

Baptism In Biblical Perspective  
Covenantal Baptism: Who Is To Be Baptized?  
Acts 16:25-34

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Acts 16 is the marvelous moment of a conversion in a place called Philippi. There is miraculous intervention in the freeing of Paul and Silas and yet they are remaining in the area with the other prisoners and the Lord uses that plus what they had preached, prayed and sung in the hymns for the impact upon a Philippian jailer and the other prisoners. Acts 16:25-34 says, **25** *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying (while in jail) and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,* **26** *and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.* **27** *When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.* **28** *But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."* **29** *And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.* **30** *Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* **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.*

The grass withers and the flower fades. This is the Word of God and it abides forever.

This is our second study on Baptism and the first one had to do with Identifying the Sacraments by God's Institution of Baptism and the Lord's Supper in the New Covenant. I will not spend time reviewing that because you can get it via the Briarwood website either downloading the audio or reading the transcript but I wanted to move right on ahead to Who is to be Baptized? There is probably no question I get more other than predestination or election than this matter of baptism. We have a thing called the "3 D" night which stands for Dinner, Doctrine and Dialogue with the pastor that happens every 5 to 6 weeks and I don't even have to look at the questions that are turned in because I know there is going to be one on election, the sovereignty of God and on baptism either the mode of baptism or the subjects of baptism. One of the questions is why do we baptize new believers? It is because most have never been baptized and most people accept that but another question is why do we baptize the children of believing parents? One of the reasons that is such a challenge is because of where we live. We happen to live in an area where the understanding of covenantal baptism is not as pervasive as another position within Protestant Christianity of believer's baptism only and not believers and their household. If you don't mind the whole issue of the mode of baptism I will answer in our next study on baptism and we will work through why pouring or sprinkling?

But in this study we will cover what about why believers and their household? If you could just for a moment step out of our little bubble in the South here you would

quickly find out the majority report throughout Christendom is in fact not believers only but believers and their household. If you get outside our little regional section and move throughout the world you will find that the majority report throughout Christendom is not only believers and their household but pouring and sprinkling as the primary mode of delivering baptism. That doesn't make it right but the question is why is that there and why is it that we believe that covenantal baptism, believers and their household, is a Biblical method of delivering baptism. That in fact, what is the purpose of baptism but a sign and seal not of my faith to the world, but a sign and seal of God's covenant to be received by faith thereby declaring we believe His promises?

I want to just one thing about the previous study that this is obviously not an issue that divides believing Christianity from unbelieving Christianity or liberal Christianity from conservative Christianity or those who believe in the essentials of the faith and those who don't believe in the essentials of the faith. It's an intramural discussion. It is one that believers have with each other. This is the kind of one that were supposed to be able to agree to disagree and while we may have someone who practices immersion and believers only then over here is covenantal baptism of pouring with believers and their seed. Then there is among us a recognition that that is a secondary doctrine. It is not a primary doctrine for salvation but it is a secondary doctrine concerning the edification of the church and thus being a secondary doctrine we are able to give some liberty to one another in addressing this. Now, of course, if someone proposes to you that it is an essential doctrine then I believe that person surely is in error because Paul said, "I didn't come to baptize I came to preach the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:17)." Baptism is not a necessary doctrine for salvation. It is a secondary doctrine. Now that doesn't mean it is not an important doctrine but it is a secondary doctrine for the edification of the church and not a primary doctrine for the salvation of lost people.

This is one of those situations where I love to appeal to logic. The logic is this; either the covenantal baptism, believers and their household, are right or believers only baptism are right or both are wrong but both can't be right, although covenantal baptism does subsume believers baptism as well as the baptism of covenant children. Why is that the case? To answer this let me walk you back through a number of things and we'll look at a couple of passages.

The first thing we need to look at is what is baptism? The first thing about baptism is that it is the sign and seal of the covenant that God has instituted. Baptism is the sacrament of the New Covenant which replaces the Old Covenant sign of circumcision in the same way that the Lord's Supper replaces the Passover. The book of Colossians affirms to us the parallel between baptism and circumcision. It is also affirmed in Galatians but for the sake of time I am just going to go to one passage that affirms it. First of all you can see it logically replacing circumcision. How can you see it logically? In the Old Covenant if someone became a believer and had never been circumcised they would have to be circumcised. An example of this is Abraham. Abraham as an adult became a believer and he had to be circumcised and his sons, his seed were circumcised, the believer and the seed. Now we see baptism replaces circumcision as the initiatory sign. Paul is very clear in the book of Galatians, the book of Colossians, the book of Ephesians and the book of Hebrews that circumcision is fulfilled in Christ and now the New Covenant sign that replaces it is baptism.

