

Covenant Baptism

SERMON

By

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TEXT: Colossians 2:6-15

PROP: Because children of believers are members of God's covenant community they should receive baptism as the sign of the covenant.

Colossians 2:6-15 (ESV)

6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, **7** rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. **9** For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, **10** and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. **11** 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, **12** having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. **13** And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, **14** by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. **15** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Our attention has been drawn to the subject of baptism in our service this morning and it is my purpose to consider this sacrament in greater detail. In the history of the church the sacraments have been a major issue of debate and their meaning and observance continues to divide the church of Christ.

There are a number of different views on the meaning of baptism. Roman Catholic theology teaches that baptism is a means of dispensing saving grace to the believer, "for through baptism as through a door men enter the Church." Lutheran theology teaches that Christ is dispensed with the sacrament such that men are ordinarily regenerated by it. Both believe that children are always saved by baptism. Similarly the Church of Christ and others boldly proclaim that we are saved by baptism. It is of particular interest that Jewish theologians also maintain that circumcision saves which

places them with the majority of modern Judaeo-Christian positions with regard to initiatory ritual.

However the Bible teaches that baptism **signifies** a washing away of sin as we are washed by the blood of Christ and his Spirit. It is not the means whereby we are saved but "**signifies and seals** our engrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's." (*Westminster Shorter Catechism #94*) It is belief in Christ through which we are saved and the lack of it by which we are condemned (Mark 16:16). "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

In Colossians Paul sets forth **the pre-eminence of Christ**. He tells us that our redemption and the forgiveness are in Jesus.

Colossians 1:13-14 (ESV)

13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, **14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul continues to say that Jesus is pre-eminent in all creation and indeed is the creator of all things. He is the head of the church. He takes first place in everything, He is the one through whom God reconciles all things to himself. He is the true knowledge of God's mystery. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him and

Colossians 2:9 (ESV)

9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,

Paul never visited Colosse but Epaphras, the founder of the church there, visited Paul in prison in Rome to tell him of some strange doctrines that threatened the spiritual health of the church. The false doctrine Paul was responding to is not at all clear because the epistle does not really address an error as much as it set forth the sufficiency of the person and work of Christ. Paul was imprisoned in Rome at the end of his ministry so that all sorts of false teachings and Jewish tradition had been inculcated into the churches.

1. Human traditions and philosophies have no part in one's salvation. Neither are we saved by works such as baptism.

Colossians 2:8-10 (ESV)

8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

One characteristic that distinguishes Christianity from all other regions of the world is the teaching of salvation by grace, through faith, apart from human works. For this reason, the following headline in the Grand Rapids Press was especially interesting- "Conversation to Hindu Faith Is Tortuous." The article stated, "A West German businessman has completed his conversion to the Hindu faith by piercing himself through the cheeks with a 1/4-inch thick, 4-foot-long steel rod, and pulling a chariot for 2 miles by ropes attached to his back and chest by steel hooks. Others walk through 20-foot-long pits of fire, wear shoes with soles made of nails, or hang in the air spread-eagle from hooks embedded in their backs."

What a contrast to the text before us. Aren't you glad that conversion to belief in Jesus Christ is not accomplished by this kind of self-inflicted torture? Paul is concerned that we not be captured by philosophy or empty deception or deluded with persuasive argument. Why? Because we must come to Christ for wisdom and knowledge which can ultimately be found nowhere else. We are saved through no other knowledge save that of Christ. There is no human protocol or tradition that will bring us into salvation. In particular baptism does not save us. Though it is a sacrament ordained by Christ it is not through the administration of baptism that we are saved. According to our text, we have been filled or made complete in Christ who is the head of all rule and authority.

Paul has been talking about the means of our salvation, our transferral into the kingdom of his beloved Son, our deliverance from the domain of darkness. How is that accomplished? Not by baptism or philosophy or science or tradition but by the power of Christ who is *e/shaddai* God Almighty. It is accomplished by grace. There is no if clause here. No, "If you believe." No, "If you hold to a certain philosophy." No, "If you bow down to this idol or that one." God out of his mere good pleasure has mercy on whom he has mercy and has compassion on whom he has compassion. He alone has the power to make us complete, to deliver us from the domain of darkness, and he does so with complete sovereignty. We **have been filled** or made complete (*peplaromenoi*- perfect passive participle) in every particular, and have been rendered perfect. We have been rendered perfect by a power outside ourselves.

