Shorter Catechism 95 "Why Baptize Babies?" November 3, 2013
Jonah 2
Psalm 29
Colossians 2:6-3:4

"Salvation belongs to the LORD!"
In recent weeks we have looked at the Flood and Israel's crossing of the Red Sea –
both of which are used in the NT as pictures of baptism.

Jonah provides us with another picture of baptism.
Jesus says that the "sign of Jonah" would be given to his generation –
that the Son of Man would spend three days and three nights in the grave –
and that the men of Nineveh would rise up at the judgment
and condemn his generation. (Luke 11:29-32)

Jonah passed through the waters of judgment and God saved him,
in order that he might proclaim fire from heaven against the Assyrians.

Jesus speaks of his death as a sort of baptism – just one chapter after talking about Jonah.
"I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!
I have a baptism to be baptized with,
and how great is my distress until it is accomplished." (Luke 12:49-50)

Jesus came to bring the final judgment upon the earth –
but first he had to be baptized in that judgment!
The waters of judgment – the fires of God's wrath – first had to be poured out on Jesus.

This is what baptism is all about!
In baptism you hear the thunder of cascading waters.
In baptism you pass through the waves and breakers of God's judgment.

And the only way that you can survive baptism is through the Voice of Jesus!
(Which is why we need to sing Psalm 29!)

Sing Psalm 29
Read Colossians 2:6-3:4

I know that some of you struggle with the idea of infant baptism,
so today I would like to lay out the biblical teaching
on the relationship between baptism and circumcision?
Colossians 2 is the one passage of scripture that makes a direct connection between them.

I want you to see the big picture of what Paul is doing here.
The orthodox Judaism of Paul's day found their identity in two things:
circumcision and the law.

In Galatians, Paul deals with this at some length.
The Judaizers were saying that Jewish Christians
could not have table fellowship with Gentile Christians,
because Gentile Christians were not circumcised and did not observe the law.

In response, in Galatians 3:27, Paul says that the boundaries of Christian fellowship
are not circumcision and law,
but baptism and faith.

"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,
for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.
For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Notice that Paul does not say that baptism and faith fit as one-to-one replacements
for circumcision and law.
If baptism simply replaces circumcision, then Paul could have said to Peter,
Hey, Pete, the Gentiles were baptized, so eat with them!
But he doesn't.

What's the problem with saying that baptism simply replaces circumcision?

If all you do is make a one-to-one correspondence between circumcision and baptism,
then you wind up with a Jesus who is just like Moses!
and a faith that is just like the law!

But Jesus is *better* than Moses!
And faith is *better* than the Law.
And baptism is *better* than circumcision!

Because baptism is the sign that the new creation has come.
Think about the pictures of baptism that we've looked at over the last couple weeks.
The flood (1 Peter 3).
In the flood God saves one household through water–
the same waters that destroyed the wicked–
and through water God brought about a new creation.
The Red Sea (1 Cor 10).
Paul says that Israel was baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.
God saved one household through water,
destroying Pharaoh's armies,
and establishing a new humanity–Israel, "my firstborn son".
Leviticus speaks of the consecration of the priests,
and of the cleansing of the unclean through water.
Ezekiel 36 promised the day would come when
God would sprinkle clean water on his people.

So every Israelite knew that washing with water was a sign of the new creation.

But of course, baptism–for the Judaizers–was all about *Israel*.
Israel needed to be cleansed (that was what Ezekiel had said!).
Sure, Gentiles needed to be cleansed as well,
so Gentiles should be both baptized and circumcised!
They needed to believe in Jesus and follow Moses!

And to this Paul says *NO!*

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.
For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

That is at the heart of what Paul is doing in Colossians 2 as well.

Colossians is all about who Christ is, what Christ has done,
who we are in Christ, and what that means for our lives.
And verses 9-12 express this in four "in him" statements.

1 Verse 9 – "in him [in Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily"
Who is Christ?
Christ Jesus the Lord is the eternal Son of God.
In Christ the whole fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.
Christ is fully God.
The stupendous message of the Gospel is that God himself has come in the flesh.
Salvation belongs to the LORD – as Jonah had said.
The incarnation is the turning point of history,
because in Christ God has united himself to man.

