

An Appeal to Baptized Unbelievers

Murray 2015

By Dr. David P. Murray

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Deuteronomy 10:16
Preached on: Sunday, March 15, 2015

Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids
950 Ball Ave NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Website: www.frcgr.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/frcgr

Let's turn again to the passage that we read together, Deuteronomy 10. We'd like to read together verse 16.

16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

This sermon is "An Appeal to Baptized Unbelievers." Now, that description should shock us, baptized unbelievers. It's a contradiction, really, in terms. It's self-contradictory, we might say, or an oxymoron as some others might call it. It's like saying something like a male woman, or a tall dwarf, or a white African American, or a black Ku Klux Klan. You hear these words and they jar, don't they? "That doesn't go together. That can't go together. That doesn't work." There is something almost horrifying about it, and equally this term, a baptized unbeliever, should be equally shocking and horrific to us and that's why I want to make a plea to those of you here tonight who fit this description and I want you to feel the horror of this title, of this name, of this description, that you might take the appropriate action and respond in the right way.

I want to do so by looking at this chapter here, especially verse 16. Let me just briefly divide it up to give you some idea of the context. In verses 1 to 11, we have Israel's glorious history. It's interesting, so often when God commands something to be done like verse 16, it's almost always preceded by what he has done and that's what we have here in verses 1 to 11. Moses recounts all God's deeds in Israel's glorious history. It's a beautiful summary of a glorious history. Then in verses 12 to 13, we have Israel's loving response, what was expected of them. "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to love him, and to serve him," and so on. Then verses 14 to 15, we have Israel's amazing privilege. Why should they do this? Again, more material is given to urge them to this duty. "Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is." It's saying, "Look, God owned everything and everyone. Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to chose them." He's saying, "Of all the millions and billions of people, all the millions and billions of acres, God chose you people in this place to love you more than any other. He chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day." This is an

amazing privilege and, therefore, it all leads up to this solemn call, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked."

Well, obviously we need to understand a little bit about circumcision if we're going to understand this verse so we want to, first of all this evening, give a brief history of circumcision; then secondly, the meaning of circumcision; and then thirdly, the call of circumcision.

But first of all, the history. As you know in Genesis 3:15 after the fall of man into sin, God promised that of the seed of the woman he would bring one to crush the devil's head. He promises a seed of the woman. That could be any woman, any family. It's very broad. Genesis 12, God narrows it down and he selects one family line from which he would bring this seed and it was Abraham's family. He picked out Abraham and he said to Abraham, "In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed." He's narrowing it down, for sure. He's saying the seed of the woman, Abraham, he's coming from you, but notice it's with a view to opening it way up. "In you," narrow, "shall all the families of the earth be blessed." I couldn't be wider, could it?

But there's a problem. Abraham has no seed. Abraham has no child. So God confirms the promise in Genesis 15. He says, "Abraham, I'm telling you," this is some years later, "in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed. I'm going to bring forth from you this seed, this son."

More years pass. Genesis 16 occurs and what do we find there? Abraham turns away from this promise of God that God would give him a seed and Abraham says, "Well, I'm going to manufacture my own seed." So he enters into an intimate relationship with a servant girl, Hagar, produces a seed, Ishmael, and all the mess that went with that, and God told him it was a grievous sin. Not just the act of adultery but turning away from the promise of God to his own wisdom and his own power.

So what did God do? Well, if it were you or I, we might have said, "Well, enough is enough. Abraham, I gave you the promise verbally twice, maybe three times, and it wasn't enough so I'm going to go and choose someone else." But God doesn't do that. Instead he doubles down and he adds to the verbal promise a physical help for Abraham to believe that. That's what he does in Genesis 17. He adds the covenant sign to the covenant promise. He adds circumcision, a very physical, very vivid, very permanent sign. It's almost as if God engraves in Abraham's own skin the promise, "Abraham, from you, your seed, a son will come." Abraham would know that, remember that seed every single day, and he's saying to Abraham, "I've given it to you verbally, now I'm giving you it physically. Now, in faith, wait for it."

And so this was applied to every Israelite boy at the age of eight days, and even to Gentile converts, people who came within the covenant community. Then we find in the New Testament that it very seamlessly seems to pass over into baptism. The sign of the covenant changes to a bloodless sign but no less vivid, no less physical, the sacrament of baptism. You can read of the parallel between circumcision and baptism in Colossians

2:11-12. We don't have time to go into that tonight, but that's a very brief pointed history of circumcision leading into baptism, and similarly with baptism, God's basically giving us a very physical visible reminder, help, to believe the covenant promises.

