

1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

CHP.29 OF BAPTISM – Msg. 4

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I. BAPTISM – A REFORMED CONTEXT

- Introduction to the 1689 29:1-4 reformed, confessional context leading up to Christian Sacraments.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

Para. #1 (Unit 1 in 4 Parts)

- Part 1 = Biblical Witness
- Part 2 = Variant in Baptism's significance = Sacramentalism / Infant Baptism.
- Part 3 = Variant in Baptism's significance = Anti-Sacramentalism/ Infant Baptism.
- Part 4 = Circumcision / Baptism Analogy¹

III. THE SUBJECTS OF BAPTISM

Para. #2 – (Unit 2 in 4 Parts)

- Part 1 = Biblical Witness.
- Part 2 = Biblical Covenants & Infant Baptism.
- Part 3 = Why is Infant Baptism widely practiced?
- Part 4 = Children of the Church. (A)
- Part 5 = Children of the Church. (B)

IV. THE ELEMENTS & MODE OF BAPTISM

Para. #3 & #4 (Unit 3 in 2 Parts)

- The Elements Identified & Considered
- The Mode Identified & Considered

¹ Analogy - A comparison between two things, typically for the purpose of explanation or clarification.

Acts 17:11 “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

Para. #1 - Unit #1 – Part 3 – Variant in Baptism = Anti-Sacramentalism / Infant Baptism.

Anti-Sacramentalism – the rejection that the Sacraments themselves apart from salvific faith grant, confer or bestow upon the recipient the forgiveness and pardon of original sin.

➤ **Historical context / situation**

Prior to doing so, it would be helpful to very briefly set the issue of baptism in its historical context. To do so, let's consider it in

FOUR important historical steps:²

1. The NT witness/historical setting.
2. The first post-biblical witness 2nd century.
 - (a) Tertullian (*protest against the biblical significance being expanded*)
3. Subsequent, early post-biblical witness 3rd century
 - (a) Augustine (*biblical significance expanded*)
4. Reformation period (reforming the already biblical significance *expanded*).

INTRODUCTION:

A recap of the historical steps.

1. Tertullian (160-220 AD) a protest against the “biblical significance being expanded”)
2. Augustine (354-430 AD) biblical significance expanded.
3. Significant to our catalyzing this expanded view was the state/church wedding which took place in the 4th century in the year 380 when the State Church of the Roman Empire was declared by an imperial edict.

² Kurt Aland; *Did the early church baptize infants*; Westminster Press

4. 3-4th century until the Reformation period during the approx years of 1517-1648.

What was “The Reformation”? The Reformation was a movement within Western Christianity in the 16th-century Europe that posed a religious and political challenge to the Roman Catholic Church and papal authority and furthermore sought to place the Scriptures as the rule and authority in the Church.

This is of course a very simple over-arching statement (regarding the Reformation) but serves us well in so much as bringing to light the background/context of the societal & political climate from which **a shift regarding the Expanded Significance of Baptism arose.**

It was during and shortly after the reformation that the Sacramentalist view of Baptism and its associated significance began to be rejected / reformed by those who would become known as, or identified as Anti-Sacramentalists.

Anti-Sacramentalists - Those who maintained that the Sacraments themselves apart from or void of saving faith **DID NOT** grant, confer or bestow upon the recipient forgiveness and/or pardon of original sin.

Thus, this shift (anti-sacramentalists) was a great revival of the true and authentic significance of Biblical Baptism.

Reference the graph.

Two groups of anti-sacramentalists emerged from the reformation:

1. **The Baptists** (various types) – who opposed infant Baptism introduced and made tradition by the Sacramentalists.
2. **The Paedo-Baptists** (various types) – who while rejecting both the Roman Catholic view of ‘baptismal regeneration’ supported infant baptism/sprinkling.

With the aid of our graphic chart – we clearly see that ancient church history seems to strongly indicate that it was the Baptists who followed the principal teachings of the reformation to their logical conclusions and fully returned to what had been largely lost – the NT Apostolic Biblical Significance of Baptism.

