

I believe that one reason why so many of us have a difficult time understanding the importance and meaning of baptism especially as it applies to infants is because ministers and Bible teachers have been somewhat reluctant and embarrassed to deal publicly with the OT counterpart of baptism which was circumcision. We cannot really understand why infants are baptised unless we understand the place of circumcision in the OT.

Today people are far more open about talking about biology and anatomy than previous generations. For example, I think of a boy named David. He is about 12 years old with brown eyes and sandy hair. His mother just had a baby boy. She was in one of those rare hospitals where young David and his father could look at the baby ^{in the nursery} from behind a glass window. In fact ^{as unbelievable < > it may sound} the doctor allowed him and his father to watch from behind the window when the little guy was circumcised about the third day.

David was a little shaken up when he saw what the doctor was doing. "Why do they do that, dad? especially to a little baby?"

"It's done for hygienic reasons, son."

"What's that mean?" David asked. He didn't know that big word. "What's hygienic?"

"Hygienic means that it has to do with health and cleanliness. Doctors have discovered that the rate of cancer in this area of the body is much less in persons who were circumcised at birth compared to those who were not." So today nearly every baby boy that is born is circumcised before going home with his mother."

David's family was a devout Christian family. His father knew that David was concerned for his little brother and was feeling some anxiety over having watched that minor surgery. He began to think that David was too young to have seen the operation performed. But he decided to talk about it a little more that evening at family devotions ^{after dinner.} David's father opened the Bible to the book of Genesis, chapter 17 where circumcision was first instituted by God as a religious observance and as the sign of the covenant of grace.

David thought a few moments about the brief account and then asked, "Dad, did God tell Abraham to circumcise himself and his sons for health reasons?"

"Well, David," his father began, "I don't think that was the most important reason. Although that might have been a reason. There were a number of reasons why God gave this order to Abraham but perhaps the easiest reason for us to remember is this. God gave this command to circumcise all

the men and infant sons in Israel as a sign that he had separated Israel from the wickedness of the pagan nations who did not worship God. And it was also a sign teaching Israel that we and our children are conceived and born in sin and need to be cleansed by the blood of Christ. Circumcision in the flesh was supposed to remind Israel of their need of a clean heart.

Then David's father turned to the passage in Deuteronomy which I read this morning. "Circumcision was meant by God to remind all Israel that they all need a new heart, a cleansed heart. The Bible teaches that our hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked until God cleanses them. Jesus said, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man." And remember the prayer we pray in church sometimes, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." This is something that we all need and not just adults," his father said.

David went to bed that night disturbed, not so much about his little brother but about himself. He knew what God required of him, to fear him, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord with all his heart and to

keep his commandments. Sometimes he tried to meet the requirements but he never felt like he was making much headway. And besides that he found all these requirements to be a chore and a burden. Then he thought of the words of his father and the words of Deuteronomy 10:16, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart." He thought of his little brother and how painful ~~the heart~~ circumcision must be. But he realised he needed a new heart, a clean heart if he were to fulfil God's requirements. But how could he get himself a clean heart?

He thought of a story a Sunday school teacher had once told his class. Once there was a little pig who was always wallowing in the mud. David never wallowed in the mud but he felt like there was mud caked around his heart that God wanted to remove. The owner of this little pig would bring him to the barn every day and give him a bath, clean him up and scrub him so the little pig was clean and pink. But as soon as he was released he returned to the mud. David felt like all his efforts and all his parents efforts to keep him clean in heart were like that. His parents would spank him if he said bad words or if he lied or did something wrong. He would straighten up for a while but soon fall back into his old ways. But then he remembered

the rest of the story. One day the owner of the pig said to himself, "I love that little pig and I want him to stay clean but I know that as long as he has the heart of a pig he will act like a pig and wallow in the mud. I will give him a new heart. I will give him the heart of a pure lamb without blemish. And so the owner took the purest lamb in the flock and performed heart surgery on him and the pig. He removed the heart of the pig and replaced it with the heart of the spotless lamb. The lamb died for the pig but from that time on the pig had a new heart, a clean heart, a heart to obey his owner.

Then he remembered the moral of the story. The teacher had said that Jesus was the lamb of God who gave his life in order that he might cleanse us and give us a new heart and that through faith in Christ we might be cleansed inwardly. He asked Jesus to give him a new heart, to perform that spiritual heart surgery on him and Christ came into his heart and dddd just that. David didn't know it but another verse from Deuteronomy was fulfilled when he asked Christ to give him a new heart. IN 30:6 we read, "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

The next morning David told his father about his prayer for a new heart and how he wanted to have the heart and mind of Christ. But then he asked, "Did the doctor who circumcised my little brother do it Because God commanded circumcision in the CT?"

"No," his father replied. "Since the coming of Jesus God no longer requires circumcision as the sign of the covenant. Today it's done just for hygienic purposes."

"Well, why would God do away with it?"

"I don't know fully, son. Maybe the blood of circumcision was to remind the CT people of God of the blood of Christ. The shedding of the blood of Christ brought the end of the need of bloody sacrifices on our part. We no longer sacrifice sheep and goats and we no longer circumcise our infant boys for religious reasons. The shedding of the blood of Christ was a perfect and complete sacrifice which makes the former practices unnecessary."

"Well, doesn't God want to remind us today of our need of a clean heart. If circumcision served that purpose in the CT don't we still need to be reminded of our need for a clean heart?"

"Yes, and God has given us something to take the place of circumcision. Just as he gave us the bread and wine of

~~by~~ *circumcision*

to replace the killing of the Passover lamb he has given us baptism in the place of circumcision. The apostle Paul says in Colossians 2:11f., 'In Christ you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.'"

"Baptism in the NT means the same thing as circumcision in the OT. It is a sign telling us that we need our hearts cleansed by the blood of Christ. This is something that little children need every bit as much as the most hardened sinner. Your baptism did not save you or cleanse you any more than circumcision saved or cleansed the OT people of God. But God has commanded his people to give the sign of the covenant of grace to our infant children as a sign pointing them to their need of Christ, to their need of a new heart cleansed and made pure by Christ and received through faith."

David began thinking of his friends Margaret and Tommy whose parents were not Christians. "I wonder if Margaret and Tommy were baptized. Their parents don't seem to know Christ. They don't go to church and Tommy doesn't seem to

know anything about Jesus and his need of a Saviour."

David's father answered, "I don't know if they were baptized. I do know that sometimes parents who aren't Christians want their children baptized. Sometimes they think it will save their children. Sometimes they do it out of custom. But God has told us that the sign of the covenant should be given only to those who will be raised in a family where they will be taught it's meaning. The Word of God and the Sacrament of Baptism should never be separated. That's why our minister will not baptize a child unless his parents or at least one of them is an active member of the church who has made a profession of faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour."

Breakfast had been over for some time and it was time for David to go off to school and his father to work. But before David left he put his arms around his father to kiss him goodbye. He said, "I'm glad you are my daddy and that you and mommy love me and have told me about Jesus"... And then he paused before he went on. "And I'm glad that I was baptized. I can't remember when. I was too young. But I'm glad you told me about my baptism and how it is a sign telling me that I need Jesus to cleanse my heart and be my Saviour."