2 Thus v 10 – "and you have been filled *in him*, who is the head of all rule and authority."
Since Jesus Christ is Lord – since he is God in the flesh –
therefore do not get distracted –
do not get pulled away by any other power.
No man-made philosophy, no human tradition,
can compare with Jesus.
And as the "fullness" of deity dwells bodily in Christ,
so now you have been *filled* in him.

3 v11 – "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands,
by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,
having been buried with him in baptism"

4 v12 – "in him also you were raised through faith in the powerful working of God,
who raised him from the dead."
I realize that the ESV says "in which" in verse 12 –

but the construction is exactly parallel with verse 11.

Paul is making two different assertions about who we are in Christ:
in verse 11, in Christ you were circumcised…
in verse 12, in Christ you were raised through faith…

Let's look a little more carefully at what Paul says in verses 11-12.
In Christ you have been circumcised.
That's an odd thing for Paul to say!
Normally Paul insists that circumcision is not necessary for Christians.
Why does he say that you have been circumcised?
Moses spoke of the necessity of having your *heart* circumcised.
If all you have is an outward circumcision –
a circumcision made by hands –
then you, like your fathers, will fall and die in the wilderness!
We need a circumcision done without hands –
a circumcision that is done by God!

And this, Paul says, is what you have in Christ.
In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands,
by putting off the body of the flesh…

The problem with the Law was the flesh.
After all, the Law is good!
The law simply states what God requires of us.
If Adam and Eve had not fallen into sin,
then we'd have no difficulty doing what God requires!
But our flesh – who we are *in Adam* – is weak.
(As Paul will say in verse 13 – "you, who were *dead* in your trespasses
and the *uncircumcision* of your flesh,
God made us alive together with him,
having forgiven us all our trespasses").

Whether Jew or Gentile, the problem was the same.
We were *uncircumcised* in our flesh.
Sure, maybe the Jews had a hand-made circumcision –
but all of us, in Adam, were dead in our sins.
We lacked the circumcision made without hands.

But this is what Jesus has done!
"In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands,
by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ."

The handmade circumcision cut off the foreskin – a piece of flesh –
in order to represent what we really needed.

And what we really needed was for the whole body of the flesh to be cut off –
or as Paul says, *stripped off*.

Paul will use the same language five times in two chapters:
here in 2:11, he says "stripping off the body of the flesh"
in 2:15, he says that Christ stripped the rulers and authorities
and put them to open shame.
In 3:9, he says that you have stripped off the old self with its practices,
and in 3:10 he says that we have put on the new self –
and finally in 3:12 he says that because you have put on the new self,
therefore you must *put on* the new clothing of Christ.

It's interesting to note that all of this language of stripping off the old
is all attributed to Christ.
He is the one who stripped off the body of the flesh –
he is the one who stripped the rulers and authorities and shamed them –
when Paul says that you have stripped off the old self and put on the new self –
he attributes that to how "you have died
and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (3:3).

This stripping off of the body of the flesh is what Jesus did on the cross.
You were helpless.
You were dead in your sins.

There is a beautiful picture of this in C.S. Lewis's *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*:
when Eustace turns into a dragon,
there is no way that he can turn back into a boy,
unless Aslan comes and strips him of his "old self."
Eustace tries – and he peels off one layer,
but no matter how many layers he peels – he's still a dragon underneath!

Only Christ can strip us of our old identity – the body of the flesh.

Hence, Paul says, you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands,
by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,
having been buried with him in baptism…
There's a big debate over what is meant by the "circumcision of Christ."
Does it mean "the circumcision which Christ underwent" (the cross)
or does it mean "the circumcision which Christ performs" (baptism).
I think Paul means the former.
I think Paul sees the cross as the place where Christ was circumcised –
where he was cut off – stripped of the body of the flesh.
But I also think that Paul means the latter.
Because baptism is one place Christ communicates to us the benefits of the cross!

And either way, Paul is saying that we are buried with Christ in baptism –
that baptism is the place where we are united to Christ –
the place where we receive the circumcision made without hands.

Now this may seem strange.
If circumcision was an outward ritual that ultimately "didn't work,"
then why does Paul refer to another outward ritual?
It's sort of like 1 Corinthians 10.
In 1 Cor 10 Paul says that all Israel was baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the Sea –
all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink,
for they drank of the spiritual rock that followed them – *and that Rock was Christ*.

