

A SHORT PRIMER ON BAPTISM

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

- It is a sign of belonging to the covenant.
 - Like circumcision in the Old Testament, baptism is the sign of entrance into the covenant community of the people of God.
 - Gen. 17:9 – “And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”
 - Col 2:11-12 – “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.
 - Baptism is not just a sign of the external relationship with the church. It is the sign of the spiritual covenant of grace.
 - The sacraments are “signs of the covenant, or of God’s good will towards us, and of the obligation of the church to repentance and faith.” (Zacharius Ursinus)
- It is a seal of the covenant promise of God.
 - “When a young man and woman are married, they make a covenant and give each other a ring as a sign of their covenant. When they look at their ring, they are reminded of their covenant to one another.” (Sartelle, p. 4). In the same way circumcision in the OT and baptism in the NT demonstrate the promise of God, that if we come to him in Christ by faith he will be just and faithful to forgive our sins.
 - But, if one does not have the right of property (baptism), one has no promise to claim the right of possession (salvation).

WHY SHOULD PARENTS PRESENT THEIR CHILDREN FOR BAPTISM?

- It is a command of God:
 - Jesus said, “**Let the little children come to Me**, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14).
 - Peter commanded – “Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **For the promise is to you and to your children**, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:38-39).

- God takes this command seriously:
 - Moses was threatened with death for not applying the sign of the covenant to his child – “And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses’ feet, and said, “Surely you are a husband of blood to me!” So He let him go. Then she said, “You are a husband of blood!”—because of the circumcision” (Exodus 4:24-26).
 - The Pharisees rejected Jesus by rejecting baptism – “But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.” (Luke 7:30).
- It is agreeing with God and putting His name on our children (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) Matt. 28:18-20.
 - For example, when a child is born, he is the child of his parents, but his parents then name him and sign the birth certificate, acknowledging that this is their child. In the same way, God himself places his name upon the child and acknowledges that this child is his, and as his child has a right to all the promises, privileges and responsibilities of a child of God.

IS BAPTISM NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?

- No.
- Old Testament example: David understood his son who died on the seventh day (prior to the covenant sign of circumcision) to be saved (2 Sam. 12:18-23).
- New Testament example: Jesus said the thief on the cross (who had not been baptized) that he would be with him in paradise (Luke 23:40-43).
- Canons of Dort 1.17 states, “Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with the parents are comprehended, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom it pleases God to call out of this life in their infancy (Gen. 17: 7; Acts 2: 39; 1 Cor. 7: 14).”

WILL THOSE WHO GOD PLANS TO SAVE BE BAPTIZED?

- Yes, when they have opportunity, for this is the normal means of grace which God has ordained for his people.
- Therefore, while baptism is not required for salvation, it is necessary as an act of obedience to God for those who are being saved.

WHAT BENEFITS DO CHILDREN RECEIVE FROM BAPTISM?

- “Baptism means being set apart to a holy life. Just as utensils and people were anointed with water or oil in the Old Testament and set apart for holy use, so in baptism the person is anointed and set apart for holiness.” (Sartelle p. 7).
- Baptism signifies inclusion in the visible church and access to the means of grace (Preaching and, upon confirmation, the Lord’s Supper).
- Baptism proclaims the Promises of God:
 - That He will be their God, just as He is to their parents.
 - That He will provide redemption of sin in Christ
 - That He will give them His Holy Spirit.

WHAT RESPONSIBILITY DO PARENTS HAVE IN BAPTISM?

- “When we as parents remember the sign of salvation applied to our children, it is a call to raise them as God directed.” (Sartelle, p. 21).
- “We go to great pains to teach our children math, science, business, football, baseball, tennis, golf, and soccer, or perhaps ballet, music, art, and theater. But how much time or effort is spent in the training of our children in godliness?” (Sartelle, p. 20).
- “It may seem that all you need to do is have your child baptized, and all will be well, as if baptism were the ultimate fire insurance.” But, “if you and your wife don’t love each other as the Bible commands, if you don’t teach your children Scripture, if you don’t discipline them as God’s Word teaches, if you don’t pray with and for them daily, if Christ is not the center of your home, then you may baptize your children, but they will grow up just like children from non-Christian homes.” (Sartelle, p. 19).

WHAT RESPONSIBILITY DO RECIPIENTS HAVE IN BAPTISM?

- Responsibility to exercise faith in Christ as they are instructed in His Word. – “Justification, which is by the blood of Christ, is complete and perfect in this life by imputation, for “there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 8:1.) (Ursinus)
- Responsibility to perform new obedience to Him, out of thanksgiving, according to His Word. – “Regeneration, on the other hand, which is effected by the Spirit of Christ, and which consists in a change of our evil nature to that which is good, is not perfected, but only begun in this life; yet in such a manner that this beginning does really take place in all the godly, and is experienced by them as long as they are in this life, because they truly and heartily desire to obey God in all things, and are greatly grieved on account of their defects, and remaining corruption.” (Ursinus)

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO ARE BAPTIZED BUT LATER DENY THE FAITH?

- We cannot see the hearts of people and thus we don’t know who are elect. We baptize based on what we can see at the time, not what God has decreed. We do not presume upon the election of God.
- Those who reject the gospel show they were never elect in the first place. 1 John 2:19 – “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”
- Therefore, the promise of God is true, but if by faith that promise is not claimed, it does not mean that God was therefore unfaithful to His Word. The fault lies in the person rejecting God’s promises.
- For example, if a child has a right to an inheritance, they still must claim that inheritance to benefit from it.
- Baptism is the right of property in the Covenant of Grace (God’s covenant in Christ for the salvation of his people) which must later be claimed as the right of possession through personal faith in Christ.

SUMMARY OF DIFFERENT VIEWS

- **Baptist View**
 - Baptism is not necessary for salvation.
 - Children are not to be baptized.
 - Baptism is simply an act of obedience by adults in response to salvation.
- **Reformed View**
 - Baptism is not necessary for salvation. (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 72)
 - Both children of believers and newly converted adults are to be baptized. (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 74)
 - Baptism of children brings them into the visible Church and gives them the right of property (right to lay claim to God's promise of salvation in Christ). (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 74)
 - Baptism of children is a recognition of what they already are by birth (to at least one believing parent). (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 74)
 - When the Holy Spirit Works in them (as He wills – John 3:7-8) and they come to a suitable age of understanding the message of the Gospel, they must claim the right of possession by professing personal faith in Christ. (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 21)
- **Lutheran View**
 - Baptism is necessary for salvation. (Augsburg Confession Article IX)
 - Both children and newly converted adults are to be baptized. (Luther's Small Catechism Q. 251)
 - Baptism of children, because God has promised in His Word to work by His Spirit simultaneously with the application of water, results in their immediate regeneration and justification. (Augsburg Confession Article IX; Luther's Small Catechism Q. 245 & 248)
- **Roman Catholic View**
 - Baptism is necessary for salvation. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1257)
 - Both children and newly converted adults are to be baptized.
 - Baptism of both children and adults, by the application of water itself, automatically regenerates, infusing righteousness into them, which they must maintain through good works in order to be finally saved. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1263, 1266)