

# The washing of regeneration

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Prof J.Douglas Macmillan

- [ 0 : 00 ]     So this morning, will you come with me to Titus, the Abyssal of Paul to Titus, the third chapter. And there is it again, verse 4.
- But after that the kindness and love of God and Savior toward man appears, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.
- And let us look especially at the words that picture how God saved sinners in Christ, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.
- Mercy is the foundation of all God's saving work.
- And the manner in which he saved sinners is plainly declared for us. He saved us, says the Apostle to Titus, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.
- [ 1 : 24 ]     This morning has already been made clear. We are involved in administering the sacrament of baptism.
- baptism in the standards of our church, which bring together the teaching of the scriptures about baptism.
- Baptism is spoken of as being two things, a sign and a seal. A sign of God's great covenant of grace and mercy.
- And a seal, an outward symbol and seal of that covenant mercy. That is true of all sacraments.
- The sacrament of baptism and of the Lord's Supper. The sacrament of baptism and of the Holy Spirit.
- [ 2 : 54 ]     A work of the Holy Spirit. Last Sabbath evening we were thinking of the testimony of John the Baptist to Jesus of Nazareth.
- And part of that testimony we put across in this striking way. There standeth one amongst you whom ye know not, he it is who shall baptize you.
- What did the baptism mean? By the baptism with which Jesus would baptize men.
- He shall baptize you, he said, not with water but with the Holy Ghost. This we believe is what Paul has in view when he talks of the spiritual work of renewing and salvation in the words of our text.
- The washing of regeneration. Not merely the washing of regeneration. Not merely the washing of water but the washing of regeneration. And the renewing of the Holy Ghost.
- [ 4 : 03 ]     The baptism of the Holy Spirit is an inward spiritual and saving work. Baptism with water is merely an outward signification.
- A sign of that inward deeper spiritual and saving work. Then he emphasized that baptism, water baptism, although it is a sacrament, is not a saving sacrament.
- It does not mean that when a person, an adult or a child is baptized, that that adult or child is thereby automatically regenerated.

No, we do not teach because we do not believe baptismal regeneration. Baptism does not make a Christian in the sense of one who is a true believer in Christ.

Baptism does not. Baptism does admit into the membership of the visible church. And it brings within the reach of the baptized all the privileges and blessings and promises.

[ 5 : 34 ] Let me say covenant promises. The visible outward church of Christ.

There are people here who are not members in full communion, as we say. They have never openly ratified and testified what was signed to them in baptism.

They have never done that because the baptism has never become a real work of conversion, of regeneration, of renewal, and of saving faith in Christ.

In other words, the things which were signified outwardly have never yet for them been fulfilled in reality. Now, although they are not members in full communion, they are members of the visible church by baptism.

They have never ratified that membership. Many of them deny it explicitly.

[ 6 : 49 ] In fact, to refuse to repent and to believe in Christ and to become a member in full communion may not consciously be, of course, but it is, in essence, a denial of the membership which is yours by baptism.

Now, before looking very specifically at the words of our text, I want to read to you what our church believes about baptism.

And to read to you from what are parts of what we call her authorized standards. First of all, from the Shorter Catechism.

What does the Shorter Catechism, which gathers up the teaching of Scripture about various doctrines, what does the Shorter Catechism have to say about baptism?

And our church adheres to the doctrinal position of the Shorter Catechism. It says that baptism is a sacrament.

[ 8 : 09 ] That's the first thing. The Lord's Supper is also a sacrament. We all know that. And we hold it in very high esteem. And rightly so.

But let me emphasize that baptism is also a sacrament. And should be held in equally high esteem with the Lord's Supper. But you ask, what is a sacrament?

And the Shorter Catechism answers very simply and very beautifully, a sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein by sensible, that is, outward sensible, by sensible signs, types, and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.

They are represented to believers. They are outwardly and visibly seen. They are representations. The sacrament of the inward spiritual realities, the benefits of the new covenant.

And they are sealed to them. God seals these benefits towards you. What you do with them, of course, will be a different matter. But God seals them to you in covenant promise.

