

# Unto You and Your Children

By Larry E. Ball

**Bible Text:** Acts 16:14-16

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## **Bridwell Heights Presbyterian Church PCA**

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This morning we will divert our attention from our studies in the book of Romans and I am going to read a passage from the book of Acts in regard to the topic of baptism as we, as Presbyterians, believe is taught in the Word of God. I am going to preach on the issue—that we have seen the sacrament administered here this morning—from the book of Acts chapter 16, reading verses 14 and 15; Acts chapter 16, reading verses 14 and 15 in regard to the conversion of Lydia.

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.<sup>1</sup>

And may God add his blessing here as we read this portion of his holy Word.

In view of the administration of the sacrament of baptism here this morning I thought it appropriate and fitting to preach on the topic. It is not a topic we deal with very often. It is something we assume in the Presbyterian Church.

My goal here this morning is to convince all the Baptists in the world the requirements of infant baptism. I love my dear brethren, the Baptists. I respect them greatly. They are my brothers in the faith and many of them are so far sanctified and blessed beyond what I will ever dream. But when it comes to the topic of baptism we certainly differ.

Presbyterians baptize their babies. We do so because we believe the Bible warrants that. Not only do we believe it is our obligation, but we believe that God is greatly grieved when parents omit the baptism of their children. Some have accused us as simply holding to an old Roman Catholic tradition. And, in all fairness, that is certainly simply untrue.

By the way, not everything the Roman Catholic Church believes and does is wrong. The Roman Catholic Church believes in the doctrine of the trinity. So do we as Protestants.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 16:14-16 (All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated).

The Roman Catholic Church believes in the dual nature of Christ, that he was both man and God. So do we as Protestants. Just because the Roman Catholic Church practices it does not necessarily mean that something is wrong. Regardless of the practices of the Roman Catholics, our basis is in the Bible and the Bible alone.

Let me also say that it is very difficult, living in America, living in the South, living in a culture that has been so permeated with certain baptistic ways of thinking, it is very difficult to come to understand and to believe in the doctrine of infant baptism. Because of the way we have been raised, because of the great influence of those who have opposed infant baptism, it is very difficult in our society to come to a position where one is convinced this is the will of God.

I have been there. I was a difficult struggle for me. We come to the Bible with red sunglasses on and all we see in the Bible is red. What we have to do is to take those red sunglasses off and that is hard to do when you have been raised with them.

I am, like the hard shell Baptists, I am a hard shell Presbyterian and especially when it comes to the legitimacy of covenant baptism in lineage with our fathers which go way back to the Reformation, hundreds of years ago, and even our father in the Catholic Church who properly understood the meaning of the baptism of children. It has been a struggle for me to overcome my upbringing. I thought once in ways which were basically baptistic. And this morning I want to take you with me through that struggle which I have been through—the road less traveled, as some might say—and how I have come to such conviction about such a sacrament as the baptism of our children.

After many years in the ministry I have come to believe there are many obstacles, there are many impediments before we can come to understand the validity of infant baptism. And I am going to mention those to you here this morning.

“What was it, Larry, that led you from a position where you had great doubts about the validity of baptizing children to becoming such a hard shelled Presbyterian where you believe that it is grievous to God if we do not baptize our children. How did you get from point A to point B?”

Well, it took a long time. There are several impediments that I had to overcome.

After many years in the ministry one of the first impediments—and maybe one of the most difficult—is the impediment that somehow people believe that we are saved by our free wills apart from the gracious mercy of God. Before we even deal with the text, we have to get beyond that point. We have to come to the conclusion: It is not by the free will of man that man is saved. God is not somehow in heaven sitting up there powerless waiting on man to make his ultimate decision of whether he will believe in Jesus or not believe in Jesus. We have to get beyond the point where we believe that God has done what he can, but man ultimately saves himself by his own free will. Man has to believe and God is dependent upon man. Man believes and then God takes over. You have got to get beyond that. Man has faith and then God regenerates man. You have got to get

beyond that. Faith causes a new birth. Faith causes us to be born again. You have got to get beyond that. If we don't get beyond that there is no use even discussing the whole matter of infant—or, I prefer the term covenant—baptism.

