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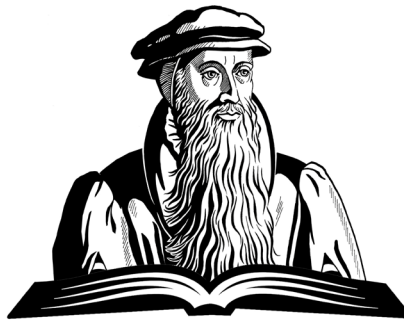
Shorter
CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #49

Means of Grace:
Christian Baptism
Catechism Questions 94 and 95



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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Lecture #49

Means of Grace: Christian Baptism

Question 94: *What is baptism?*

Answer: *Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's.*

Question 95: *To whom is baptism to be administered?*

Answer: *Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized.*

In this lesson, we have two Questions looking at a particular sacrament. Remember that sacraments are a means of grace. They are instituted by Christ to serve as a sign and a seal of the blessings of the covenant of grace. In particular, we look at baptism. I imagine that you've seen someone baptized before, and if you've read through the New Testament, you've certainly come across examples recorded in the Scripture. Perhaps you yourself have been baptized. We hope that this lesson will clarify and confirm the precious gift Christ has given us in baptism. The two Questions are #94 and #95.

Question #94: "What is baptism?"—"Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's."

This Question focuses on the very basic truths of baptism. Notice particularly the word "ingrafting." It's a word that is taken from agriculture, where there can be a branch of one plant grafted into the trunk of another, and so, then it can live upon the other plant. And the idea is that we are grafted in, or brought into fellowship with Christ, to live upon him.

You'll notice that the words in this Answer, some of them, are taken directly from Scripture. For instance, in Matthew 28, verse 19, Christ says, "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." These, of course, are the names of the three divine persons of

the Godhead. And one thing that baptism teaches us is that there is great intimacy with the Triune God held forth. Well, we'll think about that more.

Question #95 is, "To whom is baptism to be administered?"—"Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized."

Well, this Answer is taking up the idea of the subjected of baptism—who should be baptized. And we'll look at that more in depth in our lesson.

So let's think of the three main points for our lesson, which are, first, *An Instituted Sign*; second, *A Spiritual Message*; and third, *A Covenantal Privilege*.

First then, *An Instituted Sign*. As a sacrament, baptism was immediately instituted by Christ. That is, Christ himself instituted baptism. We see this in Matthew, chapter 28, verses 18 through 20. It's a glorious passage, well worthy of your study. But notice particularly as it relates to baptism. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Just very quickly notice that the baptizing is a mark that's given to those who are Christ's disciples, that as the apostles went forth, and ministers still today teaching all nations, then it is that they are to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and to continue teaching them, that they would then embrace the fuller commandments of Christ as he has given himself in his Word. And so it's a mark, a sign of discipleship, of belonging to Christ. This is basic to the idea.

But we want to look at the outward part of baptism for just a moment. The outward part, the sensible part—remember thinking of a sacrament that has something that appeals to our physical senses—it is the washing with water. That baptism demands water is clear throughout the New Testament. Particularly in Acts chapter 8, Philip is telling an Ethiopian eunuch about Jesus Christ. And then notice what happens in Acts 8, verse 36: "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" And so, of course, water is needed then for baptism. The *Catechism* does not specify a particular way the water is to be applied to the one being baptized. Now this is important, because some Christians have demanded that the only way one can be baptized is by being immersed, that is, to be brought all the way under water, to have his whole body brought under water.

However, notice how the word itself is used throughout the New Testament. The word that we're familiar with—baptize, baptizing, baptism—comes from a Greek word, *baptizō*. Of course, you can hear the relationship there. Well, knowing that helps us in a number of ways. For instance, we find this word translated on occasion. For instance, in Mark, chapter 7, verses 3 and 4, we read, "For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brassen vessels, and of tables." Now these verses in context are Christ reproving the false practices and superstitions of the Jews of his day. But for our purpose, notice verse 4 in particular. It's helpful because, in this verse, in the Greek, the word "baptize" and "baptizing" is used. In our translation, it says, "except they wash." Well, the Greek word here for wash is "baptize," and it could have been translated for us, "except they baptize." And later in the verse, it says, "washing of cups, and pots, brassen vessels, and of tables." Again, the word here is "baptizing," that is, the baptizing of

cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.

