

BAPTISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE REFORMED AND PENTECOSTAL MODEL

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Abstract

Baptism has been a mean of identifying with Christianity from the start and since the 16th century it has been one of those recurrent theological issues which have engaged Christians in debates. Genuine children of God truthfully come up to the same scriptures but often arrive at radically diverse conclusions. Jesus during his last task commanded the apostles as well as the church to “go...and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. The rite of baptism is practice, by all Christian Churches, and as well confesses that Baptism was instituted by the Lord Jesus as an abiding sign of admittance to His church. This work intends to explore here, the points of convergence and divergence between the Reformed model and the Pentecostal model of baptism. The paper shown among others that their major point of exit is that Pentecostal churches do not baptize infants. Rather, children in Pentecostal churches are dedicated to God and blessed and their mode of baptism is by immersion whereas Reformed baptize infants to initiate them into covenant with God and to integrate them into the visible church and their mode of baptism is by pouring or sprinkling.

Keywords: Baptism, Pentecostal Model, Reformed Model, Comparative, Christian Churches

Introduction

Baptism has been a mean of identifying with Christianity from the beginning, as made known by the several mentions in the Acts of the Apostles as well as the Pauline epistles. Baptism is one of those persistent theological issues since the 16th century which has engaged the Churches in debates. Sincere and honest believers come up to the same scriptures yet over and over again reach very different conclusions. All Christian churches practice the rite of baptism is practice by All Christian churches and as well

acknowledge that Baptism was instituted by the Lord Jesus at the same time as an abiding symbol of admission to His church; they do so in large part because Jesus in his last assignment commanded the apostles as well as the church to “go...and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28: 19).

It is almost unanimously accepted that baptism in a number of way connected with the commencement of the Christian life; it is one’s commencement into the universal, unseen church as well as the local, visible church (Erickson 358). But the questions of what does it denote, who is eligible as well as how must it be organize have received a considerable disagreement regarding baptism and go on to split the faithful. Although it is not likely that we will adequately resolve these questions inside one small paper, we can at least make clear the Reformed position intended for persons who are new to the faith.

The meaning of baptism

Baptism (Greek baptein, “to dip”), in Christian churches, the universal rites of initiation, performed with water, usually in the name of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) or in the name of Christ (Price 1). According to Collins Discovery Encyclopaedia, “baptism is a rite of purification by water, a ceremony invoking the grace of God to regenerate the person, free him or her from sin, and make that person a part of the church” (1). Baptism is a method of sanctifying grace as well as a gospel ministry to the persons of God. This is a mark and seal of the Covenant of Grace picturing what Christ has completed on behalf of his people and sealing salvation to the same. Consequently, children of covenant of parents who believe as well as unbaptized mature converts have to be baptized. Therefore, baptism is more often than not necessary for membership in the church. To Erickson, “baptism is an act of faith and a powerful testimony to the believer’s union with Christ” (361).

Baptism according to Galatians 3: 27, means united into one body with Christ. So baptism is a complete pledge which takes us into the closest union with Christ. Baptism is not only united into one body with Christ. It is as well union with Him in his death and burial and resurrection. Baptism also takes us into the dying and the rising of the Lord Jesus, and this feature is mainly clearly emphasized by full immersion. In Christianity, the sacrament of admission to the church, symbolized by the pouring or sprinkling of water on the head or by immersion in water. The rite is more often than not followed by the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”. (Collins Discovery Encyclopaedia 2). Frankly speaking, Christians accept as true that after his resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to his disciples and ordered them to

baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. St Paul, in his lessons, proof that baptism mean the wiping away of past sins and the rebirth of the individual into a new life.