That's not biblical. Man does not save himself by his own free will. God elects before the foundation of the world. God sent Jesus to die for his people. And God regenerates a dead man's heart and God puts in him the desire to believe in Christ and he comes to Christ and he trusts in Christ and his only hope is in Christ and he adores Christ and Christ's death on the cross is a horrible thing but it was done for him. And all of his sins are forgiven. He believes all those things not because he had the power himself to believe them, but because God regenerated his heart and changed his heart and brought him unto the Lord Jesus Christ. God regenerates dead men's hearts. God gives men faith. And only after all that does man believe in Christ.

Salvation does not depend upon man. Man is dead. Man is like someone in a cemetery and the gospel goes to him as a dead man and only when God regenerates his heart can the dead man respond unto the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. God raises dead men from spiritual death. God can and does save whomever he wills by the power of his sovereign grace. And that can and does include children as well as adults.

We have got to get beyond this concept that somehow God is a powerless God waiting on man to make the first move. God makes the first move and God changes men's hearts and God causes men to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you can't get beyond that, you will never come to a conviction about what we have done here this morning. God can save and God can regenerate old men, young women, babies, even babies in the womb. God saved John the Baptist. God regenerated John the Baptist while he was still in his mother's womb. When John the Baptist in his mother's womb came near the mother of Christ he leaped for joy because God had already regenerated his heart. God had already chosen him out that he would have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. God wasn't sitting there waiting and saying, "Well, when he is born and he grows up, maybe he will make a decision for Jesus." God regenerated his heart even while he was in the womb. He loved the Lord Jesus Christ in the womb.

Isaiah said, "The LORD called Me from the womb; From the body of My mother He named Me."<sup>2</sup>

God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you"<sup>3</sup>

You see, God does not depend upon our decision. God regenerates whom he will, when he wills and it is all by his power. And God even set aside in the womb certain people for himself. This idea that God cannot regenerate a heart until you grow up and reach an age of accountability or exercise your free will is preposterous. It is unbiblical. God can save

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 49:1

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 1:5

a baby as well as an adult and it is a matter of his sovereign grace. God can regenerate whomever he wills at whatever age he wills, even a child in the womb he can regenerate and give them a new birth and a new life. We have to understand that very fact first.

That is why we don't believe in believers' baptism. We believe that God himself regenerates the hearts of men and God tells us whom to baptize. And he tells us to baptize those who respond in faith who may be believers and may not be believers. Only God knows who are believers. Preferably we might call it professor's baptism. Even the Baptists aren't sure who believers are. God tells us to baptize those who respond in faith. And also he tells us to baptize their children, their families, their households.

So we have got to get beyond this concept that, "Well, everybody is an individual and everybody has his own free will and we just wait until they grow up and then we try to get them to make a decision for Jesus and that decision will cause them to be born again and then we will baptize them as believers."

God chooses whom he will regenerate and God chooses to regenerate even children in the womb and God—when we respond to his sovereign mercy—tells us not only to baptize those who respond, but to baptize their children, that the promises of God are not only to them, but also unto their children. So it is a matter of sovereign grace. Salvation does not depend upon man who responds. But salvation depends upon God who initiates the whole process of salvation by his grace and by his mercy.

There is another impediment we got to get by. We are not just New Testament Christians. You hear that over and over. "I am a New Testament Christ. The Old Testament was for the Jews."

Well, let me tell you something. Don't tell Paul and Peter that because you might make them upset. Don't tell Jesus and Paul and Peter that because they may get angry with you because all through the New Testament what do they do but quote the Old Testament, passage after passage after passage. "Did not Isaiah say...?" "Did not Jeremiah say...?" "Does not the law say...?" "Does not Moses say...?"

