

Intro:

READ WLC Q&A 165

Main Point of Text: Paul says what Spirit expresses in the Sacraments is that all Christians, even opposites, are now one.

Sermon Point: *Baptism is Admission into Membership of Christ's Church.*

Move 1: Christ commands water baptism as a symbol of the Trinity's ceremonially cleansing of you.

LC: "is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost":

- Sacrament: signs/seals of our having a claim or share in Jesus Christ and His holy household.
- NT, ordained of Christ/Triune. Mt. 28:19. One Name, three Persons.
- Washing w/ water. WLC 162: "outward and sensible sign". Ceremonial cleansing. WCF 28:3: Dipping "not necessary", but "rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling". Meaning in mode.

Move 2: Baptism is the sign and seal of Christ's claiming you, and your belonging to Him.

LC: "to be a sign and seal of" (objective meaning, physical symbol; subjective pledge, spiritual guarantee):

- "and resurrection unto everlasting life": *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:* (Rom 6:5)
- "and regeneration by his Spirit": Eph. 5:25-27; Titus 3:5-6.
- "of remission of sins by his blood": Rev. 1:5: *... washed us from our sins in his own blood.*
- "of adoption": Gal. 3:26-27: *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

LC: "of ingrafting into himself": expresses your union in Christ and communion with Him.

Move 3: Baptism is the sign and seal of your being received and belonging to Christ's Body.

LC: "whereby" moving from invisible/spiritual to visible expression/commitment:

- "enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's": Rom 6:4
- "the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church": Covenant identity is corporate. 1 Cor. 10:2: were baptized "unto" Moses: 1 Cor. 12:13: all baptized into one body [Visible Church]. Whole context of the chapter is "one body" that needs each other, all are important/belong.

Conclusion:

Baptism is Admission into Membership of Christ's Church.

Of the Sacraments and Baptism (excerpt from Membership Class with extended explanations on paedobaptism and immersion verses sprinkling/pouring).

Chapter 27: Of the Sacraments

27:1

a. The word “sacrament” comes from the Latin word that represents the Greek word, *mysterion*, and communicates a sacred, spiritual bond.¹ The sacraments are signs, symbolizing what they represent. They are also seals: they “confirm our interest [having a claim or share]² in Him” and “engage [us] to the service of God in Christ”. Like the seal of a message with the king’s ring, the sacraments are “a confirming testimony to the believer concerning what he has received.”³ But they also express our loyalty like a soldier to his king: “The sacraments ... must be seen from a covenantal perspective. As they point to the gospel, they confirm God’s promise, ‘I will be your God.’ As they express our commitment to Christ, they indicate our response to God’s grace: ‘We are your people’ (Rev. 21:3).”⁴ They also express that we belong to the Kingdom of Heaven, and are exclusive “badges of membership”, as Hodge says, for the Visible Church (truly so for the Invisible Church).

b. The sacraments are not magical, but they are effectual for true believers. Jesus spiritually feeds our faith and we grow in grace and sanctification together in Him. As signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace, they are other means given by God for us to exercise godliness. They express and really exhibit our communion (1 Cor. 10:16, “fellowship”) with Jesus Christ and with one another gathered together in the Spirit. This is why LC 161 and SC 91 call the sacraments “effectual means of salvation”, not initially, but ongoing. They do not create saving faith, but they strengthen saving faith: “The Word is the instrument of regeneration ... The sacraments are meant to edify [along with the Word] those who are already in grace. The Word is used to originate the communion of saints, whereas the function of the sacraments [along with the Word] is to quicken and sustain that communion ... The Word is the gospel addressed to the ear; the sacraments are the gospel addressed to the eye.”⁵

27:2 The sacraments themselves are not actually the things they signify, but the way Scripture refers to them figuratively sometimes sounds like it: “the effects of the one are attributed to the other”. LC 162 similarly distinguishes the two parts of a sacrament: (1) “the outward and sensible sign”; and (2) “the inward and spiritual grace thereby signified”. While the sacraments in worship truly convey spiritual blessing to our souls, the elements themselves are purely symbolic memorials: “in remembrance of me”. The sacraments have no power to save, but they represent and affirm that true believers are in union with Christ and commune with Him. They remind us through the senses of who we are in a very helpful way to compliment (and always be accompanied by) the Word. They are “pictures of the truths they represent”⁶. They remind us that Jesus is literally, though spiritually, with us to the end of the age. They help us experience spiritually the reality of these covenant promises. The LC 161 says they actually “strengthen and increase [our] faith”. “Baptism (and the Lord’s Supper) simply expresses the verbal content of the gospel in non-verbal form.”⁷

¹ Hodge, 327.

