

Baptism is one of the two New Testament ordinances (sometimes called sacraments). It is the formal expression of a believer’s entry into a saving relationship with God through Christ (Acts 2:38–41; 1 Peter 3:21), and as such is a visible word: from the side of the person baptised, baptism is a visible and decisive expression of his or her repentance and faith in Christ (Acts 2:38–41; Romans 6:3–4); from God’s side, baptism is a sign of the baptised person’s union with Christ and remission of sins (Romans 6:3–4; Hebrews 10:22). It follows, therefore, that the only proper subjects of baptism are those who profess repentance and faith in Christ (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 2:37–41; 8:12–13, 36–38; 9:18; 10:47–48; 11:16; 15:9; 16:14–15, 31–34; 18:8; 19:3–5; 22:16; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21). The due administration of this ordinance involves immersion in water.

(Sola 5 Confession 7.7)

The second of the Ten Commandments forbids manmade constructions as an aid to worship. This is because human beings cannot properly conceive of the living God, except inasmuch as he has revealed himself in Scripture. Nevertheless, knowing the human need to see, feel, taste, touch, and hear, God has given two sacraments to the new covenant church as visible signs of his covenant with his people. These two signs form the subject of Confessions 7.7 and 7.8.

The Confession begins with the simple affirmation that **baptism is one of the two New Testament ordinances (sometimes called sacraments)**. This immediately sets the Confession apart from Roman Catholicism, which recognises seven sacraments. Some Protestant churches hold to a third sacrament: foot washing. They do this because Jesus, after washing his disciples’ feet, told them to do the same. Do you think that this command creates space for a third sacrament? If not, why not? _____

The Confession defines baptism as **the formal expression of a believer’s entry into a saving relationship with God through Christ**. How do the supplied texts (Acts 2:38–41; 1 Peter 3:21) support this affirmation?

Given this understanding of baptism as **the formal expression of a believer’s entry into a saving relationship with God through Christ**, what should we think about the practice of rebaptism? _____

Baptism is defined as **a visible word**. What do you think is meant by this phrase? _____

Baptism has two sides to it, according to the Confession: the baptismal candidate’s side and God’s side. We might argue that there is a third side: the church’s side. Read the supplied texts and comment briefly on the significance of baptism from the various sides.

From the side of the person baptised, baptism is a visible and decisive expression of his or her repentance and faith in Christ (Acts 2:38–41; Romans 6:3–4). _____

From God’s side, baptism is a sign of the baptised person’s union with Christ and remission of sins (Romans 6:3–4; Hebrews 10:22). _____

What would be the significance of baptism from the church’s perspective? _____

Why does it follow, therefore, that the only proper subjects of baptism are those who profess repentance and faith in Christ? In what way do the supplied texts (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 2:37–41; 8:12–13, 36–38; 9:18; 10:47–48; 11:16; 15:9; 16:14–15, 31–34; 18:8; 19:3–5; 22:16; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21) support this affirmation? _____

How do you answer those who suggest that, in household baptisms, there must have been infants who were baptised? _____

As a Baptist Confession of Faith, the Confession concludes that **the due administration of this ordinance involves immersion in water**. This is seen (1) in instances of baptism in the New Testament; (2) in the basic meaning of the Greek word for baptism (which means to immerse); and (3) in the practice of the earliest church, where immersion was the standard practice. Given this understanding, how do we think about those who have been baptised by sprinkling or pouring as adults having professed faith in Christ? _____

One final note is in order here for BBC’s practice in particular, which is again not a practice followed by all Reformed Baptist Churches. At BBC, we baptise people into membership. Since “in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13), we only baptise those who understand that, by baptism, they are entering into formal membership of the church, with all the attendant privileges and responsibilities attached to that. There is no formal minimum age limit for baptism or membership in the church. While there are Constitutional limitations on certain membership responsibilities (e.g. only members over the age of 16 can vote in members’ meetings), and while there may be certain ministerial restrictions based on age, there is no minimum limit for the purposes of baptism and church membership.