

LD 27 Biblical Practice of Infant Baptism

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Everlasting Assurance

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In connection with our consideration of Lord's Day 27 of the Heidelberg Catechism which focuses on the biblical practice of infant baptism, in connection with that we read this morning out of Romans 5. Romans 5. I draw your attention especially to verses 12 and following of Romans 5. It sets before us the contrast between the headship of Adam and the headship of Jesus Christ. We read the entire chapter of Romans 5 this morning.

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: 2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: 5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. 6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. 11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. 12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: 13 (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. 15 But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. 16 And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. 17 For if by one man's offence death reigned

by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) 18 Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. 20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: 21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thus far we read God's word.

So on the basis of this passage of Scripture and many others, we have the instruction of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 27. You can find that on page 15 in the back of your psalter. The second Lord's Day in the Catechism on baptism and the Catechism asks here,

Q. 72. Is then the external baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?

Not at all: for the blood of Jesus Christ only, and the Holy Ghost cleanse us from all sin.

Q. 73. Why then doth the Holy Ghost call baptism "the washing of regeneration," and "the washing away of sins"?

God speaks thus not without great cause, to-wit, 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.

Q. 74. Are infants also to be baptized?

Now especially we focus on this question and answer this morning.

Q. 74. Are infants also to be baptized?

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.

Now pray and ask God's blessing on the preaching.

Father in heaven, we pray for understanding of thy word this morning so that we would be able to defend in this world in which we live the practice of infant baptism, but also so that when parents present their children for baptism, that they may do so not out of custom or superstition but instead that they would do so understanding that this is what the Scriptures require of them. We pray, O Lord, that thou wilt use this word as well to remind us on how we are to live as those who have been baptized. So speak powerfully to us, Father, of thy covenant love and mercy in Jesus Christ so that our hearts would be filled with joy and gladness and we would respond with praise. Also may we be reminded how we are to live as thy children in the midst of this wicked world. We pray all these things in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The question that we focus on this morning is this question: why must infants be baptized? Why must infants be baptized? This thinking of infant baptism is part of our thinking. It's part of our Reformed biblical thinking. I don't hear within the church anybody saying, "Maybe we should do away with infant baptism." No, it's part of our thinking. When couples are blessed with a child, it's the practice that the husband is coming to me or to one of the elders and saying, "When can I come before the consistory to request baptism?" Right away they're thinking about baptism of that child that has been given.

That's part of our thinking, but it's still important that we consider this question this morning: why must infants be baptized? It's important, first of all, because there are many in the church world who do not practice infant baptism. Of course there are those who are known as Baptists, that goes all the way back to the Anabaptists and there were those even before that who taught believer baptism and rejected the idea of infant baptism, but we know that it's prevalent as well in many churches today where they do not practice infant baptism but instead they practice only believer baptism. So it's important in our days that we understand that and can defend the practice of infant baptism to others and show that this is the biblical truth, especially over against their arguments and their arguments are these, especially this: in the New Testament we do not read of any infant baptism. They would say there's no proof in the New Testament for infant baptism. Jesus doesn't command it in the Great Commission, there are no examples specifically of children or infants being baptized in the New Testament, and they say if the church were to do this, the New Testament would make explicit that the church is supposed to baptize their infants. Now just on the surface, it may seem that those are powerful arguments to reckon with, but we're going to see this morning that's not the case.

So that's, first of all, why it's important that we understand the answer to the question why our infants must be baptized, but the second reason it's important is that here within the church, even though there's no discussion and no debate about it, that we still understand and know why it is that families in our church bring their children to be baptized. If we don't understand that, then it becomes custom or superstition, and if we don't understand that, then what happens is God is very displeased with the church, even

a church that is baptizing their infants because it's just done out of habit, it's just done because, "Well, that's what my parents did with me and my grandparents did with my parents, and what I see other people in the church doing. Well, it must be that I'm supposed to do the same." Well, then it's not done in a way that is pleasing to God and then that sacrament isn't signed and sealed. The meaning is lost.

