

Although the baby is tiny, the promises of God are not small, but immense. Faith teaches us that the church lies at the center of God’s purposes for the world, and we have an obligation to understand and bear witness to the magnificent prospects that lie before the church, the body of Christ, the pillar and ground of the truth, the house of God, the temple of God, the family of God, the visible expression of the kingdom of God on the earth in her offices, her sacraments, and her order. God takes the small things, the insignificant things, the low things, the despised things to accomplish His purposes in the world, so no Christian should ever say, “What difference does it make?” You and I do not know what difference our obedience will make in the purposes of God in the world.

Some sermons have a narrow focus and deal with one passage, exegeted carefully. This is not one of those. Sometimes it is necessary to take a broad brush to integrate the pieces together, a practice often followed by the Lord Jesus and Stephen in his defense before his martyrdom.

There are three things I want to establish this morning: 1. What Promises were given to Israel about inheriting the Gentiles? 2. What Objections arose from the Jews concerning this inheritance? 3. How were these objections resolved?

- I. The Promises. I will not spend too much time with this, for this is very well known.
 - A. To Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Genesis 12: The world would be blessed through Abraham’s seed.
 - B. Isaiah 54:3-5
 - C. Mal 4:11
 - D. Many others could be cited.
 - E. Peter had preached to the Cornelius and the Gentiles and the Holy Spirit had been given to them just like He had been given to the Jews at Pentecost. They were not to be considered unclean beasts, for what God had cleansed, Peter was not to call unclean.
 - F. Paul confirms this in the passage read at the beginning: but he carried it beyond anything that any Jew could have been expected to believe in the Old Testament.
 1. Jesus Christ had broken down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, making them both one. 2:18-21 One household, one building
 2. But this would be done, not by making something new, but by making the Gentiles “fellowcitizens and members of the household of god.”
 3. They would be fellow heirs, of the same body and partakers of His promise through the Gospel. Eph. 3:4
- II. The Objections; the problems: There were two major hurdles for the Jew to get over in order to accept the idea that the Gentiles could be partakers of them in one body of the blessings of Messiah.
 - A. There was the law of Moses and the obedience it required, to the laws, the ordinances, the precepts. Dietary laws, laws of cleanness; the worship and Jerusalem; Sabbath worship; all the things that made the Jew the Jew, separating him from all other peoples for hundreds and hundreds of years. The Jew looked upon the Gentiles as unclean; they

would not eat with them, having only such concourse with them that was absolutely necessary.

- B. Even above the law was the rite of circumcision, which went back to Abraham, a sign and seal of Abraham’s faith, which was the fountain of all their blessings. You could not convince a Jew that the faith of a father would have no bearing on blessings to the children, for the whole nation of Israel was witness to the fact that God does indeed bless children for the faith of their parents. There were many such things in the Old Testament, about both good and evil coming upon children because of the obedience or disobedience of the parents. Even as the curse had come upon all the world because of the sin of one man, Adam, so blessings would come to the world because of one man, Abraham, the sign of which was circumcision.
- C. To the Jew, the solution to both these problems was the same. To the Law of Moses, if the Gentiles were to be part of the blessed people, then let them be circumcised, keep the law of Moses, worship at Jerusalem, and consent to be instructed in the law and the prophets. They would then be clean and could fellowship with the people of God. What could be more reasonable than that?

III. The New Testament writers found it necessary to refute the Jews on both points. Paul and the writer of Hebrews devastated both objections by the wisdom given to them by the Holy Spirit.

- A. In these two books, Galatians and Hebrews, the Spirit of God explains that the Mosaic Law contain the promise of Messiah and teach moral truth, but both of these were revealed before Moses and Aaron. There was no moral truth added by Moses and Aaron and no new promise of Messiah. The things introduced by Moses and Aaron cannot in any way abrogate the promises to Abraham, who never lived under Moses and Aaron, but received the promises by faith. Everything that was a picture of Christ is done away now that Christ has come, and the eternal law of God that each man love Him with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength and his neighbor as himself remains, although the law testifies to our helplessness and inability to perfectly obey this eternal law. It therefore condemns us, but cannot redeem, for the law energizes sin and cannot cure it.
- B. The believing Jew, swallowing hard, but taught by the fact that the Holy Spirit had come upon Cornelius and the Gentiles, could with great difficulty, accept the passing away of Moses and Aaron as a temporary structure and could see all these things fulfilled in Christ. Even the dietary laws could be seen and abrogated and should not be imposed upon the Gentiles. Worship could be performed everywhere and it would not be necessary to worship at Jerusalem because God was everywhere and Jews widely dispersed throughout the world had already erected the synagogue system which was to become the pattern in some sense for Christian worship.
- C. But what to do about circumcision? This was hardest of all, for this was not introduced by Moses, but given to Abraham, without all the ordinances, customs, and ceremonies of Moses and Aaron. Shouldn’t at least the Gentiles be compelled to be circumcised if they were to be of one body with the Jew? How could there be one Lord and one faith when the Gentiles were unclean and their un-circumcision was a testimony that they did not know Abraham and were not heirs to the promise.
- D. The answer of the Holy Spirit is given by Paul the Apostle in Colossians 2:6-14

