

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #35, Lord's Day 27, part 2

The Baptism of Infants



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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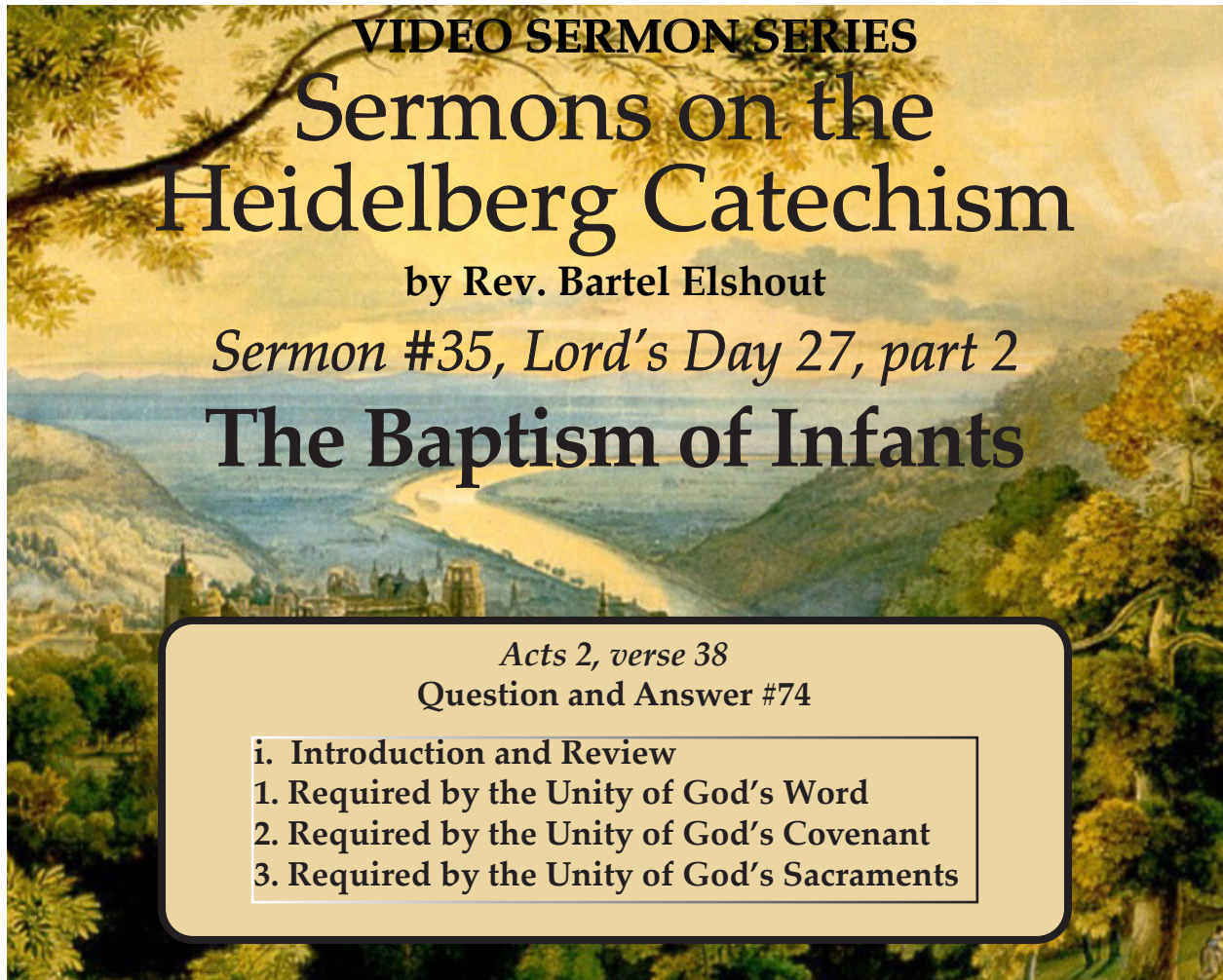
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Sermon #35, Lord's Day 27, part 2

The Baptism of Infants

Acts 2, verse 38

Question and Answer #74

i. Introduction and Review

- 1. Required by the Unity of God's Word**
- 2. Required by the Unity of God's Covenant**
- 3. Required by the Unity of God's Sacraments**

Introduction

Boys and girls, did you ever ask your mommy or daddy, “Why was I baptized as a baby?” Perhaps you’ve asked that question when baptism was administered in our congregation to babies. Why do we baptize babies? And some of you young people, growing up, you may have met people, sincere Christians, who may have told you that they believe that the baptism of babies is not scriptural, that only believers, only adults should be baptized. And this issue is not new, congregation. This issue became a matter of great significance already at the time of the Reformation and that which followed, when the Anabaptist movement emerged and openly challenged the baptism of children, really considering it one of the relics of a corrupt Roman Catholic church. Congregation, nothing further from the truth.

