

The Meaning of Baptism

With Special Reference to The BAPTIST View

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Part Two

Concluded from British Reformed Journal No. 29 and originally published in British Reformed Journal No. 30 April - June 2000.

(VI) THE ERRORS OF IMMERSIONIST BAPTISM

We must now consider the many weaknesses inherent in the baptist presentation of Christian baptism. All of these stem from the mistaken notion that *baptizein* means always and only to dip or immerse. We have seen how this forces them into an unwarranted use of prepositions (*en* and *eis*). We have also seen that the immersionist theory foists an alien interpretation on Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12, which texts are then called upon to lend support for their theory of dipping.

Here we must clearly state that the Reformed do not reject immersion as a valid baptism.¹¹⁷ The *Westminster Confession* gives the classic Reformed view of the requirements for a valid baptism:

[1] The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, [2] wherewith the person is to be baptised into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, [3] by a minister of the gospel, lawfully called thereunto (XXVIII:ii).

Three things are needful. **First**, water must be applied to the baptismal candidate. Second, he must be baptised into the Name of the Triune God. Third, the sacrament must be administered by a lawfully called minister. Immersions in Trinitarian baptist churches fulfil these criteria. Therefore, they have a valid sacrament and we view it as such.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXVIII:iii; also see Form for the Administration of Baptism (The Psalter, p. 85).

We do, however, object to their unscriptural view of immersion-only baptism.¹¹⁸ When they bind the consciences of the people of God to something that He has left free, they offend Christian liberty and divide the body of Christ. They convert a gospel ordinance into a new legalism.

Their second error is in their signification of immersion. Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12 do *not* teach that the believer ought to go down into water and arise from it in baptism and thus signify his death and resurrection with Christ. This error compounds the first. Not only do baptists (wrongly) make the mode of dipping obligatory, but they then make the mode itself significant, even the key for understanding baptism.¹¹⁹

These errors have their effect upon the baptist presentation of the sacrament of baptism and, therefore, on their teaching regarding salvation. As Jay Adams observes:

The symbol in the sacrament (which is an important thing) is either disclosed (a purpose of the sacrament) or destroyed by a true or false mode of observing the sacrament. Mode and symbol, and therefore *mode and meaning, can - not be divorced*.¹²⁰

(1) First, they err by misrepresenting the symbolism of the sacrament of baptism. "Immersion in water and emersion out of it," states John Gill, is "a very expressive emblem of Christ, his death, burial and resurrection from the dead." He proceeds to mock the notion of "sprinkling a few drops of water on the face."¹²¹ A. H. Strong gives six instances of the symbolism of baptism. Cleansing is not included, whereas the death-burial-resurrection picture not only comes first but is the basis for several of his other instances.¹²² All other items of baptismal symbolism are "**only subsidiary pictures of the act of baptism**," writes W. A. Jarrell:

.....its main design being to picture the '**Gospel**' - THE DEATH, THE BURIAL AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST. The 'gospel' - **the**

¹¹⁸ Cf. **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 (XXVIII:iii:)."

¹¹⁹ Baptist immersionism is not alone in adding something to the simple biblical ordinance of baptism and then making that addition significant. Some have advocated trine immersion and saw in the three dip-pings the three days and nights Christ was in the grave. The ancient church, especially in the West, increasingly practised anointing with oil or the laying on of hands by the bishop after baptism and saw in this the conferral of the Holy Spirit.

¹²⁰ **Adams**, Op. cit., p. vi; italics mine. After all, church ceremonies, if given theological significance, will surely have doctrinal ramifications.

¹²¹ **Gill**, Op. cit., p. 899. For other references to the death-resurrection symbolism, see pp. 905, 911, 914.

