

C. Baptismal Vows

1. (a) Have you been baptized?
- (b) If yes, did your baptism take place after your conversion?
- (c) By whom? When?

2. **Q. 98. What is baptism?**

A. Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament instituted by Jesus Christ,¹ to be unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death, burial, and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him;² of remission of sins;³ and of his giving up himself unto God through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.⁴

¹Matt 28:19. ²Rom 6:3-5; Col 2:12; Gal 3:27. ³Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38; 22:16. ⁴Rom 6:3-4.

1 Peter 3:21 tells us that in the act of baptism we are giving an “answer (or pledge) from a good conscience toward God.” That means that part of the essence of baptism involves a kind of dialogue between God and the one being baptized. In the very act of being baptized God is asking, “What have you to say for yourself, ‘guilty,’ or ‘not guilty?’” And for baptism to be what it is, you must be able to give an “answer from a good conscience toward God.” The conscience either excuses or accuses us before God (Rom 2:15), and in the case of a believer who trusts in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our conscience is cleansed and cries out in faith, “not guilty in Jesus.”

Therefore, the very act of baptism must be done in faith and from a good conscience, for in it you are pledging (i.e. making a vow) to God that you are in Christ. In other words, through faith you pledge to God by going down in the water that you have died with Christ—that the penalty of your sins and the wrath of God have been satisfied, and that the ‘old man’ has died (Rom 6:1-14). Furthermore, through faith you pledge to God, by coming up out of the watery grave, that as surely as Christ was raised from the dead, so also have you been raised a new creature in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 2:19-20). In baptism, you pledge that as surely as Noah emerged from God’s wrath in a new world as a new creature, so also have you emerged a new creature vowing to live in new obedience unto God (1 Peter 3:18 - 4:6).

Perhaps the most important aspect of baptism is what God says to the one being baptized. God speaks in your baptism in two inseparable ways: First, He speaks to you through the sign of baptism. He does not leave us to wonder if He has received our plea offered in faith. 1 Peter 3:21 also tells us that “baptism saves. . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” This means that in baptism God pledges to us, through the sign of being raised out of the watery grave, that as surely as death had no jurisdiction over Jesus and therefore he was raised from the dead, so also have we been raised, and will be raised, in Him. The act of coming out of the watery tomb is intended to signify to us that God has received our plea in Jesus Christ—a declaration received by faith. Secondly, God speaks to us through the words of institution, for he pledges to the one being baptized that through faith in Jesus Christ and his righteousness they have become name-bearers of God. For in baptism God covenants with us and sets his Triune name upon us; He declares us both to be his children and his disciples.

The very act of baptism is a solemn vow to God, taken in the presence of his people. And in order to draw out the essence of this dialogue, the person being baptized will be asked to take the

following vows. These vows are inherent in the act of being baptized, but they will be vocalized at the time of baptism for the sake of greater clarity. They will be as follows:

1. Do you acknowledge that you are a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving the wrath and curse of God, and without hope if not for the sovereign grace of God? Do you?
2. Do you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon His righteousness alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel? Do you?
3. Do you resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as a new creature and as becomes a follower of Christ? Do you?

Baptism will then be followed by a prayer to Almighty God for an *increase of the graces and gifts* of the Holy Spirit to enable you to hold fast the Faith which you will now visibly own, having entered into the church by baptism, and also for the help of maintaining a constant war against the world, flesh, and the devil (Eph 1:13-14; 3:14-21).

- (a) Are you able and willing to take these vows? See 2 LCF chapter 23, “Of Lawful Oaths and Vows.
- (b) When someone is brought into membership at Sycamore Baptist Church who has already been baptized, it will be publicly recognized that we acknowledge and accept your prior baptism and your vows thereof. If you have already been baptized, do you acknowledge that you have already taken these vows?

D. Church Covenant

It is very important to note that the follow questions flow out of one’s baptismal vows before God to walk by faith and obedience in newness of life. If you are freely choosing to join Sycamore, believing that God has added you to this church, then you are freely choosing to walk together in holiness for mutual edification and for the glory of God.

1. It is the duty of all members to make use of the public means of grace and attend all of the stated meetings of the church unless providentially hindered by such matters as illness, accident, or unusual working conditions (i.e. acts of necessity or mercy). The stated meetings of the church include the midweek prayer service, the business meetings of the congregation, but especially all of the services on the Lord’s Day (Heb 10:24-25).
 - (a) Do you attend the services regularly and do so out of a hunger for God?
 - (b) Do you agree to continue to seek to do so?
2. The church expects all members to make use of the private means of grace which are available to them, such as regularly reading the Bible, regularly catechizing your children, and regularly engaging in private and family prayer.
 - (a) Do you read the Bible and pray regularly?
 - (b) Do you catechize your children?

