

Acts 2:37-38 (LD 27, Q/A 72-73) “The Effect of Baptism”

For the Children: What effect does baptism have on you? Do you sometimes think it's really about someone else's baby and doesn't have much to do with you? But every baptism in our church is for all of us. It does not save us. But it does teach and assure us about the work of the Lord Jesus and His Spirit. The Lord Jesus died and rose so that we could be forgiven. The Holy Spirit enables us to believe in the Lord Jesus and repent of our sins. When we believe in Him, then our sins are forgiven. That makes baptism important, for teaching and reassuring us. It makes repentance very important, as part of the faith that joins us to the Lord. **Questions:** How do we know that baptism doesn't save us? How does baptism help us trust the Lord Jesus? What does baptism teach about the Holy Spirit?

Introduction:

First Point: Baptism and Forgiveness

- 1) **Baptism for Forgiveness:** The crowd, cut to the quick by Peter's sermon, asks what they can do to be saved. Peter replies, "Repent, and...be baptized...for the forgiveness of your sins." Does this mean that forgiveness automatically follows baptism, or that there is something sinners can do to earn forgiveness?
- 2) **One Ground and One Instrument:** Peter calls on the people to repent. Repentance and faith go together as the 2 sides of conversion. Repentance means turning away from sin and faith means turning to Christ – not looking to one's own deeds to earn salvation. Similarly, the people are called to be baptized "in the Name of Jesus Christ" i.e., in union with His Person, through His work. The sole ground of forgiveness is Christ's work. The only way of entering union with Him is by faith (including repentance).
- 3) **Further Evidence:** That faith is essential for salvation as a means/instrument (though not as a ground or meritorious cause) is seen in the fact that elsewhere, forgiveness is linked only to repentance (3:19). Furthermore, there are instances where the unbaptized are forgiven (Lk. 23:42-43) and the baptized are not (Acts 8:13-24). In the OT also, the circumcised are not all forgiven (Dt. 10:16).
- 4) **Another Meaning for "For":** V. 38 could also be translated, "...be baptized...*with reference to/in association with*...the forgiveness of your sins." As a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, baptism teaches and assures us that Christ washes away our sins when we are joined to Him by faith. Baptism is clearly associated with the forgiveness of sins.
- 5) **Sacramental Language:** When Scripture speaks of the sign as if it were the thing signified (e.g., Titus 3:5, 1 Pet. 3:21), it is reminding us that regeneration and salvation surely follow Christ's work for the elect. Acts 2:38 is saying that forgiveness also surely follows His work. These blessings are even more sure than the fact that water washes away dirt from the body. See Q/A 73.

Second Point: Baptism and the Spirit

- 1) **Baptism Is a Sign and Seal of the Spirit's Work:** In v. 38, Peter also makes a connection between baptism and the work of the Spirit. Faith and repentance only take place when the Spirit applies His regenerating power to the sinner. Moreover, baptism is a sign and seal of this "washing of regeneration" (Q/A 69-70). This is why the Apostles' Creed places forgiveness under the heading of the Holy Spirit's Person and work. The Nicene Creed follows suit.
- 2) **The Pentecostal Outpouring:** The promise in Acts 2:38, however, has especially to do with the outpouring of the Spirit in the new covenant, as Joel 2:28-29 and Ezk. 36"25f. foretold. Temporarily, during the transition between the old and new covenants, one could receive the fullness of the Spirit some time after believing and repenting. See Acts 8. Today, we receive that baptism of the Spirit when we are born again.
- 3) **Application for Today:** All members of the covenant, young and old, should trust the promise of forgiveness of sins due to Christ's work as applied by the Spirit. All should be strengthened in that trust every time we participate in a baptism, for the effect of baptism is to teach and assure us of the work of Christ and His Spirit. All of us are also called to repentance, which is an essential part of the faith that joins us to Christ. Without that union with Him, there is no forgiveness of sins.

Conclusion: