

## REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 6 OCTOBER 2013 EVENING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Scripture Versification 8-1; 1, 2

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Psalm of praise: 66:7

**Prayer:**

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

**Amen**

Psalm 50:11

**Scripture reading:** Ezekiel 36

**Scripture text:** Ezekiel 36:25-27; Catechism Sunday 26

**25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.**

**26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**

**27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.**

(Ezekiel 36:25-27)

At times we focus so much on physical life that we completely miss the spiritual world of which we are part – we actually live as if it doesn't even exist.

- It's as if we naturally only think about the physical world as if it is the only world that exists,
- and also as if it is the world that determines our well-being and prosperity.

The heart transplant story tells of it.

Some 40 years ago the first heart transplant – as everyone believed – featured prominently in the media.

- Physically this was true for the modern world.
- But the first heart transplant for eternal life happened many, many centuries ago.

Let's consider in this sermon the following things that concern eternal life. It's all about how we are cleansed, and of course how we are clean and that we should remain clean. The moment we lose our purity, death comes – physically and spiritually!

### **1. Purity and living through the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ**

#### **2. What is the meaning of granting of the Spirit?**

#### **1. Purity and living through the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ**

It sounds strange to us that the Lord speaks in this passage of the clean water He would sprinkle on his people.

- We can't imagine anybody would sprinkle dirty water on another person – let alone sprinkle water on anybody!
- In the time the book Ezekiel was written, clean water was a very scarce commodity.
- It was so scarce that it was not wasted or sprinkled onto anybody.

Therefore it means that the Lord would grant the believers something very precious – something of they would not be worthy. The Lord also describes this same act in another way:

- He is going to replace our hearts.
- He will literally perform a spiritual heart transplant. He is going to remove the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh.
- He is going to remove our hardened hearts that continue to sin and give us the gentleness of his peace and presence.
- And so the image of God, namely true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, is restored in us.

This certainly happens in the area of our spirit – but the effect is very much physical.

**"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."**

Hence the Lord reveals in this passage that his Spirit becomes part of us when He saves us – when He gives us a new heart.

- His Spirit cleanses us – He cleanses our lives.
- The Spirit of God does not cleanse our lives through making us perform some weird and extravagant miracles.

- He guides us to do what the Lord expects us to do – to follow his decrees and keep his laws.

To follow the Lord's decrees and keeping his laws means that we should comply with the Ten Commandments.

- This physically means to be obedient and not kill anybody.
- Also, to not use the Lord's Name blasphemously.
- And similarly, to meet the Lord in public worship and to worship Him.

What makes me go to church to worship the Lord? It all starts in my spirit where the Spirit of the Lord calls me to the meeting ordained by Him to bless his children.

Where and how is it that the Holy Spirit of God is in me to call my spirit and guide it? It all starts when God changes my heart.

**"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. "**

The Lord started this process long before the creation – Ephesians 1:4 **just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love**, – but physically when we are baptized. This is what the Lord in fact refers to when He says:

**"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean;**

In the time of Ezekiel the baptism of repentance had long been administered.

- When someone repented because of a sin he had committed he went to the temple where the priest joined him in prayer.
- The sign that the Lord had forgiven his sin was the baptism of repentance.
  - The priest dipped a bunch of hyssop in water and sprinkled the sinner.
  - This was called the baptism of repentance – the baptism also administered by John the Baptist.

This was a prophecy of the blood of the Lord Jesus that would cleanse us of our sins like water washes the dirt off our bodies. Cleansing of sins means forgiveness of sins – this was already signified by the baptism of repentance in the Old Testament.

**"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool."**

(Isaiah 1:18)

Due to our sins, which are red as scarlet, we deserve damnation, but the Lord acts differently. He makes us, who believe in his Name, the children of God.

## 2. What is the meaning of granting of the Spirit?

When somebody is baptized we could so easily be misled and think it's all about the water – especially because the Lord states so clearly in the Old Testament: I will sprinkle clean water on you.

When baptism is administered something extremely important happens:

- Baptism and the Spirit of God go hand in hand. The Lord says:  
**I will put My Spirit within you...**

The heart transplant has certain very clear effects on a person with a new heart. His attitude and the way he lives are suddenly completely different.