Well, how does this help us at all? Well, of course, the Pharisees and other Jews were not interested in Christian baptism, but the idea is helpful to us to understand what the word means. For instance, the word “tables,” there in verse 4, is a word referring to a flat piece of furniture for eating, or as in a flat piece of furniture for sleeping, like a bed or a couch. Whatever the case, plunging such a piece of furniture under water for a ceremonial purpose, every time before eating, is unthinkable. We have no record of that. It’s not as if the Jews came into a house, and said, before we eat, we have to take that table and plunge it under water. Instead, the simple point is that they were sprinkling water upon these items as an outward sign of purifying them.

The same idea is expressed in Hebrews 9, and verse 10. In this verse, the Old Testament ceremonies—divinely instituted ceremonies—are being contrasted with the New Testament. And among the Old Testament ceremonies, there are those which were said to have “stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.” And so, in Hebrews, what’s being contrasted is the old covenant signs and ceremonies, with the new covenant reality. But for our purpose, notice the word “washings,” in Hebrews 9, verse 10. It’s the word for “baptism.” In fact, it could have been translated “baptisms.” And so instead of as we read it, “divers washings,” it could have been translated “divers baptisms.” And in the Old Testament, we find instances where there were ceremonial sprinklings of water upon things that were to be set apart unto the Lord. We do not find something being plunged under water, but we do find instances of the priests sprinkling with water.

The point in all of this is to see that the main use in the Bible of the word “baptize,” or “baptism,” or “baptizing,” is associated with washing. Notice, this washing is not just an outward thing, because in Christian baptism, it is to be in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. This is, of course, to be pronounced audibly at the baptism, because the Word of God and the sign he’s instituted are always joined together. Why? Well, it’s because the sign—here, baptism—is a display of his promise. And doing these things helps display before all that it’s not some superstitious, religious institution of men, but it’s a divinely-provided outward display of a promise being given. So while water is being applied to the one being baptized, the words spoken—that he’s being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost—these words declare what this is a sign of.

Well, what is the message? Well, for this we look at our next point: second, *A Spiritual Message*. We could simplify by saying this: the message of baptism is the message of the gospel. As sinners, we’re unclean, we’re profane, we’re corrupt, and we have no right to draw near to God. Well, just as physically, if we’re dirty, we need to be cleansed before we participate in various privileges; spiritually, before we enjoy the fellowship of God, we must be cleansed. But not for washing of the outward man, but rather, the purifying of our conscience, as Peter writes.

Christ said, “baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” This is not just an expression of authority, but rather, “in the name of” is actually an expression of fellowship. In other words, they’re being brought into fellowship with the Triune God. The one being baptized is being given a great privilege to be offered the fellowship of God. Well, in order for that to happen, he must be cleansed. Remember when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, in Isaiah 6? He instantly thought, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips.” Well, that’s what all of us are. We’re unclean sinners. And if ever we should be brought into the fellowship of a holy God, we must be cleansed. And so there’s an outward sign of it.

Well, the significance of this can be seen in a number of places. In Romans 6:3, for instance,

Paul says those who are baptized are “baptized into Jesus Christ.” This means that baptism tells us of union with Christ. Not that we become Christ, but rather, we partake of Christ. We enjoy his fellowship. This is why the *Catechism* says that “baptism...doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ. To “signify” means to point out; in other words, it’s a sign. To “seal” means to authorize, or to confirm. And so, baptism is this outward display of a sign and seal that we are being brought to enjoy Christ. It’s an outward sign, pointing to that privilege. We’re being brought to Christ to enjoy him as our Savior. We’re being brought to the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost to enjoy the Triune God and his fellowship.