It’s remarkable that the first generation, and the second generation Reformers, and many great Reformed theologians after them, all unapologetically have upheld the doctrine that we are to baptize our children, have unapologetically upheld the truth that New Testament baptism has taken the place of Old Testament circumcision. And that’s significant. That is not proof in itself. But if you take a man like John Calvin,¹ John Calvin, who was so committed to reforming the church, so

¹ John Calvin, or, Jean Calvin, (1509–1564) – was a well-known French theologian, pastor, writer, and Reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, after whom many Reformers patterned their teachings.

committed to see to it that the church again function biblically in her preaching, in administration of the sacraments, and every aspect of church life, I can assure you that if John Calvin had felt that the baptism of children is but an unhealthy relic of Roman Catholicism, he would have rejected. Instead, when you read his *Institutes*,² he goes out of his way to affirm that baptism of our children is indeed that which the Scriptures mandate.

And of course, that's the important issue for us tonight. Because we want to make certain that what we do is consistent with the Word of God. We want to make sure that today, in our preaching, in all of our functioning as a church, in the administration of the sacraments, that we truly are the heirs of the apostles. And so, the question is, and of course, that's what Baptists will confront us with, who will insist that they are following the practice of the apostles, and that our practice is contrary to the practice of the apostles. And I will try, I will make an attempt tonight to give us the clear, biblical context for why we baptize infants. It's really a vast subject that would require a lot more time and space, but I will really try and make an effort to deal with a number of very important key issues that, hopefully, will help us understand why we baptize infants.

So let us read again Lord's Day 27 of our Heidelberg Catechism.

And we read in Question #72: *Is then the external baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?*

The Answer is: *Not at all; for the blood of Jesus Christ only, and the Holy ghost cleanse us from all sin.*

Question #73: *Why then doth the Holy Ghost call baptism "the washing of regeneration" and the "washing away of sins"?*

Answer: *God speaks thus not without great cause, to wit—to know—not only thereby to teach us that as the filth of the body is purged away by water; so our sins are removed by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ; but especially that by this divine pledge and sign He may assure us that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins as really as we are externally washed with water.*

Question #74: *Are infants also to be baptized?*

The Answer is: *Yes, for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church, and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant.*

Thus far, our Heidelberg Catechism. And so, as we focus on *The Baptism of Infants*, we will see, first of all, that it is Required a the Unity of God's Word, the unity between Old and New Testaments. Secondly, it's Required by the Unity of God's Covenant. And so the point we will try to make is that the Bible only knows of one covenant. We have one Bible, and we have one covenant, even though there is a new administration of that covenant, we will see, but it is the same covenant. Thirdly, it's Required by the Unity of God's Sacraments. As we will see that both circumcision and baptism symbolize the same foundational theological truth; both sacraments are symbolic of the regenerating and renewing work of the Holy Spirit. So, *The Baptism of Infants; Required by the Unity of God Word; Required by the Unity of God's Covenant; and, Required by the Unity of God's Sacraments.*

So, before we get into this, I just want to address very quickly a few preliminary issues.

Issue #1, is we need to understand that John's baptism—I've said this before—that John's baptism is not and cannot be New Testament baptism. So, John's baptism is not the template

² *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, by John Calvin.

according to which we establish the New Testament doctrine of baptism. So what John the Baptist was performing was a Levitical rite, a Levitical rite that he had been taught by his father, Zacharias the baptist. And so, every priest, as I've said before, in the Old Testament, they were baptizers. The book of Hebrews tells us that all of those ceremonial rituals, all of those ceremonial washings are referred to as baptisms.

There were several reasons why John's baptism is not, and cannot be a New Testament baptism. First of all, how can we have a New Testament sacrament, when the Old Testament has not yet come to its conclusion. We know that what separates the New Testament sacraments from the Old Testament sacraments is that the bloody sacraments are replaced by unbloody sacraments. And so the Old Testament is in full force until the rending of the veil, when Christ cries out, "It is finished" (John 19:30), and when the veil is rent, that's when the Old Testament comes to an end (Matthew 27:51).