1. Vs. 6, 7: Everything is in Christ; nothing can be added to Him that will make Him fuller. Therefore, fix your attention on Christ, on thanksgiving and faith. If you want fullness, make it the fullness of thanksgiving, for you add nothing to Christ but only receive of Him. The Vine bears you, not you the Vine. Your knowledge, your will, your maturity, your experience, your sufficiency, your good works—none of these add anything to Christ, and even your faith and your thanksgiving comes from Him by the Spirit of God. The only things you added to His cross were your sins and iniquities; you added to the problem, but have nothing to bring to the table of solution. The fullness is in Christ.
 2. Vs. 8. Those who add to Christ are cheats and worldly, looking for a worldly reward. They do not have your best interests at heart. They would add something of the world to Christ, to make up something lacking in Him.
 3. Vs. 9: All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ. There is nothing else. “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,” is the way He put it when one of His disciples wanted Him to show them the Father.
 4. Vs. 10: If all the fullness is in Christ, then we are complete in Christ, and need nothing else.
 5. Vs. 11: Though uncircumcised in your flesh, you are uncircumcised, because you have what circumcision witnessed: the circumcision of the heart which brings faith, for faith comes no other way than by means of regeneration and the implanting of a new nature.
 - a. This is what Abraham had, and he saw the day of Christ and rejoiced. Circumcision testified to the necessity of a spiritual rebirth, for the flesh profits nothing. “Ye must be born again,” was the message of Christ to Nicodemus and to all the Jews.
 - b. Circumcision also testified to the necessity of cutting off sin, the works of Adam. Only Christ could do this, for He circumcises our hearts and makes us new in Christ.
 6. Vs. 12. The sign and seal of this work of Christ is our baptism, so that we need not be circumcised, but are admitted to the people of God by baptism, so that we need not be circumcised.
 7. Vs. 13. Those baptized are not to be considered, therefore, unclean; but they are considered alive, and all their trespasses are forgiven them. It is not strictly true that baptism is the equivalent of circumcision, for circumcision also had some elements that pertained to Abraham’s physical seed and included the Edomites, the Ishmaelites, others of physical descent from Abraham; but that which pertains to holiness and the Messiah and gift of the Holy Spirit are fully signified by baptism.
- E. So the last barrier to the Gentiles being complete and equal heirs to the promises is taken away; all offenses and uncleanness is washed away in Baptism, which signifies the work of the Holy Spirit, as John the Baptist had indicated.
- F. But what about babies, born to gentile believers? Are they to be circumcised to indicate that they are clean and to be included in the family of God. No, they are clean if one parent is a believer, as Paul tells us. Hence, they must not be denied the sign of the promise made to them because of the faith of their parent. The Jew would have thought

it very strange that he was included with his children, but the Gentile had to consider his children unclean. Therefore households were baptized from the very beginning, even Lydia’s household where no man is mentioned.

Summary and Application:

- A. Sacraments are signs and seals of the promises of God; only secondarily are they witnesses to our own faith.
- B. There is one faith, one Lord, one baptism, for the Jew and the Gentile. These controversies were experienced in the early church and settled by the practice of the church in the baptism of infants and including them in the family and fellowship of the church.
- C. It is possible to make too much, or too little of baptism:
 1. Too much, as Rome and some of our Lutheran friends. Baptism itself is not a washing away of sin. Circumcision testified to the promise of God respecting the children of Abraham and to the necessity of putting away sin and looking n faith to Messiah—repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Circumcision became un-circumcision of there was no faith.
 2. Too little, as our Baptist friends, who ceremonially exclude the children, until they can add to Christ’s fullness by their own adult powers. Hence, personal experience is the final defense against the baptism of infants.
- D. Our children are to be brought up in the faith, carefully catechized, for their baptism gives the same advantage that circumcision brought to the Jew: chiefly that unto them are committed the oracles of God. They are to learn the word of God and be disciplined to obedience in love. We are to pray for them, nurture them, treasure them, be thankful for them, remembering the promise of God in Psalm 92: [As a Christian you do not need to cut this out of your Bible!]

12 The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

13 Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.

14 They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing;

15 To show that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

May God bless you. Amen