

Sunday, March 3, 2024

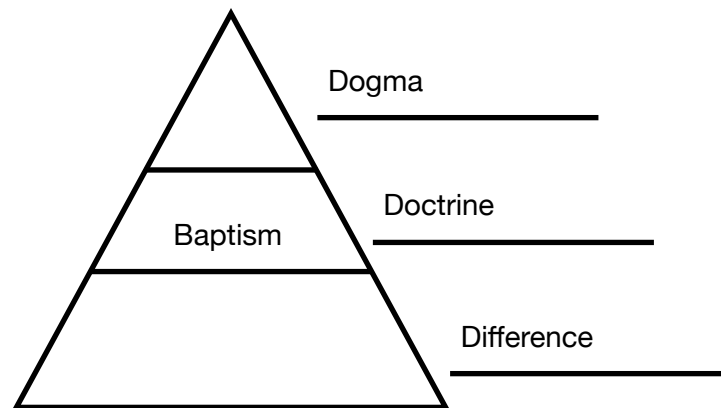
## Handout - Lesson #1

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### Introduction & Historical Theology

#### - Introduction

- Theological Triage<sup>1</sup>
  - John Rabbi Duncan: “I’m first a Christian, next a Catholic, then a Calvinist, fourth a Paedobaptist, and [finally] a Presbyterian.”



#### • Our Goal

- Helopoulos: “I pray that you will see the blessing of the sacrament of baptism and the goodness our God has shown by gifting it to his people.”<sup>2</sup>
- Fesko: “The overall goal ... is to validate the exegetical and theological conclusions of the Westminster Confession of Faith on baptism.... A biblical doctrine of baptism is crucial for the edification of the church and the glory of the triune God.”

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<sup>1</sup> Naselli and Crowley, *Conscience: What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ*, 85-87.

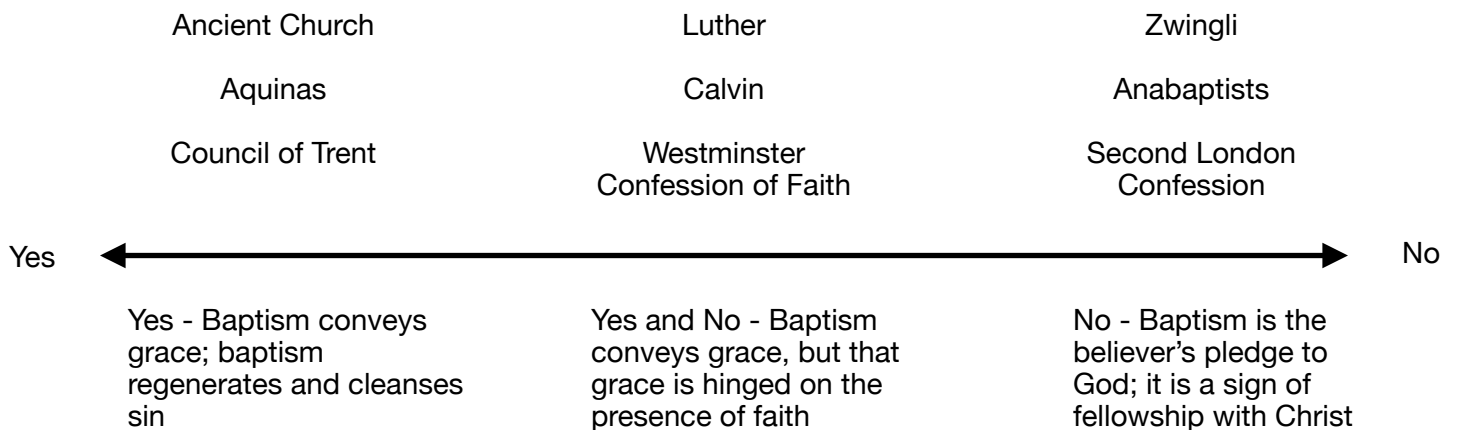
<sup>2</sup> Helopoulos, *Covenantal Baptism*, 16.

- Historical Theology<sup>3</sup>

- Stephen Nichols: “The Holy Spirit is not unique to our age. The Holy Spirit has been at work in the church for the past twenty centuries. We could put the matter this way - it is rather prideful to think that we have nothing to learn from the past.”<sup>4</sup>

- **Soteriology and the Sacraments**

- What is the relationship between soteriology and baptism? Does baptism convey grace?



- Yes:

- Tertullian, *On Baptism*: “All waters, therefore, in virtue of the pristine privilege of their origin, do, after invocation of God, attain the sacramental power of sanctification; for the Spirit immediately supervenes from the heavens, and rests over the waters, sanctifying them from Himself; and being thus sanctified, they imbibe at the same time the power of sanctifying.”
- Aquinas, *Summa*: “The baptized are enlightened by Christ as to the knowledge of truth, and made fruitful by Him with the fruitfulness of good works by the infusion of grace.”
- *Catechism of Trent*: “Baptism may be rightly and accurately defined: The Sacrament of regeneration by water in the word. By nature we are born from

<sup>3</sup> The following material is based on Part 1 of Fesko, *Word, Water, and Spirit*, 13-194.

