

Lesson 25 **HOLY BAPTISM**25.1 **The Meaning of Baptism**

Holy baptism was instituted in the Church by Christ to signify and seal God's promises. The word **baptize** means to immerse, and also signifies washing, cleansing and purifying. The sign used is water, and the act of baptism is meant to signify the washing away of sins, or the cleansing from sin. In the Old Testament, cleansing occurred by both water and blood, 2 Kings 5:14; Exodus 24:7, 8, and both sprinkling and immersion signified purification, Isaiah 52:15; Ezekiel 36:25.

The promises and blessings given to us in baptism are:

## 1. Forgiveness of sins

The first gift sealed in baptism is the cleansing from sin in Christ's blood. Just as water washes the body, so Christ's blood washes the soul through the working of His Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:13. Although we must still deal with the effects of sin our whole life long, baptism reminds us that in Christ all our sins are removed and we may stand innocent before God's throne, Acts 2:38.

## 2. Renewal of life

Baptism is also a cleansing by the Spirit of Christ, through whom we are quickened to new obedience, Colossians 3:13; 1 Peter 1:2. Through the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, our lives are purified and set apart to God's service. David prays for forgiveness and renewal, and also uses terms which allude to baptism, Psalm

51:7,10,11. Paul also calls baptism “the washing of regeneration”, Titus 3:5 and the “washing away of sins”, Acts 22:16.

### 3. Union with Christ

Holy baptism also signifies our union with Christ. Through baptism we are always reminded that we are members of Him, that He is our Head, and we are His members, Romans 6:1-11; Colossians 2:12f. We are united with Him in His death and resurrection, and therefore always may be sure that we will receive all the blessings of His work through faith.

#### 25.2 The Foreshadowing of Baptism

The sign and seal of the covenant that prefigures holy baptism is **circumcision**. Circumcision involved the shedding of blood, and so pointed to a sacrifice that was yet to come. Baptism, on the other hand, does not involve the shedding of blood, Colossians 2:11; Romans 2:29; Philippians 3:3.

The sacrament of baptism was also foreshadowed in the LORD’s mighty acts of redemption for His people, for example, Noah and the flood, Israel led through the Red Sea, Israel at the Jordan, Israel under the cloud of God’s protective care, 1 Corinthians 10:1f; Exodus 17:1-7. In particular, references to the flood and Red Sea are found in the *Form for the Baptism of Infants*.

#### 25.3 The Recipients of Baptism

Holy baptism is also the sign of being received into the Church of Christ. Those who are or wish to be members of God’s Church must be officially proclaimed as members, one by one, Psalm

87. Adults may become members by confession of faith, and thus are baptized upon public profession of faith. Infants born in the covenant are members of Christ's Church, and thus are publicly received into the Church by holy baptism.

### 1. Adults

The initial proclamation of the gospel was directed to adults. Therefore, in the call of the gospel, repentance is a condition for baptism, Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 3:19. Our *Form for the Baptism of Adults* illustrates this order. This order is also implied in Romans 6:1f., although the children of the new believers in Rome are included in this passage.

### 2. Infants

Because of the order of the texts above, Baptists hold that infants should not be baptized. According to them faith must precede baptism. The Reformed doctrine, however, maintains that the Scriptures teach and require infant baptism. The covenant is made with believers and their offspring, Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39. Paul calls the children of believing parents holy, 1 Corinthians 7:14. The Lord Jesus received the children, and blessed them, Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15. The New Testament speaks of the baptism of households, a phrase which indicates that upon conversion of the parents, the blessings of Christ came to the whole family, Acts 10:48, 16:15, 34, 35; 1 Corinthians 1:16, 16:15.

## 25.4 The Administration of Baptism

Christ administers His blessings in the Church by means of His servants. While the office bearer administers the sign, Christ Himself

by His Spirit gives the thing signified. There is no magical power in either the water, or the person administering baptism.

Because it is a sign by which we are received into the Church, baptism may only be administered once, Ephesians 4:5, 6. Even if it has been administered in a church which has fallen away from the truth, it may be recognized as a real baptism. One condition applies, namely that baptism must use the Trinitarian formula. In order to be truly baptized, one must be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptisms administered in apostate churches are called **vestiges**, or **traces** of God's Church and covenant, and so are not repeated when the recipient later confesses the doctrine of salvation and joins the true Church.

## Exercises Lesson 25

**I. Reference Passages**

Study and Review: Belgic Confession, Article 34.  
Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 26, 27.  
Canons of Dort, I. 17; II. 5.

**II. Review Questions**

1. What is the main idea contained in the word **baptism**?
2. Why do we baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Why is this necessary?
3. How is our baptism effective in our life of faith?
4. Are all who are baptized actually saved? Why not?
5. Why do we baptize infants? What are the Scriptural arguments in favour of doing so?
6. Why do we believe that children who die in infancy are saved? Do they receive faith when they are baptized?

**III. Extra Questions**

1. Explain the difference between the baptism of John and the baptism we know in the Church today.
2. Prove from Scripture that baptism replaces circumcision.

3. What do the Baptists teach concerning baptism? What is wrong with their theory?
4. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and what is its relation to the sacrament of baptism? See Matthew 3: 11, Acts 19:1-7.