

## **Chapter XXVI: Christian Baptism**

Christ instituted baptism after the resurrection, Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:16. He charged His disciples to baptize those who were made disciples “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” that is, into special relationship with the triune God. While He did not intend to prescribe a formula, the Church chose the words of the institution, when it felt the need of one. The present formula was in use before the beginning of the second century. Protestants regard a baptism legitimate, which is administered by a duly accredited minister and in the name of the triune God, while Roman Catholics, who regard baptism as absolutely necessary unto salvation, permit its administration, in case the life of a child is in danger, also to others than priests, particularly to midwives.

### **1. The Proper Mode of Baptism**

Baptists not only maintain that the proper mode of baptism is by immersion, but even assert that immersion belongs to the very essence of baptism. Baptism applied in any other way is not baptism at all. They hold that the fundamental idea of baptism is that of being buried and rising again with Christ, Rom. 6:3-6; Col. 2:12, and that this is symbolically indicated only by immersion. But Scripture clearly represents purification as the essential thing in the symbolism of baptism, Ezek. 36:25; John 3:25-26; Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:22; 1 Pet. 3:21. And this can be symbolized by sprinkling or pouring as well as by immersion,

Lev. 14:7; “And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let go the living bird into the open field.”

Num. 8:7; “And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: sprinkle the water of expiation upon them, and let them cause a razor to pass over all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and cleanse themselves.”

Ezek. 36:25; “And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.”

Heb. 9:19-22; <sup>19</sup> For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses unto all the people according to the law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, <sup>20</sup> saying, This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded to you-ward. <sup>21</sup> Moreover the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry he sprinkled in like manner with the blood. <sup>22</sup> And according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission."

Heb. 10:22. "let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: and having our body washed with pure water,"

Consequently the mode of baptism is quite immaterial: it may be administered by immersion, but also by pouring or sprinkling. But the Baptists have another argument, namely, that the New Testament warrants only baptism by immersion. However, they fail to prove their point. Jesus did not prescribe a certain mode of baptism, and the Bible never stresses any particular mode. The word (*baptizo*) employed by Jesus does not necessarily mean 'to immerse,' but may also mean 'to purify by washing.' There is not a single case of baptism mentioned in the New Testament of which we are sure that it was baptism by immersion. It is very unlikely that the multitudes who flocked to John the Baptist and the three thousand who believed on the day of Pentecost were baptized in that way. Neither is it likely that this mode was applied in the cases mentioned in

Acts 9:18; "And straightway there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received his sight; and he arose and was baptized;"

Acts 10:47; "Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?"

Acts 16:33-34. <sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. <sup>34</sup> And he brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God."

## 2. The Proper Subjects of Baptism

There are two classes to whom baptism is applied, namely, adults and infants.

a. Adult baptism. Baptism is intended for believers and their seed. In the words of the institution Jesus undoubtedly had in mind primarily the baptism of adults, for it was only with these that the disciples could begin in their missionary labors. His instruction implies that baptism had to be preceded by a profession of faith, Mark 16:16. On the day of Pentecost those that received the word of Peter were baptized, Acts 2:41; cf. also Acts 8:37 (Auth. Ver.); 16:31-34. The Church should require a profession of faith of all adults seeking baptism. When such a profession is made, this is accepted by the Church at its face value, unless there are good reasons to doubt its sincerity.

b. Infant baptism. Baptists deny the right of infant baptism, since children cannot exercise faith, and since the New Testament contains no command to baptize children and does not record a single instance of such baptism. Yet this does not prove it unbiblical.

(1) The scriptural basis for infant baptism. Infant baptism is not based on a single passage of Scripture, but on a series of considerations. The covenant made with Abraham was primarily a spiritual covenant, though it also had a national aspect, Rom. 4:16-18; Gal. 3:8-9, 14. This covenant is still in force and is essentially the same as the "new covenant" of the present dispensation, Rom. 4:13-18; Gal. 3:15-18; Heb. 6:13-18. Children shared in the blessings of the covenant, received the sign of circumcision, and were reckoned as part of the congregation of Israel, 2 Chron. 20:13; Joel 2:16. In the New Testament baptism is substituted for circumcision as the sign and seal of entrance into the covenant, Acts 2:39; Col. 2:11-12. The "new covenant" is represented in Scripture as more gracious than the old, Isa. 54:13; Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11, and therefore could hardly exclude children. This is also unlikely in view of such passages as Matt. 19:14; Acts 2:39; 1 Cor. 7:14. Moreover, whole households were baptized and it is unlikely that these contained no children, Acts 16:15; 16:33; 1 Cor. 1:16.

(2) The ground and operation of infant baptism. In Reformed circles some hold that children are baptized on the ground of a presumptive regeneration, that is, on the

assumption (not the assurance), that they are regenerated. Others take the position that they are baptized on the ground of the all-comprehensive covenant promise of God, which also includes the promise of regeneration. This view deserves preference. The covenant promise affords the only certain and objective ground for the baptism of infants. But if the question is raised, how infant baptism can function as a means of grace to strengthen spiritual life, the answer is that it can at the very moment of its administration strengthen the regenerate life, if already present in the child, and can strengthen faith later on when the significance of baptism is more clearly understood. Its operation is not necessarily limited to the very moment of its administration.

**To Memorize. Passages bearing on:**

a. The institution of baptism:

Matt. 28:19. "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Mark 16:15-16. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that does not believe shall be condemned."

b. Baptism as a symbol of purification:

Acts 22:16. "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name."

1 Pet. 3:21. "Which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

c. The substitution of baptism for circumcision:

Col. 2:11-12. "In whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having

been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

d. The permanent application of the covenant of Abraham:

Rom. 4:16. “For this cause [it is] of faith, that it may be according to grace; to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”

Gal. 3:29. “And if ye are Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise.”

e. The inclusion of children in the New Testament church:

Matt. 19:14. “But Jesus said, Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”

Acts 2:39. “For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him.”

1 Cor. 7:14. “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.”

### **For Further Study:**

a. Do the following passages prove that the disciples did not use the trinitarian formula in baptism? Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5.

b. How does the spiritual meaning of baptism compare with that of circumcision? Compare Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4 with Acts 2:38; 22:16.

c. Can you prove that circumcision was abolished in the New Testament? Acts 15; Gal. 2:3; 5:2-3; 6:12-13.

### Questions for Review:

1. When did Christ institute baptism?
2. What is the meaning of baptism into the name of someone?
3. Were the words of Christ intended as a formula?
4. What do Baptists regard as the essential thing in the symbolism of baptism?
5. What is the essential thing in it?
6. Did Christ prescribe a certain mode of baptism?
7. Can the necessity of immersion be proved from Scripture?
8. Who are the proper administrators of baptism? What is Rome's view?
9. What is the condition of adult baptism?
10. How can infant baptism be proved from Scripture?
11. What views are there as to the ground of infant baptism?
12. Which should be preferred, and why?
13. How can infant baptism be a means of grace?