Israel partook of Christ – but that wasn't good enough –
and they perished in the wilderness.

So Paul warns the church – don't do that again! –
and then he points them to the Lord's Supper,
and calls them to flee from idolatry by looking to the Lord's Supper –
"the bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ."

The problem in the wilderness was that the Law could not bring Israel into the land –
not because the Law was the problem,
but because the *flesh* was the problem!
The flesh is weak – the flesh is impotent – and cannot bring salvation!

That is why the *Word became flesh* –
because only when the fullness of the deity dwelt bodily
was there finally a *man* of our flesh who could triumph over the powers!

Salvation belongs to the Lord!
And when the Lord acts to bring salvation to his people,
then the sacraments that he appoints become effectual means of salvation!

This is why I find our Shorter Catechism so helpful:
"The sacraments become effectual means of salvation,
not from any virtue in them, or in him that does administer them,
but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit
in them that by faith receive them."

Now this emphasis on faith has led some to say that infants should not be baptized
because infants are not capable of professing faith.

Our Shorter Catechism deals with this topic in question 95:

Q. 95. *To whom is baptism to be administered?*

A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church until they profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him; but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized.

I like the Westminster Shorter Catechism.
But this is one place where the Shorter Catechism is not especially helpful.
What it says is true –
we should not indiscriminately baptize people;
for those who are outside the visible church,
we should require them to profess their faith in Christ
and their obedience to him before we baptize them;
but then they say that "infants of such as are members of the visible church
are to be baptized" –
I agree,
but it would have been helpful to explain *why!*

Our German and Dutch friends provide some help here.
The Heidelberg Catechism asks:

74. Q. Should infants, too, be baptized?
A. Yes. Infants as well as adults belong to God's covenant and congregation. Through Christ's blood the redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit, who works faith, are promised to them no less than to adults. Therefore, by baptism, as sign of the covenant, they must be grafted into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the old covenant by circumcision, in place of which baptism was instituted in the new covenant.

1. Infants Belong to God's Covenant and Congregation
Both in the OT and in the NT,
the children of God's people are included with their parents.

Certainly this was true of Abraham.
God told Abraham that he would be a God to Abraham and to his children.
In Genesis 17, God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision as a sign of the covenant,
as Paul says in Romans 4:11-12,
"he received the sign of circumcision as a seal
of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.
The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised,
so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,
and to make him the father of the circumcised
who are not merely circumcised
but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith
that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised." (Rom 4:11-12)

Faith was required no less in the OT than in the New.
The question is whether the children of believers still share in the covenant.

Paul certainly addresses them as a part of the congregation:
he says later in Colossians, "Children, obey your parents in everything,
for this pleases the Lord." (Col 3:20).
This is paralleled with addresses to
Wives, Husbands, Children, Fathers, Slaves, and Masters.
And Paul speaks of Jesus as *their* Lord –
just as much as Jesus is Lord of wives and husbands.
In fact, in 1 Corinthians 7:14, Paul will say that the children of believers are holy,
whereas the children of unbelievers are unclean.

That may sound shocking, but listen to how Paul says it:
"If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever,
and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.
For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife,
and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.
Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy."

The point of "holy" vs "unclean" does not mean "saved" or "unsaved."
To be "holy" does not mean to be saved – it means to be *set apart* –
to be distinct – belonging to God.
In the OT, the unclean contaminated the clean.
So if you bring the holy and the unclean together, the holy becomes contaminated.

It appears that the Corinthians were asking this question about mixed marriages.
If I am a believer, and I'm married to an unbeliever,
does that render my children unclean?
And if so, should I divorce the unbeliever so that I can have a holy household?

And Paul says no.
At least, not if the unbeliever is willing to stay.
If he wants out – let him go!
But in Christ – in the NT – the *holy* has greater power than the unclean.
In the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, mixed marriages had to end
because the unclean was contaminating the holy.
But now the holy cleanses the unclean!
Just as Christ touched the leper, and the leper became clean! –
so also now the presence of the holy wife cleanses the unbelieving husband
thereby rendering your children holy.