[ 9 : 36 ] And they are applied to believers. Those who by faith receive them. They are applied by God.

Now that is what a sacrament is. According to the Shorter Catechism. What is the sacrament of baptism? What is baptism? Baptism is a sacrament wherein the washing with water, note that the washing with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost does signify and seal our engrafting into Christ.

Not merely our burial and rising with him in his death and resurrection, but our engrafting into his glorious passion and his glorious worth.

Our engrafting into Christ in the totality of his worth. And partaking of the benefits, our partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace.

And note this how it closes, our engagement to be the Lord. No old-fashioned way of putting it, but still understandable by us all and very beautiful.

[ 11 : 01 ] Our engagement to be the Lord. Let me ask you, my friends, and I should suppose that not one of you here is unbaptized.

There may be one or two, I don't know. But this is what was signified and sealed for you and your baptism.

There was an engagement for you to be the Lord. Those of you who were baptized in childhood, that engagement was taken by your parents.

They brought you to the Lord's house and they asked God to work in you and to make you his own. Let me ask you if your life is fulfilling or denying that engagement.

Now that's the shorter catechism. And the shorter catechism, we're told, is for those of weaker minds. And we've got something else. We've got the larger catechism, which I suppose, although it's not stated, I suppose, is for those of stronger minds and clearer understanding.

[ 12 : 18 ] And I want you to be patient while I read you what the larger catechism has to say about baptism. I'm saying this, I'm reading this because I believe there is a great deal of confusion in people's minds nowadays as to what baptism is and what it is about.

And there is very little clear biblical teaching about baptism. Therefore, baptism is neglected not only by parents but by all of us as individuals.

What is baptism? asks the larger catechism and it goes on to answer, baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament wherein Christ has ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost to be a sign and seal of engrafting into himself.

That, in essence, is the same as the shorter catechism. But now the larger catechism expands this all. What is it to be engrafted into Christ?

It is to have remission of sins by his blood. This was what John the Baptist preached in the desert according to Mark 1 and 4.

[ 13 : 52 ] He preached the baptism of repentance and the remission of sins. The remission of sins by Christ's blood, regeneration by his spirit.

It speaks of adoption into the family of God and resurrection unto everlasting life. By it, the pasties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church and enter into an open and professed engagement to be holy, to be holy and only the Lord.

That is what baptism is. That is what you are doing when you baptized your child. That is what was done by your parents in your baptism.

They were entering into an open and professed engagement to be holy and only the Lord.

Unto whom is baptism to be administered? The larger catechism answers it in this way, first of all negatively and then positively.

[ 15 : 12 ] Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church. And so strangers from the covenant of promise till they profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him.

Anyone who has not been brought into the visible church in childhood and taught the gospel from their youth and they are not to have baptism.

If they have been out with the church, they are not to have baptism until they have been taught and until the teaching has flowed into faith, regeneration, conversion, real Christian experience.

That's the position the Baptists have too and we wholly agree with it. We would not dream of baptizing an adult who would not profess conversion. But we do not stop shortly because the answer goes on to say this, but infants descended from parents either both or but one of them professing faith in Christ and obedience to him are in that respect within the covenant and to be baptized.

Not only believers but the children of believers are to be baptized because if they are in the visible church then they have been brought within the promises of the covenant of grace and the privileges of the covenant of grace.

[ 17 : 00 ] One further question and answer. How is our baptism to be improved by us? Or in other words, what is our responsibility because we have been baptized?

The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism is to be performed by us all our life long.

Especially in the time of temptation and when we are present at the administration of the sacrament to others. By serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it and of the ends that is the purposes and of the ends of which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed by it and our solemn vowed made in it.

By being humbled for our sinful defilement our falling short of and walking continually to the grace of baptism and our engagement by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ into whom we are baptized for the mortifying of sins and quickening of grace and by endeavouring to live by faith to have our conversation that is our manner of life in holiness and righteousness as those that have therein given up their names to Christ and to walk in brotherly love as being baptized by the same spirit into one body.

