

Infant Baptism, Salvation, and the Sinners Prayer
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The Protestant Reformation brought about a return to Scriptures alone, faith alone, and grace alone. But one thing that it did not rectify was the issue of infant baptism. In fact, the Reformation Anabaptists were not warmly welcomed in any European state in the 16th Century.

The argument around infant baptism surrounds the power of the water that is poured, sprinkled, or rubbed onto the head of the infant. Wherein does this water get this efficacy? Is it:

- The prayer of the priest or pastor spoken over the water?
- The words of Matthew 28:19 being pronounced over the water when it is being poured, sprinkled, or rubbed?
- The faith of the parents being transmitted to the infant, as therefore a salvation by proxy?
- The faith and/or righteous life of the pastor or priest performing the ritual?

What part of the ritual of baptism bestows upon it such magnificent effect?

In order to show how baptism has been understood in the past, perhaps a citation will suffice. It consists of Article 27 of the 39 Articles of Religion of the Church of England, still the rule of faith for the Church of England:

“XXVII. Of Baptisme.

“Baptisme is not only a signe of profession, and marke of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from other that be not christened: but is also a signe of regeneration or newe byrth, whereby as by an instrument, they that receaue baptisme rightly, are grafted into the Church: the promises of the forgeuenesse of sinne, and of our adoption to be the sonnes of God, by the holy ghost, are visibly signed and sealed: fayth is confyrmed: and grace increased by vertue of prayer vnto God.

“The baptisme of young children, is in any wyse to be retayned in the Churche, as most agreable with the institution of Christe” (“42 and 39 Articles of Religion”; from: <http://www.episcopalian.org/efac/1553-1572.htm>; accessed: 21 Oct 2004).

One will readily note several points. The language of New Testament regeneration is ascribed to this ritual, as well as its application to young children. And, in this document, this power is ascribed to baptism “by virtue of prayer unto God.” Hence, our earlier question is answered by

this Article. It is prayer unto God that gives this power to the sign or symbol of water in this ritual.

So what role is the role of prayer in salvation? While quite a number are vocal in their disenchantment with a “sinners prayer”, does not the Anglican Article cited above state that “grace is increase by virtue of prayer unto God”? Of whose prayer does this speak? Of the priest or pastor over the water? Of the parents as they watch the ritual take place? Of the baby being baptized? Does this ritual not beg the question: why is prayer over water by a third party deemed more powerful unto salvation than a sinner repenting with his own voice, lips, and words in what is often called a “sinners prayer”?

“She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world’” (John 11:27).