

Proof of infant baptism by believing parents -
Lord's Day 27

sermonaudio.com

Heidelberg Catechism Series
By Pastor Pieter Van Ruitenburg

Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 7:1-24
Preached on: Sunday, August 9, 2020

Bethel Netherlands Reformed Congregation
8920 Broadway Street
Chilliwack, BC V2P 5W1

Website: www.nrcchilliwack.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/bnrchilliwack

Congregation, we are at Lord's Day 27 of the Heidelberg Catechism Questions 72 through 74 on page 56. Let us read the questions and the answers.

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

A. 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"?

A. 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?

A. 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.

So far.

Congregation, three questions, three answers, however, the first two, 72 and 73, have been dealt with, I think, last Sunday. I think I'm going to let it go. What is contained in 72

and 73 was talked about already, that only the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cleanses from sin, that the Holy Ghost is necessary, that therefore baptism is called the cleansing of our sins because it's an external washing with water pointing to the internal washing. So we will mainly deal with Question and Answer 74 tonight and the theme is "Proof of infant baptism by believing parents." Proof of infant baptism by believing parents. Three thoughts. Why infant baptism, what's the big deal? Why are worried about that? Why do we even talk about it? Secondly, the proof of infant baptism from the Bible. And in the third place, the parents of the infants baptized. So proof of infant baptism by believing parents: why infant baptism, the proof of infant baptism, and the parents of the infants baptized.

Congregation, so many of our forefathers were Baptists. John Bunyan, for example. Well, how do we honor him? With that beautiful book, as he's the author of "Pilgrim's Progress," he was a Baptist, so sound in doctrine, so generous, so kind, so biblical, and yet he did not baptize children and was baptized himself as an adult. So many of our forefathers, Spurgeon and Huntington and many more were Baptists. We even read their sermons. Philpot was a Baptist. So we honor them, we like them, so you understand that tonight I'm not going to fight with them. I'm not going to fight with Bunyan. Who am I? I'm not waging a war and yet we also need to be honest and say, well, I agree in this case more with Calvin, for example. Calvin was absolutely against having only adult baptism. He was in favor of infant baptism. He saw it in the Bible but we're not going to fight, we are going to show you what the Bible says and show you what's so convincing for us.

Now preparing this sermon, I realized that I had to be careful that this is not a lecture tonight, just convincing you about truth and doctrine and proving it with the Bible. You know, we are here in a worship service, right? A worship service for God's glory and to also receive something for our personal souls, instruction and comfort and be humbled and be needing Christ. We also need to keep in mind before I go there, that every one of us, every one is subjective. You know, it would be hard if I would be convinced of the Baptist's standpoint, it would be hard to convey that, right, and it would be a big thing in the church, the pastor changed to become a Baptist. Of course, there would be such a huge thing so am I objective? I pray that I am but I have to look at myself, be honest with yourself. But are you all objective? Nobody is.

I heard a Baptist, a former Baptist speaking. He changed to Reformed. He was raised Baptist but it frustrated him. He saw some problems with that also in the family and when he was 15-16 years old, his parents pushed him, "You are not a member of the church yet." They don't have Baptist members, right, baptized members. "You're not a member of the church yet. You should become a member. You should repent and believe." They say, "Oh yeah, that's right, I should. Yeah, I should." And he felt pressured and he had constantly that question that, "If my faith is not good enough, then I'm not in the covenant." And he struggled and struggled and was wondering if his relationship with his dad and mother also played a role in the change of mind.

So let us all be critical about ourselves, assuming the fact that why we choose for this or for that side. We all wear glasses, don't we, especially with a subject like this. We wear

glasses and if you have the wrong glasses on, you don't see things, and if you have the right glasses on, you say, "Yes, that makes sense." So I see some people have glasses on and they don't see infant baptism in the Bible at all. They just don't see it because they have their glasses on. And others say, "But I see it here and there. It's so clear for me," because they have, in my opinion, biblical glasses on. So tonight we have to find the biblical glasses to look at texts in a biblical way, not just with the wrong glasses on because we want the text to say this or something, or not to say something.

We also have to keep in mind the difference between Baptist and Reformed is not only the baptism point. Some think that way. They say, "You know, the only difference, the only difference is they baptize children, we baptize children and they don't. They only baptize adults. That's the only difference." That's impossible. That's simply not true. There are many more things playing a role. You cannot isolate that thing. The whole theology is different. Yes, the theology of Spurgeon. Yes, the theology of Philpot is a different theology. We have to keep that in mind. We read the Bible in a different way. We look at the Old Testament in a different way. We look at the relationship between New and Old Testament in a different way. We look at Israel in a different way. Many more things. We even look at conversion in the Old Testament in a different way.

