

THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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Why Do We Baptize Babies?

By Rev. Sean McCann

The simplest answer to this question is that we baptize the infant children of believers because we believe that God tells us to do so in his word. This command to baptize our infants is not found in one explicit verse, but rather it is woven into the grand redemption story that runs throughout Scripture from beginning to end. God reveals himself through promises, stories, poems, prophecies, teachings, and letters, and when we piece together what God says through these various authors, times, and genres, we see his overarching redemptive plan to graciously save a people for himself by the atoning work of his son Jesus on the cross. So to understand the true meaning and use of baptism, we must first understand God's plan to save. And when we understand God's plan to save we see that the fuller answer to our question is that **God makes promises of salvation to his people in a covenant, and instructs that those promises be sealed with his covenant sign, which is now baptism.**

To understand this statement, we will break it down into three parts:

First, we see that God accomplishes salvation through the Covenant of Grace. We read in Genesis that when God had created man, he entered into a covenant with him (a covenant is an agreement or contract between two parties). This covenant – sometimes called the “covenant of works” – required Adam and Eve to perfectly obey God's word, and either be rewarded with life for keeping the covenant or punished with death for breaking the covenant. Tragically, our first parents broke the covenant of works when they sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit, and thus cast all mankind into an estate of sin and misery under God's wrath. But God, out of his good pleasure, made another covenant with mankind – this one called the “covenant of grace” – to deliver his elect. The basis for this second covenant was no longer works, for works could no longer bring fallen man back into a state of innocence; the basis is now grace through faith. In this new covenant

God promised to send a deliverer to bruise the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15) and thus crush the power of Satan and redeem his people.

From that moment onward, Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden to live in a world of suffering and death. Their hope (and the hope of all of humanity) for eternal life in this fallen world was no longer found in keeping the covenant of works, but rather in fulfilling the requirements of the covenant of grace. What are those requirements? There is but one requirement: faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). In the Old Testament, when the name of Jesus was not yet known, this faith was expressed by believing God's promises of a savior to come (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:9); and now that Jesus has come as “the mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 9:15), the glorious promise of the covenant of grace is all the more clear: all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved (Acts 16:31). The covenant of grace is the framework through which we understand God's saving purpose from the Garden of Eden to the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Second, we see in Scripture that God includes children in the Covenant of Grace. The great example of how the covenant of grace worked before the coming of Jesus is found in the life of Abraham, an Old Testament saint saved not by works, but through faith (Rom 4:9). After Abraham believed, God told him how he would work in the covenant of grace: “I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.” (Gen 17:7)

From this text we understand that God included the children of Abraham in his covenant of grace. This means that the promises (salvation by grace alone) and requirements (though faith alone) of the covenant were extended to all of Abraham's offspring. This inclusion of his children carries over into the New Testament as

March-April

Upcoming Events

For more information about any of these events, refer to our website (www.covenantreformed.net), or the church office (828-253-6578; crpchq@gmail.com).

The Lord's Supper

Please prepare your hearts in advance to take of the sacrament together.

During Morning Worship:	During Evening Worship:
March 10, 24	March 31
April 14, 28	

Presbytery Women's Gathering:

April 13

Fellowship Meal:

March 3, following morning worship.

Elder Groups:

April 7, following morning worship.

Veterans' Restoration Quarters Meals:

Lunch: March 6 and April 3
Dinner: March 21 and April 18

Weekly Events

Sunday:

Opening Exercises	9:30 am
Sunday School	9:45 am
Morning Worship	11:00 am
Evening Worship	6:00 pm

Except for 1st Sundays and Easter Sunday

Wednesday Evenings:

Supper	6:00 pm
Bible Study/Prayer	6:45 pm

Bible Study

For Men:

Men's Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
ROMEOS	8:00 am	Every Thursday
<i>(Retired Old Men Eating Out)</i>		
at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge		
Norm Bomer's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

For Women:

Carol Belz's Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
Fellowship Hall	10:30 am	Every Wednesday
Debbie Cate's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

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believers are referred to as the spiritual children of Abraham (Gal 3:7, 29). The promises that God gave to Abraham in Genesis 12 continue to be made to all who believe and are “blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Gal 3:9)

When we put this all together, we understand that those who trust God – both in the Old and New Testaments – are called children of Abraham. And as children they receive their inheritance in his promise of salvation through faith. This promise is passed down from one generation to the next, and thus includes children in the covenant of grace. This does not mean that children of believers are automatically saved, but it does mean that God will honor his promise to save them by faith if and when they believe (Rom 2:28-29).

