

# ROMAN CATHOLICISM

## In the Light of Scripture

by

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### CHAPTER ELEVEN

#### BAPTISM

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH places strong emphasis on sacraments, \* and puts baptism in the very forefront of these as being essential to salvation.

**\* To avoid the sacerdotal implications of the word “sacraments,” many Protestants prefer to refer to baptism and the Lord’s Supper as “ordinances”; but in this book we are using “sacraments” because of the constant comparison between Roman Catholic and Protestant rites.**

So vital is it that, whereas ordinarily only a priest can perform the rite, in cases of emergency a layman may administer it where no priest is available! In the booklet, *What Catholics Believe* (Catholic Truth Society), the case is cited of an English soldier in India, who used to take his morning walk by the seaside to baptize the number of infants left there to be washed away by the tide, with the comment, he could not save their earthly life, but he could bring them to life eternal. Another case mentioned was that of a child left in charge of a baby brother. The baby was suddenly taken with a fit, and the child baptized him. The conclusion stated was that all should know how to baptize so that we might be ready for a similar emergency.

Romanism teaches that the souls of unbaptized infants at death go to a place somewhere between Heaven and Hell called limbo, there to spend eternity in a condition of natural happiness. Not having sinned themselves, they do not go to Hell, but since they have the stain of original sin not washed away by baptism, they can never enter Heaven to enjoy the beatific vision of God.

Unbaptized adults at death go straight to Hell, since in addition to original sin, they have actual sin, sins of their own committing.

As for unbaptized infants, first let it be said that “limbo” is a figment of Romish imagination, there being no support in Holy Scripture for the existence of such a place. It cannot be “hades,” the grave or place of departed spirits, translated “hell” in the English Bible, for that is temporary only, since in Revelation 20:13, 14 we learn that **death and hell [hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.**

There is no room here for a place of eternal existence in a state of natural happiness, outside of Heaven itself. Heaven remains, and Hell, the lake of fire, wherein are cast all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life. Moreover, no mention whatsoever is made of baptism in this connection, either for infant or adult.

The dictionary meaning of the word “sacrament” is “*a religious ceremony or act, regarded as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.*” The essence of this is that a sacrament is symbolic. Rome does not accept this definition, however. To her, baptism is much more than a symbol of grace already received; it is the rite which itself imparts saving grace, so that a baptized person is saved and an unbaptized one is lost. Thus to continue the quotation from the booklet already mentioned:

*All good comes to us by the Precious Blood. . . . It is by the Sacraments that the merits of the Precious Blood are applied to our souls. They are thus the chief means of our salvation. . . . For the Sacraments are not merely signs of grace, they give the grace they signify. A little water is poured on the body, and the baby’s soul is cleansed from original sin [Page 33]. Baptism is a sacrament which cleanses us from original sin, makes us Christians, members of the Church, and heirs of heaven . . . Baptism also forgives actual sins, that is the sins which we ourselves commit, and takes away all punishment due to them, when it is received in proper disposition by those who have been guilty of actual sin [Page 35].*

The language employed is clear and unequivocal. But does it agree with the teaching of Scripture? Emphatically not. It is not only not found there, but it directly contradicts what the Bible says.

Can the pouring of a little water on the body cleanse the soul from sin?

**Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God** (Jeremiah 2:22).

**Pilate . . . took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person** (Matthew 27:24).

Did Pilate’s hand-washing cleanse away his guilt? No, nor can water in a baptistry or font avail. But what water cannot do, the precious blood of Christ can effect.

**The blood of Jesus Christ his [God’s] Son cleanseth us from all sin . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness** (I John 1:7, 9).

Can baptism make us Christians, children of God, and heirs to Heaven? Again the answer is no. Only the work of the Holy Spirit, wrought in us as we receive the Lord Jesus into our hearts by faith can accomplish this.

**He [Jesus] came unto his own [the Jewish people, whose King and Messiah He was], and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God** (John 1:11-13).

