

EPC Book of Order – Baptism

3-2 The Sacrament of Baptism

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ. By the act of Baptism, a person becomes a part of the Visible Church, for it is a sign and a seal of the Covenant of Grace for believers and their children. As a sign it proclaims God's forgiveness and our redemption in Jesus Christ. As a seal, God marks us as adopted children of our heavenly Father. It indicates our engrafting into Christ, our rebirth, the remission of sins, and our ability by the power of the Spirit to walk in newness of life. This sacrament is to be continued by God's people until the end of the world.

A. Candidates for Baptism: Those eligible to receive this sacrament are those who have professed their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and have promised to be obedient to Him, along with the infants of one or both believing parents. Also, those who have legal responsibility for an infant have the right to present the child for Baptism.

B. Method of Baptism: In the sacrament of Baptism, water is to be used. Immersion or dipping the person into the water is not essential and Baptism is ordinarily administered by pouring or sprinkling.

C. Effectiveness of Baptism: God's grace and salvation are not inseparably connected to this sacrament. Some who are baptized will be lost and some not baptized will be saved. Nevertheless, it is a great sin to make light of or to neglect this sacrament. A great benefit is lost when Baptism is neglected, for God promises to bless His people through this sacrament. The effectiveness of Baptism is not tied to the moment it is administered, yet God who keeps His promises confers His grace according to His own will and in His appointed time.

D. Administration of Baptism: The grace received through Baptism does not come from the tradition or form of administration, and since it is not dependent upon the devoutness or the intention of the person administering it, Baptism should be administered only once.

E. Time and Place of Administration:

1. Since Baptism is the act by which a person is solemnly admitted into the visible Church, the regular administration of the sacrament should ordinarily be in the presence of the family of believers. At that time, the benefits and promises should be set forth. The people should be reminded of Baptism as a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace, of our engrafting into Christ, and of the need to yield to God through Jesus Christ to walk in newness of life.
2. However, if circumstances justify administering the sacrament at a time and place other than public worship, the Teaching Elder may judge. In any event, at least one Ruling Elder should be present to represent the congregation and to assume on behalf of the congregation the commitment required by that

congregation in the baptismal vows. No such private administration should convey the impression of baptismal regeneration or its necessity for salvation, and those present are to be reminded that Baptism is not inseparably connected with God's grace and salvation.

3. Ordinarily the Session shall authorize and approve Baptisms. In exceptional cases, when it is not possible to convene the Session for approval, a Pastor of the church may perform the Baptism without approval of the Session. If at all possible, a Ruling Elder should be present. That Pastor shall report the Baptism to the Session.
4. All Baptisms shall be recorded in the permanent record of the Session.

F. Baptism for Adults: When a person who was not baptized as an infant, desires to profess faith in Christ and be engrafted into His Body, being admitted into the visible Church, the sacrament of Baptism shall be received.

1. **Proper Instruction:** Those persons desiring to be baptized shall receive necessary instruction concerning the meaning of the sacrament, the obligations of Church membership, the need to live by faith, to walk in holiness and righteousness, and to act in brotherly love toward those who have been baptized by the same Spirit into the same Body. The Session shall authorize the Baptism of the petitioner only when it is fully satisfied as to that person's full intention to be obedient to Christ and a profession of faith has been made.
2. **Minister's Duty:** The Minister shall remind those present of the meaning of the sacrament as a sign and seal of engrafting, remission of sin, regeneration by the Spirit, adoption, and resurrection to everlasting life. All should be reminded to be thankful for their own Baptism with its benefits and privileges, to be humble because of sin and walking contrary to the grace given us, and to draw strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we were baptized.
3. **Recipient's Duty:** Prior to Baptism, the recipient shall make affirmative response in professing faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, affirming intention to walk in newness of life as one of those who have given their names to Christ. The recipient shall further affirm faithfulness and support of the Church and of the local church.
4. **Congregation's Role:** In receiving a person into its fellowship and in acknowledging that person to be a part of the covenant community, the congregation assumes responsibilities toward that person. As Christ commanded His Church to baptize and teach, the congregation shall affirm its duty and commitment to the recipient publicly. The following or like question shall be proposed to the congregation by the Minister: "Do you, the members of this congregation, and in the name of the visible Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, take responsibility for the continued Christian nurture of _____,

promising to set a godly example by your own life, and to pray for ____ in this new life of faith?"