That's why we do not read of the institution of baptism until Matthew 28. And so, just before Christ ascends, it is then that he gives the only command in the New Testament to baptize, when he tells his disciples, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them"—baptizing the nations, baptizing the families of the earth—"in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). Because there's a passage in the book of Acts that also underscores the fact that John's baptism was not New Testament baptism. Turn with me for a moment to the Book of Acts, chapter 19, and there we read, in the opening verses, that in his travels, Paul comes to Ephesus, and he meets with some believers there. And he asks those believers, "Have you already, have you also received the Holy Ghost?" And they give a very surprising answer, and they said, "We don't even know whether there is such a thing as the Holy Ghost" (verse 2). And then, verse 3, this is important, then Paul says this, "And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized?" Because, you see, if they had received New Testament baptism, they would have been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. "And they said, unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." So, the logical conclusion is very obvious. If John's baptism had been New Testament baptism, there would have been no reason for the Apostle Paul to baptize them. Because then, Paul would have been, literally, he would have been the first Anabaptist. He would have been the first "re-baptizer." He would have done over what John had already did. And so, Paul very clearly identifies what John's baptism was. John's baptism was a Levitical ritual, a ritual with which the people would have been very, very familiar; a ritual that symbolized their uncleanness, of which he spoke and testified, that would have reminded them visually that they indeed needed to repent of their sins and believe on the one who would come after John the Baptist.

And so, this is important, because I'm going to focus briefly on Acts 2, verses 38 and 39, a very crucial passage for us in our understanding the very nature of New Testament baptism. And so, that means this, congregation, that the first administration of New Testament baptism takes place on the day of Pentecost, on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God has been poured out, and when the Apostle preaches his powerful sermon, and when many, many were pricked in their hearts. That itself is a remarkable language—their hearts were cut open. We could actually say, what the Holy Spirit was doing, he was circumcising their hearts. And because he circumcised their hearts, they became receptive to hear the gospel. And when they then asked the question in holy desperation, "Men and brethren, what must we do?" The Apostle, he responds with clarity, that they should repent, and they should submit themselves to baptism, in order that they might

receive the assurance of the pardon of their sins; not that baptism itself would communicate that pardon, but their submission, as Jews, as circumcised Jews, their submission to the sacrament of New Testament baptism would indicate that they believed Jesus Christ to be indeed the Messiah.

Then, Peter adds these significant words, and says, “For”—in other words, now he gives the argument of why they should submit to baptism—“For,” he says, “the promise”—which promise?—the promise of the Holy Ghost—“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.” And to a Jewish audience—which this is what it was—to a Jewish audience, those words, “the promise is unto you and to your children,” would have been understood very, very well. Because what Peter was really doing, what he was paraphrasing, he was paraphrasing the original covenant promise that God made to Abraham, which we read in Genesis chapter 17, when God said to Abraham, “I will be a God unto you and to your seed” (verse 7). Or, if we use the language of Acts 2, verse 39, “I will be your God and the God of your children.”

And so, why is this important? Because, here, Peter, moved by the Holy Spirit, at the first administration of New Testament baptism, reaches back all the way to Genesis 17, and he repeats the identical promise that God proclaimed at the initial administration of circumcision. Again, congregation, that is not accidental; that is by divine direction. That’s why, in our Form for baptism, our forefathers unapologetically link Genesis 17, verse 7 and Acts 2, verse 39.

And so, what Peter is saying to that Jewish audience, he is saying to them, those who were so smitten, realizing they had killed their own Messiah, grieving deeply over their sins, and in God’s name, and moved by the Holy Spirit, he declares to them, that the promise that God made to Abraham, that God made to your father, that promise stands today, and your baptism will be the affirmation that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he is also your God. And that the promise that God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that that promise is just as true for you today, the promise is unto you and to your children. And so, it’s obvious that if the promise, it says, “For”—if the promise is to us and our children, the logical implication is that the sacrament itself is for us and for our children.

