**Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion***

Lesson 41: Baptism (Book 4, Chapters 15-16)

**Chapter 15: Baptism**

1. Calvin calls baptism “the sign of initiation by which we are received into the society of the church, in order that, engrafted in Christ, we may be reckoned among God’s children.”
2. As a result, baptism is given first to serve our faith before God and then to serve as our confession before men. Baptism is not merely a means by which "we confess our religion before men, as soldiers bear the insignia of their commander as a mark of their profession" (as our Baptist friends believe). Rather, it actually is God's testimony to us--confirming for us that his promises to cleanse those who trust in him are trustworthy and sure
3. But baptism does not effect what it promises without and apart from faith in the Word of God. This is not magic nor does the water of baptism have power in and of itself. Rather, as we pass through the waters of baptism, we have our eyes drawn from the water to Christ that we might "fasten our minds upon Christ alone.”
4. What baptism signs and seals for us--the cleansing from sin, assurance of pardon, the reality of repentance, mortification and renewal in Christ, union with Christ--is not just for our past sins. Rather, we can return to our baptism again and again trust that its testimony is true for our entire lives: "we must realize that at whatever time we are baptized, we are once for all washed and purchased for our whole life. Therefore, as often as we fall away, we ought to recall the memory of our baptism and fortify our mind with it, that we may always be sure and confident of the forgiveness of sins"
5. This doesn’t give us a license to sin but rather it consoles us that when we are genuinely despairing and troubled in conscience over our sin(s), baptism is a visible witness of the invisible grace of God’s mercy in Christ – the washing away of our sins.
6. “In short baptism reminds and assures us that we receive the remission of all our sins in the blood of Christ.” --J. Mark Beach
7. Another benefit of baptism is mortification of sin in Christ. Romans 6:3-5 – “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”
8. Our lives are hidden in Christ which baptism portrays and so death of old self and life of new self is promised and portrayed to us in baptism.
9. Another benefit of baptism is that we are participants in all the good gifts that Christ bestows. “Lastly, our faith receives from baptism the advantage of its sure testimony to us that we are not only engrafted into the death and life of Christ, but so united to Christ Himself that we become sharers in all His blessings.”
10. Galatians 3:27 – “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”
11. Calvin takes a brief detour to talk about the baptism of John the Baptist. Was his baptism the same that the apostles performed or different? “John and the apostles agreed on one doctrine: both baptized to repentance, both to forgiveness of sins, both into the name of Christ, from whom repentance and forgiveness came.” The only difference is that John’s baptism was in the name of the One who was yet to accomplish salvation on earth, while the apostles baptized in the name of the One who had finished bring salvation on earth.
12. Next, we see that baptism is symbolized in the Old Testament. 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 – “For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, **2**and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,”
13. Israel’s passing through the sea on dry ground was a symbol of passage from death (Egypt, house of bondage) to life (toward Promised Land). So we see mortification and washing/cleansing even in the Old Testament. But notice that almost all who went through the Red Sea died in the wilderness because of their unbelief. The Egyptians tried to pass through and it was judgment to them.
14. Against the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, Calvin argues that baptism does not remove original sin (our depravity inherited from Adam) and it doesn’t restore us to that original righteousness that Adam had before the Fall. Rather, in baptism, believers are assured that the condemnation rightly due to us has been “removed and withdrawn from us since the Lord promises us by this sin that full and complete remission has been made.”
15. We will fight against indwelling sin for the entirety of our lives, but sin no longer holds power or guilt/condemnation over us. “Baptism indeed promises to us the drowning of our Pharaoh [Ex. 14:28] and the mortification of our sin, but not so that it no longer exists or gives us trouble, but only that it may not overcome us.”
16. Finally and secondarily, baptism is a confession on our part before the world. “It is the mark by which we publicly profess that we wished to be reckoned God’s people; by which we testify that we agree in worshiping the same God, in one religion with all Christians; by which finally we openly affirm our faith.” Thus, secondarily, we wear the badge of Christ by means of baptism, identifying ourselves as His.