So we want to understand why it is that we must baptize our infants and that is what's required. That's what every one of the parents in the church here as answered in the first question of the baptism form, that you believe that your children ought, ought to be baptized.

Now as we answer that question this morning looking at the Heidelberg Catechism and we're also going to take some time to look at the baptism form and what it says as well. Let us understand that the answer that's given in the Heidelberg Catechism and the baptism form as well, that it doesn't just point out a couple of proof texts. It doesn't just give a couple of texts. Now there are some texts that are mentioned specifically in the baptism form, but it's not meant simply to give a couple of texts as a proof text, "here it is," but instead what the Heidelberg Catechism does and the baptism form as well, is that it argues on the basis of the entirety of Scripture. There is the thought of Scripture from beginning to end that stands behind what it is that the Heidelberg Catechism says and the baptism form as well.

That's important in our day because, as I said earlier, there are those today who say, "Well, there's no proof in the New Testament for infant baptism." Well, if you're looking for a specific proof text, you might say it can't be found. Now there is household baptism in the New Testament and that indicates strongly infant baptism, but yet you can't go to any one verse and say, "There it is. There it clearly mentions a baby being baptized." Yet we see and understand that the entirety of Scripture, the thinking of the word of God, as it were, is that infants must receive the sign of the covenant which is now baptism. So we want to look at this as the Heidelberg Catechism does, from the entirety of Scripture, the plain teaching of all of Scripture that infants must be baptized.

So with that in mind, we consider this morning "The Biblical Practice of Infant Baptism." That's our theme: the biblical practice of infant baptism. You notice, first, the reasons and then, secondly, the significance, and there we come to application then for the church, and there I want to address specifically parents and children and young people about what this sign and seal means for us as a church.

But first, the reasons. The Heidelberg Catechism begins this way, "Yes, they are to be baptized, infants are, for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God." We want to see and understand the covenant basis for infant baptism and this morning we're going to see that specifically from this perspective, especially from the perspective of the organic character of God's covenant. So there are different aspects to the covenant of God. We know the essence of God's covenant. The essence of God's covenant is the relationship of friendship that God establishes with his people in Jesus Christ. There are many different aspects of that covenant that we could look at this

morning. We're not going to deal with all the aspects of the covenant but what I want to do is zero in on this particular aspect of the covenant of God: the organic character of God's covenant.

Now we do that because our baptism form really as part of the explanation for why we baptize our infants as is found here in the Heidelberg Catechism, the baptism form especially points us to that aspect of God's covenant. In that section that we've read very often that has the title over it, "To infant's of believers," we read this, "And although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ." I'm saying to you this morning that that beginning part of the baptism form there is pointing out the organic character of God's covenant. Now understand what that means. "Organic" means "living," and what that points out to us is that in the covenant we're not just a bunch of individuals who are brought into a relationship of love and friendship with God, for there is an organic character to the covenant that begins and ends with understanding that we have a head and that we are part, then of the body of that head. Organic is something living and there is a head to the covenant. What the baptism form does is it contrasts two heads. It contrasts the headship of Adam with the headship of Jesus Christ as that which is set before us this morning in Romans 5. So when we talk about the organic character of God's covenant, what we're talking about is the headship of Jesus Christ and what that means, then, for the church and the people of God.