¹²² **Strong**, Op. cit., pp. 940-942. See also pp. 942-945.

death, the burial and the resurrection of Christ - being the FOUNDATION and the PROCURING CAUSE of all these other things pictured in baptism, only the watery **burial and resurrection** therefrom can be the picture expression and profession of the 'gospel.'¹²³

We agree with the baptists that Christ's vicarious death, burial and resurrection on the third day, according to the Scriptures, is indeed the gospel (cf. I Cor. 15:3-4). However, we deny that the rite of baptism was ordained by God to show forth Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection by immersion in and removal from water. The sacrament of baptism is definitely *not* "a parable of Christ's death and resurrection in the [immersion and emersion] of believers." Herman Ridderbos is quite right to describe this view as "fiction" and as having "no support whatever."¹²⁴

(2) This false conception largely displaces the true symbolism of the sacrament of baptism. Sadly, the baptists are so taken up with the notion that baptism portrays our descending into and rising from Christ's grave that they take insufficient note of the sacramental element, *the water*.¹²⁵ Water is spoken of in the Scriptures in two main senses: as a refreshing fluid or as a cleansing agent.¹²⁶ In its *internal* use, that is, when a man drinks it, it is symbolic of life. When used *externally*, on the skin, it speaks of purification. This latter use is found time and time again on the sacred pages of the Bible, and, indeed, the world over. Water is recognised as the *universal solvent*.

The representation of the Spirit by water is not uncommon in the Old and New Testaments.¹²⁷ The problem is that it does not play the proper role in baptist thinking about baptism. William Williams states that he knows of no standard Baptist confession which "declares that baptism symbolises the washing of the Holy Spirit."¹²⁸ Baptist works uniformly fail to do justice to the picture of cleansing in the sacrament of baptism. This is not surprising, since, in the baptist scheme, water is forced to signify *two* things: a burial element and a cleansing agent.¹²⁹

¹²³ Jarrell, Op. cit., p. 99, n. 1; emphasis Jarrell's.

¹²⁴ Ridderbos, Op. cit., pp. 404, 402.

¹²⁵ There are three sacramental elements: water in baptism and bread and wine in the Lord's Supper (**Westminster Confession of Faith**, XXVIII:ii; XXIX:iii, v-vii; **French Confession of Faith**, XXXVIII [Schaff, Op. cit. p.381]; **Second Helvetic Confession**, XIX, [Ibid., p. 887]; **Heppe**, Op. cit., pp. 593-594).

¹²⁶ Scripture also has several references to water at the creation and at the flood (cf. Leonhard Goppelt, "Udwr" (Grk. Udwr) in Gerhard Kittel ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley trans. and ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. VIII, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], pp. 314-333).

¹²⁷ E.g., Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28; John 3:5; I Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5.

¹²⁸ **William G. Williams**, *Baptism: A Discussion of the Words*, "Buried with Christ in Baptism", (Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye and New York: Eaton & Mains, 1901), pp. 75-76.

¹²⁹ E.g., **W. A. Jarrell** speaks of a "*watery* burial and resurrection" (Op. cit., p. 99, n. 1; italics mine).

In fact, the baptists see *two* signs in baptism: that of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and that of purification. As is the often the case in such situations, the seven lean kine eat up the seven fat kine. How different is the intensely Biblical treatment of baptism in the *Heidelberg Catechism*! In the two Lord's Days which deal with baptism, we find one reference to purging, two to cleansing and no less than twelve to washing.¹³⁰ The *Belgic Confession* expresses well the signification of the baptismal rite:

.....as water washeth away the filth of the body, when poured upon it, and is seen in the body of the baptised, when sprinkled upon him; so doth the blood of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, internally sprinkle the soul, cleanse it from its sins, and regenerate us from children of wrath, unto children of God (XXXIV).¹³¹

Had the baptists gotten hold of the *one* signification of the water in the sacrament, they would have been guarded against the death-burial-resurrection notion. Ridderbos' comment is correct:

“So far as the water of baptism is concerned, its symbolical significance, as appears from the whole of the New Testament, is that it purifies, not that one can sink down into it and drown, *to say nothing of being buried in the water.*”¹³²

(3) Rather than focusing attention on the action of the water, the baptist sacrament makes man the main sign. In effect, the baptist tells those who witness an immersion, "Watch the man being dipped. As he goes down into the water, think of Christ's burial. As he comes up out of it, think of Christ's resurrection." We are in full accord with the baptists regarding the necessity of looking to Christ. Hebrews 12:1-2 describes the Christian life as an arduous marathon. Only by looking to Jesus will we ever complete the course. That is not the issue.

