

Sprinkling, Infant Baptism and The Bible

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To my wife, Nancy,
who, believing the promises of God sealed in baptism,
has done so much to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,
and who has been abundantly used for blessing in our family.

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Preface

The two parts of this book have different beginnings. The first part is the result of a change in convictions, the second part the result of a clearer understanding of the Biblical teaching regarding baptism.

That second part of the book, dealing with the baptism of infants, is the result of an extended correspondence with a Baptist minister in England on the subject of baptism. In the course of this friendly correspondence, he suggested that I read and respond to the book, *Baptism Not for Infants*, by T. E. Watson.¹

In responding, there were many issues raised that required study and reflection. The result was a clearer understanding of the Biblical basis for infant baptism. That study not only clarified many things, however, but convinced me that many of the traditional arguments for Paedobaptism (infant baptism) were weak. Many of the issues raised by Watson were not, as he pointed out in his book, adequately answered by Paedobaptist writers.

It did appear from further study, however, that these questions could be answered if one had a sound Biblical view of the covenant and of the grace of God. This book, therefore, is a defense of paedobaptism from the viewpoint of sovereign, particular grace, and from the viewpoint of a firm belief that there is only one, everlasting and unconditional covenant of God—the viewpoint Watson calls "high Calvinism."

In his book Watson simply dismisses the arguments of high Calvinism as being "obviously contrary to Scripture" and makes no attempt to answer them. This, of course, suggests that he has no answer. Nor, do I believe, has any Baptist writer adequately answered those arguments.

In addressing Watson's book and other matters raised in correspondence, the response ran to many pages. That response was later given to others who were interested in the subject. They urged that it be reorganized and published as a book. And since there seemed a need for a book written from a Biblical perspective of grace and the covenant, a book designed to answer the Baptist arguments, I agreed to prepare what follows. Thus the second part of this book.

As to the first part of the book, when putting this material together, I had no intention of including any material on the mode of baptism, but for two reasons decided to include that material also. The first reason was personal, the second doctrinal.

Having always been taught that both sprinkling and immersion were legitimate modes of baptism, there was little reason to investigate the matter, since only sprinkling was ever practiced in the churches to which I belonged. I had never even witnessed a baptism by immersion until several years after I was married and had opportunity to watch an elderly lady being baptized by immersion at the local swimming pool.

Questions arose, however, through reading a pamphlet by Robert Harbach, "The Biblical Mode of Baptism." Although the Protestant Reformed Churches, in which Harbach was a minister, generally taught that both sprinkling and immersion are legitimate modes, Harbach argued that sprinkling or pouring are the *only* Biblical modes for baptism. His arguments were unanswerable.

Later on in one of the congregations I served, a brother in Christ, who had studied the matter carefully, insisted as Harbach had done, that the Bible only warrants sprinkling or pouring as modes of baptism. The same brother recommended reading Jay Adams' book, *The Meaning*

¹Worthing: Henry E. Walter Ltd, 1970.

*and Mode of Baptism.*² Having read Adams' book, I was convinced that the arguments for immersion are wholly without Biblical ground, and that immersion is not a Biblical mode of baptism

There seemed little reason for writing against immersion, however, since Adams' book was and still is in print. But in investigating the matter of paedobaptism versus credobaptism (believer's baptism), it became increasingly clear that the two issues are related and really cannot be divorced. The meaning of baptism stands at the heart of both issues.

Watson himself recognizes that in his book. He insists that paedobaptists change the very meaning of baptism not only by baptizing infants and but also by sprinkling them, and with him I agree. I would insist that a correct Biblical understanding of the meaning of baptism affects not only the objects of baptism but also the mode. I disagree with him, however, that it is the Baptists who have the correct meaning of baptism when they insist that only professing believers can be baptized and that they must be baptized by immersion.

My prayer is that God will bless these efforts and use them for good. May He use it to bring a measure of agreement with those who call themselves Reformed Baptists and who agree with us at many points regarding the sovereign and particular grace of God, and the everlasting and unconditional covenant of grace.

Ronald Hanko

²Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my indebtedness to a book, a pamphlet and a person, all of which were influential in developing and sharpening my views on baptism and without which this book would never have been written. The book is *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism* by Jay E. Adams, a concise and valuable study of the principal arguments for paedobaptism. The pamphlet is *The Biblical Mode of Baptism*, by Robert C. Harbach, a minister, now deceased, in the Protestant Reformed Churches, the denomination in which I serve. Both of these have already been mentioned, but depending so heavily upon their arguments, it is necessary to acknowledge my debt to them.

The person, not yet mentioned, is Brian Crossett of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Ballymena, Northern Ireland, a congregation in which I served for a number of years. Having made the study of baptism his particular interest over many years (he is the only person I know who has read all four volumes of Dale's³ massive work on the meaning of the word "baptism"), he had much to teach me and many of the arguments for paedobaptism presented in this book are arguments I learned from him.

There are many who have read this book before publication and offered helpful suggestions and criticisms, among them, my sister, Karen Van Baren; John Hooper, a good friend from Saltash, Cornwall, and a former Baptist; and Ron Koole, from the Reformed Free Publishing Association. Most helpful of all, however, has been my very dear friend and brother in Christ, Hugh Williams of Lutterworth, England. His detailed and very helpful critique of my manuscript and his many invaluable suggestions for improving it are much appreciated, as well as the large amount of time he devoted to it. The book would not be the same without his help.

Ronald Hanko

³J. W. Dale, *Classic Baptism, Judaic Baptism, Christic Baptism and Patristic Baptism, and Johannic Baptism*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989-1995.

Introduction

We agree with those Baptists who think the subject of baptism is of primary importance and needs to be addressed. We have no sympathy for those who refuse to address the issue, or insist that it is a non-issue and that any practice should be allowed. Indeed, one of the great weaknesses of the evangelical movement today is its refusal to face controversial issues including this issue of baptism. Not only is baptism an ordinance and command of Christ Himself, but the matter of baptism involves the doctrines of the church, of the covenant, and of the grace of God, all matters of tremendous consequence. A proper understanding of it, then, is crucial.

In defending infant baptism we are not defending all the arguments of other Paedobaptists. Indeed, we believe that Paedobaptists have rarely argued their case clearly and consistently and have often based their arguments on faulty views of the covenant or of the church. Thus, though we will not spend time with their arguments, we wish to make it clear from the outset that we have a fundamentally different view from almost all Paedobaptists of the Biblical ground for baptizing infants.

Most of these traditional arguments for infant baptism are based on a wrong view of the covenant that makes a major concession to dispensationalism in teaching more than one covenant (works and grace), and another major concession to Arminianism (free-willism), in teaching a conditional covenant that depends on God and man working together and not on God's grace alone. We also will not spend any time trying to argue that paedobaptism was the view of the early church. Even if it was, that does not make it right, nor have such arguments ever convinced a single Baptist. It is Scripture that must decide the case and it is to Scripture that we appeal. To argue from tradition and neglect Scripture is the great error of Roman Catholicism, and those who believe in infant baptism on the basis of tradition alone are no better than the Romanists. We agree, then, with Marcel that "it is impossible for us to found infant baptism (or any other teaching) on extra-canonical texts." To do otherwise would be a return to Romanism. The doctrine of infant baptism, therefore, "must be established and justified biblically."⁴ Indeed, as Calvin says, "It would be a most miserable asylum, if, in defence of infant baptism, we were compelled to have recourse to the mere authority of the church."⁵ To prove, therefore, that either paedobaptism or believer's baptism was the universal practice of the church back to the time of the apostles proves nothing.

Infant baptism is the principle issue addressed in this book. We introduce, in the first part of the book, material on the mode of baptism for three reasons only. First, we are convinced that the way to an understanding of infant baptism lies in part through a proper understanding of the mode. If a Baptist can see that he is wrong on the mode (usually easier to demonstrate), he is also open to being convinced regarding the objects of baptism.

Second, a careful study of the mode of baptism brings us to the testimony of Scripture. With regard to the mode the testimony of Scripture is as clear as it can be, and those who will give careful attention to Scripture's testimony regarding the mode, will also, we are sure, hear what Scripture has to say about the objects of baptism. The matter of mode, therefore, reminds us of the basics of Scripture study, especially that Scripture must interpret itself, and that its

⁴Pierre Ch. Marcel, *Baptism, Sacrament of the Covenant of Grace* (Cherry Hill: Mack Publishing, 1973), p. 21.

⁵John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by John Allen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), IV, viii, 16, vol. II, p. 432.

testimony is final. Having come to Scripture and been reminded of its principles in connection with the mode of baptism, the matter of infant baptism takes us into a deeper study of that precious and wonderful Word of God.

Third, many of the passages which bear on the question of mode raise issues that reflect on the meaning of baptism and the proper objects of baptism. One cannot, for example, deal with the baptism of Israel in the Red Sea and the mode of their baptism, without also facing the fact that the nation as a whole was baptized, including the infants, and that their baptism was not a commemoration of what *they* had done in believing and trusting God, but a remembrance of what *God* had done for them.

In all of this, we trust that our emphasis on the sovereignty of God and of His grace are the foundation not only for a proper understanding of baptism, but of all doctrine.

PART I

The Mode of Baptism

Chapter 1 The Meaning of the Word “Baptism”

It has often been claimed that the New Testament word “baptism” always and only means “to immerse” or “to submerge.” Carson, a Baptist, says: “Baptism in the whole history of the Greek language has but one [meaning]. It not only signifies to ... immerse, but it never has any other meaning.”⁶ Not only do Baptists claim this but many Paedobaptists concede the point. Among Baptists, therefore, this understanding of the word leads to an insistence that baptism by immersion is the only valid baptism.

A little word study will show, however, that it is not the case that baptism means immersion. Indeed, the word tells us nothing at all about the mode of baptism. That must be learned from other considerations.

Such study will show that there are a number of passages in the New Testament in which the word cannot and does not have the meaning immerse or submerge. We plead, therefore, with those who believe otherwise, to hear our side of the matter and not just to charge us with blindly following human traditions in not practicing baptism by immersion.

(1) One passage is Matthew 20:22, 23:

And Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, we are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of the Father.

To understand baptism as immersion in this passage is impossible. This is easily seen if one simply substitutes the word immersion or immersed for the word baptism or baptized in the verses. That Jesus is referring to his suffering and death is evident from the reference to His cup in Matthew 26:39: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” Drinking of that cup and being baptized are the same thing in Matthew 20:22, 23. Drinking and being immersed are two very different things.

To say that He was to be immersed in suffering or death or that his suffering and death are an immersion means little. As we will see, the idea is rather that he would come into the *closest possible contact* with suffering and death: He would *taste* suffering and death to the full. If we understand baptism to mean *coming into contact* with suffering and death, then the idea of baptism and drinking fit nicely together.

(2) Nor can baptism mean immersion in Mark 7:1-5, where Scripture speaks of the washing of cups, pots, brazen vessels, and of tables, and uses the Greek word “baptize” for these washings:

Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash (baptize themselves), they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing (baptizing) of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy

⁶Alexander Carson, *Baptism in its Modes and Subjects* (Philadelphia, 1845), p. 19.

disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?

Here, though the word “baptize” might mean immersion in reference to the cups, pots and vessels, it is ridiculous to think that it must have that meaning in relation to tables or to think that the Pharisees immersed themselves every time they came from the market..

(3) In Luke 11:37, 38 we read that Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees for not washing before dinner:

And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed (baptized himself) before dinner.

Here, too, the word translated “washed” in the KJV is a form of the Greek word “baptize” but cannot mean immersion in the sense that Jesus took a bath before dinner. It does not even necessarily refer to the immersion of his hands (cf. also the previous passage, Mk. 7:2-5). Jewish tradition summarized in the Talmud did not require immersion, but speaks of “hands made clean as far as the wrist:” Edersheim says, “If he poured the first water over the hands as far as the wrist and poured the second water over the hands beyond the wrist and the latter flowed back to the hands, the hands nevertheless become clean.”⁷ In Jewish tradition, therefore, the baptizing of hands referred to pouring water over the hands, not to immersing them.

(4) That baptism does not mean immersion is also clear from the verses that describe the gift of the Holy Spirit as a baptism. None of these passages refer to an immersion, but to the *outpouring, shedding forth* or *sprinkling* of the Spirit:

Isaiah 32:15 - Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.

Isaiah 44:3 - For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.

Joel 2:28, 29 - And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

Matthew 3:16 - And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.

John 1:32, 33 - And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

Acts 10:44-45 - While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

(5) Even more important is I Corinthians 10:2, which in the Greek speaks literally of the Israelites being *baptized* into Moses: “And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the

⁷Cf. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), vol. II, pp. 9-15.

sea.” Of this passage we will have more to say, but it should be noted here that the Israelites, though they were baptized, were *never* immersed in the cloud or sea: they went over on dry ground (Ex. 14:16, 22, 29; 15:19). Indeed, the verse speaks of their being baptized in the cloud and in the sea, but *into* Moses *by* the cloud and sea. Can the verse possibly be saying that they were immersed in Moses? The word must mean something else. It means once again that they were brought into the *closest possible contact* with Moses as a mediator.

(6) I Peter 3:20, 21 speaks of the flood as one of the great Old Testament pictures of baptism:

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This Old Testament baptism was not by immersion either, and the word “baptism” when used by Peter to describe the flood cannot mean “immersion.” Noah and his family were not immersed in the waters of the flood. Nor does it make any sense to read Peter’s reference to baptism as a reference to immersion: “The like figure whereunto immersion doth also now save us.” Rather the reference is to coming into contact with the resurrection of Christ, not in the water of baptism but in its spiritual reality.

(7) Paul speaks of baptism in I Corinthians 1:13 and Jesus Himself speaks of it in Matthew 28:19 as baptism in (literally “into”) the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

I Corinthians 1:13 - Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

* * * * *

Matthew 28:19 - Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

What could it possibly mean to be *immersed* in the *Name* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit or in any other name? It means, rather, to be brought into the *closest possible contact* with that great Name.

(8) The same is true of I Corinthians 12:13, which speaks of being baptized into one body:

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Can the Word of God be saying that we are *immersed* in one body? It is difficult to see how that could have any meaning. Indeed, in the rest of the verse the comparison is not to a bath or some kind of immersion but to drinking! Once again the emphasis is not on immersion but on the closest possible contact with something, in this case the body of Christ which is the church.

(9) Finally, Hebrews 9:10 speaks of the many “washings” of the Old Testament as “baptisms” and makes specific mention of three of those baptisms in verses 13, 19 and 21, none of which were immersions, but were sprinklings or pourings.

Verse 10 - Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

Verse 13 - For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

Verse 19 - For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people,

Verse 21 - Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

Those who do not know Greek should understand that the word translated “washings” in the KJV is really the Greek word “baptisms.” This can easily be checked in a good concordance. The washings or baptisms referred to were *all* by sprinkling or pouring (cf. Lev. 16:14, 19; Num. 19:18, 19; Ex. 24:7, 8; Lev. 14:4-7; 49-52).

What, then, does the word baptism mean? It means *to bring two things into the closest contact, so that the condition of the one is changed by the other*. One can therefore be baptized with fire, with the sword, with the Spirit, into death or into Moses, all of which bring about great changes in one’s condition, without ever being immersed in anything.

Dale defines “baptize” thus:

Whatever is capable of thoroughly changing the character, state or condition of any object, is capable of baptizing that object: and by such change of character, state or condition does, in fact, baptize it.⁸

Even today we use the word “baptism” in this sense when we speak of a soldier’s first battle as a “baptism by fire.” Then too the idea is not that he is immersed in enemy fire, but for the first time comes into close contact with it, and is forever changed by such contact.

Thus, to be baptized into Moses meant that Israel was brought into contact with him as the God-appointed and typical mediator. In that way their condition was changed from slavery to freedom. That Christ was baptized with death does not mean He was immersed in it, but that He was brought into the closest possible contact with it so that His condition was changed from being counted guilty before God, to being justified on our behalf.

When Scripture says, therefore, that we are baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-6), it is not saying that somehow we are immersed in those events (whatever that would mean). It refers instead to the fact that we through faith are brought into contact with His death and resurrection, by which our condition is completely changed:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

That is the meaning of baptism and the reality of baptism for us!

It should be evident that this is the real meaning of the word “baptism” from the fact that it perfectly fits all the Scripture passages in which the word is used. The meaning “immersion” does not so fit in spite of all the Baptist protestations to the contrary.

The point, then, of this chapter is that the word baptism does not and cannot mean only, ever and always immersion as the Baptists insist. In fact, the word says nothing about the mode

⁸Dale, *Classic Baptism*, pp. 352-54. Quoted in Adams, *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism*, p. 4.

of baptism. That must be determined from other Scriptures. If baptism does not mean immersion, however, one of the principle Baptist arguments for immersion is destroyed.

Chapter 2 The Symbolism of Baptism

Having seen what Scripture means by baptism, we must also understand that water baptism is symbolic. We do not believe that the water of baptism itself has any efficacy or power, as Romanism, Anglicanism and Lutheranism teach. Its value lies in the fact that it is a *symbol* or *picture*.

Its symbolism is very rich. Because it means “union” with Christ, it also points to all that we have in union with Him, cleansing from sin (Ezek. 36:25), forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), adoption into God’s family (Gal. 3:26, 27), regeneration (Jn. 3:5; Tit. 3:5), and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:25-27).⁹ To quote these passages is to see the rich symbolism of baptism:

Ezekiel 36:25-27 - Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

Acts 2:38 - Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Galatians 3:26, 27 - For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

John 3:5 - Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Titus 3:5 - Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

Especially, however, baptism symbolizes washing in Christ’s blood and Spirit which is the source of all these other blessings.

As a picture it has continuing value to the church, since it presents so graphically the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. One of the old Reformation creeds puts it this way: “Christ appointed this external washing with water, adding thereto this promise, that I am as certainly washed by His blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water, by which the filth of the body is commonly washed away.”¹⁰

All would agree, we are sure, that the water of baptism symbolizes the blood of Christ, and that the application of the water (leaving aside for a moment the matter of *how* it is applied) represents the washing away of sins by Christ’s precious blood. In other words, baptism represents the application of salvation *in justification* (the removal of the guilt of our sins) and *in*

⁹Rodger M. Crooks, *Salvation’s Sign and Seal: What do Paedo-baptists Really Believe?* (Christian Focus: Fearn, 1997).

¹⁰*Heidelberg Catechism*, 69.

sanctification (the removal of the filth and pollution of our sins). It represents the forgiveness of our sins as we receive that forgiveness in our justification. It also represents the actual cleansing of our hearts and lives when we are made holy and receive holiness in our sanctification.

That has consequences for the mode of baptism, since the application of Christ's blood to us is always represented in Scripture in terms of pouring or sprinkling (Is. 52:15; Heb. 10:22; 12:24; I Pet. 1:2), never in terms of immersion, unless, of course, one presupposes that the word "baptism" itself means "immersion." But this we have already shown to be a false assumption. Notice these passages!

Isaiah 52:15 - So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Hebrews 10:22 - Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 12:24 - And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

I Peter 1:2 - Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you and peace be multiplied.

Baptism in the blood of Christ is not by immersion but by sprinkling or pouring!

However, since the application of the water represents the washing away of our sins in justification and sanctification, the water of baptism *not only represents the blood of Christ, but also the Spirit of Christ*. He, the Spirit, is the One in whom and by whom we are washed (baptized) both for the remission and cleansing of sin.

This is reason why Scripture describes the gift of the Spirit as a baptism:

Matthew 3:11 - I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.

Acts 1:5 - For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

Acts 11:16 - Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

I Corinthians 12:13 - For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

The gift of the Spirit is a baptism, but not for any other reason than that the Spirit has an important function in the cleansing of sin. He is the one who applies to us the blood of Christ both for our justification and our sanctification, and since He does this by giving Himself to us, we can be said to be *baptized* not only in the blood but also *in* (or with) the Spirit when we are saved.

All this has many important consequences. For one thing, it is the answer to the error of Pentecostalism which teaches that the baptism in the Spirit is something additional and subsequent to salvation. That the baptism in or with the Spirit is nothing other than salvation is clear from Scripture:

Acts 2:38, 39 - Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall

receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

Romans 5:1-5 - Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Romans 8:9 - But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

I Corinthians 12:13 - For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. Which text compare with compared with John 7:37-39 - In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

Galatians 3:2 - This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Ephesians 1:13, 14 - In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Baptism in the Spirit, therefore, symbolizes especially those parts of salvation that we call regeneration and sanctification through which the filth of sin is washed away and we made holy.

This, too, has consequences for the mode of baptism. Not only the application of the blood of Christ, but also the application of the Spirit of Christ, is always described in Scripture in terms of sprinkling or pouring:

Isaiah 32:15 - Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.

Acts 2:17, 18 - And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

Acts 10:45 - And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

If the water of baptism represents *both* the blood and the Spirit of Christ, and if it invariably describes the application of *both* in terms of pouring or sprinkling, then it is difficult to see that the picture would be by some other mode. Picture and reality ought to match.

Chapter 3

The Sign and the Reality of Baptism

We have been speaking in the previous chapter especially of water baptism, that is, of the sign of baptism. But it is of the utmost importance, when speaking of baptism, to realize that the New Testament uses the word in two different ways. A failure to recognize this often leads to misunderstanding and error.

Sometimes when the New Testament uses the word "baptism" it is referring to the sacrament or rite, what we might call *water* baptism:

Matthew 3:7 - But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Matthew 28:19 - Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 2:38, 41 - Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.... Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

I Corinthians 10:2 - And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

This is really not baptism, properly speaking, but the *sign of* baptism—a symbol pointing to an invisible spiritual reality.

In distinction from the symbol or sign, the *reality* of baptism is the actual washing away of sins by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ. That is the reality of which water baptism is only a picture. Speaking of baptism in *that* sense it is entirely proper to say that baptism *saves* us. I Peter 3:21 speaks of baptism in this way: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The difference between baptism in this sense and the sign is the difference between *ritual* baptism and *real* baptism.¹¹

Many passages in the New Testament speak of this spiritual saving reality and not of the sign, that is, not of water baptism. The most notable of these passages are I Corinthians 12:13, Romans 6:3-6, Galatians 3:27, Ephesians 4:5, Colossians 2:12, and all those passages which speak of being baptized in or with the Holy Spirit:

I Corinthians 12:13 - For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Romans 6:3-6 - Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

¹¹Michael Kimmitt, *Baptism: Meaning, Mode and Subjects* (Trelawnyd: K & M Books, 1997), p. 9.

Galatians 3:27 - For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Ephesians 4:5 - One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Colossians 2:12 - Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

None of these passages is speaking of water baptism. Unless we realize this we will fall into all sorts of errors and come to very wrong conclusions, e.g., that *water* saves (I Pet. 3:21) or brings us into fellowship and communion with Christ (I Cor. 12:13).

The difference between sign and reality is clearly evident in the fact that not all who are baptized with water receive the *reality* of baptism. There are both in Baptist and in Paedobaptist churches those who never have the saving reality which water baptism pictures. Nor do all who remain unbaptized with water thereby forfeit the spiritual reality of baptism by which we are saved. Many who die in infancy unbaptized do inherit the kingdom of heaven, especially from among those infants who come from Christian families and inherit it because though unbaptized with water, they are baptized with the blood and Spirit of Christ.

Nevertheless, the two, sign and reality, are related. The one points to the other, and that may not be forgotten. A sign that said "Chicago" but pointed in the opposite direction would only mislead and deceive. A sign must always point to the reality if it is to be of help to us. Thus, the sign must match the reality, and the reality must match the sign.

This difference between the sign of baptism and the spiritual reality is called by Ursinus "double water:"

There is, therefore, in baptism a double water; the one external and visible, which is elementary; the other internal, invisible and heavenly, which is the blood and Spirit of Christ. There is, also, a double washing in baptism; the one external, visible, and signifying, viz: the remission of sins on account of the blood of Christ shed for us, and our regeneration by the Holy Spirit and engrafting into his body, which is spiritual, and perceived only by faith and the Spirit. Lastly, there is a double dispenser of baptism: the one an external dispenser of the external, which is the minister of the church, baptizing us by his hand with water; the other an internal dispenser of the internal, which is Christ himself, baptizing us with his blood and Spirit.¹²

The question of the mode of water baptism can, therefore, be answered by examining the mode of spiritual baptism. If we ask, how are we baptized by the blood and Spirit of Christ? The answer of Scripture is "by sprinkling or pouring." It would be strange, not to say misleading, if sign and reality did not match at that point.

By the same token, the reality must also "match" the sign. It would not do at all to have the *eating* of bread and drinking of wine, though they also represent the death of Christ, as symbols of the *cleansing* of sin by Christ's sacrifice. In baptism cleansing is the reality and so the sign which points to that reality must also speak of cleansing.

Indeed, Christ has given us the sign to help us understand and believe the reality. If I say, "Can anything really wash away *my* sin - wash it *all* away? That is too much to believe. My sins are too great and too many." Then the sign of baptism says, "As really as water washes away the filth of the body, so really does the blood of Christ wash away sin." Thus the sacrament of

¹²Zacarias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (New Jersey; Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.), p. 372.

baptism encourages and supports my faith in Him and His sacrifice.

We believe that Baptists are wrong at this point in their insistence on immersion. Since the blood and Spirit of Christ, the two things represented by the water of baptism, are applied by sprinkling or pouring, to administer the sign by immersion reduces the correspondence between sign and reality and lessens the effectiveness of the sign insofar as it is supposed to point us to Christ's blood and Spirit as the only hope of spiritual cleansing.

This is true especially in the fact that baptism by immersion suggests that it is the quantity of the water, and therefore of the blood and Spirit which makes the difference, when in fact, it is not the quantity, but the value of the blood and Spirit which determines their power. They are powerful not because there is enough of the blood of Christ to immerse the whole world, but because it is the blood of the Son of God, one drop of whose blood is sufficient to make complete atonement for sin.

