

# Celebrating Sacraments

## Week 7 - Baptism of Children

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### CATECHISM CORNER

#### Heidelberg Catechism

Lord's Day 27

Q&A 74

Q. Should infants also be baptized?

A. Yes. Infants as well as adults are included in God's covenant and people (1), and they, no less than adults, are promised deliverance from sin through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith (2). Therefore, by baptism, the sign of the covenant, they too should be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers (3). This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision (4), which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism (5).

1) Gen. 17:7; Matt. 19:14

2) Isa. 44:1-3; Acts 2:38-39; 16:31

3) Acts 10:47; 1 Cor. 7:14

4) Gen. 17:9-14

5) Col. 2:11-13

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### WHAT WE BELIEVE

1. Read Acts 2:36-41. Our text is from Peter's sermon at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled Jews from every nation under heaven. What caused the gathered to ask Peter and the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

2. In verse 38 Peter says, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Is Peter saying we are saved by our baptism? Explain your answer (feel free to look at other scriptures to inform your answer).

3. What is the promise Peter mentions in verse 39?

4. Who receives the promise Peter mentions in verse 39?

### A REAL PATRIARCHY

"New inquiries have shown us what significance 'corporate personality' has had for the thinking of the Bible, and how great a part family solidarity played in the ancient world. If we wish to understand biblical texts rightly, we must radically free ourselves from modern

individualistic thinking, and in particular keep before our eyes the fact that the family represented by the father of the household was in old times much more strongly experienced as a unity than today. People felt the solidarity, the mutual responsibility and the unity of the group. All important questions were decided by the father of the household and his decision was binding on all. In particular in its relation to God the household was a unity.

Correspondingly it was normal for the ancient mind to regard the faith of the father of the household as decisive, if a household broke away from the old religious community and embraced a new religion. Doubtless from an early time there were mixed marriages, because only one of the partners had been laid hold of by the Gospel, but in such cases, as in Jewish missions, it was commonly the woman who alone changed her religion. If the father of the household became a Christian, the family followed him, not indeed always, but usually."

Jeremias, J. (1960). *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (D. Cairns, Trans.; p. 22). SCM Press Ltd.

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### **GOD SPEAKS TO US**

1. In verse 38, is Peter telling us that we must repent and be baptized as a prerequisite for receiving the Holy Spirit? Explain your answer.
2. How have you experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit in your life?

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### **GOD SPEAKS TO OUR FAMILY**

1. First CRC teaches that infants should be baptized because God's covenant promises extend to our children. Does our text contradict this teaching when it says, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"? How is it possible for an infant to repent?
2. How would you respond to the claim that Acts 2:39 doesn't support infant baptism because the promise is only for 'your children' whom the Lord our God calls to himself - meaning only those who can repent and believe?

### **HISTORICAL BAPTISM**

"The 'promise' of which v. 39 says that it is valid also for the children, is in fact the promise of Joel which was mentioned in 2:17-21, the promise, namely, that God will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh and that 'Your sons and daughters will prophesy' (Acts 2:17=Joel 2:28). The promise of the Spirit is for the children just as for 'your young men' and 'your old men' (ibid). Thus the children are not coming generations, but the sons and daughters of the hearers. Since the gift of the Spirit (2:38) is linked to baptism, 2:39 contains the challenge to have the children baptized also. Let us turn to the Gentile Christian Church. Here voices from the most widely scattered territories bear us unanimous witness that the primitive usage of baptizing households (Acts 11:14; 16:15, 33; 18:8; cf. 1 Cor. 1:16) survived uniformly in east and west.

Hippolytus graphically describes to us how in the Roman Church long before his time, as early as the second century, at the festival of Easter the families who were being admitted were baptized; first the children, including the infants who could not yet speak (i.e. answer the baptismal questions), then the adult males and last the women."

Jeremias, J. (1960). *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (D. Cairns, Trans.; p. 41). SCM Press Ltd.

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## **GOD SPEAKS IN WORSHIP**

1. Verse 37 says the crowd was, "cut to the heart" - meaning Peter's words convicted them of their sin. What elements of worship convict you of your sin?

2. The form for infant baptism in the Christian Reformed Church asks the congregation, "Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive these children in love, pray for them, help instruct them in the faith, and encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers?" The congregation then responds, "We do, God helping us." How do you keep this promise?

## **GOD-ACTIVE BAPTISM**

"The most fundamental and profound distinction between the two sides in the debate over infant baptism is not the connection between faith and baptism, nor the significance of what takes place at its administration, but whether one views baptism primarily as a divine action of the Lord or as the work of human obedience. This is the fixed point from which all of the other arguments flow.

In contrast to the Baptist position, which views baptism primarily as the willful act of the person baptized, and conditions its reception on the prior faith of the human recipient, the Reformed doctrine of baptism views the rite as one in which God is the principal actor. God is active in placing His sign and seal upon those whom He chooses, and just as with His decree of election to salvation, it is His sovereign good pleasure which determines those to whom it is to be administered.

Pierre Marcel points out that the verbs used in the baptismal texts of the New Testament are entirely passive in form. Thus, one is baptized or receives baptism, just as one receives circumcision. Even the command to "repent and be baptized" implies a certain passivity on the part of the one undergoing baptism, for no one ever self-administers the rite. Rather, even the adult believer merely submits himself to baptism, just as Jesus submitted Himself to the baptism of John. In baptism, it is Christ who is operative, "while the person baptized is the passive object of His deed." In the Reformed understanding, then, the person coming for baptism does not so much perform an action as allow himself to be acted upon. And it should be obvious that the baptism of the infant children of believers accords perfectly with such an understanding of the nature of the sacrament."

Holstrom, B. (2008). *Infant Baptism and the Silence of the New Test*

**CLEAN CHILDREN**

"What, then, does this text (1 Corinthians 7:12-14) mean? To get at the answer, let us try to determine how a first-century Jewish person would have understood these words. Remember that the primary biblical meaning of the verb sanctify is "to consecrate, to set apart." In fact, to be sanctified in the Old Testament was to be purified or set apart by some ritual of purification, and the primary such ritual was circumcision. So Paul is saying, using language that is filled to the brim with covenant import, that an unbelieving husband is set apart by his believing wife and an unbelieving wife is set apart by her believing husband. Why? So that their children will not be unclean. In the old covenant, being unclean meant being outside the camp, separated and apart from the covenant community of God. Paul's words here, then, mean that by virtue of the faith of only one parent, children are holy. This is an explicit New Testament affirmation that the infant child of one believer in a marriage is in a state of consecration. The child is not considered unclean, but is set apart and considered holy. And the rite that consecrates the child in the new covenant community is baptism."

Sproul, R. C. (2011). What Is Baptism? (First edition, Vol. 11, pp. 66-67). Reformation Trust.

**THE GOSPEL CALL**

1. Is it appropriate to tell people to repent and be baptized? Why or why not?
2. Peter's exhortation called those present to confront their sin. Is this a good evangelistic strategy for our current cultural context? Why or why not?