

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 27: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, QUESTION 72-74

Question 72: IS, THEN, THE OUTWARD WASHING WITH WATER ITSELF THE WASHING AWAY OF SINS? **No, for only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sin.**

Abraham did not receive a circumcised heart (a forgiven and regenerated heart) through circumcision. He was saved *before* he was circumcised. Circumcision was added to symbolize and certify what Abraham already had (Rom. 4:11). Likewise, baptism symbolizes and certifies what believers already have (Acts 10:48). Salvation from sin is through faith in Christ alone, apart from works, including the work of baptism. The repentant thief on the cross went to heaven without being baptized.

There are two or three verses in the NT that appear to say that baptism is necessary for salvation. “He who *believes and is baptized* will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). But notice that it does not say “he who is not *baptized* will be condemned,” but only “he who does not *believe* will be condemned.” It is the lack of *belief* not the lack of *baptism* that results in condemnation. *Baptism* is mentioned right after *belief* simply because it is the *first fruit* of faith. It is the *first work* commanded by Christ for all new believers. He who truly believes in Jesus will obey His command to be baptized. The person who refuses to be baptized shows he does not have true faith. Similarly, when Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized. . . for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38), he mentions baptism right after repentance because it is the *first fruit* of repentance – which is inseparable from faith: “*repent and believe* the gospel” (Mark 1:15). When Ananias told Paul, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16), Paul was already converted (his sins were already washed away) *before* he was baptized – before he even met Ananias (see Acts 9:1-16). Therefore, his baptism was divine assurance of his spiritual cleansing, especially as he called upon the Lord to cleanse him from sin (1 John 1:9).

Question 73: WHY THEN DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT CALL BAPTISM THE WASHING OF REGENERATION AND THE WASHING AWAY OF SINS? **God speaks thus with great cause, namely, not only to teach us thereby that just as the filthiness of the body is taken away by water, so our sins are taken away by the blood and Spirit of Christ; but much more, that by this divine pledge and token He may assure us that we are as really washed from our sins spiritually as our bodies are washed with water.**

Sometimes a symbol (like baptism) is called by the name of what it symbolizes. For example, circumcision, which is the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, is sometimes called the covenant itself (“the covenant of circumcision,” Acts 7:8), even though it is only a symbol of the covenant. *This highlights the close connection between the symbol and what it symbolizes.* Baptism is called “the washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5) because it symbolically assures us *believers* of our regeneration: just as certainly as our bodies are washed with water, we can be *just as certain* that we are forgiven by Christ’s blood and regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

Question 74: ARE INFANTS ALSO TO BE BAPTIZED? **Yes, for since they, as well as their parents, belong to the covenant and people of God [Gen. 17:7], and through**

the blood of Christ both redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit, who works faith, are promised to them no less than to their parents [Isa. 59:21; Acts 2:39], they are also by Baptism, as a sign of the covenant, to be engrafted into the Christian Church, and distinguished from the children of unbelievers [1 Cor. 7:14], as was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, in place of which in the New Testament Baptism is appointed.

God’s covenant of salvation with believing Abraham included his descendants. “I will be a God to you and to your descendants after you” (Gen. 17:7); which is why God commanded Abraham to give the sign of this covenant to his descendants. God did not promise to save *all* of Abraham’s descendants; only that His elect would be among his descendants in every generation, and that from the seed of believers “He intends to raise up a seed for Himself” (Vos, “Doctrine of the Covenant”). It was this covenant promise that distinguished the seed of believers as a “*holy seed*” (Ezra 9:2). “God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Deut. 30:6). “*My covenant* I will establish with Isaac” (Gen. 17:20-21); “for in Isaac your seed shall be *called [effectually!]*” (Gen. 21:12). “Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, *the remnant will be saved*” (Isa. 10:22); “*this is My covenant with them: My Spirit* who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants, says the Lord, from this time and *forevermore*” (Isa. 59:21). In some cases, the hearts of God’s elect are regenerated in the womb, so they grow up loving the Lord. “From my mother’s womb, You have been my God” (Psalm 22:10). John the Baptist was “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). Cf. Ps. 25:12-13.

God’s covenant of salvation with believers and their seed has not been abolished in the NT; only the *sign* has changed from circumcision to baptism; and part of the newness of the new covenant is that females can receive the sign of salvation. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter told the Jews to repent and be baptized, because the promise of salvation “is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, *as many as* the Lord our God shall *call [effectually!]*” (Acts 2:39). The children of believers are still a “*holy*” seed (1 Cor. 7:14) – still distinguished by the same promise that distinguished them in the OT (Deut. 30:6). Paul told Timothy, “I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (2 Tim. 1:5). If the Baptists are right, that infants of believers should no longer receive the sign of God’s covenant of salvation, then this major change should be clearly indicted in the NT. But instead of change we see the same pattern. For example, when Lydia (an adult convert, like Abraham) believed, then “she and her household were baptized” (Acts 16:15; cf. v.33) – just like Abraham had believed and then he and his household were circumcised! The Bible assumes a household *usually* includes children: “an elder must be one who rules his own household well, having his children in submission with all reverence” (1 Tim. 3:4)! There is no stipulation in the NT that *only confessing believers* are to be baptized. There is no example in the NT of a child from a Christian home who was baptized *after* confessing faith in Christ! Is not the Baptist view, an argument from silence?

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