Chapter 4

The Biblical Ground for Sprinkling

In discussing baptism we do not wish to antagonize anyone or cause or further division within the church of Christ. It is our deepest desire to see unity in these matters, especially between those who are otherwise agreed with us. But, such unity is not furthered by silence. Unity is in the truth, and the truth of Scripture is that sprinkling is the proper mode of baptism.

We often hear that there is no Biblical basis for sprinkling infants and that such a practice is simply a carry-over from Roman Catholicism. Indeed, there are a number of anti-Calvinist books on the market that simply assume that if a church baptizes infants it must also be wrong on other matters.¹³

We not only believe that there is a sound Biblical basis for the practice of sprinkling, but believe that it is the only mode of baptism recognized by Scripture! Let us look at the matter more closely.

As to the charge that sprinkling is simply a carry-over from Romanism, we would point out: (1) that this is no argument at all. If everything Rome teaches that is found in Protestantism must be discarded, then even the doctrine of the Trinity must go! (2) Not only that, but we have in our possession a Romish liturgy for the baptism of children which says in its instructions for the persons performing the baptism: "He *immerses* the child or pours water on it."¹⁴

Along similar lines, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

The essential rite of Baptism consists in immersing the candidate in water or pouring water on his head, while pronouncing the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

Rome, too, immerses. The "argument" that sprinkling is Romanist can be set aside, therefore.

As to the Biblical ground for sprinkling or pouring, the evidence, it seems to us is incontrovertible. We would point out the following:

(1) All the ceremonial baptisms of the Old Testament were by sprinkling or pouring. That these are real baptisms is clear from Hebrews 9:10, where the New Testament Greek word "baptisms" (translated in the KJV as "washings"—cf. also vss. 13, 19, 21) is used for these washings.

Hebrews 9:10 - Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

(2) As already noted, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, symbolized by water baptism, is always described in Scripture in terms of sprinkling or pouring:

Isaiah 44:3 - For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.

Ezekiel 36:25 - Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be

¹³Cf. for example the wretched anti-Calvinist pamphlet by Paul A. Bailey, *The Supreme Irony* (Bicester: Penfold, 1996).

¹⁴This is a card with the imprimatur of the Roman Catholic Church, about 6 x 9 inches, printed on both sides with detailed instructions for the priest performing the baptism. No publication information is provided on the card.

¹⁵*Catechism of the Catholic Church - Popular and Definitive Edition* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 2000), p. 289.

clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. (And that this is a reference to the gift of the Spirit is clear from verse 27, "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.")

Joel 2:28, 29 - And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

Malachi 3:10 - Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Acts 8:16 - (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

Acts 10:44, 45 - While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 11:15 - And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

(3) Likewise, the application to us of the blood of Christ, also symbolized by the water of baptism, is always described in Scripture as being by sprinkling:

Isaiah 52:15 - So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Hebrews 10:22 - Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 12:24 - And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

I Peter 1:2 - Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you and peace be multiplied.

(4) The great typical baptisms of the Old Testament, and they *are* baptisms, according to the New Testament use of the word, were not by immersion:

I Corinthians 10:1, 2 - Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

I Peter 3:20, 21 - Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, the only ones who were *immersed* in these typical baptisms were Pharaoh with his armies and the ungodly world of Noah's day! Thus, too, the wicked shall be immersed in the

lake of fire in the end.

That needs emphasis. In the two great typical baptisms of the Old Testament it was not the believers who were immersed. It was not Noah and his family who were immersed in the first great typical baptism of the Old Testament, but rather the ungodly world. Likewise at the Red Sea it was not Moses and the Israelites who were immersed, but Pharaoh and his army. There was immersion on both occasions, but it was not the baptism that took place. So too in the New Testament, the ungodly will be "immersed" in the lake of fire:

Revelation 20:13-15 - And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

(5) As we hope to show in a subsequent chapter, the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) actually says nothing about the mode of baptism.

(6) Finally and more importantly, the baptism of Jesus, when looked at in the light of Scripture *cannot have been by immersion* (this, however, we will deal with in chapter 7).

Immersion is not the proper mode of baptism, therefore, according to the testimony of Scripture, and even those who argue that both sprinkling and immersion are legitimate modes of baptism have not given sufficient heed to the testimony of Scripture. Immersion, if it is anything, is a sign of judgment, not of salvation.

This raises the question whether baptism by immersion ought to be accepted as legitimate baptism. In light of what we have said it is tempting to say that they ought not be, but the objections to rebaptizing someone who has received trinitarian baptism are even greater (see Part I, Chapter 14), and so it has always been the practice of Reformed churches to accept these as legitimate baptisms. With this we agree.

Chapter 5 Immersion as a Sign of Judgment

Not only are the Baptist arguments for immersion invalid, but immersion, as we have suggested in the previous chapter, is not even a sign of salvation but rather of judgment. Immersion is not, therefore, an acceptable, though less preferable mode of baptism, as many Paedobaptist writers suggest: it is not a legitimate mode of baptism at all!

There are two great baptisms in the Old Testament, the salvation of Noah and his family in the great Flood and the passage of Israel through the Red Sea. The Flood is called a baptism in I Peter 3:20, 21 and the Red Sea a baptism in I Corinthians 10:1, 2:

I Peter 3:20, 21 - Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 10:1, 2 - Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

These passages have been cited before and will be coming up for discussion again, but here we should notice that in these two great Old Testament baptisms, *none of the people of God were immersed*. So intent are some Baptist writers on proving immersion that they suggest that the Red Sea was a baptism by immersion - the Sea on both sides, and the cloud above, so that Israel was surrounded by water and therefore immersed. Gill says, for example:

As the Israelites were under the cloud, and so under water, and covered with it, as persons baptized by immersion are; and passed through the sea, that standing up as a wall on both sides of them, with the cloud over them; thus surrounded they were as persons immersed in water, and so said to be baptized.¹⁶

This is simply playing around with the testimony of Scripture, however, for Scripture clearly indicates that the Israelites passed through the Sea dry shod:

Isaiah 11:15, 16 - And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dryshod. And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

Nor were they completely surrounded with water, for the cloud was not above them but behind them as they passed through the Sea:

Exodus 14:19, 20 - And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. More important, however, is the fact that both in the Flood and at the Red Sea those who

¹⁶John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), volume II, p. 643.

were immersed were not God's people but the ungodly; at the Flood the whole of the ungodly world and at the Red Sea the armies of Egypt and Pharaoh their leader. On both occasions immersion was a sign of destruction and judgment.

This is true in the New Testament as well. We are aware that many, both Baptists and Paedobaptists, are convinced that the baptisms of Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17) and of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) were by immersion. With these two incidents we will deal in the chapters that follow. Leaving them aside, therefore, the only clear example of immersion in the New Testament is the immersion of the wicked in the lake of fire:

Revelation 20:13-15 - And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

There too immersion is a sign not of salvation but of judgment.

It is ironic, to say the least, that Baptists with all their emphasis on believer's baptism are actually baptizing in the way that God in wrath "baptizes" the ungodly world. With all their emphasis on immersion as the proper and Biblical mode of baptism, they are actually applying what is a sign of wrath and judgment and not of salvation.

Chapter 6 Sprinkling as a Sign of Grace

One of the reasons we believe the question of the mode of baptism to be so important is that this sign of baptism when properly administered by sprinkling points us to the truth that salvation is by grace alone. That ought not surprise us, since baptism symbolizes our salvation and it would be surprising indeed if it did not say something about salvation by grace.

As we will see in a later chapter (Part II, Chapter 4), baptism in Baptist thinking really marks our faith and repentance, that is, our response to saving grace, and not God's gracious work. Put more simply, in the immersion of adults almost all the emphasis is on what we do, whereas in the sprinkling of infants *the emphasis is all on what God does*.

Believing that water baptism symbolizes salvation and that salvation is all of grace, we believe that the sprinkling of infants is not only Biblical, but also a powerful testimony to the gracious character of our salvation. For this reason also we sprinkle those who are baptized.

Baptism by sprinkling or pouring beautifully symbolizes salvation by grace alone in that the water of baptism is applied "from above" pointing to the heavenly source of grace and salvation. Immersion does not and cannot symbolize this, and though other paedobaptist writers have pointed this out, it does not seem to matter to Baptists, probably because they see baptism as marking our response rather than God's work.

Sprinkling or pouring, then, point to the truth that taught in Isaiah 45:8;

Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it.

Indeed, Isaiah 32:15 speaks of the gift of the Spirit, symbolized in baptism as a pouring out from on high:

Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.

In the New Testament this is emphasized as well. In James 1:17 we read:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Thus the many New Testament passages which speak of the outpouring of the Spirit are emphasizing not only the *gift* of the Spirit but also that the Spirit is the Spirit of God who brings salvation as a gift from heaven and from God. And since baptism symbolizes this gift of the Spirit it is appropriate and right that baptism also be administered in a way that reminds us of the heavenly source of our salvation.

There are, then, two elements here: (1) the fact that sprinkling or pouring points to the grace and Spirit who are "from above;" and (2) the fact that being administered in this way baptism points to the fact that God is Author of our salvation. This, as we have seen and will see again, is the proper emphasis of baptism. Baptism is not a sign of our work, that is, of our response to God's grace, but of the work of God Himself in freely granting and bestowing salvation.

All this is beautifully symbolized in baptism when it is properly administered, that is, not by our being put into the water, but by the water which symbolizes the cleansing grace and Spirit of God being administered to us from above, that is, by sprinkling or pouring.

Chapter 7

The Baptism of Christ

The argument of the Baptist for immersion that is based on the baptism of Christ has to do primarily with the prepositions used in the verses which describe that baptism. Matthew 3:16 says; "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway *out of* the water." Mark 1:10 uses similar language: "And straightway coming *up out of* the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him."

It is simply assumed by most Baptists and by many Paedobaptists, that these prepositions, "out of" and "up out of" indicate that Jesus was under the water as a result of his being baptized by immersion and came up out of the water after being immersed by John. Gill says:

That this was the way in which it was anciently administered, is clear from several instances of baptism recorded in Scripture, and the circumstances attending them; as that of our Lord, of whom it is said, that when he baptized (sic) he went up straightway out of the water, which supposes he had been in it.¹⁷

Even a convinced paedobaptist like Calvin believed that Jesus was baptized by immersion and simply takes it for granted that it was so:

Moreover, from these words we may infer that John and Christ administered Baptism by total immersion, though we must not worry overmuch about the outward rite so long as it accords with the spiritual truth and the Lord's institution and rule.¹⁸

These assumptions are not supported by Scripture itself.

There are several considerations that lead to this conclusion:

(1) There is first of all the argument about the words used. In both texts the Greek preposition *apo*, translated "out of" is used. This word is translated "from" 372 times and "out of" only 27 times in the New Testament.

Note the following table:

Greek Preposition	Possible translation	Times so translated	If translated this way the passage under discussion reads ...
<i>apo</i>	out of (KJV)	27	Jesus went up straightway <i>out of</i> the water...
Matthew	from	372	Jesus went up straightway <i>from</i> the water...
<i>apo</i>	(up) out of (KJV)	27	And straightway coming up <i>out of</i> the water...
Mark	from	372	And straightway coming up <i>from</i> the water...

The point is that these prepositions do not necessarily imply that Jesus was in the water at all, as the alternative translation, "from," so clearly shows. Indeed, the translation, "from," is preferable both in light of the fact that Greek has another word better translated "out of," and in light of the fact that the translation of *apo* as from is far more common in the New Testament.

This preposition, therefore, is not describing the baptism at all and say nothing about the mode of baptism. They do not imply immersion or sprinkling, and any argument for one mode

¹⁷Gill, *Body of Divinity*, volume II, p. 641.

¹⁸John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. T.H.L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, volume I, p. 78.

or the other must be based on other information.

(2) There is a further consideration, however, in the story of Jesus' baptism. It may not be overlooked that He was baptized at 30 years of age (Lk. 3:23), by a priest (John was a priest—Lk. 1:5, 13), with water, and that He said at the time of His baptism, "thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

There were rules laid down by the law for the consecration of a priest, all of which rules were fulfilled in the baptism of Jesus. That He fulfilled "all righteousness" by His baptism, then, can only refer to the fact that He fulfilled the righteous demands of the law. What law? The law He fulfilled can be nothing but the law for the consecration of a priest. A priest was not consecrated until he was *30 years old* (Num. 4:3, 47). At that time he was consecrated *by another priest* (Ex. 29:9) and was consecrated by *sprinkling with water* (Num. 8:6, 7).

So that we have these verse in front of us, let us quote them in full:

Numbers 4:46, 47 - All those that were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the chief of Israel numbered, after their families, and after the house of their fathers, *from thirty years old* and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that came to do the service of the ministry, and the service of the burden in the tabernacle of the congregation.

Exodus 29:9 - And *thou* (Moses was also a priest) shalt gird them with girdles, Aaron and his sons, and put the bonnets on them: and the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and *thou* shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons.

Numbers 8:6, 7 - Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: *Sprinkle water of purifying upon them*, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean.

Christ was not of the tribe of Levi, but was nevertheless called and ordained of God to be the great High Priest of His people. Hebrews 7:13-17 remind us of these things:

For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

That Christ's baptism had to do with His work and calling as a priest is evident from the fact that He Himself later made reference to His baptism as proof of His priestly authority. When challenged by the Jews concerning his authority to cleanse the temple, which was the work of a priest, He made reference to His baptism by John and asked the leaders of the Jews if John's baptism was a legitimate baptism, implying that if it was, then He was indeed a priest and had every right to cleanse the temple (Lk. 20:1-8):

And it came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders, And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority? And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying,

If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. And they answered, that they could not tell whence it was. And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

In fulfilling the law, therefore, Christ could not have been baptized in any other way than by sprinkling. Else He would have been breaking the law, not fulfilling it. As Spencer says, “Not only is there not one shred of evidence to remotely suggest that Jesus was immersed, but such a ‘baptism’ would have contradicted, nullified, and denied all that it stood for.”¹⁹ Christ's baptism is not proof, therefore, that immersion is the proper mode of baptism, but exactly the opposite. His own explanation of His baptism reminds us that also in His ordination and consecration to the priesthood He had to keep and fulfil the law. We ask those who believe otherwise to consider this carefully.

¹⁹Duane E. Spencer, *Holy Baptism: Word Keys Which Unlock the Covenant* (Geneva Ministries: Tyler, 1984), p. 37.

Chapter 8 John's Baptism

Other favorite passages of immersionists are those which speak of John baptizing *in* the Jordan:

Mark 1:5 - And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him *in the river of Jordan*, confessing their sins.

Mark 1:9, 10 - And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John *in Jordan*. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him:

Matthew 3:5, 6 - Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him *in Jordan*, confessing their sins.

It is simply assumed that this refers to the mode of John's baptism, that is, that his baptizing them in the Jordan means that they were immersed in the Jordan River by John, but that assumption is false. The word "in" can just as well refer to the place where John baptized as is evident from Mark 1:4 which speaks of John baptizing *in* the desert and John 3:23 which speaks of him baptizing *in* Aenon, an area near the Jordan River.

Mark 1:4 - John did baptize *in the wilderness*, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

John 3:23 - And John also was baptizing *in Aenon* near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

Comparing Mark 1:5 and 9 and Matthew 3:6 with the many other passages which use the word "in" with a place name will show that when so used in Mark 1 and Matthew 3 "in" refers not to the mode of baptism, but to the place where John baptized, and can just as well be translated "at" or "near," thus giving in English a truer sense of the word. Mark 1:5 could just as well and better be translated "at the river of Jordan" and Matthew 3:6 as "at the Jordan." That translation would at least make it clear that passages say nothing at all about the mode of baptism.

There are, however, several other passages which we must examine in connection with John's baptism.

a. John 1:19-28.

And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were

done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Let us remember here that John was a priest, the son of a priest (Lk. 1:5ff), and would have been accustomed to performing baptisms.²⁰ The fact that priests and Levites were sent by the Jewish leaders to question John on this point (Jn. 1:19), and the fact that they asked about his baptism shows that John was indeed doing the work of a priest and doing it in the manner of the Old Testament priests: “And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?”

These leaders knew from the Old Testament Scriptures:

(1) That Messiah would baptize:

Is. 52:15 - So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

(2) That on at least one occasion Elijah had baptized, when he poured 12 jars of water on his sacrifice at Carmel:

I Kings 18:33-35 - And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.

(3) That Messiah would come “in the spirit and power of Elijah:”

Luke 1:17 - And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

(4) That Messiah would be “the prophet” of whom Moses had spoken:

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 - The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

(5) That Messiah would be the purifier of God’s people:

Acts 3:19-26 - Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea,

²⁰Cf. chapter 7 above.

and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

And, since John was not doing the ordinary work of priest in the temple, they thought that he, one who was performing priestly baptisms, was either the Messiah himself or Elijah or “that prophet.”

This is important. It shows, first of all, that John’s baptism was not essentially different from the baptisms of the Old Testament. If John’s baptism had been something completely different from the baptisms of the Old Testament there would have been no reason for asking this question, nor for sending the priests and Levites to ask it.

The question of the priests and Levites also suggests, therefore that John’s baptism was by sprinkling or pouring and not by immersion since the “baptisms” of the Old Testament were ordinarily by sprinkling or pouring and not by immersion. If John had baptized by immersion the priests and Levites would not even have recognized what he was doing as the work of an Old Testament priest. The argument is along these lines, therefore:

John was performing baptisms, something which was the province of the priest in the OT.

John had the right to do this as a priest and the son of priest.

That he performed his baptisms away from the temple suggested that he might be either the Messiah or Elijah returned or “that prophet” of whom the Scriptures testified.

If he was none of these three, then the question had to be asked, “Why baptizest thou then?”

But since the Jews did not question either his right to baptize or the manner of his baptism the clear implication is (1) that his baptisms were recognized as of the same kind as those of the OT; and (2) that he baptized by sprinkling, since that was the Old Testament manner.

b. John 3:23-28.

And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison. Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

This passage closely parallels John 1:19-28, for it indicates that John’s baptizing raised questions among the Jews about “purifying.” That word, “purifying,” can only refer to the ritual purifications of the Old Testament and the questions show that John’s baptizing was identified by the Jews with these ritual purifications. In this case they were not concerned about John’s authority but about the fact that Jesus was performing what they considered to be the same kind of purifications and attracting more followers than John. Nevertheless, the fact that they identified both John’s baptisms and Jesus’ with those ritual purifications leads to the conclusion that those baptisms were performed in the same way as the purifications of the Old Testament.

That was part of the calling of a priest. Every Old Testament washing, ritual purification, and sprinkling is referred to in Hebrews 9:10 as a baptism. The KJV speaks of “diverse

washings” but the word translated “washings,” as we have already seen, is really the New Testament word “baptisms.” According to the original Greek, therefore, all these “washing” were baptisms in the New Testament sense of that word.

These baptisms were an important and large part of the work of the priests and we will be looking at them more closely in another chapter. But the point here is that John’s priestly office allowed him to be a “baptizer” but also meant that the baptisms he performed would have been performed as were the Old Testament baptisms, none of which were by any other mode than by sprinkling or pouring.

Chapter 9

The Baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch

In this chapter, continuing our study of the mode of baptism, we wish to look at the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-39). This, along with the baptism of Christ, is taken by most Baptists to be the clearest example in Scripture of baptism by immersion.

We read in Acts 8:36-39:

And as they went on their way, they came to a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

Here again the argument rests primarily on the prepositions used.²¹ It is usually assumed by Baptists, as well as by many Paedobaptists, that the words "down into the water" and "up out of the water" describe the *baptism* of the Eunuch and therefore also indicate that he was baptized by immersion (Acts 8:38, 39). There are problems with this.

(1) The prepositions used, "(down) into" (*eis* in Greek) and "out of" (*ek* in Greek) do not imply immersion at all. They do not necessarily even imply that anyone was in the water. The word translated "into" in Acts 8:38 (*eis*) is translated in the King James Version of the New Testament in many different ways including "at" (20 times), "in" (131 times), "into" (571 times), "to" (282 times), "toward" (32 times), "unto" (208 times). This can be checked with a good concordance. The word translated "out of" (*ek*) in the King James can also be translated very differently: "from" (182 times), "up from" (2 times), and "out of" (131 times). Substituting these different translations in the two verses will immediately show what a difference that makes. We beg our readers to take the time to do so. The following tables will help:

	Possible translation	Times so trans	If translated this way the passage under discussion reads ...
<i>eis</i>	(down) into (KJV)	571	And they went down both <i>into</i> the water...
	at	20	And they went down both <i>at</i> the water...
	in	131	And they went down both <i>in</i> the water...
	to	282	And they went down both <i>to</i> the water...
	toward	32	And they went down both <i>toward</i> the water...
	unto	208	And they went down both <i>unto</i> the water...

This table makes it clear that only one of the possible translations, the second, does not make sense, but also shows that the preposition does not necessarily imply that Philip and eunuch were even in the water, i.e., "they went down both unto the water." Even the translation "into" does not in itself imply that either or both of them was actually under the water. One can

²¹Cf. chapter 7 above.

be said to go down into the water and only be standing in the water.

	Possible translation	Times so trans	If translated this way the passage under discussion reads ...
<i>ek</i>	(up) out of (KJV)	131	When they were come up <i>out of</i> the water...
	from	182	When they were come up <i>from</i> the water...
	up from	2	When they were come up <i>from</i> the water...

Again, the point is simply that these prepositions do not necessarily imply immersion and do not say anything about the mode of the eunuch's baptism.

As a further example of what we are talking about we refer our readers to John 20:4 and Luke 12:36 where these words are translated "to" and "from. John 20:4 says, "The other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first *to (eis)* the sepulchre." Luke 12:36 reads, "And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he shall return *from (ek)* the wedding."

These words, then, are *not describing the baptism at all*, but what took place immediately before and after it. If they are not describing the baptism, they are also not describing a baptism by immersion. There is simply no evidence in the passage regarding the mode of baptism. Here too that must be determined from other passages.

The proof that these prepositions are not describing the baptism is easily found in the text, since they are applied *both to the eunuch and to Philip!* If they are describing an immersion baptism then Philip *also baptized himself by immersion*. He also "went down into" and "came up out of" the water. Either they describe the baptism by immersion of both, Philip baptizing himself as well as the eunuch, or they do not describe the baptism at all. Indeed, it is almost as though Scripture is emphasizing this for *twice* it speaks of the fact that *both* went down into the water (vs. 38).

The only possible conclusion, therefore, if we will but pay attention to Scripture, is that Acts 8:36-39 says nothing at all about the mode of baptism. Acts 8:36-39 is not proof for baptism by immersion. It simply does not say how Philip baptized the eunuch. The argument for sprinkling or immersion must be based on other passages.

Chapter 10

Old Testament Baptisms

The two great Old Testament baptisms, the Flood and the passage of Israel through the Red Sea have some bearing on the whole question of the mode of baptism, if only because these passages are consistently misinterpreted by the Baptists. They insist that baptism means immersion—only, ever, always immersion. This is not true in the case of these typical baptisms, and so the Baptist argument is proved false.

It must be emphasized, first of all, that these Old Testament events were *baptisms*. The New Testament itself defines them as such, using the New Testament word, the same word that is always used in the New Testament to describe both the water sign of baptism and the spiritual reality to which that sign points. The New Testament defines the Flood as a baptism in I Peter 3:21; "The like figure whereunto even *baptism* doth also now save us." The passage of Israel through the Red Sea is also called a baptism in I Corinthians 10:1, 2; "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all *baptized* unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea."

Recognizing the fact that the New Testament so clearly identifies these events as baptisms, some Baptists have tried to find immersion in the record of these Old Testament events. It has been suggested, for example, that the Israelites were immersed in the Red Sea in that the cloud was above them and the water on both sides. We have already quoted John Gill along these lines. Another Baptist writer, arguing that baptism means burial and therefore immersion writes: "The children of Israel were completely buried in the sea and in the cloud, when they were 'baptized into Moses.'"²² Some Baptists have even suggested that the Israelites came through the sea completely soaked.

All this is, however, contrary to the testimony of Scripture. For one thing Scripture clearly states that the Israelites came through the Sea on dry ground (Ex. 14:16, 22, 29; 15:19) and that they themselves were "dry shod" and not soaking wet (Is. 11:15, 16):

Exodus 14:16, 22, 29 - But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.... And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.... But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

Exodus 15:19 - For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

Isaiah 11:15, 16 - And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dryshod. And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

Scripture also makes it clear that the Israelites were not surrounded by water as some

²²J. J. Sims, *Christian Baptism: the Plain Teaching of the Word of God* (Pickering & Inglis: Glasgow, n.d.), p. 27.

Baptists suggest. The cloud was not over them, at least not when they passed through the sea, but behind them, separating them from the Egyptians (Ex. 14:19, 20):

And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.

Even more importantly, however, the fact is that the Israelites were in no sense of the word immersed, nor did they even get wet in this baptism. This was the driest baptism on record, contradicting the Baptist assumption that a person is not baptized unless he is completely wet. All of which is to say that neither the amount of water nor the manner of its application are the important things in this Old Testament baptism.

What was true of Israel at the Red Sea was also true of Noah and his family. In that baptism, too, no one who was baptized was immersed, even though the water saved them. Noah and his family were born up by the water and carried into a new world, but the only ones who were immersed were the ungodly.

There is no way, therefore, that baptism always means immersion, all arguments of the Baptists to the contrary. Nor can these events be dismissed by an appeal to the fact that they were in the Old Testament and were but types, for the New Testament clearly and unmistakably identifies them as baptisms.