We are under both the teachings of the Old Testament and the New Testament. There is one way to be saved. There has always been one way to be saved and that is by grace through faith. It was true of Abraham. It was true of Paul. It was true of Martin Luther. It is true of everyone hear today who is a Christian. There has always been one way to be saved and that is by grace through faith alone. And with that salvation comes promises, promises to our children.

The New Testament is not new because it is so different, but because it is so much better. Abraham was saved by faith and so are we. God made promises to the man of faith, to the man Abraham and he also made promises to his children as he does to us today.

In Acts 2:37 when Peter was teaching/preaching on the day of Pentecost they asked him, "What must we do to be saved?"

And he said, “Repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy household.”

Everyone in thy house. They didn’t ask him about the household. They didn’t say well, Peter, what about our children?” They just asked him about themselves. “What must we do?”

And all of the sudden Peter says, “Not only you will be saved, but everybody in your house will be saved.”

And we could say, “Why would Peter say that?”

Because that is what he said to Abraham. That is what he said to everyone in the covenant down through history. The promise of God to save includes our children. The promise was to Abraham and the promise is to us. It hasn’t changed. It is the same as it was in the Old Testament. And when God makes a promise, God gives a sign. When God makes a promise, God gives a sign and he says, “Not only is that sign to be administered to you, but it is to be administered to your children.”

You see, in the Old Testament circumcision was the sign of faith. But God said, “Give it to the children even though the children are not old enough to believe. That doesn’t matter. That is not the point. The point is, I promised to save them, too, and I seal it with circumcision.”

As we come into the New Testament we see that the sign has been changed to baptism. And that is why whenever they ask the question, “What must we do to be saved?” God always brings in the children. He brings in the children. He brings in the household. He says, “Not only you will be saved, but also your children will be saved. Even though they are not able to believe yet, they are to receive the sign because God promises to do something.”

God is not waiting on them to do something, but God takes it into his own hands and says, “You know, salvation is by my sovereign grace anyway. I choose whom I want to choose, whom I want to save. And I promise you that I will save your children.”

How do I know that?

Well, here is the sign of baptism. It is the sign and the seal and God will deliver what he promises unto you. And that is why we find in the New Testament text all these references to household baptisms.

When was ever the last time you saw a household baptized? I can’t remember. But yet it is through the Bible over and over and over. It is in the New Testament.

For example, in Acts chapter 16, verse 15, the passage we just read. Look what God did. Acts chapter 16, verse 14, “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart,”<sup>4</sup> first...to do what? “...to respond.”<sup>5</sup>

It doesn't say that she responded and then the Lord opened her heart. God opened her heart. She responded to the things spoken by Paul and what was the immediate result of that? “When she and her household had been baptized...”<sup>6</sup> It doesn't say her household responded. It simply said Lydia responded.

What was the next step? Bring your household with you and we will baptize the whole household.

Why? Because that is what God did to Abraham.

“Abraham, bring your son.”

“Isaac, bring your son. Not when they get old enough to make a profession of faith, bring them now as children of the covenant and I will apply the sign of the covenant to them. And that is the assurance you have that I will bless them and I will choose them and I will regenerate them and I will give them faith just like I gave you faith.” That is your assurance.

Acts chapter 16, verse 33, the Philippian jailer, one of the most unquoted, misquoted passages in the Bible, Acts chapter 16, verse 30. The Philippian jailer, after he was scared...fear and trembling, Acts 16, verse 30...

And after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"  
They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."<sup>7</sup>

Period.

Most people I know who quote that passage like to put a period there. There is no period there. There is a phrase there. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”<sup>8</sup> He didn't ask about his household.

He says, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved.”<sup>9</sup>

And why would Paul respond by saying, “Not only you will be saved, but your household will be saved.”

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 16:14

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 16:15

<sup>7</sup> Acts 16:30-31

<sup>8</sup> Acts 16:31

<sup>9</sup> Acts 16:30

“I didn’t ask about my household. I didn’t ask about my children. You know, they are supposed to wait until they get old enough to make their own decision.”

No. God sovereignly saves whom he will save. And if God saves you, he promises to save your children.