So what is the heart of it? Maybe that helps you concentrate, what is the real heart of the difference between believing in infant baptism or not? Well, the Reformed, the children belong to the congregation. They belong to the congregation. They are separated from the world. They have an earmark, they have a label, they have been separated by the Lord. They are holy. They are sanctified. Really they are sanctified and truly privileged. The Lord has given them certain promises and the Baptists miss that. The children are not members of the congregation whatsoever. They become members when they repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are baptized as adults. Then they become members, and before that they are not members whatsoever. They are privileged pagans. And parents believing in the baptism standpoint look at the children and say, "That child is not only unconverted, that child does not belong to the church." They can say that because the child is not in and under or in the covenant. There's no relationship with the covenant.

Now I have talked to the preschool children in this sanctuary and I stood here before this pulpit and I showed them the baptism font and I told them about baptism, and I said that water on your forehead will never dry up. But a Baptist can't say that, right? And I said the Lord has given you a special attention because you are, in an outward sense, a child of the covenant. So that's why you were baptized because you are special, special to the Lord. If you're a Baptist, you cannot say that, that you're special to the Lord.

Our parents have to answer questions like, "Do you believe in spite of the fact that they are subject to all misery and ye condemnation itself, yet that they are sanctified, that they are sanctified in Christ? Are they sanctified in Christ and therefore as members of the church ought to be baptized?" And the parents say, "Yes." So they say, "I confirm that. My child is sanctified in Christ and is a member of the church and therefore he must be baptized." Do you see that? A Baptist cannot say that, that the child is sanctified in Christ. "And what is that, sanctified? No, no way. A member of the church? Before they

believe, a member of the church? Absolutely not. They are members when they repent and believe and are baptized as an adult."

So that's the heart of it. That's serious business, I think. It's not just something like, "Whatever. One baptizes children, the other not." It goes way way deeper. So what we believe is that God, the God of Israel, the God of the Bible, is a family God. A family God. Not a God working randomly among people here and there. No, he works in families. A family God. 310 times in the Bible, the word family. 338 times a different word, [unintelligible]. And 63 times the seed. Now the seed sometimes refers to natural seed but so often the Lord speaks about the family and he deals with people family-wise, in collectives, in families. And sometimes the Lord begins a new thread like with Rahab and then the children, grandchildren, great grandchildren are belonging to the same family as well. A family God.

Salvation is personal. I agree with that. Something needs to happen to me personally, to my children personally. It's not sufficient that they're baptized. Absolutely not. They need a new heart. And yet although salvation is personal, the way God deals with the church, deals with people is in families, in church families. For example, think of Romans 9 is in the New Testament. It's about the Apostle Paul talking about Israel and explaining how the Lord dealt with the people of Israel as a family God. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren," my brethren, "my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever."

Now has God changed? So God is a God in the Old Testament of family, in the New Testament not anymore? I can't accept that, that God is changing so dramatically and changing his ways so profoundly. We see the Old Testament developing, we see the fulfillment of the things in the New Testament. We don't see the change. And you know, we keep old and new covenant and Old and New Testament together because it's the same God. So that's why faith and the covenant and the work of the Holy Spirit and everything is the same, maybe clearer and richer in the New Testament but not different. You see, that is the main thing. You need those glasses on. You need the glasses on of the unity of the Bible instead of splitting it in two pieces. The Old Testament is the Old Testament. The New Testament, yes, that's what it is, that's so different. That's blasphemous. So Calvin has studied that and seen that it is one substance, one substance of all the New Testament and that Abraham was not saved in any different way than Paul. Same faith. Same Christ. Same conversion. In fact, the same covenant not only a newer version of it.

So a family God yet some state, Baptists state that in the Reformation they broke with so many things of the Roman Catholic Church, right? With idolatry and teaching about Mary being innocent, and you name all those extra doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformers broke with all of that. The Baptists say except one thing. The

Roman Catholics, they accuse us of being Roman Catholic because the Reformation is almost done and you need one more step, you need to become a Baptist and now you're completely reformed they say. But you know, that's only if you have the wrong glasses on. Calvin was not afraid to disagree with anything and if he would have seen that infant baptism is wrong, he would have been courageous about that because he couldn't lose anything anyway. He was not biased at all.