The problem is that God has not constituted the sinner as the sign in the rite of baptism. Whereas baptists berate the Reformed for disobeying Christ's command to dip, the truth of the matter is that they have misconstrued the baptismal sign. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states:

¹³⁰ **Heidelberg Catechism**, Lord's Days 26 & 27.

¹³¹ Cf. **Heidelberg Catechism**, Q & A 69, 73; **Westminster Larger Catechism**, Q & A 165; **Westminster Shorter Catechism**, Q & A 94. The Form for the Administration of Baptism also brings out the cleansing symbolism (The Psalter, pp. 85-89).

¹³² **Ridderbos**, Op. cit., p. 402; italics mine.

There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or *sacramental union*, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other (XXVII:ii).¹³³

Thus we ask, Where is the *sacramental union* between the dipped sinner and the dead, buried and resurrected Christ? Any semblance of such a thing in Romans 6:3-5 has already been exploded. If it is true that what God has joined together man must not put asunder, it is also true that what God has not joined together, man must not seek to unite. There is no sacramental union between the dipping sinner and Christ's death, burial and resurrection, and baptists must not speak as if there were.¹³⁴

That the sacramental union is between the water and the cleansing of the Holy Spirit is affirmed by the *Heidelberg Catechism's* Answer 71: "The Scripture calls baptism the washing of regeneration [Titus 3:5], and the washing away of sins [Acts 22:16]." This is the *heart* of the sacrament of baptism. As Louis Berkhof says,

The sacramental union between the sign and that which is signified . . . is usually called the *forma sacramenti* (*forma* here meaning essence), because *it is exactly the relation between the sign and the thing signified that constitutes the essence of the sacrament*.¹³⁵

We may express this in other terminology: it is the sacramental union which constitutes baptism *as a means of grace*. Thus the *Belgic Confession* states that the sacraments

are visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, by *means* whereof God worketh in us by the power of the Holy Ghost (XXXIII).

The baptist, in tampering with the *sign* of baptism, affects the *sacramental union*, which is the essence of the sacrament, and, hence, the sacrament as a *means of grace*. In short, the baptist has been led away from looking at the water, which speaks of the sovereign, heavenly, purifying work of the Spirit of Christ, into looking at the submerging and emerging of a *sinful man*. That it is the farthest thing from the divine mind to desire us to look at man is evident to all with even a basic knowledge of the Bible. That God should

¹³³ Cf. **Belgic Confession**: "the sacraments are connected with the thing signified" (XXXV).

¹³⁴ One wonders if the baptist weakness regarding the sacramental union was in any way responsible for the omission of most of the material in the Westminster Confession's chapter "Of the Sacraments" (XXVII) by the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (XXVIII). **Samuel E. Waldron**, however, does not suggest this (A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, [Great Britain: Evangelical Press, 1989], pp. 337-338).

¹³⁵ **Louis Berkhof**, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. 1996), p. 618; italics mine. Cf. **Turretin**, Op. cit., Vol III p. 348; **Heppe**, Op. cit., pp. 597, 638.

wish us to do this at a Christian sacrament, which speaks of His mighty purifying work, is blasphemous.¹³⁶

(4) The presentation of man as the object of contemplation at the sacrament of baptism - though they say it is to make them think of Christ - has disastrous effects on the sacrament's ability to witness to God's salvation. That an Arminian, like Oscar Brooks, voices Arminian views when speaking of baptism does not surprise us.¹³⁷ When, however, he says that his views on baptism arose from a contemplation of his (ritual) baptism, that is dipping, we begin to take notice.¹³⁸

More disturbingly, we find Calvinistic baptists, like Samuel Waldron, making strange remarks that baptism is, in part, a *sign of our faith*.¹³⁹ If baptism is a *sign* of our faith is it also a *seal* of our faith as well? As if God's sacraments point anywhere other than to His salvation!