Now, even though I cannot prove conclusively that Peter and the apostles did precisely that, that they baptized entire households on the day of Pentecost, I do believe it’s very likely. Why?—because later in the Book of Acts, we read several times of baptisms of entire households. Then why did they do that? Because they understood that that is God’s method. So in the Old Testament, if a Gentile wanted to be incorporated into the household of God, into the family of God, the people of Israel, not only would he be circumcised, but all his sons would be circumcised; his entire household would be circumcised. His entire family would be incorporated into the household of God. And so, if the promise is for us and our children, that means the sacrament is for us and our children. And so, this is significant. And even though I will later say a few words about Colossians 2, where we see the connection between circumcision and baptism, I believe that this is the most significant link in Scripture between baptism and circumcision. So, the exact same covenant promise that God made at the initial administration of circumcision, he repeats at the initial administration of the sacrament of baptism.

1. Required by the Unity of God’s Word

And that leads us to a very important point that we need to understand, and that is the important connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Because our dear Baptist brethren—and I mean that sincerely—and so, what I’m saying is in no ways meant to say anything derogatory about Baptists. I know God-fearing Baptists, I have dear friends among them. But we have to

address this doctrine. Because ultimately, for a Baptist, the doctrine of baptism begins at Matthew 1, verse 1. For us, we go to Genesis. Our Bible begins in Genesis, not in the book of Matthew.

One of the foundational principles of interpreting the Word of God, recovered again in the Reformation, is that all of Scripture is the context for every individual passage. And so, what we need to understand is that on the day of Pentecost, Peter is preaching from the Old Testament Scriptures. We need to realize that the Old Testament was the Bible of Christ and of the apostles. The New Testament, as we have it today, was not completed until many, many years later. So the apostles, in all of their teaching, in all of their preaching, they preached from their Bible, and their Bible was the Old Testament Scriptures.

Turn with me for a moment to Acts 28, verse 23, which is an example of many passages that confirm this, but this one in particular is an important passage. Acts 28, verse 23. This comes at the very end of the Book of Acts. The Apostle Paul now has arrived in Rome, and he is held prisoner in his own house, but many people are coming to him. And look what it says here about Paul's ministry in Rome. It says, "He expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening." So what Paul was doing, he was expounding the Old Testament Scriptures in light of the coming of Christ, in light of his finished work. He was preaching Christ from the Old Testament Scriptures. That's why the New Testament is ultimately the final result of the apostles expounding Old Testament Scripture in light of the coming of Christ, in light of his accomplished work. And so, the New Testament is not the replacement of the Old Testament. The New Testament is the completion of the Old Testament. The New Testament is the final concluding chapter in which all the truths that are found in the Old Testament, they all come together in the New Testament Scriptures.

And I realize some things have changed. We will focus on that briefly, why we transitioned from a blood religion to an unbloody religion. But the important thing is, the foundational theology of the Old Testament was not set aside by the New Testament. The New Testament is not a replacement of the Old Testament. The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. And so, when it says in Luke 24, verse 45, which we referred to this morning, where it says that "He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures." Which Scriptures?—the Old Testament Scriptures. Later, when we read about the Bereans, they are highly commended for the fact that they examined Paul's preaching. And what they did, they "searched the scriptures... whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). They evaluated Paul's preaching in light of their Bible, in light of their Scriptures.

Why is that so important for the sacrament of baptism?—simply for this reason, congregation. If you had come to Peter or the apostles, and if you had suggested that because of the finished work of Christ, that God's way in dealing with his people and their seed had changed radically from what it had always been, they would have rejected such a preposterous notion. They would have rejected it as being entirely unscriptural. And that's the point Peter makes. Peter is saying to his audience, God has not changed. He is the same God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the same God, and that's why the promise, his promise, the promise of the Spirit is unto you and to your children. Because the inclusion of children, their incorporation into the family of God by means of circumcision and baptism was an absolutely foundational and essential truth of the Word of God. The apostle would have rejected, would have rejected Baptist theology outright, would have rejected it as being contrary to the Word of God. That's why our forefathers, our Puritan forefathers, were so fond of speaking of the two Testaments as the two lips of the one mouth of God—two lips of the one mouth of God. Boys and girls, when you come home, you can do a little

experiment. I want you to hold one lip and try to talk only. And then switch lips, try it with the other one. You will not be very successful. It will be very garbled. In order for you to speak, you have to speak with both lips. And so, we cannot understand the Scriptures unless we recognize that God has two lips—Old and New Testament—but ultimately one mouth.

