Westminster Confession of Faith
Chapter 28: Baptism

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant (GENESIS 17:7).
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Personal Reflections:
The efficacy of baptism, when it is efficacious, is not tied to the moment of baptism, but it is conferred to the elect at the appointed time (John Gerstner, Douglas Kelly, and Philip Rollinson).

Jacob and Esau: both were circumcised, yet Esau was never united to Christ and Jacob was unconverted until much later in life (Gen 32:24-28)

Though baptism does not save, grace is conferred to those (adults and infants) who receive it.

A true grace that will, Lord willing, result in salvation.

A person is still saved only by grace, through faith, at God’s appointed time.

VII. The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered unto any person.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:4-6).

Baptism signifies a once for all event, and thus should not be repeated.

A non-Trinitarian baptism, performed outside the true church by an unlawful minister, is not a valid baptism. A person “baptized” in such a way has not been truly baptized, and should arrange to be baptized properly. This is not a second baptism, as the first was invalid.

VIII. How should God’s people honor the sacrament of baptism?

God’s people should celebrate their baptism.

Believers should praise God for the covenant of grace, their union with Christ, regeneration, and cleansing from sin.

Believing parents should look to God with hopeful expectation regarding the salvation of their children, should raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and pray fervently for the consummation of their union with Christ.

God’s people should improve their baptism (WLC 167).

By experiencing its meaning and working out its implications
By dying to sin and living unto Christ
By attending the sacrament
By being more fully united to Christ
By loving others as Christ loves us

I. Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ’s own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world.

A) A sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Christ:

Baptism, as defined by Scripture, is a sacrament (WCF 27) instituted by Christ (Matt 28:19) that together with the preaching of the Word and the Lord’s Supper, form the ordinances in which the Covenant of Grace is administered in the New Testament dispensation (WCF 7).

Covenant of grace: the covenant made with man after the failed Covenant of Works made with Adam (WCF 7.2-3)
1. One covenant of grace in various administrations and two dispensations
2. OT dispensation: administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances...all foresignifying Christ to come (WCF 7.5)
3. NT dispensation: administered by the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (WCF 7.6)

B) Admission into the visible Church:

What is the visible Church?
The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children (WCF 25.2).

Into what 2 classes are members of the visible Church divided?
1. Those who make a profession of faith in Christ
2. The children of one or both believing parents (I Cor 7:14)

How is membership in the visible Church possessed?
1. Adults: by profession of faith
2. Infants: by nature of the enduring covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:7 – membership by birth)
   The children of one or both Christian parents do not possess the full privileges of membership (the Lord’s Supper) until a profession of faith is made.

Does membership in the visible Church guarantee salvation?
1. No. It is only through faith in Christ that a person is saved (Eph 2:8-9).
2. The visible Church consists of wheat and tares (Matt 13:24-30).
3. The invisible Church consists of the full number of those truly united to Christ (WCF 25.1).
What is the connection between baptism and church membership?
1. Baptism publicly signifies that those baptized (whether adults or infants) are members of the visible Church.
2. Baptism also indicates membership in a particular body of the visible Church.

Is Baptism subsequent to membership in the visible Church?
Yes. Baptism signifies (declares) that professing believers and their children are members of the visible Church.
In both cases, baptism signifies what is already possessed.

How does Baptism signify and seal membership in the visible Church?
1. Baptism is the sign and seal of union with Christ.
2. Union with X includes union with the body of which X is the Head.
3. Christ is the Head of the Church (Eph 5:23-30).

- Baptism is the sign and seal of membership in the visible Church (I Cor 12:13).