² Spear, 141.

³ Williamson, 201. He adds, “A seal is that which attests or confirms”, and thus “... the primary importance of the sacraments is to benefit believers.”

⁴ Spear, 141.

⁵ Green, 202-203.

⁶ Spear, 330.

⁷ Williamson, 208. As Clark puts it, “... the Word and the sacrament have the same content ... The blessings conferred by the Word and those conferred by the sacraments are identical” (WPB, 100).

27:3 Grace truly is conveyed, “exhibited”⁸, but not literally through the water or the bread and wine (against the Roman Catholic Church’s view of *ex opere operato*), nor by the physical application or consumption, but by the Spirit feeding our faith in the act of commemoration. God wisely uses all our senses to touch our soul. But the actual grace conferred is not by any power in the signs, but by the Spirit; as well, their actual effect does not depend on the person administering them (see also LC 161 and SC 91). This is a great comfort for anyone that later has a pastor deposed as a heretic or ungodly man. The efficacy of the sacraments depends only on the fact that God authorized and commanded them, and that the Holy Spirit applies them with the word of institution. This will apply particularly to a question of rebaptism directly addressed in the next chapter. By the Spirit, “Worthy receivers” truly benefit.

27:4 Only two sacraments are ordained “by Christ ... in the gospel [NT]”: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Thus the Roman Catholic Church’s five other sacraments are invalid.⁹ The Confession here teaches that only a minister may administer these Sacraments, because “Scripture says that ‘ministers of Christ’ are to be the ‘stewards of the mysteries of God’ (1 Cor. 4:1). ‘And no man taketh this honour unto himself’ (Heb. 5:4). There is no evidence in Scripture to show that other than church officers ever administered the sacraments in the apostolic church.”¹⁰ This also helps preserve their solemn sacredness.

27:5 The OT sacraments of circumcision (Gen. 17) and the Passover Meal (Exodus 12 and 13) exhibited the same substance of the NT sacraments. Christ changed them to Baptism (Matthew 28; Colossians 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 10:1-4) and the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26ff; 1 Cor. 5:7, 11:23ff) to represent the full revelation of the Kingdom of Heaven in Himself. With this being the case, notice that the first sacrament is a one-time initiatory act into the covenant community, and the second is an ongoing act of spiritual fellowship and sustenance. They express our Union in Christ and our communion with Him and one another. Circumcision and Baptism both represent spiritual regeneration and cleansing, and Christ is now our Passover.¹¹ “The new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed. The bloody signs were superseded by the two bloodless signs. But the significance remains the same ...”¹²

Chapter 28: Of Baptism

28:1 Baptism was ordained by Jesus to be “continued in His Church until the end of the world”. Baptism is “admission ... into the visible Church” (see LC 165 and Gal. 3:27).¹³ This is why it is crucial that you are baptized before you partake of the Lord’s Supper (you must first belong to the Visible Church: Ex. 12:48). Baptism is a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace,

⁸ Provided, granted. Spear, 142.

⁹ “At last the number seven was suggested during the twelfth century, and determined authoritatively by the Council of Florence, 1439, and by the Council of Trent, 1562. These are Baptism, Confirmation, the Lord’s Supper, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders, Marriage.” Only Baptism and the Lord’s Supper meet the criterion of a true Sacrament: 1) instituted by Christ; 2) represents, seals, and confers Christ and the benefits of the new covenant to all in the covenant community. Hodge, 334-345.

¹⁰ Williamson, 204.

¹¹ Hodge, 335-336.

¹² Williamson, 205.

¹³ “... the predominant theme in Scripture’s references to baptism is union with Christ and the triune God which embraces and transcends all other subordinate aspects of the meaning of this sacrament ...” Williamson, 208. Therefore, over against the Baptists’ view of it being a symbol of burial with Christ, Clark explains: “If burial were to be symbolized, instead of using water it would have been more appropriate to dig a grave and use earth. Water fits in with washing.” (WPB, 103).

visibly representing for true believers their engrafting into Christ with all His benefits (Gal. 5:25). It mainly connotes our union in Christ together; 1 Cor. 10:2 says they were baptized “unto” Moses: “... baptism basically has to do with a ‘merging’ or ‘identification.’”; so, per 1 Cor. 12:12, “The baptism is ... into the body of Christ.”¹⁴

28:2 Baptism must be by water, explicitly Trinitarian, with a proper Trinitarian understanding.

