

Means of Grace, Lesson #7 - Baptism
Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 28.3-7 "Of Baptism":

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3. *Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.*

RP Testimony

3. *We reject the teaching that an essential feature of baptism is immersion.*

Argument for requirement of immersion

Immersion argument rests upon two contentions:

- 1) That "baptize" means "to immerse"
- 2) Passages like Rom 6:3-6 and Col 2:11-12 plainly imply that the death and resurrection of Christ provide us with the pattern for immersion in, and emergence from, the water.

Immersionist: The word for "baptize" in the NT (*baptizo*) means "to immerse" and always indicates immersion.

Counter: The fact that *baptizo* may sometimes refer to immersion there is no question. The question is whether it refers to it automatically.

Examples in the Old Testament

Lev 14:1-7 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest. 3 And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine him; and indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper, 4 then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed two living and clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. 5 And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. 6 As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. 7 And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field.

Lev 14:16 Then the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before the Lord.

Ruth 2:14 Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, "Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar."

1 Sam 14:27 But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened.

- One case where *baptizo* does not mean, and cannot mean, immersion (Lev 14:6).
- A case where it is unreasonable to suppose that immersion was required or took place (Lev 14:16).
- Another instance where dipping, but not immersion, is the reasonable and natural supposition (Ruth 2:14).
- Finally, a case where immersion is not unreasonable but it is not by any means necessary to the action denoted by *baptizo* (1 Sam 14:27).

Examples in the New Testament

Luke 11:37-38 And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. 38 When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed [baptized himself] before dinner.

Matt 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Acts 1:5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

- John the Baptist's baptism with water contrasts with the baptism of the Holy Spirit
- If baptism means immersion then the statement of John that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire must mean strictly "he shall immerse with the Holy Spirit and fire".
- What we find is that the baptism of the Spirit is referred to in terms that are quite contrary to the idea of immersion.

Acts 1: 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come[down] upon you..

Acts 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.

- Terms in each of the above passages are terms of affusion and not of immersion.

Second argument for requirement of immersion:

The Burial and Resurrection of Christ - since baptism represents union with Christ in his death and resurrection, immersion in water and emergence from it provide an analogy which visually portrays that which is represented and sealed by baptism.

- Baptism represents other aspects of life with Christ, such as remission of sins.
- If baptize truly always, automatically means "to immerse", then the identification with Christ would primarily be with Him in his death/burial only and not His resurrection (no emergence).

"But whether the person being baptized should be wholly immersed , and whether thrice or once, whether he should be only sprinkled with poured water---these details are of no importance, but ought to be optional to churches according to the diversity of countries. Yet the word 'baptizo' means to immerse, and it is clear that the rite of immersion was observed in the ancient church." - Calvin, Institutes 4.15.19

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4. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.

RP Testimony

4. The children of believing parents are to receive baptism because of their covenantal relationship.

5. In administering baptism to her children the church recognizes their rightful place within the covenant, and her obligation to give them pastoral care and oversight, and to assist the parents in carrying out their covenanted responsibilities. In presenting them for baptism, parents not only claim for their children the nurture and benefits of the Church, but dedicate them to God in the service of Christ.

6. The baptism of infants sets before parents the obligation to do all in their power to lead their children to a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

7. Baptism is not to be administered to the infants of persons who, though members of the church, have so neglected the means of grace as to cast doubt on their profession, or their intention to fulfill the baptismal vows.

Why do we baptize infants then?

- Continuity between old covenant and new 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, 12 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.

- God commanded the sign of the old covenant to be given to both adults and their children.

Gen 17:9-10 And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 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;

- Question of whether infant children of believers are to be included in the new covenant is not so ambiguous/questionable.

1 Cor 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

Acts:2:38-39 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. 39 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.”

- Where does the bible reverse God’s command to Abraham to administer the covenant sign and seal to children of believing parents?

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5. Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it; or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.

- Baptism is not essential to salvation, but it is essential for the spiritual well-being of a Christian.
- Baptism is a direct command from our Lord.

6. The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.

RP Testimony

8. We reject the teaching that a person cannot be saved without baptism; or that persons are regenerated by baptism.

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7. The sacrament of baptism is but once to be administered unto any person.