How do we know that? How do we know God will keep his promises? You baptize them. In the Old Testament you circumcise them and you know that God will keep his promises and he will be not only your God, but he will be a God also unto your children.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”<sup>10</sup>

You see, when we come to church we come to church with our families. We come to church with our children. When we come to baptism we come to baptism with our children, with our families because God calls families into his church. God cares about your children, as we are going to see here in just a minute.

God deals with families. God saves families, not just individuals. Families come to God. And God says, “Come with your family. Come with your family. Come with your children. Come into the Church and receive all the blessings of the Church.”

You see the sacraments. You see the preaching of the Word of God. You see the prayers of God’s people. You see all the blessings of being in God’s Church. It is like a fence around us to protect us from the world, to enable us to go out into the world and to conquer for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And God says, “Come unto me.”

And we say, “God, what about my children?”

And the modern idea is, “Well, leave your children in the home. Just come by yourself.”

No, God says, “Come with your family. Come with your children into the Church.”

We do that naturally. How many of us would move to another city and leave our children at home and say, “Well, little Johnny, you are two years old and we are not going to make this decision for you. We are going to wait until you get about 16 and let you make your own decision. Now, if you want to move with us, that is good. If you want to move with us, that’s your decision.”

How many of us do that? What we do is we say, “Little Johnny, mom and dad are moving to Atlanta and you are coming with us because you are a part of the family. Little Johnny, mom and dad are coming into the Church and you are coming with us because you are a part of the family and God’s promises are not only unto us, but also unto you.”

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 16:31

Ask most Christians about their children and see what they say. It is a good test.

We say to people, "Are you a believer?"

They say, "Yes, I am a believer."

We say, "What about your children?"

And you don't know what kind of response you are going to get.

"Well, they are potential Christians. Potential, you know, one of these days when they grow up they will make their own decision."

"You mean they are not Christians. If you are not Christians then you are an unbeliever. You are saying they are an unbeliever."

"No, no, no. I am not saying that."

"You are saying they are lost if they are not Christians."

"No, no, no. I don't believe they are lost."

"But you are not saying they are Christian, are you? What are they, half Christian? They are kind of half way on the road? They are potential Christians?"

Are they unbelievers? You know, some families treat their children as unbelievers until they make a decision for Jesus and then all of the sudden they become believers. That is why the doctrine of accountability, the age of accountability, has been developed is to get them out of that mess.

"Well, our children aren't really Christians until they make their own profession of faith or they walk down the aisle or they say the sinners' prayer and then they become Christians. Well, what were they before? Unbelievers? Enemies of God?"

"Well, no, no. I wouldn't say that."

"Well, what would you say?"

You are either a child of God or a child of the devil, one or the other. And that goes for your children. And if you are a Christian, according to our view of the Scriptures, your children deserve the name Christian, too. You call them Christian.

Why is it...? Let me ask you a question. Why is it that in almost every religion of the world children are called by the name of their parents' religion except for Christianity?



Muslim children are Muslims. Jewish children are Jewish. But Christian children, oh, they are not Christian until they make a decision for Jesus. Why is that?

It is because we don't understand the Word of God. Christian children are Christian by virtue of their baptism into the covenant of God. They are not half children or half Christian no more than they are half children. They are Christian and we should teach them that.

And people object and say, "How can you be sure they are the elect?"

Well, we don't know that. That is not our arena. God didn't ask us to ascertain who is the elect and who is not the elect. God calls us to deal with our children as if they were believers, as if they were Christians. And unless we prove otherwise, unless they prove otherwise by denying the faith we are to treat them as Christians.

1 Corinthians 7:14, the apostle Paul says that your children, the children of believers are holy. 1 Corinthians 7:14...I will read that to you. 1 Corinthians 7:14. I didn't say this. Paul said it. 1 Corinthians seven, verse 14, here talking about a believing husband and an unbelieving wife or vice versa, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband."<sup>11</sup>

Now that is a passage we are going to have to deal with, right? How can unbelieving wife be sanctified, unbelieving as she is, be sanctified by her believing husband? You tell me that. We are going to have to rearrange our thought patterns here, aren't we? They are set aside. They receive the blessings of God. Even if they are unbelievers they still are imparted with many of the blessings of God. They are set aside by God. Even though they are unbelievers, they are married to believer and that puts them in a special category.

