

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2019

Week 31: July 28-August 3

What is Baptism?

Read: Genesis 17:7-8,11-13; Exodus 12:22,48; Leviticus 4:6,17; 9:9; 14:16,51; Numbers 8:7; 19:18; Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Joshua 3:15; Ruth 2:14; 1 Samuel 14:27; Proverbs 6:23; Ecclesiastes 12:11; Isaiah 21:4; 44:3; Jeremiah 4:4; Ezekiel 23:15; 36:24-26; 39:29; Joel 2:28; Malachi 2:7; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 7:4; 10:38-39; 16:16; Luke 18:15-17; 23:43; John 3:3,5-6; 10:28-30; Acts 1:5; 2:17,33,38-39,41; 8:36-38; 10:45,47-48; 16:25,33; 20:28; Romans 2:29; 4:11; 6:1-4; 9:6-8; 10:14-17; 1 Corinthians 7:14; 9:27; 10:2; 11:29,32; 12:13,27; 2 Corinthians 1:20-22; Galatians 3:27-29; 6:15; Ephesians 2:8-9; 4:12; Colossians 2:11-12; 1 Timothy 5:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Titus 3:4-7; Hebrews 6:2; 8:6; 10:10-14; 12:5-6,24; 1 Peter 2:9; 3:20-21; Revelation 3:19.

There are arguably few points of doctrine that Christians debate more vigorously over than that of Baptism. This is one of those notions over which Christians will go to the mat. In my library, I probably have about thirty books on baptism, all written from various perspectives and coming to various conclusions, and all by Bible-believing, God-fearing Christian scholars. And there is no consensus.

Does that mean that we shouldn't take a hard-line on Baptism? No. It just means that when we take our positions, we must remember that in most cases this is an intra-mural debate — it is a debate between brothers and sisters in Christ and whether one sprinkles or immerses does not make one a heretic.

One of the biggest challenges with this debate is that it really represents three different debates all rolled (and sometimes confused) into one. The first question simply is, "What is baptism?" This covers not only the definition of terms but also why we baptize people, how often people should be baptized, and what it accomplishes. The second question is, "Who should be baptized?" In other words, do we baptize everyone, do just believers get baptized, and do we baptize children of believers? The third question is, "How is one to be baptized?" And from there, the debates ensue.

Baptism: What does the word mean?

The first part of understanding what baptism is has to do with what the word itself means. It is drawn from the Greek word, "Baptizo," which has a variety of meanings. Our friends in the Baptist churches will say quite dogmatically that "baptizo means to forcibly immerse." Well, it can mean that, and in classical Greek, that is how the term is ordinarily used. The problem is that the Bible was not written in classical Greek, it was written in "Koine" (or Common) Greek.

Is there a difference? Well, language changes in its usage over time, there is no way around that. And, by the time we arrived in Jesus' and the Apostles' day, the word Baptizo had come to refer to a change in state of being. So, for example, Jesus states that his time on the cross was a baptism as well as the events of Pentecost. Paul speaks of the Red Sea crossing as a baptism and uses it as an analogy for putting one's faith in Jesus Christ. Paul also connects baptism to circumcision. The author of Hebrews speaks of "various baptisms" and of the atonement in Christ as a "better baptism." Peter says that the Flood was a baptism not for the people immersed by the water of the flood, but for the people saved in the boat. Truly, this word means much more than to forcibly immerse.

So, What is Baptism?

We refer to Baptism as a "Covenant sign and seal." It is a sign that we have been marked as part of the covenant body of the church. When that baptism is joined with faith, then the promises that baptism represents are understood to be sealed to the individual. For more on this, I encourage you to read the Heidelberg Catechism, questions 69-74.

Symbolically, baptism points to the circumcision of the heart spoken of in the Old Testament (for a Jew is one inwardly, not outwardly in the flesh). And thus, it points us to the changed life of a born-again believer when they profess faith and the anticipation of a changed life when a covenant child is presented for baptism.

Who should be Baptized?

