

Part I: Baptism

Article VII

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

Matthew 3:13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; 22:19-20; John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; 20:7; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16,21; 11:23-29; Colossians 2:12.

Key Text:

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Matthew 28:18-20: And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*" Amen.

Acts 2: 41-42: Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Romans 6:3-5: Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection.

Colossians 2:12: buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Lord's Supper

Luke 22:19-20: And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

Acts 20:7: Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

1 Corinthians 11:23-29: For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Baptism

Our name "Baptists" expresses one of most unique tenets of our identity, practice and theology. Our name, however, does not reflect a designation our ancestors consciously chose to describe themselves. Opponents actually chose our name for us. Since other Christian groups identified our spiritual ancestors with a name that describes our unique belief regarding the Christian initiation rite, it is incumbent upon us as Baptists to understand the richness of this biblical practice. Asking a series of probing questions will help us.

First, what is the difference between an “ordinance” and a “sacrament?” The *BF&M* identifies baptism as a church ordinance. Other Christian groups, such as Catholics and Presbyterians, prefer the term sacrament. A sacrament is a ritual act that functions as a means of grace (Catholic) or a sign of grace (Presbyterian). The term “sacrament” is not an inherently incorrect term if one retains the original meaning of the term. A sacrament originally denoted an “oath of allegiance” undertaken by a new Roman army soldier to his superior commanding officer. Baptism then is a public oath of allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Baptists prefer the term “ordinance” to sacrament. An ordinance is an act ordained or commanded by Christ (Matt. 26:26-29; 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 15:23-25). In addition, Baptists affirm that the New Testament connects the ordinances to the Gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. According to the New Testament, Christ established only two ordinances: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The act of immersion portrays death and resurrection. The elements of the Lord’s Supper portray the crucified body and shed blood of Jesus.

Second, what is the meaning of the term “baptize?” Baptize is an anglicized form of the Greek verb *baptizo*. The translators of the *King James Version* did not translate the Greek word; rather the translators brought the word over into the English language. In this practice, the translators followed the explicit instructions of King James, the head of the Anglican Church (Church of England). According to W. F. Moulton’s *The History of the English Bible*, King James drafted a series of instructions to the translators. Rule 3 stipulated, “The old ecclesiastical words [are] to be kept, viz. the word “church” not to be translated congregation.” Translations such as “congregation” for church or

“immerse” for baptized attacked the theology of the national church which sprinkled infants. However, the Greek verb means to “dip, plunge, or immerse.” The *BFM* rightly defines baptism as “the immersion of a believer in water.”

Immersion symbolizes the meaning of baptism (death, burial and resurrection) in a way that sprinkling or pouring cannot convey. These are the other two modes of baptism practiced by some denominations. Further, the New Testament describes baptism as occurring in watery depths. John baptized at Aenon “because there was plenty of water there” (John 3:23 HCSB). At his baptism, Jesus “went up from the water” (Matt. 3:16). When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, they both “went down into the water” (Acts 8:38).

Third, who is the church to baptize? The *BFM* clearly answers that the church baptizes only believers. As John Hammett, professor of theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, points out the terms “faith” or “believer” occur five times in the four sentences of the article on baptism. In the Great Commission, becoming a disciple of Christ precedes the command to baptize. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter commanded repentance prior to baptism (Acts 2:38-39). The proper member for baptism is a believer. This rules out infant baptism.

Fourth, what is the meaning of baptism? Archaeology of the earliest church buildings reveals the meaning of baptism. Christians constructed baptisteries in the shape of crosses or coffins. Baptism is a Christian drama of the Gospel message. Through baptism, the church enacts a drama of the Gospel, conversion and community. Baptism is historical; the ordinance symbolizes the most significant moment in cosmic history—the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the core proclamation of the Gospel. Further, baptism is confessional. As noted by the *BFM*, baptism symbolizes the believer’s faith in the Gospel of death, burial and resurrection. Baptism is doctrinal. Baptism highlights two specific doctrines: Trinity and conversion. The

church baptized in the name of the loving Father, redeeming Son, and sealing Spirit. Moreover, baptism is testimonial. Baptism dramatically portrays the conversion of the believer. Baptism depicts the union of the believer with the crucified and resurrected Lord. The New Testament expresses this union with Christ by means of the language “baptized into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Through union with Christ by faith, a believer dies, buries the old life, and walks in resurrected life. Finally, baptism is prophetic. Through baptism, a believer affirms the final resurrection of the dead.