First look at the Lord's view of us: In verses 13 and 14 of this chapter Ezekiel describes his people's idol-worship:

**13 'Thus says the Lord God: "Because they say to you, 'You devour men and bereave your nation of children,'**

**14 "therefore you shall devour men no more, nor bereave your nation anymore," says the Lord God.**

(Ezekiel 36:13 and 14)

Christ instituted baptism. Why?

- Because He uses something visible to show that we are very dirty because of our sins, but that He does something about it – He washes away all my sins.
- He uses something from the physical life to reveal what happens in the invisible sphere of my life.
  - With the baptism He promises that as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly His blood and Spirit wash away the impurity of my soul, that is, all my sins.

What shall we do now? The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cleansed me and He gave me his Spirit – what will happen next?

This is exactly where the effect of the heart transplant kicks in!

- Suddenly the Spirit of God leads me to break with my sins.
- Immediately it can be seen in the way I behave – physically visible.
  - I no longer pick a quarrel easily.
  - Suddenly I increasingly become aware of what is important in honour of God – and then I make myself available for it.
  - I no longer complain about life – I share the peace of the Lord with everyone.
  - By doing so I live the fruits of the Spirit.

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.**

(Galatians 5:22)

And so I remain clean – and I let my heart make me experience and live – in principle – the joy of eternal life.

This passage from the Scriptures teaches us that the Spirit of God does not make us do unusual things – such as what we are often taught.

- The Spirit of God does not necessarily make us speak in tongues.
- He does not make us drop down and have convulsions.
- He does not make us cry out about what we experience.
- He guides us to be responsible and become different – to turn away from sin.
- He guides us to live in the peace and insight God grants us.

From this we learn that salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ is absolute and is necessary if we want to become holy.

- But it doesn't show us a dark and difficult road ahead – it teaches us that the Lord, together with salvation, also grants us his Spirit to replace our tainted and sinful heart.
- He replaces our attitude and our insight – but we have to enter this new life and accept it with the greatest responsibility.

Hence parents who do not walk in these ways cannot have their children baptized. The reason being very simple:

- People, whose lives do not show that the Spirit of the Lord is their companion in life, cannot guide their children in the ways of righteousness.

It sounds unreasonable, but it isn't. The life of a person whose heart has not been reborn shows it. He makes himself known as an enemy of the Lord.

- He who has not been reborn cannot lead a reborn Christian.
- Or we can put it like this: He who is still caught up in his heart of stone cannot lead somebody to know the Lord, because he has not received the heart of flesh from the Lord.

To live according to the heart God has given us, we must become dead to sin. The Lord states it explicitly:

**19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.**

**20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**

**21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.  
 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.  
 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.**  
 (1Corinthians 15:19-23)

Let's have a look at what is written in the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 26 about it:

69. Q. How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?

A. In this way: Christ instituted this outward washing[1] and with it gave the promise that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly His blood and Spirit wash away the impurity of my soul, that is, all my sins.[2]

[1] Matt. 28:19. [2] Matt. 3:11; Mark 16:16; John 1:33; Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3, 4; I Pet. 3:21.

70. Q. What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?

A. To be washed with Christ's blood means to receive forgiveness of sins from God, through grace, because of Christ's blood, poured out for us in His sacrifice on the cross.[1] To be washed with His Spirit means to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ, so that more and more we become dead to sin and lead a holy and blameless life.[2]

[1] Ez. 36:25; Zech. 13:1; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 12:24; I Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:5; 7:14. [2] John 3:5-8; Rom. 6:4; I Cor. 6:11; Col. 2:11, 12.

71. Q. Where has Christ promised that He will wash us with His blood and Spirit as surely as we are washed with the water of baptism?

A. In the institution of baptism, where He says: 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 (Matthew 28:19). He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16). This promise is repeated where Scripture calls baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins (Titus 3:5; Acts 22:16).

**Amen.**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 31:1, 4, 15

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

**Amen**

Dr MJ Du Plessis  
 Helping Reverend  
 Reformed Church Clanwilliam  
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