

“Confirming and Improving Your Baptism”

Based on Genesis 12:1-14; 28:1-22

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March 13, 2016 2:30 p.m. at New Horizon URC

Introduction: Think of the character of the biblical man, Jacob.

-As a teenager and young adult, at times he lied to his parents.

-At times, he schemed against his twin brother, Esau.

-Later on, he tricked his employer, his uncle Laban. Jacob used some dishonest methods.

In those early years, especially, Jacob was anything but godly.

-But, God had put his mark upon Jacob. Eight days after his birth, Jacob was circumcised.

We learned last week that was a visible mark, giving added assurance that as God was the God of his father, Isaac, and of his grandfather, Abraham. So God would be his God. /

In those early years, Jacob’s scheming led his brother to want to kill him.

So Jacob had to run for his life. Before he left, his father Isaac reminded Jacob of his identity. “May God Almighty, El Shaddai, bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers.” It’s the covenant blessing, similar to the one God himself had given to his grandfather, Abraham. Jacob is reminded that he truly is a son of the covenant.

In Genesis 28 we read the familiar story of how Jacob rested for the night, after he left home.

He slept in a place that became known as “Bethel.” In Hebrew, “Bait-El.” El, the name for God, Bait, the word for “house.” Bait-el, Bethel, means, “the house of God.” The place where God dwells. The place where God is found.

Without going into detail, in that dream God confirmed what Jacob’s father had told him.

Namely, that He is the covenant God of his grandfather Abraham, and the God of his father, Isaac. And now God also is showing himself to be the God of Jacob himself. From generation to generation!//

Now, on a human level Jacob could have responded to God in his natural self, in a scheming

and devious way. But, by God’s grace, Jacob responded to God in personal trust. In vs. 16, Jacob says: “Surely, surely I know, the LORD, Yahweh, is in this place.”

And he says, "This place is the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." In that dream, God had come down to Jacob. But by faith, as it were, Jacob also had risen up to God.

From Genesis chapter 17 and other places, we learn about God's covenant with believing parents and their children, from generation to generation. The sign of the covenant in the

OT was a bloody sign, that of circumcision. But Jesus has come, shedding his blood. So there is no longer any need for blood. Thus the NT sign of the covenant is that of WATER.

God marks children of believing parents today with that water sign, that water mark. He says: "I will be your God, and you shall be my people."

God says that to the parents, when their babies are baptized.

But, the outward sign of water does not change hearts. Not for babies. Neither for adults, when adults are baptized. The water in itself does not change anyone's heart.

Circumcision of babies in the OT didn't change their hearts either.

It changed their bodies. But it didn't change their hearts.

-We see that illustrated with Jacob's twin brother, Esau.

Like Jacob, Esau also was circumcised as a little baby. He received the outward, visible sign. But, as he got older, Esau did not respond to God in faith. Esau, instead, hardened his heart. As he came into his teenage and young adult years, we see that Esau rejected God. He refused to put his trust in the God of his father, Isaac, and his grandfather, Abr.

We say Esau became a "covenant-breaker." From the human side, Esau "broke" God's covenant. Later on, most of Israel, likewise "broke" God's covenant. In Jer 31:32 God speaks of making a "new covenant" with Israel, someday. Why?

God says this new covenant "will not be like the [old] covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because **they broke my covenant**, though I was a husband to them, declares the LORD."

Esau is a paradigm, a type, of later, unbelieving Israel.

Those Israelites in later history "broke" God covenant. You see, the Israelites were supposed to "confirm" God's covenant. God made his covenant promises, and His people were expect to confirm it, to respond to those promises, in true faith and trust.

But they didn't. They became "covenant breakers."

But, praise the Lord, Jacob **confirms God's covenant**, made with his forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob responds with his own, personal trust.

And that trust was also looking forward to the coming of Jesus.

We can say that, in some sense, Jacob was trusting **in Jesus**. //

1.B. So it must be for all of us, raised by Christian parents, and receiving God's covenant mark

of water baptism. The water itself does not save us. It is a sign. An important sign, yes.

But the water does not change our hearts. Instead, God by His Word and Spirit changes our hearts. And we must testify of that change. We must "**confirm**" God's covenant with us.

By declaring that we love the Lord. That we are trusting in Jesus, whose blood is the blood of the covenant, atoning for our sins. That we are desiring to live for Jesus, in thankfulness.

In many churches, many denominations, they call public profession of faith, they call it

"**confirmation**." And I think that is a very good word. Our children, as they come to the years of understanding, must say, as Jacob said: "The God of my parents and grandparents, shall also be my God." Each of our children must likewise "**confirm**" the covenant. Each generation must personally speak of their own, faith, their own trust, in Jesus. Yes, God shows a certain favour upon our children, placing them in Christian homes and Christian churches. But as we are seeing today, and two weeks from today, our children must confirm it./

So, children and teenagers, let me urge you to be thinking about your public profession of

faith. You don't have to wait until you are 18 or 20 years old. That you also will say, with your Christian parents:

"I also believe in Jesus. The God of father and mother, shall also be **my God**."