Now, it's true that Paul doesn't say anything about baptism here.
But you do see an example of the same principle in Acts 16.
In Acts 16, Paul and Silas are thrown into prison in Philippi –
and are delivered by a great earthquake.
But rather than run away, they wait quietly for the jailer.

When the jailer asks "what must I do to be saved?"
Paul and Silas reply,
"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household."
And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.
And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds;
and he was baptized at once, he all his family.
Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them.
And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God."
(Acts 16:31-34)

The NT very consistently speaks of households being baptized.
The Greek household included members of your extended family,
along with servants (and their families).
The point here isn't whether there were children in the household –
the point is that Paul says to the jailer,
"believe in the Lord Jesus and you [singular] will be saved,
you and your household."

When the jailer believes in the Lord Jesus, salvation comes to his household.
And so when he is baptized, all his family is baptized with him.
(literally it says that he "and all of his" were baptized at once).

Baptism is what marks you as belonging to God –
belonging to the holy community.

2. Redemption from Sin and the Holy Spirit Are Promised to the Children of Believers
The Heidelberg Catechism also says that

"Through Christ's blood the redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit, who works faith, are promised to them [the children of believers] no less than to adults."

This one is really quite simple.
It's exactly what Peter says on the day of Pentecost.
When the crowds ask, "what shall we do?"
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.
For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off,
everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (Acts 2:38-39)

The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off…
This is Abrahamic language.
For you and for your children is the same language that God used with Abraham.
And for that matter, the language of "for all who are far off" has an Abrahamic feel –
since the promise to Abraham was that all nations would be blessed through him!

When Peter says the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off,
that is going to sound like an Abrahamic promise –
and especially to an audience of Jews who have gathered from "far off"
in Jerusalem for Pentecost!

So the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off,
everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

What promise?
The promise of verse 38:
"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."

The promise of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit
is for you and for your children and for all who are far off.
Now, when a Jew hears that a promise is for him and his children,
he's not going to think, "well, once my children are old enough,
I'll make sure to tell them!"
A Jewish audience is going to assume that his children are included in the covenant.
So the fact that there is no controversy in the first century over the status of children
is significant.

If the had insisted that the children of believers
were *not* a part of the church and *should not* be baptized,
then one would expect some controversy on the point.

But the apostles baptize households –
and speak to the children as a part of the congregation just like everyone else!

3. Therefore, They Should Be Baptized

How do you think about your own baptism?
Does it have any significance for you today?
It should.
Paul speaks to the Colossians,
and tells them that their baptism is a past event which has present implications.
And even so, I say to you,
that your baptism points you to the washing away of your sins.
Maybe you can remember the day vividly.
Some people have quite an experience when they are baptized.
But maybe you were baptized as an infant and can't remember it,

But whether or not we felt anything,

whether or not it was a dramatic experience,
Paul says that in God's eyes,
baptism is our being united with Christ in his death and resurrection,
that just as he died for our sins, and was raised from the dead,
so now we have died TO sin, and have been raised in newness of life.

We are to look back to our baptism as a reminder of what we have become in Christ.

But aren't there times when you feel like giving up?
Aren't there times when you are bombarded with temptation,
when your temper is flaring,
your kids are getting on your nerves,
your spouse is being insensitive to your desires,
and you just want to get out of there?

Are there times when you think that sin is too powerful?
times when you believe that there is no way to keep up your struggle against sin?

In those times, remember your baptism!
Martin Luther, when he was tempted by sin,
would often say,
"Satan, you have no power over me,
because I've been baptized--so I belong to Christ."
Your baptism is a concrete reminder that you have died to sin.
Your baptism is God's way of showing you that he has washed all your sin away,
and has defeated all of the enemies which attack you.

Jesus
1) has wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us,
nailing it to the cross
and 2) has disarmed principalities and powers,
making a public spectacle of them and triumphing over them in the cross.

So when you are faced by your own idols
--your own sinful cravings--
Mock them.
Remind them that they are defeated enemies.
They have been exposed for the deceptive frauds that they are,
by the power of the cross.

You have been claimed by Christ as his own,
through the circumcision of Christ,
namely, baptism,
where he snipped away your old life,
and gave you new life and the forgiveness of sins.