

Name: _____



Advanced Bible Correspondence Course Lesson 27: Holy Baptism

LORD'S DAY 27

Q.72. IS THEN THE EXTERNAL BAPTISM WITH WATER THE WASHING AWAY OF SIN ITSELF?

ANSWER: NOT AT ALL (A); FOR THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST ONLY, AND THE HOLY GHOST CLEANSE US FROM ALL SIN (B).

**(A) MATTHEW 3:11, 1 PETER 3:21, EPHESIANS 5:26 (B) 1 JOHN 1:7,
1 CORINTHIANS 6:11**

Undervaluing baptism

There are people who undervalue baptism. To them it is no more than a formality. It is something that has to be. One cannot be a good churchgoer without having his child baptized. They say, "We are not heathens, are we?" But they do not grasp its meaning. To others, who do not want to be so superficial, baptism does not amount to much. They say, "It must be done. But the fact of the matter is that an unconverted person is no more than a baptized heathen." To both groups of people, the covenant has no function or significance. Baptism has become no more than an empty, meaningless ceremony.

Overvaluing baptism

On the other hand there are people who overvalue baptism. They believe that baptism in itself gives grace or infuses grace. To them baptism has some magic power. Baptism itself supposedly washes away sins. For that reason Constantine the Great did not have himself baptized until he was on his deathbed. He thought that the later he was baptized, the more sins he would be rid of, and then he would certainly enter heaven without sin. Thus people also began to believe that the baptism of infants washed away original sin. This is a terrible superstition. It is against this superstition that the catechism responds with question 72. The answer is short and forceful: "Not at all." A very clear Scriptural answer follows: "*The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). Many more texts of Scripture could be quoted, which clearly show that only being baptized is not enough. Think for instance of Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8. He was baptized,

but gave evidence that he did not possess the new life. This sacrament does not *work* faith, like some churches teach. It *strengthens* the faith which has been worked through the preaching of the Word and the operation of the Holy Ghost. This sacrament points to the means by which sins are washed away, but it is not the means itself. But the blood of Christ is an efficacious means, when it is applied by the Holy Spirit. It does cleanse from all sins. So we cannot do with less and more is not needed, no matter how many sins we have.

Q. 73. WHY THEN DOETH THE HOLY GHOST CALL BAPTISM “THE WASHING OF REGENERATION” AND THE “WASHING AWAY OF SINS”?

ANSWER: GOD SPEAKS THUS NOT WITHOUT GREAT CAUSE, TO WIT, NOT ONLY THEREBY TO TEACH US, THAT AS THE FILTH OF THE BODY IS PURGED AWAY BY WATER, SO OUR SINS ARE REMOVED BY THE BLOOD AND SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST (A); BUT ESPECIALLY THAT BY THIS DIVINE PLEDGE AND SIGN HE MAY ASSURE US THAT WE ARE SPIRITUALLY CLEANSED FROM OUR SINS AS REALLY AS WE ARE EXTERNALLY WASHED WITH WATER (B).

(A) REVELATION 1:5, 7:14, 1 CORINTHIANS 6:11 (B) MARK 16:16, GALATIANS 3:27

Names for baptism

Answer 72 clearly states that the external baptism in itself does not wash away sins. The answer certainly does not leave any room for doubt. However, then we are still left with another question: Why then did the Holy Spirit permit Paul to express baptism as such? Just look again at answer 73. There are two reasons for it. The sacraments are signs: their purpose is to give a better understanding of the promises of God. The sacraments are also seals: they seal the promises; they affix a stamp of authenticity to them.

Instructing

So the first aim of the sacraments is to instruct, to teach. There are lessons which must be drawn from the names given to the sacraments. Like the filth of a body is purged away by water, the sins are removed by the blood and Spirit of Christ. The blood of the Lord Jesus cleanses from all sins and the Holy Spirit renews us. We need to be renewed inwardly, receive an enlightened understanding, a new will and new affections. Two things are involved: justification and sanctification, forgiveness and renewal through the blood and the Spirit of Christ. The designation of the sacrament as “washing of regeneration” and “washing away of sins” indicates that which is made visible by it: the washing away of sins and the renewal of life.