Not only is it seen theologically and logically throughout the Scriptures as it unfolds and in fact the early Church had a big discussion on this. They even had their first General Assembly in Jerusalem over this matter. I would have loved to have been there during the first Presbyterian Church Assembly in Jerusalem. They had to handle the question, do you have to be circumcised and become a follower of Moses before you are baptized as a follower of Jesus? They said, “no circumcision is fulfilled and while we certainly recognize were in a transitional age and we need to be thoughtful of the Jewish people that have been evangelized you don’t have to be circumcised. You don’t have to physically join the Jewish community through circumcision because that has been fulfilled in Jesus but what are we to do? We are to do what Jesus said and that was to go and make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Here of course the parallel between the two are established as circumcision in its spiritual impact and baptism in its spiritual impact are brought out in this passage in Colossians 2:8-12; **8** *See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him (Christ) the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. 11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ...* In other words, circumcision pointed to the work of Christ where He cut out your old heart and gave you a new heart, being born again. Circumcision anticipated the circumcision of Christ where He cut out your old heart and gave you a new heart and then He parallels it with baptism in verse 12; **12** *having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.* So just like circumcision was anticipating our Lord’s work of cutting out your old heart and giving you a new heart so that you were born again, so baptism is a declaration of God’s work in which you are born again. You die to yourself and now you are alive unto Christ. So the parallel of the two are set before us in this passage. So we see theologically they are unfolding in Scripture with its purpose and logically why baptism replaces circumcision and now their parallel relationship is established so that we see the relationship between the two.

So how did Jesus ordain baptism? First He ordained baptism by commanding it as you can see in Matthew 28:18-20; **18** *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.”* Secondly, He modeled baptism for us as we have studied in Matthew 3. Our Lord modeled baptism by taking an Old Testament rite of cleansing, baptism, and in the engagement of it with John the Baptist so established it in practice. Then, thirdly, of course, the early Church practiced it as we see the Gospel being preached and people being baptized and added to the body of Christ, believers and their households. Fourthly it was not only commanded by the Apostles but it was practiced by the Apostles whenever they established the church.

By the way, the Lord’s Supper follows the same pattern. Jesus commands it, “Do this, remember the body and blood of the Lord. Do this. (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24, 25)” He commands us to continue the Lord’s Supper. It replaces the Old

Covenant sign of the Passover. The New Covenant sign of the Lord's Supper replaces the Old Covenant sign of the Passover. Then He practiced it just as He did with baptism. He not only commanded it but He practiced it. Thirdly the early church commanded the Lord's Supper and fourthly they practiced it with great regularity and in some cases perhaps even weekly.

Now, let me give the picture to you. What is baptism? It is the sacrament of the New Covenant that's a sign and a seal that had been ordained by God. I want to go back and show you the continuity of your Bible here. So why do we call it the Old Covenant? It is because there are a series of covenants that are leading up to Christ. This is very important here because many of us have been raised with a Bible that tells us that God did different things at different times to save people and this was called dispensational theology as opposed to the unfolding of the covenants which is the unity. Clearly everyone in the Old Testament doesn't understand everything fully and nothing in the Old Testament contradicts the New yet on the contrary it is building step by step by step. So Adam in the Adamic Covenant, the covenant with Adam, He says, "I am going to promise you a Seed that will save My people and defeat the Evil One and sin." Then the covenant with Adam is built upon the covenant with Noah. The rainbow is given. The declaration of God's kindness and grace is extended throughout all of humanity from horizon to horizon.

Then thirdly that covenant is then moved from Adam to Noah to Abraham and then with Abraham God not only continues the covenant but He takes one man from which He is going to bring a family, bless that family and its seed, to bring forth a nation and there He institutes the sign of circumcision. Abraham, the believer is circumcised and his children. If anybody comes out of the Gentile world into that community such as the Gideonites they have to be circumcised. It is a believer's circumcision, if you will. Then also their covenant children have to be circumcised which would be the males representing the household. So the sign of circumcision has been introduced.

