in Jesus Christ. It is a sign in that it vividly symbolizes the faith, spiritual blessings and experience of the believer. Baptism is a seal in that it formally and publicly expresses the believer’s faith, formally and publicly initiates him into the New Covenant community, and is a fundamental, formal, and public act of obedience arising from faith.

3. The Meaning and Symbolism of Baptism

- 1 Peter 3:17-22

- Some difficult aspects of this passage we're not going to get into. Let's keep focus on baptism.
- Why does Peter discuss Christ's work, salvation, and baptism? → v. 17 → To give reason for us to persevere in submission to Christ's lordship and be willing to suffer for doing his will
- What does baptism picture? → salvation, like salvation from the Flood
 - ❖ So what does the water symbolize? → God's judgment for sin
 - ❖ What corresponds to the ark? → Christ; he saves us from God's judgment
- What does v. 21 tell us about baptism?
 - ➔ Not about the physical performance of the act, but "the pledge of a good conscience toward God", i.e., faith, trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior; that is what saves
 - ➔ What might the washing of dirt from the body picture? → washing away/forgiveness of our sins; cf. Acts 22:16
 - ➔ Salvation is by the resurrection of Jesus Christ; so in this passage baptism is connected in some way to the death (v. 18) and resurrection of Christ (v. 21)
 - ❖ This vs. raises the question of whether baptism saves us/is necessary for salvation. The short answer is no. But we will take up that question more fully later in the study.
- Takeaways from 1 Peter 3 → Baptism pictures salvation from God's judgment (including forgiveness of our sins) through faith in Christ and by the death and resurrection of Christ; it encourages following Christ as Lord and persevering in doing so against persecution/suffering
- Romans 6:1-14
 - Vs. 1-2 - The context of Paul's discussion is entering fully into a vigorous Christian life, the importance of obedience in the Christian life
 - Vs. 3 - What does it mean to be baptized into Christ's death? → To be identified with it, share in it; united with Jesus in it; ultimately, to trust in it as on your behalf so that Jesus's death is your death.
 - Vs. 4 – What is a burial? → It is a memorial of someone's death
 - ❖ Does it cause the person's death? → No
 - ❖ Who was buried and who was raised?
 - What symbolism in baptism do we see here?
 - ➔ Jesus's death and resurrection
 - ➔ Our death and resurrection by identification with and sharing in Jesus's

➔ Our old and new life (and so also the new birth)

➔ Repentance and faith (implied by these others); cf. John the Baptist's baptism of repentance

➤ Vss. 5-14

➔ What is our "old self" (literally, "Old Man"; v. 6)? ➔ us in and of ourselves, our sinful nature, us characterized by the sinful nature passed on to us by Adam (the Old Man)

➔ What does baptism indicate/remind us of?

❖ We will be raised from the dead!

❖ We are free from sin; the power of sin has been broken in our lives

❖ Our fundamental identity is now Christian; we belong to God; we are dead to sin

➔ What is to be our behavior in light of baptism? ➔ We are to live lives of obedience to God and righteousness

• 1 Corinthians 12:13 – What might this passage suggest about the symbolism of baptism?

➤ The work of the Holy Spirit ➔ the baptism of the Holy Spirit = being given the Holy Spirit (= the new birth/regeneration)

• Sign and seal of New Covenant membership and its blessing mirroring the role of circumcision in the Old Covenant

• In light of all of this, it serves as the rite of formal initiation into the Church/New Covenant.

➤ What makes baptism fit as a rite of initiation?

• Recap:

--Covenant Sign and Seal

--Initiation

--Washing away of sin

--Death and resurrection

--Judgment waters

--Old and new life

--Jesus'

--Ours

--Repentance and Faith

--Work of the Holy Spirit

--New birth

--Baptism of the Holy Spirit

• Jesus' death and resurrection is central to the symbolism of baptism. In baptism, we reenact Jesus' death and resurrection; we essentially reenact the gospel as an expression of faith in it. It serves as the formal public declaration of our faith in Christ, his death and resurrection for our salvation, the washing away of our sins, our resurrection from the dead, that Jesus paid the penalty of our sins, our repentance from our old life/sin, our possession of new life in Christ, that we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and have been born again. Getting baptized expresses our faith in and commitment to Christ as well as testifying to God's acceptance of us in the New Covenant and his commitment to us as his covenant

partners to whom he gives the blessings of the covenant. It testifies to what is already true of us spiritually by faith in Christ.