Fifth, what is the context of baptism? Like the Lord’s Supper, baptism is communal. By participation in baptism, a believer identifies with Christ and identifies with the people belonging to Christ, the Church. As a visible symbol of the community of faith, biblical baptism does not occur in the context of a family, home fellowship, or Bible study group. Baptism depicts the unity of the church (Eph. 4:5) as well as the union of the believer with the Body of Christ. In baptism the believer undergoes an oath of allegiance to the risen Lord and an oath of allegiance to the body, the covenantal community. The community of faith pledges to shepherd the new believer into discipleship. Baptism is a community celebration and commitment.

In our recent revision of the *BF&M*, not one word pertaining to the ordinance of baptism was altered. We have enjoyed a high level of agreement for decades for several reasons.

We are in strong agreement regarding the importance of baptism. The most substantive source regarding the significance of baptism comes from Jesus himself – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:20).

Southern Baptist scholars have strongly held that baptism is a public expression of an inward reality of having been unified with Christ. His death represents our death to self, and his

resurrection represents our having been raised new creatures who are no longer under the curse and enslavement of sin (Col 2:12). In other words, we have viewed baptism as an act of obedience (which is why we refer to it as an ordinance) and as a symbolic event (which is why we have rejected the term sacrament).

The Southern Baptist understanding of baptism stands in conflict with the official doctrine of traditional Roman Catholicism and even some Protestant groups who teach that in the act of baptism there is the impartation of grace without preexisting faith. This belief that grace is imparted to the subject of baptism is why it is called a sacrament.

As Southern Baptists we have historically rejected any notion of sacramental grace in baptism as this idea runs counter to the clear doctrine of salvation in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.

The idea of “faith” or “belief” presupposes sufficient cognitive ability and maturation so as to reject any possibility of infants being appropriate candidates for baptism. This has historically been true of all Baptists.

For instance, *The Schleitheim Confessions* of AD 1527 states: “Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with Him in death, so that they may be resurrected with Him, and to all those who with this significance request it [baptism] of us and demand it for themselves. This excludes all infant baptism...”

In support of this position, one only has to look at various baptism narratives in the book of Acts where the contexts clearly demonstrate that believers were baptized following a response of faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 10:44-48; 16:14-15; 32-33).

That baptism does not save is clear. That baptism is not optional is equally clear. A non-baptized Christian is an oxymoron. It is nonsensical. The New Testament knows of no such creature! The same should be true for Christians and the church today!

Baptism		
Sacrament	Ordinance	
The word “sacrament “ means to make sacred, to dedicate to a god or to a sacred use. The Latin word was used in the Vulgate to translate the Greek <i>mysterion</i> , which gave it the idea of something mysterious or magical. Thus, groups that prefer to call these rights the “holy sacrament” usually connect with them some mysterious power or actual conveying of grace (Ryrie, <i>Basic Theology</i> , 421).	Ordinance (though a synonym of sacrament in the dictionary) does not incorporate the idea of conveying grace but only the idea of a symbol. Thus, the ordinance itself has no inherent power to change those observing it, though God may use it to minister to them (Ryrie, <i>Basic Theology</i> , 421).	
Catholic View	Lutheran View	Presbyterian View
<p>Sacramental View</p> <p><i>Ex Opera Operato</i> “in the doing of the work”</p> <p>The Council of Trent defined a sacrament as something presented to the sense which has the <u>power</u>, by divine institution, of not only signifying, but also <u>efficiently conveying</u> grace.</p>	<p>Sacramental View (Martin Luther)</p> <p>There is no conveyance of grace unless the sacrament is accompanied by faith.</p> <p>In infants, an “unconscious faith” is expressed, or a vicarious faith by the parents is imparted.</p>	<p>Sacramental View (John Calvin)</p> <p>Sacraments are not means of grace <i>ex opera operato</i> or in virtue of some inherent content of the rite itself. They are visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, by means whereof God works in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. In particular, they are signs and seals of God’s working out the covenant which He has established with the human race. (Erickson, <i>Christian Theology</i>, 1093.)</p>
Number of Sacraments/Ordinances		
Roman Catholics (7)	Protestants: Minimalists (2)	Protestants: Maximalists (5)
Baptism Confirmation Penance Eucharist Marriage Extreme Unction - for the time of death Holy Orders - priesthood; ordination	Baptism Lord’s Supper	Baptism Lord’s Supper Foot Washing (Jn. 13) Marriage (Eph. 5) Prayers for the sick (Jas. 5)