But what does it mean? Let's pause there, secondly, for a moment or two. What is the meaning of circumcision? I'd like to give you three ways to understand this. First of all, it's a covenantal cutting. It is a very physical act, isn't it, of cutting, of cutting off skin, and in doing that God is saying to Abraham, "Abraham, I am cutting you off from this sinful world. I am separating you from this sinful world. I'm ending the natural connection and relationship between you and this world. Look what I've just done. Look at this cutting. Look at this separating. Look at that dying piece of skin. That's how I want you to view the world to you."

And this idea is also found in the New Testament with baptism. For example, in Romans 6 we read in verse 4, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Verse 2, "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" He's saying in the same way baptism has cut you off, separated you off from this sinful world. So it's a covenantal cutting.

Secondly, it's a covenantal claiming. Circumcision was a sign that God put on his covenant people to say, "You are mine. You're my possession." It was very common in these days for ownership to be established by a seal, a mark, a brand or a cutting, or a tattoo, that kind of thing, and here God is putting his brand, his cut, his mark, upon his people to say, "You're mine." It's not just, "I'm cutting you off from the world and leaving you hanging there in midair," no, he's saying, "I'm cutting you off in order to take you to myself. You're mine. You're my possession. I'm bringing you into relationship with me." And that was really the heart of the covenant, "I will be your God. You will be my people." There is a claim. There is an ownership. There is a relationship established here.

A covenantal cutting and a covenantal claiming and then, thirdly here we have a covenantal commitment. A covenantal commitment. In doing this, God is committing himself to his people as covenant people and he's saying, "I am committing to make every necessary provision for this covenant to be fulfilled." That's what he's saying to Abraham, "Abraham, I know you doubted my provision. I gave you a verbal promise and you said, 'Ah, it's not enough. I need to add a little bit. I need to do my own bit. It needs a bit of my own wisdom and my own power.'" And God's coming along and saying, "I don't need you. Keep your own wisdom and power out of this. I have plenty enough of my own to do this. I am committing myself, Abraham, to you by word and deed. Every time you see this in yourself, in your children, I want you to remember I am utterly, 100%, totally committed to the fulfillment of this promise."

So these are the three meanings of circumcision: a covenantal cutting, a covenantal claiming, and a covenantal commitment. So thirdly, here's where we want to pause for a bit: the call of circumcision. If that's its history and that's its meaning, what is its call? What does it demand of us? What does it say to us? Well, here we're told in verse 16,

"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart." That's the call. It's saying let the heart reflect the flesh. Let the spiritual reflect the physical. Let the inward reflect the outward. And that's not a call unique to this chapter in the Old Testament. Some people think of the Old Testament as just an outward physical ritualistic religion. Circumcised, you're saved. Not at all. Throughout we have this call to say don't rest in your covenantal sign. Don't rest in the physical, in the ritual, in the sacrament. No, use that to press on to get the real meaning of it. Let the heart reflect the flesh. "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart."

You get that also in Leviticus 26:40-42 where God says, "if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled." Do you see what God is most interested in? Whether their heart is circumcised or not. In this same book, Deuteronomy 30:6, there is a wonderful promise. Israel, we are told, are going to sin, they're going to reject God, they're going to turn to idols and they're going to be carried into captivity but God will bring them back and there's a wonderful promise here, "And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed," to do what? "To love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." You see, what he's saying is God is going to make the heart reflect the flesh. He's going to produce a love and a devotion within. It's not just going to be an external ritual. Jeremiah 4:4, "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart."

And this is a theme that continues into the New Testament as well. For example in the book of Romans 2, we read these words, "is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." So you see, there are many other passages we could point to. Circumcision had a call in it and it was saying let the heart reflect the flesh.

Now, as we've seen in Colossians 2, circumcision, Paul tells us, moves into baptism and therefore baptism has not just a similar meaning but a similar call. Baptism also says to us, "Let the heart reflect the flesh." If we could make this Old Testament verse into a New Testament verse, it would be, "Cleanse therefore your heart." That's what baptism is saying.