Well, the applying of water in the name of the Triune God indicates that in order to enjoy that fellowship, we need to be cleansed from our sin. It tells us the great message of the gospel, that God is coming and saying, “I would have you unto me, but you first must be cleansed.” It also tells us who it is that cleanses us from our sin, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, there’s another part of this message. Now he speaks of what we just talked about, but he also speaks of the enjoyment of his benefits. So it’s union with God through Jesus Christ, but it’s also then union in order to enjoy and live upon what he provides us. Thus, the *Catechism* says that baptism signifies and seals our “partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace.” To partake is to share in the good things that God has sworn to us in his covenant. What this means is that God is drawing near to us and saying, “I am giving you this sign, that I authorize you to enjoy all the riches of salvation by Christ. He’s not just content to tell us of it, he gives us then a sign to assure us of these things.

Now, as with all of God’s promises, this thing demands that we trust him. So it is with baptism. We consider the promise shown by baptism, all the riches of Jesus Christ given to us—forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, joy in the Holy Ghost, heaven forever—and it is then that we must by faith embrace them. What a privilege it is that God does not merely tell us, but then he draws near and, as it were, through the waters of baptism, holds forth a sign to assure us that this promise is for us. It is a privilege indeed. In fact, if you or I have been baptized, we can always think about the message that God has brought to us in our baptism, because that message is the message of the gospel held forth to us.

Well, there’s another part of this message. It speaks of union with Christ; it speaks of partaking of all the benefits of the covenant of grace; but it also testifies of commitment. Notice the *Catechism*, “Our engagement to be the Lord’s.” This is because God is separating us. He’s taking us out of filth, and bringing us into a covenant of grace where there is holiness. And so, by being baptized, God has claimed us. And as being claimed by God, we’re then to walk as those in fellowship with God. As God has said, in effect, “I take you to be mine,” we then come to him and say, “I take you to be mine.” There’s an engagement. And if you’ve been baptized, oh, remember this, that God has placed this upon you with all of its privileges, and you’re called then to give yourself wholly to him. Oh, there’s so much more in baptism, but I hope that this message will help you think more through it.

Before we close, consider then the third point of our lesson, that this is *A Covenantal Privilege*. Baptism is not for everyone in the world. Not everyone is supposed to be baptized. Instead, it’s a privilege for those who are in covenant with God. So first, we can say this: if someone is outside of God’s covenant, that person first must confess Jesus Christ as Savior before being baptized. There are many examples of this in the New Testament, particularly in the book of Acts. When someone who was an unbeliever outside of God’s covenant first trusted in Jesus Christ, that person was then baptized—so faith, then baptism. The kingdom of Jesus, of course, was advancing throughout

the book of Acts, gathering in people who were out of God's covenant, bringing them into God's covenant. And so, when they were brought in, then they were baptized. A good example of this is the one mentioned earlier with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, in Acts chapter 8, verses 36 and 37. We read, "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So this one outside of God's covenant—the Ethiopian eunuch—first believes, and then is baptized.

Now, by the way, this pattern is exactly how the Old Testament worked as well. Before one who was not a Jew could enjoy the benefits of the covenant of grace under the old covenant, for instance, before they could take the passover, that non-Jew had to be circumcised first. And so the sign of cleansing—the filthy part, circumcision—was applied to one who's brought into the covenant. For instance, Exodus 12, verses 47 and 48: "All the congregation of Israel shall keep it"—the passover—"And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof." Notice, circumcision was a sign of entrance into the covenant. And that particularly was under the old covenant.