28:3 Dipping (or dunking) a person is “not necessary”; this does not mean immersion is an option, but rather that the practice is only “rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling”. Jay Adams explains: “... mode cannot be separated from meaning. The sacraments are symbolic. If so, then ‘mode’ and ‘symbol’ are one and the same ... Mode and symbol, and therefore mode and meaning, cannot be divorced.”¹⁵ A number of considerations are in order about baptism’s mode and meaning with a gleaning of Scriptures:

a. Christ’s baptism was related to His anointing to office as with the sprinkling or pouring of oil over the head of priests and kings (Ex. 29:7; Num. 8:6-7; 1 Sam. 10:1; Ps. 2:2: King Jesus is “my anointed”). As well, the sacrament represents the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which in Acts 2:17-18, 33, is said to be “poured out” on the Apostles, and later to have “fell on them” (and so were “baptized”) in 11:15-16.¹⁶

b. The Greek word for *to baptize* (**βαπτίζω**) has a broad usage, but primarily means *to dip, to purify, to wash*; it is used interchangeably with another Greek word that means “to wash” (baptism represents inner cleansing and purification by the regenerating and renewing washing of the Holy Ghost that unites us to Christ).¹⁷ Ward explains, “The root idea of the Greek word baptize is not total immersion but an intensive dipping which involves a transformation (cf dyeing) ...”¹⁸ So, in Mark 7:4, “wash” and “washing” is the Greek “baptize” and “baptizing”, including a table (not immersed). In Lk. 11:38, the Pharisee marveled that Jesus had not “washed” (“baptized”) before dinner (see Mt. 15:2 of His disciples).

c. Heb. 9:13, 19, 21, and 10 refer to the OT “sprinklings” of blood to ceremonially cleanse, atone, or sanctify the people and the tabernacle and its ceremonial tools as “baptisms” (translated “washings”; see also the connection with 10:22, 24 related to sprinkling of Christ’s blood to cleanse our consciences.)¹⁹

d. Moses and the OT Church (including children) were “baptized” under the cloud (Christ) and by the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1-4), just as Noah and His family were “baptized” by the flood waters (1 Peter 3:20-22); they were savingly sprinkled by merciful mist while God’s enemies were immersed with judgment.

e. Paul was baptized standing up by a bedside (Acts. 9:18, 22:16). As well, “In the case of Saul’s baptism, the baptism of the household of Cornelius, and that of the household of the Philippian jailer, since each of these acts of baptism was carried out within a home (Acts 9:11; 10:25; 16:32), and in the last case sometime after midnight (Acts 16:33) but before dawn (v. 35), it is virtually certain that these baptisms would not have been by immersion, since few homes in those times would have had facilities for such an act ...”²⁰

f. When it is said of outdoor baptism events that they were “coming out of or up from the water” (Mark 1:9-10; Acts 8:36-39), note that Luke says such of Philip and the eunuch, but Philip was not baptized—he did the baptizing; and, the Eunuch had just read Isaiah 53, which is preceded

¹⁴ Jay Adams, *Meaning & Mode of Baptism* (Phillipsbug, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976) , 34-35.

¹⁵ Ibid , vi.

¹⁶ Ibid, 23.

¹⁷ Hodge, 341.

¹⁸ Ward, 176.

¹⁹ Reymond, 933.

²⁰ Ibid.

by 52:15: “So shall he sprinkle many nations ...” (see also Ezek. 36:25)²¹ Related to this, when Israel crossed the Jordon River into the Promised Land, the priests stepped their feet into water, but then the waters were blocked up and they crossed over on dry land, of which they then were said to “come up out of” it (Josh. 3:13; 4:16-19).

g. “Total immersion lacks Old Testament precedent or clear New Testament justification.”²²

28:4

a. Covenant children should be baptized due to their covenant representation within the privilege of being born into covenant families (LC 166 says “infants” of Christian parents are to be baptized because they are “within the covenant”). Spear explains, “The case for infant baptism does not rest on a few proof texts, but on an understanding that God deals with His people by way of covenant.”²³

b. Based on Genesis 17, God almost killed Moses until his wife marked their son with the sign of church membership (Exodus 4:24-26; see Pastor’s sermon, “Commit to Your Children”).

