

Titus 3:4-7 (WCF 28:5-7) “The Efficacy of Baptism”

For the Children: What does God promise us in baptism? That the person being baptized is already saved? No, He is promising that all those who are saved, are saved by the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross, which the Holy Spirit enables us to believe. How does the Holy Spirit enable us to believe this promise? By getting us to read it in the Bible, see it in baptism, and believe it with the new heart He gives us. **Questions:** Does baptism itself actually take away our sins? Does everyone baptized first have to be born again? What is wrong with being baptized a second time?

Introduction:

First Point: How We Are Saved

- **No Contribution:** Roman Catholicism teaches that our good works can contribute to our justification. Similarly, it teaches that baptism washes away our original sin. Titus 3:5 and Acts 22:16 are used to try to prove this. We argue, however, that our salvation is entirely of grace (vss. 5 and 7) and grounded solely in the saving work of Christ. It is NOT on the basis of our deeds (v. 5). Our justification is a once-off thing accomplished by Christ (v. 7)
- **The Lord Uses Means:** Jesus’ work is the sole ground of our salvation. However, Christ sends His Spirit to create faith in us – “by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (v. 5). Faith joins us to Christ, resulting in the application of His saving work to us. The Spirit uses the Word to work that faith. Baptism is a visible form of that Word. It is a means of grace, by which our faith is strengthened, according to God’s purposes
- **Sacramental Language:** Because the connection between the washing of regeneration and the washing of baptism is a close one, the term “washing of regeneration” is used – as if the baptism and the regeneration were one. Acts 22:16 is similar. As with metaphors, this keeps the connection strongly before us. But it is not that baptism itself washes or regenerates; rather, the strong connection is that baptism strengthens our faith in God’s work of cleansing and regenerating. It is a means of grace
- **A Sin to Neglect:** WCF 28:5 states that it is a “great sin” to condemn or neglect baptism. This is despite the fact that baptism is not part of the ground of our salvation. One may be saved without having been baptized – as with the thief on the cross. But baptism as a means of grace and sign and seal of the covenant must be taken seriously. It is commanded by God, it extends His promises, it signifies and seals great truths. It was a serious sin to neglect circumcision in the OT as well (Gen. 17:14; Ex. 4:24-26). It is a serious sin to refuse to baptize children of believers today

Second Point: When We Are Saved

- **When Word and Spirit Work in Us:** God “saved us” when His kindness and love for mankind appeared (v. 4) AND the washing of regeneration by the Spirit took place. In other words, the time we may say we are justified is once we have faith, after the Spirit enables faith and applies Christ’s work to us
- **Not So Inseparable:** On this basis, WCF 28:5 maintains that regeneration and baptism do not necessarily coincide. Not all who are baptized are necessarily regenerate. The same is true with circumcision in the OT, as Esau illustrates. See also Jer. 9:25, Acts 8:13f
- **Delayed Reaction:** Because the critical factor is the Spirit’s regenerating work, the efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment it is administered (WCF 28:6). The Spirit works in whom He will and when He will (Jn. 3:8). Only then will the grace promised in baptism be conferred on the person baptized. It is appropriate to baptize babies, who may not be regenerate yet, because baptism is a testimony that God unites us with His Son when He will, not a testimony that we are all regenerate already
- **But Once to Be Administered:** Because baptism is a sign and seal of Christ’s saving work and the Spirit’s regenerating work, it is to be done just once for each person. For these works are once-off. Re-baptizing (for example, of someone baptized as an infant) makes God’s testimony in the first baptism meaningless, as it were

Conclusion: