

Blueprints for Belief

Laying the Theological Foundations for Constructing Your Faith

Westminster Confession of Faith 28.1-7 – Baptism

- Baptism is a sacrament, instituted by Jesus, and should be practiced by the church until He returns. It initiates a person being baptized into the visible church. It symbolizes and seals to us that we have the gift of grace, we have been grafted into Christ, we're born again, our sins are forgiven, and we are walking in repentance. (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38-41; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:11-12; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21)
- Baptism should be done by an ordained minister with ordinary water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 8:36-38; Hebrews 10:22; Matthew 28:19)
- Baptism doesn't have to be done by immersion. Pouring or sprinkling is acceptable. (Mark 7:3-4; Hebrews 9:10; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 10:22; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18, 33)
- Adults who profess faith in Jesus should be baptized along with their infant children. (Matthew 28:19; Genesis 17:7-12; Colossians 2:11-12; Acts 16:14-15; Acts 16:31-34; 1 Corinthians 1:16; 1 Corinthians 7:14; Acts 2:38-39)
- We should not neglect baptism, but it is not required for salvation. Likewise, it does not guarantee salvation. (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; Luke 23:39-43; Romans 10:9-13; 1 Corinthians 10:1-5; Acts 8:13, 18-24)
- Baptism is not effective only in the moment it is done. It is a means of grace, but God gives grace when and if He chooses. (Acts 2:38; Titus 3:5-7; 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 4:11; John 3:8)
- Baptism should only be done once for any believer. (Ephesians 4:4-6; Acts 19:1-5; Romans 6:3-4)

Response to Credo-Baptists

- In the missionary situation of Acts, the gospel is coming to first-generation converts; naturally, the focus falls on adults responding in faith and being baptized.
- The New Testament nowhere explicitly repeals or narrows the long-standing divine command that the covenant sign belongs to believers and their children. Instead, it intensifies the inclusion of children.
- The sign is given based on God's covenant promise, not on the strength of the recipient's understanding at that moment.
- The earliest extrabiblical sources we have—from the second and third centuries—already assume or discuss infant baptism as a known practice, which strongly suggests it arose much earlier, closer to the apostolic era; the record is sparse for all baptismal practice, not just infant baptism.
- Reformed paedobaptism has always distinguished between the visible and invisible church. We give the sign to those God designates as belonging to His visible people (believers and their children), while affirming that Christ died to actually save the elect among them.

Discussion Questions

1. How does seeing baptism as a sacrament and “means of grace” (rather than just a symbol) shape the way we approach it in the life of the church and our families?
2. In what ways should our view of covenant and the visible church influence who we believe ought to be baptized (adults, children, or both), and why?
3. If baptism neither guarantees salvation nor is absolutely required for salvation, how should we teach its importance without either neglecting it or turning it into a bare ritual?

Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter 28

1. Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ’s own appointment, to be continued in his church until the end of the world.
2. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the gospel, lawfully called thereunto.
3. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.
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.
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.
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.
7. The sacrament of baptism is but once to be administered unto any person.