Paul continues,

Colossians 2:11-12 (ESV)

11 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, **12** having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

We are not rendered perfect by physical circumcision done by man but by spiritual circumcision done by Christ, which is to say, having been buried with Christ by baptism we were thereby circumcised with a circumcision made without hands. The power of God spiritually circumcises us or baptizes us and raises us up with Christ. That we are raised up through faith in the powerful working of God speaks of a faith that is also the gift of God. Faith is the fruit of conversion. No one will have faith in the power of God unless they have been spiritually circumcised or baptized into Christ.

We read,

Ezekiel 36:25-27 (ESV)

25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. **26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

And,

1 Corinthians 6:11 (ESV)

11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

All of this is passive. We were washed, sanctified, justified in the name YAHWEH Christ - **by the Spirit of God**. We are washed by the Holy Spirit not by the water of baptism or the act of circumcision. Physical circumcision or baptism is an outward sign and seal of this inward work of God's Spirit.

We find a strong case for infant baptism here in

Colossians 2:11-12 (ESV)

11 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, **12 having been buried**

with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Circumcised with a circumscion made without hands -- having been buried with him in baptism. Clearly baptism is circumcision made without hands. And if so although physically different circumcision and baptism both serve the same purpose. The purpose of circumcision is given in,

Genesis 17:7,9, 11 (ESV)

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

9 And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.

Genesis 17:11 (ESV)

11 (Circumcision) shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

The covenant of grace is stated in verse 7,

Genesis 17:7 (ESV)

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, **to be God to you and to your offspring after you.**

It is this covenant for which circumcision and now baptism is a sign and seal. Therefore as Abraham a believer in Yahweh was to circumcise all the males in his household so are we who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to baptize all the children in our household. Paul writes,

Galatians 3:9 (ESV)

9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

The covenant blessings apply to the entire household of believers. The children of believers obviously benefit from Christian upbringing like Timothy of whom we read,

2 Timothy 3:14-15 (ESV)

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it **15** and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

If children benefit from the covenant of grace they deserve the sign and seal of it. Again we read.

Acts 2:38-39 (ESV)

38 And Peter said to them, "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. **39** 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."

The covenant promise of which Peter speaks apply to the believing parents, to their children and to their offspring who have yet to be born and all of these should receive the sign of the promised blessing.

Our text in Colossians chapter 2 teaches us that we are saved not by baptism but by the power of God through which we are made alive together with Christ. When we were dead in our transgressions by grace alone God forgave us canceling our debt. Not by baptism did he do this. but by nailing the sins of his people to the cross and declaring that our sins are forgiven. God buries us with Christ in baptism and raises us up in Christ "through faith in the working of God."

There is a tradition that Jonathan Edwards, third president of Princeton and one of America's greatest thinkers, had a daughter with an uncontrollable temper. But, as is often the case, this weakness was not known to the outside world. A worthy young man fell in love with her and sought her hand in marriage.

"You can't have her," was the abrupt answer of Jonathan Edwards.

"But I love her," the young man replied.

"You can't have her," said Edwards.

"But she loves me," continued the young man.

Again Edwards said, "You can't have her."

"Why?" asked the young man.

"Because she is not worthy of you."

"But," he asked, "she is a Christian, is she not?"

"Yes, she is a Christian, but the grace of God can live with some people with whom no one else could ever live."

We must understand that conversion brings about a **process** of sanctification in us. We are justified, adopted and sanctified as the result of conversion. All this by the power of God not by works of righteousness which we have done. Not even by baptism. But baptism is the sign and seal of God's covenant and we as believing parents should be faithful in providing the sign of God's gracious promise to be a God to us and to our children after us. Because God has washed me with his blood and Spirit I must increasingly live a holy and blameless life. It is a necessary consequence of regeneration.