

Baptism with water

extract from Proposition XII § v, vi, vii

§ v. Thirdly, since John's baptism was a symbol, and since the symbol gives way to the substance, the thing which is symbolized remains. That is, the one baptism of Christ remains, though the other ceases, which was the baptism of John.

I think that few will deny that John's baptism was a symbol of Christ's baptism. But if someone does deny it, it can easily be proved from its nature; John's baptism was a baptism with water, but Christ's is a baptism with the Spirit. Therefore John's baptism must have been a symbol of Christ's. Moreover, no one will deny that John's baptism was water baptism; and it has already been proved that water baptism is not Christ's baptism. From this arises the confirmation of our thesis:

Argument: No baptism is to continue now, except the one baptism of Christ.

Therefore water baptism should not continue now, because it is not the baptism of Christ. . . .

Argument: Secondly, if water baptism was supposed to continue in his church as a perpetual ordinance of Christ, he would either have practiced it himself or commanded his apostles to do it.

But the scripture plainly affirms that he did not practice it (John 4:2). And I have never read anything that says that he commanded his disciples to baptize with water. As for what some allege, that Matthew 28:19 etc. (where he tells them to baptize) should be interpreted to mean water

baptism, that just begs the question,¹ as will be considered further on.

Therefore, to baptize with water is not a perpetual ordinance of Christ to his Church.

This argument is more convincing to me because I do not find any permanent statute* or requirement of Christ, necessary to Christians, for which we do not have either Christ's own practice or his command. For example to obey all the commandments which include our duty both to God and to our neighbor,* etc. and where the Gospel requires more than the Law, that is clearly stated in the fifth and sixth chapters of Matthew and elsewhere. Moreover, regarding the duties of worship, he tells us to meet, promising his presence, and commands us to pray, preach, watch, etc. and gives teachings concerning some temporary things, such as washing one another's feet, breaking bread (to be discussed later) but it is only for this one subject of baptizing with water (though it is argued for so earnestly) that we do not find any precept from Christ.

§ vi. To make water baptism a necessary institution of the Christian religion, which is pure and spiritual and not carnal and ceremonial, is to detract from the New Covenant dispensation and set up legal rites and ceremonies. This matter of baptism, or washing with water was one of those ceremonies, as the apostle says in Hebrews 9:10, "it only concerned food and drinks, various baptisms,² and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation." So if the time of reformation, the dispensation of the Gospel which puts an end to the shadows, has now come, then such baptisms and carnal ordinances should no longer be imposed. There is no explanation for how baptism with

¹ A fallacy classified by Aristotle in which the proposition which must be proved is assumed in one of the premises.

² Barclay follows the Greek original, βαπτισμός "baptisms" although the King James version and many others translate the word "washings."

water now becomes a spiritual ordinance, more than it was before in the time of the Law. It is still only water, and a washing of the outward man, and a cleansing of the dirt of the flesh. Those that were washed before were not made perfect in their conscience, and neither are they nowadays, as our adversaries must acknowledge and as experience shows abundantly. . . .

§ vii. *Argument:* If water baptism had been an ordinance of the gospel, then the apostle Paul would have been sent to administer it. But he declares positively (1 Corinthians 1:17) “That Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” This reasoning is undeniable, because the apostle Paul’s commission was as large as that of any of the apostles. Consequently since he was in a special manner the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles, if water baptism should be considered the badge of Christianity (as our adversaries claim), he had more need than any of them to baptize with water, so that he could mark the Gentiles he converted with that Christian sign. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and in his epistles it is clear that he labors to wean them from the former Jewish ceremonies and observances, though he was sometimes unfairly criticized by his brethren who were unwilling to lay aside those ceremonies. Therefore, though his commission was as full as that of the other apostles as to the preaching of the Gospel and the New Covenant, it did not require him to lead his converts into Jewish observances and baptisms, even though the other apostles indulged in that practice among their Jewish proselytes. He “thanks God that he had baptized so few,”³ implying that he did not do it because of his apostolic commission but rather in consideration for their weakness, just as he circumcised Timothy at another time.

³ 1 Corinthians 1:14 RB

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XII § v, vi (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 355-357 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 272-274.