And so we cannot read the Old Testament properly, except in light of the concluding revelation of the New Testament. Nor can we understand the New Testament correctly, unless we understand the great foundation of the New Testament, the great presupposition of the New Testament. Because the New Testament is saturated with Old Testament Scripture. Either by direct quotations or allusions, there are at least 3,000 references to the Old Testament in the New Testament. And so, any interpretation of New Testament Scripture that clearly contradicts foundational teaching of the Old Testament is therefore incorrect. So that means, that our view of baptism, our view of children, has to be consistent with the Old Testament theology regarding covenantal children. Because when God said to Abraham, “I will be a God unto you and to your seed,” he was expressing a very foundational truth. He was expressing something that is so very much part of his divine character. This is a foundational principle.

And that’s why, it would have to have been very clearly revealed in the New Testament that now God dealt with his people in an entirely different way than he did in the Old Testament. And nothing is further from the truth. Yes, we replaced the bloody sacrament with an unbloody sacrament, but the foundational truth that God is the God of his people and their seed, that the promise is unto us and to our children, that is a foundational truth of the Word of God.

2. Required by the Unity of God’s Covenant

That brings us to *The Unity of God’s Covenant*, because circumcision and baptism are sacraments of the covenant of grace. That’s also important for us to understand. In other words, baptism was not instituted to give me an opportunity to make a profession to the world that I now belong to Jesus. And so, the baptism is not about us. Baptism is not a reflection of who the parents are, or the children. But ultimately, baptism is a sacrament, is a sacrament whereby God communicates to us who he is. And so, baptism is a sacrament that is administered, not on the basis of our subjective assessment of whether the parents are true believers, or even the child. The basis for baptism is objective—it’s God’s truth, God’s covenant truth. God is a covenant God. That’s one of the overarching themes of the Bible. So, let me try to explain, very briefly, very simply, what that means.

In the Bible, as I just explained to my profession class this morning, “covenant” is much more than just an agreement. We should not think of the biblical covenant as just a contract. But in the Bible, covenant speaks of a relationship. And so, ultimately, what we see in Scripture is that when God creates man, he brings them into an intimate love relationship with himself. He enters into a covenant with our first parents. And that covenant is broken, and the rest of Scripture reveals to us what God has done to bring fallen sons and daughters of Adam, to bring them back into a covenant relationship with himself. That’s God’s good pleasure.

That’s why the Bible ends, as we saw this morning, by the repetition of that very basic covenant formula of Scripture, when God says, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” That is the overarching goal of the redeeming work of Christ. That’s why the Bible ends that way by emphasizing that that will be the glorious reality of the New Jerusalem, that God will forever be the God of his people, and they shall forever be his people. “I will be your God and you shall be my people.”

That’s clear from Genesis 17, that God spoke about that covenant. To those who claim that

circumcision simply reflected a national covenant with Israel, they ignore the plain language in Genesis 17, where God says to Abraham and Sarah that they would be the father and mother of many nations. And Galatians 3—I have no time to go into that now—Galatians 3 makes it clear that the covenant that was affirmed at Mount Sinai, that was the covenant that God established with Abraham. And it's very clear from Galatians 3, that that covenant is the covenant of grace.

Some of the children have learned in school about the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works was the covenant that God made with Adam before he fell. And Adam was able to maintain that relationship with God based on his own obedience—he was perfect, he was sinless. But now that we have fallen, oh, God has graciously revealed to us another way in which we can come into a relationship with him, in and through his beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and that's called the covenant of grace. And so, that relationship is no longer based on what we accomplish, but that relationship with God is now founded upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why we call it the covenant of grace.

And so, the covenant of Genesis 17 is not merely a national covenant; it is the covenant of grace. And what God communicates in that chapter, that it is his revealed will that the truth regarding him and his covenant, that that truth would be signified and sealed with the birth of every man-child. Now, the question has been asked throughout the years, "Well, what about girls then?" Of course, the nature of circumcision was such that it could not be administered to girls. But that's not the point. They were just as much the beneficiaries of those promises as were the boys. Because, you see, that's why it's so important for us to understand that circumcision was a sacrament—a sacrament by which God visibly communicated the essential truths about himself and the manner in which he deals with sinners. And so, when a boy would be circumcised, that circumcision was God's opportunity to affirm to his people his covenant promise that he would keep from generation to generation. And the girls were as much included in that promise as were the boys. And so, the point is that what happened at circumcision is very, very foundational.

