

BF&M 7: Baptism and The Lord's Supper

Memory Verse: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." 2 Corinthians 5:17

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are two Christian practices that churches and denominations have differed over for hundreds of years. Even the word we use to refer to these practices, obaptism, is different from what many Christians call them—sacraments. But the primary difference is not over the way we refer to them but rather the meaning we see in them.

Baptism

You would expect that a church that calls itself Baptist would have definite opinions about the practice of baptism. And we do. We believe that the New Testament teaches that baptism is the immersion in water of a person who has exercised saving faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

There are three important aspects of New Testament baptism. The first of these is the manner or mode of baptism. The BF&M states that "Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water..." The Greek verb commonly used in the New Testament that is translated "baptize" is *baptizo*. It literally meant "to immerse, to dip, or to bury." The very word itself denotes immersion. In **Romans 6:3-4**, in explaining our death to sin and new life in Christ, Paul speaks of our being "buried...by baptism...." In addition, the clear practice of the church in the New Testament was to immerse those who professed faith in Christ, e.g., **Matt. 3:16-17, Acts 8:36-39**.

The practice of pouring or sprinkling water on a baptismal candidate is not found in the New Testament. While the verbs for "pour" and "sprinkle" are found in the New Testament, neither is used for baptism. The practice of pouring or sprinkling grew out of the later practice (later than the New Testament) of infant baptism.

This leads us to the second important aspect of baptism, the candidate for baptism. Again, in the New Testament only believers, those who could consciously profess faith in Christ, were baptized, e.g., **Acts 2:41, 16:30-33**. Thus, the BF&M states that "Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer...." It wasn't until late in the second century that infant baptism came to be practiced and accepted in the church.

Closely related to the candidate for baptism is the mode of baptism. The BF&M states that baptism "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." In other words, baptism proclaims faith and confirms faith. It does not create faith or complete faith. The belief that baptism is necessary for salvation or gives

salvation is called b_____ r_____. This is not taught in the New Testament. In fact, there are clear instances of salvation in the New Testament a_____ f_____ baptism, e.g., **Luke 19:8-10, 23:39-43, Acts 10:44-48**. When the apostle Paul was rebuking the church at Corinth over their divisions regarding following him or Cephas (Peter) or Apollos, he wrote this: *"I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius...For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel..."* (1 Cor. 1:14, 17). If baptism saved or was necessary for salvation, how could Paul say that Christ did not send him to baptize? He could only write those words because baptism does not save.

Baptism is not necessary for being in the kingdom of God, but it is necessary for membership and fellowship in a local church. "Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper."

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." The Lord's Supper is the second of the two ordinances that Christ gave to His church. We see it instituted by Christ Himself in the Gospels, e.g. **Matt. 26:26-29**. This is another practice that Christians have disagreed about down through the centuries—and to this day.

The Roman Catholic Church believes what is called transubstantiation. This means that, in the Lord's Supper, when the priest says of the bread, "This is my body," it actually *b*_____ (is transformed into) the body of Christ. Likewise, when he says of the cup, the wine, "This is my blood," it actually *becomes* the blood of Christ. Therefore, in the performance of the Mass, Christ is crucified again.

In response to this teaching, Baptists say that the Roman Catholic church fails to recognize the s_____ character of Jesus' statements when He declared, "This is my body," or "This is my blood." Jesus spoke in symbolic terms many times when speaking of Himself. **See John 6:41; 10:9; & 15:1**. In a similar way, when Jesus says, "This is my body," he means it in a symbolic way, not in an actual, literal, physical way.

The Lutheran Church rejects transubstantiation in favor of what it calls c_____ -substantiation. Martin Luther rejected the Catholic teaching, yet he insisted that the phrase "This is my body" had to be taken in some sense as a literal statement. In some sense, the body of Christ is "in, with, and under" the elements of the Lord's Supper, much as water is present in a sponge. The water is not the sponge, but is "in, with, and under" the sponge, and is present wherever the sponge is present (Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, p. 391).

Still, it seems that the Lutheran view fails to realize that Jesus is speaking of a spiritual reality but using physical objects to teach us when He says, "This is my

body." There is no more need to think that Jesus meant for us to believe that the bread and the cup were his literal body and blood in the institution of the Lord's Supper than he meant for us to believe that we are to literally eat His flesh and drink His blood in John 6:53-59:

53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." 59 Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

Rather than focusing on a literal, physical presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, Baptists believe that there is a s_____ presence of the Lord, which is consistent with His being present by His Spirit whenever His church gathers. When we partake of the bread and the cup, we are reminded of the sacrifice of the God-man, Jesus Christ, on the Cross, as well as His resurrection from the dead. We believe that the Lord's Supper is a p_____ of the gospel in a visible way, **1 Cor. 11:26**. This preaching of the gospel is not only a look back at His death, but also a look forward to His coming again. Therefore, it is appropriate to speak and act in a way that the Lord's Supper is seen as a c_____ as much as it is a commemoration.

When the local church celebrates the Lord's Supper, we proclaim the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ even as we anticipate His return, when the church will celebrate the wedding supper of the Lamb (see Rev. 19:7). Likewise, when the church celebrates baptism, we complete the picture Christ provided for us of a believer transformed by God's grace and power. Observed regularly, baptism and the Lord's Supper teach the congregation the basic truths of our gospel. Taken together, these two ordinances not only fulfill the Lord's command but also serve as beautiful public testimonies to the sum and substance of the gospel. Believers should find great joy and satisfaction in observing and participating in these ordinances. (p. 99)