Reformed basic views of baptism

Baptisms as a sign and seal of the covenant

The place held by Reformed churches such as Presbyterian and Anglican on baptism is fastening intimately to the concept of the covenant. According to Erickson, “they regard the sacraments as signs and a seal of God’s working out the covenant which he has established with the human race. Like circumcision in the Old Testament, baptism makes us sure of God’s promises” (359). Writing on the significance of the sacrament of baptism to the Reformed, Erickson opines that, “the covenant, God’s promises of grace, is the basis, the source, of justification and salvation; baptism is the act of faith by which we are brought into that covenant and hence experience its benefits” (359). From the above, we can deduct as follows: that the process of baptism make known both the means of introduction into the covenant and a mark of salvation. That, it thus signifies the recipient’s initiation into the community of God.

That baptism is the new covenant form of circumcision. “David Kingdom in his book, children of Abraham receives this view. So they would argue that to experience the circumcision of Christ, in the putting off of the flesh is the same thing as being buried with him and raised with him in baptism through faith” (The Reformed Doctrine of Baptism & New Testament Practice 13). “But the Reformers also saw baptism as a visible “sign” and “seal” of the grace God gave to his people by Jesus dying in our place, bringing our dead hearts to spiritual life so that we could believe in Him, forgiving our sins and the power to walk in that newness of life” (Highlands Reformed Church 2). We can infer that according to the Reformed Churches, baptism is an observable symbol as well as promise from God to us that He will save us from our sins moreover; it is a physical mark as well as oath from us to God that we will have faith in His son Jesus Christ as well as live for him. It is too a “stamp” of the grace that God has promised. The Reformed Churches as well believed that baptism is a symbol of the grace of God in Christ; the effectiveness was not fastening to the timing. This means that baptism may go before faith in Christ as in the example of small children who cannot so far express faith. If our circumcision occurred at baptism, it will therefore mean that individual would no more than experience rebirth after one received water baptism.

Infant baptism

The custom of baptizing young children or infants is known as infant baptism. In theological talks, the practice is at times alluded to as paedobaptism or pedobaptism from the Greek word “pais” meaning “child”. The practice is at times compared with what is known “believers’ baptism” or credobaptism from the Latin word credo meaning “I believe”, which is the religious custom of baptizing no more than persons who have personally confess faith in Jesus; thus excluding under aged children.

The doctrine of children baptism is central to the truth of the scripture because baptism is the mark of God’s covenant of grace; the truth of God’s covenant to all the doctrines of God’s Word. Many Reformed churches, while holding formally to infant baptism, nevertheless do not consider the doctrine in connection with and as related to the truth of God’s covenant. Or, if they do, an erroneous and basically Armenian view of God’s covenant vitiates the doctrine of infant baptism as well as other doctrines and makes a solid biblical apologetic all but impossible (Hanko 2).

The subjects of baptism according to Reformed, fall into two common groups. First, there are fully grown person who have come to trust in Christ. Explicit examples are established in Acts 2: 41 and 8: 36 – 38. Second, young children along with even children were as well baptized in New Testament period. According to Pieper, “proof is seen in the fact that children were brought to Jesus to be touched (Mark 10: 13 – 16). In addition, we read in Acts that entire family were baptized (Acts 11: 14; 16: 15, 31 – 34; 8: 8). It is sensible to suppose that for the most part of these families were not make up wholly of fully grown person. Young children are fraction of the people of God, exactly as certainly as, in the Old Testament; they were component of the nation of Israel” (277).

A crucial issue between those who hold to infant baptism and those who do not is whether God saves his church in the line of continued generations. It is clear that all the children of the Israelites were circumcised in infancy. The Reformed maintain that this was commanded because God saves his church in the line of continued generations. Presbyterian and Reformed Churches belief that baptism, whether of infants or fully grown person, is a “symbol as well as seal of the covenant of grace”, and that baptism allows the people baptized into the physical church. Being an affiliate of the physical church does not promise the act of saving from sin or it consequences; although it does offer the child with many benefits, including that of one’s exacting congregation agreeable to help in the bringing up of that youngster in the way he should go, thus when he is aged he will not turn from it. Elect children (the predestined for salvation) who die in childhood are with faith considered regenerate on the basis of God’s covenant promises in the covenant of grace. Members of the physical church,

as well as young children, are considered to be electing by faith unless and until they prove otherwise by committing apostasy.

