

## LORD'S DAY 27

72. Q. Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins?

A. No, only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins.<sup>1</sup>

1. **Matthew 3:11** I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

**1 Peter 3:21** There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal

of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

**1 John 1:7** But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

73. Q. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins?

A. God speaks in this way for a good reason. He wants to teach us that the blood and Spirit of Christ remove our sins just as water takes away dirt from the body.<sup>1</sup> But, even more important, He wants to assure us by this divine pledge and sign that we are as truly cleansed from our sins spiritually as we are bodily washed with water.<sup>2</sup>

1. **1 Corinthians 6:11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

**Revelation 1:5** and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

**Revelation 7:14** And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

2. **Mark 16:16** He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

**Acts 2:38** Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

**Romans 6:3-4** Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

**Galatians 3:27** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

74. Q. Should infants, too, be baptized?

A. Yes.  
 Infants as well as adults  
 belong to God's covenant and congregation.<sup>1</sup>  
 Through Christ's blood  
 the redemption from sin  
 and the Holy Spirit, who works faith,  
 are promised to them  
 no less than to adults.<sup>2</sup>  
 Therefore, by baptism, as sign of the covenant,  
 they must be grafted into the Christian church  
 and distinguished from the children of unbelievers.<sup>3</sup>  
 This was done in the old covenant by circumcision,<sup>4</sup>  
 in place of which baptism was instituted  
 in the new covenant.<sup>5</sup>

1. **Genesis 17:7** And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

**Matthew 19:14** But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

2. **Psalms 22:10** I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God.

**Isaiah 44:1-3** Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen. <sup>2</sup> Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you: "Fear not, O Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. <sup>3</sup> For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring;"

**Acts 2:38-39** Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

**Acts 16:31** So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

3. **Acts 10:47** Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?

**1 Corinthians 7:14** For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

4. **Genesis 17:9-14** And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup> "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; <sup>11</sup> "and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. <sup>12</sup> "He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. <sup>13</sup> "He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup> "And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

5. **Colossians 2:11-13** In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, <sup>12</sup> buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. <sup>13</sup> And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,



In the previous Lord's Day, we paid particular attention to the wording of Q. 69. We stressed the fact that the Catechism does not ask, "How does your baptism benefit you?" but it asks, "How does baptism signify and seal to you that Christ's sacrifice benefits you?" Baptism

itself cannot save us. Baptism can only point us to Christ, who can save us by virtue of His obedience unto death on the cross. This matter is taken up in this Lord's Day, wherein we learn what baptism does and what baptism does not do.

The Catechism first tells us what baptism does **not** do. The church of Rome teaches that when baptism is administered, sins are actually and immediately forgiven. The moment that the water touches a person's forehead, his sin is removed. Rome teaches that without baptism there is no forgiveness of sins.

The Catechism denies the teaching of Rome. Baptism does not wash away sin. Only Christ's blood can wash away sin. What does baptism do then? Baptism strengthens our faith by teaching us about, and assuring us of, the promise that God will forgive us our sins if we ask this of Him in faith. By faith we are grafted into Christ and share in the forgiveness of sins which He obtained with His blood.

Rome teaches that baptism leads **directly** to the forgiveness of sins (Baptism  $\Rightarrow$  forgiveness of sins).

The Reformed teach that baptism leads **indirectly** to the same (Baptism  $\Rightarrow$  strengthening of faith  $\Rightarrow$  forgiveness of sins).

In baptism we receive the sign and seal of the promise, but with the promise comes the demand to believe. Only those who fulfil this demand receive what is promised. Only those who believe share in the forgiveness of sins.

We should be clear on this matter. All those who belong to the covenant receive the promise. But not all who receive the promise receive what is promised because they do not accept it in faith.

Baptism might be compared to a cheque. If I write you a cheque for \$100, I have promised that amount to you. I have an arrangement with the bank which allows you to take that promise to them, and they will give you the said amount from my account. But if you do not cash it, you do not receive that \$100.