Finally, we understand that God gives signs of the Covenant of Grace to all members, including children. When we return to Genesis, we see that God gave a sign of the covenant of grace to Abraham (Gen 17:9-14). This sign was circumcision and it was to be applied to all of the male members of Abraham’s family, including infant children. Later on in Israel’s history we see the sign given not only to Jewish children, but also to Gentile converts who believed (Ex 12:28). The covenant of grace in the Old Testament is therefore sealed by a sign applied both to children of believers and to adult converts.

So when we turn the page to the New Testament and the continuation of the same covenant of grace, we are not surprised to

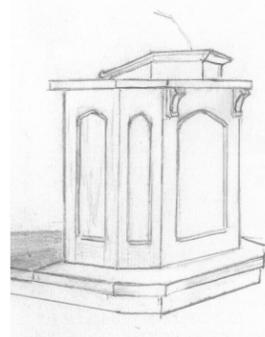
find a sign that is applied to both children of believers and to adult converts. Jesus taught that the sign of baptism replaced the sign of circumcision (Col 2:11-12). He taught this by undergoing baptism himself (Mt 3:13-17), by including little children in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 19:14), and by commanding his disciples to baptize his disciples (Mt 28:19). This replacement is confirmed in the book of Acts when the new believers at Pentecost were not circumcised but baptized, and when the converted Gentiles at Cornelius’ house are baptized instead of circumcised (Acts 10).

So just as the believers in the Old Testament were saved by grace and given a sign for them and their children (the sign of circumcision), so too are believers in the New Testament saved by grace and given a sign for them and their children (the sign of baptism). If God had intended to make a change in who was to receive his sign of grace, then surely he would have made that change explicit, and yet we find no such restriction in his covenant sign. In fact we see just the opposite, a record of household baptisms throughout the early church (Acts 10:47-48; 16:15, 30-31; 18:8; 1 Cor 1:14, 16).

We are surely safe to conclude then, as we look at the full scope of God’s revelation, that his gracious promise of salvation is to be shown forth in the precious sign of baptism joyfully applied both to adult converts and to the children of believers.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



One of my favorite games growing up was *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?* In every level you received clues and had to figure out where to find Carmen Sandiego among all the cities of the world. So far this year, my sermon preparation has felt a little bit like that old game, only now I am trying to locate the Apostle Paul in his seemingly unending travels throughout the Mediterranean world. My Bible Atlas is never far from hand as we have tracked Paul and his companions on their three missionary journeys over land and sea. As we draw our sermon series in Acts to a close, we have one last journey to make: we must follow Paul on his final journey to Rome.

Paul’s final journey begins in Chapter 21 when he visits Jerusalem and is falsely accused by the Jewish authorities of bringing Gentiles into the temple. The Roman tribune arrests Paul in order to quell a riot, and Paul will spend the rest of the book in chains, moved from place to place and questioned by a number of different authorities. On a narrative level, we will follow Paul from Jerusalem (Ch. 21-23) to Caesarea (25-26), and finally across the Mediterranean Sea to Rome (27-28). Thematically, the main point of this entire section is found in Paul’s defense speeches, where – as Darrell Bock summarizes – “he explains and defends his ministry as being faithful to God’s call and plan.”

As the subtitle of the series suggests – “God’s Kingdom Advances” – I believe the underlying theme of the whole book is the coming of the kingdom of God. I have been helped in my understanding by Alan Thompson, who argues “that the major theme of Acts is the reign of the Lord Jesus who enables the spread of the word.” The book begins with the ascent of Jesus and the falling of the Holy Spirit, and then follows the continuing reign of King Jesus by his Spirit through his church. It may appear strange then for the final chapters of Acts to focus not on kingdom advancement, but on God’s great herald bound in chains, yet even here we see the victorious spread of the message of the kingdom as it advances all the way to Rome.

So I hope you enjoy our final journey with Paul this spring. Though most of us will never be called upon to defend the gospel in a formal hearing, we can learn much from Paul’s faithful boldness of how the Lord sustains his servants and sends his Spirit to empower us to be his witnesses to the very ends of the earth.

Preaching Schedule

Date	Morning	Evening
Mar. 3	Acts 20:1-12	
Mar. 10	Acts 20:13-38	1 Sam. 13
Mar. 17	Acts 21:1-36	1 Sam. 14
Mar. 24	Acts 21:37-22:29	1 Sam. 15
Mar. 31	Acts 22:30-23:22	1 Sam. 16
Apr. 7	Acts 23:23-24:21	
Apr. 14	Acts 24:22-25:27	1 Sam. 17
Apr. 21	Acts 26:1-32	
Apr. 28	Acts 27:1-28:10	1 Sam. 18

What Hath Outreach to Do with Discipleship?