Again, we are surprised when we consider the treatment of baptism given by Dagg, another Calvinistic baptist. Dagg divides his chapter on baptism into five sections. The fourth, "The Design of Baptism," concerns itself with the significance of this sacrament. Dagg's thesis is: "Baptism was designed to be the ceremony of Christian profession."¹⁴⁰ What about baptism as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace? Or of renewal by the Holy Spirit? Dagg subsumes all these under the subject of *our profession*. Amazing! The best way to account for these oversights is to say that these Calvinistic men were led astray by the symbolism of a man's dipping in water, but far removed from that of Biblical baptism.

(5) In the baptist immersion, water is the receptive element. Instead of *en* exclusively indicating instrumentality - baptising *with* water or *with* the Spirit - they make water the passive, receptive element. The water of baptism symbolises the Holy Spirit. This is obvious to all and the baptists admit this. Also this is proven by the Bible's frequent paralleling of "baptising with [*en*] water" with "baptising with (*en*) the Holy Spirit." The baptist mis-

¹³⁶ Calvin's statement may be taken as axiomatic: "it is certain that all ceremonies are corrupt and noxious which do not direct men to Christ" (Op. cit., p. 424 [IV:x:15]).

¹³⁷ Thus Brooks writes, "Believers, accepting the presentation of the gospel with its emphasis on Christ's death, gladly entered the baptismal waters *to dramatise their faith response* to the salvation event in Christ and to indelibly *associate themselves* with their Lord" (Op. cit., p. 120; italics mine).

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. ix, 161 (cf. back cover).

¹³⁹ Waldron writes, "Baptism symbolises a *saving response* to the gospel." "Baptism symbolises *compliance* with the demands of the gospel." "Baptism is a symbol of *both* the blessings of the gospel and the *saving response* to the gospel. It symbolises *repentance* and forgiveness" (Op. cit., pp. 347, 350; italics mine).

¹⁴⁰ Dagg, Op. cit., p. 70.

understanding of the role of water in baptism has serious implications for understanding the role of the Holy Spirit in a baptism by dipping.

The primary error of the baptist imagery is that it *makes the Holy Spirit passive*. They might object that the water (and hence the Spirit) is also passive in pouring or sprinkling, but there is an important difference. The issue of the Spirit's role as active or passive does not concern the human administrator of the sacrament but *the relation between the baptised sinner and the water*. In effusion (pouring) or aspersion (sprinkling) the sinner is passive and the water (the Spirit) is active. In dipping the sinner goes down (active) into the (passive) water. The symbolism is all wrong! "The baptist view . . . in presenting the Holy Ghost as a quiescent receptacle," as Dale says, "revolutionises the gospel scheme and, logically, subverts the cross of Christ."¹⁴¹

The Spirit of Christ is the omnipotent, immanent agent of the Triune God. He is "*the power of the Highest*" (Luke 1:35). He is the one who revealed His might by raising up Jesus from the dead (Rom. 8:11). His coming in Acts 2:2 is with a sound like "a rushing mighty wind" from heaven. Nowhere more clearly is His power set forth, however, than in His saving work upon the fallen sons of Adam. He sovereignly regenerates dead sinners (John 3:5-8). He works faith in us (Gal. 5:22). He distributes spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12:4). In short, He is the great bestower of salvation. This salvation, the Bible tells us, is entirely "the gift of God" and not in any way "of works" (Eph. 2:8-9).

In effusion or aspersion we see this. Through the symbolism of baptism, we see the heavenly Spirit coming upon the dead sinner and cleansing him and giving him life. The sinner just stands there. He did nothing for his own salvation. He was entirely passive. The sign fits with the reality of salvation.

