

COVENANT BAPTISM
Joint Adult Sunday School – June 2022
Westminster Presbyterian Church

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:18–20)

I. Review

A. Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace

1. Covenants in involve (a) oath-consecration and (b) blood-sacrifice.
2. The “sign” of entrance into the Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament was circumcision (Gen 17:11).
3. The “sign” of entrance into God’s Covenant of Grace in the New Testament is baptism (Matt 28:19).

B. The Three-Fold Summary

1. God, in both the Old and New Testaments, consecrates to Himself in covenant professing believers and their children (Gen 17:7, Is 59:21; Acts 2:39; 1 Cor 7:14).
2. God, in both the Old and New Testaments, explicitly attaches specific signs (circumcision [Gen 17:10] and baptism [Acts 2:38; cf. Col 2:11-12]) to this covenant, signifying to his people (a) the sure promises of life (upon condition of faith in Christ) and (b) warning them of the sure penalty of judgment (upon condition of unbelief).
3. Therefore, since the **same covenantal significance** attends both signs (and since the covenant sign of circumcision was applied to infants of professing believers in the OT), and since God has enjoined us (in the NT era) to administer baptism (Matt 28:19-20) to all whom God has consecrated to Himself in covenant, then we should apply the sign of baptism to professing believers and their children, in humble obedience to biblical command and example.

II. Baptism in Practice

A. FOR THE CHURCH

1. Baptism pictures God’s faithfulness to save a people for himself, and to judge the earth in righteousness.
2. Baptism reminds us that Sunday worship is a solemn (and joyful!) communion with the triune God Himself.
3. Baptism magnifies the grace of God by picturing our utter inability to receive the blessings signified by any activity of our own.
4. Baptisms exhort church members to persevere in faith, and endeavor to be “clean on the inside” in Christ.
5. Baptisms should remind us of our own baptism, that we might strive, by God’s grace, to “improve” our own baptism today.

WLC Q. 167. *How is baptism to be improved by us?*

A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; **[1] by serious and thankful consideration** of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; **[2] by being humbled** for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; **[3] by growing up to assurance** of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; **[4] by drawing strength** from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and **[5] by endeavoring** to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.

B. FOR PARENTS

1. Baptism assures parents of God's special care and covenant relationship with their children.
2. Baptism portrays to parents (and to us all!) the fact that merely being born into a Christian home does not a Christian make.
3. Baptism obligates believing parents to pray with and for their children, and to raise them up in the Lord, so that they might receive Christ and his benefits signified and sealed in baptism.
4. Baptism reminds believing parents whose children do not know the Lord that He is still their God, beckons them to saving mercy in Christ all their days, and may yet bring them home to him.

C. FOR CHILDREN

1. Baptism is a "naming" ceremony where children are claimed as God's own covenant children.
2. Baptism assures a covenant child has a Christian family at home and at church.
3. Baptism warns children of the dangers of forsaking the faith of their parents.
4. Baptism formally inaugurates one into a covenant community where the gospel of God's Son is, by grace, the atmosphere of his/her existence.
5. Baptism is a means by which the Holy Spirit communicates the power of Christ in the gospel to God's own in his time.

"It is in the faith of this institution, in the embrace of its promises, and in the discharge of its obligations that believing parents present their infant seed for baptism as the sign and seal of the covenant of grace. They commit them not only to God's care but also to His covenant faithfulness ...

It is, after all, the Lord's own nurture which infant baptism signifies and seals."

– John Murray