Baptism

- Biblical and theological meaning of baptism
- Historical views of baptism
- Subjects of baptism
- Mode of baptism
- Rebaptism

Biblical/Theological Meaning

- Commanded by Christ.
- Associated with repentance and faith.
- Is it essential for salvation?
- Part of a composite conversion event.
- Symbolizes union with Christ.
- Represents forgiveness of sin.
- Connected with receiving the Holy Spirit.
- An act of commitment.

Biblical/Theological Meaning

- Represents entrance into the church.
- Entrance upon the way of servanthood.
- Eschatological significance.
Historical Views

• Baptismal regeneration (sacramental view)
  – The act of baptism brings regeneration.
  – Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopalian, Lutheran.
  – Lutheranism: requires faith to be effective.
    • Unconscious faith (infant faith)
    • Vicarious faith (proxy faith) of sponsors
    • Anticipated faith (the candidate at a later time)
  – Disciples/Churches of Christ: the event at which God grants new life.

• Baptism as the sign of the covenant
  – Reformed, Presbyterians.
  – Sign of covenant in OT is circumcision.
  – Sign of covenant in NT is baptism.
  – Sign and seal: sign of God’s working and seal of God’s promises to the person.
  – Both are to be given to infants.
  – Faith = collective faith of the community.
  – Some tension with idea of election.

• Baptism as a symbol of salvation
  – Baptists, Mennonites, Brethren, Pentecostals.
  – Outward token of what has already taken place inwardly (regeneration).
  – Public testimony to one’s faith in Christ.
  – This view practices believer baptism only.
    • Those who can confess their faith.
    • Not the same as adult baptism.
Historical Views

- Anabaptist theology = sign and seal
  - Not the same as Reformed concept.
  - Sign of what God has already done (new birth).
  - Seal of confirmation and encouragement to candidate (an aid to deepened faith).

- Analogy of wedding:
  - Sign of a relationship that already exists.
  - Pledge of lifelong commitment.
  - Makes the relationship more “real.”
  - Community support and accountability.

Subjects of Baptism

- Infant baptism vs. believer baptism
  - Infant baptism = pedobaptism = applied to infants who can’t confess their faith.
  - Believer baptism = applied only to those who can confess their faith.

- Early church: believer baptism, followed by chrismation or confirmation.

Subjects of Baptism

- Infant baptism introduced after 2nd century.
  - Became standard under Constantine.
  - Suitable to church-state system.
  - Confirmation separated from infant baptism; event at which person made own commitment.

- Believer baptism is the norm in the NT.
  - Repentance, faith, confession, baptism.
  - Reason why NT associates baptism so closely with receiving the blessings of salvation.
Subjects of Baptism

- Arguments for infant baptism:
  - Silence of NT.
  - Household baptisms.
  - NT shows missionary situation.
- Theology of baptism determines your view.
  - Baptismal regeneration can baptize infants.
  - Baptism as sign of salvation = believers only.
- Most traditions see need for two events.
- Age of accountability for children?

Mode of Baptism

- Three primary modes:
  - Immersion (fully submerged in water)
  - Affusion (pouring)
  - Aspersion (sprinkling)
- Believer baptism can be done all 3 ways, although immersion is most common.
- Most common mode for infant baptism is sprinkling, but Orthodox immerse.

Mode of Baptism

- Immersion
  - *Baptizo* means to dip or plunge under water.
  - Descriptions in NT suggest this.
  - Represents death and resurrection with Christ.
- Affusion (pouring)
  - Associated with coming of Holy Spirit.
  - Earliest pictures show pouring.
- Aspersion (sprinkling) associated with cleansing from sin (OT rituals).
Mode of Baptism

• How important is the mode?
  – Didache is flexible on mode.
  – Mode should represent meaning.
  – Some immersionists argue that mode is essential.
• How many times, what direction?
  – Most immersionists: once backwards.
  – Brethren: three times forwards.
• Is it appropriate to contextualize baptism?

Rebaptism

• Should churches ask people to be rebaptized if baptized by a different type (infant baptism) or a different mode (pouring)?
  – “Baptism is an unrepeatable act” (Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry).
  – “As many times as it takes” (ATS student).
  – Depends on what you think the meaning is - or which meaning takes priority.
  – What is your practice?

Case Study

• You are teaching a class for potential new members at your church. At the end of the class, all 15 participants want to join your church. Your independent church has a policy of believer baptism by immersion. This is an obstacle for four of the participants. They come to talk to you about it....
Case Study

- Jane is a Quaker. She has never been baptized and thinks it places too much emphasis on externals. She has made a public confession of faith before.
- Frank was baptized as an infant in a Lutheran church. He thinks if he is rebaptized he will insult his parents by rejecting what they did for him.
- Helen was baptized as Mennonite by pouring and doesn’t feel the need to be rebaptized.
- Bill is a college student who was baptized in a swimming pool by others in his house church.
- What are the issues? What do you tell them?