So let's look at the parallels here just for a moment or two. If circumcision was a covenantal cutting, so is baptism. Baptism when administered to a child is saying to this child, "You are separated. You are cut off from this sinful world." It's saying there are millions and billions of children in this world but you have been cut off from them. You have been separated from them. This act of baptism, this special mark that God has put upon you is saying, "This child is now holy." Cut off, that means, primarily. Separated. He's now apart.

That's what we're saying about Jamieson tonight. Jamieson is now separated. In fact, Martin Luther used to use this as a way to help him stop sinning. Whenever he was being tempted to sin, one of the things he would say to himself was, "Martin, you're a baptized man. God has separated you from this world. You're not to go with the flow." We might

say the same ourselves when friends and peers are tempting us to go with the flow in the course of this world. Remember your baptism. Those of you older here, even children, you can't remember your actual baptism but you've seen one tonight. The same thing happened to you which was God coming down and taking you out of this world and separating you and putting you apart and saying, "You are now to be different. You are to be cut off. You are to be separate. The world is to be dead to you. Sin is to be dead to you."

Think of Abraham. Why did God do this to him? Remember, it was to remind him of his sin and to remind him to be cut off from sin. And it must have been an extremely painful memory for him, but it must have greatly helped him too. When he's being tempted to sin again and resort to his own wisdom and his own power and other circumstances, "Abraham, come on. Remember, God cut you off from this way of thinking and doing and living. How dare you go back to it?" So we are to remember the waters of baptism every day and use it as a reminder, "God has cut me off. God has separated me."

So I appeal to you today here who are baptized and yet unbelievers, separated and yet not separated, cut off from this world yet still joined to this world, God has come to you in baptism and put this mark in you and said, "Be different. Be separate," and you said, "No, I'm just going to conform. I'm just going to go with the flow." A baptized unbeliever, a separated unbeliever, it just doesn't make sense. Try to feel the incongruity of it. Try to feel the clash of it. In baptism, God came into your life and took you out of the millions, as he says here in verses 14 and 15. Of all the people on the earth, he chose you and put you apart to be cleansed, to be washed, to be holy. Does your life reflect that?

Baptism is a cutting off but, secondly, God not only cuts off by baptism, God also claims by baptism. Just as circumcision was a claim of God, so baptism is God putting his stamp of ownership upon us and in this case it's even more solemn and serious than in the Old Testament because in the New Testament we are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In other words, God has put his name upon you by baptism. Not just the Father's name, not just the Son's, not just the Spirit's, but all three. All three are making a claim upon your life. God has come to you in your baptism and engaged himself to you, taken you into ownership, claimed you as his.

That's what's happened to Jamieson tonight. God has come and said, "Jamieson, you're mine. My name stamped upon you." What a name. What a name.

And therefore, again we ask, how can I live as if I'm not God's? How can I live as if I am my own? How can I live as if the world owns me? There is something again so horrific about this. You know what it's like when we've put a name on something and said, "This is mine." We don't expect anyone else to touch it or take it or use it, and we'd be quite offended if they did. So consider God's view of you tonight, baptized unbeliever. God's put his name on you. He's said, "You're mine." And the world is using you. You're using yourself. You're rejecting that claim of ownership. You're trying to scrub it out of your mind, of your memory, but baptism can't be rubbed out. You can't be rid of it. It's there all your days. God sees it. God sees his name on you.

You might say, "Well, I never had a choice in this." Aren't you glad? Who would have ever chosen to be God's left to ourselves? None of us would. This isn't about your choice. It's not even about mom and dad's choice. This is about God's choice. A sovereign, gracious, merciful choice that he has come and put this mark on you and said, "Mine." How do you respond to that? Do you say, "No way. Not me. I'm going to live my own life. I'm going to live my own way. No one owns me. I'm independent. Free agent." I'm afraid you're not and you never will be. You cannot erase this mark of ownership no matter what you do, no matter where you go, God still claims you, "Mine."

Why don't you to encourage you might say, "Well, you know, I've done so much. I've been here, done that, gone there. Surely God has renounced me now. Surely God has rescinded this claim. Surely God has given up on me." No. Why not go and get your baptismal certificate, bring it out, see the date. That's God's certificate of ownership and take it to him and say, "God, I have not lived as I ought to have lived. I've lived, yes, as a baptized unbeliever. I've lived joined to this world. I've lived rejecting your claim of ownership. But look, it still stands. Here it is. You've claimed me. God, take me in accordance with your promise, in mercy possess me, receive me, fulfill this unbreakable covenant promise." Use even this baptism tonight to remember what happened to you and the claim God made upon your life. Plead the waters of baptism. Plead the name of God. Say, "God, your name is on me. Let what's on my flesh be in my heart."

