

## —Westminster Shorter Catechism—

### *Lesson 51—To whom is baptism to be administered? Q. 95*

#### **The Subjects of Baptism**

- I. Adult baptism was clearly the apostolic practice, Acts 2.37-41; 5.14; 8.13, 35-38; 9.17-18; 10.47.
  - A. In the case of adults who were formerly heathens or unbelieving Jews, baptism followed upon their profession of faith as a sign and seal of the faith they professed in Christ and His gospel and as a bond of the covenant obligations into which they were entering by receiving a baptism into the name of God, Rom 6.1-14; 1Cor 1.10-13; 6.19-20.
  - B. Professing adults claim to have the thing signified, an ingrafting by faith into Christ and a partaking of the benefits of His covenant, and upon this profession of membership in Christ, they're welcomed into the visible church of Christ and given the sign of baptism.
- II. Infant baptism was also clearly the apostolic practice, Acts 2.38-39; 16.14-15, 31-34; 1Cor 1.16; cf. Ex 12.48.
  - A. In the case of believers' children, baptism follows upon their being born in the covenant community as members of the covenant in an external sense. Their baptism acknowledges their membership in the visible church, Gen 17.7-11; WLC 62-63.

#### **Arguments for Infant Baptism**

- I. The church in the NT is the same as the church in the OT. There are not two covenants of grace, but only one, the same in substance though different in administration, WCF 7.5-6.
- II. Believers in the NT are members of the covenant made with Abraham in Gen 17; cf. Gal 3.7-9, 26-29; Rom 4.11. And as Abraham was allowed and commanded to put the sign of the covenant upon his infant children, so unless Christ has disallowed it to NT believers, then we're not only still allowed, but fall under the obligation of the same command given to Abraham. Now read Mt 19.14-15; Acts 2.38-39; 1Cor 7.14.
- III. Paul speaks to the children in Eph 6.1-3 and Col 3.20 telling them to obey their parents in the Lord according to the Fifth Commandment because, as members of the covenant of grace, they're under its obligation to obedience no less than their parents are. Paul wouldn't speak to children about the obligations of the covenant unless they applied to them.
- IV. The baptisms of the NT are household baptisms. Whether or not there were children in those households is beside the point. *The fact that the faith of the head of the family brought the entire family under the administration of the covenant of grace is the point.* It shows us that the orders God gave in Gen 17 for administering the sign of inclusion in the covenant of grace are still in force, which means baptism, which is the NT sign of inclusion, is to be applied to our children.
- V. If infants are capable of grace (the thing signified), then they are capable of baptism (the sign), and the conversion of John the Baptist in the womb proves that they are capable of grace, cf. Jer 1.5.
- VI. Flavel: "But many baptized infants prove naught. And so do many baptized adults. Duties are not to be measured by events."

#### **Inferences**

- I. All of us who are baptized need to see that we not only have the sign of the covenant but the grace of the covenant. Many glory in their baptism like the Jews glory in their circumcision. But what is the sign without the grace, Rom 2.25, 28-29? Watson, "Those who live unsuitable to their baptism may go with baptismal water on their faces and sacramental bread in their mouths, to hell."
- II. We must labor to make a right use of our baptism and improve upon it, WLC 167.
  - A. Use it as a shield against temptation. Watson, "Satan, I have given myself up to God by a sacred vow in baptism. I am not my own, I am Christ's. Therefore I cannot yield to your temptations, for then I

should break my oath of allegiance which I made to God in baptism.” Luther tells us of a woman, who when the devil tempted her, beat him back with the words, “Satan, I am baptized.”

- B. Use it as a spur to holiness. Make good on your baptismal engagements. Renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, and devote yourself to God and His service. We should walk as becomes those who have the name of God upon us and who profess to be His child.
- III. It’s a fearful thing to abandon the faith. To do so is to renounce your baptism. It’s to break your vow to God Almighty, Ecc 5.4-6. Consider the warnings God gives in Heb 6.4-6; 10.35-39.
- IV. Parents, don’t neglect to bring your children for baptism; but also don’t neglect the *obligation* that baptism places upon you. Don’t forget the *promises* sealed in that baptism for your children, and don’t lay by the strong arguments bound up in that baptism which you can wield in prayer to God.
- V. **In sum**, the biblical teaching is clear: *the families of professing Christians are to be Christian families*, families raised up for the Lord and in the ways of God, little churches consecrated to Christ and wholly governed by His Word. Parents aren’t to wait and see whether their children decide to follow Jesus. They’re to raise their children as Christian parents should (cf. Eph 6; Col 3) and they’re to raise their children for the Lord and as belonging to the Lord as His covenant children, Gen 17.7, 10; 1Cor 7.14; Mal 2.15. Edwards, “Family education and order are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual. But if these are duly maintained, all the means of grace are likely to prosper and be successful.”