Baptism is similar. God gives the promise of the forgiveness of sins, but you must cash in your baptism, so to speak. Through prayer you must take this promise to God, as it were, and in faith ask Him for what He has promised.

In defence of Rome someone might argue that Scripture calls baptism the washing away of sins. It does not say that it is the **promise** of the washing away of sins. Scripture says **it is** the washing away of sins! Why does Scripture say it like that?

Let us go back to our example of the cheque for \$100. If I gave you a cheque for that amount, you would probably go home and tell your parents that the minister gave you \$100. That is the way we speak. Actually, all that I gave you was a piece of paper containing the promise of \$100, for that is what a cheque is - a promissory note. But if you trust me, then you will not see much difference between the cheque and the real thing.

In the sacrament of baptism, God gives us the promise of forgiveness and renewal. And in order to impress upon His faithfulness and trustworthiness, He says that He gives us the real thing. As far as God is concerned His promise is very real—so real that He identifies the promise and what is promised. This language should remove all doubt about the certainty of God's promise.

But, if what is promised is only received through faith, we might wonder whether baptism is of any real value to the infant.

The Catechism says that "*by the use of the sacraments, God more fully declares and seals to us the promise of the gospel!*" (cf. Q&A 66). In order for baptism to be of any benefit to us, it must be **used**. That does not simply mean that baptism has to be administered. No, we use baptism each time we concentrate upon its meaning. To use baptism, then, a child must be old enough to understand what is being taught to us. Until he is able to understand, baptism does not benefit him.

This doesn't mean that the baptism of the child is useless until then. By no means! In the first place, the baptism of the infant benefits the parents. In the second place, it benefits the whole congregation who see the sacrament administered to the child. Others benefit immediately from the baptism of the child, but the child itself must grow old enough to understand before

his baptism can be of any use to him. For only when he is old enough to understand can the sacrament teach and assure him of the saving work of Christ. Only when he is mature enough to understand can he use his baptism.

Because baptism is only of benefit to those who understand what is portrayed in it, the parents (or guardians) of the child must promise to instruct the child in the faith before baptism may be administered. If this promise of instruction is not made, then the child cannot receive baptism. Baptism is of no value to a child unless he/she is taught about the work of Christ.

Why baptise infants then? Why not wait until they are a little older and are able to understand? God demands that children be baptised in their infancy for two reasons:

1. First, in order to give comfort to the mother and father of the child. The parents are comforted by the fact that the God of the covenant claims this child as His own.
2. In the second place, God wishes to teach us that He is the first One in our lives. Lest we should ever say that we chose God, God comes to us while we are new-born babies, to prove that it is He who chose us first. Lest we should ever say that God loved us because we first loved Him. God comes to us long before we even know He exists, much less love Him. God is first. God takes the initiative in salvation. When God established His covenant with us, we contributed nothing. The establishment of the covenant is one-sided.

Are all children included in the covenant? All the children of believers are included, but not the children of unbelievers. For God declared to Abraham, *“I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you”* (Genesis 17:7). The promise was repeated in Acts 2:39: *“For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”*

Here we see the wisdom of God in choosing to work His salvation primarily through the covenant. God doesn't just work with individuals. Oh, sometimes He does that. But God has chosen to work primarily through the covenant. And no wonder. If men are to believe in God and in Jesus Christ, they must know about God. They must learn the Scriptures. Now God says to Christian parents, *“I give the promise to you and to your children”* (cf Acts 2:39). At the same time God demands that these Christian parents bring up their children to know God and to love Him. God uses parents, who have the authority over their children, to raise these children in the Christian faith.

There are some, however, who say that baptism should not be administered to children. They misunderstand the purpose of the sacrament. They believe that in baptism man speaks to God. They believe that man makes a promise to God and then receives baptism. But as we saw in LD 26, it is God who is sealing the promise in the sacrament of baptism.

TRUE	FALSE
In baptism, <b>God</b> signifies and seals His <b>promise</b> ...  ...to man	...to God  In baptism, <b>man</b> professes His <b>faith</b> ...

God gives the promise to the little child. As the child grows older, the parents are to instruct him in the faith and to teach him that God requires him to respond by accepting these promises in faith.