However, in dipping, it is not the Spirit who comes down, but the sinner who goes down into the water. Man enters the Spirit, symbolised by the waters.¹⁴² The Spirit is passive. The baptismal sign has been subverted. It does not properly point to the great work of salvation applied by the Spirit of Christ.

To make matters worse, one finds throughout baptist literature such statements as Dagg's: "The significancy (sic) of baptism *requires* immersion."¹⁴³ Note that Dagg is not merely saying that the symbolism of baptism *permits* immersion but that it *requires* it.

¹⁴¹ Dale, *Johannic Baptism*, p. 178.

¹⁴² Interestingly, while the baptist puts the sinner in the Spirit, the Bible puts the Spirit in the elect sinner: "I will put my Spirit within you" (Eze. 36:27; cf Harbach, *Op. cit.*, p. 16).

¹⁴³ Dagg, *Op. cit.*, p. 38; italics mine.

Thus, for him, effusion or aspersion *do not* convey the significance of baptism. In so writing, Dagg is in harmony with the baptist confessions.

"Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance" (*The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1688*, XXIX:iv).

"We believe that Christian baptism *is* the immersion in water . . ." (*The New Hampshire Baptist Confession*, XIV [1833]).

"CHRISTIAN BAPTISM. - This *is* the immersion of believers in water . . ." (*Confession of the Free-Will Baptists*, XVII:i [1834, 1868]).¹⁴⁴

(6) The notion that baptism equals immersion produces another problem.

Baptists effect their baptism by two distinct acts: a going into and a coming out of water. The water, as we said, symbolises the Holy Spirit, who unites the sinner with Christ and, therefore, with the Triune God. The question then arises, Why take the believer out of the water (the Holy Spirit)? How can union with God Triune possibly be signified by a dipping in and a coming out of water? Moreover, how can union with God in Christ possibly be signified by a *momentary* immersion in and emersion from water? Surely if dipping into water symbolises union with Christ, the sinner ought to be kept there! Do we not believe the preservation and perseverance of the saints? Then, of course, the confessing Christian would drown. Such are the problems involved when the significance of the sacrament is changed from its divinely given original.

(7) From all this it follows that the baptists ought to reconsider their understanding of baptism. They often attack non-immersionists for "disobeying the Lord's command to dip." They accuse us of "will-worship" and say that we hold to the "commandments of men."¹⁴⁵ W. A. Jarrell repeatedly enters into a diatribe against the "incomplete reformation" of the sixteenth century.¹⁴⁶ He even asks,

How can anyone say that the substitution and practice [of effusion] in the incompleteness of the sixteenth century "Reformation" is not a fulfilment of Dan. 7:25 ["he shall speak great words against the most High . . . and think to *change times and laws*"]??¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Schaff, Op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 741, 747, 755; italics mine.

¹⁴⁵ E.g., Gill, Op. cit., pp. 899, 909. Jarrell puts it very pointedly: "Dear Christian minister, Christian scholar, Christian, WILL YOU OBEY GOD IN IMMERSION, OR WILL YOU OBEY MEN BY EFFUSION?" (Op. cit., p. 43; emphasis Jarrell's).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 72-85, 98.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

However, from what we have seen, it is the baptists who need to return to the "old paths" of the Word of God. They need reformation in the area of the sacrament of baptism. Their theory is false. Though we grant their baptism as valid, we urge them to drop the rite of dipping. Instead, they ought to baptise by effusion or aspersion. They are the best Biblical modes.

Should a baptist minister become convinced of this, he should not just preach the proper understanding of baptism, while continuing with the faulty sign of dipping. The people will still be so bewitched by the baptismal pool, the dippings and the dripping robes that they will maintain their old misunderstanding of baptism. They will continue to view it as the re-enactment of Christ's burial and resurrection and be prone to conceive of man as active and the Spirit as passive.