Assuring

Baptism has not only been given us by the Lord to teach us something, but much more to assure us of the truth of the promise. The sacrament is also a seal. A seal is the stamp of authenticity. A seal that has been affixed to a deed shows that this document is valid. In this way the Lord affixes the seal of baptism to the promise of the gospel. It is a pledge and true token that, if we believe these promises, we are as certainly washed inwardly from our sins as we are externally washed with

water. That is the seal. This seal serves for the strengthening of faith. The believer indeed needs this strengthening. He is shown the certainty of the promises of God. Weak faith is strengthened by it. The sacrament is as an oath of God. In the sacrament faith hears the voice of the Lord and is strengthened by it. The believer sees with his eyes: as surely as the water flows there, the Lord has taken away all my sins through the blood of the Lord Jesus. In baptism the Lord confirms: I have done it.

Q. 74. ARE INFANTS ALSO TO BE BAPTIZED?

ANSWER: YES, FOR SINCE THEY, AS WELL AS THE ADULT, ARE INCLUDED IN THE COVENANT AND CHURCH OF GOD (A); AND SINCE REDEMPTION FROM SIN BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST (B), AND THE HOLY GHOST, THE AUTHOR OF FAITH, IS PROMISED TO THEM NO LESS THAN TO THE ADULT (C); THEY MUST BE THEREFORE BY BAPTISM, AS A SIGN OF THE COVENANT, BE ALSO ADMITTED INTO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, AND BE DISTINGUISHED FROM THE CHILDREN OF UNBELIEVERS (D) AS WAS DONE IN THE OLD COVENANT OR TESTAMENT BY CIRCUMCISION (E), AS INSTEAD OF WHICH BAPTISM IS INSTITUTED IN THE NEW COVENANT (F).

(A) GENESIS 17:7 (B) MATTHEW 19:14 (C) LUKE 1:15, PSALM 22:10, ISAIAH 44:1-3, ACTS 2:39 (D) ACTS 10:47 (E) GENESIS 17:14 (F) COLOSSIANS 2:11-13

Arguments against baptism

Are infants also to be baptized? Many people say: No, because:

- Nowhere in the Scriptures has the command been given to baptize children.
- Nowhere do we read that the apostles baptized children.
- It says in Mark 16:16: *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”* Since young children cannot make confession of faith, they should not be baptized.
- We do not have our children baptized; they must choose for themselves when they are old enough.

The covenant

The Catechism gives three reasons why children *ought* to be baptized. Believing adults are in the covenant. When adults enter into a covenant or agreement with somebody, their children are also automatically involved. Paul said, *“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy”* (1 Corinthians 7:14). This was true with Abraham and it is still true. The only difference is that ancient Israel was the covenant people; now the church of the Lord is the covenant church, and the children are then included in it. And as they belong to the church of the Lord, they should also bear the distinguishing mark. They are set apart from the world. The Lord took them, so to speak, out of the world and drew them unto Himself within the pale of the covenant.

The promise

The second reason for the infant baptism is the promise. Deliverance from sin through the blood of Christ and the Holy Ghost, who works faith in us, is not less promised to the children than to the adults. These are the things which are sealed in

baptism. This promise was already given to Abraham and repeated by Peter on the day of Pentecost: *“For the promise is unto you, and to your children”* (Acts 2:39). The Lord makes it clear in baptism: I want to be the God of these children. The Lord Jesus rebuked His disciples sharply: *“Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not”* (Mark 10:14).

Do those children then by baptism receive the forgiveness of their sins and the Holy Spirit? The answer has already been given: baptism itself is not the washing away of sins. It is a confirmation of the washing away of sins by Jesus’ blood.

Circumcision and baptism

There is a third reason for infant baptism. Baptism came instead of circumcision. In essence baptism is the same as circumcision. Both are sacraments which signify and seal the same thing. Circumcision belonged to the old covenant people. Baptism belongs to the covenant people of the New Testament. Just like the young boys were circumcised on the eighth day, so young children now must be baptized. The Lord does not give less in the New Testament than in the Old. He who rejects infant baptism separates the Old Testament from the New. In Colossians 2:11 the Holy Ghost shows us that baptism and circumcision are the same by joining them. Paul there wrote to the Christians at Colosse: *“You are indeed true Christians, even though you are not circumcised. Circumcision is not necessary at all, for you have already been circumcised with the circumcision of Christ. For you are buried with Him in baptism, and you are also risen with Christ out of that watery grave through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised Christ from the dead”*.

Questions:

- *How can we undervalue or overvalue Holy Baptism?*

- *What does baptism signify?*

- *What does baptism seal?*

- *What three reasons are there for infant baptism?*

- *Where in the Bible does it say that baptism in the New Testament is equivalent to circumcision in the Old Testament?*

Evaluator: _____