

Acts 2:36-41 – A Saving Response to the Gospel

I. Introduction

- This passage records the response to Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. The sermon is not finished (in a sense) until it is applied by the hearer to themselves.
- This passage sets forth for us Christian discipleship 101: how do we respond to the call of the good news about Jesus? To respond to the gospel savingly is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to repent of your sins, to be baptized, and to follow Jesus wherever He tells you to go.

II. Conviction of Sin (vs. 37)

- Peter's bold, Scriptural preaching had the effect of awakening the consciences of his hearers. They were cut to the heart.
- The Holy Spirit was sent forth into the world to convict the world of righteousness, sin, and judgment. (John 16:8)
- Faithful preaching proclaims the law of God showing us our sin, and proclaims the gospel (the solution for sin that is found in Jesus, the Savior for sinners)

III. Faith, Repentance, and Baptism (vs. 38)

- Peter calls his hearers to repent, because they had a part in killing the Prince of Life.
- Repentance is a change of mind. It is a turning around and going in the other direction (Acts 3:19)
- The preaching of repentance is essential to faithful gospel proclamation (Luke 24:46-47, Acts 20:20-21)
- A saving response to the gospel requires faith in Jesus Christ. Without faith in Him, we cannot be saved (Acts 16:31, Rom. 10:12-13).
- Baptism is an outward physical sign pointing to inward spiritual realities that are received by faith.
- Baptism signifies:
 - Baptism points to our entrance into the church of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12:17, Eph. 4:4-5)
 - Baptism points to our union with the resurrected Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27-29, Rom. 6:1-11)
 - Baptism signifies our forgiveness of sins, having been cleansed (Acts 22:16, Col. 2:11-12, 1 Pet. 3:20-21)
 - Baptism signifies our new commitment to a resurrected life of holiness (Rom. 6:1-14, Tit. 3:3-7)
 - Baptism is an outward physical sign of the inward physical work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 1 Pet. 3:20-21)
 - Baptism is an appeal to God to do the inward work of regeneration and renewal (1 Pet. 3:20-21)
- Peter focuses on the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's baptism is associated with water baptism, though they are not conditioned upon one another (1 Cor. 12:12-13, see Acts 8:14-17, 9:17-18, 10:44-48, 19:1-7).
- We are called to "improve our baptism" (i.e. live like we are baptized, Rom. 6:3-4). Baptism is God's call on our life to be those set apart from the world, living in a holy manner, and living for Jesus!

IV. The Promise to You and Your Children, and to the Gentiles (vs. 39)

- Vs. 39 is relevant for considering the question of household baptism. Our Standards teach that the children of believers ought to be baptized (Shorter Catechism, Q. 95).
- The language of "household baptism" is reflective of Scriptural language, whereas "infant baptism" is more individualistic in nature.
- What is the "promise"? The gift of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:4, 2:33, and Joel 2, Isa. 59:21)
- Why does Peter say "to you and to your children"? This is the language of covenant promise (see Gen. 17:7, Deut. 29:10-13, see back of notes)
- Who are "all who afar off"? The Gentiles (Eph. 2:13)
- Why did Peter and Luke use the language of "household"? The household is a meaningful category drawn from Scripture (Acts 11:13-14, 16:15, 16:31-34, 18:8)
- God's promises to the children of believers: a hope-giving source of strength for us as we raise our children in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Isa. 44:2-5).