Presbyterian and a lot of Reformed Churches view children baptism as the New Testament shape of circumcision in the Jewish covenant (Joshua 24: 15). Circumcision did not produce trust in the 8-day-old Jewish covenant people Israel. Similarly, baptism doesn't produce faith; rather it is a mark of membership in the physical covenant community" (Wikipedia 2). It then means that Presbyterian and Reformed churches perceive true Christians' children to be members of the physical Church which is the covenant community. They as well see true Christians' children to be full members of the local church everywhere their parents are members and members of the universal church (the set of all true believers who make up the invisible church) except and pending when they prove otherwise. Baptism is the symbol of person within the covenant of grace and in the universal church, even though rebirth is not inseparably connected with baptism.

The Reformers on the other hand supposed that "the children of believers could and should be baptized. This is based on several lines of Biblical evidence: if New Testament baptism replaces Old Testament circumcision as a sign of inclusion into the visible covenant community, then logically, the same people who were circumcised in the Old Testament should be baptized in the New. Since, in the Old Testament, all male babies were required to be circumcised, therefore, at least in the New Testament era, all male babies should be baptized did not mean that he personally had saving faith; the entire history of the "Old" Testament is replete with examples of circumcised Israelites who worshipped idols and were condemned by God. But, circumcision did mark God's people from the pagan world and was a sign that they were the special recipients of His grace and mercy" (Highlands Reformed Church 3).

In the New Testament, "women were also baptized which means that God at the present needs His covenant mark to be given to women as well as men. Logically then, female babies should now receive the covenant sign as well as male babies. The line of evidence for giving baptizing to the children of professing parents is found in Acts 2: 38 – 39 wherein the Apostles clearly state that the promise of regeneration, forgiveness and baptism are given to you and your children. The Reformers believed that salvation was a sovereign act of God and that he has promised (generally speaking) to save the children of believing parents (1 Cor 7: 14)" (Highlands Reformed Church 3). Thus we can infer that baptizing person's children in Reformed Churches is a work of faith on the part of Christian parents, claiming the promises of God to keep their children. Once more it brings the children into the physical expression of the family of God, marking them off from the world.

The Reformers on the other hand discarded any “magical” part of baptism; they did not consider that just because they performed a certain rite that either they or their children were automatically saved (the view called “baptismal regeneration”). They recognized that while baptism was an order that we have to obey, there might be extraordinary situations or conditions where a person might well be saved, although never baptized (WCF 28: 5) (Highlands Reformed Church 3). Baptism thus is an outward mark that one belongs to God; however, there might well be those who truly belong to Christ who have never been baptized; and there are many who are baptized who by no means come to saving faith. Therefore to them infant baptism incorporates a child into the Body of Christ, so making him a member of Christ, a redeemed member of the order of Christ’s new creation.

It is in this vein that Reformed theologians in Britain are again urging that from this basic point of view infant baptism better accords with God’s mode of incorporating men into the redeemed society than does the baptism of mature believers (Beasley-Murray 369-370). It will not be possible for most Churches to maintain the practice without minimizing the participation in salvation and the church. This is why many members of Reformed Churches incline to the view that full membership in the Church is not accorded to infants baptized; that must await their later confirmation.

Mode of baptism

Christians plainly disagree over the proper mode of baptism. Some argue that the sacrament is only valid if the recipient is immersed completely under water: others are convinced that pouring and sprinkling are appropriate modes of baptism. According to statement of Westminster confession (WCF 28: 2 – 3), the Reformed position on mode of baptism is as follows:

2. “The outward element to be used in the sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the gospel, lawfully called thereunto.

3. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person” (Mode of Baptism 1).