5. **The Administration of the Sacrament:** After asking God's blessings to attend the sacrament, the Minister shall then administer Baptism with water, either by pouring, sprinkling, or immersion and without other ceremony. The Minister shall use the following or like words: "____+++, on your profession of faith and promise of obedience to Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The sacrament is to be concluded by a prayer.

G. Baptism for children:

1. **Role of the Parents:** One or both believing parents, or a believer(s) exercising the authority of a parent(s), are encouraged to present their children, prior to the time when children are able to make their own profession of faith, for the Sacrament of Baptism, which should not be unnecessarily delayed.²⁸⁸ Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace and in part confirm our position with and in Christ and demonstrate to the world the visible difference between it and those who belong to the Church.
2. **Role of the Session:**
 - a. It is the duty of the Session and Teaching Elders to offer instruction to the parents concerning the nature and meaning of the sacrament, the obligations assumed, and the role the congregation plays with the parents in the spiritual nurture and growth of the child.
 - b. Ordinarily the Session shall authorize and approve the Baptism of infants and children of active members of the local church, except in such cases as the Minister may deem inexpedient. In that case the Minister shall report the Baptism to the Session. All Baptisms shall be recorded in the permanent record of the Session and the child's name inscribed on the baptized roll.
 - c. The Session may authorize those on the inactive roll to present children for Baptism. It may also require evidence of the intent of the petitioner(s) to follow the vows to be taken by meeting the requirements for restoration to the active roll.
 - d. The Session may grant permission to believers who are not members to present infants for Baptism, provided such persons are members in good standing in some true branch of the visible Church. In such cases, the Church Session shall be careful to notify the governing body of the particular church in which those believers hold membership, of the Baptism of the infant.
 - e. It is the continuing obligation of the Session to watch over the children of the congregation, to provide for that spiritual nurture necessary to grow in grace, and to provide opportunities, such as a communicants' class, where the children of the congregation may come to profess their

faith and be prepared to assume the obligations and privileges of full participation in the life of the congregation.

3. The Role of the Congregation with the Parents: The Baptism of a child requires a two-fold affirmation, one by the parents and one by the covenant community.

- a. The parents are to take vows indicating their commitment to bring the child up in the faith and in the loving discipline of the Lord.
- b. The congregation commits itself to provide nurture, support, and a godly example in assuming with the parents the spiritual oversight of the child.
- c. Parents and congregation together are to encourage growth in grace until the child, having become of age, claims Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior.
- d. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church does not recognize godparents since the members of the local church assume with the parent's responsibility for the spiritual life of the child. However, it is permitted to have persons who might become the responsible parental authority for the child to assume the vows of obligation with the parents. In such a case, the persons participating with the parents should have the same qualifications for membership in the visible Church.

4. Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism:

- a. The Minister shall remind the congregation:
 - 1) of the meaning and nature of Baptism, they should be reminded to remember the significance of their own Baptism,
 - 2) of the significance, benefits and privileges of their own Baptism,
 - 3) of their failures contrary to the grace of Baptism and for God's mercy and forgiveness
 - 4) to recommitment themselves to their endeavor to live by faith.
- b. The parents or other responsible person shall assume the following or like vows of duty and obligation:
 - 1) Do you acknowledge 's need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?
 - 2) Do you claim God's covenant promises and benefits for and by faith do you look to the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of your child as you do your own?
 - 3) Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and do you promise by relying on God's power and grace through the Holy Spirit to live an exemplary life before your child?