**Chapter 16: Infant Baptism Best Accords with Christ’s Institution and the Nature of the Sign**

1. Calvin argues that baptism and circumcision contain the same promises. Both promise “God’s fatherly favor, forgiveness of sins, and of eternal life.” The dissimilarity only lies in the outward manifestation. In other words, the promises of God are the same in both sacraments and only the way it is administered is different. This corresponds to the people of God. There’s one people of God administered in the OT as the nation of Israel and administered in the NT as the Church. The initiation into the OT administration of the people of God was circumcision. The initiation into the NT administration of the people of God is baptism.
2. God doesn’t make empty promises or mock us with “mere trickery” as if what is symbolized is without foundation in reality. “If the covenant remains firm and steadfast, it applies no less today to the children of Christians than under the Old Testament it pertained to the infants of Jews.” The underlying basis of this is the covenant of grace uniting both Old Testament and New Testament. If you don’t have the covenant of grace concept down, then you won’t see these correspondences. This is why dispensationalists which see disunity between the Old and New Testaments are not paedobaptists.
3. 1 Corinthians 7:14 – “For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his [believing] wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her [believing] husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.” There’s a legal holiness that comes by being associated with the people of God. It’s not salvific holiness, but there’s still the element of being “set apart.” Notice how this matches with Ezra 9:2 whose context is intermarriage: “For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands.”
4. Calvin argues based on Matthew 19:13-15 that if the reality of the kingdom of heaven belongs to infants, why should the sign of that kingdom be denied them? "If it is right for children to be brought to Christ, why not also to be received into baptism, the symbol of our communion and fellowship with Christ? If the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them, why is the sign denied which, so to speak, opens to them a door into the church, that, adopted into it, they may be enrolled among the heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven?"
5. But what about the fact that no infant baptism is mentioned in the NT? Calvin points to the “household” baptisms that we see in Acts and says there’s no good reason to rashly conclude that infants were excluded. If we were to use that same argument, then we would have to conclude that women are forbidden from the Lord’s Table since we do not read anywhere in the NT that they were admitted.
6. “In truth, any attack on the ‘unfitness’ of infants receiving baptism as the sign and seal of the covenant is equally an attack upon circumcision. The latter was more than a physical sign of earthly, physical enjoyment in Canaan; it's primary import was union and communion with Jesus Christ and its equation with baptism in Colossians 2:11-12 proves as much. In both Testaments, those who receive the covenant sign are called ‘children of Abraham.’” –Derek Thomas
7. What are the benefits of infant baptism? “God’s boundless generosity, in showing itself there, first gives men ample occasion to proclaim His glory, then floods godly hearts with uncommon happiness, which quickens men to a deeper love of their kind Father, as they see His concern on their behalf for their posterity.”
8. Children also receive benefit: “being engrafted into the body of the church, they are somewhat more commended to the other members. Then, when they have grown up, they are greatly spurred to an earnest zeal for worshiping God, by whom they were received as children through a solemn symbol of adoption before they were old enough to recognize him as Father.” Children needs the same aids to strengthen faith as adults do. Both adult and children alike need the symbols God offers us to move them to “surer confidence” in His promises.
9. Colossians 2:11-12 – “In Him [Jesus] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, **12**having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”
10. “What do these words mean, except that the fulfillment and truth of baptism are also the truth and fulfillment of circumcision, since they signify one and the same thing?”
11. Think about this: “Christ was sanctified from earliest infancy in order that He might sanctify in Himself His elect from every age without distinction.” Being an infant does not preclude one from sanctification as seen with the prophet Jeremiah and John the Baptist.
12. How wonderful it is to contemplate that God is the heavenly Father of our children and they are under His care. “Let us therefore offer our infants to Him, for He gives them a place among those of His family and household, that is, the members of the Church.”