As I said, in the baptism form, as that's built on Romans 5, there is a contrast between these two heads, Adam and Jesus Christ. We are reminded in the baptism form that we and our children are conceived and born in sin and we are children of wrath. Why is that? We and our children are conceived and born in sin and are children of wrath because of our first head, Adam. In the very beginning when Adam was created, he was created in a unique relationship with the rest of the human race. He was the head of the human race. What that means is, is that the guilt of Adam after he sinned is a guilt that comes upon us. So here's the argument of the baptism form, a right biblical argument: children can be and are the objects of God's displeasure even before they show their rejection of God or their disbelief. Even before they are born and they can do anything sinful in rejecting God, rejecting his truth, and not believing in him, they are worthy of the wrath of God. Why is that? Well, it's because of their father, Adam. It's called original sin and part of that original sin is original guilt. The guilt of Adam is my guilt. The guilt of Adam is your guilt. You deserve the wrath of God before you do anything sinful. It's because of the principle and the concept of headship. Not only that, but Adam's pollution is passed on to us as well so that of ourselves, we are totally depraved, we can do no good, we can only sin.

Now the point of the baptism form is that one can be guilty before God and worthy of condemnation without their knowledge. They don't need knowledge of these things to be worthy of that, it's because of headship. But thanks be to God that Adam is not the only head that there is but God sent this second head and the first Adam was sent to look ahead to the second Adam who is the head, then, only of his people, that's our Lord Jesus

Christ. Now here we get at the organic character of the covenant of God. We look at Jesus Christ. He is a head.

Now here's where the contrast is. Adam was the head of all men, Jesus Christ is the head only of the ones who were given to him. He's the head only of his elect, his elect people, and the point we see and understand, though, is just as those who are sinful are worthy of the wrath of God without knowing anything about it, now the same is true for those who belong to the head, Jesus Christ. There is nothing that we do to belong to Jesus Christ. We belong to him because we're chosen in him and this is why it is, in part, that infants must be baptized.

Now part of the point is, again, contrast. Adam was a head, Christ is a better head, a higher head, a head who is more powerful. Christ's power and influence are greater than Adam's. That's what we read here in Romans 5, especially 18 and 19, is it brings it all together, "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." And what's more amazing is that second part, that many are made righteous, are righteous before God in Jesus Christ.

What great power we see in this second head, Jesus Christ. You can understand that from a few examples of everyday life. A child breaks a toy, brings it to dad, "Can you fix it?" We all know that when a child breaks a toy, it can happen just like that. It doesn't take much for a child to break a toy but to fix it takes much longer. It takes a greater power, as it were, than the breaking of it.

The same thing might be true with remodeling a house. I could go into a house a demolish walls but now after demolishing and taking things apart, now it has to be put together again. It's beyond my pay grade. I can't do it. So it takes a greater power, a greater work, to put it back together, to fix it, as it were.

And so also that's true when it comes to our salvation. There is Adam who is a head but breaking it all, as it were. That happened very quickly. But the power that it takes to restore so that we could have life and friendship with God, so that we can be reconciled to God again, that takes a greater and higher work and that's the work of Jesus Christ. And the point is that all of God's people from the beginning to the end of the world, no matter what age they are, they are united to Christ and, therefore, they are saved by him and have life and friendship with God only through him.

You see, salvation in Christ is not merely a possibility. He didn't come to this world to make salvation possible. He accomplished our salvation and the reality is that we don't need to know about that salvation in order to be saved. That's what the baptism form is saying, rightly so, because it has to do with our connection to the head, Jesus Christ. This is the organic viewpoint of God's covenant. Children are included in the covenant of God because elect children are chosen in Christ and because in that they are part of God's covenant, and that brings us back to the language of the Heidelberg Catechism. Why do we baptize our children? Children as well as adults are included in the covenant and church of God. It goes back to this: all of God's elect people, chosen in Christ. The

organic character of God's covenant. There are many aspects and implications of that too, but this we want to see and understand, along with this, God works in the line of generations in his covenant.

So why do we baptize our children? The organic character of the covenant, all God's people are in Christ, and that includes children as well, even when they're without knowledge of Jesus Christ, but we see and understand as well that God works in the line of generations in the covenant. We sang that a few moments ago in the versification of Psalm 105, and here's where it is that the baptism form brings out specific texts: Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39, those familiar passages which we ought to look at again and be reminded of because they are so important and so powerful. Genesis 17:7, "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." Now again, because we understand the organic concept of the covenant, Genesis 17:7 is not simply saying, "Your children after you, Abraham, are in the covenant," but that seed, when we read seed we have to be thinking of Christ and all those who are in Jesus Christ. Galatians 3 brings that out as an explanation of that. Then Acts 2:39, "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."