C) A sign and seal:
Sign: signifies or declares something else (not itself)
A sign is not the thing signified (Baptism is not regeneration)
Seal: authenticates or confirms that to which it is affixed
Illustration: a diploma and its seal (one signifies while the other authorizes)

How does baptism serve as both a sign and seal?
1. Baptism must be understood as a manifold concept and viewed in its entirety, rather than focusing upon individual parts.
   - Baptism has in view the great work of divine, covenantal grace.
   - Essentially Baptism signifies union with Christ, and consequently it signifies, in a general way, all the benefits which Christ brings to His people (Johannes Vos).
2. Sign: signifies our union with Christ (declaration)
3. Seal: God’s stamp of approval on Baptism as a sign (authority)

Of what is Baptism the sign and seal?
1. The covenant of grace:
   - Broadly: the covenant of grace or the plan of redemption
   - Specifically: union, regeneration, cleansing, and obedience
2. Ingraffting into Christ:
   - To be truly united (as a branch) to the person and work of Christ (the Vine), such that we become partakers of the spiritual life and power of Christ (John 15:5; Rom 6:5; Gal 3:27).
   - Our inauguration into Christ’s possession
     - Adults: a realized union
     - Infants: an expectant union (engagement)
   - From union with Christ flow the other benefits signified

2. The evidence for household baptisms:
   Acts 10:47-48 - Cornelius
   Acts 16:15 - Lydia
   Acts 16:30-31 – the Philippian jailer
   I Cor 1:16 – Stephanas

When we read the New Testament accounts of baptism, every person identified as having a household present at his or her conversion also had the entire household baptized. These accounts include every baptism of persons described in detail after the appointment of Christ’s apostles (including Paul) was complete (Chapell).

Conclusion: infant baptism is in keeping with Scripture, the practice of the New Testament church, and the evangelical church throughout the ages.

V. Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved, without it; or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.

A person may be lost with baptism and another saved without it
Luke 23:42-43 – though saved, the thief was never baptized
Acts 8:13 – though baptized, Simon remained “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity (8:23; cf. Esau who was circumcised and yet unsaved Rom 9:11-13)

As a sacrament ordained by Christ, it is “a great sin” to neglect it.
Exodus 4:24-26 – God’s anger was stirred by Moses’ neglect of circumcision
Luke 7:30 – the Pharisees spurned John’s baptism and were thus condemned

1. Evangelical necessity (because it is commanded it must be obeyed) versus absolute necessity (a person cannot be saved without it)
2. Allowance is made in those cases where God’s providence prevents a person from being baptized (Luke 23:39-43).
3. The sin is a wanton neglect and disregard for the Lord’s ordinance. God’s children should desire to uphold the ordinance of baptism.

VI. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, not withstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in His appointed time.
3. Circumcision as a sign and seal:
   A) Sign: circumcision signified the need to be united to Christ by faith
   B) Seal: God’s promise to honor the covenant blessings (salvation) when the conditions of the covenant (faith) were met.

   Faith does not cause, but claims the covenant blessings.

   Circumcision was a visible pledge that covenant promises would apply when the covenant conditions were met. The sign did not have to be tied to the moment of belief (Bryan Chapell).

In the New Testament, the sign of the covenant changes.

1. Why does the sign change?
2. God’s command: Col 2:11-12; Matt 28:19
3. Christ’s work:
   A) Circumcision prefigured the need for blood
   B) Christ’s blood has been shed once for all (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11; Heb 9:14)
   C) The blood is no longer necessary and so the emphasis is on its effect – cleansing from sin

While the sign changes, the principles of the covenant remain in effect.

1. Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself (Acts 2:38-39).

   A) The promises continue to be extended through families.
   The representative principle continues (Acts 16:30-31)
   B) God continues to honor those who turn to Him in faith
   2. Without an express mandate, New Testament believers would expect the sign to apply to themselves and their children.

   A) An argument from silence, but the silence speaks volumes!

Scriptural evidence for the practice of infant baptism:

1. The absence of a contrary command to overturn two-thousand years of covenant history

3. Regeneration:
   The new birth (John 3:3)
   In Baptism, like regeneration, the recipient is wholly passive
   Baptism is not regeneration
   Titus 3:5 – the washing of regeneration
   We are not regenerated by washing (Baptism), but we are washed (spiritually cleansed) by regeneration (the new birth) (Vos).