Then we move from Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses. When you get to Moses God does not repeat the promise to Abraham. This is very important. It automatically moves forward. Now He adds another covenant sign of the Passover meal to renew your relationship with the Lord. Then as the covenant moves from Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses it now goes to the Davidic covenant, to David. There is no repetition. By the way, "I'll be a God to you and to your children after you and by the way practice the Passover." No, He doesn't say that it just automatically continues because as the covenants unfold everything in a preceding covenant is in force as it moves to the subsequent covenant unless the subsequent covenant abrogates it or alters it.

For instance, in the days of Adam we are fed by the fruit of the ground. In the days of Noah all animals may be used for sustenance, nothing is unclean. In the days of Moses that is abrogated and now there is clean and unclean. When we get to the New Covenant it says there isn't any longer clean and unclean. You may order bacon tomorrow morning at the Cracker Barrel. I suggest turkey sausage it will be more healthy for you but you may do that. That was the big discussion in the New Testament. When they got to the New Testament they said, "Well we have to circumcise." Why? They automatically assumed just as circumcision had gone from Abraham to Moses to David and then it would immediately move to the New Testament and Christ. That's why it had to be affirmed, no, it's been fulfilled in Christ and done away with. It's now abrogated

but everything in the preceding covenant automatically moves forward and then that stair step now arrives at the top level.

We now have arrived at the New Covenant in Christ. So the covenant of grace, saving us by grace, starts with Adam, builds to Noah, builds to Abraham, builds to Moses, builds to David, and then it builds when they restore the people back from the Babylonian Captivity and anticipate the day when the covenant of grace will be fulfilled with a Mediator who does not need a Savior and who can be our Savior. Then that day comes in Jesus Christ, a New Covenant in which all of His people will know Him and all of His people will have His Spirit to follow Him. Those are glorious days in the New Covenant with Jesus Christ. What were the two Old Covenant signs? They were circumcision and the Passover. Now we are in the New Covenant and the new signs are baptism and the Lord's Supper.

I want to go to another little presentation that may help us. The Old Covenant signs of circumcision and the Passover are pointing to Christ. Both of these Old Covenant signs they are full challenging to grasp because they are gory. They shed blood. In fact on the days that the Passover lamb was shed the picture upon the priest was horrendous and even the Kidron brook would run red on the day of Yomkippor, the Day of the Atonement. Circumcision is a symbolic act of death. It is declared even by its act that there is no hope in generation; we need to be born again. There is no hope in the flesh. The cutting off of the flesh is a symbolic sacrifice, it's a shedding of blood. There is the need for justification. There is the need for regeneration and they are both pointing to Christ. Then there is the Passover where there is the ongoing need of the sacrifice of a mediator of a lamb who not only will God's judgment pass over it but God's grace will continue to keep us and grow us. So circumcision is done once. Why? It is anticipating that in a Savior you are born again and you are justified which is once and for all but the Passover is done time and time again. Why? It is because it points to sanctification and it is a continual progress of growth, renewal and refreshment.

Now, when the two signs of circumcision under Abraham and the Passover under Moses are given they are said to be everlasting, eternal. One may be thinking, "But Pastor we don't do them anymore." The reason why we don't do them anymore is because they're everlastingly and eternally fulfilled in Christ. Galatians, Ephesians, Hebrews and Colossians declare Christ is your circumcision. What does circumcision mean? It means to cut. He has cut away your sin record and nailed it to the cross. He has cancelled out your certificate of debt. Christ is your circumcision and in Him you have a new record, you're justified. Christ has cut out your heart and given to you a new heart. In Christ you are regenerated. You are born again; regeneration. So the covenant has now come to fruition. What it anticipated in the Old Covenant is now fulfilled and declared in the New Covenant. This is God's marvelous work.

It was prophesied for us in the Bible. There are multiple prophecies of this New Covenant given to us but I just want to take you to one in Jeremiah 31. Here these are quoted in the New Testament as being fulfilled in Christ and there's a New Covenant coming. Jeremiah 31:31-34 says, **31** *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,*** **32** *not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33* *But this is the covenant that I will make with the*

*house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts (they will have a new heart). And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*" Regeneration is a new heart with God's law upon it. Justification is forgiveness where their sins are remembered no more. This is a people who will have My Spirit within them. They will know Me and I will know them. This is the elect of God, the royal nation from every tribe and nation secured by the blood of Jesus Christ.

I want to take you to another such covenantal passage that is quoted in the New Testament and it's found in Ezekiel 36. In like manner, Ezekiel anticipates this day of the New Covenant. Ezekiel 36:22-24 says, **22** *"Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. 23 And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. 24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.* My dear friends with all due respect that is not speaking of that small piece in the Middle East. This is My Father's world. That was just a down payment and there is coming a new heavens and a new earth, the land of the redeemed. It is that land that we are headed to.