Now some say, "Reverend, pastor, let's not talk too long about this. It's clear. In the New Testament nothing is ever mentioned about infant baptism. Period. It's not commanded. You don't see the practice of it. You don't hear the details about it. It's just absolutely absent. It's not in the Bible. Period. So forget about it. Don't do your best to fight it," they say. You know, but I see it. I see infant baptism all the time. It makes so much sense and they say, "You're biased." Well, maybe I'm biased, biblically biased then. I see it through a biblical perspective. I see it as I hope to show.

Proof of it. Let me try to reason a certain way. You agree that circumcision is the sign of the old covenant, you agree? Circumcision is the sign of the old covenant and baptism is the sign of the new covenant? You say, "Of course. Everyone agrees with that." Right? Now if the sign of the old covenant and the sign of the new covenant are compared and it's the same covenant at heart, if it's the same covenant at heart, then circumcision and baptism are very close, are almost the same, and then it's hard to believe if the covenants are so close, if God has not changed, it's hard to believe that baptism was administered to boys and the children, and in the New Testament you would expect more inclusive in the New Testament? No, that's going downwards, it's going backwards instead of richer and better. In the New Testament ladies, women, girls, are baptized as well because it's richer in the New Testament. And you go backwards. The same covenant, we believe, at heart the same covenant, the substance being the same substance.

So I agree that there is no command in the New Testament to baptize children but I also don't see a command to baptize girls, women. But it's still happening. So if it was commanded or not, that's not an issue because we all agree it was not commanded that women were baptized. But you say, "Yeah, but we see that some women were baptized." Right, but not a command so don't forget about the argument to command it. And children are baptized, really? So how many times does it say in the Bible that they believed and their whole house? And their whole house. Acts 16 about the jailer, "And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Your faith affects your whole house. "And thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway."

Now Baptists say house, that just means all adults and the slaves. You know, do you have the wrong glasses on now? Why? Why limiting it? Why don't you just admit it that word "house" can easily mean the children as well? In fact, important dictionaries just come up with that and say it can include children and it always included children. I don't see anything in the Bible about children that were not baptized, from believing parents they

were baptized later. If I would find one example of that, someone whose parents are baptized and he or she was baptized later, no examples of that. And are not office-bearers supposed to rule their houses well? Keeping the children in submission with all gravity? So then "household" also means something else and not include children? It certainly includes children.

So if you have the wrong glasses on, you don't see it, you don't want to see it. You're subjective, I suppose, and I cannot help it, I can't help it that I see it. No reason why the children would be excluded. I would even argue that if the children would not be included, the Bible would deceive us. If the children would not be included, it would have told us. From an historical standpoint, that's hard. Historians differ in opinion. The one says infant baptism was already starting in the first century, right after this. And others say, no, it started in the third century. What I know for sure is this, that in the beginning of the third century, some state, some historians state that infant baptism was common. In the third century, common. And we have no information from the first centuries that anyone was opposed to that. So we have lots of information on doctrinal issues from the first centuries but not about infant baptism. There was no point apparently. That's not a very strong argument, is it? It's not but telling that it is from a later date is also an interpretation.

So infant baptism is not saving. The fact that the Reformed churches has given the impression that baptism worked in a magic way has created much confusion. I agree. And that was for many reasons to reject infant baptism altogether. I understand. But you know, you can find wrong examples of infant baptism theology and then shoot it down. First find a warped interpretation and say, "See how wrong they are?" Of course. I do the same thing. I can say, "Baptists, I know Baptists and they are so Arminian because it's their choice before baptism instead of baptism first and God's choice first." That's not fair. So you don't single out the wrong examples and then attacking them in the hope that people will accept this for all of them. No, you can't do that.

So circumcision is the sign of the covenant. Circumcision pointed to, what? Pointed to the blood of Christ and in the New Testament baptism is not bloody anymore because the Lord Jesus gave his blood. But circumcision was not just an ethnic thing, like people like John MacArthur say. Only an ethnic thing. They were circumcised to show that they were Jewish, that's it. No, it was a sign of the covenant and the covenant was not only the covenant about the Promised Land and God's voice, the prophets, but also salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we believe that we must view the children as holy. You know, we were reading 1 Corinthians 7 tonight, the reason for that is this, for the unbelieving husband, suppose an unbelieving husband, because she was reached by the gospel, she was converted and he was not. What would she do? Just say, "Let us separate. Let us divorce." No, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified," is sanctified, "by the wife," is set apart. Sanctified is an Old Testament word. By the wife and also the other way around, "the unbelieving wife," it is an unbelieving wife and he is converted, "is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean," else were your children unclean, "but now are they holy."