In the Reformed community, “since the sixteenth century, there has been a hardy debate going on over the mode, the meaning, and the recipients of baptism. Since the sixteenth century, there have been those within the Reformed tradition who have argued that the mode of baptism must be immersion. They have also argued that the meaning of baptism, because it symbolizes our spiritual union with Christ, that the meaning of baptism requires believers-only baptism” (Reformed Doctrine 3).

The foundation of the Reformed Church option of pouring or sprinkling as their mode of baptism is based on the New Testament practice of baptism which confirms effusion or sprinkling or pouring as a mode of baptism. For example, you keep in mind when Saul of Tarsus was baptized, where was he baptized? Yes, in a residence, in the home of Simon the Tanner. In addition to it would have been very doubtful that there would have been any facility in a home big enough to immerse a person.

Perhaps the best creedal statement of Reformed theology is the Westminster confession of faith. It briefly states the classic Presbyterian position regarding the mode of baptism: “dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person” (Battle 9). The confession says that “baptism is “rightly administered” by pouring or sprinkling, and that immersion (“dipping”) is “not necessary”. Rightly administered meant that pouring or sprinkling had scriptural support. The term “not necessary” meant to the Westminster divines that immersion should not be practiced in Reformed churches. They prohibited immersion because by the exclusive principle, all worship forms that are not explicitly required by scripture or necessarily derived from scripture were to be avoided. It was only recently that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has allowed immersion to be at the discretion of local session” (Battle 9 – 10).

Reformed Churches supposed immersion was “not essential” for true baptism to take place. On the other hand, they did admit baptisms by immersion as valid though not “correctly” manage and organize. It was not compulsory for persons who have been baptized by immersion to be rebaptized when joining a Reformed church. An important religious ceremony in the Christian Church such as baptism may be valid though not appropriately administered; for instance, baptizing by immersing the head only is an inappropriate mode, but it does not nullify the sacrament (Battle 10). The Reformed as well express disagreement that immersion does not stand for the burial Christ experienced since Christ was buried in a cave, not in the ground (Smalling 3).

Pentecostal basic views of baptism

Water baptism

The greater part of early Pentecostals, who came out from Wesley Holiness and Baptist groups, perform water baptism by immersion. Charles Fox Parham began baptizing in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ about 1901. The greater part of Pentecostals practiced trince baptism until 1913, when some attendees at the World Wide Pentecostal Camp Meeting in Arroyo Seco California became persuaded that the right New Testament

method for baptism was “in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Glossary of Pentecostal 1).

Pentecostal churches keep to scripture in practising baptism by immersion. For Pentecostals water baptism is an outer sign of a change that has by now occurred. It is the change that is necessary; the water baptism is an additional element (Pentecostalism 1).

Pentecostal see “water baptism as primarily a physical means by which one expresses faith, it certainly also operates as a public statement of our commitment to the Lord Jesus. It is a declaration on our part that we intend to follow Jesus Christ for the rest of our life. By obeying Him in a baptism we are confessing, and proclaiming Him as our only Master, and Lord” (Grace Community 4).

The early church understood that such faith have to be there in order for baptism to have any meaning. This is obviously established in all of the New Testament examples and exhortations concerning baptism. The Book of Acts gives us numerous examples, regarding the very first Christian baptism as we read: “persons who received his message (Peter Gospel) were after that baptized and about three thousand were added to their figure that day” (Acts 2: 41).

Infant baptism and child dedication

Infant baptism is not practiced in Pentecostal churches. They consider water baptism the same as an outer look of an inner work of grace following an individual’s option to go after Christ. Infants are unable to come to such a choice because they do not realize their need for salvation. Pentecostal churches believe that an individual should show a clear understanding of the gospel message, as well as a dedicated faith in Christ, prior to being baptized. It has to be noted here that a readiness to comply with Christ’s command to be baptized is a significant pointer of the genuineness of the person’s faith (Grace Community 4). This shows that to be baptized, new converts requisite to come to a point where they truthfully wish to openly confess their born again experience, their dedication to Christ, and their yearning to serve and fellowship with other believers.

