

Baptism Proper

- The Institution of Baptism

- *Christ instituted baptism in the Great Commission and not in His submission to John's baptism*
- 3 Differences
 - The redemptive-historical timeframe for John's ministry
 - John was the last of the Old Testament Prophets (Matt.11:13; Luke 16:16).
 - His ministry was to call Israel to repentance and his baptism was not a perpetual right but a special sign for that generation
 - John's baptism epitomized the particular crisis in covenant history represented by John's mission as the messenger bearing the Lord's ultimatum.
 - John ministry was preparatory and so was his baptism
 - John saw this difference (Matt. 3:11).
 - He was the messenger, Elijah, coming to prepare the way for the Lord (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 4:5; Matt. 3:1-3).
 - John's was merely a baptism of Water
 - John's baptism was one of repentance and not into the name of the Trinity.
- Based on these three points Christian baptism is therefore founded on the divine command not the baptism of Christ.

- **The Formula of Baptism**

- Matthew 28:18-19— *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*
- The Risen Messiah institutes the rite of baptism on the Ground of his authority.
 - Christ is the eschatological Prophet, Priest, and King who, as the last Adam, came to take up the failed work of the first (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45-49).
 - The language of imminence (the soon coming of the kingdom) is not found outside of the Gospels because, with the coming, dying, and rising of Christ, imminence has given way to presence (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 17:21).
 - Jesus is the Messiah who rules over his kingdom which is a covenanted Kingdom. (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25)
- Baptism is situated within the context of the covenant history of God’s people. However, baptism is specifically the sign of the new covenant.

- **What does it mean to be baptized into or in the name of someone?**

- This formula is used other places in the New Testament (1 Cor. 10:2 and 1 Cor. 1:13)
- This construction indicates that the person who is baptized into a name or person is baptized into a relationship... “baptized into” is

a way of expressing the idea that a person is “in union with” the person or name into which he has been baptized.

- 1 Corinthians 10:2—“all were baptized into Moses”
- 1 Corinthians 1:13—the Corinthians *were not* baptized into Paul’s name
- To be baptized, therefore, into the name of the triune Lord, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is sacramentally to enter a relationship with the Lord by Union with the Mediator of the new covenant, by which people are the beneficiaries of the blessing of redemption and submit to His covenant lordship.
- “Baptized into the name of the Lord” appears to be shorthand for the fuller triune formula.

- **The Symbolism of Baptism**

- Initiation into the Covenant Community
 - Baptism is the initiatory rite administered to converts to Christianity (Acts 2:41; 8:26-40).
 - Baptism is administered to adult converts who profess faith in Christ and the person baptized joins the body of Christ, the covenant community.
 - Baptism is not an isolated event for the believer.
- Two Important notes regarding baptism as a sign and seal of membership in the church or covenant community.
 - First, baptism is a sign and seal of church membership, but it is “for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the *visible* church” (WCF 28.1).

- Biblical evidence points to the fact that the church is a mixed body of believers (Acts 8:9-25; 1 Tim. 1:20; 1 John 5:16-17; John 15:1-10; Matt 13:5-6, 20-21).
- This much seems clear—there are those who will profess faith in Christ and be baptized, but they apostatize under the pressure of trial or persecution.
 - The baptism of those who permanently apostatize is not a sign of blessing and covenant membership, but of sanction and covenant judgement—a baptism of fire.
- Second, baptism is a sign of church membership, but the church is a covenant community, not a voluntary association of people.
 - If the church were a voluntary institution there would be no place for children who have yet to make a profession of faith.
 - *“Baptism is a declaration of intent by the church-community to accept the child in order to prepare it for participation in the church-community in the future.”¹*
 - Baptism as Union with Christ
 - *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Rom. 6:3).*

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 1, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 257-59, n. 395.

- Water baptism preaches union with Christ, the moment of its administration is not immediately tied to the realities it signifies and seals.
 - The Adult Convert’s baptism—water baptism preaches union with Christ *after* his Spirit Baptism
 - The Infant’s baptism—water baptism preaches union with Christ before their Spirit baptism.
- To be united with Christ means that we are now under his covenantal headship (Rom. 5:12-21), and his actions are representative for all those connected to him (see Westminster Confession of Faith 26.1).
 - Baptism, therefore, for both infant and adult, binds the church together as the visible body of Christ.

- **The Mode of Baptism**

- Denominational Differences
 - Baptist congregations largely practice immersion.
 - Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics baptize by pouring or sprinkling.
 - In the canon of Scripture, all three modes of baptism appear:
 - Immersion
 - 1 Peter 3:21—Peter called the flood a baptism.
 - 1 Cor. 10:1-2— Paul calls the Red Sea crossing a baptism.

- Jonah 1:7-16—Jonah immersion in the waters of the sea.
- Luke 12:50—Christ called his crucifixion a baptism.
- Rom. 6:3—Believers buried with Christ
- Pouring
 - Isa. 44:3—the Baptism of the Spirit
 - See also Ezek. 39:29; Prov. 1:23; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 12:10; Acts 2:33
- Sprinkling
 - Num. 8:5-22—the cleansing rituals of the Old Testament
 - Ps. 51:7 is based on this cleansing ritual
 - See also Num. 19:18-20; Ezek. 36:25; cf. Ex. 24:8; Lev. 8:30; Heb. 9:19-21; 11:28; 12:24
 - The weight of the significance of baptism hinges not on the mode but on the preaching of the Word. Recall that the Word can exist apart from the sacrament, but the sacrament cannot exist apart from the word.

Summary and Conclusion:

“This chapter has surveyed the institution, formula, symbolism, and mode of baptism. Christ instituted baptism in His Great Commission as the sign and seal of the covenant of grace. It is to be administered in the name of the triune Lord, as it is the Father who sends the Mediator, His only begotten Son, to redeem a people for Himself, and to sanctify them and apply the work of redemption through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To be baptized into the name of Christ, then, signifies union with Him and to His body, and the shared benefits of His redemption.”²

“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 engrafting 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 28.1)

² J.V. Fesko, *Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 335.