

THE EQUIP INSTITUTE

Theme: Baptist Beliefs

Topic: BF&M (2000): Article VII: Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Fall 2025

Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and his Word for the sake of living rightly before God in his world. The topic this week is Article VII in the Baptist Faith and Message (2000), which is on baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Article IV

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

Matthew 3:13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; 22:19-20; John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; 20:7; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16,21; 11:23-29; Colossians 2:12.

Key Biblical Texts

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:13-17)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)

⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:41-42)

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:35-39)

³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Rom. 6:3-5)

²³For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. ²⁷Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Cor. 11:23-29)

¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col. 2:11-12)

Observations

Exposition of Article VII

Historical Context

This article is a complement to Article V on the Church. The BF&M 1925 included two different articles, but they were combined with minimal revisions into one article for the BF&M 1963. The BF&M 2000 carried over from the previous edition with no revisions. Though the confession wasn't revised in 2000, there was a debate on the floor of the SBC Annual Meeting during the vote for the BF&M 2000.

Key Ideas

Baptism is performed in the name of the Triune God

The method of baptism is full immersion

The recipient of baptism is a believer

The reason for baptism is obedience to the biblical command

The proclamation of baptism is identification with Jesus as Lord

The symbolism of baptism is the gospel and its implications

The administrator of baptism is (normally) the church

The privileges of baptism include church membership and participation in the Lord's Supper

Baptism is a testimony to God's grace, not a means of acquiring God's saving grace

Baptism is intended to be a one-time ceremony

The Lord's Supper is intended to be an ongoing ceremony

The participants in the Lord's Supper are baptized members of churches

The elements of the Lord's Supper are bread and the fruit of the vine

The symbolism of the Lord's Supper is to memorialize the gospel and its implications

The anticipation of the Lord's Supper is the Second Coming of Jesus

The Lord's Supper is a testimony to God's grace, not a means of acquiring God's saving grace

The Debate

Nearly every Christian denomination argues that the biblical pattern is that baptism is prerequisite to the Lord's Supper. There are no known unbaptized Christians in the New Testament, and both church membership and communion followed baptism in the earliest churches. This is controversial among Baptists because of our belief that the only biblically valid baptism is the immersion of a believer. Other denominations often object when Baptists restrict participation in the Lord's Supper to believers who have been biblically baptized, since this rules out infant baptism.

Historically, different Baptists have held to three positions on the relationship between baptism and the Lord's Supper. With the exception of the debates over the "doctrines of grace," this is the oldest debate among Baptists.

1. Close, strict, or restricted communion is the view taught by the Baptist Faith and Message. It simply states that one of the requirements for participation in the Lord's Supper is biblical baptism. This is the majority tradition among Baptists historically, and it might be considered the Baptist version of the majority Christian practice.
2. Closed or local-church-only communion is the view that only members of a particular local church can participate in the Lord's Supper. This has always been a minority tradition among Baptists, as well as other Christian groups. The rationale is that church discipline and communion should be closely related. Advocates also point out that the instructions related to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament were given to specific local churches.
3. Open communion is the view that there is no relationship between baptism and the Lord's Supper. Communion is for all Christians, regardless of their baptism. Among other Christian denominations, only theological liberals affirm this view. But among Baptists, some theological conservatives practice open communion because they do not want to exclude other believers from the Lord's Supper only on the basis of their being mistaken about baptism. This has historically been a minority view among Baptists but has become far more popular over the past generation among Southern Baptists. A 2012 poll from LifeWay Christian Resources estimated that 52% of SBC churches practice open communion.

At the 2000 SBC Annual Meeting, a move was made from the floor to revise the BF&M to argue for open communion. That move was defeated by messengers and the traditional language was retained in the new edition of the confession. However, it is conceivable that a future edition of the BF&M could be revised to be more neutral on this issue. There is historical precedent for this sort of approach. The Second London Confession does not address this matter at all because the majority of the London Particular Baptists, who affirmed close communion, did not want to bind the conscience of the open communion minority by making this issue a test of confessional fidelity.