Now the New Testament says, as well, children are included in the covenant of God, in the line of generations. God is a God who works graciously in generations. It's clear in the Old Testament. Genesis 5, you read of the generations following Adam, of how it is that God worked in family lines. There was Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in fulfillment of that promise in Genesis 17:7 and all of Israel after that. There is a clear teaching in the New Testament, as well, when households were baptized. Households were baptized and that wasn't just true in the New Testament, in the Old Testament circumcision also was in households. When God commanded that of Abraham, every male in his household was to be circumcised. The Reverend pointed that out last Sunday night.

Now that doesn't mean that all children baptized are included in the covenant. That doesn't mean that all of our children are in Jesus Christ. That's not at all what that means. That's why it is even for our own understanding of this, we have to be very careful with saying that all of our children are covenant children. There was a question asked at the classical examination of Reverend Norman, are all children born into the church covenant children? We have to be careful how we answer that question because there is the viewpoint of some that all children born into the church and baptized are covenant children. They receive a promise from God, every one of them. But the promise is this, "I will save you if when you're older you believe." It's a conditional covenant idea. They believe all are in the covenant and so they break the covenant, then that puts them outside of that covenant. That's not at all the idea that we understand by the covenant. No, God's covenant people are his elect people in Jesus Christ, and of our children, we don't know. We don't know but we do know this: God normally works in the line of generations. Upon them come the blessings of the covenant of life and friendship with God. Those who are his people in the line of generations, they experience the blessings of God's covenant, the work of God, they have new life, they repent of their sins, they have faith, they are justified, they are sanctified and glorified. That's the way God normally works in

the line of generations. On the basis of that, this organic character of the covenant, God's working in the line of generations, we baptize our children.

Along with that, then, the Catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism and the baptism form both point out that there is one sign of the covenant that has changed forms. In the Old Testament, it was circumcision and in the New Testament now it is baptism. This also is why we baptize our children. It goes back, first of all, to the meaning of circumcision and baptism. They really mean the same thing. The outward form of the sign in the Old Testament was circumcision as Abraham was commanded to do that first in Genesis 17. This is a sign, this sign of circumcision, taught Abraham and his children and his whole household that they were unclean and they brought forth unclean seed. So circumcision says to us the same thing, we are unclean of ourselves and we bring forth as parents unclean seed. Circumcision signifies that salvation is all the work of God. It signifies the righteousness of faith, the righteousness by faith as we read in Romans 4:11. It's a bloody sign that points ahead to the Messiah who would come and save his people from their sins so that they can be righteous before a holy God. It also signifies the work, God's work of cutting away sin and evil from the hearts of his people.

Baptism signifies the same thing, however, as it looks back to the finished work of Jesus Christ. Baptism points out to us the righteousness which is by faith. It's an outward sign with that inward meaning and washing that points us to the washing away of sins in the blood of Jesus Christ and the washing of the work of the Holy Spirit within us. So infants being circumcised in the Old Testament tells us children are to be baptized in the New Testament.

But there's more to it than that. God has given the covenant sign also as a seal to guarantee what he promises. What has God promised in his covenant? God promises to save in the line of generations. He promises to save in the line of generations and, you see, that's why that we baptize our children. God's promise is that. The sign reflects that. If we don't baptize our children, that's not at all reflected in the covenant sign, and so we baptize our children because this reflects, then, God's work in the line of generations. God gives a public seal to his church and he says, "I will gather my children from your children." He goes on record in baptism of saying that very thing.