- 4) Do you commit yourself to pray with and for your child, to teach your child the Scriptures and the great articles of our faith in Jesus Christ?
 - 5) Do you promise to use every means provided by God, including faithful participation in the life of the Church, to bring your child up in the loving discipline of the Lord?
- c. The congregation acts for the whole family of God and assumes responsibility for the child by answering the following or like questions:
- 1) Do you, the members of this congregation, acting for yourselves and in behalf of the whole Body of Christ, assume responsibility with these parents for the spiritual nurture of this child?
 - 2) Do you commit yourself to set a godly example before this child, to provide as far as you are able, all that is necessary to the end that this child may one day confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord?
- d. The Minister shall set apart the water from all common uses to this holy use and mystery and pray for a blessing upon the Sacrament. Then the Minister shall use the following or like formula without adding any other ceremony and shall baptize the child with water, saying: “ , child of the covenant, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” The Sacrament is to be concluded by a prayer.

Westminster Confession of Faith

Chapter 28

Baptism

1. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ.¹ By baptism a person is solemnly admitted into the visible church.² Baptism is also a sign and seal of the covenant of grace,³ of the believer's engrafting into Christ,⁴ of rebirth,⁵ of remission of sins,⁶ and of the believer's yielding to God through Jesus Christ to walk in newness of life.⁷ By Christ's own direction this sacrament is to be continued in his church until the end of the world.⁸

1. Mt 28.19, Mk 16.16.
2. 1 Cor 12.13, Gal 3.27-28, Acts 2.41, 10.47.
3. Rom 4.11, Col 2.11-12, Gal 3.29.
4. Gal 3.27, Rom 6.3-5.
5. Ti 3.5.
6. Mk 1.4, Acts 2.38, 22.16.
7. Rom 6.3-4.
8. Mt 28.19-20.

2. The physical substance to be used in this sacrament is water. The person is to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit⁹ ordinarily by a lawfully called minister of the gospel.¹⁰

9. Mt 3.11, Jn 1.33, Mt 28.19-20, Acts 8.36,38, 10.47, Eph 4.11-13.
10. See General Note.

3. Dipping the person into the water is not necessary. Baptism is correctly administered by pouring or sprinkling water on the person.¹¹

11. Heb 9.10,19-22, Acts 2.41, 16.33, Mk 7.4, Acts 1.5, 2.3-4,17, 11.15-16, 10.46-47, 1 Cor 10.2.

4. Not only those who actually profess faith in and obedience to Christ are to be baptized¹² but also the infants of one or both believing parents.¹³

12. Mk 16.15-16, Acts 8.37-38; see citations under Section 1 above, Acts 9.18.
13. Gn 17.7,9-10, Gal 3.9,14, Col 2.11-12, Acts 2.38-39, Rom 4.11-12, 1 Cor 7.14, Mt 28.19, Mk 10.13-16, Lk 18.15-16, Acts 16.14-15,33.

5. Although it is a great sin to condemn or neglect this sacrament,¹⁴ baptism is not inseparably connected with God's grace and salvation. One can be saved and reborn without baptism,¹⁵ and, on the other hand, everyone who is baptized is not therefore unquestionably reborn.¹⁶

14. Lk 7.30, Ex 4.24-26, Gn 17.14, Dt 28.9.
15. Rom 4.11, Acts 10.2, 4, 22, 31, 45-47, Lk 23.40-43.
16. Acts 8.13,23.

6. The effectiveness of baptism is not tied to that moment in time in which it is administered.¹⁷ However, by the correct use of this sacrament the grace promised in it is not only offered but actually embodied and conferred by the Holy Spirit to everyone (adult or infant) to whom that grace is given, according to the purpose of God's own will and in his appointed time.¹⁸

17. Jn 3.5,8, Rom 4.11.
18. Gal 3.27, Ti 3.5, Eph 5.25-26, Acts 2.38-41, Eph 1.4-5, Acts 16.31,33.

7. The sacrament of baptism should be administered only once to a person.¹⁹

19. Ti 3.5; there is no command, and no adequate example for the repetition of baptism.