SCRIPTURAL ARGUMENTS FOR HOUSEHOLD BAPTISM

³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. (Acts 16:31-34 ESV)

Children of believers are members of the covenant people of God	Circumcision and Baptism are Related as Signs of the Old and New Covenant Respectively	The Household is Often treated as a Unit in Scripture	Other Scriptural Clues
The covenant blessings are promised to believers and their children in the Old Testament (Gen. 17:7, Deut. 5:2-4, 29:29).	Circumcision signified separation from the sinful world and becoming God’s special possession (Gen. 17:7-14). One was marked out as a member of God’s people by circumcision. Baptism also distinguishes us as members of God’s people separated from the world (1 Cor. 12:13, Eph. 4:4-5).	A household may commit itself to serving the Lord (Gen. 18:19, Josh. 24:15).	When Peter speaks of baptism as an appeal to God for a good conscience, the Old Testament type he uses is an example of a household being saved through water, Noah and his household (1 Pet. 3:20-21)
The blessings of the Holy Spirit are promised to believers and their children in the Old Testament (Isa. 44:3, 59:21, Joel 2:28-29)	Circumcision signified our need for cleansing and washing away the filth of sin (Jer. 4:4, Col. 2:11). Baptism signifies cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16, Rom. 6:1-11, 1 Cor. 6:11, Tit. 3:5).	Households often perished together or were saved together (Gen. 7:1, Ex. 12:27, Num. 16:32, Deut. 11:6, Josh. 6:25, Heb. 11:7).	An additional Old Testament type of baptism was a corporate, household baptism (1 Cor. 10:1-4).
The blessings of the Holy Spirit are promised to believers and their children in the New Testament (Acts 2:38-39)	Circumcision and Baptism both call the receiver to a new way of life (Deut. 10:12-16, Rom. 6:3-4).	The promise of salvation is offered to a household (Acts 11:14).	The inward application of baptism (i.e. the regenerating, cleansing work of the Holy Spirit) is not tied to the moment of baptism. It may precede or come after baptism (John 3:5, cf. with John 3:8, Acts 8:12-13, 8:22-23, 10:44-48).
Children of believers were included in covenant commitments (Deut. 29:10-13).	Circumcision was a physical sign which pointed to an inward reality of faith and repentance by the Holy Spirit’s working (Deut. 10:16, 30:6, Jer. 4:4).	Households were baptized together (Acts 10:44-48, 16:15, 16:31-34 18:8, 1 Cor. 1:16).	The New Covenant is better in every respect than the Old Covenant. If one of the blessings of the Old Covenant was the inclusion of the children of believers, how is it possible that the children of believers are now excluded? (Isa. 59:21, Heb. 7:22, 8:6)
The children of one or more believers is considered “holy” (<i>hagios</i>) (1 Cor. 7:14). Children of covenant households are treated differently and given special promises (Ps. 37:25-26, 90:16, 103:17-18, 112:1-2, 115:13, 128, 145:4, 147:13)	Circumcision was a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith, showing that one was justified before God (Rom. 4:11-12).		The command to disciple the nations involves first, baptizing them, and second, teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded. The order is not teach and then baptize.
Children are addressed in Ephesians as recipients of the letter to the church in Ephesus and commanded to obey their parents “in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1-3). See Eph. 1:1-4, 2:8-10, 4:1-4, 5:1, 6:1-3. Do all these verses apply to the children in the Ephesian church, or just chapter 6?	In Galatians, where Paul deals with the question of whether circumcision is necessary for Gentile believers, he teaches that we may know who the seed of Abraham is: they are those baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29).	Some argue that there is no specific mention in these passages of the presence of any infant in the households, and so the claim that they are to be baptized on the basis of what is written here is invalid. However, this argument assumes the primacy of the individual, supposing that Luke is giving a record solely of the Christian faith of particular individuals. We noted earlier that modern individualism is foreign to the world of the Bible. The relevant datum in each case is the household. Luke considers the household to be the significant unit. From this it follows that if infants were present they would, as part of the household, receive the covenant sign. The fact that particular individuals are not mentioned proves our point. The interest of the New Testament is not in the age or nature of the particular individuals who were part of the household—whether they were adults, adolescents, children or infants—but on the household as such. (Robert Letham, <i>A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Baptism</i>)	
	In Colossians, Paul mentions both circumcision and baptism in close relationship as together signifying our death to sin, and our new life in Christ (Col. 2:11-12)		