What will happen? He goes on to say in Ezekiel 36:23-27, **23** *And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. 24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you...* If you come back for the next study we will see why he says he will sprinkle clean water on you. Oh my goodness and he goes on to say, *and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* So watch here what He is saying. I will give you a new heart. Regeneration is My promise in this New Covenant. You are born again. I will forgive you of your iniquity which is justification and I will put My Spirit within you and you will follow Me which is sanctification. You will grow. My holiness you will vindicate as My people in this New Covenant.

So here is this New Covenant that is prophesied. Now watch how appropriate it is. Circumcision and the Passover anticipated Christ who is our Circumcision and who is the Passover Lamb. Both of those are bloody and they are looking to Christ and in Him, the final sacrifice, they are fulfilled. Now Jesus institutes two new signs; a once and for all initiatory sign and seal of the covenant, baptism that replaces circumcision and the Lord's Supper that replaces the Passover. These are bloodless because they point back to what He has done. It has been done. The Sacrifice has been made and the signs and seals of the New Covenant declare the Savior has satisfied the justice of His Father. He

is our Circumcision therefore we are baptized in the name of Christ, with all the promises in the covenant with a new heart and a new Spirit within us and a new record. Then we practice the Lord's Supper which remembers the Sacrifice. It doesn't anticipate a sacrifice. It doesn't re-sacrifice Christ but declares that the sacrifice has been fully given in Jesus Christ.

So let's go to the question again. So what is baptism and who is to be baptized? Baptism is not the believer's sign of their faith but it is God's sign to be received by faith. It is the Covenant Maker's sign. The sign and seal of a covenant aren't from the recipient it is given from the Covenant Maker. When you get married you have a marriage covenant and you make promises. You say to the man, "What sign did you bring declaring your integrity to fulfill these promises?" What is the purpose of the ring? The purpose of a ring doesn't make a marriage. It doesn't profess marriage. The purpose of the ring is as a sign to tell the one who received the promises that "I will do what I promised." Then the one who received the ring then takes it and says, "I believe you. I believe that you will do that." Ladies, that is usually in a fit of weakness that you do that but praise the Lord that you have done that. So the man makes the promises, he gives the sign and the woman says, "I believe you." The purpose of God's sign is to tell His people, "I am your Husband. I am a covenant keeper. Here are My promises. I will do what I promise" and then we tell Him, "We believe You." Thus we receive the sign of the covenant, baptism. Therefore the purpose of the covenantal sign is not the sign of my faith to the world, the covenant sign is God's sign to me to be received by faith. That's what its purpose is.

That particular fact reminds me that baptism is not a converting act. It is a confirming act of God's promises and that I believe Him. Well, then who should be baptized? If it is not a converting act but a confirming act then who should be baptized? If it is a sign from God that His promises are Yes and Amen in His Son and then when we receive them we say that we believe Him then Harry I can see why as a new Christian I would be baptized but why our household? Why did the Philippian jailer and his household get baptized? This is an intramural discussion. We believe that it is appropriate that the sign be placed upon believers and their household. Why? It is for a number of reasons.

The first reason has to do with the examples in the Old Covenant. What is the predecessor of baptism? It is circumcision. Who was circumcised? The very first one was Abraham and his seed. Why? It is because God in His covenant made a promise to the believer; "Not only do I give you a new heart, a new record, and a new life but I will be a God to you and to your children after you." God in His covenant work placed the family as His primary notice operandi. "I will be a God to you and to your children after you. That is My promise to you." That promise was not only give with Abraham but it continues to Moses, to David and it continues when they are restored and it doesn't have to be repeated it just continues step by step by step by step.

Now we come to the New Covenant. With all due respect with those who disagree with me, I really do not need to show you why we baptize our children. You need to show me where in the New Covenant God has removed the promise. When did He abrogate that promise, "I'll be a God to you and to your children after you"? The sign has changed but did the promise change? When we came to the New Covenant did God say "I no longer work through the family"? Did God remove that promise, "I'll be a God

to you and to your children after you” that He gave to Abraham which was reaffirmed in every covenant and now that we have come to the New Covenant, the better covenant, and the family has now been removed at the heart of God’s covenantal working? If so, then I need you to show me where but granted the sign has changed from circumcision to baptism. But has the covenant promise been removed? I find it not removed. On the contrary, I find it reaffirmed.

