

The Augsburg Confession

Article 9

The Sacraments

In the fifth article on the means of grace we confessed: *“To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.”* Then, in articles seven and eight we read: *“The church is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel”* and *“the sacraments are efficacious even if the priests who administer them are wicked men.”* The stage has now been set for the following articles which will deal with the sacraments.

Baptism

The first sacrament addressed in the Augsburg Confession is Baptism. This is a very short but succinct confession which reinforces once more the power of God’s Word in the sacraments He has instituted and given to His church. We confess: *“It is taught among us that Baptism is necessary and that grace is offered through it. Children, too, should be baptized, for in Baptism they are committed to God and become acceptable to Him. On this account the Anabaptists who teach that infant Baptism is not right are rejected.”*

Areas of Disagreement

- What is the meaning or purpose of Baptism?
- Who should be baptized and at what age?
- How should the water of Baptism be applied?

When we discuss the doctrine of Baptism with others we will find that there are three main areas of difference. The first concerns the meaning and purpose of Baptism; the second deals with whether unbaptized people need to be a certain age or attain certain knowledge before they can be baptized; and the third relates to the water of Baptism and how it should be applied to the person being baptized. Let’s take a look at each of these three differences in the light of what God tells us in His Word.

The Meaning and Purpose of Baptism

The first concerns the meaning and purpose of Baptism. This is related to a what a person believes about the power of Baptism. Is Baptism simply *symbolic* of our salvation, or is it the power of God to save? Is Baptism the work of God, or a work of man? If Baptism is only symbolic of our salvation, and something we do as a confession of our faith in God, then Baptism is not really nothing more than a powerless tradition.

But *“Baptism is necessary”* and *“grace is offered through it.”* We teach that Baptism is a “Means of Grace” and does convey spiritual blessings from God.

- Jesus speaks of the necessity of the cleansing power of Baptism: ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).***
- It is more than just a symbol or picture of what God accomplishes through other means. Through Baptism forgiveness of sins is truly given as Peter says: ***“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).***
- Baptism is able to do this for us because it is the work of God, connected to His powerful Word. Paul writes: ***“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”(Ephesians 5:25-27).***

According to Scripture, Baptism is necessary because its purpose is to wash away our sins and give us forgiveness. Baptism is powerful and is able to forgive sins because it is connected to God’s Word.

Infant Baptism

The question of baptizing infants was brought to the fore by the Anabaptists at the time of Luther. They had two objections to infant Baptism. The first was their belief that infants weren't sinful (or weren't accountable for their sin at their young age). But compare what the Bible says about sin and accountability for it: ***“But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Galatians 3:22)***. See also Genesis 8:21; Romans 3:23 and John 3:5-7.

The second objection was based on their belief that infants can't believe. While infants and very young children may not be able to express their faith, Scripture tells us clearly that infants can believe. Jesus says, ***“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:3-6)***. See also 1 John 2:13.

But what does God tell us about who should be baptized, and at what age?

- Jesus tells His disciples to Baptize ***“all nations” (Matthew 28:19)***. The command to Baptize was not limited to any specific groups: it was not just for Jews, but all people (Acts 8:27-40); it was not just for men, but all people (Acts 16:13-15); it was not just for adults but ALL people! Peter says ***“let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39)***.
- The apostle Paul compares Baptism in the New Testament to circumcision in the Old Testament, which was done when the baby was eight days old (Leviticus 12:3). ***“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:11-12)***.
- There are also numerous examples of family baptisms recorded in Scripture (Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33; 1 Corinthians 1:16).

Note: As a result of the inspired record of Scripture concerning baptism, Church History shows that infant baptism was practiced by Christians from the very beginning.

Method of Baptism

The third question: In what way should the water of Baptism be applied? Must a person be immersed under the water, or is pouring or sprinkling water over the person sufficient?

Immersion in Baptism illustrates a beautiful picture of the new life that is given to us through Baptism: *“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).*

While this is a wonderful reminder, there is nothing in Scripture which dictates that a person be baptized by immersion only. And what is the meaning of the Greek words? *Baptizo* (baptize) has the general meaning of “dip, immerse, or submerge” while *baptismos* (baptism) simply means “to wash or purify by means of water.” But the idea of submerge does not fit the context every time the word “baptize” is used (cf. Luke 11:38; Mark 7:4). In the New Testament the word “baptize” simply means to wash with water - and does not always carry the idea of submersion as the method of washing.

A person may be immersed in Baptism, it is not necessary. The method itself is not the important thing; what is important is that water is applied - in any way!

This water of Baptism, connected to the Word of God and applied in any way, is a powerful life-giving and sin-destroying sacrament through which our Savior offers the forgiveness of sins to all people!