

COVENANT (4)
Covenant Fellowship Church
Wednesday, 18 December 2024
Nelson D. Kloosterman

A Liturgical Form for the Baptism of Infants

The Institution

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ:

As we celebrate holy baptism, let us first hear our Lord Jesus Christ's institution of this sacrament. After He had risen victoriously from the grave, Jesus said to His disciples:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, 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).

In obedience to this command, the church has always baptized believers and their children.

The Promises

Let us hear the promises of God that are confirmed in baptism. The Lord made this great promise to Abraham: “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).

Generations later, though Israel was unfaithful to God's covenant with them, God renewed His promise through the prophet:

“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. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:33–34).

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4), our Lord Jesus Christ, to give pardon and peace through the blood of the cross, the “blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

After Jesus had risen from the dead, the apostles proclaimed: “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. 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” (Acts 2:38–39).

Anticipating the fulfillment of God's promises, Paul assures us, “If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; ... if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:11–13).

These are the unfailing promises of our Lord to those who are baptized.

The Instruction

Hear also the teaching of Scripture concerning the sacrament of baptism.

The water of baptism signifies the washing away of our sin by the blood of Christ and the renewal of our lives by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). It also signifies that we are buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4). From this we learn that our sin has been condemned by God, that we are to hate it, and that we must consider ourselves as having died to it. Moreover, the water of baptism signifies that we are raised with Christ (Col. 2:12). From this we learn that we are

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to walk with Christ in newness of life. All this tells us that God has adopted us as His children, “and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17).

Thus, in baptism God seals the promises He gave when He made his covenant of grace with us, calling us and our children to put our trust for life and death in Christ our Savior, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and to follow Him in obedience and love.

God also graciously includes our children in His covenant, and all His promises are for them as well as us (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). Jesus demonstrated this when He embraced little children and blessed them (Mark 10:16). The apostle Paul said that the children of believers are holy (1 Cor. 7:14). So, just as the children of the old covenant received the sign of circumcision, our children in the new covenant are given the sign of baptism (Col. 2:11–12). We are therefore always to teach our little ones that they have been set apart by baptism as God’s own children, and because of that, they are to repent of their sins and embrace God’s promise of forgiveness in Christ by faith.

The Prayer of Preparation

Let us pray:

Our Father in heaven, we pray that You will never destroy us in our sin, as You once did with the flood upon the world, but save us, as You saved believing Noah and his family, and spare us, as You spared the Israelites who walked safely through the Red Sea.

We pray that Jesus Christ, who went down into the Jordan River and came up to receive the Holy Spirit, who sank deep into death and was raised up as the Lord of life, will always keep us and our little ones in the grip of His hand.

We pray, O holy Father, that Your Spirit will separate us from sin and openly mark us with a faith that can stand the light of day and endure the dark of night.

Prepare us now, O Lord, to respond with glad hope to Your promises, so that we and all entrusted to our care may drink deeply from the well of living water. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Vows

The minister then addresses the parent(s):

Since you, _____, have presented this child for holy baptism, you are asked to answer the following questions sincerely before God and His people:

1. Do you acknowledge that our children, who are conceived and born in sin, and are subject to the misery that sin brings, even the condemnation of God, are sanctified in Christ and so, as members of His church, ought to be baptized?
2. Do you acknowledge that the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, summarized in the articles of the Christian faith and taught in this Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?
3. Do you sincerely promise to do all that you can to teach this child, and to have him/her taught, this doctrine of salvation?

The parents respond: We do, God helping us (*or if only one of the parents is a confessing member:* I do, God helping me).

The Sacrament

Our Lord said, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14).

_____, I baptize you into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Optional:

The minister addresses the congregation:

Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive this child in love, pray for him/her, help care for his/her instruction in the faith, and encourage and sustain him/her in the fellowship of believers?

The congregation responds: We do, God helping us.

A triumphant song may be sung.

The Baptismal Prayer

O Lord, our gracious God, forever faithful to Your promises, we thank You for assuring us again in the sacrament of baptism that You forgive us and receive us as Your children in Christ. Grant wisdom and love to the parents and to us all as we carry out the vows just made. We pray that You will guide our little ones throughout their lives. Enable all of them to respond in faith to the gospel. Fill them with Your Spirit and make their lives fruitful. Uphold them in their hour of trial, and when Christ returns, let them celebrate with all the people of God Your greatness and goodness forever in the joy of Your new creation. Amen.

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The Sixty Second Case for Infant Baptism

(From *Infant Baptism and the Silence of the New Testament*, by Bryan Holstrom)

God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham and commanded him to circumcise every male child in his household, which was to serve as a sign of the covenant between them (Gen. 17:9–14).

This covenant . . . finds its fulfillment in the promised seed, Jesus Christ, and continues in force until all those for whom He died are welcomed into His kingdom (Gal. 3:16–4:7; Heb. 6:13–18; 9:15; 1 John 2:25).

With the death and resurrection of Christ, the sign of the covenant was changed to baptism, in order to reflect the reality that a bloody sign (circumcision) was no longer appropriate, now that Christ had shed His blood for the remission of sins (Heb. 9:23–10:14; Matt. 28:19–20).

The New Testament is devoid of any language suggesting that the rules for membership in the church have changed from what had prevailed for two thousand years. On the contrary, because the new covenant era is an era of greater grace, the application of the covenant sign is no longer limited only to males, but now encompasses all the children of believers (Acts 2:38–39).

Because baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant, Paul connected the significance of the two rites, and described baptism as the ‘circumcision of Christ’ (Col. 2:11–12).

The household baptismal accounts in Acts demonstrate that the principle of family solidarity that applied in the Old Testament period still holds true in the New Testament era. They also make it highly probable that Acts, contrary to popular opinion, contains explicit accounts of children being baptized (Acts 10:24–48; 16:11–15; 16:25–34).

Paul declared that the children of Christian parents were “holy” (1 Cor. 7:14).

Jesus rebuked His disciples for trying to prevent believers from bringing their infant children to Him in order to receive His blessing. He told them that “of such is the kingdom of God,” and warned that those who reject the reception of little children in His name thereby reject Him (Mark 10:13–16; Matt. 18:1–6).