

Please turn in your copies of God's Word to Acts chapter 2. Last week we began looking more in depth at the sacrament of baptism, seeing that it is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. We looked at the connection between the Old Covenant sign of circumcision and the New Covenant sign of baptism, that in essence they signify and seal the very same spiritual realities unto those who receive the external mark. This morning we will build upon what we have already considered as we continue our look at the sacrament of baptism and how the Lord has prescribed us to worship Him. With this in mind turn your attention now to the reading of God's most holy Word from Acts chapter 2 beginning at verse 38.

Read Acts 2:38-39

Pray

The purpose of this sermon series, I have said numerous times, is for us to understand why we worship the way we do. It is for us to examine what the Word of God says concerning worship and to base our practices here at Westminster upon those things, and those things alone, which the Lord has prescribed to be done in the worship of Him. And so it is absolutely necessary for us to consider these things. It is absolutely necessary that we learn from the Word of God and make these things our standard. We do not base our practice in the Church on tradition or preference or anything else besides the Word of God. We are to dig into the Word, search the Scriptures to see whether or not our practice here is in accordance with it. I fear that many in the Church today, and even in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, do not hold these truths concerning the worship of God as conviction. And so it is my hope that as we continue in this series these truths will become your conviction if they are not already. And if they are already, I pray that you become better equipped to explain and defend our worship practices from the Scripture and be able to more readily shut down any attack on Biblical worship that may come your way. This morning we are going to continue to live more deeply into the Biblical doctrine and practice of baptism. This is, perhaps, one area

in which the modern evangelical Church is most divided, and an area in which you may be challenged the most in your understanding of it. As I've said previously, nearly all claiming the title of Christian recognize the command for baptism; however, the differences come when we put that command into practice. One question which tends to produce varying answers is who may be baptized? It is my hope this morning that as we consider the theme of baptism and its recipients that you will see our practice of baptizing both believers and their children is not only an acceptable practice, but is commanded by Scripture and necessary for the right administration of the sacrament. We will consider this theme under three heads: first, the call to repent and be baptized; next, those who heed that call; and finally, the children of believers.

Let us first consider the call to repent and be baptized. In our text we read the words of the Apostle Peter, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The Apostle Peter has essentially entered into the mission field without ever leaving the confines of Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit has descended upon the Apostles and has empowered them to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ unto those gathered in the city on the day of Pentecost. This verse comes at the end of what could be called the very first sermon of the New Testament Church. Peter faithfully expounds the Gospel of Jesus Christ, showing that He was raised by the power of God, explaining to those Jews gathered that He is the promised King that is to sit on the throne of David forever. He concluded this Gospel presentation with the glorious declaration of verse 36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." The people there heard the Gospel. They understood what was being said unto them, and they knew that it was the truth of God and it would radically change who they are. And so we read, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the

apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter’s response was simple, repent and be baptized.

There is first the call to repentance. You must turn away from your sin and turn unto Christ. Unfortunately, most people conflate repentance and confession of sin, but the two are not synonymous. Repentance is much more than just confessing your sin. It is forsaking your sin, casting it off so as to walk in the ways of righteousness. The Shorter Catechism gives us a helpful definition of repentance in its answer to question 87, “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.” Repentance involves having a true sense of your own sin. In other words, you come to understand your need for the Savior. The Lord Jesus came to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). Part of being saved involves understanding just what it is that you are being saved from in the first place. If you do not feel the gravity of your sins then true repentance cannot take place. You must also apprehend the mercy of God in Christ. A true sense of your sin does you no good unless you also then understand and believe that there is abundant mercy to be found from God through faith in Jesus Christ. You must remember that salvation from sin is the result of God’s mercy and grace alone. Then, out of grief and hatred of your sin, you turn from that sin and turn unto God. True repentance bears out the fruit of that repentance by no longer walking in the way of sin but walking in new obedience unto the Lord.

