

Holy Baptism

LORD'S DAY 26

69. Q. How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?

A. In this way:
Christ instituted this outward washing ¹
and with it gave the promise that,
as surely as water washes away
the dirt from the body,
so certainly His blood and Spirit
wash away the impurity of my soul,
that is, all my sins. ²

1. **Matthew 28:19** Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

2. **Matthew 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.

Mark 16:16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

John 1:33 I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 2:38 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."

Romans 6:3-4 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

1 Peter 3:21 There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

70. Q. What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?

A. To be washed with Christ's blood means to receive forgiveness of sins from God, through grace, because of Christ's blood, poured out for us in His sacrifice on the cross. ¹
To be washed with His Spirit means to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ, so that more and more we become dead to sin and lead a holy and blameless life. ²

1. **1 Peter 1:2** elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

Revelation 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

Revelation 7:14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Ezekiel 36:25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

Zechariah 13:1 In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.

Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

Hebrews 12:24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

2. **John 3:5-8** Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Romans 6:4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

1 Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Colossians 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.

71. Q. Where has Christ promised that He will wash us with His blood and Spirit as surely as we are washed with the water of baptism?

A. In the institution of baptism, where He says: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28:19). *He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned* (Mark 16:16).

This promise is repeated where Scripture calls baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins (Titus 3:5; Acts 22:16).



Before we proceed with the matter of baptism, let us first turn to the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision, to learn what God symbolised to His people in the old covenant.

When man fell into sin, the fountain of life was closed. Sin acted like a lid which stopped the fountain from flowing. As a result of sin, man no longer deserved the blessings of life, but only the curse of death. Christ came to take away our sin, so that the fountain of life might flow for us once again. Through the shedding of His blood, we are blessed with new life—eternal life.

Circumcision portrayed this gospel message. Circumcision was a minor operation whereby the foreskin which covered the penis was cut off. The penis is the fountain from which new life flows. The foreskin symbolised sin which blocked the fountain of life. By the removal of the foreskin, which required the shedding of blood, God symbolically declared that sin was removed, and the fountain of life was opened for man again.

After Christ offered the perfect sacrifice for sin, God put an end to the sacrifices and symbols that required the shedding of blood. Therefore circumcision was replaced with baptism.

The Jews of Christ’s day were familiar with the ritual of baptism. They baptised Gentiles who embraced the faith of Judaism. This baptism was likely based upon the Old Testament Levitical laws which demanded washing for the removal of impurity. The proselytes, as the converts to Judaism were called, received baptism as a symbol that they were washed of their uncleanness and made holy to God.

John the Baptist also baptised many in the waters of the Jordan River. His baptism is called the baptism of repentance, for he called the people to turn from their sins. As a sign that they would begin a new and holy life, they were baptised, signifying the cleansing from their old sinful way of life.

Christ took this rite of baptism which was very familiar to the people, and made it into a sacrament.

The word “*baptism*” is taken directly from the Greek language. The word in Greek means “*to dip*”. The baptism of John was a baptism of immersion, whether completely or in part. This also appears to be the manner in which the apostles baptised, for Paul refers to baptism as the burial with Christ into death (symbolised by immersion into the water) and the rising with Christ to a new life (symbolised by rising out of the water - cf. Romans 6:1ff.). Often water is a symbol of death in the Old Testament.

Although the New Testament only records instances of baptism by immersion, the early Christian church began to baptise by sprinkling as well. Perhaps this was done for the sake of little children, or for the sake of convenience when sufficient water for immersion baptism was not available. Was any truth really lost in sprinkling rather than with immersion? We do not think so. Ezekiel already prophesied that in the new covenant the Lord would *sprinkle* the hearts of His people and make them clean (cf. Ezek 36:25f.).

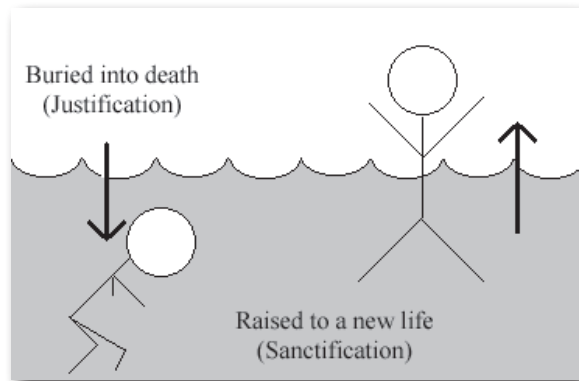
Although both modes of baptism are acceptable, baptism by immersion portrays more graphically the two-fold promise of baptism. This two-fold promise corresponds to the two-fold effect which sin had upon man:

1. Through sin, man became **guilty** of disobedience. He became worthy of eternal condemnation.
2. Through sin, man also became **corrupt**, depraved. His good nature was lost, and he became inclined to all evil. This corruption is not external but internal, a corruption of the heart, mind and will.

This corresponds to the two-fold promise of baptism:

1. We are **washed with Christ's blood** from the **guilt** of our sin. (which process we call **justification**). The Scripture teaches us that we are justified when we believe in Christ and seek the forgiveness of sins in Him.