Chapter 11 Old Testament Prophecies of Baptism

Further evidence for sprinkling as the Biblical mode of baptism is found in the Old Testament prophecies of baptism. There are several steps we must follow in looking at these prophecies.

In the first place, we must remember that water baptism is only a sign. The reality of baptism is the washing away of sin by the blood and Spirit of Christ our Savior. There seems to be little disagreement about this, for Scripture's testimony is clear. That the washing away of sin by Christ's blood is baptism in its deepest spiritual reality is clear from Titus 3:5, I Corinthians 6:11, and Revelation 1:5. Titus 3:5, 6 and I Corinthians 6:11 also show that the work of the Spirit in sanctifying us is properly called baptism.

Titus 3:5 - Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

I Corinthians 6:11 - And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Revelation 1:5 - And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

If this is true, then all the Old Testament passages which prophesy the death of Christ and its saving power and the work of the Spirit as Sanctifier, are prophesying of baptism, that is, of the spiritual reality of baptism to which the water sign points. That spiritual reality, when prophesied in the Old Testament, is customarily described in terms of sprinkling or pouring.

Not only that, but if the spiritual reality, prophesied in the Old Testament is described as a sprinkling or pouring, is it strange that the sign should also be by sprinkling or pouring? Ought not the sign correspond to the reality?

The passages, then, that prophesy the work of the Spirit in terms of sprinkling are Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 36:25-27, Joel 3:28; 29, and Malachi 3:10.

Isaiah 44:3 says:

For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring" (notice the reference to infant baptism as well).

The pouring of water here is the Old Testament figure for the outpouring of the Spirit.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 speaks of sprinkling:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgment, and do them.

The cleansing with water is once again the equivalent of the gift of the Spirit of God as Sanctifier.

Joel 2:28, 29, the passage Peter preached on at Pentecost, describes the gift of the Spirit

also in terms of pouring:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

Finally, Malachi 3:10, though it does not speak specifically of the Spirit must be understood as prophesying that event, for the blessings of God, so great that there is not room enough to receive them, must be the blessings of salvation given by the Spirit of Christ (Eph. 1:3; 3:16-19). The verse from Malachi which prophesies this is verse 10:

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Likewise, the application to us of the blood of Christ, also symbolized by the water of baptism, is always prophesied and described in the Old Testament as being by sprinkling in Isaiah 52:15;

So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

This passage is, of course, the introduction to Isaiah 53 and its precious and abiding testimony concerning the death of Christ and its saving benefits.

Indeed, every passage of the Old Testament which speaks of the blood of the sacrifices which symbolized the shed blood of our Savior, speaks of that blood being sprinkled or poured (Ex. 9:8, 10; 24:6, 8; 29:16, 20; Lev. 4:7 18, 25, 30, 34; 14:7, 51; 17:13; etc.). Even the water that was used in the cleansing rituals of the Old Testament was sprinkled or poured. This in itself is a powerful testimony for all these sprinklings and pourings were symbolic of true baptism, the cleansing power of the blood and Spirit of Christ, but when one adds the testimony of Hebrews 9 which identifies these sprinklings and pourings as "baptisms," the testimony of Scripture is unmistakable and irresistible.

All the prophecies, therefore, of the Old Testament which prophesy the reality of baptism and have something to say about the mode, speak of sprinkling or pouring. That is no small testimony concerning the manner of the application of the sign of baptism. The water which symbolized the application of the blood and Spirit of Christ, we believe, ought to be administered in the same way that the reality is administered, by sprinkling or pouring.

Chapter 12

Baptism with the Holy Spirit

Both the Old Testament (Is. 44:3; Ezek. 36:35; Joel 2:28; 29) and the New Testament (Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; 2:3, 4, 16, 17) speak often of baptism in or with the Holy Spirit. There are, of course, many issues involved in understanding this concept including the important question of whether or not this baptism with the Holy Spirit is a kind of "second blessing" of salvation.

Without entering into the whole controversy with the Charismatics and Pentecostals over the meaning of this baptism, we believe that the baptism in or with the Holy Spirit is "baptism," that is, part of the washing away of sins by the Spirit of Christ, that it refers to the spiritual reality of baptism of which the water is only a sign and symbol.

That water baptism is a picture of baptism with the Spirit is clear from Matthew 3:11:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.

John, by putting himself in the position of everyone who baptizes with water, reminds us that water baptism is only a picture of a spiritual reality performed not by a man but by Christ Himself. Water baptism is a picture of baptism with the Spirit.

To understand this, we must remember that there are two parts to our salvation, though not two distinct stages as those who believe in a "second blessing" teach. The removal or washing away of our sins involves first of all our justification, that is, the removal of the guilt of our sins, so that we are counted innocent by God Himself as Judge. This aspect of the washing away of sins is accomplished by the blood of Christ and the water of baptism is symbolic of that blood first of all.

The washing away of our sins also includes our sanctification, however. Sanctification is the washing away of the actual filth and presence of sin in our lives and hearts. That work is accomplished by the Spirit of Christ, and He also is symbolized in the water of baptism. This second aspect of the symbolism is often forgotten, even though Scripture speaks so often of baptism in or with the Holy Spirit.

The point that needs to be made here, however, is that the baptism in or with the Holy Spirit is *always* described in Scripture in terms of sprinkling or pouring. We have already seen that in connection with the Old Testament prophecies which foretell the gift of the Spirit, but the New Testament passages leave us with the same testimony.

There is good reason for this. That the Spirit is always poured out or shed forth or sprinkled upon believers is an important reminder in Scripture that He is the Spirit of God, sent from heaven above by God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and that He works the work of God according to the purpose of God.

That emphasis is especially important today, when it is so often apparently forgotten that the Holy Spirit is a person, the third person of the Trinity, and not some *thing* to be manipulated and given by mere men, who show themselves to be mere religious hucksters and tricksters. Jesus Himself reminds us of this in John 3:3, 7, where He not only tells us that we must be born again but that we must be born from above (the word in John 3:3 and 7 can be translated as "from above" and should be translated that way, we believe, in light of the chapter's emphasis on the sovereignty of the work of the Holy Spirit).

John himself compares his water baptism and the baptism with the Holy Spirit in Mark

1:8; “I indeed have baptised you with water, but he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost.” There are other reasons why this passage is important, not the least that it establishes the identity of John’s baptism with Spirit baptism and therefore with all other New Testament baptisms. As far as the mode of baptism is concerned, however, it seems strange, to say the least that John would have meant: “I indeed have immersed you in water, but he shall pour out upon you the Holy Ghost.” At very least that would sever all meaningful connection between John’s baptism and Christ’s.

The identity of mode both in the sign and in the reality is one of the keys to a proper understanding of baptism. *The Baptist destroys this identity by insisting that the mode of the spiritual reality is very different from the mode of the sign.*

Chapter 13

Baptism into Christ

One of the key Baptist arguments for immersion is the supposed correspondence between immersion and Christ's burial and resurrection. According to every Baptist writer, we go down into His death in the same way that the baptized person goes under the water and come up again through His resurrection in the same way that a baptized person comes up again out of the water. This is, however, a very superficial argument.

a. Romans 6:3-5.

The key passage for Baptists who make this comparison between death, burial, resurrection and baptism is Romans 6:3-5 which speaks of being buried with Christ by baptism and of being baptized into Him. This is to a Baptist indisputable proof of baptism by immersion. The passage reads:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

The Baptist argument is that this burial by baptism is best pictured by immersion, since immersion is a going down into the water just as burial is a going down under the earth. Baptism by immersion, therefore, symbolizes this burial in a way that sprinkling cannot. Further, that baptism ought to be by immersion, is indicated in the passage by the word "into." We ought, the Baptists say, be put *into* the water, not just have it sprinkled on us, to symbolize the fact that we are baptized *into* Christ.

This argument has a lot of appeal and is used also by Paedobaptists who believe that immersion, along with sprinkling, is a legitimate Biblical mode of baptism. What seems to be proof for immersion vanishes, however, in the face of some careful study.

At issue here is the meaning of baptism which we have discussed previously.²³ "Baptism," as we have seen does not mean "immersion," but rather it means bringing two things into contact so that the condition of one is changed by the other. Thus one can be baptized by a sword or by fire as well as by water. In Matthew 3:11 Jesus speaks of being baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost. Does He mean that we are immersed in fire and in the Holy Ghost.

The point of this passage when it speaks of baptism is that we are brought into contact with the death, the burial and the resurrection of Christ, all of which change our condition. That we are brought into contact with the death of Christ means that we are dead to sin and no longer alive to it. That we are brought into contact with His burial means that His burial is the power by which our sins are left behind and destroyed. That we are also brought into contact with His resurrection means that we are alive unto God.

The text, when it speaks of being baptized into Christ is not saying that we are immersed in His death and then also in His resurrection. That would be meaningless. Nor is water baptism intended to be a picture of His going down into the earth, for His burial was not even of that sort. That is what burial is to us, but to the Jews it was the laying of a body in a cave, something which immersion does not and cannot symbolize, as we shall explain more fully below.

This is confirmed by the fact that Romans 6:4 speaks literally of being buried by baptism into *the* death, that is, the death that atones for sin and frees the believer forever from the guilt of

²³Cf. chapter 1 above.

sin, and gains for him all the benefits of such freedom, including deliverance from the power and dominion of sin. The point is not that the believer in baptism is symbolically immersed in death, but *that he is united by baptism to the death that atones and delivers, and therefore cannot continue in sin.*

What is even more important however, is that Romans 6:4 indicates that baptism is not the actual burial with Christ, but the *means* by which we are buried, i.e., the “hands” that put us in the grave. In other words, we are not buried in baptism or when we are baptized, but *by* baptism. To put it as strongly as possible, even if burial for the Jews was a going under the earth baptism would not be that burial, but the hands which accomplished that burial - that put the body in the grave.

What simplifies the matter in Romans 6 is that Scripture is talking there about the spiritual reality of baptism and not water baptism. The water does not bury us into His death, but the spiritual reality does. Let us note that! If water baptism buries us with Him and plants us together in the likeness of His death, then what Rome teaches is correct, that the water of baptism has saving power. Romans 6 must, therefore be talking about the spiritual reality of baptism. Nevertheless, there is and ought to be a correspondence between the spiritual reality and the water sign. If the spiritual reality is that we are immersed in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, then the symbol should also be by immersion, but that, as we have seen, is meaningless.

Romans 6, however, also speaks of being planted together in the likeness of his death (verse 5) a reference which sounds at first to suggest the idea of immersion in that planting involves putting a seed under the ground. The fact is that the Greek word used here has no such connotations, but is a word which simply emphasizes again the idea of unity with Christ and means “to join, to unite, to become one” and could be better translated “ingrafted” here in Romans 6:5. It would then plainly emphasize the point that the Heidelberg Catechism makes when it speaks of faith as an ingrafting into Christ: “Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ? No; only those who are ingrafted into him, and receive all his benefits, by a true faith” (Quest. 20).

The point in Romans 6, therefore, is not that by baptism we are immersed in the death of Christ, but brought into contact with His death, as also with His burial and resurrection, all of which permanently and savingly changes our condition from dead sinners to living and holy saints.

b. Colossians 2:11, 12.

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

This passage is similar to Romans 6 in that it speaks of being buried with Christ in baptism. Here too, the idea that burial is a picture of submersion would not have entered the mind of those to whom Paul was writing, for the Jews did not bury their dead underground in graves as we do, but placed them in caves or cisterns, such as the tomb in which Christ was buried.²⁴ Burial with Christ in baptism, therefore, would not have suggested the idea of submersion to the early church. Nor does it mean we are submersed with Him or in Him, but rather that we are united to Him, dead, buried and risen again with Him, sharing in His finished work.

²⁴Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. II, pp. 315-320.

Indeed, this is the main thought of the whole book of Colossians which speaks of Christ's glory as the Head of the church (1:18), of our union with Him (1:24) and of the fact that in union with Him we have all things and are complete, lacking nothing (2:10). We even have circumcision in Him (2:11), something which these Gentile Christians needed to know since there were those who were telling them they did not have it and needed it.

1:18 - And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

1:24 - Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.

2:10 - And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.

2:11 - In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

“Buried with Christ in baptism,” therefore, does not mean “buried with Him in an immersion” but “buried” with Him through union with Him, and not only buried in union with Him, but risen again also (2:12) and victorious (2:15), and in no need of anything beside Him, whether philosophy and tradition (2:8), or the observance of days (2:16), or the worshipping of angels (2:18), or subjection to ordinances which require the neglect of the body (2:23). Note the emphasis in these passages on union with Christ and how beautifully the idea of baptism as union with Christ fits:

2:12 - Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

2:15 - And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

2:8 - Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

2:16 - Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days.

2:18 - Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.

2:20-23 - Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

c. Galatians 3:27.

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

This third passage clinches the matter. It defines baptism into Christ not as an immersion, but as the putting on a garment: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” *That* is the meaning of baptism - not immersion, but constant, living, vital contact with Christ, that can be described as a wearing of Christ and which forever changes anyone who does put Him on. Through this putting on of Christ the believer is justified (2:16),

lives (2:20), is blessed a child of Abraham (3:9), is s child of God (4:7), stands in liberty (5:1), is lead of the Spirit (5:18); shows the fruits of the Spirit (5:22, 23), crucifies the flesh (5:24), is crucified to the world (5:14, and is a new creature (5:15).

Chapter 14

Acts 19:1-6 and Rebaptism

The Baptist practice of rebaptizing those who have not been immersed or who have been baptized as infants rests mainly on the conviction that sprinkling and paedobaptism are not baptism at all. We have shown the fallacy of the Baptist convictions regarding sprinkling, but need to look at the passage which Baptists use to support their practice of rebaptizing, Acts 19:1-6.

The passage reads:

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

Baptists understand the Word of God to be saying here that Paul rebaptized certain persons who had been baptized by John, though they are reluctant to say that Paul did this because he thought John's baptism was illegitimate. After rebaptizing these people who had been baptized by John but had not heard of the Holy Spirit, he also laid hands on them so that they received the Spirit and spoke in tongues.

This is a misreading of the passage. The Baptist reading makes most of verse 4 a quotation of Paul's words to these disciples and then makes verse 5 a reference to what Paul did after he finished speaking. In other words, the Baptists read verse 4 and 5 thus (notice the quotation marks):

Then said Paul, "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

When they (they, the disciples to whom Paul is speaking) heard this, they (these same disciples to whom Paul is speaking) were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

According to this Baptist interpretation "they" in verse 5 refers to those to whom Paul was speaking and it is they whom Paul baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, they having been previously baptized by John. Reading the passage that way it does indeed teach rebaptism, but also suggests that John's baptism was not really Christian baptism at all.

The passage should be read in the following way (again notice the quotation marks):

Then said Paul, "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they (the people who came to John's baptism) heard this, they (the same people who came to John's baptism) were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

"They" then refers to the people whom John baptized and verse 5 refers not to Paul's rebaptizing of certain persons in Ephesus but to John's baptism of certain people at the Jordan. It

also identifies John's baptism then as Christian baptism, not as something that needed to be re-administered.

The proper reading of the passage, therefore makes verse 5 part of the quotation of what Paul said to these Ephesian disciples and not a description of his rebaptizing them. Indeed, if that is the proper way to read the verse, then verse 5 is saying that John baptized them, the only time they were baptized, and did so in the name of the Lord Jesus, identifying John's baptism with every other New Testament baptism.

Grammatically, this is the way to read the verse, since it is verse 6 that mentions Paul once again and continues the story of what he said and did with the word "and." There is, therefore, no ground to be found for rebaptism in these verses, nor in any other passage of Scripture.

Rebaptism is, in fact, a denial of the great Biblical truth that we can only be saved once. No one who believes in the sovereignty of God in salvation, in the saving power of Jesus, in the efficacy of the Holy Spirit's work, and in the perseverance of saints, ought to rebaptize, since baptism is a picture of salvation and ought for that reason only to be administered once. One of the Reformed creeds states this:

Therefore we believe, that every man, who is earnestly studious of obtaining life eternal, ought to be but once baptized# with this only baptism, without ever repeating the same: since we cannot be born twice (*Belgic Confession of Faith*, Art. 34).

This appears to be the emphasis in the Westminster Confession of Faith in XXVIII, 7, where it proves the statement "The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered unto any person" with a reference to Titus 3:5:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

The Confession of Faith apparently uses this verse as proof because it speaks of baptism as the "washing of regeneration" and assumes that just as regeneration can only happen once, so baptism which pictures it can only be administered once to any person.

We will examine this matter of the connection between "once saved always saved," that is, between sovereign grace and water baptism in another chapter and another connection. But it is important here as part of our answer to those who are willing to practice rebaptism, believing that the only legitimate mode of baptism is baptism by immersion. Believing that baptism is a picture of regeneration and that regeneration can only happen once no Reformed person ought to rebaptize anyone.

Let us note, however, in closing this chapter, that the usual interpretation of Acts 19:1-6 leads inevitably to the conclusion that John's baptism was not Christian baptism and that all John's disciples needed to be rebaptized in order to become Christians. This would have included Jesus and some of twelve disciples as well. Yet not a hint of such rebaptism is suggested anywhere in Scripture.

What is more, if John's baptism was not Christian baptism, then John's baptizing is of no value as far as determining the mode and subjects of baptism, nor is Christ's baptism the same as ours. That leaves us with only a few other references to baptism in the New Testament. The Baptist, therefore, with his interpretation of Acts 19 puts himself in a dilemma.

Chapter 15

Other Passages

There are a few other passages we must look at that bear on the question of the mode of baptism. They are John 3:23, Acts 2:41 and 4:4, and Acts 9:17, 18 and 22:12-16.

a. John 3:23.

The passage in the KJV reads:

And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

Baptists like this verse because of the translation of the KJV which refers to “much water” at Aenon where John was baptizing. The need for much water implies, so it is thought, baptism by immersion, since very little water is needed for sprinkling or pouring, though it must be admitted that even if that is true it is only an inference and not directly stated.

However, the word translated “much” in the KJV can also be translated “many” and is more often translated that way in the New Testament. It is translated “much” around 75 times and nearly 190 times as “many.”²⁵ Translated that way, the verse would read: “And John also was baptizing in Aenon, near to Salim, *because there were many waters there.*” Grammatically, this is the better translation since the word waters and the verb are plural, not singular, that is, even if one uses the translation “much” the passage speaks literally of “much waters.”

Since this was the reason for John’s baptizing in Aenon, the question must be asked and answered, “Why were “many waters” necessary in order to baptize the people that came to him. A mere abundance of water does not answer this question since there was no more water at Aenon than anywhere else along the Jordan, i.e., if John only needed enough water to immerse people, he could have found that anywhere along the Jordan.

The answer is to be found in the name of the place, Aenon means “springs” or “fountains,” and in Leviticus 14:5, 6; 51, 52; 15:13 (cf. also Num. 19:17) we learn that at least some of the Old Testament washings being done with *clean running* water. In each of these passages the word translated “running” is actually the word “living” and refers to fresh water, which was a picture in the Old Testament of the Holy Spirit: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (Jn. 7:37-39).

Notice what the Old Testament passages say:

Leviticus 14:5, 6 - And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running (living) water: As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running (living) water.

Leviticus 14:51, 52 - And he shall take the cedar wood, and the hyssop, and the scarlet, and the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain bird, and in the running (living) water, and sprinkle the house seven times: And he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird, and with the running (living) water, and with the living bird, and with the cedar wood, and with the hyssop, and with

²⁵Robert Young, *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 678.

the scarlet.

Leviticus 15:13 - And when he that hath an issue is cleansed of his issue; then he shall number to himself seven days for his cleansing, and wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in running (living) water, and shall be clean.

Adams sums the matter up very neatly with a quote from another writer:

To think that John would leave the Jordan river (the largest source of water supply in Palestine) for any other area in order to find more water is, upon reflection, unthinkable. But it is interesting to ask why John did leave Jordan at this time. Christy proposes the following idea, "The thought that was no doubt in the mind of John leading to this change of location was the contrast of the cool clear water of these 'many springs' with the foul, muddy flood of the Jordan 'overflowing all its banks,' as it usually did at this season of the year (Joshua 3:15), and then the insistent requirement of the law, that he should use clean water for baptism, altogether render it easy to account for his presence at this time. Here again, simply the use of the right translation is sufficient to remove all the difficulty. John was baptizing in Enon, near to Salim, because there was much water or many springs there, as there are at this time, and that is all there is of it. It really proves nothing either way, except perhaps, that John was endeavoring to comply with the law, which, as he know said that "he should sprinkle them with clean water".²⁶

It was not, therefore, the quantity of water which mattered but the fact that it was living or running water, not stagnant or polluted water. That kind of water John found both in the Jordan when he baptized there and later in the springs of Aenon which still exist today.

There is no proof in the passage for immersion.

b. Acts 2:41 and 4:4.

2:41 - Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

4:4 - Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

These passages from Acts make reference to the baptisms that were carried out on Pentecost and subsequently when great numbers of people were baptized by the Apostles. These baptisms were carried out at Jerusalem and those who deny baptism by immersion have long pointed out, though Baptists have seldom listened, that there are no rivers in or near Jerusalem and that the only available water supplies that could have been used for baptizing these thousands (3000 on Pentecost and another 5000 a little later) were pools such as the pool of Bethesda or the pool of Siloam (Jn. 5:2; 9:7).

These pools were the cities' drinking water supply as well as the source of water for every other purpose. It is unlikely that there was enough water in these pools to baptize as many people as were baptized on these occasions and even more unlikely that the authorities, who were hostile to the early church would have permitted the use of the city's water for this purpose.

c. Revelation 19:13 uses a form of the word "baptism" that sometimes means to dip and is so translated in this verse: "And he was clothed with a vesture dipped (baptized) in blood: and his name is called The Word of God."

The Old Testament reference to which this passage alludes, however, suggests that

²⁶Adams, *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism*, pp. 13, 14, quoting from Wilbur A. Christy, *A Modern Shibboleth*, pp. 82, 83.

“dipped” is not the best translation in Revelation, since it speaks of sprinkling! The Old Testament reference is Isaiah 63:3, 4, which says: “their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments” thus picturing Christ as Judge in same terms as He is described in Revelation 19.

The passage, therefore, instead of being evidence in favor of the Baptist argument that baptism means immersion, actually proves the opposite.

Chapter 16

Conclusions

The only possible conclusion, therefore, for anyone who will look closely and carefully at the testimony of Scripture, is that there is no Biblical ground for immersion as a proper mode of baptism. Baptism in Scripture, whether the reality or the sign is by sprinkling or pouring.

This matter of mode, however, is not as important as the matter of the proper subjects of baptism, either believers and their children or believers only. Nevertheless, the two are not unconnected and a proper understanding of the mode of baptism leads to a better understanding of infant baptism. It does that in several ways.

First, understanding the biblical teaching concerning the mode of baptism leads to an understanding of the meaning of baptism. This is crucial. If baptism means immersion, as the Baptists contend, it is difficult to see how even the sign of baptism can be applied to infants without seriously injuring them. If baptism means that we are brought into contact with something that changes our condition, it is not only easy to see why infants need baptism, but how baptism can be applied to them.

Second, a proper understanding of the mode of baptism helps us to see that the focus in baptism is not on our faith, repentance or conversion, but on God's grace. It signifies, when done by sprinkling or pouring, that we have everything "from above." That, too, is crucial to an understanding of infant baptism. If baptism marks our faith or repentance, infants ought not be baptized since they are incapable of both conscious faith and active repentance, but if baptism marks the promise and grace that are from above, then infants can be baptized, since grace does not depend on our age, efforts, or abilities.

Third, understanding the mode of baptism makes the water of the sacrament much less important. We believe that one of the reasons Baptists have such a difficult time seeing the warrant and necessity of infant baptism is that they place far too much emphasis on the water and the amount of water used. Baptism to them means immersion and so they lose sight of the biblical reality to which the water points.

For these three reasons we have considered the question of mode and pass now from that question to the more important and more difficult question of subjects - from the "how" of baptism to the "who" of baptism.

Before we do that, though, there is one more question to be answered: "Does Scripture's emphasis on sprinkling or pouring as the proper mode of baptism mean that those who have been baptized by immersion are not truly baptized or that they ought to be rebaptized?" We do not believe that to be the case. The more important thing in baptism is that one be baptized according to the formula of Matthew 28:19, that is, into the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

Also, no Reformed Church since the time of the Reformation has refused to recognize these baptisms by immersion. That would be to put too much emphasis on the water and would suggest that Baptists, simply because of the way they were baptized, are not fellow Christians. That suggestion we will not make and do not believe it ought to be made.

PART II

Infant Baptism

Chapter 1

Infant Baptism in the New Testament

The chief Baptist argument against infant baptism is that there is not a single example of infant baptism in the New Testament. John Gill says, for example: "It is strange ... that among the many thousands baptized in Jerusalem, Samaria, Corinth, and other places, there should be no one instance of any of them bringing their children with them to be baptized, and claiming the privilege of baptism for them upon their own faith, nor of their doing this in any short time after."²⁷ This is a very popular argument and one which has great appeal to those who are not willing to look into the matter and study Scripture carefully. Many Paedobaptist writers have agreed with the argument and defended infant baptism on other grounds.

In fact, this Baptist argument, if true, would carry considerable weight. It would be strange indeed if the new Testament advocated infant baptism and included not a single example of such practice.

Gill's argument, however, assumes that just because infants are not specifically mentioned in the recorded instances of baptism in the New Testament, they were not present and were not baptized. Neither, however, are they mentioned in Exodus 14, which tells the story of Israel's passage through the Red Sea and was one of the great baptisms of the Old Testament. Yet we know that they were present and were baptized with the rest of the nation:

Exodus 12:37 - And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children.

With regard to the lack of an express command, not everything in Scripture is proved or commanded by an *express command*. What we need to establish something as our own practice is a warrant by way of precedent, practice, commission, direction, promise, or rule. We do not look for an express command regarding every New Testament practice. The keeping of the Lord's Day on the first day of the week is a good example.

We have before us a book by a Baptist writer who argues for the admission of women to the Lord's Supper, not from an express *command* regarding the place of women at the Lord's table (there is no express command or specific instance of women being present at the Lord's Supper in the New Testament), but by bringing different Scriptures together and drawing conclusions from them.²⁸ We only seek to do the same.

This same writer states that the New Testament rule for baptizing adult believers "is Christ's commission to His apostles, which stipulates ... that baptism be administered to professing believers."²⁹ But what rule was John the Baptist following then, if his baptism is an example of New Testament baptism? John baptized them not as believers in Christ, but with the command that they had to go on and believe in Him who was to come (Acts

What is more, there are no examples of teenage children coming for baptism when they are old enough to make their own independent profession of faith. The argument from silence, in other words, works both ways.

Gill also implies that the sheer weight of numbers is against the practice of infant baptism and speaks of thousands being baptized without mention of infants being baptized among them. In fact, after Pentecost there are only seven other occasions on which baptism was administered that are recorded in the book of Acts:

²⁷Gill, *Body of Divinity*, vol. II, p. 638.

²⁸Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, pp. 46, 47.

²⁹Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, p. 48.

8:12, 13 - But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

8:36-39 - And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

9:18 - And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

10:47, 48 - Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

16:15 - And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

16:31-33 - And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

18:8 - And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

There are also two in I Corinthians 1:14 and 16 where Paul speaks of baptizing Crispus and Gaius and the household of Stephanus:

Verses 14-17 - I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

What is more, of these nine baptisms, five were of households (Acts 10:47, 48 - the household of Cornelius; 16:15 - the household of Lydia; 16:31-33 - the household of the Philippian jailer; 18:8 - the household of Crispus, and I Cor. 1:16 - the household of Stephanus). Of these households baptism we will have more to say, but it must be clear that there is no argument in numbers, or if there is, that it favors an argument for household baptisms.

All that aside, however, there are, in fact, two examples of infant baptism in the New Testament in I Corinthians 10:1, 2 and Hebrews 9:18-20. Accepting these as examples of infant baptism, however, requires acceptance of some points we will be making in further chapters. One must, for example, accept the complete unity of the Old and New Testaments and of Israel and the Church in order to accept these verses as examples of infant baptism.

Without getting ahead of ourselves it is evident:

- (1) that the references to these two events are found in the New Testament, and;
- (2) that they are there called baptisms, using the New Testament word, which the Baptists

would say only describes the practice of immersing adult believers.

a. I Corinthians 10:1, 2.

The first of these passages is I Corinthians 10:1, 2. There we read: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea."

This passage:

(1) Uses the New Testament word baptism.

(2) Describes the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea as a baptism.

(3) Teaches the baptism of infants, in that there were infants among the Israelites, who were also baptized:

Exodus 10:9 - And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the LORD.

Exodus 12:37 - And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children.

I Corinthians 10:1, 2 is a New Testament passage, therefore, that speaks of infants being baptized and gives an example of that practice.

The usual Baptist objection is that this refers back to the Old Testament and is merely a typical baptism. That objection, however, holds no water. The truth is that all baptisms are typical. Water baptism is only ever a *sign*. There is, therefore, no real difference between the baptism of Israel in the Red Sea and baptism in the New Testament, in that both are with water and both are symbols of our regeneration and the beginning of our new life in Christ.

Baptists also object that these were different kinds of baptisms, the baptism of Israel in the Red Sea being a kind of "national" baptism marking Israel's birth as a nation. That, however, contradicts I Corinthians 10:1, 2 which uses the ordinary New Testament word to describe the event and gives no indication at all that this "baptism" was in any way different from any other New Testament baptism.

That the baptism of Israel symbolized regeneration and the beginning of the Christian's new life is clear from the verses that follow in I Corinthians 10. These verses speak of eating spiritual meat, drinking spiritual drink and of being followed by Christ.

Not only that, but the Word of God in this passage calls the Israelites our fathers and makes the whole of their life an example to us. We belong to the same family as they did, therefore, and must do as they did, accepting their practice as ours.

There is one more question that needs to be answered about this passage, however: What does it mean to be baptized into Moses?

There is a similar passage in I Corinthians 1:13;

Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

We do not believe that "to be baptized in the name of Paul . . . or unto Moses . . . is on the part of the baptized, to be made the believing and obedient disciples of Paul or Moses."³⁰ Rather we believe that it refers to union with the person in whose name we are baptized. The very language used bears this out. The phrase is literally "into the name of" in I Corinthians 1:13, in the great commission, and in I Corinthians 10:2, though translated differently there in the KJV (literally, the Israelites were baptized "into Moses").

In I Corinthians 1:13, therefore, Paul is making the point that by baptism the members in

³⁰Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, p. 51.

Corinth were not brought into union with *him*. Rather (this is assumed in I Cor. 1:13) through baptism we are brought into union with Christ.

That, of course, leaves the question what I Corinthians 10:2 means. We, however, agree here also with Adams, who says: "Make of it what you will, 'baptized *into Moses*' cannot be interpreted apart from 'as many as have been baptized *into Christ*' (Rom. 6:3), the same teaching found two chapters later in the words: 'for by one Spirit are we all baptized *into one body*' (I Cor. 12:13)."³¹ We would, then, interpret the passage along those lines, that through their "baptism" in the Red Sea the Israelites were identified thereafter with Moses, their mediator. The history of Moses as mediator bears this out and shows just how closely they were identified.

Galatians 3:27 goes even further in our explanation of the fundamental meaning of baptism "into" Christ by defining it as a "putting on of Christ:"

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Nor does the verb necessarily imply any activity on the part of the person who has put on Christ (indeed, how can we who are dead in sins until we put on Christ, be active in putting Him on?). The Greek verb translated "put on" *can* mean "to clothe oneself" but *can also mean* "to be clothed" or "to be invested.:" Luke 24:49 uses the word this way:

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be *endued* with power from on high.

Infants may not be able to "put on Christ's livery," but they certainly can have it put on them by God.

b. Hebrews 9:18-20.

The other passage is Hebrews 9:18-20. It reads:

Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.

Here the New Testament proves conclusively that the Jews did baptize, that these baptisms were *sprinklings*, and that they were applied to *children*. In verse 10 the word "washings" of which this is one, is actually the Greek word "baptisms." This can be checked in a good concordance. Verse 19, which speaks of one of these baptisms, a sprinkling of blood and water, says that it was applied to *all* the people. We know from the Old Testament that all the people means just that. When the Israelites gathered, they gathered also with their children:

Exodus 20:12 - Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

On the occasion referred to in Hebrews 9:18-20 they gathered with their children to be baptized. The same happened at the ratification of the covenant:

Deuteronomy 29:10-15 - Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: that he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Neither

³¹Adams, *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism*, p. 30.

with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day.

This is one of the passages, therefore, that stands as a New Testament warrant for infant baptism. It speaks:

(1) of baptism (the New Testament Greek word for baptism is used);

(2) of baptism by sprinkling;

(3) of the baptism of infants ("all the people");

(4) of this baptism as a *pattern* for the New Testament, since that is the main point of passage (vs. 20). As the Israelites were baptized, ate the same spiritual meat and drink and yet perished in the wilderness (they were not all believers), so must we who are also baptized and partake of that spiritual meat and drink beware lest fall after the same example of unbelief

The argument that this refers back to the Old Testament is beside the point. The only questions that can legitimately be asked about this baptism are:

(1) What did it signify? There can be no doubt that it signified the same thing as all other Biblical baptisms, the washing away of sin by the blood of Christ, for it included both blood and water as the following passages so clearly show:

I Corinthians 10:1-4 - Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

I Peter 3:21 - The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Especially Hebrews 9:13, 14, 22, 23 - For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? ...And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

(2) What covenant or testament did it represent and was that covenant in any essential features different from the new covenant? A comparison of Hebrews 8:10, Exodus 19:5, 6 (cf. also Deut. 14:2), I Peter 2:9, and Revelation 1:6 shows that they are not different in essentials:

The passages listed compare in this way:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people (Heb. 8:10).

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel (Ex. 19:5, 6).

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you

out of darkness into his marvellous light (I Pet. 2:9).

And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (Rev. 1:6).

But we refer our readers to chapter 12 of this section for a more detailed explanation of this point.

The thing that needs to be remembered in all of this, then, is that there is no fundamental difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, even in the matter of baptism. To think otherwise is to go in the direction of Dispensationalism and to separate the Old Testament and the New Testament.

No more, therefore, than baptism was something new and unheard of to the Israelites when John began baptizing at the River Jordan, is the thought of baptism in the Old Testament a surprise to us. There is but one people of God, one covenant, and one way of salvation.

Chapter 2

Faith, Repentance, Discipleship and Baptism

Another significant Baptist argument against paedobaptism and for believer's baptism says that faith, repentance and becoming a disciple of Christ must precede baptism. This argument is critical to the Baptists. One Baptist preacher in expounding on the subject of baptism repeatedly says that the sign implies the presence of what is signified prior to the administration of the sign.³²

The argument is based on various passages which list these things before baptism. The passages are Matthew 28:19, which lists discipleship before baptism (the word teach there is literally "makes disciples of", Mark 16:16 which lists faith before baptism, and Mark 1:4 along with Acts 2:38 which are understood to teach that repentance must precede baptism.

Obviously, if these verses do teach that faith, repentance and being discipled must precede baptism, then only those who are of an age to show that they have repented of their sins, believed in Christ and become His disciples can be baptized. The Baptist argument, however, is based on the assumption that the order in these passages is in fact the order in which these things must take place. That assumption is not only unproved by the Baptists, but is false.

a. Mark 16:16; Faith and Baptism.

This verse reads:

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

The fact that faith is mentioned before baptism is taken as proof that it must precede baptism. Thus, too, Baptists speak of the rite as *believer's* baptism.

The first thing that must be said here is that the Baptist position is an impossibility. They can, at best, only baptize those who make a *profession* of faith. Because no one can know the heart, there is no way of ensuring that all baptized persons are indeed believers.

The usual Baptist response is that they baptize far fewer unbelievers than do those who practice family baptism. This, of course, is beyond proof, but the fact of the matter is that if a Baptist church baptizes even one hypocrite or unbeliever, they are no longer practicing *believer's* baptism.

That, however, is not the main point. The words of Jesus in Mark 16:16 also need to be explained, especially as they are the command and warrant for the New Testament church to be baptizing. There are several things that need to be said about this passage.

First, the passage does not say (though every Baptist reads it that way), "He that believeth and *then* is baptized shall be saved." It only says that both faith and baptism are necessary for salvation.

Second, just because faith and baptism are *listed* in that order does not mean that they must necessarily *happen* in that order. II Peter 1:10 lists calling before election, but calling does not come before election, as every Calvinist knows:

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.

The order in Mark 16:16 is simply the order of importance. Faith is listed before baptism because it is far more important. We see this in the last part of the verse where baptism is not even mentioned again, though faith is.

³²Robert Martin, Emmanuel Reformed Baptist Church, Seatac, Washington, series of 8 study tapes on baptism.

Indeed, if the order in Mark 16:16 is the temporal order, i.e., the order in which things must actually take place, then the order is faith, baptism, *salvation*: "He that believeth, and is baptized shall be *saved*!" No Baptists, certainly not those who are Calvinists, want that order! Yet if the order of the passage is the temporal order then the verse not only puts faith before baptism, but baptism before salvation and teaches the error of baptismal regeneration. The Baptist, however, wants arbitrarily to change the rules for interpreting the passage in the middle of the verse. He wants the relation between faith and baptism to be temporal, but not that between baptism and salvation!

Not only that, but there are passages in the New Testament that suggest that at least in some cases faith did not precede baptism. Acts 19:4 speaks of John's baptism and says that he told the people *when he baptized them*, "that they should believe on him who should come after him." He did *not* baptize them because they had *already* believed on Christ, but with a view to their believing in Christ. Indeed Mark 1:4 suggests that John baptized before he even preached!

Perhaps a Baptist would argue that John's baptism was prior to Christ's ministry and therefore, faith in Christ could not and did not precede baptism then, but only repentance. But this leaves a Baptist with only several options:

(1) To admit that faith did not always precede John's baptism, that it was really the same as the Old Testament baptisms and, therefore, of no significance with respect to the New Testament sacrament. In that case John's baptism cannot be used by a Baptist to prove *anything* at all about the New Testament sacrament - not immersion, not the necessity of faith and/or repentance prior to baptism. This, however, would ignore the fact that *half* of the references to baptism in the N.T. are to John's baptism.³³ The only other option, though, is:

(2) To continue to use John's baptism as an example of New Testament baptism and to concede that faith at least need not necessarily precede water baptism. This, however, would be conceding that the *foundation* for Baptist teaching is in error, i.e., that baptism is not necessarily *believer's* baptism.

b. Acts 2:38; Repentance and Baptism.

Another argument for so-called believer's baptism is the argument that not only faith, but also repentance, must precede baptism. The principle text in support of this argument is Acts 2:38 which reads:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

To some extent the argument based on this verse has been answered in the previous section, but there are some things that do need to be pointed out in connection with the verse.

Here again the Baptists simply assume, having already made the same assumption with Mark 16:16, that the order in the verse, repentance and baptism, is the temporal order in which these two ought always to take place. This assumption is also unproved and false.

Even if repentance had to precede baptism in the case of those who were converted under Peter's Pentecost preaching, that does not mean that repentance must always precede baptism. Mark 1:4 and Acts 19:4 show that this is not so.

Let us look first of all Mark 1:4, which says:

John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

³³Matt. 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 16; 21:25; Mk. 1:4, 5, 8, 9; 11:30; Lk. 3:3, 7, 12, 16, 21; 7:29; 20:4; Jn. 1:25, 26, 28, 31, 33; 3:23; 10:40; Acts 1:22; 10:37; 13:24; 18:25; 19:3, 4.

On the basis of Acts 2:38 the Baptists conclude from that the baptism of repentance is a baptism which is preceded by repentance.

This is, however, by no means evident. The word "of" *could* mean "the baptism that has its source or basis in repentance" and be suggesting that baptism ought to follow repentance. The word "of" might also mean, however, that baptism and repentance belong to one another, without saying anything about the order in which they occur.

We believe that the phrase says nothing about the order in which the two occur, but rather means that repentance and baptism always belong together - that baptism demands repentance (either prior or following or both).

What is interesting, however, is that other passages which do speak of an order between baptism and repentance teach that baptism is *followed by* repentance! Matthew 3:11, a parallel passage to Mark 1:4, makes this clear. There we read of a baptism "unto" (literally, "into") repentance, where word "unto" has the idea of "movement towards something." The idea, then, is that baptism is administered with a view to repentance following or even as a kind of call to repentance. Matthew 3:11 reads in full:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:.

In suggesting that baptism looks forward and not back to repentance, Matthew 3:11 identifies an important difference between the Baptist and Reformed views of baptism. The Baptist view is that baptism is a sign or mark of *what we have done* in repenting and believing. The Reformed position is that baptism is sign or mark of *what God has done* in regenerating us. It does not mark our response to grace, but the work of grace itself and calls us to respond to that work.

Baptism, in the very nature of the rite, is a picture of the washing away of sins by the blood of Jesus. This is what God does in saving us, and He does it *first*. He does it when we are yet incapable of responding to His gracious work. Repentance follows.

If we understand this, then infant baptism will not seem something strange, but fitting. After all, there is no one of us, saved as an adult or as an infant, that does not enter the kingdom of heaven *as* an infant, that is, by a work of pure grace that precedes all activity and response on our part. That work of grace is what infant baptism marks and commemorates.

Acts 19:4 gives further confirmation of what we have said. Paul refers to the baptism of John and says that John told the people *while he was baptizing them* that they should believe on Christ who would come:

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

He did not demand faith before baptizing them, but called them to faith while baptizing them. In that light it is difficult to see that how the baptism of repentance, as John's baptism is called, could be a baptism in which repentance, but not faith, had to precede the baptism.

Furthermore, the fact that repentance does precede baptism in some cases does not prove that it did in all. We will have more to say about this in the next section.

c. Matthew 28:19; Discipleship and Baptism.

The passage under discussion records the great commission. It reads:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

There is here one Paedobaptist argument that is never addressed by the Baptists—the fact that this commission concerns *nations* (which always include infants), not individuals. Indeed, nothing is said about individuals.

What is more, Matthew 28:19, is the obvious fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 52:15: "So shall he sprinkle many nations." You may argue that Isaiah refers to the reality of baptism, not the sign, and that is true, but even then the reality is a sprinkling and is a sprinkling of the nations, and as we have seen in Part I, chapter 12, the reality of the sign should mirror the thing signified.. Not only that, but when these nations are saved, they are described in the book of Isaiah as bringing with them their sons and daughters and as being gathered in with their children, even nursing children (e.g., 49:22; 60:4). Indeed, it is impossible to disciple and baptize nations without also discipling and baptizing the children who belong to that nation.

The argument, that this passage speaks of nations would be of no weight, however, if the passages established a temporal order between teaching and baptism or faith and baptism. The reference to nations would not affect a command that required first teaching, then faith, then baptism. But there is *no temporal order* established in the passage.

The Baptist argument, therefore, is that these passages do establish a temporal order, first discipling (teaching) then baptizing. The passage, however, establishes *no temporal order at all*.

Consider:

(1) The word "then" is not found in the verse, though the Baptists explicitly or implicitly read it in there. If the passage used the word "then" there would be no question that the Baptists are correct, but the word is not there, though every Baptist automatically reads it into the verse.

(2) Not every list of things in Scripture lists things in their temporal order (II Peter 1:10 is a very good example - calling does not precede election either temporally or logically, but the order there is the order of experience). There are many different ways one can list things as well and it is not uncommon to list them in order of importance, as we believe the Word of God does here (cf. Rev. 7:5, for example, where Judah is listed first because it is first in importance).

(3) We have already seen that in the case of John's baptism faith in Christ did not precede baptism but followed it, so that unless the baptism of John is not a New Testament baptism, the passage cannot be establishing a *necessary* and inviolable temporal order.

(4) With respect to Matthew 28:19 it is very clear from the grammar that there is no temporal sequence in the verse. The two things, teaching and baptism, take place concurrently. "Baptizing" is a present participle which always denotes contemporaneous time. In other words, Matthew 28:19 literally says: "teach all nations, *while baptizing them*," or, "...when baptizing them." the two events taking place side-by-side, not one after the other. If Jesus had wanted to indicate a temporal order here He would either have had to use the temporal adverb "then" or an aorist participle and a different order. This follows from the fact that passage is talking about nations, not individuals.

In the case of new disciples who are converted under missionary preaching, we have no quarrel with the fact that *disciples* are first made and then baptized. That is the only way things can be done in their case. That, however, proves nothing about the children or families of disciples. The Baptist argument from passages such as this runs something like this:

Adults who are baptized must first be discipled.

Infants are not adults (and cannot be discipled).

Therefore infants should not be baptized.

Apart from the fact that it is not true that infants cannot be discipled and taught, this argument is fallacious. Those who have difficulty seeing the fallacy of this argument should

think about the similar argument:

Adult who are punished should first be found responsible for wrong-doing.

Infants are not adults.

Therefore infants should not be punished.

The argument assumes what needs to be proved; that because in some cases Scripture speaks of disciples being baptized that therefore *only* disciples can be baptized. To put it in other words, even if the passage is speaking principally of adult believers, it speaks only of them and not of children. To say what must happen in the case of adults implies nothing about children. To use a little different example, to prove that believing adults are saved does not prove that infants are lost, though they are incapable of conscious, clearly professed faith.

What is more, disciples are followers and learners, something that does not exclude children but rather includes them. The passage, therefore, does not teach what the Baptists want it to say: "Go, therefore, and convert people, and when they are able to give a credible profession of their own conversion, then baptize them," but says rather: "Go to all nations and make disciples of these nations, while at the same time baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." The passage says nothing about the order in which these events are to take place, allows no assumptions about the subjects of baptism, and certainly does not forbid infant baptism.

Chapter 3

Baptism and Regeneration

The relationship between baptism and regeneration is very important in the matter of baptism's subjects. If baptism pictures regeneration and infants can receive regeneration, the new birth, as a gift, it is difficult to see why they may have the reality and not the sign or picture. If, however, one believes in decisional regeneration, i.e., that regeneration follows upon a man's own decision to believe, then it is difficult to see both how an infant can receive the reality of regeneration, since he is unable to make a decision or to believe in Christ, and even more difficult to see how he can receive the sign of regeneration and salvation.

In the relationship between baptism and regeneration Titus 3:5 is an important passage. It reads:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

The word "washing" tells us that the verse is speaking of baptism even though the New Testament word is not used here. The reference is, however, not to water baptism, but to the corresponding spiritual reality, the washing away of sin by the blood and Spirit of Christ. That makes no difference, though, because just as the water sign tells us something about the spiritual reality, so the spiritual reality must correspond to the water sign.

That washing or baptism is the washing *of regeneration*, that is, a washing which begins with and is in principle accomplished in regeneration, for regeneration is the gift of a new heart and makes one a new man in Christ, which is no different than saying he is cleansed from his sin by the work of the Holy Spirit. Water baptism pictures this.

The point, however, is that the reality of baptism is not something we do, but something God does. The sign must correspond. Baptism is not a sign of our activity or an "embodiment" of our activity in repenting and believing, even when it follows these, but a sign of God's work in regeneration, through His uniting us to Christ. To put the matter as plainly as possible, even when water baptism follows repentance and faith in the case of an adult, it does not look back to the person's repenting and believing but to God's work of sovereign grace which preceded and produced that repentance and faith. The passage speaks of this by describing that reality of baptism as the washing *of regeneration*. The sign of baptism, therefore, pictures the very first work of God in the heart of person, the wonderful work of regeneration by which the sinner is raised from death to life and given the new life of Christ (regeneration is spoken of as the implanting of the new life of Christ, or the gift of Christ Himself to the believer in such passages as Gal. 2:20).

The spiritual reality of baptism, therefore, pictures something that takes place, a sovereign and gracious act of God that precedes any activity on the part of the sinner. Indeed, there can be no activity of repenting and believing until a person is regenerated. That is a fundamental principle of Calvinism. The spiritual reality of baptism, then, is something that precedes faith, repentance and all other spiritual activity. It would be strange indeed, if the sign of necessity had to follow these activities, as the Baptists insist.

The issue, therefore, is not just the order of baptism but the order of salvation and the issue is sovereign grace over against Arminianism. This we hope to show in more detail in the next chapter.

Let it be said at this point that the practice of infant baptism, when it is practiced in faith

and with understanding is a celebration of sovereign and divine grace and of the fact that grace and therefore God Himself are first in the salvation of the sinner. It is a sign to those who believe in sovereign grace, that God is able to do and has promised to do spiritually what is symbolized in baptism, that is, regenerate the children of believers.

Bromiley points this out:

In contrast to the Lord's Supper it is an act in which the recipient has a passive, not an active role. Even an adult convert does not baptize as he takes, eats, or drinks. He is baptized. He does not do something for or to himself. Something is done for, to and on him.³⁴

We do not believe, of course, that He promises or actually does regenerate every one of them. But He does promise and His promise is always "Yea and Amen" and therefore in the confidence that He will fulfil that promise to those children whom He has chosen we are not afraid to apply to all our children the sign of God's power and grace in regeneration.

³⁴Bromiley, *Children of the Promise*, p. 32. Quoted in Jim West, *The Baptism of Infants in the Old and New Covenants* (Western Classis of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1998), p. 4.

Chapter 4 Infant Baptism and Sovereign Grace

"And although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as they are without their knowledge, partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received into grace in Christ.³⁵

This passage from the Form for the Administration of Baptism used in Reformed churches very nicely sums up what we wish to show here, that is, that infant baptism is part and parcel of the doctrine of sovereign grace, and that a denial of infant baptism is really a denial of sovereign, irresistible, and efficacious grace.

The argument of the Form for the Administration of Baptism is founded on the truth that infants can be and are saved by God:

But thou art he that took me out of the womb: *thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly* (Ps. 22:9, 10).

For thou hast possessed my reins: *thou hast covered me in my mother's womb* (Ps. 139:13).

Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and *before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee*, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations (Jer. 1:5).

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for *they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them*, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:34).

For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and *he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb* (Lk. 1:15).

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. *And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them*(Mk. 10:13-16).

If they can be saved they can also receive baptism as the *sign* of salvation. To say that they cannot have the sign when they *can* have the salvation to which the sign points is inconsistent, to say the least.

A Baptist will argue, however, that a person must give evidence of having salvation before he can receive the sign. He will insist, therefore, that faith must precede water baptism. So, he says, water baptism ought to be administered only to believers. The bedrock of Baptist teaching is, then, the idea that faith must precede water baptism.

This teaching is based on a misinterpretation of Mark 16:15, 16. These verses, however, do not say that faith must precede baptism. Nor does any other Scripture passage. The argument

³⁵"Form for the Administration of Baptism," in *The Psalter with Doctrinal standards, Liturgy, Church Order and Added Chorale Section* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 86.

that this is the order of the passage is really no argument at all. It is true that faith is mentioned before baptism in Mark 16:15, 16. That order is important. But that does not prove that the order is a *temporal* order, i.e., first faith, then baptism. The passage does *not* say, 'He that believeth and *then* is baptized shall be saved.' Baptists assume that it says 'then' but it does not. The order in Mark 16:15, 16, is simply that of priority, i.e., that faith is *more important* than baptism, something we all believe. This we have already seen.

