

Baptism Questions

In Jesus' earthly ministry He left two ordinances: The Lord's Supper¹ and Baptism. We practice these two today in obedience to our Lord.

Neither of these ordinances is of any value without personal, saving faith in Jesus Christ. Both baptism and the Lord's Supper are concrete symbols of spiritual realities of which we lay hold by faith. If a person does not have faith, baptism is of no value. In other words, those being baptized today must personally believe that baptism is a symbol, or a sign, of the following four spiritual truths or realities that apply to each of them by faith:

1. The first concerns baptism as a symbol of one's dying to self and being raised to new life in Christ. Romans chapter six is probably the most well known passage.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.

Those who are being baptized tonight are testifying to the fact that God has raised them to a new life of obedience to him. They have left behind their slavery to sin, and now, by God's grace, they are new creatures following in the footsteps of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The plunging under the water represents burial to the old man as the Bible calls it, while the coming up out of the water represents new life.

Have you been born again? Another way of asking the question is, Are you a "new creature" in Christ? Is it your earnest desire to be, and by the Holy Spirit's power, are you putting to death your old self, having died and been raised with Christ to a new life?

2. The second concerns baptism as a symbol of cleansing or purification from the defilement from sin. In Acts 22.16 the apostle Paul was told "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins..."

Sin defiles us before God and prevents us from entering into his presence. We need to be washed from this filth before we can enter into a personal relationship with God and baptism is a symbol of God's washing us, cleaning us from the filth of sin that separated us.

The water here represents the cleansing work of the blood and the Spirit.

Do you believe that your sin has made you filthy before God? Do you believe that Jesus alone has cleansed you of your filth before God and nothing you have done or can do is able to cleanse you except your faith in Jesus?

3. The third concerns baptism as a symbol of being clothed with Christ and is related to the second; if in the second we are cleansed from filth – having our filthy garments removed – the third has to do with being clothed with new, clean garments. It is a picture of justification by faith. When God looks at those who believe in Christ, he sees the beautiful white garments of Christ in place of our old filthy garments. We are clothed with Christ.

Here, just as assuredly as the water surrounds your body, so the righteousness of Christ surrounds or covers you.

¹ We view the Lord's Supper as a *symbolic memorial*. In other words, we do not understand the elements (bread & cup) as conferring grace in-and-of themselves (that's why we don't call the Lord's Supper a *sacrament*, but rather an *ordinance*). The elements are *symbols*. The bread represents Christ's physical body and the cup his violent death on the cross. The Lord's Supper edifies us as we remember these truths about our Savior and what they mean for our salvation when we partake of the elements.

Do you believe that Jesus, having cleansed your filth, has clothed you in His own righteousness?

4. The fourth and last concerns baptism as a symbol of the resurrection. It is a sign of the promise to us that God will one day raise up these mortal bodies from the dead never again to see or experience death. Just as Jesus himself was buried and raised, so baptism symbolizes the burial of our bodies in the dust from which we were taken, and the resurrection of our mortal bodies when the trumpet sounds and the Lord returns to gather his people.

Here, just as assuredly as you sink below the waters and are brought up from them, so your physical body will one day (the Lord's return notwithstanding) be buried in the earth and at Jesus' return will be raised from the ground to everlasting life, never to die and suffer decay again.

Do you believe that, unless the Lord returns beforehand, you will physically die because of Adam's sin? Do you believe that your belief in Jesus guarantees that just as Jesus himself was physically buried and raised from the dead, you too will be raised when He returns to judge the world in righteousness?

So there you have it. As these brothers and sisters in the Lord are baptized this evening, let us consider the work of God both in their lives and in the lives of all believers. God has done more than we can do or think on our behalf and he has given this sign as a way for us to remember what he has done and return praise and thanks to him for it.