

Baptism

We are not saved through water baptism, but through the gospel that baptism symbolises

*“Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Why does He not say, You are clean through the baptism wherewith you have been washed, but through the word which I have spoken unto you, save only that in the water also it is the word that cleanses? Take away the word, and the water is neither more nor less than water. The word is added to the element, and there results the Sacrament, as if itself also a kind of **visible word**”*

(Augustine, Tractate 80 on John’s Gospel, commenting on John 15:3)

- See also Acts 2:38 (in the context of a the gospel just preached); Romans 6:3 (in the context of 5:1; 1 Corinthians 1:17; Galatians 3:27 in the context of v25; 1 Peter 3:21)
- Baptism doesn’t do you any good if you don’t believe (e.g. 1 Corinthians 10:2)
- Contrast the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, or the Mormons, or the International Church of Christ.

Baptism is associated with repentance; but Christian baptism is a sign of what God does for us and not what we do for God

- John the Baptist came “proclaiming a baptism of repentance” (e.g. Luke 3:1-14).
- But John’s outward washing pointed forward and prepared for the inward washing by the Holy Spirit that only Jesus could bring (e.g. Luke 3:16; Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5).
 - o This happens when someone is born again. It is *not* about a special experience of the Holy Spirit after someone is already a Christian.
- Thus although Christian baptism is sometimes preceded by repentance (e.g. Acts 2:38; 22:16), it is a sign of what God does for us not what we do for God.
- By his baptism, Jesus was symbolically joined to us (Luke 3:21-22 in light of what follows). By our baptism we are joined to him (we are baptised “into” him, e.g. Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27) and we are joined to his body, the church (e.g. Acts 2:41; 10:47-48; 1 Corinthians 12:13)
- Jesus’ baptism entailed his death on the cross *for* us (e.g. Luke 12:50); our baptism entails our death *with* him (e.g. Romans 6:3-4)

Should we baptise children?

- Interestingly, the Protestant Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Cranmer) gave a resounding yes, though they didn't hesitate to overturn church practices they thought were unbiblical. So what convinced them?
- Some people think we shouldn't baptise children, because:
 - o they aren't old enough to repent and believe. But remember, baptism is a sign of what God does for us not what we do for God. So perhaps the question is how old someone has to be before God can be at work in them...
 - o it will give nominal Christians a false sense of security. But that's only if we hold a "magic" view of the sacrament (see above).
 - o There is very little data on baptism of children in the NT. But consider the baptism of "households", Acts 16:25, 33; 1 Corinthians 1:16. More importantly, the argument from silence actually works the other way...
- In the Old Covenant, children were included within the people of God and boys were circumcised on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3). They were considered members of God's people unless they apostatised.
- There is no indication that the status of children has changed in the new covenant (whereas other covenantal changes are *very* clearly signposted). On the contrary, Peter announces on the day of Pentecost that "the promise is for you and for your children" (Acts 2:38).
- Three quick other arguments:
 - o The "vine" imagery of Romans 11 implies that God's people still has a "family tree" structure.
 - o The status of children of mixed marriages (1 Corinthians 7:14) is a more natural question if children of believers are considered to be in the covenant.
 - o Statistically speaking, God more often chooses the children of Christians to be Christians.