Following the Baptist line of reasoning, one might just as easily prove from II Corinthians 1:6 that consolation comes before salvation or from I Corinthians 1:30 that wisdom, righteous and sanctification come before redemption. because they are mentioned first. In fact, following the Baptist line of reasoning, the order in Mark 16:15, 16, is first faith, then water baptism, *then salvation*; an order no Baptist could accept. All Mark 16:15, 16, proves, then, is that faith, baptism and salvation are very closely related to each other.

The main point of the Form for the Administration of Baptism, however, is that infants are saved "without their knowledge." In this way the Form connects infant baptism and sovereign grace.

That infants are saved without their knowledge is self-evident. But this means that there is no other way to save an infant than by sovereign grace. He cannot respond to the Gospel, exercise saving faith, make any decision, or do any works, and must, then, be saved solely by the sovereign grace of God. Infant salvation, therefore, is a powerful demonstration of salvation by grace alone.

What is more, the salvation of infants demonstrates what is true for everyone whom God saves. *We must all become like little children if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven*, that is, we must be saved in the same way that a little child is saved, without our having done anything in order to be saved.

Many Baptists believe this. Holding to the doctrines of grace and believing the sovereignty of God in salvation, they insist as we do, that God is always first in the work of salvation. Faith, therefore, is not something that precedes salvation, but is itself part of the gift of salvation:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).

It is not something we produce in order to be saved, but something God gives us in saving us.

Yet, the same Baptists who insist that faith cannot not precede salvation, say that it must precede the sign of salvation. How inconsistent! Ought not the sign correspond to the reality? If it is not necessary to have faith before God can begin to save us, then the sign ought to say so. In infant baptism it does!

The Baptist view really leads to the conclusion that infants cannot be saved, though few Baptists actually draw that conclusion. If infants cannot receive the sign of salvation because they are unable to respond, then most certainly they cannot receive the salvation that water baptism pictures! John Hooper points this out in an unpublished paper:

Are we to take the view that children cannot be saved until they reach years of discernment and understanding, when they are old enough to make a conscious decision for themselves? If so then we make a major concession to the theology of free-will and conditional salvation. At its heart it is Arminian thinking. It is a theology that has at its root salvation by works, not by grace

alone. It is all very well for us to proclaim allegiance to the gospel of sovereign grace in the realm of adult salvation, but if we do not follow it through consistently into the realm of infant salvation too, our words are hollow and our theology is half-baked.³⁶

The truth is, of course, that no one is saved *because* he first believes the Gospel. He is saved through believing, but not *after* or *because of* believing. That would make faith a work and be a denial of salvation by grace alone. When we believe, it is because God has already begun His work of salvation in us. Yet even those Baptists who believe in salvation by sovereign grace say that a person's receiving the sign of salvation does depend on his faith! He can receive salvation "without his knowledge," that is, before he is capable of responding and while he is still dead in sin, but cannot receive the sign of that salvation in the same way.

We do not deny, of course, that sometimes water baptism follows faith. In the case of adult converts it is often so (but even then it marks the fact that they entered the kingdom as little children). We are only saying that it *need not* be so. The very idea that one *must* believe before receiving the sign of salvation *and of entrance into salvation* is implicitly Arminian - a denial of salvation by grace. This should be clear to anyone who understands the doctrines of grace.

It is even clearer when we understand that water baptism is only the *sign of baptism*. The real baptism is the washing away of sins by the blood of Jesus Christ:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? (Rom. 6:3).

Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead (Col. 2:12).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Tit. 3:5).

The real baptism is not something that depends on our believing response, or even follows our response, but is "without our knowledge." Indeed, it was principally accomplished already at the cross, long before we were born:

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8).

How fitting that the sign should match the reality at this point.

Not only that, but we actually receive true baptism, the washing away of our sins, *as soon as we are reborn* into the family of God. At that time we are still "infants" in understanding and obedience:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

Is it so strange, then, that we should receive the sign of baptism at the time of our first birth and when we are still infants?

Baptism as the sign of salvation ought to reflect the character of that salvation, especially its free and gracious character. It does that in a very wonderful and beautiful way when infants

³⁶John Hooper, *Believers, Their Children, and the Gospel of Sovereign Grace*, 2nd edition (2005, unpublished), p. 14.

are baptized. In fact, it is our conviction that only the teaching of infant baptism fits the doctrines of grace and the truth that salvation is by grace alone without works. What a beautiful picture of salvation by sovereign grace it is when a tiny infant, not even aware of what is happening to him, receives the sign of God's grace and salvation through the blood of Jesus! Just as that infant receives salvation 'without his knowledge', so also he receives baptism as the sign of that salvation 'without his knowledge'.

All this is the reason why Mark 10:13-16 is sometimes used a proof for infant baptism even though it does not mention baptism at all. The children who were brought to Jesus were infants (in the parallel passage, Luke 18:15-17, the Greek word for an infant or baby is used, something also suggested in Mark by the fact that these children were "brought" to Jesus). And, without even the possibility of any kind of believing response from them, Jesus grants them salvation; for what else is it, in being brought to Him, being received by Him, and blessed by Him, but to be saved in Him? The argument, therefore, is that insofar as these infants received salvation from Him, the sign of that same salvation should not be withheld from them. How could it be withheld?

The Belgic Confession of Faith uses this same argument (Article 34):

And indeed Christ shed his blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful, than for adult persons; and therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that, which Christ hath done for them.

When an infant is baptized, therefore, it must be on some other ground than his *believing response* to the Gospel promises. He is incapable of such a response. He must, in fact, be baptized simply on the ground of God's promise to be the God of His people and of their children:

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee (Gen. 17:7).

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call (Acts 2:39).

Because of that promise of God we may expect a response from him in later life, but neither his salvation nor his receiving the sign of that salvation depends on his response.

This promise does not mean that every baptized infant will be saved. Nor does some vain hope for the salvation of *all* their children cause believing parents to have their children baptized. The foundation for infant baptism is the *promise* of God made to believers that He will be their God and the God of their children (Gen. 17:7, Acts 2:39). Believing parents, therefore, expect that God will gather His elect from among their children and have their children baptized in the sure hope that God who promised will also perform it.

But why should all our children be baptized, when we know that not all will be saved? For the same reason that we bring them all under the preaching of the gospel. Believing parents have *all* their children baptized because they understand that baptism is a kind of visible gospel that will have the same twofold fruit among their children that the preaching of the gospel has, according to God's own purpose in predestination. Baptism, like the gospel, they believe, will be used by God for the salvation of those of their children who are elect, *and for the condemnation of the rest*.

Indeed, Baptists make a fundamental error at this point by viewing baptism as a picture of what we do in salvation, that is, of our repentance and faith, when in fact it is a picture not of what we do, but of what God does. It symbolizes, as we have seen, cleansing from sin (Ezek.

36:25), forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), adoption into God's family (Gal. 3:26, 27), regeneration (Jn. 3:5; Tit. 3:5), and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:25-27).³⁷ Especially, however, it symbolizes washing in Christ's blood and Spirit which are the source of all these other blessings.

By making baptism symbolic of what we do, Baptists make a serious mistake. The focus, then, is moved from God to us, fostering carnal pride. Instead of showing that faith repentance and holiness are things which must follow upon God's work, it leads to carnal security by focusing on what we have already done and thus tempting us to put our trust in it, or doubt because what we have done may not be enough. That is probably the reason why many who have been baptized under this teaching return to be rebaptized time and again. What they have done seems in light of subsequent events not to have been enough.

It is not what we do, but Christ's death and resurrection. It is not our faith and repentance which save us, but union with Christ.

Thus infant baptism teaches us that salvation does not depend on us, but on the sovereign grace of God, who grants salvation to sinners in the same way that they came under condemnation in Adam, that is, without their knowledge.

West sums it up this way:

Does baptism symbolize what we do or what God does in us? If the former choice, then the question about who are to be baptized is settled at once. Baptism would then symbolize our response to the Gospel. If we first act, and then God reacts, then baptism would testify to what we perform for ourselves. This translates into the slightly altered humanistic phrase, "God baptizes those who help themselves" instead of "God helps those who help themselves." Baptism would represent our human might and our human power instead of God's Spirit Who baptizes us....

However, if baptism symbolizes God's work in us so that we are impelled by God to come to God, then it is much easier to understand why children who are too young to profess their faith in Christ should be baptized. If Christ could make even the stones to cry out, He is certainly able to make babies His disciples.³⁸

³⁷Rodger M. Crooks, *Salvation's Sign and Seal*, p. 33.

³⁸Jim West, *The Baptism of Infants in the Old and new Covenants*, p. 3.

Chapter 5

Infant Baptism and the Promise of God

The relation between baptism and the promise of God is of critical importance. Not only as we shall see, does the Baptist fail to take the promise of God regarding His covenant seriously, but the Baptist does not even see that baptism marks and seals that promise. Watson, whose book we have already quoted, explicitly rejects the idea that baptism is “the sign of an objective promise, and has no reference to the character and condition of the person baptized,”³⁹ and therefore also the idea that baptism is a seal of anything.⁴⁰

Not only do paedobaptists see baptism as a seal of God’s objective promise, but object strenuously to the Baptist idea that baptism somehow marks the spiritual condition of the person baptized. Where in Scripture is the support for the idea that baptism somehow shows the spiritual character of the person baptized? Indeed, no Baptist can consistently maintain that baptism marks the spiritual condition of the person baptized unless he is willing to say that every baptized person is saved. Even he knows better. He will say he baptizes *fewer* unsaved persons, but that is to concede the whole point, even if what he says is true (it is, of course, unprovable). Admitting that they baptize even one unsaved person, is the same as admitting that baptism does not mark, sign, seal, or embody the spiritual condition of the person baptized. It cannot. It can only mark, sign, seal, embody something objective -the sure and unchangeable promise of God.

Watson closes his case for believer's baptism by saying, "Not that any church of professing believers will be entirely free from occasions of stumbling, alas. But it will be *much purer* than the corresponding Paedobaptist church, and will thereby bring more glory to the name of the Saviour."⁴¹ Somehow, the Baptist case always seems to come down to this utterly unprovable assumption. Yet even if it were proved, it only shows that the Baptist does not believe his own objections to paedobaptism. He says that paedobaptism is wrong because individuals who do not have faith are baptized and then admits that he has the same problem while trying to cover himself by saying that he has less of a problem.

Insofar as baptism marks the objective promise of God it is exactly like circumcision which is called a seal of the righteousness which is by faith in Romans 4:11:

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

It is true, of course, that circumcision did not guarantee that the person circumcised was justified in the sight of God, but neither does baptism. Circumcision guaranteed the objective promise of God to justify His people. It sealed that promise only to the elect, but to them it was sure and insofar as it was applied to their children it also guaranteed the rest of God’s promise that He would have His elect and justified people among their children.

We say, then, that baptism seals something to those baptized though only to the elect, that is, the sure promise of God to be the God of His people and of their children. We add, however, that it is also a seal to the *whole church* of that promise of God to the elect and their elect children, a kind of visible gospel promise, but with this we will deal in more detail in chapter 17.

What has been said about God’s promise leads us to two passages from His Word:

³⁹Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, p. 80.

⁴⁰Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, p. 82.

⁴¹Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, p. 101.

a. Acts 2:39.

This verse reads:

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

Though there is no mention of infants being baptized on Pentecost, nor any proof that there were such, the case for infant baptism does not rest on proving the unprovable. It rests, rather, on what God says in Acts 2:39. This verse, however, gives the reason for what is stated in the previous verse, as the word "for" indicates. In the two verses Peter is saying to the adults there; "Repent and be baptized *because the promise is unto you.*" Notice that Peter does not say "Repent, and then be baptized because you have repented." Those present were not baptized on account of their repentance, even though the baptism in this case must have followed the repentance, but *on the basis of the promise of God.* That promise, Peter says, is not only to them, but also to their children. It is on that basis that we baptize infants - the promise is to them also.

That promise can be the basis of infant baptism because it is a promise of God, sure and immutable. Hebrews 6:13-20 tells us this:

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

This, of course, gets us into the whole question of whether or not the promises of God are conditional to all or particular and unconditional to the elect only. Let us simply state that on the basis of Hebrews 6:13-20 and other passages, we believe firmly in an unconditional and particular promise and find in that the only possible ground of infant baptism. To teach a conditional and general promise is to overthrow the sure ground of infant baptism in Scripture.

Those paedobaptists who believe in a conditional promise have denied the basis of infant baptism. This, we believe, is one reason why many Baptists put so little stock in paedobaptist arguments and find them unconvincing.

A Baptist asks his paedobaptist acquaintance, "Why do you baptize infants?" The paedobaptist says, "Because of God's promise to save believers and their children." The Baptist says, "But not all of those children are saved! How can you baptize them all?" To which the paedobaptist replies with a long explanation of the fact that the promise is for all children of believers conditionally, but depends for its fulfilment on their later response.

The Baptist sees immediately that such a promise is really no promise at all, and therefore no basis for infant baptism. Indeed, he could justly respond, "In that case you would be better off as a Baptist and wait for that response on which the fulfilment of God's promise and the child's salvation depend."

If the promise of God is to be the basis of infant baptism then that promise must be sure, unconditional and particular, that is, only for the elect. Such a promise provides a firm

foundation for infant baptism in that guarantees absolutely the salvation of the (elect) infants of believers.

That promise is the basis of infant baptism also because it *promises* salvation to believers and their children and promises it unconditionally (God's promises never depend on us). That salvation promised is the salvation symbolized in baptism.

Nor will the argument of the Baptists overthrow this - that some infants of those adults to whom the promise comes do not have the promise either as it comes promising or as it is surely fulfilled. Scripture makes it very clear:

(1) that the unbelief of some does not void the promise or make it *of none effect*. Romans 9:6 says:

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel (cf. also 4:16).

(2) that neither natural descent nor coming under the preaching of the promise guarantee a share in the promise. That is the teaching of Romans 9:7, 8:

Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed (cf. also 10:16ff). and

(3) that the promise is its own guarantee in that it is the sovereign, efficacious, and immutable Word of God and as such brings about the spiritual rebirth of those to whom it belongs, so that they very really can be called "children of the promise" (Rom. 9:8).

To put it in terms of Acts 2, the fact that the immutable and unconditional promise of God is to believers and their children, though not to *all* their children, neither voids the promise itself nor its sureness, but rather insures the salvation of some. On that basis, that some, the elect, will receive the salvation promised, we baptize all.

No Baptist can guarantee that all who receive the sign of baptism receive the reality. In that light we baptize on a better basis than the Baptist, for the Baptist baptizes some on the basis of what they have done in repenting and believing, without any assurance that it is genuine, while we baptize on the basis of the promise of God, believing that it will be fulfilled, even if only to some of our children.

No Baptist we have ever met takes that promise to heart. Though it is the *promise* of God who cannot lie and who does not change, the Baptist always puts a big "maybe" in front of it, an act of unbelief and stumbling at the Word of God. We confess our faith in that promise by having our children baptized, even while we understand that the promise never has and never will guarantee the salvation of *all* of our natural descendants. If even a remnant is saved according to that promise, the promise has not failed:

Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 11:5).

We insist, therefore, that the promise must be received as a promise that God will have His elect among our natural descendants when we believe. It is in this confidence that we baptize our children, believing that God will use even that to separate the wheat from the chaff. We will have more to say about this later, but the point is that the unbelief of some does not void the promise, and that baptism, like the preaching of the Word is a two-edged sword, used both for the salvation of some and the condemnation of the rest. For those reasons we are not afraid to baptize knowing that some will be baptized who are neither saved nor elect.

The rejection of this argument by the Baptists on the basis of the last part of verse 39,

"even as many as the Lord our God shall call," will not do. They insist that this means that those who have the promise and are baptized must also be able to understand and respond to the call. But this ignores the grammar of the sentence. They want to read the sentence: "The promise *is* (now) unto you, and (will be) to your children and to all who are afar off, even as many (of them) as the Lord our God shall call." But that reading does not make sense either in Greek or English. Try to read the verse that way without the words in parentheses!

The verb "shall call" with its future tense can only refer syntactically to "those who are afar off. The first part of the verse must, therefore, be read as a whole: "The promise *is* to you and your children."

The grammar of the text puts "us" and our children together and separates "those who are afar off. If children were lumped with "those who are afar off, then the text would read, "...to you and to your children and all who are afar off." In other words, the promise belongs to those who believe at the moment of their believing. They have, then, God's own guarantee of the salvation of their children.

In the end, however, the argument makes little difference, for even with respect to those who are afar off, the Word of God in Acts 2:39 indicates that the promise already belongs to them also! It is worth noticing, too, that the promise belongs to them, not because they will repent and believe, but because God will call them. We see here again, how the Baptist is forced to put man's activity to the front as the reason and ground for baptism, while the Reformed consistently emphasize God's work and sure promise as the ground and reason for baptism.

Another way of putting it is to say that the Reformed baptize in the assurance that God will fulfil His promises, do the work He has spoken of, and save His elect, while the Baptist always baptizes merely on the basis of a person's own profession and in the hope that the person baptized will not turn out a hypocrite.

One more thing concerning this verse. Baptists always insist in their defense of believer's baptism, that Acts 2:39 has nothing in particular to do with believers and their children, but is only the general call of the gospel to all who hear including the promise that those who repent will be saved. But this promise is not addressed to all and sundry. It is a promise that God makes in the church and to the church. As Hooper puts it:

We should understand first that it is a promise God has given to His church. No such promise has been made to the ungodly and their children. The promise of Acts 3:38 and 39, with the hope and comfort it conveys, is no more for the children of the world than the promise of Genesis 17:7 and 8 was for the Egyptians, Philistines, Hivites or Gergashites and their children. This sets the children of believers apart from all other children and has implications for every area of their life, whether in home, school or church.⁴²

b. Acts 16:29-34.

Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

⁴²Hooper, *Believers, Their Children, and the Gospel of Sovereign Grace*, p. 12.

This passage confirms what we have said about Acts 2:39. Paul promised the salvation of the jailer's house, without even knowing who was in the house, when the jailer himself inquired concerning salvation. Paul did that knowing the sovereignty of God in salvation and the certainty of God's promise to save the households of those who believe.

No Baptist we have spoken to is able to understand this as a *promise*. The Baptists always want to make this just a pious wish on Paul's part, or simply a statement that if others in the man's house believed then they too would be saved. But the verse does not say that. It says as emphatically as possible: "*You believe, and you and your house will be saved!*"

That promise, Scripture teaches belongs both in the Old Testament and in the New to all God's people. It was on that basis that Old Testament people of God circumcised their children and it is on the basis of that promise that New Testament believers baptize theirs.

Chapter 6

Family Baptism

The argument from the repeated mention of family baptism in the New Testament is one of the clearest and easiest proofs of infant baptism. As we have pointed out, of the nine references to actual baptisms in the New Testament, five make reference to households or families.

a. Acts 16:14-15.

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

This passage is one of the principle grounds for household baptism and speaks of something the Baptists do not and cannot practice. The whole question of whether or not Lydia was married and had children is beside the point. That example and the example of the Philippian jailor are clear warrant for household baptism, and some households inevitably will include children.

We are willing and even eager to baptize households on the basis of God's sure family promises. No Baptist can do it, because baptism, in his opinion, must follow upon the faith and repentance of the *individual*.

Our willingness to baptize households or families, therefore, follows in part from what is sometimes referred to as "covenant" or "federal" theology, that is, the belief that God does not deal with men individually, but always in their relationships to others, as members of the family, of the church, of a nation, even of the human race (cf. the whole doctrine of original sin), of the *body* of Christ, or of an elect and redeemed *world* (Jn. 3:16). Covenant theology is always federal and communal.

b. Acts 16:29-34.

Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

Our arguments with respect to the Philippian jailor are similar to those with respect to Lydia and we will not, then, repeat what we have just said. It needs to be added here, however, that this is another passage that shows that God's *sure and immutable promise* is the real basis, first for assurance of the salvation of the children of believers (though not all of them), and then also for infant baptism as a seal of that salvation.

Note please that Acts 16:31 neither says nor implies: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house, *if they believe*." Not only that, but any Baptist who insists that the order in such verses as these is always temporal, ought to be troubled by the fact that here the baptism of the jailor's household *precedes* any mention of their faith.

The two examples given in Romans 9 illustrate the unfailing character of God's promises

to save His people and their children, and *are* examples where only one child in the family was saved. Both in the family of Abraham and Sarah and in the family of Isaac and Rebekah there was only one, and these are the examples Paul uses to prove that the promise and word of God are not without effect!

c. Acts 10:48, Acts 18:8 and I Corinthians 1:16.

These passages read:

And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days (Acts 10:48).

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other (I Cor. 1:16).

With reference to the households of Cornelius, Crispus and Stephanus we would only add in addition to what we have already said, that in speaking of households it is not uncommon in everyday speech or in the Scriptures that the household (or larger group) is described as doing something when in fact not every single member is doing it or capable of doing it. Nevertheless, the main point of the reference to Crispus is that it proves both household salvation and household baptism and underlines what we have already said along those lines.

We prefer, therefore, to describe our practice and belief in relation to baptism as "family" or "household" baptism rather than as "infant" baptism. There are several reasons for this:

(1) We do not only baptize infants. Those who are converted later in life and have never before been baptized we too baptize as adults.

(2) In baptizing infants or adults, the baptism of families is our practice wherever and whenever possible.

(3) Family or household baptism is the kind of baptism Scripture describes when speaking of those who ought to be baptized.

(4) Speaking of "family baptism" serves as a reminder of how and why such passages as Acts 16:14, 15, 31-34 are proof for the practice of baptizing infants as well as adults.

Thus, too, these passages are used to support the practice of baptizing the children of believers. It is true, of course, that we do not know if there were small children in any of these households (it is unlikely that there were no infants at all in all four of these families). Nevertheless, if family or household baptism is the pattern laid down in Scripture, it is impossible to practice such without baptizing infants, since most households do include them.

We would add that if believer's baptism only is the rule of Scripture, family or household baptism becomes an impossibility. Even if it so happens that different members of the same family are converted and baptized at the same time in a Baptist church, they still are not baptized *as members of a household or family*, but as individuals, each as a result only of his own profession of faith.

That we baptize households and families follows from our belief in God's family covenant, i.e., that He sovereignly, graciously, and unchangeably promises salvation to families and households, promising to be the God of believers and their children (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39).

Our practice does not, however, mean that we presume to think that every member of a household is necessarily saved. But, baptism even of those who profess faith as adults can never be as such a guarantee either. *Never* does baptism prove or say that the person baptized is certainly saved.

That we baptize families or households, following the clear example of Scripture itself, is a memorial to the fact that God Himself is a Family, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to the fact that he magnifies His grace and reveals Himself in sending salvation to families. He is indeed the God of families:

Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock (Ps. 107:41).

Regarding these passages we wish to make another point using Acts 10:44-48 as an example. Baptists insist that those who were baptized in the house of Cornelius were those who heard the Word and upon whom the Holy Spirit came (vs. 44), in other words, those and those only who were old enough to respond in faith to Peter's preaching. It should be noted, however, that the language of the passage does not exclude infants or the possibility that there were infants as well as adults baptized on this occasion.

In everyday speech we include in statements of this sort those to whom the statement does not always strictly apply. I might say, for example, "We are driving to the store and shopping for groceries." That does not imply that everyone who goes to the store is actually capable of driving, selecting items and paying for them." Thus when verse 48 speaks of "them" being baptized we understand that there were those who were capable of responding to Peter's preaching but may not assume that every single baptized individual was.

Family baptism is the rule of Scripture, a rule that can only be obeyed when families, including children are baptized!

Chapter 7 The Blessing of Jesus

Matthew 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17.

These three important parts of God's Word are parallel passages though they do not necessarily all record the very same incident:

Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence (Matthew).

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them (Mark).

And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein (Luke).

These are important passages to every paedobaptist, but not because they are an example of infants being brought for baptism. To use the behavior of the twelve disciples at the time little children were brought to Jesus to "prove" that the disciples were not accustomed to seeing infants baptized, as some Baptists do, is as weak as some of the arguments of the paedobaptists that they ridicule. None of the passages which record the incident tell us why the disciples rebuked those who brought these children or give any indication that this was due to a supposed belief on the part of the disciples that only adults could be baptized (or saved).

Nor does any Paedobaptist that we know of use these passages (Matt. 19:13-15, Mk. 10:13-16, and Lk. 18:15-17) to prove infant baptism by way of insisting that these parents brought their children to Jesus that He might *baptize* them. Matthew Poole and other Baptists miss the point entirely. The point is that these verses prove that Jesus granted salvation to these infant children, the salvation that baptism symbolizes, and that therefore it is not incredible to suggest that these same infants might be able to receive the sign of that salvation. This is an argument, by the way, that no Baptist we know has addressed or answered - the argument from reality to sign based on the correspondence between reality and sign.

If the use of Matthew 19:13-15 as evidence for infant baptism shows "the absence of stronger proof," as one Baptist suggests, then, Watson's argument here shows equally the absence of stronger proof for his case. He argues fallaciously that because the Lord did not use this occasion to command His disciples to baptize infants, or because the disciples did not subsequently baptize these children, that therefore infants are not to be baptized. The point of these verse is that if infants can receive the spiritual reality to which baptism points than they can also receive the picture or sign.

Indeed, the fact that these verses prove infant salvation is only part of the argument from these verses. Even more important is what Jesus says about "receiving" the kingdom "as a little

child." The fact that we *receive* the kingdom and that we receive it as *little children*, both show that this is a matter of God's sovereign work apart from, prior to, and not depending on any response from us. Of that baptism is a sign. It is *not*, as we have shown, a sign of faith and repentance, therefore, but of regeneration, something that precedes both faith and repentance. It is a sign, in other words, of how we "receive the kingdom" *not of what we do after we receive it* (repent, believe, live as disciples).

