

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 26: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QA'S 69-71

Question 69: HOW IS IT SIGNIFIED AND SEALED TO YOU [*the believer*] IN HOLY BAPTISM THAT YOU HAVE PART IN [*received the benefits of*] THE ONE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS? **Thus: that Christ instituted this outward washing with water and joined to it this promise, that I am washed with His blood and Spirit from the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as certainly as I am washed outwardly with water, whereby commonly the filthiness of the body is taken away.**

We have already learned that baptism and the Lord's Supper are the NT signs and seals of salvation for believers, replacing the OT signs and seals of salvation: circumcision and Passover. We will now begin to learn that baptism is the sign and seal of the *beginning* of our salvation in forgiveness and regeneration; whereas the Lord's Supper is the sign and seal of the *continual growth* of our salvation in communion with Christ. "Baptism is the sign of the covenant between God and the faithful; the Lord's Supper is the sign of the *preservation* of the same covenant" (Ursinus, 380).

It is clear that baptism has replaced circumcision, because they both symbolize and certify for believers "circumcision of the heart" (Rom. 2:29) – which is a forgiven and regenerated heart (Deut. 30:6; Isaiah 52:1; Jer. 4:4; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11-14). We have already learned that God first established His covenant of grace with Abraham by saving him through faith in the Christ who was to come (John 8:58). Then He gave him circumcision as "a sign of the covenant" (Gen. 17:11), to *certify* his salvation in Christ (Rom. 4:11). For the believer, circumcision certified **both forgiveness** (the removal of sin's guilt) **and regeneration** (the removal of sin's inborn corruption). Since Christ's blood on the cross has abolished all other blood-shedding, baptism is now the sign and seal of a forgiven and regenerated heart (Col. 2:11-14).

God designs baptism to be a visible symbol to certify His promise to every believer: "whoever believes in Him will receive the remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). God uses water (a cleansing agent) to certify the same promise: "just as certainly as water washes away the dirt of your body, I have washed away the dirt of your soul. I have forgiven you and regenerated you for the sake of My Son's sacrifice on the cross." Thus, God "uses this external symbol as a means, and as a visible word or promise to stir up and confirm the faith of those who are baptized" (Ursinus, 372). We must first have faith before our baptism can confirm or strengthen our faith (cf. Acts 8:36-38).

The amount of water used in baptism is not the important thing. The Greek word for *baptism* "means to plunge, to dip, to wash, or to sprinkle. In the eastern church they were ordinarily immersed. Those, however, who lived in the colder regions of the north were commonly sprinkled with water. But this is a matter of no importance, as washing may be performed either by dipping or sprinkling" (Ursinus, 357). Being **cleansed** by the blood of Jesus is referred to as a "**sprinkling** of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:2); which is appropriately symbolized and certified by the sprinkling of water: "I will sprinkle clean water on you...I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart...I will put My Spirit within you" (Ezek. 36:25-27). We believers have "our hearts *sprinkled* from an evil conscience and our bodies *washed* with pure *water*" (Heb. 10:22).

Question 70: WHAT IS IT TO BE WASHED WITH THE BLOOD AND SPIRIT OF CHRIST? **It is to have the forgiveness of sins from God through grace, for the sake of Christ's blood, which He shed for us in His sacrifice on the cross; and also to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ, so that we may more and more die unto sin and lead holy and blameless lives.**

Our spiritual cleansing has two parts: (1) cleansing by the blood of Christ, which is to be **forgiven** the penalty of sin for the sake of Christ's shed-blood on the cross; and (2) cleansing by the Spirit of Christ, which is to be **regenerated** by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), which is the *beginning* of sanctification (the removal of the inward corruption of sin), "which consists in a change of evil inclinations into those which are good, which the Holy Spirit works in the will and heart, so as to produce in us hatred to sin, and a desire to live according to the will of God" (Ursinus, 361).

Baptism is to be administered only *once* (just as circumcision was never performed more than once on the same individual) because it symbolizes and certifies for every believer what happens only once: the forgiveness of the eternal penalty of sin; and regeneration. Therefore, as we stated earlier, baptism is the sign and seal of the *beginning* of our salvation in forgiveness and regeneration.

This is why baptism is used as an *initiation* ceremony into the Christian church (Acts 2:40-41, 47), just as circumcision was the initiatory ceremony into the Jewish church. Initiation into the new covenant community by baptism is a sign and seal of the believer's initiation into the covenant of grace through forgiveness and regeneration.

Since "external baptism is a sign of the internal, that is, of regeneration, salvation and of spiritual absolution" (Ursinus, 372), "the church administers baptism lawfully...only to those whom she ought to regard among the number of the regenerate" [Acts 10:48] (Ursinus, 373). This will be explained more fully in QA 74.

Question 71: WHERE HAS CHRIST PROMISED THAT WE ARE AS CERTAINLY WASHED WITH HIS BLOOD AND SPIRIT AS WITH THE WATER OF BAPTISM? **In the institution of Baptism, which says: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" [Matt. 28:19]. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" [Mark 16:16]. This promise is also repeated where Scripture calls Baptism "the washing of regeneration" [Titus 3:5] and "the washing away of sins" [Acts 22:16].**

Question 71 quotes the four main proof texts of the Catechism's teaching on baptism: Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; Titus 3:5; and Acts 22:16. The latter three will be explained in connection with Question 72. Concerning Matthew 28:19, Ursinus has a good summary: "Baptism is a sacred rite instituted by Christ in the NT, by which we are washed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, to signify that God receives us [believers] into His favor, [He *forgives* us] on account of the blood which His Son shed for us, and that we are regenerated by His Spirit; and that we, on the other hand [as Christ's disciples and members of His church], bind ourselves to exercise faith in God, and to perform new obedience to Him" (Ursinus, 357).

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