Then there is the second part of the call, to be baptized for the remission of sins. I remember one time years ago I was asked if I believed in baptism for the remission of sins, and the person who asked this of me was shocked when I answered yes but denied baptismal regeneration. Friends, it is not baptism which brings about the remission of sins but only the blood of Jesus Christ. Baptism, if you recall from last week, signifies and seals that

washing away of your sins by the blood of the Lamb. But the water itself is not the cleansing agent but only the Spirit applying the blood of Christ to your heart. Calvin writes, “Although in the text and order of the words, baptism doth here go before remission of sins, yet doth it follow it in order, because it is nothing else but a sealing of those good things which we have by Christ that they may be established in our consciences.” And so the call is to be baptized. To reject this call, to neglect this sacrament of initiation into the visible Church, is to commit a great sin. You cannot forgo the waters of baptism and claim to be obedient to the commands of the Lord. It is required of each and every one of you to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins. If you have not submitted yourself to that command of the Lord then you must repent of your sin of neglecting the sacrament and bear out the fruit of that repentance by receiving the sign and seal of the New Covenant.

And there were many on that day who did just that. They heard the Gospel proclaimed, they were pricked in their heart as verse 37 tells us, and they heeded the call of the Lord through His servant Peter to repent and be baptized. In verse 41 we read, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” The gospel was faithfully preached, and, as men obeyed that gospel and believed in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, they were baptized. The Spirit worked in a mighty way through the preaching of the Word to bring many souls unto Christ. Matthew Henry comments, “These same persons that had many of them been eye-witnesses of the death of Christ, and the prodigies that attended it, and were not wrought upon by them, were yet wrought upon by the preaching of the word, for it is this that is the power of God unto salvation.” They received the Word of the Lord, embraced it as the means of salvation, and welcomed it to change their hearts and lives. What a beautiful account this is of the power of the preached Word to convict men of sin and drive them to their Savior. Oh, that Jehovah would cause such a great and blessed thing to happen in our lifetime in this land

as well, that thousands upon thousands would come to a saving knowledge of Christ Jesus through the proclamation of His Word.

And so we see here that first category of people who are those who receive baptism. They are those who hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, are pricked in their heart, and repent and believe the Gospel. These people who were present this day were Jews who had come to the city of Jerusalem for the feast days. This was their first time ever hearing the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They new of the covenant promises of the Lord made in the Old Covenant, but here they are confronted with the fulfillment of those promises in Christ. They were baptized; believing with the heart, they made confession with the mouth, and enrolled themselves among the disciples of Christ by that sacrament which He had instituted. These men converted from their Jewish faith and embraced the Christian religion. That is why they were baptized. We practice the same thing today. Think of our missionaries out in the mission field in foreign lands. There are those those have faithfully proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ and have seen men convert from all sorts of false religions: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions. This is in keeping with what our Catechism says, “Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to Him.” This is the normative practice of the Church, to preach the Gospel to those who are outside of the covenant and upon their conversion to the Christian faith to baptize them. In fact, this is what was seen under the Old Covenant dispensation as well. When someone who was outside the covenant people of God came to embrace the true religion they were to be circumcised as signifying that they had embraced the covenant and were no longer part of the heathen nations.

This first category of people who are the right recipients of baptism shouldn't be a controversial thing. On this particular point virtually all of Christianity is in agreement. And yet, our Baptist brothers take upon themselves the moniker of credobaptist and act

as though that is a title reserved only for them. Friends, we are credobaptists as well. We baptize new converts who are outside the covenant people of God upon their repentance a credible profession of faith. I'm overwhelmed with joy every time I get on Facebook and see our brothers in other Presbyterian Churches posting images of a new convert being baptized. What a glorious thing that is. I pray that the Lord would bless our efforts here in evangelism and outreach so that we too will have baptisms of new professing believers. So we ought to embrace the title of credobaptist for ourselves and not let the Baptists have that claim. We are credobaptists; they are credo-only baptists. There is a big difference there.

And that difference is the spark of the division on this topic of who is to receive baptism. We are credobaptists, but we are not credo-only baptists. We believe what the Apostle Peter said is true, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." We believe that baptism is not simply for those who heed the call to repent and be baptized, but for the children of believers as well. Remember, these converts on the day of Pentecost were Jews. They understood the promises of the Lord. They knew that their children were part of the covenant people of God and were rightful heirs of the promise. And so upon their conversion to the Christian faith and receiving the New Covenant sign they would have thought to themselves, "What must be done with my children? Must they be thrown out, or taken in with me?" And Peter answers, "Taken in, for the promise, that great promise of God's being to you a God, is as much to you and to your children now as ever it was." He uses the very same language that these Jews would have remembered from that covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 17, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And

God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.”