Add that to some of the the other things that Jesus says about children and you have clear proof that children can and do receive the reality to which water baptism points. In Matthew 18 Jesus speaks of little child being humbled (vs. 4), having Christ in him (vs. 5), believing in him (vs. 6) and being among the lost which the Son of man comes to save. These children are specifically described by him in the passage as "little," literally "tiny" (vss. 6, 10), indicating that they were not, as the Baptists content, children who were of an age to make a credible profession.

Especially what Jesus says about a little child believing in Him is important. That one statement destroys the every argument for believer's baptism, or admits to baptism little children who can and do believe! Again, we quote from Hooper:

The expression "child-like faith" has entered common parlance as an expression of uncomplicated, unquestioning trust, yet we find it difficult to accept that a small child is capable of "child-like faith" toward the Saviour. We make faith so complicated, so adult. The Lord used children to illustrate an important point for grown-ups, saying "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein (Luke 18:17; cf. Matt. 19:14 and Mark 10:15), but many Christians show a strange reluctance to accept the full force of His words. The kingdom of God includes little children - the Greek word used by Luke means a babe in arms - and the way by which they enter is the way we all must go, the way of faith. We must receive the kingdom as a little child receives it - by simple trust in the Lord Jesus, an absolute dependence upon Him and confidence in all that He has done for our salvation. This is the faith that is the gift of God (cf. Eph. 2:8) and which He dispenses to whomsoever He will, including little children. Let us never underestimate the spiritual capacity of a little child in whom the Spirit of God is at work.⁴³

To this we would add the fact that faith in its deepest reality is not the act of believing and trusting, but union with Christ. That is why Scripture speaks so often of believing "in" Christ, or "on" Christ or even "upon" or "into" Him. That spiritual reality can be given as easily to a little infant of days as it can to an adult.

You see the consequence, do you not? Baptism, then, even in the case of an adult believer or professor, is not marking some spiritual activity on his part but rather his receiving the kingdom through regeneration. That kingdom he receives as a little child, that is, without any preceding activity on his part. His faith and repentance, therefore, are not the reason for his receiving the kingdom, but the consequence of it and baptism marks the way he receives the kingdom, as the sign so clearly shows. The water does not symbolize faith or repentance, but the washing away of sins by the blood of Jesus (justification and the washing of regeneration). To put it differently, baptism does not mark the spiritual activity that is the result of God's work, but the sovereign work of God which begins our spiritual life, a work performed while we are still like little children, unable to do anything at all even to further that work. This is a crucial point.

⁴³Hooper, *Believers, Their Children, and the Gospel of Sovereign Grace*, p. 18.

All the well-known Baptist writer, John Gill can do with this passage is to say that the passage is not speaking of actual infants, but of infants metaphorically, that is, of adults who become like infants. The passage makes it clear, however, that these were young children of whom Jesus was speaking. Both the fact that they were brought to Jesus and that He took them in His arms (Mk. 10:16) show that the reference to children is not metaphorical.

Chapter 8

Baptism and Entrance into the Kingdom

Mark 10:13-16 and its parallels in Matthew and Luke, the passages just referred to, are often used in another way by paedobaptists to prove infant baptism. In Mark we read:

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

Those who hold to so-called "believer's baptism" find the use of this passage baffling, since it does not speak of baptism at all.

It is, nevertheless, an important passage and *can* be used to support the practice of infant baptism. This is true for several reasons, but we must notice from the outset that these children were in fact *infants* (Lk. 18:15, where the Greek word used can only mean infants or babies).

(1) These *infants* were received by Jesus, who also took them in His arms and blessed them. To be received into Jesus' arms and blessed is nothing more or less than salvation itself. That these infants were in fact saved by Jesus is clear also from verses 14 and 15 where He speaks of them receiving the kingdom.

Of that salvation and reception of the kingdom baptism is a *picture* or *sign* which shows us how we enter the kingdom. The Paedobaptists argument, then, is this: that if these infants can receive the *reality* to which baptism points, why cannot they receive the *sign*? To put it differently, if they can receive the greater thing, why not the lesser? Indeed, we believe that because they can and do receive the reality, they *ought* also to receive the sign, since salvation is promised to them no less than to adults in the covenant of grace.

(2) The second argument is a little different. It is based on what Jesus says in verse 15. There He tells us that no one receives the kingdom except in the way an infant receives it, that is, passively, without knowledge, and by the power of grace alone. To receive the kingdom as a little child, therefore, is to receive it without works - without any effort on our part. That is the only way an infant *can* receive the kingdom!

And, indeed, that is the only way *anyone* can receive the kingdom. Initially, when salvation first comes, we are neither seeking it nor desiring it. We are, after all, dead in trespasses and sins, and it is only when God graciously *gives* us salvation and the kingdom by regenerating us that we also begin to seek and know what He has done.

Jesus, then, tells us that there is only one way to receive the kingdom, that is, as a little child. If we have not received it in that way we have not received it at all (vs. 15)!

Therein is another reason we baptize infants. We do not say that every baptized infant itself is necessarily saved, but we see in the baptism of every infant a picture of how salvation is possible for that infant according to the promise of God's covenant, that is, by the power of sovereign grace.

Not only that, but in every baptized infant we have a picture of how *any and everyone of us* has been saved - not by our willing or efforts, but by almighty power of sovereign grace, which came to us unlooked for and unsought and *gave* us new life and birth.

Infant baptism is, therefore, a wonderful testimony to the power and sovereignty of

grace! How sad that many do not have or see that testimony in the baptism of helpless infants!

The parallel passage in Matthew 18:1-11 is, if anything, even stronger, though the occasion was different. There the Word of God not only speaks of a little child, but Jesus speaks of such a little child humbling himself (vs. 4), being identified with Christ Himself (vs. 5), believing in him (vs. 6), of being under the care of angels (vs. 10), and of being among those who are saved by Christ (vs. 11).

The word used to describe such children and translated "little child" is a word which never in the New Testament refers to a child that is able to act and live independently of its parents, "little child," then being a good translation of the word. Such Jesus says, though that may be difficult to understand are capable of believing, acting in humility, and being saved.

Chapter 9

The Holiness of Covenant Children

I Corinthians 7:14 speaks of the holiness of covenant children and therefore of something that Baptists have difficulty understanding:

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

Watson, a Baptist writer, shows his ignorance of the what the passage means by stating that the "holiness of the children is not inferred from the faith of the believing parent, but from the sanctification of the unbelieving party, by or to the believer."⁴⁴ Where he gets this interpretation we do not know. No commentator we know of even suggests it.

The verse says exactly the opposite, that the holiness of the children is inferred from the faith of the believing parent. The verse is saying something like this: "the unbeliever is sanctified by the believer, as is evident from the holiness of the children produced by this union," i.e, the fact that the children are holy (and this is taken for granted) is proof that the unbelieving partner is also sanctified. The word translated "else" in the AV has the meaning "since" or "because." It does not and cannot mean "thus" or "so" as some Baptists suggest.

The difficulty, however, is with the meaning of the word holy, whether it means spiritually holy as cleansed by the Spirit, or holy in some other sense, and then, too, whether it means exactly the same thing with respect to the unbelieving marriage partner and the children of the marriage.

We believe that in reference to the children the word refers to the holiness that is part of salvation, the holiness that belongs to those who are reborn, cleansed from sin, and consecrated to God. Why? First, because that is the usual meaning of the word in the New Testament and second, because the word is set in contrast to the word "unclean" a word that means "spiritually unclean" or "sinful" in every almost every New Testament reference (there are only three instances where it refers to Old Testament ceremonial uncleanness and in those cases the context makes it very clear that ceremonial uncleanness is meant):

Acts 10:14, 28; But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.... And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Acts 11:8; But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

Hebrews 9:13, 14; For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

But even if the uncleanness is the ceremonial uncleanness referred to in a few passages, that ceremonial uncleanness meant that a person had *no access to the Old Testament church and its worship and to the fellowship of God's people* and cleanness meant the opposite. Cleanness even in that sense, then, has implications for the children of believing parents.

⁴⁴Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, p. 39.

We do not, however, think that it means the same thing in the case of the unbelieving partner and would agree with what one Baptist writes: "Now what holiness or sanctification has an unbeliever? Certainly not the sanctification of the Spirit, because this is accompanied by belief of the truth (II Thess. 2:13)." It seems to us, therefore, that it can only mean that the unbeliever is "sanctified" with regard to his or her position in the marriage relationship so that the believer will not be corrupted and polluted by constant contact with him or her (cf. II Cor. 6:17). But this is not the point of our discussion here.

Nevertheless, even if one disagrees with this interpretation of the word "holy," the verse still makes it very clear that the faith of a believer "sets apart" his or her children, even if the other partner is wicked and unbelieving. There is, therefore, a difference between the children of believers and the children of unbelievers, and that difference follows from the faith of the believing parent(s). This, of course, is something no Baptist can admit, for it strikes at the very foundations of what he believes about baptism. It implies the unity of the old and new covenants especially as far as the family promise of the covenant is concerned, and even implies, that as a result of that covenant and its promise, there is ground for distinguishing the children of believers from others by the sign of that covenant and promise.

All this is confirmed by the fact that children who are obviously very young children, are addressed and exhorted as saints in Ephesians 1:1, with 6:1-4 and Colossians 1:1, 2 with 3:20, 21:

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.... Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians).

Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.... Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged (Colossians).

These verses make it clear that when Paul calls the members of the churches of Ephesus and Colosse "saints and faithful" or "saints and faithful brethren" he is speaking to the children as well, not only including them as members of the church, but also among the people of God. This is the holiness of covenant children and it is the reason for baptizing those children of the covenant.

Chapter 10 Unbelievers and the Covenant

One Baptist objection to infant baptism, is that some are baptized who are not saved and never will be saved. They constantly remind us of this by telling us that in baptizing infants we baptize those who have not repented and professed faith. To Baptists this seems wholly arbitrary.

In answer to this objection, we would point out, first of all, that it is plainly *impossible* either in Baptist or Reformed churches to baptize only saved persons. Because the secrets of the heart are unknown to us, even Baptist churches can baptize those only who make a *profession* of faith and repentance.

In pointing this out to various Baptist friends and acquaintances, the response has usually been: "But we baptize fewer unsaved persons than you do." The fact is, that if a Baptist baptizes even *one* unsaved person, he is no longer practicing "believer's baptism," but only something that might be called "professor's baptism" or "professed believer's baptism." He, as well as we, has to reckon with the fact that unbelievers receive the sacrament, and that in calling his practice *believer's* baptism he only covers up the fact that he does not and cannot baptize only believers.

It should not surprise us, however, that both in Baptist and in Reformed churches unbelievers are baptized. In Scripture both baptism and circumcision are deliberately applied to unbelievers. Abraham circumcised Ishmael, after being told that Ishmael had no part in the covenant:

And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.... And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him (Gen. 17:18-19, 23).

Likewise, Isaac circumcised Esau after being told that Esau was reprobate:

And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger (Gen. 25:23).

The Baptist argues at this point that circumcision was only a mark of national identity, but that simply is not true in light of what Scripture says about circumcision. It was always a sign of "the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision (death) of Christ" (Col. 2:11; cf. also Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4) and a seal of the righteousness of faith (Romans 4:11):

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

The same is true of baptism. The baptism in the Red Sea (identified as a baptism in I Cor. 10:1, 2), was applied by God to many "with whom He was not well pleased" and who subsequently were destroyed of Satan (I Cor. 10:1-10):

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual

meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness ... and were destroyed of the destroyer.

In the other Old Testament type, Ham was "baptized" (I Pet. 3:20, 21) with the rest of Noah's family:

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The only question, then, or so it seems to us, is this: "Why is God pleased to have it so - that the sign of the covenant and of salvation, both in the Old Testament and the New, be applied to unsaved as well as to saved persons?" Whether they are adults or children really makes no difference now. Even the Baptist must answer this question, though in answering it, he admits that he does not practice "believer's baptism."

The answer to this question lies in the eternal purpose of God. Only someone who firmly believes that God has eternally ordained all things, including the salvation of some and not of others, can give a clear and unequivocal answer to this question.

The answer must be that baptism and circumcision in the Old Testament, like the preaching of the gospel, are a power and a testimony both for salvation *and for hardening and condemnation*, and this according to the purpose of God. II Corinthians 2:14-16 speak of the gospel in these terms and it is not much to believe that the sacraments which are a sort of visible and tangible gospel have the same effect:

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?

We baptize infants as well as adults, therefore, understanding that God will use it for the salvation of some, and for the condemnation of others, according to His own purpose, as in the case of Ishmael or of Esau. Then, too, we need not worry about whether or not we are baptizing only believers as every Baptist should worry.

Chapter 11 Circumcision and Baptism

Colossians 2:11-12 is one of the pillars on which the unity of the covenant and of its sign rests. In spite of what Baptists say, the verses *do* identify circumcision and baptism. They are not just “two different symbols of the same truth.” Colossians 2:11, 12 says:

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

The Baptist argument against the unity of circumcision and baptism rests on the premise that the difference between outward signs of baptism and circumcision is an essential difference, but that is what needs to be proved. His argument is really:

The outward signs of baptism and circumcision are different in their administration.

A difference of administration is an essential difference.

Therefore baptism and circumcision are essentially different.

And

Circumcision was primarily a sign of outward blessings.

Baptism is the outward sign of inward spiritual blessings.

Therefore there is no real correspondence between circumcision and baptism.

But that assumes what needs to be proved.

Our argument is:

(1) The spiritual reality of baptism and circumcision are the same.

The outward signs correspond to the spiritual reality.

Therefore the outwards signs are also essentially the same.

And

(2) The apparent difference between circumcision and baptism is only a difference of administration.

A difference of administration is not an essential difference.

Therefore the outward signs of circumcision and baptism are essentially the same.

This can be proved.

Baptists would have a hard time denying that the same spiritual reality is symbolized by both circumcision and baptism. Scripture teaches that plainly as we show below. One Baptist even says that they are “different symbols of the same truth.” Nevertheless, to show just how closely Colossians 2:11, 12 identifies them, we have included a diagram that is taken from J. O. Buswell's *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*.⁴⁵

Insert Diagram

That leaves us, then, with the necessity of showing several things: (1) that the outward, visible signs do correspond not only to the same spiritual reality but to each other; and (2) that the apparent difference between them is only a difference of administration.

We want to show first of all, therefore, that because the outward signs of circumcision and baptism correspond to the same spiritual reality they also correspond to each other. Both are pictures of the work of God in the heart through regeneration. Both picture the removal of the guilt and pollution of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Baptism is a picture of the washing of regeneration by which God cleanses the heart of

⁴⁵(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 261.

sin, and cleanses it so thoroughly that it is a "new heart." Because that work is performed upon the heart, we ourselves, by virtue of that cleansing, can be said to be born again, and to be new creatures in Christ. Water is used because of its cleansing power. So used, it is a picture of the blood of Christ and its cleansing power.

Circumcision, on the other hand, is a picture of the cutting away of sin from the heart. According to Colossians 2:11 it is the "putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ," that is, by the death of Christ on the cross (described as a circumcision both because it involved the shedding of blood and the removal of sin from Him as the Sin-bearer). In so far as it was performed upon the male generative organ it also pictures the cutting of the link with Adam by which we are guilty and defiled in him.

Circumcision is not, then, merely a sign of outward blessings. This is established beyond doubt in Romans 4:11:

And he received the sign of circumcision, *a seal of the righteousness of the faith* which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

The two outward signs, though they appear to be very different - one involving cutting and the other washing - point to the same spiritual reality, and in pointing to this same reality the two signs do correspond. If $b = a$ and $c = a$, then $b = c$. That is simple logic. A diagram will, perhaps, illustrate this correspondence more clearly than words. The two realities (and the signs with them), then, correspond at the following points:

	Spiritual Circumcision	Spiritual Baptism
Work:	removal of sin	removal of sin
Place:	from the heart	from the heart
Means:	by means of the shedding of blood	by means of the shedding of blood
Basis:	by the death of Christ	by the death of Christ
Author:	through the Holy Spirit	through the Holy Spirit
Manner:	in regeneration	in regeneration
Result:	unto holiness	unto holiness
Objects:	for the elect	for the elect

But what about the difference between them—cutting in one case, washing in the other? Since they make the same picture it should be clear that the *only* difference between them is a difference of the way in which the signs were administered. The cutting and washing, therefore, are in the nature of the case matters of administration, and reflect the fact that the Old Testament *always required the shedding of blood*, while in the New Testament the shedding of blood is done away by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Baptists do nothing to show that this is not true. They claim that they are "different signs" but do nothing to show (1) that this difference is any more than a difference of administration, and (2) if it is, in what respects it is more than a matter of administration, or (3) that a difference of administration is an essential difference. They often claim that under the old covenant the sign of circumcision promised certain material blessings, but even this was not an

essential difference in that those material things were promised only as types of spiritual things. Any Baptist who is not a Dispensationalist would have to admit that.

It must be pointed out, however, (1) that what we refer to as baptism and circumcision are only the *signs*; and (2) that as far as the meaning of these signs is concerned, they are *exactly* the same! The *reality* of circumcision is exactly the same as the *reality* of baptism.

The real circumcision and the real baptism are salvation itself, that is, the removal of sin by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This is clear in the case of circumcision from Deuteronomy 30:6 and Colossians 2:11:

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 (Deuteronomy).

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ (Colossians).

In the case of baptism we see this from Romans 6:4-6 and I Peter 3:21:

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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Romans).

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Peter).

They are, therefore, exactly the same as far as the spiritual reality is concerned, and though the signs may appear very different they symbolize the *same* spiritual truth. To say that the two are different, therefore, is to fall into the error of dispensationalism and to say that there are *two different ways of salvation* in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Most Baptists try to avoid this by insisting, in spite of Deuteronomy 30:6, and Colossians 2:11, that circumcision in the Old Testament was not a sign of salvation but some sort of mark to identify *the members of the nation of Israel*.

This Paul rejects in Romans 2:28, where he insists that the outward circumcision is not the real thing at all and that, therefore, to be a Jew outwardly is nothing - that the only circumcision which matters is that of the *heart*, and the only Jew is he who is one *inwardly*. All those who wish to maintain that there is something special about being a natural descendant of Abraham ought to read this passage:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh.

Why then the difference between the outward signs of circumcision and baptism? That is easy to see in light of the chief difference between the Old Testament and the New. In the Old Testament all those things that pointed ahead to Christ involved the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22), but once the blood of Christ was shed there could be no more shedding of blood (Heb. 10:12):

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission... But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.

That is the *only* real difference between the signs of circumcision and baptism. In meaning and reality they are exactly the same. Thus, too, Scripture itself identifies them in Colossians 2:11, 12. Perhaps because these verses make up one long sentence, we are inclined to miss the point Paul is making. He says that to be circumcised *is* to be baptized! That is in fact one of the main points of the chapter. Speaking to Gentile believers, he is saying to them that they have *all* things in Christ (v. 10), *including circumcision!* They lack nothing at all in Christ, in whom dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily (v. 9).

That circumcision and baptism not only have the same meaning, but are the same as far as their *spiritual realities* are concerned is the reason, we believe, that their outward signs must be administered (under the one everlasting covenant of God) to the same people, including infants, in the Old and the New Testaments.

Add to this the fact that circumcision

Chapter 12

One Covenant

Essential to a belief in family baptism is a firm belief in one covenant. That there is but one covenant of God we will show in more detail in the next chapter, but the many passages which speak both of the covenant in the singular and which speak of it as an everlasting covenant are sufficient proof for us. We reject, then, the views of most other paedobaptists, that there are at least two covenants, one of works and one of grace, and see such views as a major concession to dispensationalism. We also believe, therefore, that the Old and New Covenants are only different administrations or revelations of one covenant of grace.

Baptists, especially Reformed Baptists are caught on the horns of a dilemma at this point. To say without qualification that there is but one covenant in the Old and New Testaments, would be a surrender to the paedobaptists and covenant theologians, and yet they also understand that to make any principal separation between the two testaments is to fall into dispensationalism and ultimately into the error of classic Schofieldian dispensationalism which makes a complete separation between the Old and New Covenants even as far as the way of salvation is concerned.

Thus Reformed Baptists try to have it both ways, insisting on one covenant over against dispensationalism and yet seeing important and principle differences between the Old and New Covenants. Watson is a good example of this. After insisting that there is but one covenant, he goes on to talk about a Jewish faith, a Jewish church and finally a separate covenant of grace!⁴⁶ He only promotes confusion, however, though he insists that it is the paedobaptists who are confused. How can there be more than one covenant of grace without their being more than one grace or more than one way of salvation? What is the difference between the Baptist position as presented by Watson and classic Schofieldian dispensationalism?

Watson, of course, like most Reformed Baptists, is trying to have it both ways. He does not want dispensationalism, but neither does he want one covenant, so he halts between two opinions. We insist over against such confusion that there is but one covenant.

With regard to those supposed two covenants, Watson says that the covenant of grace was made with Christ and the covenant of circumcision (here he has changed his language and no longer speaks of two covenants of grace) with Abraham - that the one promises spiritual blessings, the other material blessings.

It is impossible, however, to follow this reasoning consistently since it leads to a denial of what Scripture says about the children of Abraham (Rom. 2:28, 29; 9:7, 8; Gal. 3:29), i.e., that not all the circumcised *are* counted children of Abraham, and that all believers are! Notice what the Word of God says:

For he 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 (Romans 2)

Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed (Romans 9).

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3).

⁴⁶Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, p. 82.

His main point is that there is a real difference between the Old Testament covenant in that it promised material blessing to Abraham's descendants. But those blessings promised cannot be anything else essentially than the true spiritual blessings of salvation and of the kingdom of heaven, though promised under the types and shadows. They were promised to Abraham and his seed *forever* (Gen. 17:7, 8). Many, including Abraham, did not in fact receive them, and therefore only the dispensationalist is consistent in insisting that if these blessings are truly material, then there must be a special earthly future for the Jews.

Scripture, too, makes it clear that these blessing were essentially all spiritual in Hebrews 11:8-16;

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Abraham himself never received anything of the land which was at the heart of all the promises, and Acts 7:5 tells us that the promises were also made to him:

And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

But he understood that these promises of material things were only the "wrapper" in which the spiritual realities they pictured were enclosed. When he left Ur, therefore, to go the land God had promised him, he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God, as did Isaac and Jacob after him.

Those promises are the same promises that are made to us, therefore, though stripped of their typical form and "wrapper." But that part never mattered. One never did have to receive those things to receive the promises. Abraham himself did not receive them, yet was an heir of the promises.

There is, therefore, only one promise, made to Abraham and to God's people in every age, the promise of salvation and eternal blessing through Jesus Christ. That one promise belongs to the one covenant of grace which God has administered and revealed in every age and which is the same today as it was then.

Chapter 13

The Old and New Covenants

Hebrews 8:6-13. That the difference between circumcision and baptism is only administrative follows from the fact that the old and new covenants to which these signs belonged *differed only in administration*. This is a crucial point in the debate between Paedo- and antipaedobaptists. Interestingly, it is Hebrews 9:6-13, the passage that speaks most clearly of the old and new covenants that shows the difference between them to be only a matter of administration.

Let us get the verses themselves before us:

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

Notice the following:

(1) If Hebrews 8:6-13 speaks of two covenants different in some essential way, then the passage cannot be reconciled with Genesis 17:7 and other like passages which speak of *one everlasting* covenant. Genesis 17:7 says;

And I will establish my *covenant* between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an *everlasting* covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

(2) Hebrews 8:10 uses the ordinary covenant formula (thy God, my people) to show that the new covenant is not essentially different from the old. At that point, with respect to their very nature and character, they are the same.

(3) The reference to the law confirms this. In the new covenant the law is not removed, but rewritten on different tables - the fleshly tables of the heart (II Cor. 3:3). Law and covenant still go together.

(4) In fact, the giving of the law (though differently written) *is* the "giving" of the covenant, both in Deuteronomy 4:13 and here. Compare the passages!

And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone (Deut. 4:13).

Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in

tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart (II Cor. 3:3).

(5) The two covenants are different, therefore, with respect to a change of mediator and with respect to the way the law was written, and it is in these two respects only that Scripture finds fault with the old covenant and these are *only* differences of administration as the following charts will show. The essentials are still all the same.

Similarities:

Old Covenant	New Covenant
founded upon promises	founded upon promises
(the promise = thy God, my people)	(the promise = thy God, my people)
(the promise = salvation - vs. 12)	(the promise = salvation - vs. 12)
given through a mediator	given through a mediator
accompanied by the giving of the law	accompanied by the giving of the law
(the law written by God)	(the law written by God)
established with Israel	established with Israel (vs. 10)

These, as anyone can see are essential similarities and show clearly that the two covenants are really nothing more than different revelations of the one covenant of God.

Differences:

Old Covenant	New Covenant
mediator = Moses (a type of Christ)	mediator = Christ
law written on tables of stone	law written in hearts and minds
incomplete revelation (vs. 11)	complete revelation (vs. 11)

It is quite obvious it seems to us, that the difference between type and reality, lesser or greater revelation, and manner of revelation are all relatively insignificant matters of administration and not essential matters. The revelation given in the Old Testament is not different in content, only in fulness, nor do the sacrifices, mediators, and types of the Old Testament have a different object, only a different way of directing us to and teaching us that object, which is always Christ and the salvation He brings.

(6) Indeed, if the second covenant is essentially different and better, then so are the promises not only better, but essentially different, according to vs. 6. But then how does one escape dispensationalism?

It is at this point that Baptists, whether Reformed or otherwise verge on dispensationalism or become dispensationalists in that they are forced to find some substantial and real difference between the Old and New Covenants. Martin, for example, agrees that the New Covenant is the continuation and fulfilment of the Old, that believers are the heirs of the promise made to Abraham and that they are the circumcised. He insists that the seed of Abraham is Christ and those who are in Him, but insists nevertheless that there is real diversity and difference between the two covenants.

