

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

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I. The biblical/theological meaning of baptism

- A. Baptism is commanded by Christ in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20).
- B. It is usually associated with repentance and faith (Acts 2:37-41; 8:12; 10:44-48; 16:14-15, 31, 43; 18:8; 19:1-7). In Mt. 28:18-20, it follows the command to disciple.
- C. Some texts seem to suggest that baptism is important to salvation (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21; Titus 3:5).
 - 1. It is part of the composite event in which individuals call upon the Lord to be saved (Acts 2:21, 38; 22:16).
 - 2. Yet baptism isn't mentioned in some of the important texts that say what we must do to be saved (e.g., Rom. 10:9-10).
- D. It symbolizes our union with Christ (Rom. 6:3-11; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:12; 3:1).
- E. It represents our entrance into the church (the body of Christ) and our union with other believers (1 Cor. 12:13).
- F. It's often used to express the unity of the church in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:5).
- G. It's associated with receiving the Holy Spirit, who is the pledge of the full salvation that will be revealed at Christ's return (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:12; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14).
- H. It represents cleansing and forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 10:22; Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11).
- I. It's an act of commitment - a transfer of allegiance and a pledge to a life of discipleship (1 Pet. 3:21).
- J. The new life represented by baptism brings with it a new ethical orientation (Rom. 6:1-14; Col. 2:11-12, 3:1-17; 1 Pet. 3:21-4:11).
- K. Baptism is the believer's entrance upon the way of servanthood, as we follow the path of our master (Mark 10:38-45).
- L. Believer baptism is the norm in the NT.
 - 1. The issue of household baptisms has been much discussed - see Acts 10:44-48 (Cornelius); Acts 16:15, 33 (Lydia, Philippian jailer); Acts 18:8 (Crispus); 1 Cor. 1:16 (Stephanus).
 - 2. Some of these accounts state that the word was preached to all who were subsequently baptized; others are silent.
- M. Most believer baptism traditions teach an age of accountability for children (Is. 7:15-16; Dt. 1:39; Gen. 8:21; Rom. 7:9).
- N. There are three common modes of baptism:
 - 1. Immersion best symbolizes Romans 6:1-10 (death, burial, resurrection) and is the most likely practice in the NT (Mark 1:10; John 3:23; Acts 8:36).
 - 2. Pouring (affusion) is associated with the coming of the Spirit (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:1-2, 38).

3. Sprinkling (aspersion) is associated with cleansing from sin, esp. in OT rituals of purification (Is. 52:15; Ezek. 36:25; Titus 3:5; Heb. 9:10, 13-14; 10:22; 1 Pet. 1:2).
4. The *Didache* (late 1st century, early 2nd century) is flexible on the mode of baptism: "The procedure for baptizing is as follows. After rehearsing all the preliminaries, immerse in running water 'In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'. If no running water is available, immerse in ordinary water. This should be cold if possible; otherwise warm. If neither is practicable, then sprinkle water three times on the head 'In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'."
5. Brethren baptize by trine immersion (immersing three times forward).

II. The biblical/theological meaning of the Lord's Supper

- A. It's an act of obedience to Christ's command ("do this" - Luke 22:19).
- B. The Last Supper itself was the preeminent example of Jesus' table fellowship that was a sign of the inbreaking of God's kingdom.
- C. It is a memorial, a time to remember Christ and what he has done for us - "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25). We give thanks.
- D. It's a proclamation of the gospel - Christ's death on our behalf (1 Cor. 11:26).
- E. It looks forward to Christ's return - "until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).
- F. It is a community act - one loaf, one body (1 Cor. 10:15-17).
- G. It's a participation or sharing in Christ (1 Cor. 10:16).
- H. It provides the opportunity to reaffirm the commitments that were made in baptism.
- I. All these aspects of meaning suggest that the Lord's Supper is for believers, although others may attend and observe.
- J. The Lord's Supper has past, present, and future dimensions:
 1. Looking back to Christ's death on our behalf.
 2. Celebrating our fellowship with him and with one another in the present.
 3. Proclaiming the gospel.
 4. Reaffirming our commitment to him and to one another.
 5. Looking forward to the Messianic banquet (Is. 25:6-8) and the coming marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). Cf. Mt. 22:2-14; Lk. 14:15-24.
 6. Ethical emphasis: it calls for us to act in light of our redemption in Christ and our promise of a future life with him; it calls us to live in love with one another and to work for reconciliation.
- K. Some traditions observe it in the context of a common meal (agape meal), as the early church did (see Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 2 Pet. 2:13; Jude 12).
- L. Brethren practice threefold communion, with agape meal or love feast, footwashing, and bread and cup (conflating John 13 with Synoptic accounts).