- (c) Do you agree to continue to seek to do so?
3. It is the duty of Christians to support financially the work of the Lord by systematic and proportionate giving made through the local church, and all of the members of this church are expected to confirm this rule of Scripture (2 Cor 8:1-9).
 - (a) Do you financially support the Lord's work?
 - (b) Do you agree to continue to seek to do so?
 4. Do you strive to fulfill your biblical role in the family (Eph 5:22 – 6:4)? Do you agree to continue to seek to do so?
 5. It is the duty of all who come into membership of this church to recognize and submit to the ministerial authority of the elders of the church (1 Cor 16:15-16; 1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 13:17). Will you submit to the scriptural authority of the elders of Sycamore Baptist Church?
 6. It is the duty of all members to be kind, compassionate and forgiving to one another while consciously putting away all bitterness and anger. Each one should look not only on his own interests but also the interests of the others. This love should be manifested by deeds, not just words (Eph 4:31-32; Phil 2:1-5; 1 John 3:11-18).
 - (a) Do you love the brethren, seek to live in peace and unity with them, and care for them when they are in need?
 - (b) Do you agree to continue to seek to do so?

E. Corporate Life

1. Please consider reading the attached primer on the Regulative Principle of worship. This will give you a clearer understanding of why we do what we do in the *corporate worship* here at Sycamore Baptist Church.
2. Please consider listening to the audio sermon on Ephesians 4:7-16. If you would like to receive a copy of this sermon, please speak with one of the pastors and we would be happy to get a copy to you as soon as possible. Otherwise, you may find it on our website. This sermon will give you a clearer understanding of the *body dynamic* to which we at Sycamore Baptist Church aspire.

An Introduction to the Regulative Principle of Worship

Sycamore Baptist Church is a Reformed Baptist Church. Simply put, this means that we seek to be God-centered, rather than man-centered, in our theology, piety, and practice. To be God-centered in theology was a principle mark of all Reformed & Lutheran churches during the time of the Reformation. For example, the Anglican *Thirty-nine Articles* states:

“Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite as necessary to salvation” (Article VI).

In other words, the Lord alone is the lord of the conscience. He alone, not the pope or a priest, or any other can require someone to believe a doctrine unless it is taught in the Word of God. Furthermore, if it is not revealed in the Word, it is neither safe nor wise to believe, but is nothing more than the opinions and traditions of man. This is the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone). The Reformed Baptists likewise maintained a God-centered theology, with God, through His Word, as their sole authority; “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience” (1689 Baptist Confession 1.1). Paul also makes this point clear in 2 Tim 3:16-17, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

There are differences, however, between the Reformed and the Lutheran/Anglican traditions. While both maintained the sole authority of God, through His Word, on matters of doctrine, only the Reformed tradition remained consistently God-centered in matters of piety and practice. Whereas the Lutheran and Anglicans held a view often called the *Normative Principle*, the Reformed, even the Reformed Baptists, held a view called the *Regulative Principle*. It may help to compare these two views.

The Normative Principle *of Worship*: “Whatever is not prohibited in scripture is permitted in worship.” This would mean that so long as God has not explicitly

prohibited a practice in His Word, it may be safely introduced into worship. This view would imply that the Scripture does not speak sufficiently to the matter of worship, but instead leaves much to the will and imagination of man.

The Regulative Principle of *Worship*: “Whatever is not commanded in scripture is forbidden in worship.” In other words, in all of our worship we are **only** and **always** to do what God has commanded us to do in his Word. We are to do “only” what He has commanded, which means that whatever is not commanded is forbidden. We are to “always” do what He has commanded, which means that He tells us not only what we *may* do, but what we *must* do. Simply put, the Lord *regulates* His worship, and has given us in His Word a sufficient, certain, and infallible rule for worship.

Therefore, Sycamore Baptist Church is seeking to be God-centered, not only in our theology (what we believe and teach), but also in our piety and practice (especially how we worship). We trust that His Word is sufficient to regulate our corporate worship and that He has clearly prescribed for us that which is both pleasing to Him and sufficient for the spiritual needs of His people. As a new covenant church, he commands us to preach the Word, to pray, to sing, to observe the sacraments, and periodically to take a collection for the poor. All other forms of worship may “have an appearance of wisdom. . . but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col 2:23). “In vain they worship Me, teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:9).

In our church confession, the 1689 Baptist Confession, we confess that “the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself; and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imagination, and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way, not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures” (22.1). In the words of Jeremiah Burroughs, “In God’s worship there must be nothing tendered up to God but what he has commanded. Whatsoever we meddle with in our worship of God must be what we have warrant for out of the Word of God.” We desire to maintain a God-centered focus in our theology, piety, and practice by maintaining the Word of God as our sole authority for doctrine, obedience, and worship.