(8) Thus the guilt of schism which they would attach to us lies wholly on their side. They have disfigured one of the sacraments.¹⁴⁸ They have made binding one (poor) mode of baptism to the abandonment of two excellent modes. Therefore, the sin against the *unity* of the church is with the baptists.

In so far as they insist on a rite that is difficult to administer in certain circumstances and in certain climates, they also sin against the *catholicity* of the church.¹⁴⁹ Remember that this sacrament is intimately connected with the church's attribute of universality in Acts 2:38-39 and her calling in missions (cf. Matt. 28:19-20). Furthermore, since they lay down and insist on laws which are not Biblical and frame a baptism which points to an Arminian salvation, we must conclude that they also sin against the *apostolicity* and *holiness* of the church.

(VII) CONCLUSION

Many points could be made by way of conclusion. We shall content ourselves with enlarging upon just three positive implications.

(1) *We have a glorious doctrine of baptism to preach and to believe.* What a great comfort to have the great work of the Triune God signified and sealed in such a wonderful sacrament! Reformed and Presbyterian churches must explain to Christ's sheep the meaning of Christian baptism, not neglecting to warn against the faulty baptist notions regarding the mode.

¹⁴⁸ Remember that the proper administration of the sacraments is one of the three marks of a true church (cf. **Belgic Confession**, XXIX).

¹⁴⁹ This charge is made by many, including **Charles Hodge** (*Systematic Theology*, vol. III, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1986], p. 538).

We have the "one baptism" of Ephesians 4:5 to proclaim. This baptism is based upon and dependent on the baptism of Christ on the cross, for which He was equipped, both ceremonially and really, by His baptism at the Jordan. It comes to us by way of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church which is, through the apostolic baptism on Pentecost, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20). Our people must live in the light of their baptism. They must continually grow in their understanding of the significance of their baptism "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19).

They must not be allowed to think that just because one group of churches is called by the name "baptist," that they have any particular insight into the initiatory sacrament. Their position is false and does not properly sound forth the glory of the gospel of grace. Let them not surpass us, in their zeal for promoting their faulty baptism. We have the true, God-glorifying view. Let it sound forth clearly and antithetically.

(2) This article has deliberately avoided a discussion of *paedobaptism* until now. That would have greatly lengthened it and led it away from its one subject: the *meaning* of baptism. However, the two cannot be separated and this study has implications for the *sub-jects* of baptism too. If baptism is, as the baptists say, a sign of *our profession* of faith, then it is obvious that babies cannot partake of the sacrament. If baptism is, however, a sign and seal of *what God does* in saving His people through the blood of Jesus, then infants of believers are worthy subjects of the sacrament.

Baptism, as we have seen, is rooted in Old Testament revelation, with its ceremonial purifications and sprinklings of blood, which pointed to the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:10ff.). In the older testament, especially, it is clear that children were in God's covenant and received the sign of circumcision.¹⁵⁰ We have also seen that baptism is purification by the Spirit of Christ and that baptism concerns the promise of salvation (Acts 2:38-39). These things pertain to the *essence* of baptism. They tell us what baptism is all about. *All these things are fully consistent with paedobaptism.*

Paedobaptism is particularly good at showing forth the Triune God's covenantal salvation in the line of *generations*.¹⁵¹ God is a family God, as *the Father and the Son* in the Holy Spirit. The Father is eternally generating the Son and the Son is being eternally begotten by the Father. God also deals with His covenant people in generations. He saves His

¹⁵⁰ For an excellent, brief treatment of the significance of Old Testament circumcision for New Testament infants, see **J. Barton Payne**, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), pp. 391-394.