While on the other hand their fellow Anti-Sacramentalists the Protestant Paedo-Baptists, in order to maintain the tradition of infant sprinkling but rejecting its tradition of Sacramentalism, were forced to construct, in fact invent a biblical rationale for the practice of infant baptism without the doctrinal conclusions of Sacramentalism. Or in other words, they had a tradition that needed a biblical theolog to justify it.

Thus, among the Protestant, Reformed, Paedo-Baptists there were several eminent men (Calvin, Zwingli, etc.) who (although lacking clear warrant and testimony from the Scripture for practice of infant baptism) went on to craft and articulate a carefully arranged theological system which provided them (so they thought) with the biblical justification they needed to maintain infant sprinkling/baptism.

As fellow Anti-Sacramentalists, it is their treatment of the significance of Baptism which we as now want to consider.

The mixed signal. *A variant in the significance of Biblical Baptism – Anti-Sacramentalism / Infant Sprinkling.*

WCF 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.

WCF 28:4 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.

WCF 28:6 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.

Admitted difficulty:

If you find yourself regarding such positions as being in direct conflict with one another and communicating a difficult message, your not alone, Paedo-Baptist teachers agree to its difficulty:

James Bannerman “the subject (infant baptism) is a delicate and a difficult one, and demands a more than usual earnest investigation...the difficulty that stands in the way of infant baptism lies on the very surface of the question; and those who oppose infant baptism have the advantage of an argument on their side which is both popular and plausible.”³

William Cunningham admitted that “minute and detailed expositions of the reasons and the effects of infant baptism are unwarranted by Scripture” and he further acknowledged that it is impossible to explain the “bearing and effect of baptism” in relation to infants, and continues that “Scripture really affords no adequate material for its practice”⁴

If the most learned teachers of the practice among Anti-Sacramentalist Paedo-Baptists admit to such complexity and difficulty surrounding their understanding of the Significance of

³ Bannerman, James, *The Church of Christ*, Volume II, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1960

⁴ Cunningham, William, *Historical Theology*, Volumes I and II, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1960

Baptism, I pause and wonder to myself, what does the average parent in the pew make of it all?

I suggest, that many yield a humble, but mis-guided deference to educated men, that are “trained” and “studied” in these difficult areas.

Defying the difficulty:

Despite the admitted difficulty we must none the less seek to understand their Significance of Baptism, and to do so we must zero in on the point where we differ - the application of Baptism to the infants of believers.

While we readily agree with their confession of faith as stated in paragraph one; as the followers Christ earnestly seeking to maintain purity in His Church we are forced to recognize that their Significance of Baptism, although free from its heretical Sacramentalists teaching, none the less is expanded beyond what the Scriptures give warrant to permit.

Regarding the Significance of Baptism Read Calvin’s Institutes Chp. 15 – its spot on!

Mixed signal – John Calvin Chp.16 Paedo-Baptism: ⁵

“As soon as infants are born among them (*believers*), the Lord signs then with the sacred symbol of baptism; **they are therefore, in some sense, the people of God...**The offspring of believers is born holy...**included in the covenant of eternal life...**admitted into the church by baptism...they belonged to the body of Christ before they were born...The children of the godly are born the children of the church and ...they are accounted members of Christ from the womb...**Children derive some benefit from the baptism...**being ingrafted into the body of the church.”

⁵ Chapter 16 of Calvin’s Institutes

Huldreich Zwingli “...if an infant is to be baptized, since he cannot himself confess faith, he must have the promise which counts him within the Church. The promise is, that the Gentiles, when they have obtained the knowledge of God, and true religion, shall be just as much of the church and people of God as the Hebrews. This all the prophets heralded and Christ Himself most plainly promises. “They shall come from the east and from the west, and shall recline with the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.”

Since, therefore, **the children of the Hebrews have always been counted with the Church with their parents**, and the divine promise is sure, it is clear that **the children of Christians belong to the Church of Christ just as much as their parents.** ⁶

>> Such an emphasis and significance place on the certainty of these infants “belonging to the Church of Christ” is perhaps why

Charles Hodge pleads with parents to baptize their infants “Do let the little ones have their names **written in the Lamb’s book of life, even if they afterwards choose to erase them**; being thus enrolled may be the means of their salvation.”⁷

>> Did Hodge really believe this with regard to the significance of Baptism? Can an infant’s name be written in the book of God’s decrees by baptism? Can the growing infant then choose to erase it? Was Hodge an Arminian or a Calvinist at this point with regard to his understanding of the significance of Baptism.