2. I want to call attention to something else, in connection with baptism.

It's found as the answer to Q 167, in the Westminster Larger Catechism. Now, the

Westminster confessions are almost identical to our Heidelberg, Belgic Conf, and Canons of Dort. But generally, they are somewhat longer. More detailed. Q. 167 of the Larger Catechism gives a wonderful application, to the command of God to be baptized.

Let me read the answer. I am updating and summarizing some of the words.

Q. 167 asks: "How is our baptism (both to babies and to newly converted adults)...

how is our baptism to **be improved** by us?" The answer [quote]: "There is a needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism. That improving is to be performed by us

all our life long, especially in the time of temptation,

and when we are present at the baptism of others."

How do we improve upon our baptism? The answer continues [quote]...

"We improve upon our baptism -by serious and thankful consideration of it;

-by the privileges and benefits conferred by it;

-by our being humbled because of our sin—since we fall short of the grace of baptism;

-and by growing up to the increasing assurance of the pardon of our sin;

-by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized;

for the increasing putting to death of our sin,

and increasing bringing to life of God's grace in us."

You and I, having been baptized, either as babies or as adults, must "improve upon" our

baptism. The word "prove" is in the word "improve" ...that is we must **increasingly prove** who we are. Proving, showing, more and more, that we belong to Jesus, our Saviour!

We must display our baptism in Jesus, more and more and more.

This answer is based on Bible verses such as in Colossians chapter 2.

We read these verses briefly last week, how circumcision is replaced by water baptism.

[Read Col 2: 11-12. What does that mean, "buried" with Christ.... [Read vs. 13.

When God worked upon us, in Jesus, by Jesus Spirit, he killed off our old self, our natural sinful self. And he gave us new birth; God raised us to new life, in Jesus.

And what does that mean, practically? [Read Colossians 3:1-3. Again, we are dead and buried with Christ, our old selves. And we are raised to new life, in Christ, when Jesus was raised from the dead. So, now, **prove it! Show it, more and more!**

How? [Read Col 3:5 ff. Oh, we might at times slip, fall into temptation. But we must hate

those times. We must hate our sin, our falling into that sin. We must run from that sin. Killing off that sin, more and more in our life.

Not only killing off the old self, more and more. But also “bringing to life more of the new self, the new person that we are in Jesus. How is that seen? [For example, Col 3:12-14.

That’s how we improve upon our baptism, a baptism that may have happened years and years ago. We might not even have known what was going on. But our parents did. And, most importantly, God did. And God put his mark on us. We personally **must confirm** that covenant. And not only speak of our faith, our trust in Jesus. But we must also live different kinds of lives. Proving, showing, who we really are. That we are a different people, a peculiar people... Not thinking, speaking, and living, as unbelievers sometimes do. But thinking, speaking, and living, as God’s covenant people. Improve upon your baptism!/
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-**The 16th century Reformer, Martin Luther**, also wrote catechisms. Q & A for teaching children and adults, biblical truth. In what is called his “Small Catechism,” Martin Luther urges believers “to renew” our baptism every day. Make it new again...relive it, grow in it,

Luther is quoted elsewhere as saying,

“Whenever you wash your face, remember your baptism.” Isn’t that beautiful? [Repeat.

Water is used in baptism. And as the children have learned over the years, the water points to our being dirty, our needing to be cleaned up. So it is with the sin in ourselves. The sin we are born with as well as the sin we personally commit. Our lack of agape love.

So, whenever you take a shower, or a bath, or wash your face with a washcloth...what a good time to remember your water baptism. Just like your face, your body, needs to be cleaned up—so your inner self, your heart, your soul, your mind, your attitudes...

all need to be cleaned up. Washed by Jesus.

So ask yourself...Am I showing myself to be cleaned up in Jesus?

Am I showing myself to be clean in my thoughts, my attitudes, my words, my actions?

How do I feel when I live or speak or think in dirty ways, in sinful ways?

Do I feel bad about myself? Or do I just shrug my shoulders...and make no changes.

Oh, let us examine ourselves, brothers and sisters. Examine yourself not just once and a while.

But examine yourself daily. Examine yourself, as Luther suggests, each time you wash your face, or you take a shower. How cleanly are you living? Are you speaking? Are you thinking? So it must be for each of you who have already publicly professed your faith in Jesus. And for those for you who will be doing that, soon.

2.B. And here's another helpful thought, arising from our baptism. 16th century Reformer and

preacher, John Calvin, writes this about baptism, in his Institutes: "...there is no doubt that all believers, throughout life, whenever they are troubled by a consciousness of their faults, may venture to **remind themselves of their baptism**, that from it **they may be confirmed in assurance** of that sole and perpetual cleansing which we have **in Christ's blood.**"

You see, we are often going to fail in improving on our baptism. We sometimes will look like unbelievers....and act like them, and talk like them. We will fail to show that we belong to Jesus. Then what? Do we give up? Do we despair of ever being the kind of Christian we should be? Calvin says, when we are confirmed in our baptism, we keep on thinking about the water. The pure, clean, cleansing water. It reminds us that we are washed, made clean, by the blood Jesus shed on the cross for us. The sacrament of baptism, therefore, is a seal, a guarantee....that we **surely, truly, and forever**, are forgiven by Jesus death on the cross. His blood, shed for us.

-God has marked us by the water of baptism. We belong to Jesus. Let us prove it.

LET US PRAY.