Reymond explains, “The ground of infant baptism is not then presumptive election or presumptive regeneration but rather the covenant relation in which the child stands and the ordinance or command of God. When Reformed paedobaptists are asked: ‘Upon what ground do you baptize infants,’ they should understand that it is sufficient to answer: ‘Because our infants are covenant children, and God has commanded that covenant children receive the sign of the covenant’ ... the church should baptize its infants because God requires that covenant children be baptized and for no other reason.”²⁴ As well, “The Old Testament practice of reckoning children among the covenant people of God and having the covenant sign administered to them in infancy is nowhere repealed in the New Testament.”²⁵

c. In 1 Cor. 10:1ff and 1 Peter 3:20ff, as well as Ex. 24:6-8, notice that whole families are understood to be baptized, children included by virtue of their being part of the covenant community with Jesus. The fact that many credobaptists have some kind of “dedication” service of their infants shows that “all well-exercised believers recognize implicitly what they do not all recognize expressly.”²⁶ Green clarifies that for a covenant child, “In his case baptism is a rite, not of initiation [admission], but of recognition.”²⁷

d. Peter’s baptism command said, “the promise is unto you, and to your children” (Acts. 2:38-39).

e. 1 Corinthians 7:14 shows parental federal representation makes children “holy” in the Visible Church.

f. In Acts 16, Lydia and the jailor’s whole “households” were baptized with them.²⁸

g. If Jesus says, quoting Psalm 8 (Mt. 21:16), that God ordains praise out of the mouths of babies and nursing infants, certainly those nursing infants can be baptized and recognized as members of

²¹ Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 932.

²² Ward, 176.

²³ Spear, 147.

²⁴ Reymond, 938-9.

²⁵ Ibid, 940.

²⁶ Ward, 177.

²⁷ Green, 209.

²⁸ Still, “Reformed paedobaptists must admit that nowhere in the New Testament can a direct command be found ...” However, it is also true that “Just as there is no direct command to baptize these children and to treat them as ‘little Christians,’ so also antipaedobaptists must acknowledge that there is no direct command ‘Baptize *only* those who themselves make a personal profession of faith.’ Their restriction of baptism, then, only to those who can and do make a credible profession of faith in Christ is as much a deduction from Scripture as is the paedobaptist’s practice.” Reymond, 936.

the covenant community. As well, the command to circumcise covenant children was to be done “forever”; it is so done through the New Covenant transformation of it into paedobaptism.²⁹

h. It is worth noting that just as there is no explicit command to baptize only adults, there is no explicit command or example for women to partake of the Lord’s Supper (but we know this must be deduced). As well, the Gospel always expands in the NT. Just as the Passover Feast is now shared with Gentiles as the Lord’s Supper, so too baby girls now receive the new covenant sign. To see this understood and implied OT carry over to the NT transition, see Colossians 2:11-12³⁰ with 1 Cor. 5:7 and Philippians 3:3.

i. Remember, only Ishmael, the child of the bondwoman, was there when circumcision was given by God to Abraham in Genesis 17. Abraham knew Ishmael was not a child of the promise (a true believer), and yet He rightly circumcised him with all his household (Isaac, the child of the promise, didn’t come until much later). The sign of baptism on covenant children does not guarantee head-for-head that each child is truly a Christian (against Federal Vision and the New Perspective on Paul). Yet even Jesus treated the Visible Church as such while He knew all their hearts: He administered the Lord’s Supper even to Judas.

j. It is important to note that infant baptism of covenant children was always the practice of the early Church, and rebaptism as adults was only introduced by the Anabaptists in Germany in AD 1637.³¹

k. Baptism does not represent our response, but God’s promise engrafting us into Him, by Him, to be His (SC 94).

l. We need to recognize NT baptisms of responding adults are highlighted as 1st generation Christians.

28:5 It is “a great sin” not to baptize professors of the true religion and their children: “... the New Testament does not envisage a person as a Christian who has not been baptised.”³² Notice that LC 167 says we need to improve our baptism to our own benefit. However, baptism is not indispensable for regeneration, grace, and salvation (for example, the thief on the cross). As well, baptism does not guarantee that all who are baptized “are undoubtedly regenerated”. This is against the belief of “baptismal regeneration” of the Roman Catholic Church and its other modern manifestations.

28:6 Related to 27:3, baptism is not dependent on the element, the time it is administered, nor the person or church administering it. It is effectual because it is God’s ordinance and truly by the Holy Spirit on His elect. Thus, we will not require rebaptism if you have been baptized as a covenant child or professing adult in another branch of the Visible Church. Ward points out that “... the Reformers and the Westminster men held to the validity of Roman Catholic baptism, but not to the lawfulness of receiving baptism from a Roman priest.”³³

²⁹ “Our argument is this: (1) God commanded believers to give the sign and seal of the covenant to their children, (2) baptism is the sign and seal of the covenant concerning which God gave this command (Gal. 3:16,17), (3) God changed the form of the sign and seal but not the everlasting covenant; he did not revoke his command to give the sign and seal to the children of believers, and (4) the New Testament evidence confirms this position.” Williamson, 211-212.