God has cut us off by baptism. God has claimed us by baptism. And God has committed himself to you by baptism. One of the things that baptism is saying is, just as circumcision: God has provided everything necessary for your salvation. Everything. Nothing lacking. It's all here in the Gospel. He's bonded himself in many ways. You know, a sacrament is an oath. That was one of the old Roman meanings of the term "sacrament," it was taking a sworn pledge. And we often think of the parents doing that and we do in baptism as in the Lord's Supper. We engage ourselves to be the Lord's but it's two way. God also engages himself to provide everything we need. He takes a solemn oath as well. He pledges himself. He swears on his own name, "Anything you need, I can give and I will give."

The Father is 100% committed. The Son is 100% committed. And the Holy Spirit is 100% committed. The only question is are you? Are you? Are you making use of all God's provision in the Gospel? In baptism, God cuts us apart, he claims us as his own and he commits himself. He, you could say, throws himself into the salvation of this child. It's a wonderful thought, isn't it? And what a thing to plead for parents, to come and bring our baptized unbelieving children and say, "Lord, remember their baptism. Remember the commitment you made. Please go after them. Please pursue them. Please don't give up on them according to your promise. Chase them down every lane and road and country and continent and sea and land, wherever they may be and wherever they may go. Keep your promise." Isn't that a great encouragement?

Let the heart reflect the flesh. That was the message of circumcision. That was the message of baptism. For the first time maybe, maybe until tonight you have been this

grimly described person, a baptized unbeliever. It's like saying a holy devil. A holy devil. I hope that grates on you. I hope it irritates you. I hope it's a huge big poke in the eye, a poke in your heart. "Not me." Well, you know what to do about it. Bring it to God and say, "Lord, I don't want to be a holy devil. I don't want to be a baptized unbeliever. Fulfill these promises in my life. Cut me off from this world's course and sin. Claim me as your own. Throw everything into my salvation because I need everything. Father, I need you. Son, I need you. Holy Spirit, I need you. Let my heart reflect my flesh. Let me be baptized in heart."

To every child here I say it's never too early. Are you a baptized child here? Don't be a baptized unbelieving child. There is no rule anywhere that says you need to wait until you're 18 to believe. You might need to wait until you're older to partake of some of the privileges of the church like the Lord's Supper, but there is no minimum or maximum limit for believing. You're baptized, that's enough, that's a warrant to believe, to claim the promises of the covenant of grace, to believe these promises, to lay hold on the seed of the woman who can do this cleansing of the heart. The youngest child here is called to be a baptized believer and not to stay one more day as a baptized unbeliever. No. Not one day. Is it okay to spend a day or a year in that condition? It's not, is it? It's unacceptable. It's dangerous. But also to the oldest adult I say, it's not too late. The youngest child, it's not too early. The oldest adult, it's not too late. Your baptism still stands there to be fulfilled in your heart, to be pled with to God.

Yes, tell him all your life you've not been cut off, you've not fulfilled that claim, you've not sought God's commitment to be realized in your life, but I still have life and I still have the promises. Come and cut me off from sin. Come and claim me as your own. Come and commit yourself to me in a loving, saving relationship.

Baptism should be a huge means of grace, shouldn't it? But if it's not, it will become a huge means of judgment. Baptism witnesses these truths to you tonight. God's cutting, God's claiming and God's commitment, and that should draw you and make you flee to the Savior. But if that witness is rejected, that message is despised, then your baptism will be a witness against you at the last day when you go to the judgment. It will be brought before you and you'll be told, "Well, you were cut off and yet you totally joined yourself to this world. I claimed you and you rejected my claims. I committed myself to you and you were never committed yourself."

Imagine going to judgment as a baptized unbeliever, to have all these privileges and all these promises. That water and that Triune name will be brought before you and you'll be asked, "What did you do? What did you do with it? What have you done? What have you not done?" You'll be forced to say, "I joined with the devil. I've renounced God's claim and I disregarded God's commitment." And it's too late for the heart to reflect the flesh. Too late and you will be cut off and you will go to the lake of fire.

What's the worst name you think you could be called? What would be the worst thing I could call you? Or the worst thing anyone could call you? Just have a think about that for

a moment. You're wrong. Here's the worst thing to be called: a baptized unbeliever. Don't live another day with that description. Amen.