Adult believers should be baptized. Also the children of professing believers are to be baptized. In practical terms, that means we only baptize the children of those who are members of the church and that we require baptism for membership (it is a sign of obedience to the Great Commission). And, once baptized, one never need to be baptized again (if you cannot lose your salvation because it is held secure in Christ, then you cannot lose what your baptism symbolized even if that baptism was worked while you were an infant.

What does Baptism do?

Most of the time, when people ask this, they ask if we believe that baptism saves people. No. It does not save, it is merely a symbol. We should note that typically both Lutherans and Roman Catholics teach that you are regenerated in your baptism, but that is a view not consistent with the teachings of Scripture on the matter. The Holy Spirit works regeneration, not a sacrament of the church.

How should people be Baptized?

People should be baptized by pouring or sprinkling. The practice is modeled after the Jewish practice of the ordaining a priest by sprinkling water on his person to symbolically purify him (remember, Christians are a priesthood of believers). It is also meant to be symbolic of the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost, where the flames of fire hovered over the heads of the Apostles. Finally, the Israelites were said to be baptized in the Red Sea crossing where the only ones immersed were the Egyptians...and that, under the judgment of God.

But what about Jesus' baptism? It said that he "came out" of the water...

Interestingly enough, the text can be translated as "came out" or "came from." In other words, the text simply describes Jesus as coming out of the river in which he was standing to be baptized. In the Jewish tradition, baptisms were administered to those joining the faith (a covenantal mark!) and one had to use "living water." In their tradition, living water was a reference to moving water from a spring, stream, or river. It was not stagnant and it was not saline. Given the River Jordan was a fast-flowing river, with plenty of living water and that it was also a place of covenantal significance (this is where the Israelites crossed into the land), it makes sense that John would come there to do his baptizing.

In fact, there are no uses of the term "baptize" that necessitate a reading that would imply immersion. Even when the New Testament was being translated into Latin, the church did not translate "baptizo" as "immersio", which means "to immerse." Instead, the translators simply transliterated the word baptizo into Latin to preserve the complexity of this important word.

What if I was Baptized by Immersion? Do I still have to be sprinkled?

No, that would constitute a re-baptism. The efficacy of baptism is not in the form or in who is doing it; it is in what God is doing. So, even if the form is in error, the intent is right. The same thing can be said if you were baptized as a Roman Catholic or as a Lutheran. Even though they believe some things about Baptism that we would say are unBiblical, again, the intent is correct and when someone comes to saving faith in Jesus Christ, God makes good what was improperly done.

What about Adopted Children or Foster Children? Should they be baptized?

Yes. If you are a Christian and they are in your care, under your supervision, and under your authority, it can be said that they are members of your household and ought to be baptized. During the years of slavery in the deep south, slaves were often baptized under the profession of faith of their owners. This is not to say that slavery is a good thing, but it illustrates the principle of household baptism.