The children of believers had always been part of the covenant community and received the sign and seal of the covenant. If there was to be a break from the thousands of years of infant inclusion in the covenant then we would expect to see that instruction. But we don't see it. In fact, what we do see is that even in the Old Covenant the prophecies of the New Covenant showed the inclusion of the seed of believers. Isaiah 44:3, “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.” Isaiah 59:21, “As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.” The seed of the godly are to be counted among those who are the covenant people of God. Ever since the gospel was first proclaimed, there has been no change in the nature of the covenant standing of the people of God, and children have always been given a definite place and value in the community of believers. They were the children of God's children, children of promise, children of the covenant, children on whom God had set His mark. For several thousands of years before Christ, children were members of the covenant community and God's people were profoundly aware of that fact. So if the meaning of circumcision and baptism is essentially the same as we saw last week in Colossians 2, and God commanded that infants should receive the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament then it follows that, unless God expressly forbids infant inclusion, in the new covenant infants should also be baptized. They are to be baptized because they are part of the covenant people of God, not in order to make them members of the covenant.

But the Baptist will argue that what we have is an argument from silence, and to an extent they are true, but that silence is deafening. But in another sense, it is not an argument from silence.

It is an argument from reason deduced by good and necessary consequence from the totality of Scripture. And while the argument from the continuity of the covenants ought to be enough to cause us to embrace the practice of infant baptism, we are given more evidence even within the New Testament. What does Paul say concerning the children of believers in 1 Corinthians 7:14? “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.” The child of even just one believing parent is holy, set apart unto God, by the faith of the believing parent. Are we to keep one whom the Lord has called holy from receiving the sign and seal of the covenant to which they belong that constitutes them as holy? Surely not. And every Christian recognizes there is something unique, something different, something holy about their children. We all raise our children as children of the promise, calling on them to make that promise their own and embrace the covenant. We all teach our children to pray unto God as their Father, something which is only true of those in the covenant. Praise God our Baptist brethren are inconsistent in their view of covenant children. If they were to be consistent with their understanding of who is actually in the covenant then they would treat their children as a heathen and tax collector. Unfortunately there are some who are consistent, going as far as to call their children vipers in diapers. What a sick way to view one that the Lord calls holy.

And while nearly all of Christianity is agreed on the special standing of the children of believers, the objection often comes asking where the examples in Scripture are of infants being baptized. When you look at the actual examples of baptism in the Scripture, you’ll find that surprisingly there are not many. Paul was baptized upon his conversion from Judaism. The Ethiopian eunuch was baptized likely as a convert from Judaism as well, since he was likely a proselyte to the Jewish faith. Simon Magus was baptized upon profession of faith out of paganism, though later he was proven to be a false convert. That is it for the individual examples of baptisms in the New Testament. The other accounts of baptisms are

household baptisms. The household of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10. In Acts 16 we see the baptism of Lydia and her household, “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.” Further in Acts 16 the Philippian jailer and his household. In Acts 18 we see Crispus being baptized along with those of his household. And in 1 Corinthians 1 we read Paul say, “I baptized also the household of Stephanas.” The pattern of the New Testament concerning baptism is the same pattern of the Old Testament concerning circumcision, that the leader of the household receive the sign of the covenant along with their household. Recall the command of the Lord to Abraham, “And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.” If we are to be faithful to the Word of God we must observe the same practice of administering the sign and seal of the covenant to our children.

Brothers and sisters, I know this is a doctrine that is contested within the Church today, but for 1500 years this practice was the universal practice of all Christians. It is not our responsibility to prove the inclusion of our children in the covenant community, but it is the responsibility of those claiming their exclusion to prove it from Scripture. This cannot be done. And so we practice this sacrament in this way, baptizing those who come into the covenant community from outside as well as baptizing those who are born into this covenant. May we never think that this is merely tradition or that it is simply a holdover practice from an earlier time. This is

the command of the Lord. “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” Praise God that Jehovah is a covenant keeping God.