4. When should I be baptized?

- Ideally, shortly after coming to faith in Christ, at the outset of the Christian life. “Baptism” connotes initiation, beginning something. It has to do with conversion and entering into the Christian life and the life of the Church.
 - This suggests an order for baptism and Communion → What do you think it is?
 - ❖ Conversion (repentance & faith) → baptism → communion (cf. Acts 2:37- 42). Baptism represents the beginning of the Christian life; turning from sin and surrendering to Jesus. The benefits of communion with God and the saints naturally flow from that. But this can be tricky to work out for children who come to faith at an early age. Not a hard and fast rule.
- There is disagreement among Christians about the proper timing of baptism. Some Christians believe that Christian parents should have their infants baptized and typically base this on the parallel of baptism as a covenantal initiatory rite and as the sign and seal of New Covenant membership with circumcision’s similar role for the Old Covenant. Believers are then expected to confirm their baptism as believing adults. However, the pattern we see in the NT is baptism of believers, and that seems most fitting for the meaning and symbolism of the rite.
- Galatians 3:26-27 → Baptism = putting on Christ
- The pattern we see in Scripture, particularly in the Book of Acts, is that people get baptized immediately upon coming to faith. There was practically no such thing as an unbaptized Christian in the time of the early Church. This highlights the importance of baptism in biblical thought and perhaps a deficiency in modern Evangelicalism of not placing enough importance on baptism.
 - Acts 2:38
- What about children?
 - Confession of faith
 - Parents and pastors decide per individual
 - Dedication of infants

5. Is baptism necessary for salvation?

- No, not in the sense that one is not saved until baptized.
- The Bible is clear that we are saved by grace and justified by faith apart from any external act that we perform.
 - Salvation by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9)

- Justification by faith takes place at the moment of saving faith (Romans 3:21-24).
- Thief on the cross (Luke 23:43)
- Cornelius et al. were saved prior to baptism (Acts 10:47-48; 15:8-9).
- Paul downplays baptism in comparison to the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:14-17)
- But what about passages that sound like baptism saves or is necessary for salvation?
 - Baptism often occurred in conjunction with the time when people first placed their faith in Christ and could be spoken of as if it were the same. It was a way of speaking of someone as a Christian. It is similar to us talking about someone praying the sinner's prayer.
 - Relatedly, baptism symbolizes salvation, and we sometimes speak of the symbol interchangeably with the reality it represents. E.g., saying someone graduates during their graduation ceremony.
 - But this again underscores the importance of baptism and modern under-emphasis on it.
- On the other hand, baptism is commanded by the Lord (Matthew 28:19). And so a Christian cannot refuse to be baptized without repentance and expect to be saved.

6. Baptism does help give us assurance of our salvation. It drives a peg in the ground of your Christian faith journey. (Luther)

7. How should I be baptized?

- Ideally by immersion in water - The word "baptizo" in Greek literally means "to plunge or immerse in water" and immersion seems to be what was practiced in NT references that give any indication about the method of baptism (e.g., being baptized in the River Jordan [Mark 1:5], Jesus coming up out of the water after being baptized [Mark 1:10]; cf. John 3:23; Acts 8:26-39). Immersion clearly identifies with the images of washing, dying, burial, and rising with Christ and is most fitting for the symbolism of baptism. Though we recommend baptism by immersion because it seems to best symbolize our burial and resurrection with Jesus, it is the act, not the mode, of baptism that is important.
- Publicly
 - In light of all that we have said
 - Additionally, a witness to unbelievers and to the church

8. How often should one be baptized?

- Ideally, one baptism that you appropriate by faith. If you were baptized as a child or infant, that may not have any meaning for you and you might like to be baptized now as a believer. This would be appropriate and is what we ideally recommend. However, if you know that you are saved, are able to look back at that baptism and can identify with it, can claim that baptism as your own by faith, and feel convicted to do so, then it is a legitimate option to choose to do that and not get baptized again even though FCC holds that it is most biblically appropriate to get baptized again.

9. Conclusion

Have you been baptized since you believed? Baptism is the most important landmark in your Christian life outside of conversion. It is imperative for you to be baptized according to Jesus' command. It is a great opportunity to experience God's grace, glorify him, and be a witness and encouragement to others in his name.

If you have been baptized, let reflection on its meaning encourage you at the glory of God in it and to enjoy all its benefits as well as spur you on in godly living.