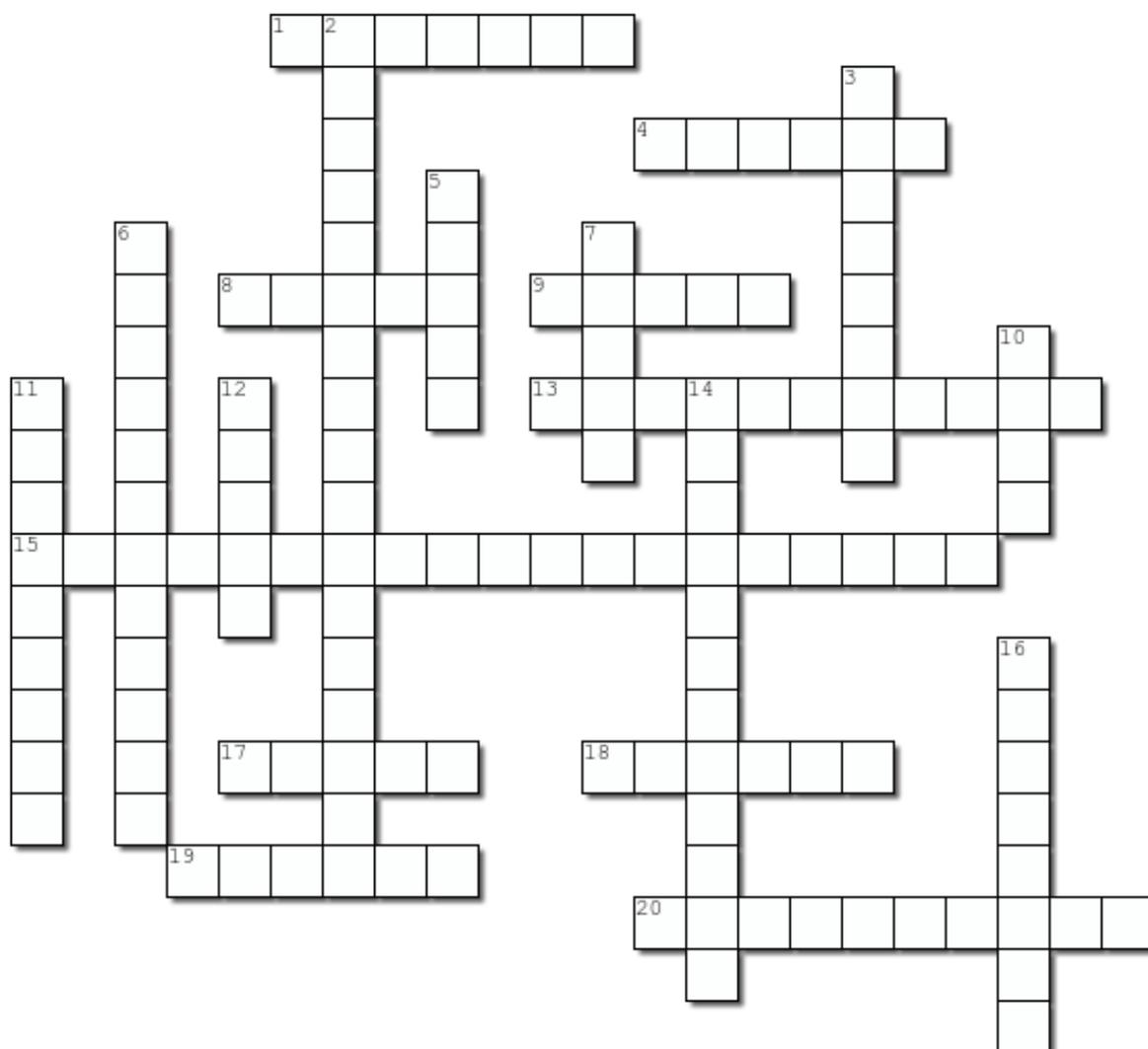
Trinitarian Name?

Jesus states that the sign of baptism is to be applied in the name (singular) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three members of the Trinity are to be noted in our baptisms. Without such, it is not a true baptism.

More?

If you want to find out more on baptism, our church has a policy on baptism posed on the website.

Week 31: Baptism



Created using the Crossword Maker on TheTeachersCorner.net

Across

1. What is the Greek word from which baptism comes?
4. This plant was usually dipped in water or blood and used to sprinkle people for ritual purification.
8. The words of the wise are like these.
9. 'All who are baptized into Jesus were baptized into his _____.'
13. When Jesus says, 'Are you able to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized' what is he speaking about?
15. This was to be sprinkled on the Levites to cleanse them of sin. (3 words)
17. '_____ comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.'
18. 'Unless one is born with water and _____ he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'
19. 'For by a _____ offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.'
20. John baptized with water, but at Pentecost the disciples were baptized with the _____' (2 words)

Down

2. 'If you are Christ's then you are _____.' (2 words)
3. 'Remove the _____ of your hearts...'
5. Those who passed through the Red Sea were baptized into whom?
6. 'In him you were circumcised with a circumcision made _____.' (2 words)
7. Baptism represents the circumcision of this.
10. God promises to do this with his Spirit on the offspring of Israel.
11. The lips of the priest should guard this.
12. 'Circumcision is a matter of the _____.'
14. Baptism is the Blood-less New Testament replacement for this covenant sign.
16. 'Let the _____ come to me.'