The difference, according to him involves three things: (1) that the Old Covenant

included a promise of the land; (2) that the Old Covenant included the promise of wealth and great physical blessing; and (3) that the covenant is broader than the spiritual and believing descendants of Abraham (here he is very unclear).⁴⁷

What Martin means, of course, is that the Old Covenant was in some sense of the word a national and earthly covenant with all the Israelite descendants of Abraham. That is incipient dispensationalism, but the Reformed Baptist is always caught between these two - the very right and proper desire to see only one spiritual seed of Abraham and the need to find some essential difference between the Old and New Covenants.

Over against this Hoeksema says:

It is by no means correct to say, that in the old dispensation the Jews were the seed of Abraham, while in the new dispensation believers are this seed. The Jews as such never were the seed of Abraham. It is indeed correct to say that for a time the seed of Abraham were found exclusively among Abraham's descendants, as they are found now among all nations. But the Scripture never identifies Abraham's descendants with the seed of Abraham.⁴⁸

The fact is, that if the Old Covenant included unbelievers in any sense of the word, and if the promise was the promise of earthly prosperity and blessings, then it is a very different covenant from the New Covenant, for that covenant is exclusively spiritual and heavenly and is established only with the elect.

Here many paedobaptists go wrong, however, for they too misunderstand the New Covenant and try to find a place for unbelieving baptized children in the covenant, i.e., they find a general conditional covenant with all baptized children to be the basis for infant baptism. They have in that case conceded the argument to the Baptists.

⁴⁷Robert Martin, Emmanuel Reformed Baptist Church, Seatac, Washington, series of 8 tapes on baptism.

⁴⁸Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grandville: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), vol. 2, p. 363.

Chapter 14

The Nature of the Covenant

This, we believe is a good place to speak about the nature of the covenant and trace its development through Scripture. We do this by way of showing that there is only one covenant, an everlasting covenant of grace which God has established with His people in every age through Christ. To see that, however, one must have a proper conception of God's covenant.

What, then, is the covenant? Scripture speaks of it often, and it is necessary to know what Scripture is talking about.

Most would define a covenant by speaking of a contract or an agreement. They would say that God's covenant with man is of the same sort as a human covenant, such as that between Isaac and Abimelech (Gen. 21:27-32), with various duties, promises and penalties.

Such a covenant is made by two parties or sides, depends to some extent on each, and can be broken by either. Adam, so it is said, was the original covenant-making party with God, but now that Adam has fallen, Christ has replaced him. If the covenant is of such a sort it is not everlasting, but when the agreement has been fulfilled is voided and discarded like any other agreement or contract. My contract with the bank for a loan to purchase a house does not continue when the bank has fulfilled its obligations in loaning me the money and I have fulfilled mine in repaying the same with interest.

God's covenant with men is *not* such a covenant. Not only is such a covenant not an everlasting covenant, but man can never be a party with the living God in making a covenant of that sort. Because God is GOD and man is a creature, owing his very existence to God, there are no duties man can assume by way of a special agreement beside those duties that he is already obliged to perform, simply because he is God's creature.

Nor can man ever merit anything with God in such a covenant by his own works or by fulfilling certain conditions. When he has done all that is required of him he is still an *unprofitable* servant:

So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do (Lk. 17:10).

Certainly he could not, as some teach, merit eternal life in the covenant. Eternal life comes only through Him who is the *Lord from heaven*, our Lord Jesus Christ:

The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly (I Cor. 15:47, 48).

Scripture, then, teaches that the covenant is not an agreement, but a sovereignly established *bond* or *relationship* between God and His people in Christ. This is clear from those often-repeated words of Scripture by which God reveals His covenant, "I will be thy God and ye shall be my people:"

And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God (Gen. 17:8).

And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians (Ex. 6:7).

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the

temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (II Cor. 6:16).

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God (Rev. 21:3).

These words, found in slightly different forms, become a kind of covenant formula throughout Scripture. They show us that a particular passage is speaking of the covenant and remind us, too, that the covenant is a relationship between God and His people.

Other passages actually describe such a relationship between God and His people:

And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: and all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: and Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him (Gen. 5:22-24).

These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9).

And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? (Gen. 18:17-18).

The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant (Ps. 25:14).

And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God (James 2:23).

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (Jn. 17:23).

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (I Jn. 1:3).

This relationship is sovereignly established by God - He makes and guarantees the relationship. In no sense of the word does it depend on man as a second party, but is wholly the work of God and all of grace, that is, of undeserved favor. The covenant is always a covenant of *grace*.

a. The Covenant With Adam.

There is only one passage of Scripture that speaks explicitly of a covenant with Adam, Hosea 6:7;

But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.

The word there means either "men" or "Adam" (they are the same word in Hebrew). But however one translates, the verse speaks of a covenant with Adam by referring either to a covenant that Adam transgressed personally or that mankind transgressed in him. We believe that this covenant with Adam was not a separate covenant but the first revelation of the one, everlasting covenant of grace. Indeed, if the covenant is everlasting, there can only be one.

We might note that the breaking of the covenant is called treachery here. That suggests that the covenant is indeed a relationship between God and His people for the opposite of a traitor is a faithful friend.

This first revelation of the covenant showed, then, what the covenant is all about. In it God showed that He is the divine Friend of His people and how He lives with them in blessed fellowship. In that first revelation of the covenant God showed too what man's calling in the covenant is - the calling to live in thankful (not meritorious) obedience.

That this was already a revelation of the one covenant is clear from the fact that Scripture speaks of our being *reconciled* to God after Adam transgressed. The word reconciliation is very much a covenant word and not only implies a previous relationship which has been damaged, but implies that the relationship *has not been completely destroyed*. It is possible to speak of reconciliation only where the previous relationship has not been ruined entirely. In marriage reconciliation is possible only where the marriage relationship has not been completely destroyed.

If it were not so, we would have to speak of God being frustrated and having to change. His first covenant and purpose would have been utterly ruined and He frustrated, made to change His purpose, and forced to start over again with a new covenant.

But how could the covenant with Adam, before he fell into sin, be a covenant of grace? We should remember that grace is undeserved favor. All that Adam was and all that he had were by the undeserved favor of God. What had Adam done to deserve anything when God established His covenant with him? What could he ever do to deserve anything from God when he owed his whole existence to God?

It was grace, too, that maintained the covenant relationship and insured that it would not be destroyed by Adam's fall. As soon as Adam fell into sin, God came to Him and put enmity between the devil and woman, thus renewing the covenant relationship of friendship between Himself and His people. They, in Adam, had chosen the friendship of the devil, but God who had chosen them to be His own, would not allow them to continue as friends of Satan.

God's dealings with His people are always and only of grace. There is no other basis on which the eternal God can deal with us.

b. The Covenant With Noah.

We believe that the different covenants of the Old Testament are in fact only different revelations of the *one* covenant of grace. If the covenant is everlasting (Gen. 17:7) there can only be one covenant.

In each of these revelations God shows something new and wonderful about His covenant of grace. Thus, in the first revelation of the covenant to Adam, God showed that His covenant was a covenant of friendship.

After Adam, the next great revelation of the covenant was to Noah. In that revelation of His covenant God showed its *universal* character, i.e., that the covenant would embrace the whole of the world He had created. The covenant, you see, is not just made with man, but with "every living creature of all flesh" (Gen. 9:15). It is a covenant with the day and with the night (Jer. 33:25). The universality of God's covenant, therefore, is not a universality which embraces all things or all men *without exception*, but it does embrace all things *without distinction*, so that in the end all things shall be renewed and represented in the new heavens and earth.

That covenant is well symbolized by the rainbow as it arches over the whole of God's creation. It is a covenant that will finally be consummated in the new heavens *and new earth*. It is a covenant in which even the *creature* "shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

This, we believe, is one of the reasons why the Bible in speaking of God's purpose,

speaks of His purpose concerning the *world* (the cosmos):

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (Jn. 1:29).

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16).

In the end the whole of God's world will be redeemed and saved, though not every single creature or person.

This must be so. God will not allow His purposes to come to nothing. He will not allow man, by his sin, to steal away from Him the world that He created for His own glory. He saves His world.

All this is very important in understanding such passages as Isaiah 11. Reading such a passage, many conclude that there will be a future *earthly* kingdom in which some of the effects of sin will be overcome, but Scripture promises no such thing. It is speaking of the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells - a kingdom in which the wolf will indeed dwell with the lamb, for "the creature also shall be delivered ... into the glorious liberty of the children of God." And what a glorious day that will be.

Nevertheless, even Genesis 9 shows that the covenant with Noah is part of the one, everlasting covenant of God by using the covenant formula (vs. 9), by speaking of a covenant that included Noah's seed (vs. 9) and by explicitly referring to this covenant as an everlasting covenant (vss. 12, 16):

And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.... And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations... And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

c. The Covenant with Abraham.

Scripture shows clearly that the covenant with Abraham is the same as the covenant with Noah. When God made His covenant with Abraham He made it also with his seed, and told Abraham that it was an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:7):

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

There are several notable features about the covenant with Abraham. The first, and most important is that the covenant with Abraham (and thus also with Noah and with Israel) was very much a covenant of grace. This was displayed in the great revelation of the covenant in Genesis 15.

To understand Genesis 15, one must know that in those days a covenant was sealed, not by drawing up a contract and having it legally attested, but by walking together between the cut-up pieces of an animal or animals. Jeremiah 34:18 also describes this solemn ceremony.

That ceremony was only used for important matters and was a warning that anyone who violated the covenant deserved to be cut in pieces and his body cast out as food for the beasts and birds. Thus God threatened Israel when they broke a covenant they had made among themselves (Jer. 34:19, 20):

The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf; I

will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth.

Since a human covenant is between equals, it is also an agreement (a bilateral or two-sided covenant) and therefore all those who were involved in making the covenant walked together between the pieces of the animals. God's covenant is different because God and man never act as equals in the covenant. The covenant between God and Abraham shows this.

That covenant, according to Genesis 15, was very much a one-sided (unilateral) covenant established by God *alone*. When God covenanted with Abraham by walking between the pieces of the animals, then Abraham was fast asleep. Abraham had nothing to do with the making of that covenant. In no sense did it depend on him. It was, indeed, a covenant of *grace*.

Not only that, but by passing between the pieces of the animals God declared symbolically that He alone would suffer the consequences of any covenant breaking, as indeed He did in the death of His Son:

He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken (Is. 53:8).

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree (Gal. 3:13).

For our sins in the covenant, God, in Christ, suffered the penalty by being cast out and cut off: "My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?" Thus, the covenant of grace, revealed to Abraham, was fulfilled in Christ.

d. The Covenant and the Land Promise.

Genesis 15 shows clearly that God's covenant with Abraham (and through Abraham also with true Israel and with us) is a covenant of grace. That same chapter, however, reminds us of another notable feature of the Abrahamic covenant, i.e., that it involved a promise of the *land*.

The land promise, however, is very often misunderstood. It is that promise which leads many to look for some future restoration of the nation of Israel *in the earthly land of Canaan*. We believe this to be a vain hope.

The covenant with Abraham shows just how vain that hope is. For if the covenant with Abraham was a land covenant, involving the promise of an earthly land, then that promise was *never* fulfilled to Abraham himself.

The Word tells us in Acts 7:5 that God gave Abraham *no* inheritance in the land, not so much as to set his foot on. Yet as Acts 7:5 says, God promised it not only to his seed, but also to *him*. There cannot be, we believe, clearer proof, that the land promise and all such promises in the Old Testament had a *spiritual* fulfilment. The promise of the land, therefore, was always essentially the promise of a *heavenly* inheritance.

Hebrews 11:8-16 confirms this. When Abraham, by faith, left Ur to go to the *land God had promised him*, he "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (vs. 10). Isaac and Jacob, too, always "confessed that they were *strangers and pilgrims on the earth*" (vs. 13) and declared that they were seeking "a better country, that is, an heavenly" (vs. 16). In fact, if they had been looking for an earthly inheritance they might have had opportunity to go back to the land from which they first came (vs. 15), but that was not their hope. Nor is it ours.

Because the land promise to Abraham was really a promise of spiritual and heavenly things, all the true children of Abraham (Rom. 3:28-29; 4:16-17; Gal. 3:29), both Jews and

Gentiles, shall enjoy the fulfillment of that promise and of all the other promises of the covenant that God made to Abraham and his seed. Not one shall fail to obtain what was promised; not Abraham himself, not those believing Jews who were scattered after the captivity and never returned to Canaan, not the Gentile believers who are also true children of Abraham by faith.

Thus all Abraham's children inherit with Abraham something far better than the hills and rivers and cities of the earthly land. They enter that blessed inheritance of which Hebrews 12:22-24 speaks, and there is none better.

The Reformed Baptist contention, therefore, that the covenant of God with Abraham and later with Israel was different in some essential points, i.e., that it involved material blessings and the promise of an earthly land is wrong. That is dispensationalism.

e. The Covenant with Israel.

That God had a covenant with Israel is clear from Scripture. How that covenant is to be understood is a matter of much dispute.

The great question is whether the covenant with Israel was a different covenant from the covenant God establishes with His people in the New Testament, and how the Old Testament (Covenant) and the New Testament (Covenant) are related to each other. Are they old and new in that they are *different kinds of covenants* made with two different groups of people or are they older and newer revelations of one covenant?

Dispensationalism answers such questions by teaching that the old and new covenants are completely distinct from one another, that they concern different groups of people, have different promises, and different fulfillments. In its most extreme forms it even teaches different ways of salvation for Israel in the old covenant and for the church under new covenant (cf. the Scofield Reference Bible notes).

There are also those who reject dispensationalism, but who still hesitate to identify completely the two covenants. Some find a difference between the promises of the old and new covenants and their fulfillments (premillennialism and postmillennialism), that is, that at least some of the Old Covenant promises have a fulfillment that is earthly, in distinction from the promises of the New Covenant which are spiritual and heavenly.

Others (the Baptists) make some distinction between Israel and the church especially as regards the covenant *and its sign*. They would say, for example, that Israel is only a type of the church and would refuse to identify circumcision and baptism, the signs of the old and new covenants.

Others makes the disjunction between law and grace. They teach in one way or another that the law has no place in the life of a New Covenant believer (antinomianism). In contrast to all of this the Reformed faith insists that there is:

(1) only one covenant;

(2) one covenant people, for Israel is the church of the Old Testament:

This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us (Acts 7:38).

(3) one sign of the covenant, for circumcision and baptism are essentially the same - Col. 2:11, 12.

(4) one Savior and one way of salvation:

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

(5) one promise, the promise of eternal life:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call (Acts 2:38, 39).

(6) one spiritual fulfillment of all that belongs to the promise:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (Heb. 11:3-16).

It even insists that there is unity between law and grace under both covenants:

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law (Gal. 3:17-21).

The Reformed faith insists on a complete unity of the two Testaments (Covenants) as a reflection, finally, of God's own unity. No more than there is division in God can there be any division between the Old and New Covenants. When God established His covenant with Israel He made it clear that he was only keeping the covenant that He had already made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex. 3:15, 16). That means that what was true for Abraham in the covenant was also true for Israel. And, since *all who believe* are the true seed and children of Abraham, what was true for Abraham is also true for us. There is but one covenant of God.

f. One People of God in the Covenant.

Many would vehemently dispute the teaching that Israel is the church of the Old Testament and that therefore God's covenant with Israel is the same covenant that He has with His church in the New Testament. For this reason we need to prove carefully from Scripture what we have said.

That Israel and the church are the same is clear. True Israel in Scripture is not an earthly people and a carnal nation, but *the spiritual people of God*, as is the church.

In Romans 9:6-8 the Word of God tells us that they are not all Israel that are of Israel:

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

It makes a clear distinction between those who are only *of Israel* and those who truly *are* Israel. Everyone who belonged to the nation was *of Israel* but only those who were born by the power

of the promise (born again by the living Word of God) were counted as the seed, that is, as children of Abraham and children of God. They were a spiritual people.

Romans 2:28, 29 confirms this in a remarkable way. It says plainly that *they are NOT Jews* who are only Jews outwardly. But a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, that is, who is circumcised in heart and spirit:

For he 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 (compare Col. 2:11).

This should mean, according to the Biblical definition of a Jew, that even the believing Gentiles are counted as children of Abraham and as Israelites. That, too, Scripture teaches. Romans 4:11-16, makes it clear that Abraham is not only the father of believing Jews, but of believing Gentiles as well. He is the father "of us all," that is, of one spiritual people. Galatians 3:7 also plainly says, "Know ye therefore that they which are *of faith*, the *same* are the children of Abraham."

In fact, the New Testament makes it clear that believing Gentiles are more truly Jews and more truly circumcised than unbelieving descendants of Abraham. Those who are only Jews according to the flesh are called in Philippians 3:2, "the concision," that is, mere "mutilators," because though circumcised outwardly, they are unspiritual. In contrast, the Philippians (who were Gentiles) are called "the circumcision" (vs. 3), that is, those, who even though they did not have the outward sign of circumcision, nevertheless had the spiritual reality.

But there are other passages as well. Galatians 3:1-7 makes it clear that the church of the Old Testament and New Testament are one by comparing them to *one person*, growing from infancy to maturity. Galatians 3:16, 29, make it clear that there is only *one seed*, that is, Christ and those who are in Him. Hebrews 12:22-24 identifies Jerusalem, Mt. Zion, and the church of the living God. To come to one is to come to all.

This is critical. Our participation in all the blessings and promises of the covenant depends upon it. There is only one covenant to which believers both in the Old and New Testaments belong and in which they share in all the blessings of God's grace, through Christ.

g. Law and Covenant.

The unique feature of the covenant with Israel was, of course, the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. What is the relationship between the law and the covenant?

Fundamental to an understanding of this relationship is Galatians 3:17-21;

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

This passage shows (1) that the covenant with Abraham (400 years before the giving of the law) is the covenant that was "confirmed in Christ," that is, the one everlasting covenant of God; and (2) that the giving of the law could not disannul this covenant (vs. 17), indeed, that it is not even

against the covenant (vs. 21).

Exodus 24:7 goes so far as to call the law the "book of the covenant," i.e., the book in which God makes known His covenant with His people:

And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.

If the covenant to which it belonged is the covenant that was confirmed in Christ, the same covenant to which we belong, then the law is still the book of the covenant, though much has been added to that book since.

According to Galatians 3:19, this written law was added to the covenant because of transgressions, until Christ should come. This means that the law, by revealing sin, shows us our need for Christ. It was, in that way, "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (vs. 24).

Romans 10:4 says much the same thing:

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

It does not say that Christ is the *end* of the law in the sense that He takes it away, but that He is the end of the law as *goal and purpose* of the law. The law was given with Christ as its goal, and it accomplishes its purpose, when by discovering sin, it showed true Israel its need for Christ and for justification through faith in Him.

That it continues to have this function Romans 7:7 shows clearly: "I had not known sin, but by the law." Galatians 3 also proves this when it says that the law was not only the Jews' schoolmaster but *ours also* (vs. 24).

We have no difficulty, therefore, in saying that the law was and is part of the covenant. It certainly was in the Old Testament. According to Galatians 3:19, it was added to the covenant at that time. That it is still belongs is implied in the fact that it continues to have the function for us. The only thing that has changed is our relationship to the law within the covenant, but that is another subject entirely, the subject of Galatians 4:1-7.

The point is that there only one covenant, a covenant to which the law has always belonged, a covenant to which we as well as the true Israel belong, a covenant of grace in Christ. The law was not, is not and never will be against that covenant.

h. The Law's Place in the Covenant.

In the last section we showed from Galatians 3:17-21 that the law was given as part of the covenant of God and that it still remains part of the covenant. This is to say, of course, that law and grace are not against each other (Gal. 3:21). The law is not against the covenant or its promises.

We also showed that in the covenant the law has the function, first, of discovering sin (Gal. 3:19, 24). With this few would disagree.

But that is not the only function of the law as "the book of the covenant" (Ex. 24:7). In the covenant the law also functions as a guide for the life of thankful obedience that Christians are called to live as God's covenant people.

According to this function of the law the believer calls the law "a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path" in Psalm 119:105 (cf. also Prov. 6:23). It is a sure and safe guide along life's pathway.

For this reason the law can also be called "the royal law of liberty" (James 1:25, 2:8, 12). That this royal law of liberty is the law of the Ten Commandments is clear from James 2:8-11:

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy

neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law (note the reference to the 6th and 7th commandments)..

It is not a different law, as some suggest. As the royal law of liberty, given by the King of kings, it defines and sets boundaries to our liberty and thus keeps our liberty in Christ from becoming licentiousness (Gal. 5:13, 14):

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

This is always the case. In a free country, liberty is guarded by law. It is law that set bounds to liberty, so that liberty is not destroyed by every man doing what is right in his own eyes. When law is discarded, as it is today, and every man does as he pleases, then finally a person does not even have the liberty to leave his own house and walk the streets without fear.

It is the law, therefore, which gives structure and order to the life of God's covenant people. It defines their relationship to Him so that He is glorified by their life. The law is able to do this because it reveals the nature and attributes of God and so shows what a God-glorifying life is.

The law does *not* bring them into a covenant relationship to God, nor does it give the necessary grace to live a God-glorifying life. For this they must always go to Christ:

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24).

Nevertheless, it is still the "book of the covenant" revealing how God's covenant people may please Him and be thankful to Him, not only in word but also in very deed.

This is not to deny, however, that the believer's relationship to the law has been changed by the coming of Christ. He is no longer "under the law" but under grace.

i. The Covenant with David.

The last great Old Testament revelation of God's covenant was that made to David in II Samuel 7. As a revelation of the covenant, it also has some notable features.

For one thing it shows again the marvelous grace of God (it is a gracious covenant). The revelation came in response to David's desire to build a house for God. God told David he might not do that, but in His great grace promised that *He would build David a house* (vs. 27)!

For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.

What is more, that house was the house in which not David but Christ is Lord. Psalm 89, which commemorates these events, makes that clear. The Psalm speaks of God's covenant with David (Ps. 89:3):

I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant,

But the Psalm makes it clear that it is Christ especially with whom that covenant is made (Ps. 89:26, 27):

He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.

David is only a type of Christ.

Second, we have here again that covenant formula that makes it clear, that for all the different circumstances, this is still the one, everlasting covenant of God. In that covenant He promises to be the God of His people and to take them as His own people (II Sam. 7:24):

For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, LORD, art become their God.

That is always what the covenant is about.

This revelation of the covenant is unique, however, in several respects. For one thing, it brings together covenant and kingdom and shows that they are very closely related.

That relationship of covenant and kingdom shows the orderly structure of the covenant. In that covenant God's people are citizens of a kingdom, and have each his proper place. That whole structure centers in the throne (II Sam. 7:13), which is really always God's throne, even when a man like David sits on it:

He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

On that throne Christ now sits (Lk. 1:32, 33):

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

He was the one through whom that throne was established forever and the King whom God promised. As king He is the Cornerstone of the kingdom, the one upon whom the whole "house" is built, and the one in whom each citizen has his proper place.

It is in this revelation of the covenant, however, that God reveals more clearly than ever before that the great King who was promised and now sits on that throne forever (II Sam. 7:13-16; Lk. 1:32) would enter His kingdom not in the way of battle with sword and spears, but in the way of suffering and shame:

I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee (II Sam. 7:14, 15).

If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips (Ps. 89:30-34).

It is not armies and weapons that had to be defeated, but sin!

That word that hung over Christ's head, therefore, on the cross, spoke truly, though those who put it there meant it in mockery. He was in His suffering, *the King* of the Jews, that is, of all true children of Abraham. As such He is also the Head of the covenant!

j. The New Covenant.

Since we have already dealt in chapter 13 with the relationship between the Old and New Covenants we will only review here:

The New Testament is called the new covenant in Hebrews 8:6-13 (indeed the word "testament" is the same word as "covenant"). According to Hebrews 8 the new covenant replaces the old.

From this many conclude that there is some essential difference between the old and new

- that they are different covenants. The Baptists come to this conclusion in their defense of believer's baptism (the covenant sealed by circumcision is not the same as the covenant sealed by baptism). The futurists come to the same conclusion in defense of their belief that there is still a special earthly future for Israel (one covenant promise for them, another for us).

We believe that the new covenant replaces the old only as a newer and fuller revelation of the one everlasting covenant of God. The differences are only differences of administration. Hebrews 8 itself makes this clear. Notice:

(1) Verse 10 uses the ordinary covenant formula (thy God, my people) to show that the new covenant is not essentially different from the old. At that most important point they are the same.

(2) The reference to the law confirms this. In the new covenant the law is not removed, but *rewritten* on different tables - the fleshly tables of the heart (II Cor. 3:3). Law and covenant still go together. In fact, the giving of the law (though differently written) *is* the "giving" of the covenant, both in Deuteronomy 4:13 and here in verse 10.

(3) Also, in both, according to verse 11, the essential thing is knowing the Lord, though there is a difference in how we do know Him. Verse 11, we believe, speaks of the New Testament as a time of realization and fulfillment. It is a time, therefore, in which God's people know Him directly and not anymore through the "teaching" of priests and Levites (cf. Mal. 2:5-7).

The new covenant, then, is not something completely different, but new in the same way that the heavens and earth shall be new when Christ comes again. The heavens and earth are not *annihilated*, but *renewed*.

The passing of the old covenant does not, therefore, bring in an entirely new covenant, but the last revelation of that one covenant in which God is the God of His people and takes them to be His own. It is the last and fullest revelation of the covenant through the coming of the things promised, rather than through pictures and types.