Do you see? Nothing you can say about that. Those children before they are grown up, before they come to faith, before they are ready for adult baptism or something, are already holy and not unclean.

Now I think that most Baptists have a real problem with that, to say, "Children in the congregation, you're holy. Children, you are not unclean. Children, you are sanctified, even your unconverted father, unconverted mother are sanctified." They have a hard time but we believe that and that is so clear, so very clear in infant baptism.

Also think of Colossians 2. Those texts I mentioned do not mention infant baptism, I know that, but what they mention is the unity of the covenant and that the children are holy, that the children are as holy as the children in the Old Testament. It's the same. So baptism and circumcision are close, actually circumcision was kind of replaced by baptism. You say, "Where is that in the Bible?" Well, you should have the right glasses on. I'll read it to you. Colossians 2:10 and further, "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom," in whom, "also ye are circumcised," in whom ye are circumcised, that's New Testament, "with the circumcision made without hands," so a spiritual circumcision, "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." So just in a couple of sentences, the Apostle Paul just shifts from circumcision to baptism because it's the same thing. We believe in the New Testament circumcision. You are circumcised outwardly in the church but you need to be circumcised without hands in a spiritual way.

So what is first, baptism or faith? Well, the Baptist says, "Believe and be baptized. You first have to believe and then you receive the sign of it. What's the sense of having a sign of something that you don't have? What's the sense of being baptized if you have no idea what grace is? That's dumb. That's not logical. That's not biblical." Let me ask the question about Abraham's children. When the Lord instituted circumcision, he first believed, Abraham first believed, right, and then was also circumcised but not his boys. His boys received the sign before they received the thing itself. So if you say that doesn't make sense having the sign before the real thing, then you are criticizing God in the Old Testament and saying, "Well, he did it wrong in the Old Testament." You can't say that, right? So don't come with that argument.

So again, the whole congregation, children included, are covenant people, and that means that the Lord gives more to our children than to the neighbor children that don't go to any church. The gospel is the same. Yes, you can preach the gospel to street kids too. The same gospel. Is there no difference between the street kids and our kids? Some say, "There's no difference, in baptism there is no difference, not really. Well, we are more privileged, our children are more privileged. He goes to Christian school maybe but there's no difference." Yes, there is. There is. Sanctified in Christ and the Lord for them underlines it and puts it in bold letters, "I can save you. I am willing to save you." The Lord gives so much in that ring, in that sign, in that seal of holy baptism, also for the children.

So that's why if you are wondering, "Can I be saved? Is the Lord willing to save me?" The Lord says, "You belong to the church. You belong to the covenant family and I have already sealed it on your forehead. I've already made it clear before." And the Lord reminds us of that. That's why we have baptism services in the church and not in a chapel with the family only. The whole church, for the whole church is repeatedly reminded of God's covenant mercies in the children as well.

You know, think of a father talking to his boy or girl. "Dad, I would like to go to that party." Now that's nice that she's open about that and the father says, "I don't think so. That's not a good idea." He's kind. He says, "No." And she says, "I really want to go there." And she is adamant, "I want to go there! I want to go there! Why not? It's always those rules here. I want to go there!" And the father says, "Girl, before you go further, I want you to go to your bedroom and bow your knees and pray and remind the Lord of the fact that you are baptized, that you are a covenant child, that you belong to the church family and remind the Lord on that and ask the Lord, 'May I with a baptized forehead go to that place?'" She looked at her dad and said, "Okay," and she left and went upstairs and didn't come back. She felt it, "I don't belong there." And of course, I agree nobody belongs there but, you know, this is so powerful, this is a really biblical approach because you show your children, "You have a label. You're sanctified in Christ. You are a member of the church and that's why you were baptized."

Ephesians 6, that's one text more uncommon, not really strong but if you have the right glasses on of the whole Bible, it makes sense. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." Because that "in the Lord," does that not tell us that there was a connection already? "Children, obey your parents, young children, in the Lord." So the Apostle Paul is kind of appealing to those children, "You are already connected to the Lord, right? So obey him in the Lord, children."

So what was the theme? Proof of infant baptism by believing parents. We talked about the heart of it, being holy; we tried to give proof of it; and I have come to the third one, parents of the infants baptized. First we sing.