3. Required by the Unity of God's Sacrament

That's why it's so important that we see the connection between the sacrament of circumcision and the sacrament of baptism. When we realize that that covenant of grace revealed to us in the Old Testament in a bloody way, by means of bloody sacrifices, that that covenant is the same covenant in the New Testament. "I the Lord change not" (Malachi 3:6). The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. And the problem, the problem with the rejection of infant baptism is that it suggests that after Christ finished his work, that God's way of dealing with man radically changed as a result of the finished work of Christ. And congregation, nothing is further from the truth. And therefore, it would have been unthinkable to Peter and the apostles, unthinkable not to include children into the covenant community, which is another way of calling the church. Our church family is a covenant community.

And so, that's why we believe one Bible, one covenant, and ultimately, one church. And so, it's not true that the church did not begin until the day of Pentecost. The church was established in the garden. Our first parents were the first members of that church. That's why, in Acts 7, verse 38, Stephen, in his address to the Sanhedrin, refers to the congregation of Israel as "the church in the wilderness." And so, what happens at Pentecost is that the boundaries of that church are expanded, but it's not a different church; it is God's church which had been limited to one nation. On the day of Pentecost, the boundaries are removed and now that church becomes international. That church will now encompass all of the nations.

Turn with me to Romans 11, verse 24, where the Apostle uses a powerful analogy to make

that point very crystal clear. He's talking about an olive tree. He's talking about what's going to happen to Israel. Look what he says here, verse 24: "If thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" So what Paul is saying, there has only ever been one olive tree. And an olive tree is symbolic of the church. And so, what happened, when they rejected Christ, they were cut off from that olive tree, in God's judgment. But what's going to happen, ultimately, at the end of the ages, those broken branches are going to be grafted into that same original olive tree.

We find the same in Ephesians 2. Let's turn there for a moment. The very same truth is emphasized in Ephesians 2. So look what Paul says here, first of all verse 18, he says, "Through him,"—that is, through Christ—"we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." So the wall of separation is gone. "Now therefore," he says, "ye are no more strangers and foreigners"—he's referring to the Gentiles—"but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God." You have now been incorporated into God's household. You have now become members of that household. "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (verses 18–20). And so the point is this, that the New Testament church is but the ultimate outgrowth of the Old Testament church. It is a church that now encompasses all the nations of the world.

Why do I emphasize that? Well, Baptists would have us believe that in the New Testament church, we have an entirely new reality. And in the New Testament church, now believers alone receive the sacrament. Of course, the reality has proven that they have never succeeded in having a believers-only church. Because, even on the day of Pentecost, people like Ananias and Sapphira were baptized. And so, the church is never able to ascertain with certainty whether someone is a believer. We can only go by someone's confession. But the point I'm trying to make is that they would have us believe that the reality of the New Testament church is entirely different from the Old Testament church. Congregation, that is not true. And that's what is affirmed on the day of Pentecost; that's what is affirmed by a passage like Ephesians 2, that the Gentiles are brought into that same household. And what is God's revealed will about that church? All through the Old Testament, his revealed will is that children must be included in the visible manifestation of that church.

And so, the truth of the Old Testament is that church membership begins at birth, and that it is God's revealed will that that church membership be affirmed by the sacrament of circumcision in the Old Testament, and the sacrament of baptism in the New Testament. And so, the inclusion of children is a covenantal requirement, made by a covenant God, a God who said of himself that "I will be the God of all the families of Israel" (Jeremiah 31:1). God is a family God. "I will be to you a God and to your seed."

That explains why God dealt in such a remarkable way with Moses. You know that after God had called him, when he's on his way to Egypt, God meets him. Open your Bibles to Exodus 4, let's read that passage, Exodus 4, verse 24: "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision." So, Moses had caved in to his wife, and as a result, his son was not circumcised. And God was so offended that he would have killed his own servant—the man whom he had preserved, whom he had called. That's how important it was for his son to receive the mark of the covenant.

And God has not changed. "I the LORD change not" (Malachi 3:6). That's why we

unapologetically maintain that the sacrament of baptism, the New Testament sacrament, the unbloody sacrament, is the New Testament equivalent of Old Testament circumcision. So that the only thing that changes is that from a bloody sacrament, we go to an unbloody sacrament.