2. We are **washed with Christ's Spirit**, and cleansed of our **corruption** (which process we call **sanctification**). The Catechism also calls this process the repentance or conversion of man (cf. LD 33). Other Scriptural names given to this process are regeneration, rebirth and renewal. This washing with the Holy Spirit was already prophesied by Ezekiel (cf. 36:25,27). Through the Spirit, Christ cleanses our hearts from the corruption that permeates it, so that once again we take delight in God's commandments. He pours His Spirit into our hearts so that once again we come to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and with all our strength (cf. Romans 5:5).





The two-fold promise of baptism.

It is important to realise that baptism is only a symbol. The Catechism mentions this clearly in Q 69 (which shows us that we should memorise the questions of the Catechism just as much as the answers!) The catechism does **not** ask, “*How does baptism benefit you?*” **Baptism in itself does not benefit us anything.** If we are to receive any benefit from this sacrament, it must be from Christ, whose work is portrayed in this sacrament. Thus the question which is asked is, “*How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?*” Any real benefit comes not from baptism itself, but from that to which baptism points. Baptism benefits us only inasmuch as it underlines what Scripture says concerning the work of our Lord.

Having said this, we have explained why we are baptised into the name of the Son and the Spirit. The Son promises to redeem us from the guilt of our sin. The Spirit promises to redeem us from the pollution of our sin. But why are we baptised into the name of the Father? What does the Father promise us? As a result of the work of the Son and Spirit, God the Father promises to adopt us as His children. He promises to care for us as a father, and make all things work for our salvation. He also makes us His heirs, so that we inherit the glory of His eternal kingdom.

From what has been said above, it should be clear that in baptism, it is God who is speaking. God reminds us and assures us in baptism of the promises that He has made with us in the covenant of grace. The Catechism teaches us this when it says "*Christ instituted baptism, and with it gave the promise...*" In baptism, God is speaking to man. We stress this, because there are those who would turn this the other way around, and make man speak in baptism. According to some, baptism is a declaration of man's faith rather than a declaration of God's promise.

TRUE	FALSE
In baptism, God signifies and seals His promise...  ...to man	...to God  In baptism, man professes His faith...

Furthermore, it must be clear to us that in baptism God does not seal what is in a child. God does not say in baptism that there is a seed of faith in the child or the seed of regeneration. **Baptism seals to us the promises** which God has made with us - promises which must be accepted with faith.

At the turn of the twentieth century, there were some in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands who taught that baptism sealed the faith or regeneration of the child.

TRUE	FALSE
God seals the PROMISE OF REGENERATION to the child.	God seals the REGENERATION of the child.

Since not all covenant children come to faith or are regenerated, how could children receive this seal of their regeneration? The answer was given that we should presume that the child is regenerated. If later in life it becomes evident that the child was not regenerated, then his baptism was not a true baptism. The baptised child who was never converted, never received the promises of God. His baptism was empty. God never spoke in it. This doctrine received the name of *Presumptive Regeneration*. The church was freed from this error in the Liberation of 1944.

The promises of baptism are real to every child of believing parents that receives the sign and seal. The promise is real, but it must be accepted in faith. Therefore a child of believing parents who does not come to faith has received the promise of God, but does not receive *what* God promises.

We come here to the limits of our understanding. We cannot fathom the relationship between the need for God to give faith and the need for man to believe.

God must fulfil His promise before we can come to faith
We must come to faith before God will fulfil His promise.

Every attempt to rationalise this in our mind leads to doctrinal error. We must simply concede our inability to fathom the mystery, and accept it in child-like faith.

Questions:

1. What was the Old Testament sacrament that corresponded to baptism? What message did it portray?
2. Why was the old sign replaced with baptism?
3. Before baptism became a sacrament, the Jews administered it. To whom, and why?
4. John the Baptist also baptised. Whom and why?
5. What does the 'word' baptism mean in the Greek language? Did John the Baptist baptise by sprinkling or by immersion? What about the apostles?
6. What does water often symbolise in the Old Testament? To what does Paul (in Romans 6) relate the immersion by baptism into water? To what does Paul relate the rising out of the water?
7. In the Bible, do we read of baptism by sprinkling? Who began this practice and why? Is any truth lost in sprinkling rather than with immersion?
8. Which method of baptism displays more graphically the two-fold promise of baptism—sprinkling or immersion? Why?
9. What is the two-fold effect which sin had upon man? What is the two-fold promise of baptism?
10. Define justification.
11. Define sanctification. Give some other names for sanctification.
12. Do we receive any benefit from baptism itself? What does benefit us?
13. What does the Father promise us in baptism? What does the Son promise us? What does the Holy Spirit promise us?
14. Who is speaking in baptism—God or man? Do all people agree with this? What do others say?
15. Does baptism seal what is in the child (such as the seed of regeneration)? What does baptism seal?
16. Are the promises of God real to every child of believing parents, or only to those children who come to faith? What must we possess before we receive what God promises in baptism?