So beloved, for these reasons, our children must be baptized. Not to baptize them is contrary to the plain and clear teaching of Scripture from beginning to end. Even as we saw the organic view of God's covenant, it's not optional. I actually came across many years ago, a pastor who said that very thing, it's optional in his church. The parents came to him and wanted their child baptized, he would do it, but if they didn't, that would be fine too. It was kind of a Reformed Calvinistic Baptist church.

Well, let's see and understand that this isn't optional. Not only that, but it's very wrong not to baptize children and here's why: water dripping down the heads of infants is a strong proof of God's saving grace, it's not because of anything that we do, and the implication is this, if we don't baptize our children, they're not in the covenant and the church of God. I want to be careful with that. When I talk to Reformed Baptists about that, they would say, "Yeah, but we don't think that. We think that children are included,

can be included in the covenant and church of God and the children are saved." Yeah, but when you don't baptize them, the implication is they're outside the covenant and the church of God because this is the sign of the covenant that pictures entering in. Don't you see?

So we have to understand that as well. Every time a child is baptized, it's a strong proof of the saving grace of God. It's not about me. It's not about me fulfilling some condition. It's not that I have to accept Jesus Christ when I'm older and then I have what is promised in baptism. No. A helpless baby who cannot speak, much less pray or give thanks to God or give a confession of his or her faith, can be expected of God for the sake of God's covenant that he establishes in Jesus Christ. So baptism is the powerful display of God's grace. Grace for children. Grace that is not dependent upon anything that we do. It's all the work of God. This is why we baptize our children.

Now because of that, we see the significance of it this morning and that's brought out in Answer 74 when it says that children must be baptized and then this is what happens, it says, "also admitted into the Christian church; and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers," and we'll look at those two parts of the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of infant baptism this morning.

First of all this: children are admitted into the Christian church. This is why they must be baptized. Now, we want to understand this rightly and I believe that this is the right understanding of that. You see, in the beginning of Answer 74 it says, "for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God." So it says they're already included in the church of God. The baptism form reflects that, as well, in its questions, that they are to be baptized because they are in the church. Well, our children are baptized because children are included, elect children in Jesus Christ are included in the covenant and church of God. We're speaking there and the Catechism is speaking there, the one body of Jesus Christ made up of all the elect.

You see, the water of baptism doesn't save them. That's what the beginning of Lord's Day 27 is about. It's not the water of baptism, that's the wrong view of the Roman Catholics, there is some kind of work of physical water itself being a grace to every child who is baptized to actually wash away sins. Baptism doesn't save our children. The water sprinkled on their heads does not do anything spiritually for them at that moment, but the Heidelberg Catechism here is speaking of the one body of Jesus Christ made up of all the elect and baptism is a picture of entrance into the covenant and church of God so they are baptized because they are, God's children are in the covenant and the church of God.

But the idea is this, when our children are baptized, they become members of the instituted church. Our children are members of the church. Children and young people, you are members of the church by your baptism. You are members of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church. Now, not a member in full communion, that comes when you make confession of your faith, then you're admitted to the Lord's Supper. Then you young men, you young boys, can come to the congregational meetings and vote there. There are membership privileges that come when you confess your faith, when you make a commitment to the church and to God who rules and governs his church. But by

baptism, children and young people are admitted to this congregation as members and the scriptural idea that's behind that is that the church is made up of believers and their children. That was true in the Old Testament.

Believers, parents and their children. That even included a carnal seed. They were all delivered from the bondage of Egypt. They all went through the Red Sea. They all saw the wondrous works of God. They were all brought into the Promised Land of Canaan. We read in 1 Corinthians 10 they were all baptized into Moses and ate of the spiritual bread and drank out of the spiritual rock that followed them, which was Christ. They received the law. They worshiped at the temple. Children received the sign of the covenant. They were part of the old custom of church.