Well, under the New Testament, that entrance is baptism. But it was not only believers who had to be baptized, just as it was not only those who were believing as adults were circumcised. This is because believers and their children are in God's covenant. Remember, baptism is a sacrament of the covenant of grace. This should lead us to ask the question, who is then included in the covenant of grace throughout history? And without any hesitation, the biblical answer is, "believers together with their children." There are too many examples of this to give them all, but think of some big ones that illustrate it quite clearly. When Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord, who entered the ark? It wasn't just Noah. It was also his household, his children, his wife. When Abraham believed the Lord and it was counted to him for righteousness, and he received, as Paul says, the sign and seal of the righteousness he had by faith (Romans 4:11), who was circumcised? It wasn't just Abraham who received that covenant sign, that sign and seal of the righteousness he had by faith. Instead, it was all of his male children in his household. His son, Ishmael, at thirteen years old, was circumcised, not by any faith of Ishmael, but by the faith of his father. And when his son, Isaac, was born, at eight days old, Isaac was circumcised. The point is that the believer and his children, his household are given the sign. It doesn't mean that everyone who receives the sign is saved, or is a believer. In other words, while Abraham was a believer and was circumcised, Ishmael was not. And remember, Isaac was but eight days old when he was circumcised. Ishmael would prove to reject the covenant, and Isaac, by God's grace, would be brought to embrace the covenant. And again, Isaac's two sons, Jacob and Esau, both were circumcised in their infancy. Well, as we know, Esau proved to be a rejecter of the covenant, while Jacob, by God's grace, came to believe the promise of the covenant. The main point is that a believer and his children, throughout the Bible, they together received the sign of the covenant.

And we do not find any rejection of this very point in the New Testament. Think by way of contrast, the dietary laws of the Old Testament were established hundreds of years after Abraham. These particular laws were instituted under Moses. So this was well after the flood—remember Noah and his household; it was well after Abraham—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; all of them as well, and many generations after would have been observing the covenant inclusion of children. But these dietary restrictions were instituted under Moses, and they provided certain regulations of what they could and could not eat. And so, when it came time to remove those dietary restrictions,

God was very clear and decisive, revealing that change to his church. You can read of this in Acts chapter 10, when God gave Peter a clear vision of the same. Paul dealt with the liberty to eat all sorts of foods in various of his epistles. And so there's no mistaking it, the dietary laws of the Old Testament do not apply to us under the New Testament. Now what does this have to do with baptism? What it shows is that when God determined a change of practice he instituted, he did so clearly, explicitly, and by means of divine revelation. However, when it comes to the point of including children of believers in receiving the covenant sign, there's no verse in the Bible that says anything to the effect that children no longer receive the sign of the covenant. And so, while we clearly see that circumcision is no longer observed, and baptism is now the sign of entrance into the covenant, we do not find anywhere where children are not to be receiving that sign. Well, there are examples we could give. Lydia, for instance, she is mentioned as believing, and her whole household is baptized. You can see that in Acts 16, verses 14 and 15. Well, we trust the point is clear.

This doesn't mean that children are automatically saved, just as neither Ishmael nor Esau were believers. What it does mean is that God is giving a great promise to his people, in covenant with him. He's saying to the people, "I offer you myself. I give you myself. I hold forth myself to you, and I say, I will be your God, and your children's God." And therefore he calls us then to believe on him, to trust in him, to follow him, to obey him. The covenant is a relationship of promise and belief. The covenant sign is being shown to us and holding forth that promise. It's a great mercy. He's coming to us in our baptism and saying, "I take you," and therefore, we are to take him.

Well, we must close. And how merciful of God to give us such a sign as baptism! If ever we've become convinced of our sins, surely we'd become convinced of how filthy they are. And yet baptism is the outward sign of the cleansing we can receive through faith in Jesus Christ. If you've been baptized, there's a question you need to ask. Have you embraced the promise of cleansing through Jesus Christ? God has made a promise to you, and he's claimed you as his own. Have you, by his grace, cast yourself upon him, and said, "Oh, cleanse me, forgive me, and receive me" to enjoy the benefits of the covenant of grace? And if you've been baptized, you are claimed by God, and so are called to walk for him all of your life in fellowship, not by your own strength, but by the strength of having him as your God through Jesus Christ. Oh, the privilege of the sacrament of baptism, this means of grace! May God bless it to you, and to all of us.