The very first time that God’s covenant of grace is preached, after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, is called the Day of Pentecost. In Acts 2 Peter is preaching away and he uses a text that parallels Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31. He uses the Joel 2 that the New Covenant promise has now been fulfilled in your midst and the evidence is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As they are responding to him it says in Acts 2:36-39, **36** *Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.* **37** *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”* **38** *And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* **39** *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”* Peter affirms what Jesus has already commanded.

Now I am a simple man and what I have before me if I am Peter or a people who have been raised with the promise, “I will be a God to you and to your children after you,” God’s covenant working is to the believer and into their household. If there is any time that you have to tell them God has removed the promise that He gave to Abraham then its now because you have in front of you people that have heard it for over 2,000 years. But not only does He not remove it, He reaffirms it and they hear the language of Genesis 15, 13 and most of all Genesis 17. “I will be a God to you and your children after you” by reaffirming it with this declaration, “The promise of this covenant and the outpouring of its blessings, the promise is for you and your children.” By the way, its not going to just stop with you and your children in this nation, its going to all the nations as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself. Then it actually goes to a Gentile. That’s what he does with the Jewish population. He reaffirms that covenant promise.

Then it goes to a Gentile and by God’s grace Paul and Silas are able to lead a Gentile to Christ, a Philippian jailer. When he leads the Philippian jailer to Christ what are the next words out of his mouth? It is found in Acts 16:31, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved you and your household.” How did the Philippian jailer say “I believe that promise of salvation in the covenant and I believe that that promise will work through me and my household”? That very hour he and his household were baptized (Acts 16:33). A lot of people try to build in the household believed but no because all you have to do is look at the last verse I read and only the Philippian jailer had yet believed but he gathered his household together rejoicing and he claimed God’s promise by the believer and his household. So the Philippian jailer was converted and he and his household were baptized and therefore the covenant sign changed but the application remained the same.

Not only are there examples from the Old Testament but there are examples from the New Testament. There are 22 documented cases of baptism. All of them are arguably and demonstratively covenantal baptism, believers and their household, except



for two. One was the Ethiopian eunuch and it would have been hard for him to have a household baptism. I will not explain why just look it up in the dictionary, hopefully with no pictures. Then there was of course the re-baptism of John's disciples who were not yet converted because they had not known of the saving work of Christ nor the doctrine of the Trinity. Other than those two, Crispus, Stephanus, the Philippian jailer, Cornelius, the heads of the households, Acts 2, Acts 4, time and time and time again its believers and their households. You find in the New Testament that they are doing it just like the Old Testament. The sign has changed but the promise has not changed. Then the only change that they make is that in the New Covenant there are no longer any ceremonially distinctions between male and female, or Jew and Gentile, or bond and free. They were all being baptized men and women alike in its application. God has not removed the promise. On the contrary, He has affirmed it. He affirmed it to the Jewish people in Acts 2 and He affirmed it the movement of the Gospel to the Gentiles that the Lord God works through the family.

Here are just a couple of closing takeaways. God is faithful to His promises. As God gave me my children I believe God's promises that He will be a God to me and my children after me but the second thing I also believed is that God is faithful to His ordained means. Some of you reading this have met with our elders when you were converted and hadn't yet been baptized and you were baptized. Why? It was because we wanted you to understand what is the symbol and what is the substance. Some of you have met with me on Saturday mornings and I applaud you for your willingness to get up early in the morning to meet with me and talk with me before your covenant child is baptized. I always have two fears and that is you either treat it superstitiously thinking, "I got them baptized so that's all I need to worry about" or superficially thinking, "This is another Kodak moment – I got their new shoes, their baby book and I got them baptized." No, you entered into a sacred covenant with a covenant keeping God.

This promise is not without commitments. This promise is with commitments. So we will stand right there at that baptismal font and the first vow they will say is, "I know that my child is in need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, my child is lost and my child needs a Savior." Their second vow is, "I am looking to my God to save them by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone even as He has saved me." They realize that while their child has been born lost their child has been born into a favored position within the covenant community. They will be able to taste, see and experience the power of God but with great blessings come greater responsibilities. The third vow is that we will pray with our child. We will teach our child the Word of God and we will bring our child into this church for it to faithfully preach and teach the Gospel of grace to call them to Christ. We are not so arrogant as a family to think we do not need the family of God nor are we so irresponsible as to think the church will raise my children. No, I am responsible in the covenant community.