It's not different now in the new dispensation. The church is a gathering of believers and their children and we see and understand that our children and young people, even though they have not made confession of their faith, they are still members of the church and so we bring them to worship. We don't leave them at home. We don't put them somewhere else and just the adults come in, but we bring them to worship and they sing the same songs we sing, and hear the same preaching that we hear, and they pray the same prayers that we pray together as a congregation. And those who are believing children confess their faith when they're older and they become members in full communion in the church, but we understand that not necessarily all those who are baptized are saved because the Scriptures teach that very clearly. There is that carnal element, as there was in Israel in the Old Testament.

Now, what does that all mean for us today? As I said in the introduction, I do want to speak specifically to children and young people and parents this morning. At this point I want to do that for a few moments. Children and young people, you are members of this church. You are members of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church and you are to live as members of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church. You must remember in your lives that you may not do what you want. Being part of a church means you're going to do what God calls you to do. Every time baptism is administered here in the church, you children and young people are reminded that you, with that child, are a member of this church and if you walk in sin in this world, even though you may not be a confessing member, when you walk in some great sin and others see that sin, it's not just about you. That's one of the lies that Satan wants us to believe, "That doesn't affect anybody else, it's just me." Not true. When we walk in sin, we walk in disobedience, we bring shame upon the name of the church, and in doing so, it's not just about our reputation in the world but it's the reputation of Jesus Christ. As part of this church, when you walk in a sinful way, you're bringing shame upon the name of Jesus Christ who is the Head and the Lord of his church. Children and young people, you must remember that as you live in this world.

Parents, we must remember this is why we have the view of our children that we do. We don't view our children as heathens who need evangelism and mission work, but instead we view them as children who belong to the church, who are covenant children until they would maybe show themselves different than that. So understanding that, wanting them to grow in their faith, we make sure that they're prepared for Catechism. We teach them. Wanting them to grow in their faith, we bring them to worship when they're able to sit in

worship services so that they can hear the preaching. Often, I'm told over and over again, how a child, a young child, caught this in the sermon, caught this in the worship. Our children by the powerful work of the Spirit in them, they're growing at a very young age in their faith by sitting under the preaching of the Gospel here in the church.

So we bring them for that purpose and we teach them how to live in faith and godliness and we set a good example for them ourselves in our own lives. We're dedicated to that, not saying to them, "Well, do as I say and not as I do," but, "Do as I say and do as I do." We're to lead them a good example and teach them this is how a member of the church and one who belongs to Jesus Christ lives. Now live in this way. Now understand with all of that, we cannot make them believers. We want them to have faith and to grow in faith. We can't make them believers. We cannot work in their hearts but we're instruments of God to teach them what it is to live in faith and holiness and godliness.

So parents, we're reminded this morning, let's be diligent and faithful in teaching our children these things, but the other thing that we see is that baptism distinguishes us from the children of unbelievers. Children and young people, and it's not just true for you, every one of us, but I want you children and young people to understand this too, it's for you too: baptism is like a uniform to you that distinguishes you from the world. Think about a uniform, think about a basketball uniform. It distinguishes one team from the other team; that the home jerseys that are white and the dark jerseys that are the away jerseys so the two teams can tell on the court which one is which. So it's a uniform, as it were. God sets his mark on you to say that you're set apart and you're to live as those who are set apart in this world. We must not live, then, like the unbelievers of the world.

Now there are those who think that even though children, infants would be baptized, yet the expectation is that when these children get older, they would go through some years, a period of time in their lives when they would go out and sow their wild oats. It would be expected that they live in ungodliness and sin for a while and that God, then, would work in them some radical conversion, some great experience in their lives that would turn them from that evil and sinful way. So their expectation of their children is that they would live in ungodliness and sin in their lives and so that's the way they treat them. That's the way they rear them. That's what's expected and hopefully God intervenes and changes them in their lives.