Note that “**receive**” and “**believe**” are here used as synonyms. True belief is more than a creed, and more than a mental assent to that creed. It is an active thing—it receives. That is what is meant by the passage in James 2:20, “**Faith without works is dead.**” Christ stands at the door of each heart, and knocks, seeking admittance as Lord and Master, as Prince and Saviour. He says:

**Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in** (Revelation 3:20).

When we open the door, He, the Prince of life, enters to abide.

**And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God (I John 5:11-13).**

Could language be more plain and straightforward?

He who has the Son, received into his heart by faith, eternal life. And the reverse is equally clear:

**He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36).**

**He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18).**

No baptismal rite, by whomsoever performed, can regenerate a soul and give him that eternal life which alone can make him a child of God and an heir of Heaven. If it could, Paul would not have written, **“Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel”** (I Corinthians 1:17). Nor could the penitent thief, unbaptized, have entered Paradise with Christ.

In the Scriptures we find that regeneration is brought about through two things: (1) the truth of the Gospel (2) the power of the Holy Spirit.

**(1) Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever . . . and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you (I Peter 1:23-25).**

**(2) Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:5, 6).**

The Romish church immediately seizes upon the word **“water”** in verse 5 of this latter Scripture and claims that it refers to baptism, but in view of all the other passage we have already considered, to claim this word as a proof of baptismal regeneration cannot be allowed. Let Scripture interpret Scripture.

**Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word (Ephesians 5:25, 26).**

**So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17).**

It is by hearing the Word of God that faith is created, the faith that opens the heart to the waiting Saviour, and He enters, and the soul is born again. The actual regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit:

**The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit (John 3:8).**

The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is indeed a miracle of grace, imparting new spiritual life to the soul once dead in trespasses and sins.

The born-again soul now hates the sins it once loved, and finds its joy in heavenly things. This work of the Holy Spirit brings its own evidence as does the invisible wind, whose sound we hear and whose coolness we feel, but this is evidence that cannot be refuted.

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (Galatians 5:22-24).**

The certain conclusion from all the Scriptures we have considered is that the rite of baptism does not forgive sin, nor does it impart eternal life and make the soul an heir of Heaven. Yet it is unquestionably a rite commanded by our Lord. Where then does it come in, and what end does it serve?

The answer to the first question is, baptism comes after salvation. There may be a considerable lapse of time between the two, or the one may follow the other so closely as to be almost indivisible. But even when the two are as close as this, it is the repentance and faith; that saves, not the baptismal rite. When our Lord gave His great missionary commission, He said:

**Go ye therefore, and teach all nations [make disciples], baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matthew 28:19-20).**

The order was first to make disciples, then baptize, then teach, and we find the disciples faithfully followed this order:

**They that gladly received his word were baptized (Acts 2:41).**

**When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).**

**Then Simon himself believed also: and . . . was baptized (Acts 8:13).** [Later events proved that Simon's profession was false, but his baptism followed his profession of faith].

**And the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him (Acts 8:36-38).**

**And immediately there fell from his [Saul's] eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized (Acts 9:18).**

**Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:47, 48).**

**Then he [the keeper of the prison] called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house (Acts 16:29-34).**

**And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8).**

There are several answers to the second question, “What end does baptism serve?”

1. *Baptism is an act of confession.* In First Corinthians 10:2 we read of the children of Israel that they “**were all baptized unto Moses.**” They became Moses’ disciples, and acknowledged themselves as such. “**We are Moses’ disciples**” (John 9:28). So the Christian believer is baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27), thus confessing faith in Him.

2. *Baptism sets forth the inward spiritual cleansing already received.*

**Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . . Then they that gladly received his word were baptized (Acts 2:38, 41).**

Having received Peter’s testimony concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, they were baptized as indicating the cleansing they had received.

3. *Baptism sets forth the believer’s union with Christ in death and resurrection.*

**What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-4).**

**And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Colossians 2:13).**

**If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).**

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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