4. Remission of sins:
   Baptism signifies the washing away of sin by the blood of Christ.

5. Walking in newness of life:
   Baptism signifies the requirement of obedience (Rom 4:12).

NOTE: It must be remembered that Baptism signifies the gospel (its verbal content in nonverbal form), not our response to the gospel.

Some object to infant Baptism on the ground that Baptism signifies a response to the gospel.

To be continued until the end of the world:
The Great Commission (in which Baptism is commanded) is in effect until Christ’s return.

II. The outward element to be used in this 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.

1. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water:
   Oil is not to be used

2. The party is to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost:

   Biblical baptism is Trinitarian (not in the name of the Son only)

   Reasons:
   -Commanded by Christ (Matt 28:19)
   -We are baptized into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – into a relationship with the Triune God
   -OT / NT continuity:
     Circumcision represented union with Yahweh (Gen 17:7; Ex 6:7)
     A union with the distinctive persons of the Godhead

3. By a minister of the gospel:
The Apostle’s were the appointed ministers of the sacraments
Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants [ministers] of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (I Cor 4:1).
III. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.

Historically there have been three modes of Baptism:

1. **Effusion**: symbolizes the pouring out of the Spirit (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5; 2:17-18; Titus 3:5-6)

2. **Immersion**: symbolizes union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom 6:1-12; Col 2:11-12)

Some denominations, insisting that *baptizo* means “to immerse,” do not believe that there is any real baptism without immersion, and thus require it.

Response:

- The meaning of *baptizo*: the term can be applied to an activity that involves immersion, but the term itself is best associated with “to wash.”

- Scripture texts in which *baptizo* cannot mean “to immerse”:
  - I Cor 10:2 – the Israelites were not immersed in the cloud and sea, but passed through on dry ground
  - Acts 1:5 – the disciples were not immersed in the Holy Spirit, He was poured out upon them
  - Mark 7:4 – the tables were not immersed
  - To insist on immersion is to exalt the mode over the sacrament.
  - The emphasis in baptism is union with Christ!

3. **Sprinkling**: symbolizes cleansing from sin (Ex 24:6-8; Ezk 36:25-27; I Cor 6:11; Heb 9:10, 13, 19, 22; I Peter 3:21)

There is no definitive evidence for the mode employed in the NT.

The confession seems to favor sprinkling or effusion, but does not forbid immersion.

**Christ Church:**

*Chapter 28 shall be interpreted in a light most favorable to practicing baptism via sprinkling, effusion, and immersion* (Constitution, Art. IV. Doctrine).

IV. Not only those that do actually profess faith in the obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.

Covenant continuity:

The blessings of salvation in the Old and New Testaments are linked to the covenant made with Abraham (the covenant of grace).

1. *I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant* (Gen 17:7).

2. The covenant with Abraham is still in effect.
   - *Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham* (Gal 3:7).
   - *The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you”* (Gal 3:8; cf. Gen 12:3).
   - ...*in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles* (Gal 3:14)
   - *The gospel and its blessings are tied to the covenant.*

Having established the covenant with Abraham, God provided a sign.

1. *You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you* (Gen 17:11).

2. To mark those who were recipients of the promise (consecration)

3. To signify His pledge to provide for those who respond in faith

   **NOTE:** The sign is subsequent to the covenant and is neither a precondition of the covenant or a means of manufacturing it.

   Faith remains the sole condition of realizing the benefits of the covenant (Gen 15:6; 17:1-7).

4. To demonstrate the need to remove uncleanness, and to foreshadow the need for Christ’s cleansing blood (Lev 20:7-8; Titus 3:5; Gen 3:21; Heb 9:22)

The sign of circumcision was for all in Abraham’s house, including infants (Gen 17:10-13).

1. Why did Abraham consecrate his entire house?

2. The representative principle:

   - The head of the household represents the family to God, and thus commits them to God and His worship.
   - This principle of headship continues in the NT:
     - Rom 5:12-21; Eph 5:25-27; Heb 11:7
     - Applied specifically to children:
       - *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy* (I Cor 7:14).

   The child is covenantally represented, not saved by the parent (salvation is through faith alone).