Now, don't get me wrong, it may be true, that there are some within the church who do that in their youth and God by his wonderful grace, amazing powerful grace, brings them out of that and we can be thankful for that. We ought not to think that that is the norm or that's the right way to view it, but that's the expectation for our children, let them get it out of their systems, as it were, and then God will bring a great change. No, we see and understand that within the covenant God as we read of that in the baptism form, there are two parts in that covenant and the two parts in the covenant are not that God does his part to get us in and we do our part to get the rest of the way into the covenant of God. That's not the idea at all. We say that God's covenant is unilateral, not bilateral. It's all the work of God bringing us into a relationship of love and friendship with himself in Jesus Christ. We can do nothing to enter into God's covenant but the idea is this: those who are brought in have a calling and responsibility in that covenant. That's our part in the

covenant. That's the exact place where the law fits in our lives. God comes to us and says, "I am the Lord thy God. I have brought you out of the bondage, not only of Egypt but the bondage of sin. Now this is how you live." That's our part in the covenant.

We're called to live in a certain way and here the baptism form is so beautiful. Through baptism we are admonished and obliged unto new obedience, namely that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son and the Holy Ghost. Cleave to him. And what does that mean? Well, we trust in him and love him with all our hearts and with all our souls, with all our mind and with all our strength, that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life.

Children and young people, that is a word to you just as much as it is to every adult who is sitting here this morning. This is how a covenant child lives. When you're afraid, trust in him. When you're tempted to disobey, obey him. Walk in new obedience.

The New Testament talks about the life of putting off and putting on. Putting off ungodliness and sin. That's the very way in which God came to Moses in Genesis 17. We read the beautiful promise in verse 7 of Genesis 17, but in verse 1, God comes to Abram and he says to him, "Walk before me and be thou perfect." He wasn't saying to Abram you have to do this and then I'll give you my promise. That's not what God was saying. He gave the promise but Abram was already a covenant child of God and he knew it, and so God comes to him and says, "Walk before me and be thou perfect."

That's the word of God to us this morning as we remember baptism. Children, young people and adults are all called to live in this way. We're to live what we are in Jesus Christ. It would be easy just to stop there but what if we're not? What if there are some of you here this morning who aren't? You're showing by that life of worldliness, whatever that worldliness may be, whatever you're involved in, whatever sin you're not putting away and not fighting against, what you're saying by that is, "I reject that God. I reject Jesus Christ." And you can be sitting here this morning and really saying in your heart and by your life, "I reject him. I want nothing to do with him. I don't want that relationship of love and friendship. I'm going to be here to make others happy but I really don't want it." Or by saying, "I want a little bit of both," we're saying in the end, "No, we don't want that exclusive relationship with him." We want it both ways and, really, that's a rejection of him as well, and that kind of rejection means this: that's not the life of one who is a child of God, and the word of God says to one who lives in that way, you're outside the kingdom, you're outside the covenant. You may have been baptized but that's not how one who is a covenant child lives.

Baptism reminds us, reminds us who are children of God, we have been set apart. We have been set apart to be his own. That means we're to live that way too. Not living in ungodliness and the worldliness that is around us, but instead living for the glory of the God who saved us by his grace, made us part of this covenant, this covenant that's organic in Jesus Christ.

So we've seen this morning why we baptize. We've seen the implications of that for our own lives. We give thanks to God for his great grace and we live as those who are adopted sons and daughters who have received that sign that sets us apart from the unbelieving children of this world. Amen.

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, we're thankful for this word this morning. We're thankful for thy covenant goodness and faithfulness, especially understanding that we are by nature children of Adam and we deserve no good thing, and yet thou art a God who hast engrafted us into Christ, chosen us into Christ from all eternity. We are thankful, Lord, for thy goodness in the line of generations and that thou hast given to us the sign of baptism as a sign and seal that this is the way that thou wilt work in thy church for the glory of thy name. Grant us grace, Father, to live this out in our lives, to be faithful in our callings, and forgive us where we have not been. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.