



BAPTISM

A SIGN OF SAFE PASSAGE



Table of Contents

- I. DOCTRINE 4
- II. STORY 6
- III. RECIPIENTS & MODE 8
- IV. QUESTIONS 8

I. DOCTRINE



The Seven Articles | Article VI

“We believe that God has given His church **baptism** and communion, the signs and seals of the New Covenant, to be received by faith as visible declarations of the gospel.”

i. INSTITUTION: “We believe that God has given His church baptism...”

After the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, baptism was filled with fresh meaning and commanded by both our Lord and His disciples:

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)*

*And Peter said to them, “**Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.**” (Acts 2:38-39)*

ii. NATURE: “...the signs and seals of the New Covenant, to be received by faith...”

For all of history, the relationship between God and man has always been mediated through *covenants* administered by God. These covenants have always been accompanied by symbols (e.g. the rainbow in God’s covenant with Noah in Genesis 9:17). After the fall in Genesis 3, salvation has always been *by grace through faith*.

Now, in the Old Covenant (B.C) era, *circumcision* was the symbol (the *sign and seal*) of God’s covenant with Abraham and his offspring. It symbolized a regenerate/born again heart (Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:28-29) and looked forward to the death of Abraham’s offspring, Jesus Christ, who was *cut off* from the covenant and counted *unclean* and *cursed* so that we might be brought into the covenant and counted *righteous* and *blessed* through faith:

*[Abraham] received the **sign** of circumcision as a **seal of the righteousness that he had by faith** while he was still uncircumcised. (Romans 4:11)*

In The New Covenant (A.D.) era, *baptism* is the sign and seal of God’s covenant with the offspring of Abraham, both Jews and Gentiles through faith in Christ (Galatians 3:28-29). Baptism symbolizes a regenerate/born again heart and looks *back* upon the death and *resurrection* of Jesus Christ, with whom we are united by grace through faith:

*In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, **having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.** And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:11-15)*

Though crucial and commanded, baptism does not *cause* regeneration or *guarantee* salvation. Two helpful analogies: a wedding ring does not make someone married or guaran-

tee someone is married, but it is certainly a helpful and meaningful symbol! Furthermore, a wax seal on an envelope from a ruler indicates the veracity of its contents and the authority of the writer. Ultimately, however, it is the presence of the Holy Spirit that is the cause of our regeneration and guarantee of our salvation:

*And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also **put his seal on us and given us his Spirit** in our hearts as a guarantee. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)*

iii. PURPOSE: “as visible declarations of the Gospel.”

Baptism is a then a powerful, crucial, and tangible symbol of gospel realities, primarily being:

1. **Death & Resurrection:** In union with Jesus Christ by faith, we have died to sin and risen spiritually with Christ in the hope of rising physically after death.

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? **Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.** For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:1-11)*

2. **Inward Cleansing:** In union with Jesus Christ by faith, we have been born again by the Holy Spirit and washed clean by the blood of Christ.

*For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.** (Titus 3:3-7)*

3. **Covenant Initiation:** In union with Jesus Christ by faith, we have been initiated into God’s New Covenant community the church, the body of Christ.

***For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:27-29)*

***For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.** (1 Corinthians 12:13)*

So...how does baptism (and communion, for that matter) *actually work*? Author N.T. Wright is helpful here: “When Jesus himself wanted to explain to his disciples what his forthcoming death was all about, he didn’t give them a theory—he gave them a meal.” We do not ask specifically how a meal knits a family together or how an earnest kiss increases love and trust between spouses. Similarly, God gives His children His Gospel Word not just for our ears, but for our eyes, fingers, noses, and tongues. This is why the sacraments have been called “means of grace:” not because they are magic rites of salvation, but because they really do increase our faith, hope, and love for God and neighbor.

II. STORY



“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)

Just as creation emerged from the waters by the Word and Spirit of God, we emerge from the waters of baptism as new creations through the powerful working of the Word and Spirit. It is the sign that the New Creation has dawned! Marking us off as citizens of heaven (and therefore strangers on earth), baptism is a snapshot off the glorious history of redemption: just as Noah’s family passed safely through the flood, and Israel passed safely through the Red Sea, baptism is a promise from God to be received with joy and wonder. By faith, we will pass safely in Christ through the waters of God’s final judgment. Let’s trace the unfolding drama together:

There are whispers of baptism in the creation story:

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. **And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.** (Genesis 1:1-2)*

The whispers become louder in the story of Noah’s ark, which Peter says baptism “corresponds to:”

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, **eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.** (1 Peter 3:18-22)*

Baptism is on display again in the Exodus when Israel, God’s covenant people, passed safely through the deadly Red Sea and was set apart as His “son” (Hosea 11:1):

*For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and **all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.** (1 Corinthians 10:1-6)*

The imagery of baptism appears in numerous places throughout the Psalms and the prophets, nowhere more striking than in the book of Jonah:

*Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying, "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; **out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.**" (Jonah 2:1-3)*

In the Baptism of Jesus, God's Son, we see Him identified as the Truer & Greater Adam, Noah, & Israel. He is the Lord of the covenant who became the Servant of the covenant in order to fulfill all righteousness on behalf of God's people:

*Now when all the people were baptized, and when **Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."** (Luke 3:21-22)*

Jesus' true "baptism" was His suffering on the cross, His burial, and His resurrection from the dead. Since we are united with Him by faith, our lives will be "cross-shaped." As we carry our cross, we can actually "rejoice insofar as [we] share in Christ's sufferings, that [we] may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed," for we will be raised and glorified with Him (1 Peter 4:13-14)!

*I came to **cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!** (Luke 12:49-50)*

*Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "**The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.**" (Mark 10:38-40)*

In the constant suffering and fiery persecution of God's people, judgment has already begun at the household of God (1 Peter 4:17). God is purifying and refining His radiant bride. One day, however, God will visit the earth again in judgment: not with a flood and not to pour our His wrath on a substitute, but to destroy sin, Satan, and death once and for all. Let us receive baptism and thank our gracious God for sending His Son to face that consuming fire on our behalf! We will have safe passage, for "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

*For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was **formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the Day of Judgment and destruction of the ungodly...But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.** (2 Peter 3:5-7, 13)*

III. RECIPIENTS & MODE

Our church's current official practice is believer's baptism by immersion, though we welcome as members those Christians who have been baptized by sprinkling or pouring as infants in a gospel-preaching church.

IV. QUESTIONS

These are the questions you will be asked before being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Prayerfully consider all five questions to make sure that you can answer “Yes” to all of them:

1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?
2. Do you believe that your sin has separated you from God the Father?
3. Have you repented of that sin by the power of the Holy Spirit?
4. Do you believe that Jesus lived a sinless life, died your due death on the cross, and rose again, conquering sin, Satan, and death?
5. Do you believe that you have risen with Christ spiritually and will one day rise from death physically to be with Him for eternity?



www.ValleyCommunity.church

 @VCCTriValley |  Valley Community Church |  @VCCTriValley
4455 Del Valle Parkway | Pleasanton, CA 94566 | 925.846.6622