Let us see what it says about parents in question 74. "Are infants also to be baptized? Yes; for since they, as well as the adult," that's the parent, "are included in the covenant and church of God," so the parent and the church, "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," so it is about true faith, "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," distinguished from the children of unbelievers. So the parents are then believers, right? If they are distinguished from the unbelievers, the children of unbelievers, then what does that mean, children of believers? We also believe in believer's baptism, in a sense, for two reasons. In the first place, the New Testament is written in a time of missions, right? The Apostle Paul was a missionary apostle. And of course, he baptized a lot of adults upon faith, and then also with their families like we do in Bolivia. I baptized in Bolivia a few years ago a few adults and at the same time the children. Their whole house was baptized. But distinguished from the children of

unbelievers, what belief is that? So that's kind of a tender issue and may the Lord give light on that and may the Lord help me word it well, and being absolutely biblical. Pray for me.

So someone is asking, "Pastor, I need my child to be baptized and I'm unconverted. May I yet have my child baptized? Do I need a new heart for that? Do I need saving grace for that? Do I need to have assurance for that? Do I need to be able to go to the Lord's Supper first?" Because that's what some say, you first have to profess and know you're certain and know you're saved and only then you can baptize your children because only then they are children of the covenant. So what do I say? What about saying, "Uh, no big deal. We baptize all the children in the congregation. You're fine. No problem." "Okay, thank you, minister," and they leave through the door. How do I feel when I have said, "You're okay"? It is not okay, okay? It is not okay. I have given permission to be unconverted. I've said that's fine, no problem. There are generations like that. We don't make a promise about that. Some churches do but we don't. You know, that's a tender issue. I don't think I can ever say you're okay. I don't think I can ever give anyone permission to have the child baptized in such a way. And if someone would show that, if we would show indifference and would show kind of, "I don't care about God. I don't care about Christ." It would be clear you can't have your child baptized.

You know there are questions in the form, the classical form for the Lord's Supper and for the Lord's holy baptism, and the parents are addressed in a certain way, right? They are addressed like they're standing here and I am saying, "Beloved ones in the Lord Jesus Christ." What does that mean? "Beloved ones in the Lord Jesus Christ," do I mean that I love those people? Well, I do. So I say, "Beloved ones, I express my love for you." No. It says, "Beloved ones in the Lord Jesus Christ." So God loves you and he cannot love you so you need Christ for that, so he loves you in Christ. "Beloved ones of God in the Lord Jesus Christ." How can I say that? How can I say, "Beloved ones in the Lord Jesus Christ"? Our forefathers have said, "Say it. Say it because that's what they should be, what they must be. They must have grace in their hearts. They must be beloved ones in the Lord Jesus Christ."

So if someone would come to me and say, "Now I can't baptize my child anymore after what you have preached because I can't say I'm converted. I don't dare to say that. I can't go to the Lord's Supper." So what do I say now? I thought about that, what I should say and I think I'm going to say this, "Friend, there's a solution for that. A solution for that." What solution? "Repent. Repent. The door is open. The Lord is willing to save. He's thrusting out his arms to rebels so what's keeping you back? You're struggling, you can't have your child baptized you think. You're concerned." And I want to also keep in mind here is there are people that are broken flaxes and smoking flaxes and bruised reeds and they struggle. They struggle. And I am not going to send them away. I don't have that freedom. I don't want to hurt God's people either. Do you see what a struggle it is?

A few more things to think about. In the Old Testament there is baptism, there is circumcision, did they ask first, "Are you saved?" No, they did not ask that. Those children were children of the whole congregation of Israel, of the whole people. They

were related. They were family. So could we say, I'm just asking, could we say that our children are children not only of the parents, also the grandparents, also of the whole congregation? I think that's also a point you need to consider. And let's keep in mind that the Lord is a wonder-doing God. He does not get permission to remain unconverted but he is a God of the families, a covenant Jehovah.

So pastorally I would say, dear people, struggle with that, and let me say this: I don't take responsibility. I have to tell you what you need and it's your responsibility. May that drive us out to the Lord. But there's a danger, the danger there is so much pressure like I talked about that Baptist friend, used to be Baptist, so much pressure on conversion, 300% pressure that people jump without having faith, that they are pressed and forced and it is pushed through their throat. That's also something to think about. Do you see the struggle? I don't have just a clear answer. I struggle with that. So I don't say no, I don't baptize the children unless you go through the Lord's Supper. That's a step too far for me. I care for those children, the covenant children. I feel for those covenant children even if the parents are unconverted because of that Old Testament idea of a family God. And yet if they say, "What now?" I feel most comfortable with this, it's a simple solution but the Lord can only work it, "O repent ye, repent ye. Why would you die?" Amen.