



SACRED SYMBOLS OF THE CHURCH Baptism: Myth vs. Truth

Today, I'd like to share the first of two messages regarding *Sacred Symbols of the Church*. Let's begin by defining two common words:

- ▣ *Symbol: A word, phrase, token, or image that is used as a representation for something else.* For example: When you see this symbol (Golden Arches), you think—what? *McDonald's*.
- ▣ *Sacred: Reverently devoted to God.* So—when we consider symbols that are *reverently devoted to God*, what comes to mind? The picture of an empty tomb? Or—how about a cross?!

The symbol of *the cross* has been—and always will be—the most common symbol associated with Christianity. But—did you know that *God* gave us *two* sacred symbols which He said were to be reminders for us—for all time? That's right. The two sacred symbols which *God*, Himself, initiated are BAPTISM and THE LORD'S SUPPER. This morning, we're going to talk about *baptism*, then next Sunday, we're going to talk about *The Lord's Supper*. Let's begin with a 7-question pre-test about baptism. Don't answer out loud, but in your outline, please circle one answer for each question. For each question, your answer will either be *Myth* or *Truth*...

1. Baptism, as pictured in the New Testament, is for the purpose of washing away sins. MYTH or TRUTH?
2. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus, but is *completed* through baptism. MYTH or TRUTH?
3. Infant baptism is necessary to protect young children from the eventuality of dying with original sin. MYTH or TRUTH?
4. *When* a person is baptized doesn't matter as long as it happens. MYTH or TRUTH?
5. Sprinkle, pour, or dunk—*how* baptism is administered is no big deal. MYTH or TRUTH?
6. Baptism is a symbol of death. MYTH or TRUTH?
7. Baptism is an action of obedience to a Biblical commandment. MYTH or TRUTH?

BAPTISM. There are few teachings within the church at large that have been debated *more*—than the doctrine of baptism. For centuries, beliefs among Christians have varied widely related to baptism.

While some might suggest that discussions about baptism are unimportant, or silly, or not worth our time—a study of the New Testament will tell you that the doctrine of baptism *does* matter. Why? Because the answers to the questions which are being debated have a direct connection to a Biblical understanding of *salvation*.

And so today, we’re going to study what the Bible has to say about baptism. By the way, remember that God’s Word—the Bible—is the only *true* source of authority—not the traditions of man, and not the traditions of the church—but Scripture alone. So—let’s open up our Bibles, and let’s see what God wants to say to us this morning. Let’s learn about baptism one question at a time. (*Now—let me encourage you to answer out loud!*)

1. Baptism, as pictured in the New Testament, is for the purpose of washing away sins. **MYTH** or TRUTH?

Often, those who believe that baptism washes away sins will use the following verse as a foundation of their argument:

Acts 22:16 “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*” (NKJV)

Some versions explain this verse with better clarity than others. The Holman Christian Study Bible gives a clearer rendering of this verse:

Acts 22:16 “*And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name.*” (HCSB)

You see, we do not call on *baptism* for forgiveness of sins. The Bible clearly teaches us to call on *the name of the Lord* for forgiveness of sins. It is Christ *alone* who saves us! Scripture never contradicts itself. Romans 10:13 repeats this theme: “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*” If baptism is required for salvation, why is it not listed in *this* verse—and many others—which explain the requirements for salvation?

Romans 10:13 could have said “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord and is baptized will be saved.”—but it doesn’t say that, does it?! Is God confused about the requirements for salvation? Hardly. We are saved by calling on the name of Jesus Christ in faith—we are saved by trusting in Christ alone—for our salvation.

Furthermore, if one *could* be baptized *for* salvation—who needs Jesus? Just go get dunked, and go on your merry way! God would not have sent His Son to die a criminal’s death on a cross, were it not *necessary* for the salvation of sinners! Not only that, but if one *could* be baptized *for* salvation, would that not constitute salvation by works? And yet, in Ephesians 2:8-9, we read these words: “*For by grace are you saved through faith—and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, lest any man should boast.*”

NO—We are *not* saved by good works—not even the good work of baptism! We are saved by grace—through faith in Christ—alone.

2. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus, but is *completed* through baptism. **MYTH or TRUTH?**

This would be the doctrinal belief of our Church of Christ friends. Acts 2:38 may be the hallmark verse for their theology: “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.’”

Those who buy into this *baptism-for-salvation* theology would say, “See there? It says repent AND be baptized—for the forgiveness of sins...If you’re not baptized, then you’re not *completely* saved!” Isn’t that kind of like saying that a woman is not *completely* pregnant?! Hmmm. Q. How can one be *partially* saved? Seems to me, you either are—or you’re not?!

In this example, mistakes have been made in interpretation. You know what the *key* word is for correct interpretation of this verse? Believe it or not, it’s the word “for.” *Repent and be baptized FOR the forgiveness of sins.* The Greek word used here is the word “eis.” “Eis” has two meanings which can both be accurate, depending on context. The first meaning of the word “eis”? “In order to get.” So if this is your interpretation, the verse would read, “Repent and be baptized *in order to get* the forgiveness of sins.”

The second meaning of the word “eis”? “Because of.” “Repent and be baptized *because of* the forgiveness of sins.” Both views could be possible based upon the meaning of the word. So how can we know which interpretation is correct? We interpret an individual verse based upon the *whole* of Scripture. There are many verses in the New Testament which clearly explain the requirements for salvation.

Many of these verses make NO mention of baptism—which would be strange if baptism were a *requirement* for salvation. One of the cardinal rules of correct Bible interpretation is to interpret the Bible *by* the Bible. Wherein, if a strong majority of verses give one explanation, yet there are a few verses which *seem* to interpret the same topic differently—more study is required. But this much is sure: The God who wrote this Bible will never contradict Himself. I’d like to look at the next two questions together:

3. Infant baptism is necessary to protect young children from the eventuality of dying with original sin? **MYTH** or TRUTH?
4. *When* a person is baptized doesn’t matter as long as it happens. **MYTH** or TRUTH?

The term “original sin” refers to the fact that all members of the human race are by nature, sinners. That’s true. By nature, by choice, and by habit, *ALL* of us—are sinners. But in Catholic and various other churches, *babies* are baptized to protect them against dying without forgiveness of original sin.

Q. Are there *any* Biblical examples of infant baptism? The answer—NO.

The Bible records *zero* examples of an infant being baptized—not even one! On the contrary, *every* mention of baptism recorded in the Bible involved people who were old enough to hear about, understand, and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Not only that, but New Testament baptism *always followed* salvation. This reality may have bearing for some of us here today. Examples:

📖 Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue. Acts 18:8

“*And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.*” Note the order: Salvation first—*then* baptism.

📖 The Philippian Jailer. Acts chapter 16. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul, “*What must I do to be saved?*” (v. 30), Paul answered, “*Believe on the*

Lord Jesus Christ.” (v. 31) Then, in vs. 33, we read: “...and immediately he was baptized...” Did you notice? No mention of the word baptism *in order to be saved*. But again, note the order: Salvation first—then baptism.

So—If you were baptized as an infant, or if you were baptized earlier in life, yet you would affirm that your true salvation experience happened *later*—should you NOW be baptized? The answer is YES. No *infant baptism ever* occurred in the Bible. And—by all examples of Scripture—no genuine baptism *ever* occurred *before* a person was saved.

So why do some churches practice infant baptism? Here’s the Catholic response from their own Catechism: “The practice of infant baptism is an immemorial *tradition of the Church*. There is explicit testimony to this practice from the second century on...” (Pg. 319, #1252)

So what we’re talking about is a man-made tradition, not a God-made mandate. Which will you follow: The traditions of man or the Word of God?

5. Sprinkle, pour, or dunk—*how* baptism is administered is no big deal. **MYTH** or TRUTH?

It *does* matter...it’s *always* important that we follow the *Biblical* model. The Greek word for “baptism” is the word, “*baptizo*” [*bap-tee-zo*] which means “*to immerse, dunk under, submerge.*” There *are* other Greek words for “*sprinkle*” and “*pour*” which could have been used, but were *not* used for baptism. This also matters because baptism is intended to be a *symbol* of something which is very important. Which brings us to the next question...