Let's turn to Colossians 2, and we will conclude with that. Colossians 2, a key passage that shows the connection between circumcision and between baptism, beginning at verse 11: "In whom"—that is, Christ—"also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands"—so it's clear in this passage that Paul is not talking about physical circumcision; he's not talking about physical baptism, but he's talking about *regeneration*. And he is illustrating regeneration and its effects by way of circumcision and baptism. So, "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (verses 11–13). So what's the point here? The point here is that the Apostle uses circumcision and baptism interchangeably, and actually refers to baptism as the circumcision of Christ. And why does he do that? Because he understood that both sacraments have the exact same theological meaning; that both sacraments are symbolic of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. So circumcision was symbolic of the circumcision of the heart. So God promised that at every circumcision that he would also circumcise the hearts of his people. And baptism is symbolic of being baptized with the Holy Spirit. So both sacraments symbolize the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. That's what Paul is talking about in this passage. That's why he uses those terms interchangeably to express the very same truths. Because he understood that circumcision and baptism are identical theologically, and because they are identical theologically, means that they are administered in the exact same context. That's why we never read in the New Testament, ever, of children of believers being baptized as adults. There's not a single occurrence of that in the Book of Acts. That's why the apostles, without apology and without hesitation, baptized entire households. Baptists would argue that those households could have consisted of all adults. But that's not the point. That's not the point at all. Anybody that would have read the New Testament would have understood what was meant by the word "household." It simply means "family." Because that's God's revealed will. It is God's revealed will that the family, as a unit, belongs to the church. It is God's revealed will that our children are received as members of the church. That's why the Form for baptism says it so plainly, "Who, as members of His church, ought to be baptized." Because God is the same, his method is the same, his covenant method is the same. He continues to be the God of his people and their seed. And so, in baptism, as in circumcision, it is God who makes a statement about himself. It is God who declares, "Because of who I am, I will manifest my grace also in this generation, because I am your God, and I am the God of your seed."

That's why, congregation, if anybody ever asks you, "What is your text in support of infant baptism?" Well, first of all, contrary to what many Baptists think, there is no command in the New Testament to baptize believers. The only command to baptize is in Matthew 28, where it says that we are to baptize that nations, we are to baptize the families of the earth. If anybody asks you what text do you have in support of baptizing children, the answer is simple: the entire Old Testament is our text. The entire Old Testament demands the inclusion of children. And the New Testament does not replace the Old Testament. And the foundational truths of the Old Testament, the foundational theology of the Old Testament is not set aside by the New Testament. The only difference is that we now are on the other side of the finished and accomplished work of Christ, so that our sacraments now look back on what he has accomplished, but the essential truths are the same.

And the silence of the New Testament, the silence of the New Testament actually proves the point. It means, that silence affirms that Old Testament covenant theology is New Testament covenant theology. Because, remember the apostles and Christ himself, they preached and they taught exclusively from the Old Testament Scriptures. So that's why the New Testament does not contradict the theology of the Old Testament. The difference is, that we now view it in light of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ, who said powerfully in John 10, verse 35, "The scripture cannot be broken." Let me say it again, to have suggested to the apostles that now children are no longer to be included in the visible church of Christ, it would have been flatly rejected by them as being very obviously contrary to the Scriptures.

So when it comes to the sacrament of baptism, the truth, the foundational truth is that "I the LORD change not." "I am the covenant-keeping God." "I am the God who will remember my covenant from generation to generation. And it is my revealed will that the children of the congregation receive the token of that covenant; that the children be incorporated into that covenant community; and that they be raised with that perspective." And with that expectation that God will do what he says, as he has done in our generation, and that it remains true to our comfort that the promise of the regenerating work of the Spirit, the promise of the application of salvation of Christ and all his benefits, that promise is to us and to our children. Amen.

Let's pray.

Lord, wilt thou bless thy own word. We have attempted to set before the congregation the essential and foundational truths that undergird the baptism of our children—the unity of thy Word, the unity of thy covenant, the unity of the Scriptures, the unity of the sacraments themselves. Lord help us to grasp this, so that when we present our children for baptism, we will not do so out of custom or superstition, but that we will do so in the recognition that it is thy revealed will that in every generation, the truths of thy covenant be affirmed also by way of the sacrament of baptism. And it would be to our encouragement as parents and grandparents that we may know with certainty that the promise is also to us and to our children. Remember us so with the favor that thou does bear to thy people. And we continue to pray that thou wouldst richly affirm in our congregation the very truth that we have tried to articulate tonight. Forgive us our sins. Go with us into the new week. Grant what is needed as we engage in our daily calling. Keep us from harm and danger. We pray for those who will be traveling great distances, wilt thou grant them travelling mercies as well. And hear us for Christ's sake alone. Amen.