And then he goes on and says, "...for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy."<sup>12</sup>

What do you mean children are holy? They are not perfect. We know that. Everybody who has children knows that. Holy means to be separated. They are separated unto God. They belong to God. They are God's children.

Even in the Presbyterian Church I have been asked over and over and over, "Preacher, what do I say to my children? Are they Christian or are they not Christian?"

Well, I say to them, "Maybe you are God's elect. Maybe you are not God's elect. Maybe you need to wait and make a decision for Jesus and become a Christian when you reach age 12. Teach them that they are Christians. They are under the covenant of God. They have been baptized into his Church. And they have a responsibility," as we will see here shortly, "to live by that faith by where they have been called."

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:14

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Let me put it very bluntly. I don't know if God loves all the children of the world. Maybe he does. But I do know that God loves all of our covenant children. I can say that. I don't know, as the song goes, if God loves all the children of the world. Maybe he does. But I do know and I can say with authority, that God loves all of his covenant children.

And then people say, "Well, you believe salvation is automatic. You believe that just because you baptize a child that automatically this child is going to be saved. This child is going to be regenerated."

No, no more than a Baptist can say somebody who professes faith in Jesus will be a true believer.

We believe in covenant responsibilities. We believe that unless we raise our children in the fear and the discipline and the admonition of the Lord that baptism in a sense will not take. It won't take. It is not automatic. This is where we disagree with the Roman Catholics. It is not automatic. We baptize our children. We give them the sign of the covenant. We tell them that the promises of God are unto them and we tell them that they have an obligation to respond to the things of God, to the teachings of God.

Unless we raise our children in church in the fear and the discipline and teaching them to love Christ, teaching them to sing all the songs, "the Bible is the book for me" and "Jesus loves me this I know" and as they get older and they get older and they get older we teach them the catechism.

We ask them the question, "Who made you?"

And from the time they are a bitty, bitty age and they can only say, "God," we teach them that God made them. We teach them who Jesus Christ is from the time they grow up. And we don't let the Sunday teachers do it. We do it at home and we don't let mommy do it. We let daddy mainly do it. Daddy has to do it. Daddy has to teach our children the doctrines of our faith in the home at the dinner table, at the supper table, in the car, wherever we are as the father and the mother, too, are teaching the children the Word of God, teaching them to sing the praises of God, teaching them to pray to Christ, teaching them that they sinners without hope except in the mercy of Christ, we believe that God will regenerate their hearts and God will bring them unto Christ.

And do you know what? He does. He does time after time after time. The exception happens on occasion, but time after time after time.

You know, when I had...we had three children in my family, when they were born into my home it was like...what a responsibility? And I pray, "Oh, God, that these children will grow up to be Christians."

What was I to do? Take them to the church. Get them baptized and say, “Well, God will take it all from here?”

No. Take them to the church. Let God put his sign upon them and then start to work. Start to work. Start teaching them the things of God. Start leading them in prayer. Start teaching them that they are sinners without the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Teach them to pray. Lead them to church to take their responsibilities seriously under the covenant and to tell them, “If you leave the Church, if you rebel against God, God is going to get you.”

And that is kind of hard to tell your children that, but that is what I used to tell my children.

“God has given you a special privilege, children. God has put you in this church and God has baptized you and God has made promises to you and you have been raised with the teaching of the Word of God. You have been raised in a church that preaches the Word of God. And if you rebel against that, if you turn away from that, God is going to get you. But if you love Jesus and you follow after Jesus God is going to bless you. And when the day comes that you understand what it all means, all you can do is look back and say, ‘It is by the grace of God. It is by the grace of God. It is by the grace of God he put me in this family. He gave me these parents. He gave me this church. He gave me the Word of God. And my Sunday school teacher taught me to sing, “Jesus loves me, this I know.” And I grew out of that and I started singing other hymns and I have started singing...we sing hymns in the car, you know. We sing at home. We read the Bible. We are taught the Word of God and daddy loves Jesus and mommy loves Jesus and you know what? I love Jesus.’”