John Calvin “Children are baptized **for future repentance and faith**. Though these are not yet formed in them, yet **the seed of both (repentance and faith) lies hid in them** by the secret

⁶ Huldreich Zwingli, *The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, ed. William John Hinke (Philadelphia: Heidelberg Press, 1922), 2.194–95.

⁷ Hodge, Charles, *A commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London 1964

operation of the Spirit...Paul terms it the “washing of regeneration and renewing” (Titus 3:5)

>> Does Calvin really want the Significance of Baptism to include that God’s Spirit works in the infants of believers, producing the ‘seed of repentance and faith’ by the sprinkling of water?

David Engelsma (Protestant Reformed Churches)⁸

“The **children of believers are included in the covenant** as children, that is, already at conception and birth. They receive forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus, the Holy Spirit of sanctification, and church membership – as children. **For they have God as their God, and are his people – as children. Therefore, they have full right to baptism...**God does not merely put the children of believers in a more advantageous position (than the children of unbelievers), so as to make it likelier that they will be saved; but he establishes his covenant with them, so as to be their God. **God gives to the children the promise of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ.** Accordingly,...the Reformed Church regards them, and must regard them, as those ‘sanctified in Christ’ ...God...gathers his church from age to age from the children of believers...Covenant children are...Jehovah’s children. **They are not sinful flesh, spiritually like the Devil; but they are holy (1 Cor.7:14).** Quite unlike the children of disobedience, who are ruled by the prince of the power of the air so that they have their conversation in the lusts of their flesh (Eph. 2:1-3), the baptized children of believers are in the Lord Jesus.”

>> This is perhaps, the most bold and logical conclusion from all the Anti-Sacramentalist Protestant Paedo-Baptist teachings. It truly embodies the historic, reformed, Paedo-Baptist witness concerning the children of believers and baptism.

⁸ Engelsma, David J., *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*, Protestant Reformed Church, South Hollan, Illinois, third printing, 1993

Of course, a lengthy interaction with this material from Engelsma would not stand long against the witness of Scripture when a constant hermeneutic is utilized and applied.

The Protestant Paedo-Baptist Significance of Baptism:

John Murray⁹

The argument for infant baptism rests upon the recognition that God's redemptive action and revelation in the world are: covenantal; in a word, redemptive revelation is covenant action and redemptive revelation is covenant revelation. Embedded in this covenantal action of God is **the principle that the infant seed of believers are embraced with their parents in the covenant relation and provision.** It is the method of God's administration of grace in the world that must be appreciated; it belongs to the New Testament as well as to the Old. **It is its presence and significance that illuminates for us the meaning of this ordinance.**

>> In his book entitled "Children of Abraham" Reformed Baptist David Kingdon ably summarizes Murray's argument as thus:

1. **Covenant Members:**

The covenant of grace belongs not to believers only, but also to their children.

2. **Infants were Circumcised in the Old Covenant:**

The covenant sign in the Old Testament was circumcision, which was applied to children, as well as in certain cases to adults.

3. **Baptism is parallel to Circumcision:**

The covenant sign in the New Testament is baptism, which has replaced circumcision and should be applied to both believers and their children.

⁹ Murray, John, *Christian Baptism*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962

Here we have in large part at least a glimpse of the biblical rationale regarding the Protestant Paedo-Baptist Significance applied to Baptism.

It forces us to recognize that while being admittedly mixed in its message, and also dangerously familiar to certain teachings of the Sacramentalists, there is at least an attempt to validate its practice from the Scriptures.

An attempt that rests heavily upon the doctrine and relationship which lies between Baptism and Circumcision.

Thus, Lord willing in Part 4 we will consider: the Significance of Circumcision in Scripture prior to moving onto Unit 2 – The Subjects of Baptism.