As I say on numerous occasions, Hillary Clinton was right in her book when she said, "It takes a village to raise a child." She just had the wrong village. It's not the government. It's the believer, their immediate family, their extended family and the family of God. Then you will stand because you say, "I believe in the means so we will pray with and for you. We will become your spiritual uncles and aunts. We'll set Godly examples and we'll make sure every time from this pulpit, every lectern, and every small

group that this child will hear of the hell to shun and the heaven to gain through a living relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Now, God will never break His covenant but there are three that can. One is the parent. It happens as the parent avoids their responsibility. Two is the covenant community and three is the covenant child. First I'd like to talk about the covenant community. We must consistently, not only hold to the Gospel and the preaching of the Word, but we must regularly pray for one another. We must always realize our first mission field which is our covenant children. It's not our only mission field but it's our first one. Praise God He has promised a harvest. So let's be faithful.

Secondly are the parents. The parents then must raise their children and increasingly in our day I see that being neglected. In fact, many times parents are much more concerned as to whether their children like them rather than whether they are going to raise them. I want to give you a word here. If you are a good parent your child will have numerous occasions where they will not like you. They will not like you and you have to be willing to forfeit your need of their affirmation for their need to be raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. That means you have to say “no” and that means you have to discipline. That means you have to point them to Christ. That means you have to affirm. That means you have to challenge. That means that you bring them to the Savior by bringing the Savior to them. This all has to do with the way you live, the way you worship, regular attendance to the means of grace in the body of Christ because you believe that God is not only faithful to His promise but God is faithful to the means that He's ordained to fulfill that promise. Say, “God by your grace I'll not break covenant.”

Here is an example. You buy a house. You say, “I don't have enough money.” So you need to enter into a financial covenant with a mortgage company. Is this striking home? So you need to find out if they are able to perform and then you sit down and enter into a financial covenant where you sign it. Then a notary seals it. Then you turn to your wife and say, “Honey we're home owners.” She says, “I know.” Then you walk out and say, “We own our own home” and you do as long as make the payments. If you break covenant you don't have a home. As a covenant community we cannot break covenant with the Lord if we are to assist parents in raising their covenant children. As parents you can't break covenant with the Lord but give attention to the means of grace that He has ordained to use. This is not magic. This is a covenant relationship through an ordained means.

Finally will then come the child. I wish I could tell you as we work our way through this; here is the sovereignty of God and here is the responsibility of man. God sovereignly will be responsible so now the question is, will we be responsible by His grace as a covenant community, as parents and then the child? This child will grow up in an advantaged position. They will see, taste, experience all of God's covenant blessings all around them but one day they must own the covenant by coming to the Mediator of the covenant, Jesus Christ and surrendering to Him as Lord and Savior. Please don't make the mistake of raising your children to act like a Christian but raise your children to become one. We are not raising Pharisees. They need to be born again. You need to bring them to Christ, call them to Christ and pray for them.

Esau was in an advantageous position but he said, “No I'll take soup.” I was just thinking about this recently. We have been plunged into sin as Adam and Eve said, “No

we'll take fruit." Esau said, "I don't want the covenant blessing, I'll take soup." It is amazing how trivial we will sell out eternity and a relationship with the Lord. My dear people, I have no greater joy than for you to walk in the Truth but to walk in the Truth you must come to the Lord who is the Truth! You must be born again. What will you exchange in the world for your soul? Come to Christ. Be not a covenant breaker. Look at what happened to covenant breakers in the Old Testament and how much severer the book of Hebrews says that it is to break covenant with the Lord, to have been exposed to His covenant blessings and then to walk away from them.

Dear brothers and sisters flee to Christ and come to Him. God's promise has not been removed. God's sign has been changed. That sign cannot save, it can only confirm. It not only confirms God's promises and God's means by God's grace may it also be a confirmation that this covenant community will be faithful to our Savior, to His people even to the least of them. "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." By God's grace may our families be strong in the Lord and not be controlled by the culture but conformed to the Word of God and by God's grace may our children rise up and bless the Lord. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could spend together in Your Word. I thank You for Your wonderful wisdom that has ordained the family in such a marvelous place. Father, help us to give attention to the way that You have arranged Your covenant community and the proper administration of the signs and seals of the covenant – baptism and the Lord's Supper. God, I thank You so much for Your grace and mercy that is abundant and free in Christ and thank You that in Your marvelous grace, calling all to Yourself from all of these nations, You have also ordained to take that institution of creation, the family, and build it into Your work of redemption through Christ our Lord. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.