

## Orthodoxy: Baptism (2)

New City Catechism Question 45: Is baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?

Answer: No, only the blood of Christ and the renewal of the Holy Spirit can cleanse us from sin.

*“John answered them all, saying, ‘I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’” (Luke 3:16)*

Last week, we defined baptism as the sign and seal of our cleansing of sin. To do this, we looked at this verse: “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience” (1 Peter 3:21).

Peter shows us that baptism must be more than an outward sign of an inward change. If it were only a sign, he would not be able to say “Baptism . . . now saves you.” Baptism is also a seal that acts as a foundation for God’s promise of salvation. This is why Peter can say that “Baptism . . . now saves . . . as an appeal to God for a good conscience.”

By acknowledging baptism as both a sign and a seal, reformed theology differs from baptist theology—except for reformed baptist theology that acknowledges baptism as a sign and seal but only baptizes by immersion after a credible confession of faith. However, this reformed doctrine also takes a firm stance against the Roman Catholic doctrine of baptism which states that baptism with water washes away original sin.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that “The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude” (Roman Catholic Church Catechism, 1257). Their doctrine teaches that salvation is received through the act of washing with water when properly performed. Reformers took great issue with this view of baptism—and for good reason.

Let’s take another look at what Peter says about baptism. “Baptism . . . now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body” (1 Peter 3:21). What is Peter saying here? The physical act of being sprinkled, poured on, or immersed is not what makes baptism the seal of our cleansing of sin.

Under the Old Covenant, circumcision symbolized the forgiveness of sins by the cutting off of unclean flesh. However, this physical act of circumcision did not cause sins to be forgiven. True circumcision came from having your heart circumcised (Deuteronomy 10:16). Many Jews claimed that as children of Abraham, as circumcised members of the covenant, they were in good standing with God. Yet their hearts remained uncircumcised, and they were far from God.

Any doctrine that elevates the physical act of washing with water above the spiritual reality of God’s promises should be rejected. Due to their doctrine of the infusion of grace through the sacraments, Roman Catholics claim the washing of baptism has a salvific effect, and this forces them to make many exceptions for people who were never baptized. The Jews incorrectly believed that their circumcision justified them before God. Today, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that washing with water cleanses from sin, granting salvation.

We can say along with Peter, “Repent and be baptized . . . for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38) without thinking that washing with water forgives sin. Baptism saves us as an appeal to God for a good conscience. In our baptism, we rest on the promise of God’s salvation. We are not given salvation through the washing off of dirt. Rest in the promise of salvation that God sealed in our baptism, not in the washing off of dirt.

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## Praying for Our Missionaries - Brothers, Sisters, and Children in East Africa

We can be praying for Pray for the children and their guardians that their basic necessities would be met. Pray that generous sponsors will be raised up to help provide basic necessities. Pray for pastors and other spiritual leaders in East Africa who are working to rescue lost children and evangelize and disciple the people.

We can be praying for the peoples of the continent of Africa. Pray for: people facing abject poverty; people living amidst political instability and tribal conflict; people facing daily hunger lack of necessities; people facing persecution; the church's strength in spiritual warfare and for the gospel to be heard through her words and seen in her deeds.

### A Spiritual Pride Check Up

In our study of the book of James the spiritual pride that disrupts community is confronted as we see the need for humility expressed in community. Jonathan Edwards, an 18th century New England pastor and theologian, wrote a work, *On Revival*. In his tenure as a pastor he experienced several revivals that brought a great spiritual awakening to New England. However, in his experience of revival he also experienced what brought an end to the fruitfulness of those revivals. Simply stated it was spiritual pride producing ungodly conflict which disrupted the work of God's Spirit in New England. And if he were alive and writing today he would also witness that any movement of the gospel is quickly quelled by spiritual pride producing ungodly conflict.

Edwards helps us to identify six kinds of spiritual pride in ourselves, so that we can repent and draw near to God for a humility to be expressed in community. I want to give you these six (in my own words) so that you can take a look at your own life, and draw near to God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, that he may give us more grace for humility expressed in our community of faith.

Spiritual pride makes you more aware of others faults than you are of your own.  
Humility makes you more aware of your own faults than you are of others.

Spiritual pride leads you to speak of others faults with an attitude of contempt and disdain for the person.  
Humility allows you to care for others in their faults with grief and mercy in a listening and encouraging life.

Spiritual pride leads you to quickly separate from people you've criticized or who have criticized you. We become cold and indifferent.  
Humility sticks with people through difficult relationships.

Spiritual pride makes you dogmatic and sure about every point of belief. A proud person can not distinguish between major and minor points of belief because everything is major.  
Humility is open and able to listen to others points of belief with an ability to change where convinced by truth and wisdom, but able to have differences and remain in community making distinctions knowing what to major on and what not to.

Spiritual pride loves to confront to win or refuses to confront because you don't want criticism.  
Humility confronts necessarily in love and is not afraid of criticism.

Spiritual pride exhibits itself with self pity and is unhappy with life. They are sure how life ought to go, and they are sure they deserve a good life.  
Humble people have a quiet joy as they pursue a life of - 'My life for yours'.

Spiritual pride is a community killer. It can be arrogant and haughty or it can be expressed in inferiority and self pity. It is always my life for me, focused on self. It is the principle of hell, so it speaks and acts to produce a hell on earth. As George McDonald wrote, "The one principle of hell is I am my own." The only place to turn to rid our hearts of this hell is to heaven where God exhibits his love to the proud of heart who draw near to him by faith in Jesus Christ.