

PREPARING FOR BAPTISM

Help me, O God, to be rightly prepared to be baptized, to witness the baptism of others, and to reflect biblically on my baptismal experience. Grant me assurance and grace to live the new life that I have publicly embraced and expressed in baptism. Lord Jesus, assure me that the pledge of a good conscience is mine as I consider my baptism rightly received by faith in Christ. Amen.

Both when we are baptized and when we are led to think back upon our baptism, we should remind ourselves why we are baptized and how it can help us afterward.

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Our church confession states:

BAPTISM is an ordinance of the New Testament instituted by Jesus Christ. It is intended to be, to the person baptized, a sign of his fellowship with Christ in His death and resurrection, and of his being engrafted into Christ, and of the remission of sins. It also indicates that the baptized person has given himself up to God, through Jesus Christ, so that he may live and conduct himself in newness of life.

The only persons who can rightly submit themselves to this ordinance are those who actually profess repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, being willing to yield obedience to Him.

The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, in which the believer is to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Immersion, that is to say, the dipping of the believer in water, is essential for the due administration of this ordinance. (2nd LBCF 29)

In short:

- Baptism signifies
 - our union with Christ, especially in his death and resurrection. [Rom. 6:3-5]
 - the washing away of our sins. [Acts 22:16, 1 Pet. 3:21]
 - the death of our old, sin-controlled self and new life granted by Christ alone. [Rom. 6:5-6]
 - the gift of the Holy Spirit. [Acts 2:38]
- Baptism pledges our repentance from sin. [Acts 2:38]
- Baptism expresses our faith. [Col. 2:12]
- Baptism publicly identifies us with Christ and His church. [1 Cor. 12:13]
- Baptism engages and pledges us to live out the new life given to us in Christ. [Rom. 6:1-11]
- Christ powerfully meets us in baptism as his appointed means to confirm and strengthen our graces for the Christian life. [Acts 22:16, Rom. 6:1-11, 1 Pet. 3:21]

SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

Christ's call to baptism is for me if I have not been immersed as a public expression of faith in Christ and repentance for sin and if I now desire to give myself up to Christ by faith as the only Savior of sinners, to repent of my sins, and to engage to walk according to the new life that Christ alone gives.

WHY SHOULD I THINK UPON MY ALREADY-ACCOMPLISHED BAPTISM WHEN I WITNESS ANOTHER BAPTISM?

The writers of Scripture repeatedly refer to baptism to stir us up by way of reminder to the blessings and duties that are signified by baptism. I am in need of being stirred up by way of reminder. Therefore, I should think upon my baptism as follows:

- As surely as I see with my eyes that someone goes into and comes up out of the water, so I know for certain that Christ died a real death, was buried, and was raised to life for the salvation of sinners.
- As surely as I remember my own baptism and the felt reality of going into and coming out of the water, so I know for certain that in Christ I was crucified in my old nature and have been raised with a new nature.
- As surely as I remember my own baptism entered by faith, I have the pledge of a good conscience from God.
- As surely as I remember my own baptism, I am forever engaged before God, the church, and the world to live according to the new life promised by the gospel.

Because baptism is once for all and signifies a once-for-all salvation, the testimony of my baptism stands firm to this day and means the very same things now that it meant the day I was baptized.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME TO BE BAPTIZED?

It means that I accept with a believing heart the death and burial and resurrection of Christ for me. It signifies and affirms that by believing I am washed of all my sins and am granted eternal life. It means that I have come out in the open with an observable, life-long commitment to follow Jesus Christ wherever He may lead.

This is not magic. Baptism does not wash away my sins or grant me new life. Only Christ can remove my sins, and that happens when I put my faith in Him. Baptism and faith are simply the outside and the inside of the same thing. But Christ has given me baptism, and I will not neglect His gift.

WHAT BENEFITS THEN DO I RECEIVE BY BEING BAPTIZED?

I confess that death and resurrection—both Christ's and mine—are necessary to save me. My secret and subjective faith is given visible and concrete expression, and a clear beginning is made to the Christian life. I am publicly received into a

family of believers who are gifted to help me live for Christ. I am assured and strengthened by the sovereign work of Christ in this ceremony that He has ordained for my good.

WHY DOES JESUS APPOINT THE USE OF WATER?

Jesus is teaching me that, just as water washes my body, so His work of death and resurrection truly cleanses my soul. Because of my weakness he stoops to “dress” the invisible work of grace in something I can feel and see and experience with the senses.

Jesus uses this visible sign and pledge to assure me that all that He has done for me in His perfect obedience, suffering, and death is certainly mine. I experience the water on my own body and am assured that what Jesus gives to sinners is given to me personally.

WHAT SHOULD I THINK AS THE BAPTISM IS PERFORMED?

As I go (or someone else goes) into the water, I consider

that Christ took up a human body and Himself was baptized
that I cannot even baptize myself much less save myself
that water only washes bodies but Christ washes consciences
that only in Him do I have hope of passing through the waters of judgment.

As I rise (or someone else rises) out of the water, I consider

that Jesus raised Himself from the dead of His own power
that He has washed me from the guilt of my sin
that He has broken the power of sin in my life
that I have been inseparably united to Christ
that I have the indwelling Holy Spirit to bring Christ’s powerful presence to me.

A PRAYER BEFORE MY BAPTISM

My Lord Jesus Christ, I am a sinner; I long to be purified; I long to be done with my sin. Christ is my only hope. I embrace You and all that You offer me in the gospel. Strengthen my faith, and grant me the grace to live for You. Help me from this day forward to manifest the new life that only You give. With Your help, I pledge before the watching world to be Yours forever. Meet with me in these waters and assure me. Pour out Your Spirit upon me that I may walk with Christ in joyful obedience and persevere in faith to the end. Amen.

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PRAYERS AFTER A BAPTISM

We thank You, Lord God, that You have blessed us with this powerful, precious gift. We ask for Your gracious help, that You would strengthen and confirm the faith You have granted and we have expressed in our baptism. Help us to renew ourselves to a full-scale demonstration of the new life you have accomplished for us in Christ and applied to us by the Holy Spirit. Nurture a true unity among us because of the common baptism we share. Amen.

Almighty and Ever-loving God, we thank You that You have washed our consciences with Your washing and have assured us of Your grace toward us. We thank You that we are united to Christ and members of the Body with one another. Assist us with Your grace, so that we may continue in this holy fellowship, and live more fully to Your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O God, keep my mind and heart focused on the main thing in baptism. It is not the removal of dirt from the body that brings such great benefits, but the working of Christ by faith and his pledge to be with us in grace and power even to the end of the age.

Enable me to continue to believe these truths so that I may have confidence that forgiveness of sins is mine and that Christ will bring me safely to glory. Amen.

RESOURCES TO PREPARE FOR BAPTISM

SCRIPTURES FOR MEDITATION

Psalm 40

Romans 6

Acts 2

Colossians 2

HYMNS FOR MEDITATION (www.cyberhymnal.org):

“Christ Arose”

“Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken”

“My Faith Looks Up To Thee”

“O Thou Who in Jordan”

“Come, Holy Spirit, Dove Divine”

“Jesus, and Shall It Ever Be”

FOR INSTRUCTION ON BAPTISM, READ:

Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), Chapter 30

<http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/library/bcf/bcf-30.html>

Keach’s Catechism, Questions 95, 98-104

<http://www.reformedreader.org/ccck/keachcat.htm>

The Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 65-73

<http://www.reformed.org/documents/heidelberg.html>