These are just the main thrust of the teaching about baptism that our church holds under dear tools.

[ 19 : 28 ] May we all today itself be given grace to improve to use that good old word to improve our baptism to reflect on the things that it means and that brings me to our text.

We are saved by the washing of regeneration and we are saved from sin and lostness of our fearful kind.

Paul has itemized this some of the things from which he has been saved in verse 3 in his testimony to Titus.

He includes Titus in it. For we ourselves we said we ourselves also were sometimes foolish disobedient deceived serving diverse lust and pleasures living in malice and envy hateful and hating one another for an unabhorrent list of evil and yet these are only a few of the evils that dwell in the human heart because of sin that Paul doesn't stop from talking about the awful state in which man is.

He goes on to talk of the kindness and love of God our Saviour appearing. The kind, the tender mystery of God has appeared in Christ and in what Christ has done.

[ 21 : 12 ] But as I was saying last week what Christ has done for us in his death and the cross in itself will not be of any benefit to us without something else.

And that something else is the work of the Holy Spirit within us. For we have been saved, he says here, by the watching of regeneration.

Now, he is facing salvation here, not to the cross and to the death of Christ, but to the faith which plays hold of these things.

He is facing it to a work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man. The gospel teaches us not merely about Christ's work for us, but about the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

And that is vitally important. we need that work just as urgently and just as desperately as we need the work of Christ's Father.

[ 22 : 23 ] Now, washing. Water is used in baptism, and I have no doubt that this word that is used here in connection with spiritual regeneration has the sword of baptism in it.

water. Water was used as a symbol of cleansing right down to the Old Testament era. People were sprinkled with water as an indication or an outward sign of their being sanctified and separated to the service of God.

The utensils in the temple, the holy vessels as were called. Not that they were holy morally, but that they were vessels specially made and specially set aside for the use of the service of God.

They were sanctified or separated to that service. And these vessels were separated to God again by sprinkling, by the symbolic use of water, the element of cleansing in life.

Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the deep spiritual thing that had to be done in men before they could enter the kingdom of God. He used that phrase which have stumbled so many, which speaks of the mystery of Anubis.

[ 23 : 57 ] He said, except a man be born again, they cannot see the kingdom of God. then he went on to say when Nicodemus said, but how can a man be born again when he's old?

Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born the second time? How utterly and completely he misunderstood the past of the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

And Jesus said, except a man be born of water, and of the Holy Spirit. Now, Jesus used waterly wine.

I think also with reference to baptism and to special significance of the cleansing use of water in the Old Testament dispensation.

Nicodemus was a man taught in the law. He was one of the rulers of Israel. And he knew what water signified. It signified cleansing and separating unto God.

[ 25 : 17 ] And so Jesus takes a hold of his knowledge and he says, no, no, Nicodemus, not of the flesh, not a rebirth of the flesh, but a rebirth of the Spirit except a man be born of water, of that which will sanctify and cleanse and separate into God, of water and of the Holy Ghost.

He cannot enter the kingdom of God. Now, you know that teaching as well as I do in John chapter 3. But Jesus identifying regeneration, the work that the Holy Spirit must do in the hearts of man, with the thought of cleansing and washing symbolized in the holy rites of the Old Testament and in the baptism of the New.

And then you see regeneration carries with it. the thought of the forgiveness of sins. The moment a person is regenerated, he is regenerated in union with Christ.

And no one can be in union with Christ without having the forgiveness of sins. And forgiveness is spoken of in many places as a cleansing from sin.

Let me just itemize one place. Revelation chapter 1 and verse 5. unto him that loved us as the apostle John and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

[ 27 : 04 ] And to him who loved us and washed us just a little ago in January, we had a communion service here and the text was from Ephesians 6, 25 to 27.

Remember the words of verse 26 there, verse 25 and 26, Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it. Why?

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the one.

Now of course, that is symbolical language, the washing of water by the one. The cleansing of the Holy Spirit for taking away sin by the Holy Spirit applying the word of God to us.

Now again you see we are seeing that baptism, the outward washing and cleansing of the water of baptism is very closely related in scripture to an inward unspiritual cleansing.