¹⁵¹ This is taught repeatedly in the Scriptures (Gen. 3:15; 17:9, 12; Ex. 20:5-6; Ps. 78:4-6; 90:1; 105:8ff.; Isa. 58:12; Acts 2:38-39; II Tim. 1:5).

people in this way since the whole idea of generating is something that is *rooted in His very Godhead*.¹⁵²

By rejecting the sacrament of baptism for their children, baptists deny the covenantal dealings of God in the generations of His people and fail to realise the implications of believing in the great Triune God. Thus baptists - even Reformed baptists - fall into individualism, and, hence, have a predisposition toward Arminianism. Such are the dangers of the antipaedobaptist view.¹⁵³

Second, paedobaptism is a wonderful declaration that in baptism man is *passive*. The *Form for the Administration of Baptism* expresses this well:

Although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as they are *without their knowledge*, partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ.

Children of Christian parents (although they *understand not this mystery*) must be baptised by virtue of the covenant.¹⁵⁴

As a final point we note that in the Bible it is clear that infants can have the real baptism.¹⁵⁵ Why then can they not have the sign of salvation?¹⁵⁶ Being partakers of the covenant, the church, the kingdom and the promise, children of believers must not be forbidden Christian baptism.¹⁵⁷

(3) **Lastly**, this view of baptism expresses perfectly *the doctrine of sovereign grace*. *Real* Christian baptism is the thorough change of the state and condition of the elect sinner by the sovereign Spirit of God who graciously applies the blood of Jesus Christ to his heart. *Ritual* Christian baptism is the sign and seal of this almighty purifying work of the Spirit, who washes us from our sins and consecrates us to the Triune God in Jesus Christ

¹⁵² This view is violently opposed to the anabaptist notion of the **Schleitheim Confession** of 1527, which speaks of infant baptism as "the highest and chief abomination of the pope" (John H. Leith ed., *Creeds of the Churches*, [New York: Anchor Books, 1963], p. 284). Thus we confess with the Belgic Confession: "we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who . . . condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, whom we believe ought to be baptised and sealed with the sign of the covenant" (XXXIV).

¹⁵³ On the other hand, **John Murray** points out that the facile individualism of antipaedobaptism is part of its fatal attraction: "To think organically of the Scripture revelation is much more difficult than to think atomistically" (*Christian Baptism*, p. 2).

¹⁵⁴ **The Psalter**, pp. 86, 87.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Ps. 22:10; 139:13; Jer. 1:5; Matt. 21:16; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 1:15; Eph. 6:1-3.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Acts 10:47. The **Second Helvetic Confession**, XX, argues similarly (Schaff, *Op. cit.*, p. 891).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. **Heidelberg Catechism**, Q & A 74.

our Lord.

Thus from beginning to end, this conception of baptism teaches the same gospel as that revealed in the Scriptures and summed in the Reformed Confessions. Word and Sacrament are thus united in teaching the one grace of God in Jesus Christ. We must hold fast to this view of baptism. An Arminian sacrament will certainly corrupt Reformed preaching. The Reformed Baptists have allowed Arminianism in through the back door with their faulty notions of dipping. Let us not do the same.

Pentecostal baptism (Acts ch. 2:vv 1-4) teaches authoritatively the great lesson that immersion is not of the essence of the ordinance. On the day of Pentecost, God exemplified a "real baptism ;" but there was "no dipping." This baptism, most dignified in itself, and most momentous to the interests of the Church, the Great Head of Zion took under his own immediate superintendence. Why, then, did not He who possesses all power, administer the *real baptism* with the emblems of the Spirit, by a *real dipping* into the emblems of the Spirit ? However we may account for it, the fact is undeniable. One reason appears to be, that in the eye of infinite wisdom, the Christian Church, at the very hour of her nativity, needed an impressive lesson against the encroaching tendency of modes and forms. The day of Pentecost bore witness to God's estimate of the necessity immersion in baptism. It told the disciples, it tells the world, that Jesus Christ fulfilled his promise to baptize with the Holy Spirit, by an observance in which the act of dipping had neither lot nor part, and mode of any kind occupied a very subordinate position. The lesson thus taught we are not disposed to confine to one denomination of Christians.

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