6. Baptism is a symbol of death. MYTH or **TRUTH?**

Romans 6:3-4 ³ *Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?* ⁴ *Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

This passage reminds us of the *picture*—the *symbolism*—that God wants us to see in baptism. In salvation, Christ forgives our sins, and we begin a personal relationship with Him. So when Christ enters our lives, we begin a lifelong process of death to self—death to the old sinful ways. Baptism is a symbol—a picture—of the fact that we are to die to self and live to Christ. [Demonstrate

– Josh] The words that I speak during baptism remind us of this symbolism. I say, “Buried with Christ in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life.”

Baptism is also a picture of the saving work of Christ on the cross: Because He loves us, Jesus died on the cross—[Josh-down] paying for our sins and He was buried. Then by the power of God, Jesus arose from the dead. [Josh-Up] Therefore, the symbol of baptism is a personal testimony of two things:

- 📖 Our belief in the crucified, resurrected Christ.
- 📖 Our union and identification with Christ—that through salvation in Jesus, we have buried an old life, and we’ve been raised to walk a new life surrendered to Christ.

7. Baptism is an action of obedience to a command.
MYTH or **TRUTH?**

Matthew 28:18-20 ¹⁸ *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Vs. 19 is the key to this question. The verb form for the phrase “*make disciples*” is a command. This verse could accurately be read as follows: “As you go, I command you to *make disciples*—baptizing them—and teaching them.” A disciple is an apprentice—a learner—one who follows. I find it interesting that the very first mark of obedience for a disciple of Jesus Christ—is baptism. Jesus *chose* to *publicly* die on a cross to purchase our salvation. Knowing that He was willing to die *publicly* for us, it really is not too much to ask that we obey His command to *identify* publicly with Him—This is done through believers’ baptism. Let’s summarize:

1. Baptism saves no one. Our sins are forgiven *only* through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
2. Baptism does *not* complete salvation. If baptism could save us in any measure, then the work of Christ on the cross was not enough.
3. Baptism is for believers only—those who have received Christ as Savior and Lord. This excludes infants, and it also necessitates that for baptism to be Scriptural, it must happen *after* conversion.

4. The Biblical mode of baptism is always immersion. There's no other example in the Bible—In the Bible, immersion is the *only* mode of baptism we find.
5. Baptism is symbolic. It symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, *and* the reality that the *believer* has buried an old life, and has been raised to walk a *new* life in Christ.
6. Baptism is obedience to the command of Christ. It is a first step of *obedience and discipleship* for one who follows Christ.

Now—based on what you've learned today from God's Word, I want you to ask yourself a question: *Do I need to be baptized?* By intent or by neglect, are you a believer who somehow has not yet been obedient in this important commandment? Or—Did your baptism and your salvation get out of order?

If either one of these things are true, I want to encourage you today: Obey Christ. If you've been saved, but you've not been Biblically baptized, you can make the decision today to obey Jesus' commandment of baptism.

Or perhaps you're facing a larger issue right now: Perhaps, what you need first is not baptism—but salvation. Baptism is totally meaningless without *first* knowing Jesus in a personal way. If salvation is the need of your life, here's how you can become a *disciple* of Jesus beginning right now...

- 📖 **Believe.** The Bible says, *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.* Acts 16:31 This is more than lip-service...this is a belief that results in action. What action?
- 📖 **Repent.** The Bible says, *Repent, therefore, and turn to [Jesus], that your sins may be wiped out...* Acts 3:19 Repentance is a change of mind and a change of heart that results in a change of actions...
- 📖 **Receive.** The Bible says, *But as many as received Him—Jesus—to them he gave power to become the sons of God.* John 1:12

So—if you sense God convicting your heart this morning, calling you to Himself, calling you to follow Him, then I invite you to pray with me right now to enter into a relationship with Christ.