Why did all that happen? Because God said it would happen. God said it would happen. If we are faithful in raising our children they will be believers.

How do we know that is true? God says, “I will baptize them and I will show you it is true. This is God’s promise. This is my Son, signed, sealed and I will deliver.”

That is the road less traveled. That is the road that brought me to the conviction that God would have us to baptize our children. Those are impediments that we have to overcome. Those impediments are salvation is not the work of man. Salvation is not a matter waiting until people get a certain age and hoping they make a decision for Jesus. Salvation is taking hold of the promises of God that not only are unto us, but unto our children, and start getting to work as soon as they are able to say, “Daddy.” As soon as they are able to say, “God.”

“Who made you?”

“God.”

“What else did God make?”

“Everything.”

“Good, son. You are on your way. Daddy loves Jesus. Mommy loves Jesus. And we want you to love Jesus, too, because Jesus has been so good to you.”

You see, we teach them. We train them. We are going to church today. We are going to a joyful occasion today. We love church in this family. There is nothing more important than God and church in this family.

“My daddy loves Jesus. My mommy loves Jesus. I am going to love Jesus, too.”

Why does all that happen? Because God makes a promise, “If you will do that I will work in the hearts of your children and your children will come up to love the Lord Jesus Christ.”

And when they do we can look back on that baptism and say, “God was faithful, wasn’t he? God was faithful.”

You know, God made a promise. I had three children 25, 27, 29. They are all Christians. And I look at them and do you know what I say? “Well, when they got old enough they made a decision for Jesus and I am so happy.”

No. I baptized all three of them. God made a promise that if we taught them in the ways of the Lord... We brought them up in prayer, bathed in prayer, bathed in the Word of God, loving them, gently, carefully, disciplining them when they needed it, drawing their attention that they were sinners in need of the grace of God. And God worked in their hearts and so drew them to Christ. Thanks be unto God that he does that. God was faithful to that day when they were baptized. And my wife and I stood there and said, “Yes, we will raise them in the fear and the admonition of the Lord.”

The promise is to you and unto your children. God does the saving and God will save your children as well as you. And we are to treat our children as Christians, not half Christians, not potential Christians, but as Christians. And we are to warn them that, “If you rebel against the blessings of God you shall suffer the judgment of God.”

It was to the Jew first in blessing and the Jew first in cursing. And likewise, children, children of this church, you who are five years old, 10 years old, 15 years old, 18 years old, if you rebel against God, if you rebel against the things we have been taught in this Word then God will come after you first. But if you love him and follow after him, depend upon him for forgiveness, God will bless you and God will bless your children. God will regenerate them and you will see their heart, some day, turned toward the Lord Jesus Christ because we obeyed God and we baptized all of our children. To God be the glory, let us pray.

*Oh Lord, our God, it is very difficult sometimes to see why we do the things we do. We do them not out of tradition. We do them out of conviction. Help us to see that salvation is not in the hands of man. Oh, let us not give man that arrogance, but help us to see that salvation is in the hands of God. And even as God regenerated the hearts of John the Baptist and Jeremiah and Isaiah even in the womb, so he can so regenerate our heart...the hearts of our children and so bring them unto himself. And yet, our Father, we confess that it is not by simply the power of the water, but it is by the power of the Spirit who works through the faithfulness of the parents and as the parents are faithful God will work in the hearts of their children. This is God's promise. And, oh Lord, help us take comfort in those promises. And may all of our covenant children here today see the blessings that God has given them and may none of them—not even one—reject and therefore bring the condemnation of God upon them, the very promises and the very blessings that he has showered upon them. And we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.*