[ 28 : 17 ] The outward is not the real thing, let me emphasize that. The outward is not the real concrete spiritual reality. It is a sign of the inward spiritual reality.

The washing with water in baptism speaks of the washing of regeneration, that by which we are saved. We are not saved by the washing of baptism, but we are saved by that which is represented and signed and sealed to us in the washing of baptism, the washing of regeneration.

cleansing is this substrate or there. And then I think there is a second thought.

Cleansing and consultation, the separating of something to God was implied in the washing.

And the very fact that that was applied to inanimate things like even the chairs and the forums and the temple and the synagogue as well as the special vessels that were used there in the service of God.

[ 29 : 48 ] That teaches us this that things as well as lessons were separated, consecrated to God.

This consecration can be there apart or first of all as an outward sign of something inward again.

An outward sign. And let me say that that's what it is in the baptism of our children. We are separating them to God in the supplement of baptism.

We are devoting them to God and to God's service. We are covenanting them to God. that's what every parent does when he or she brings their children to the church to have the baptism of baptism administered to them.

they are devoting consecrating separating their children to God and to Christ and to Christ's service.

[ 31 : 08 ] Now they're doing that in an outward way. They're commanded to do it and they are doing it because God not only asks them to do it but he makes promises that he promises to their obedience to his own commands because he promises that in his own time if we are faithful to the vows we take when we do that in his own time he will take these children and he will work the real sanctification in them he will separate them to himself one of the things that our standards say and that the old divines in Scotland used to emphasize very strongly was this that the spiritual reality of regeneration is not tied although it is linked to it is not tied to the moment of the administration of baptism it is linked to baptism it is spoken of by baptism but it is not linked to the moment of the administration of baptism it could be

God could regenerate our children at the very same time as we were baptized we would say that he would but that this consecration and this separation and this outward thing can be widely separated from the actual reality it speaks of was believed by our forefathers is taught by the scriptures and is believed by us still is that really taught in the scriptures let me just take one place from the scriptures or two places first of all 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 14 speaks of children being already the children of believers of even one believing people being having a special standing in the sight of

God then are your children holy they are sanctified they are separated to God but they are not that in a moral sense but in a legal covenantal standing before God and probably Paul means that they are separated and sanctified by the baptism which they are taught I quite honestly don't know how Baptist exegetes and give an exposition of that particular text and his teachings but I can see very clearly how Peter Baptist can do children children children already have the children of even one believing parents already have a special standing with God that standing is acknowledged by the church in their baptism they are given a place in the visible church they have every right to it they have been born in the sovereign covenant of God they have been born into those who are members of the visible church let me take you to another text

Galatians chapter 1 and in verse 15 Paul is talking about what God has done for him making him a preacher and saving him and he says when it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace you see there are two things there there is first of all a separating of the apostle Paul by the sovereign power of God what kind of separation separating was that it was a separating unto himself of this kind from his mother's womb and for many years the life of Paul would seem to deny that because the separating that God did the separating that was in the purpose of God from the womb for Paul was not realized outwardly until his calling and his calling took place in his mature years he was probably a man of over 30 before he was called and converted to kind

I am using that text just to show you that God in his sovereign purpose separates his people even from the womb we are recognizing that great fact in the baptism of our children and we are doing it because we believe that God commands us to do it the washing of regeneration symbolized and I emphasize symbolized symbolized and signed and sealed to land in an outward way baptism because it is a sacrament it is a means of grace it ushers everyone who receives it into a place where they can expect

[ 37 : 18 ] God to bless it is not just an empty right although it is a outward symbolism and all that we say it is not merely an empty right it is a means of grace and in the case of the baptism of children it should be a means of grace to the parents it should make them examine their own hearts on their own life on their own faith it should be a means of grace to the witnessing church it should make us all renew the vows that were taken for us in baptism and it should be we believe to a real means of grace to the children to whom it is administered a means of grace which God will use effectively to their salvation in his own time and in his own name to enter and through their heart and believe in it is the guys are going to to make hear the thing