<sup>4</sup> Nichols, *Five Minutes in Church History*, 5.

Adam children of wrath, but by Baptism we are regenerated in Christ, children of mercy.”

- Yes and No:

- Luther, *Small Catechism*: “It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is simple water and no baptism. But with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost...”
- Calvin, *Sermons*: “We must begin at the water, but we must not tarry at it. For the sign that is offered to our eyes, serves to lead us to the Holy Ghost, to the end we may know how it is from him that the power of baptism proceeds.”
- The Westminster Confession: “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.”

- No:

- Zwingli, *Of Baptism*: “...the word sacrament means a covenant sign or pledge.... The man who receives the mark of baptism is the one who is resolved to hear what God says to him, to learn the divine precepts and to live his life in accordance with them.”
- The Schleithem Confession: “Baptism shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life and who believe truly that their sins are taken away through Christ, and to all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be buried with him in death so that they might rise with him...”
- Second London Confession: “Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him in his death and resurrection...”

- **Redemptive History and Baptism**

- How does redemptive history and the doctrine of covenant factor into the construction of the doctrine? Should the doctrine begin with the New Testament or with the Old Testament?
  - Connections to redemptive history, covenant, and the OT were largely incidental and undeveloped in the ancient church.
    - In one notable exception, Tertullian identified the waters of the primeval creation (Genesis 1:2) as a type of baptism. The “primary principle of baptism... [is] that the Spirit of God, who hovered over (the waters) from the beginning, would continue to linger over the waters of the baptized.”
  - The medieval church began to develop a theology of baptism by appealing to the whole canon of Scripture.
    - For example, Aquinas believed that there was a parallel between baptism and circumcision. He writes, “Circumcision was a sacrament and a preparation for Baptism.”
  - Connections to redemptive history, covenant, and the OT became more explicit during and after the Reformation.
    - Westminster Confession of Faith: “This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the pascal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come.” Also, “The sacraments of the old testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the new.”
  - Emphasis on the discontinuities between OT and NT produced a distinct Baptist doctrine after the Reformation.
    - Second London Confession: “Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver, to be continued in his church to the end of the world.”
    - Fesko: “The framers of the [Second London Confession] excised any reference to typology and severed the New Testament ordinances from the Old Testament.”

- **Recipients**

- Who should be baptized?

- Fesko: “It appears that infant baptism was practiced in the earliest days of the church, though some objected, such as Tertullian. Infant baptism largely went unchecked until the Reformation and the writings of the Anabaptists. Since that time, the Anabaptists and General and Particular Baptists have rejected infant baptism as unbiblical, seeing it as a practice that the Reformers failed to reform.”

- Baptism in the Post-Apostolic Church

- Irenaeus (flourished 175-195), *Against Heresies*: “...all, I say, who through Him are born again to God — infants...”
- Hippolytus (170-226), *Apostolic Tradition*: “And first the little children are to be baptized...”
- Tertullian (ca. 160-225), *On Baptism*: “Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the ‘remission of sins’?” Because someone may be baptized and then renounce the faith, Tertullian writes, “the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children.”
- Sinclair Ferguson: “In summary then, evidence for infant baptism exists by the close of the second century. No serious theological explanation of it on the one hand nor apparent protest against it appears until the time of Tertullian. If it were practiced, why this frustrating silence? If it were not, why do we find an equally frustrating absence of recorded protest? ... The historical evidence, such as it is, can be (indeed, has been!) argued both ways. As it stands, the evidence from the early church is inadequate to ground a logically necessary conclusion either way.... Appeal to the authors and liturgies of the first two centuries can be a double-edged sword.”<sup>5</sup>

- **Mode**

- Immersion, pouring, or sprinkling? Single or threefold fold forms?

- Fesko: “Historically, there is a relative openness from a number of different periods in the church and from theologians from all of the various theological camps.... The standout exception is the position of Particular Baptists and later

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<sup>5</sup> Wright, ed., *Baptism: Three Views*, 83.

Anabaptists, who argued that immersion is the only legitimate mode of baptism.”

- Sprinkling, pouring, or immersion:

- *Didache*:<sup>6</sup> “And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in [running] water. But if you have not [running] water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot in cold, in warm. But if you have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.
- Aquinas, *Summa*: “...although it is safer to baptize by immersion, because this is the more ordinary fashion, yet Baptism can be conferred by sprinkling or also by pouring.... both single and trine immersion are lawful considered in themselves.”
- Catechism of Trent: “Baptism may be administered in three ways, by immersion, infusion or aspersion.... It is a matter of indifference whether the ablution be performed once or thrice.”
- Westminster Confession of Faith: “Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.”

- Immersion only:

- Second London Confession: “Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance.”

- Concluding Questions

- Is baptism a means of grace? If so, in what sense?
- How should redemptive history and covenant inform our understanding of baptism?
- Is infant baptism an unbiblical practice that the Reformers failed to reform?
- Are all three modes correct or is immersion the only biblical form of baptism?

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<sup>6</sup> The *Didache*, or the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, has been dated to 100-120 AD.