

## Creed of Constantinople

“We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins”

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### Baptism in the Creed of Constantinople

Of the many changes that were made to the creed of Constantinople, possibly one of the most interesting is the statement that “we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins”. This statement is nearly identical to Mark 16:16, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved”. Both seem to be stating that baptism is necessary for salvation. However, what is meant by baptism? Is it the actual use of water to baptize, or is it something else?

The word ‘baptism’ is a transliteration of the word ‘baptizo’, which is used frequently in the New Testament. In many, if not most, of the instances where baptizo is found in the New Testament, it is referring to cleansing with water<sup>1</sup>. It is used for washing, cleansing, immersing, all of which water was used for in the New Testament. Baptism is also used in Scripture when the Holy Spirit comes into a person (Matthew 3:16), and that baptism is also something the Holy Spirit works through to bring us into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:3). The early church incorporated all of these meanings into the sacrament of baptism. The washing with water symbolized the cleansing of past sins, which the early church believed happened at baptism<sup>2</sup>, and the coming into you of the Holy Spirit and bringing you into the body of Christ. However, the water in baptism *symbolized* these things, and was *not* necessary for baptism, which does seem to be necessary for salvation (going back to Mark 16:16).

Assuming that the authors of the creed held the aforesaid meaning with baptism, we are now brought to “*for* the remission of sins”. This statement could mean:

1. Baptism is required *in order* for the remission of sins.
2. Baptism is given for the remission of sins *that has already happened*.

Historically, the early church first baptized people after they had come to faith, and thus followed the 2<sup>nd</sup> meaning. However, at this time (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century), the church was baptizing infants. Now obviously an infant isn’t old enough to repent and come to faith,

so they would have been baptizing with the 1<sup>st</sup> meaning. Since this is the time period that the Creed of Constantinople was written, I'd have to assume that they did not mean baptism to come after remission of sins. Instead, they probably held infant baptism to be the welcoming of the Holy Spirit into the child. And since the Holy Spirit is necessary for a human to accept and come to Christ (John 14:16-17), baptism is required for salvation (again, this is not necessarily *water* baptism, but merely baptism in the sense of the Holy Spirit's entrance into a person).

Now, does this mean that it is impossible to be saved without baptism? Is baptism a *sine qua non* of salvation? Yes, when you define baptism as the entrance of the Holy Spirit into a person, rather than necessarily water baptism. But this is not to say that water baptism is not important, and even necessary for most people. Christ Himself instituted baptism in Matthew 3:16, and has instructed us to baptize in the name of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19), and this is done with water. There are very few examples in Scripture in which a person had been saved without being administered water baptism. One of the few instances of this recorded in Scripture is in Luke 23: 40-43. A robber and criminal, who had certainly not previously been a Christian, came to faith when he was on the cross next to Jesus, saying "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom". Jesus replied "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise". Obviously, this man went to heaven, and just as obviously, he was not baptized with water. His salvation did not depend on water baptism. Now does this contradict Mark 16:16? Not necessarily, for God is omnipotent and does not have to utilize water baptism to bring His Spirit into somebody. While water baptism is the manner in which He commands us to do it, if He chooses to bestow his Spirit on someone without doing so, then that's His business.

Though the baptism of the Spirit is necessary for salvation, baptism alone cannot save you. "For by grace you have been saved through faith" – Ephesians 2:8. We are saved by *faith* alone. However, the Holy Spirit is the One who helps us come to faith, and that is why baptism is so necessary for salvation. Neither does the act of water baptism save us, for we have been saved "not of works, lest anyone should boast" – Ephesians 2:9.

Finally, the Scriptural backup for “*one* baptism” can be found in Ephesians 4:5 – “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”. The word ‘one’ merely states that there is only one true baptism, for there is one Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, I believe the authors of the creed of Constantinople did mean to say that baptism is necessary for the remission of sins (which is necessary for salvation), a statement that is supported by Scripture (Mark 16:16). However, Scripture also states very clearly that there is more to salvation than being baptized (faith). The statement “one baptism for the remission of sins” can be taken the wrong way if you take it to mean that baptism saves you, but the authors of the creed are mostly likely saying virtually the same thing as Mark 16:16, and are thus not contradicting Biblical teaching. The inclusion of this statement of baptism in the creed served to more clearly articulate what the orthodox believed, and what you had to believe in order to call yourself a Catholic. In doing so it gave the church reason to exile certain people who did not accept the importance of baptism.

### **Baptism in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod**

The Protestant denomination that I belong to is the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). This is not to be confused with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), which is the liberal branch of the Lutheran Church. We believe in infant baptism, and will also baptize a person of any age (if someone was not baptized as a child, we will gladly baptize him or her as an adult). We also use the sprinkle method of water baptism, and do not immerse when we baptize. We do not in any way view immersion as non-Scriptural, and do not reject any method of baptism that is in the name of the Trinity. Though the Lutheran church disagrees with many of the teachings of the Catholic church, baptism is one area where Catholic and Lutheran beliefs are very similar. The following is a brief explanation of the reason we do baptize infants and use the sprinkle method, as well as the meaning that we apply to baptism.

The reason we baptize infants is primarily because of Christ’s commandment that all be baptized (Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit can come upon anyone, and is not limited by age or maturity. Since the Lutheran church does not view baptism as a profession of faith, but rather as an invitation for the Holy Spirit to enter the person (an

invitation the Holy Spirit does not turn down), there is no reason for baptism to be valid only for people of a certain maturity or level of understanding. Because of original sin, even infants are sinful and in need of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness. There is no reason not to baptize them as soon as possible. In some denominations, baptism is the believer's public profession of faith. In the Lutheran church, public profession of faith is given during a Confirmation ceremony.

The reason we use the sprinkle method is because Scripture does not clearly state the method in which baptism must be administered. Titus 3:5 refers to baptism as “the *washing* of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”. Washing does not require submerging. In addition, the word *baptizo*, which is used in the New Testament when referring to baptism, does not necessarily mean immersion. It frequently refers to washing, which certainly does not imply immersion. Also, Biblical accounts of people who were baptized in a river were not necessarily dipped. The early church did use the immersion method of baptism, but there is no Biblical evidence that says a baptism other than by immersion is invalid.

In further explaining what Lutherans believe about baptism, I will copy an excerpt from the LCMS website: Baptism “is a gracious and powerful work of God through which He miraculously washes away our sins by applying to us the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection (Acts 2:38-39, Acts 22:16), gives us a new birth in which we “cooperate” just as little as we did in our first birth (John 3:5-7), clothes us in Christ’s righteousness (Galatians 3:26-27), gives us the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5-6), saves us (1 Peter 3:21), buries us and raises us up with Christ as new creatures (Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:11-12) makes us holy in God’s sight (Ephesians 25-26) and incorporates us into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). All of this, according to Scripture, happens in baptism, and all of it is God’s doing, not ours. The promises and power of baptism are extended to all in Scripture – including infants – and are available to all.”<sup>3</sup>

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1: International Standard Bible Encyclopedia handout.  
2: Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity.  
3: Copied from <http://www.lcms.org/cic/baptism.html>.

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- The New Geneva Study Bible (NKJV) – 1995, Thomas Nelson Publishers (Nashville, TN).
- “Baptism” - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1978.
- Tim Dowley, ED., Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity, 1977 (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans).
- www.lcms.org – Online home of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (FAQ used as source).
- Luther’s Small Catechism, 1981, Concordia Theological Seminary Press (Fort Wayne, Indiana).