Can we prove that children should be baptised? Baptists will point out to us that there is not one instance of children being baptised. We admit that we do not read specifically of any child being baptised, while we do read of many adults being baptised after they believe. But Scripture gives us a **number of grounds to baptise children.**

1. The first ground for the baptism of children is the unity of the covenant in the old and new dispensations. At the ascension of Christ the church entered into a new dispensation. But covenant of grace remains the same in both dispensations. The promise is the same, and the demand is the same. The covenant is made with the same people as well. As we have seen from the quotation from Acts 2:39, the covenant in the new dispensation is made with believers and their children, just as it was in the old dispensation.

Furthermore, the New Testament sacrament of baptism corresponds to the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision. In the New Testament, inclusion in the covenant is signified by a non-bloody sign, for Christ's perfect sacrifice has put an end to the shedding of blood. But though the sign changes, the covenant remains unchanged, and the participants in the covenant remain the same. Just as children were circumcised in the old dispensation, so children are baptised in the new dispensation.

2. That children should be baptised is also clear from an incident which happened while Christ was on earth. Mothers brought their little children to Christ that He might bless them. The disciples thought that Christ was too busy to be bothered with little children. But Christ told the disciples not to prevent the children from coming. *"Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 19:13). The kingdom of heaven belongs just as much to children as to adults. Should they, then, not receive the sign and seal of their inclusion?

The fact that we do not expressly read of children being baptised in the New Testament does not pose a problem. In the first place, children were always included in the old covenant. There is no need to stress a matter which has always been well understood. Only when something changes is there a need to stress the change.

Furthermore, we should realise that with the dawning of the new dispensation, God began new covenant lines. Many of the Jews failed to accept the promise of God, so God brought the promise to the Gentiles. Naturally, when God brings the gospel to those who have not known Him, He brings it to adults who can understand it. But as soon as they believe, they are baptised along with their children. For the promise is made with believers and their children. Thus we read in the New Testament of **households** being baptised when the head of the family comes to faith (cf. Acts 16:15,33, 18:8, 1 Corinthians 1:16). Were there no children in at least one of these four households? We cannot say with certainty. But the baptism of households is in line with the command that God gave to Abraham to circumcise all those who were in his house, which included children (cf. Genesis 17:12-13). This is also in line with Acts 2:39 *"For the promise is to you and to your children."*

You have been baptised. That means that God has given you rich and wonderful promises! As you sit under the preaching, you hear these promises proclaimed. God demands that you must acknowledge these promises in faith. When the elders of the church are convinced that you know the contents of these promises, and that your faith is genuine, they will allow you to make public profession of faith, which gives you permission to partake of the second sacrament, the Lord's Supper.



**Questions:**

1. Can baptism itself save us? What can it do?
2. According to the church of Rome, how are sins forgiven? Is this correct? What washes away our sin?
3. What does baptism do? What does faith do?
4. Do all those who belong to the covenant receive the promise? Do all those who belong to the covenant receive what is promised? Why (not)?
5. To what could we compare the promise of baptism? Explain the comparison fully.
6. Why does Scripture actually say that baptism *is* the washing away of sins, and not the *promise* of the washing away of sins? What effect should this language have upon us?
7. Is baptism of any real benefit for the infant at the time he is baptised? Why not? When will it benefit him?
8. What does it mean to “*use*” our baptism?
9. Who benefits immediately from the baptism of an infant?
10. Since baptism is only of benefit to those who understand what it portrays, what must the parents of the children promise before baptism is administered?
11. What will a person learn from the fact that he was baptised when he was just a new-born infant?
12. Which children belong to the covenant of grace? Prove it from Scripture.
13. Prove from Scripture that children belong to the covenant and should therefore receive the sign and seal of the covenant.
14. We do not specifically read about children being baptised, but what do we read about in Acts 16:15,33; 18:8 and 1 Corinthians 1:16?
15. What does God require of the children of the covenant? When are children permitted to partake of the second sacrament (the Lord's Supper)?