By Rev. Chris Brown

Outreach and discipleship are two seemingly disparate ideas that actually have one fuel and one goal. Outreach is a current-day term that simply means to “reach out” to others. It is extremely broad in its scope, and can mean something as plain as saying hello to a stranger, or serving soup to the homeless. Discipleship, on the other hand, is quite narrow. It is a ministry of conforming people to the likeness of a Teacher by means of teaching. How can we be singleminded, then, if our Church wants to be one that practices something as broad as outreach, but as narrow as discipleship? The answer is that the gospel is the power of outreach and discipleship, and the glory of God is the goal of both. The gospel, narrowly defined, is that Jesus saves sinners, and that by believing in Him, you may be saved from your sin. This basic message is the power of outreach as well as of discipleship, and the point of that message is for God to be glorified.

Outreach is like a ship. It serves as a vehicle for people. Or, it is like a plot of land on which a house is being built. It is done for the sake of something else. Outreach exists to be a platform for evangelism. Jesus says, “Let your good works shine before men so that they will see your good works and glorify God.” But how can they glorify God if they have not been told the means to do so? Jesus assumes that we do good in conjunction with sharing the good news of His saving work. Meanwhile, the power within outreach and evangelism does not exist inside of us. We don’t win people to Christ by our persuasive methods, or by our decisions about what food to serve, or how big of a smile to have. Instead, the power of outreach and evangelism only comes through Jesus’ choice to pour out the Holy Spirit, like wind filling the sails of a ship. The good news is the driving force for outreach.

Meanwhile, discipleship is like the crew of a ship. The crew needs to be a team with a singular goal in mind because the aim of the crew is to steer the ship to its destination. That goal is the glory of God. I like the people living within the home that is built upon the soil of outreach: they need to learn how to live as a good family. For a people to be trained to have a God-glorifying goal in mind, they need to be united around the teaching of Jesus. Jesus teaches us both how to be saved from sin, as well as how to live out of that salvation. As we share the good news regularly in discipleship, we are awakened and renewed by God’s love, learn how to love like Jesus, and become a crew that aims at God’s glory together. At first, outreach and discipleship might seem like two very different ministries, but both rely upon one fuel (the Holy Spirit) and have one goal (the glory of God).

Books on the Conscience

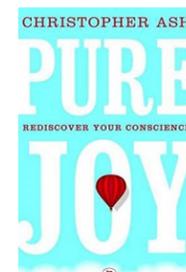
by Rev. Sean McCann

I have thoroughly enjoyed teaching the adult Sunday school class these past few months on the Christian Conscience, and I hope you’ve found it beneficial as well. For those of you who might be interested in further study on the topic, I thought it might be a helpful use of this space to recommend some of the books I found most useful.



By far the most accessible book I read – and my favorite of the bunch – was *Conscience: What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ*, by Andrew David Naselli and J.D. Crowley. This dual-authored book combines the academic rigor of a theology professor (Naselli) with the practical application of a cross-cultural missionary (Crowley). I was especially helped through this book

by the authors’ detailed study of Romans 14 and how it applies to “strong” and “weak” Christians today.



The other full-length book I would recommend is by Christopher Ash entitled *Pure Joy: Rediscover Your Conscience*. While Naselli and Crowley spend the majority of their book on how to interact with those who differ on matters of the conscience, Ash focuses more on how the individual’s clear conscience can and does bring peace with God.

If you don’t have time for a long read, then I would recommend two booklets. The first is from Ligonier Ministries’ “Crucial Questions” series by R.C. Sproul entitled *How Can I Develop a Christian Conscience?*, and the second is *The Art of Turning: From Sin to Christ for a Joyfully Clear Conscience* by Kevin DeYoung. Both of these men are known for their clarity and theological rigor, and these booklets won’t disappoint if you are looking for an introduction to the topic.

Some of the best writings in church history on the conscience are found in the works of the English Puritans. And the best of the Puritans can be found in the following articles: “The Puritans on Conscience” in *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, edited by Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, and “The Puritan Conscience” in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* by J.I. Packer. Both these articles were vital in understanding how God forms and calibrates the conscience.

Finally, if you are interested in reading about the moral conscience of a culture at large, then pick up John MacArthur’s *The Vanishing Conscience: Drawing the Line in a No-Fault, Guilt-Free World*.

If you missed any of the class, we have the recordings and class materials available on-line, just e-mail the church office and we will send you the link. As the class draws to a close, it is my hope that we will all continue to strengthen our consciences as we learn to welcome those who differ and grow together in love.