The Lord Jesus does indeed say; prohibit young children not to come up unto me. Let them draw closer even as they are learning; let the children become Christians as soon as they have turn out to be able to have personal experience of Christ. If any know the heavy significance of baptism, they will regard with awe reverence its reception more than its delay. Pentecostal churches do not baptize young children. Rather, young children in Pentecostal churches are committed to God and blessed. This is in memory of the Bible stories of young children being brought to Jesus to be blessed. A number of Pentecostal churches believe that the majority of children can be

ready for water baptism between the ages of Ten and Twelve, and that parent or pastors are competent to decide whether a particular child is capable to know the importance of water baptism by discussing it with them.

Mode of water baptism

It may not be possible to decide the issues of the correct form of baptism on the foundation of linguistic data. According to Liddell and Scott,” the predominant meaning of the Greek word baptizo is to dip or to plunge under water” (305 – 6). John Calvin and Martin Luther own up immersion to be the fundamental meaning of the word and the original form of baptism practiced by the early church (Plass 57 – 58).

The scriptural method of baptism is immersion, and is only for persons who have completely repented, having turned away from their sins and love of the world. It has to be managed and organized by a duly certified minister of the Gospel in compliance to the word of God and in the name of Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Relating the early reformed model of baptism to pentecostal model

We explore here, the points of convergence and divergence between the Reformed model and the Pentecostal model of baptism.

The point of convergence between the Reformed model and Pentecostal model of baptism is that both agree that it can happen for a person to be regenerated or saved with no baptism. They as well agree that not everybody who is baptized is surely regenerated. Another point of convergence is that both agree that baptism must be administered by a duly certified minister of the Gospel, lawfully called thereunto.

A major point of departure between the Reformed model and the Pentecostal model of water baptism is that the major Reformed confessions and catechisms stress that baptism is both sacramental and covenantal (Marcel 26). The Reformed point of view of baptism is chiefly sacramental. That is, Reformed theology sees baptism as an unexplained encounter with God that takes place during a rite involving physical elements and exceptional ceremony. And in the course of this encounter, God generously gives blessing to persons who partake through faith and as well judgement to individuals who partake with no faith. Whereas Pentecostal churches see water baptism as an outer sign of a change that has by now occurred. In the view of the Pentecostal, it is the change that is essential; the water baptism is an extra.

Another major point of departure between the Reformed model and the Pentecostal model of water baptism is the Reformed beliefs and teachings of baptism in regard to the persons for baptism. The Reformed position is that baptism has to be put to practical use equally to persons who

declare faith in Christ as well as to their children. As the Westminster confession puts it, “Not solely persons that do really declare faith in and compliance unto Christ, but as well the children of one, or both, professing parents, are to be baptized” (28: 4). Reformed baptize infants to introduce them into covenant with God as well as to incorporate them into the physical church. Furthermore their style of baptism is by pouring or sprinkling. Whereas, the Pentecostal church does not practice infant baptism. Their view is that little children are not clever to make such a choice for the grounds that they do not recognize their need for salvation. In Pentecostal churches, children are committed to God and blessed. Their model of baptism is by immersion.

Conclusion

The Reformed view of baptism is extremely sacramental. That is, Reformed theology sees baptism as a strange encounter with God that takes place in the course of a rite involving physical elements and exceptional ceremony. Furthermore in the course of this sudden meeting, God genially give blessing to individuals who partake by faith and as well judgement to persons who take part with no faith. Whereas Pentecostal churches understand water baptism to be ordinance. That is they see water baptism at the same time as an outer sign of a change that has by now occurred.

In the view of the Pentecostals, it is the transformation that is essential; the water baptism is an extra. They agree that not everyone who is baptized is certainly regenerate. One of the points of their departure is that Pentecostal churches do not baptize infants. Rather, little children in Pentecostal churches are dedicated to God and blessed and their mode of baptism is by immersion whereas Reformed Church baptize little children to admit them into covenant with God as well as to integrate them into the physical church and their mode of baptism is by pouring or sprinkling.

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