³⁰ “Clearly, for Paul the spiritual import of the New Testament sacrament of baptism—the outward sign and seal of the Spirit’s inner baptismal work—is tantamount to that of Old Testament circumcision.” Reymond, 929.

³¹ Hodge, 348. For a detailed historical account, see “Infant Baptism in Early Church History”, by Dennis Kastens (available under “Baptism” on our websites “Resources/Duties Required” tab).

³² Ward, 174.

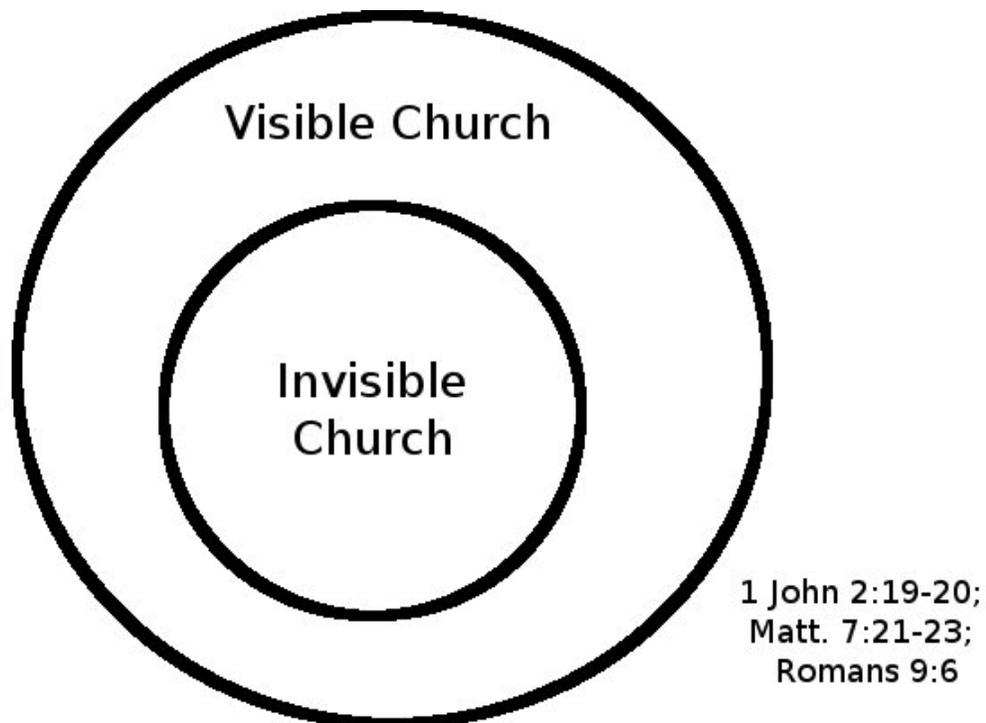
³³ Ward, 178. He also shares the following from the French Confession (1559) written by John Calvin: “... we condemn the papal assemblies ... Nevertheless, as some trace of the church is left in the papacy, and the virtue and substance of baptism remain, and as the efficacy of baptism does not depend

28:7 Because of what 27:3 and 28:6 explain, if a baptism is rightly administered (Trinitarian) by a Visible Church, it is invalid to enforce a rebaptism on covenant children or when transferring membership. Baptism in any branch of the Visible Church represents a one-time admission to the catholic Visible Church; thus, it should not be repeated, as that would communicate the person has not been a true part of Christ's universal body (and if so, should not have been partaking of communion). As baptism represents our being born-again by the Holy Spirit, we should only be baptized once, as we are only born-again once (and for good).

Suggested Readings (most of the below are available on the PECA website under "Baptism" here: <http://puritanchurch.com/resources/articles-and-media/practic-what-duty-god-requires-of-man/>):

- "Praise from the Mouths of Children", Mark Shand, PECA website Resources page
- "Forming Covenant Identity in Children", Benjamin W. Miller, PECA website Resources page
- *Baptism: Three Views*, David F. Right (Editor)
- *Meaning and Mode of Baptism*, Jay E. Adams
- *Christian Baptism*, John Murray
- "The Polemics of Infant Baptism", B.B. Warfield
- "The Validity of Romish Baptism", in *Discussions in Church Polity*, Charles Hodge
- *A New Systematic Theology*, Robert Reymond, see sections on Sacraments and Baptism
- *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkof, see sections on Sacraments and Baptism

An important diagram on this topic (also relating to WCF chapters 25 and 26) follows:



Source: Rev. Keith Evans, Lafayette Reformed Presbyterian Church (Lafayette, Indiana)

upon the person who administers it, we confess that those baptised in it do not need a second baptism. But on account of its corruptions, we can not present children to be baptised in it without incurring pollution.”