That new covenant is "better" and more glorious because it brings us Christ instead of the types of Christ. Only the final consummation of the covenant shall be more glorious.

The differences between the Old and New Covenants, then, are only in administrative details. It is only in respect to these details that one is "old" and the other "new" and that the old perishes and passes away.

How, then, are they different? According to Hebrews 8, in three ways:

(1) There is a change of mediator (vs. 6). Christ replaces Moses. This is not an essential difference, however, because Moses was a *type* of Christ. In chapter 3:5 he is even called "a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after." Also in Deuteronomy 18:15 he himself speaks of Christ as one "like unto me."

This difference, therefore, is only administrative. A new prime minister is a change of *administration*, and a new government in that sense, but not in the sense of a change in the type of government or of the constitution.

(2) There is also a change in the way the law is written (vs. 10). As we pointed out in the last article, the law itself is not taken away, only rewritten on fleshly tables of the heart instead of tables of stone.

But this, too, is only an administrative change, though it has great significance for the New Testament believer. Something *rewritten* is not something different and separate from what went before.

This second point is especially important because the giving of the law is called the

"giving" of the covenant both in Deuteronomy 4:13 and in Hebrews 8:10. One cannot, then, argue that though the law was the same the covenants are different. They are *identified* in Deuteronomy and in Hebrews.

(3) Finally, the new covenant also brings a fuller and more complete revelation. This is what verse 11 is talking about. That fuller revelation is of such a kind that all God's people know Him *directly*, and not any longer through the intervention of earthly mediators. There is not under the new covenant the need of teachers like the priests and Levites of the Old Testament (cf. Mal. 2:6, 7 for proof that they especially were the teachers of the Old Testament).

This is also an administrative change. The new covenant does not bring a new (different and separate) revelation of God, but a better revelation (Heb. 8:6), that is, one that is completed and which reveals the realities which were only prophesied under the old covenant.

There is only one, everlasting, covenant of God.

k. The Consummation of the Covenant.

One reason we do not believe that the covenant is an agreement or contract by which salvation is brought to God's people has to do with the consummation of the covenant. The consummation of the covenant is its final realization and glory in the everlasting and heavenly kingdom of Christ our Lord.

If the covenant is a contract or agreement to bring salvation, then at the consummation, when we receive the fulness of our salvation, the covenant is cast aside and discarded in the same way that any other contract would be finished and done with when all that had been contracted was completed.

But this cannot be. For one thing the covenant is *everlasting*. It is not something that is only useful for a time and then set aside as a contract or agreement would be. It must, then, be something other.

We insist, therefore, that the covenant is a relationship or bond between God and His people in Christ. That relationship is described in Scripture by the covenant formula: "I will be your God and ye shall be my people."

If that is indeed the essence of the covenant, that God is ours and we are His, then in heaven the covenant will not be left behind or set aside but fully realized. That is what heaven is all about - that we will be with God to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever.

And that is exactly how Revelation 21:3 describes the glory of the new heavens and the new earth:

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

When all is new there will be no more tears, no more death, no more crying or sorrow or pain. How wonderful that will be!

But even more wonderful is that which the voice from heaven foretells: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, *and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God.*"

Notice that this passage has in it the same covenant formula that is used throughout Scripture: "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people." There is nothing more desirable or wonderful than that!

Notice, too, that the passage speaks of God's tabernacle. In the Old Testament that was the place of His covenant, the place where He dwelled with His people and revealed Himself as their God (Ex. 29:42-46):

This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the LORD their God.

That Old Testament tent was a type and shadow of better things, for it pictured the Lord Jesus Christ himself, in whom and through whom God dwells with us and is our God, and by whom He reveals Himself to us in all His glory. In Christ He meets with us and speaks with us. In Christ He dwells among us. In Christ we know Him as the Lord our God.

1. Summary

We believe that we have showed from Scripture in previous chapters that the different covenants mentioned in Scripture are not separate covenants, but different revelations of the one everlasting covenant of God. In this last chapter on the doctrine of the covenant we wish to summarize what we have written in previous articles, listing the different covenants and what each of them shows as a revelation of that one covenant.

(1) The first revelation of the covenant was to Adam in paradise. That covenant might be called The Covenant of Life, since it revealed the essential character of the covenant. It showed what the covenant was, revealed God as the sovereign Lord of the covenant and clearly delineated man's place in the covenant (cf. Gen. 1-2 and Hos. 6:7).

(2) The second great revelation of the covenant was to Adam after the fall. That covenant could be called The Covenant of Promise. It revealed God as the faithful covenant-keeping God who maintains His covenant with His people by the power of sovereign, redemptive grace (cf. Gen. 3, esp. vs. 15). In it Christ is revealed as the promised Seed and the great Sacrifice (Gen. 3:15, 21).

(3) The third important revelation was to Noah. The covenant, at this juncture, is best remembered as the Covenant of Creation. In it God revealed the universal character of His covenant (not all men, but all creatures) (cf. Gen. 9:1-17). In it Christ is revealed as Reconciler and Lord of all (Gen. 9:15, 16, Col. 1:20).

(4) The fourth revelation was to Abraham. That covenant could well be called The Covenant of Families, since it showed more clearly than ever before that God's covenant is very much a family covenant (cf. Gen. 15 & 17). Here Christ is revealed as the Elect and the one in whom all God's people are chosen and called (Rom. 9:6-13).

(5) The fifth great revelation was to Israel. Since the giving of the law was the main feature of that revelation, that covenant should be called The Covenant of Law. In it God revealed that law and covenant are not opposed, but belong together (cf. Ex. 19-20 and Gal. 3-4). Here we see Christ as Mediator (Gal. 3:).

(6) The sixth and last revelation in the Old Testament was that to David, and might well be remembered as The Covenant of the Kingdom. In it God revealed especially the orderly structure of His covenant (cf. II Sam. 7 and Ps. 89). In this revelation Christ is shown to be the Sovereign Head and Lord of the Covenant.

(7) The whole New Testament itself is called in Scripture, the New Covenant. It is this, not because it is an entirely different covenant, but as a new revelation of the covenant, not of

types and shadows, but of the realities to which those types pointed (cf. Heb. 8). Here finally Christ comes with all His blessings and fulfils the types and shadows.

(8) Finally, we wait yet for the day when the covenant will be realized in all its fulness, when the tabernacle of God will be with men, when He will dwell with them and be with them as their God, and they shall be His people (Rev. 21:3).

It should be added here, that if the old and new covenant are essentially the same covenant under different administrations or revelations, then Deuteronomy 29:10-13 makes it crystal clear that infants are included in that covenant. It says:

Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day: that he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Chapter 15

Israel and the Church

Crucial to an understanding of infant baptism is the identity of Israel and the church. This identity is denied entirely by dispensational Baptists and is seen as incomplete by the Reformed Baptists. If Israel is not only the church, but the visible church, then infants belonged to the visible church in the Old Testament and received the sign of the covenant by way of admission to the visible church.

The argument really turns on whether Scripture speaks of a visible church, whether Israel is the visible church of the Old Testament, and whether infants belong to that church.

The question whether Israel was the visible church is rather easily answered. Scripture does identify Israel as the visible church and does so in the New Testament, Acts 7:38, where the New Testament word "ecclesia" is used:

This is he (Moses), that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.

Certainly that "church" was not the invisible church, the body of the elect, and most certainly it did include children. That the New Testament church also includes children is clear from those epistles in which Paul addresses the church and the children as members of the church (Eph. 1:1 and 6: and Col. 1:1, 2 and 3) or speaks of them as such (I Cor. 7:14):

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.... Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right (Ephesians).

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.... Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord (Colossians).

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy (I Corinthians).

Nor are those children all old enough to make a credible profession. Those who can understand "honor thy father and mother" are by no means old enough to make the kind of profession the Baptist requires as a prerequisite to baptism. We, then, believe what the Westminster Larger Catechism says, that the visible church is made up of those who profess the true religion and their children (Q&A 62).

We should also note Hebrews 3:5, 6;

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

A careful reading of this passages will show that Old Testament Israel and the New

Testament church are the *one* house of God. Moses was only a servant in that house but Christ was its builder! Moses was “in” the house as a servant, but Christ is “over” the house as the Son and hier. The implications of this are very nicely pointed out by West:

The implication is not only that the Church of God is the same in both the Old and new Testaments, but that the people (believers and their children are also identical. *If the house is the same, then surely our children have not been evicted.*⁴⁹

We believe that there is but one church, both visible and invisible under the Old and New Testaments. There are not two churches, but the visible church is the manifestation of the invisible at any time in history. God indeed "has ever had but one church in the world." On that point we agree wholeheartedly with Hodge.⁵⁰

The whole dispensational system is built on the premise that Israel is not in any sense of the word the church, visible or invisible. They are at least consistent in that denying any kind of identity at all, they also fail to see that children can be members of the church and receive the sign of the covenant by way of admission to membership. Reformed Baptists, on the other hand are left in the unenviable position of trying to take a middle position between dispensationalism and covenant theology.

They see the error of dispensationalism, which drawn to its logical conclusions, denies salvation by grace through faith in the Old Testament, but at the same time cannot concede the complete identity of Israel and the church without conceding to the paedobaptists.

Thus someone like Watson speaks of something he calls "Jewish faith" and does that by way of maintaining his view that while Israel was the church in the Old Testament it was a "Jewish church"⁵¹ and that the covenant with Israel was a different and separate covenant of grace than that with New Testament believers.⁵² According to him, therefore, "Jewish infants, while members of the Commonwealth, were not members of the Visible Church because they did not *profess* the true religion."⁵³

But what kind of faith is a "Jewish faith" and where is the proof for it in Scripture? What is the difference between this and classic dispensationalism? Either the believing Jews in the Old Testament were saved by the same faith that we are or they were not. Watson cannot have it both ways. He is trying, of course, to find some essential difference between the old and new covenants and between Israel and the church, and topples right over into dispensationalism as does every Baptist.

Also, where does Scripture speak of a Jewish church and of two covenants of grace? How is that different from dispensationalism? How is that Jewish church different from the Christian church except in non-essentials? Or if different only in non-essentials, why call it a Jewish *church*? Scripture simply calls it *the church in the wilderness* (Acts 7:38).

We are saying that the visible church is one both in the Old and New Testaments and that infants *are* members of the visible church by virtue of their birth in covenant families and baptism. But the Reformed Baptists want it both ways. They want one church against dispensationalism and two against the paedobaptists.

In reality Baptists do have a different church with a different membership than that of the

⁴⁹West, *The Baptism of Infants in the Old and new Covenants*, p. 11.

⁵⁰Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), vol. III, p. 551.

⁵¹Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, p. 75.

⁵²Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, p. 82.

⁵³Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, p. 74.

church of the Old Testament. Baptist churches have no children in them, at least not any young children, certainly not children who are too young to make a credible profession but old enough to understand the Word of God in Ephesians 6:1-3. We do not mean of course that there are no children present in Baptist churches, but that they are not in any sense of the word part of the church.

Even here, however, Baptists are inconsistent and halt between two opinions in that while they will not admit their children to membership by the sign of the covenant or recognize them as members of the church or admit to any difference between the children of believers and unbelievers, almost all Baptists have some sort of dedication ceremony or ceremony of “infant blessing.” Again, the Baptist wants it both ways. He cannot admit that there is a difference between children of believers and the children of the world without conceding to the paedobaptists, but he does not want in his heart to say that there is no difference and to put his children in the same position as unbelievers.

We believe the whole of Scripture testifies to the fact that the visible church is composed of households and includes the children of believers (Eph. 1:1, 2 and 6:1-3; Col. 1:1, 2 and 3:20; I Cor. 1:1-3 and 7:14). If Israel was the visible church of the Old Testament, then indeed infants belonged to it.

Chapter 16

Infant Baptism and New Covenant Theology

New Covenant Theology has become very popular among Reformed Baptists and claims to find middle ground between covenant theology and dispensationalism. Over against dispensational theology it believes firmly in salvation by grace and in one way of salvation and believes too that elect and Israel and the church are one in the kingdom of Christ and in eternity. It has, however, different views than covenant theology regarding Israel in the Old Testament and the sign of circumcision.

One writer describes the position of New Covenant Theology (NCT) in relation to covenant theology (CT) and dispensationalism (DISP) thus:

[NCT] believes that [CT] and [DISP] both have part of the truth, but that they go to the extreme of either separating the OT and NT so much, as with [DISP], that there is almost no relation between the two. As John J. Reisinger (a NCT theologian, RH) so well put it "Dispensationalism separates the OT and NT so effectively, that never the twain shall meet." And [NCT] sees [CT] going to the other extreme of joining the OT and the NT so closely, that there is almost no discernable difference between the two. They believe that they have found the middle road, and we would "basically" agree with that assertion, without being absolutely bound by it, which means we don't necessarily (sic) agree with everything that [NCT] says.⁵⁴

Concerning Israel and circumcision, New Covenant Theology teaches:

Israel is a temporary unbelieving picture of the people of God. There always existed a remnant of believers within unbelieving Israel.

* * * * *

Circumcision was the physical picture of regeneration. It signified that you were physically born into the unbelieving people of God, Israel. It was given to all Israelites, irrespective of repentance and faith. Baptism is the outward sign that regeneration has occurred. It signifies that you have been spiritually born into the believing people of God, the church. It is given to all those who give evidence of regeneration, which is repentance and faith.⁵⁵

The belief that Israel is primarily an unbelieving nation is the basis for the belief that Israel is not the church of the Old Testament and that it is not continuous with the New Testament church. This in turn gives room for the teaching that circumcision and baptism are not equivalent.

We are not interested in giving a detailed critique of this teaching, in that we see it as just another form of dispensationalism in that it rejects the unity of the covenant and believes that the new covenant is entirely distinct from the old. Nevertheless, because of the popularity of this teaching several things need to be said.

First, New Covenant Theology's believe that Israel is not the church openly contradicts the Word of God in Acts 7:38 where Israel is identified with the New Testament church and the New Testament word for the church is applied to Israel:

⁵⁴Donald Hockner, A Comparison of Three Systems: Dispensationalism, Covenant Theology, New Covenant Theology (http://www.pressiechurch.org/Theol_1/).

⁵⁵<http://www.ids.org/ids/wnct.html>

This is he (Moses), that was in the *church* in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.

Another New Covenant theologian says:

New Covenant Theology teaches that Israel is an unbelieving picture of the people of God and (except for the remnant of Israelites who actually believed) the individuals of that nation received God's judgment.⁵⁶

Apart from the fact that this dispensationalism, pure and unmixed - Israel only a picture of the church and replaced by the church when it comes under the judgment of God - it is difficult to see how an unbelieving people can be a picture of the people of God. Are they that picture in their unbelief? Surely not, but what then?

Also, New Covenant Theology is caught in a dilemma in its belief concerning circumcision. It tries to teach that circumcision was a picture of regeneration and at the same time that it was only a sign of national identity. The quote above shows the complete nonsense of this position: a picture of regeneration that showed you were outwardly part of a wicked and unbelieving nation? A picture of God's saving grace that marked you as part of an unbelieving multitude? It is difficult to believe that anyone who is at all Reformed could make such statements.

What is more the same quote reveals the perpetual dilemma of every Baptist in the statement that "baptism is the outward sign that regeneration has occurred." This is the kind of statement that every Baptist must make because he holds to *believer's* baptism and yet cannot possibly mean, for it says that every baptized person is saved. Baptist's, including this Baptist, must choose. Either every baptized person is saved or baptism is not an outward sign that regeneration has occurred. In that case we are back where we began, for the Baptist still has not proved that there is a difference between circumcision and baptism, between the old covenant and the new, and between Israel and the church.

⁵⁶Steve Lehrer, *Israel an Unbelieving People* (<http://www.ncbf.net/steve/>).

Chapter 17

Baptism and Admission to the Visible Church

There are two matters here: first, we must establish beyond doubt that there is a difference between the children of professed believers and the children of the ungodly and unbelieving. If there is no difference there is no ground for receiving them as members of the church and for administering to them the sacrament of baptism. We must therefore also establish in the second place that because there is a difference they can be and are viewed as members of the visible church.

That there is a difference is clear from I Corinthians 7:14:

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

There may be dispute about what the Word of God means when it says, “else were your children unclean, but now are they holy,” but it is clear that there is a difference between the children in a family where only one parent is a professing believer and the children of worldly families. Whatever “holy” means, it establishes a clear difference.

That same difference is evident in Acts 2:39:

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

Unless one believes in a general, conditional promise to all who hear the gospel, a promise which depends for its fulfilment not on God’s sovereign grace but on the sinner’s response, the fact that the promise is “to you and to your children” establishes a difference between those children and others. There is no evidence in Scripture that any others than children of believers have the promise of God to be their God (and not even everyone of them). There is, therefore, a difference between the children of believers and unbelievers.

It is this difference which makes it possible to admit children to membership in the visible church. Scripture itself does this. In Ephesians 1:1, 2 the apostle Paul addresses himself to “the saints which are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” and then goes on to speak to some of these saints and faithful in chapter 6:1-3 when he says:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and thy mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth (cf. also Col. 1:1, 2 and 3:20; I Cor. 1:1-3 and 7:14).

Indeed, it is these children to whom Paul is speaking and whom he describes in Colossians 2:11, 12 as spiritually circumcised and baptized. Why then cannot they have the outward sign of these inward spiritual realities?

The Reformed Baptist argument is that Paul is speaking only to those children who are old enough to understand and obey what he says, but apart from the fact that there is no evidence of this, i.e., that he is speaking only to a certain group of children, the fact is that children at a very young age are already able to understand and obey the simple words of the apostle to them in chapter 6:1-3, even though they may not be old enough to make a credible profession.

Hooper sums it all up thus:

But if a child is, after all, capable by the operation of the Holy Spirit of membership in the body of Christ (there is no other way of salvation even for an infant, RHH), who is to say that he or she may not be a member of the church

local? If there are children in the one but no in the other, the picture is incomplete. In fact, we know from Paul's letters that New Testament churches did have children amongst their members (Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20). To deny them that privilege now is to debar those to whom God has given entrance.⁵⁷

All this, however, does not give us the right to assume that all our children are elect. That would be little different from Abraham Kuyper's doctrine of presupposed regeneration, something we reject. We assume nothing, but simply do our duty, trusting that God *will* use our efforts to fulfil His promise in His way and in His time. We do not even believe that all children of believers dying in infancy are saved. We find no support for this in Scripture and while we understand the desire many have to tell parents that their dead child is saved, we refuse to say it if the Word does not give us that right.

This does give us the right to admit our children to membership in the visible church, for it was on this basis that they were admitted in the Old Testament, i.e., on the basis of their birth to members of that visible church, on the basis of the difference that God established between them and the children of unbelievers. On that basis and on the basis of God's own promise, they were counted as Israel.

⁵⁷Hooper, *Believers, Their Children, and the Gospel of Sovereign Grace*, p. 20.

Chapter 18

The Circumcision of Males Only

One Baptist objection to the identity of circumcision and baptism is the fact that only males were circumcised in the Old Testament and that both males and females are baptized in the New. In answering this objection we can do no better than to quote from another writer who happens in this case to be my father. He writes:

An objection against infant baptism which is often raised by advocates of believer's baptism is the fact that in the Old Testament only males were circumcised, while in the New Testament both males and females are baptized. The argument goes something like this: If baptism has taken the place of circumcision, then there should be a correlation between the administration of the sign in the Old Testament and in the New Testament as far as the participants are concerned. Then in the Old Testament the sign of the covenant ought to have been administered to boys and girls as baptism is in the New Testament.

In answer we call attention to several points.

No doubt, in part, the difference in the sign has to do with the nature of the old dispensation. God chose circumcision as a sign of the covenant in the Old Testament. We are not told in Scripture why God chose this sign in distinction from other possible signs which he could have chosen, and any answer to the question will be somewhat speculative. There are two possible reasons why God chose circumcision as a sign of the covenant in the old dispensation.

First, the sign of circumcision was a bloody sign. A great deal of blood was shed in the old dispensation, because God wanted to remind his people all the time that without the shedding of blood, there was no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). A bloody sign of the covenant would reinforce that general teaching.

Second, in close connection with the shedding of blood, the nature of the sign performed on the organ of generation was a constant reminder to believing Israel that they were incapable of bringing forth the seed of the covenant by natural generation, conception, and birth. They were able to bring forth only children of the flesh, children dead in sin. To bring forth the children of the promise, the true children of the covenant, required a wonder of grace, the miracle of grace which God performs in both the old dispensation and in the new dispensation.

Now if it is correct that this is, at least in part, the reason why God chose circumcision as a sign of the covenant in the Old Testament, then it stands to reason that this sign could be given to males only. However, this must not be construed as being an unhappy corollary of the nature of the sign which God chose. The fact of the matter is that the line of the covenant was carried on through the males. The males occupied a position of special importance in the Old Testament, and it was sufficient for them to bear the sign of the covenant. If one reads the genealogies in the Old Testament, one cannot help but be struck by the fact that only males are mentioned. The exception to this is the genealogy in Matthew 1, where five women are mentioned. These women were unique in the covenant line. Tamar brought forth the seed of the promise by an act of adultery; Rahab and Ruth were foreigners, and Rahab was a public harlot in the city of

Jericho; Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah whom David stole from Uriah by adultery and murder; Mary was the mother of Christ. But in the rest of Scripture, the genealogies are limited to males.

It is interesting to note that Reformed theologians generally have taken the position that the female was included in the male and thus participated in the sacrament in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the females are lifted to a higher position in God's covenant because they, too, along with the males, receive the Spirit poured out by Christ. Peter quotes the prophecy of Joel on Pentecost which emphasizes this very truth: "And your sons and your *daughters* shall prophesy ... And on my servants and on my *handmaids* I will pour out in those days of my Spirit" (Acts 2:17, 18 [emphasis added]).

It is not strange, therefore, that the sign of baptism is given to both males and females in the New Testament. And baptism is the appropriate sign in the new dispensation, because as water cleanses the body of filth, so the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Herman Hanko, *We and Our Children: The Reformed Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, rev. ed., (Grandville: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), pp. 128-130.

Chapter 19

The Value of Baptism

The value of infant baptism (or, for that matter of the baptism of adults) does not lie in the water of the outward rite. That rite does not in itself convey some privilege or blessing to an infant. It does not regenerate them. It does not convey grace. It does not even give us a ground for presuming that those who are baptized are regenerate or even believers.

Nor does baptism, as such, make a difference between children who have and have not been baptized, not even between children of believers who have or have not been baptized. There is, though, a difference between the children of believers and the children of unbelievers that is *marked* by baptism, i.e., that children of believers have the promise of God along with their believing parents. Thus, a parent who does not have his children baptized shows that he does not take God's promise seriously.

In the case of the person baptized, whether infant or adult, baptism serves as a beautiful picture of what God does by the blood and Spirit of Christ in saving His people and of the power of the blood and Spirit of Christ. As one Reformed creed has it, it assures us that as really as water washes away the filthiness of the body, so really do the blood and Spirit of Christ wash away the pollution of our souls.⁵⁹ In this way baptism serves to strengthen and support our faith, especially when our sins seem too great to be cleansed. In the case of the baptized infant this testimony can be understood only as the infant grows up and matures, but it is there nonetheless.

Not only that, but in the case of every baptized person the water of baptism also serves as an admonition and warning that they must live as those who are cleansed by the blood and Spirit of Christ, and that those who do not have no part in Christ and are devoid of His Spirit. We are, the Reformed liturgy for baptism says, "*admonished* and assured by baptism."⁶⁰

Infant baptism does not, however, serve as a sign and seal only to the individual person, but to the whole church of how we enter the covenant and of the promise of God to be our God and the God of our children after us. In that way it functions as a visible promise and testimony of God and is used by God to build up the faith and hope of His elect.

In contrast, the teaching and practice of the Baptists carries with it certain dangers:

(1) It is an incipient dispensationalism or concession to dispensationalism in that it is forced to make some kind of essential distinction between old and new covenant, the two Testaments, the status of God's people in both testaments, and the promises made to them under both Testaments. Thus Watson speaks of a "Jewish" faith and church and of two covenants of grace.

(2) It is an incipient denial of sovereign grace in that it teaches that one cannot receive even the *sign* of regeneration without first exercising repentance and faith - man first, God following.

(3) It changes the meaning of baptism unbiblically, making it a sign of our activity rather than of God's promise and activity.

(4) It excludes infants and small children from the visible church, in spite of the fact that they are included as both Old and New Testament show.

(5) It is individualistic rather than federal in its approach to sin and grace, something that is always characteristic of Arminianism rather than of Calvinism and Reformed theology.

(6) Worst of all, it fails to take God at His word and to believe His certain and

⁵⁹Heidelberg Catechism, 69.

⁶⁰Heidelberg Catechism, 69.

unchangeable promise to be the God of His people and their children. Many Paedobaptists fail to take this promise seriously also, changing it to a conditional promise (which is not sure), but the Baptist *cannot* take it seriously, since repentance and faith must precede and be a condition not only to the promise itself, but even to the sign of that promise.

Chapter 20

The New King James Version and Baptism

The New King James Version (NKJV) has been frequently recommended among conservative evangelicals as a good substitute for the King James Version (KJV). We believe, however, that it ought not be used in Reformed churches since there is a definite bias towards Baptist, as well as toward fundamentalist and dispensational views.

As far as its Baptist bias is concerned, there are three main criticisms.

(1) The word “seed” is mistranslated in many passages in the Old Testament as “offspring” or “descendants” (Gen. 9:9; 12:7; 13:15, 16; 15:3, 5, 13, 18; 16:10; 17:7, 8, 9, 10, 19; Num. 25:13; etc.) This is a serious error, first of all, because it obscures the reference of these passages to Christ. He is the “seed” *par excellence* of whom all these passages speak - the Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), of Abraham (Gen. 17:7), of David (II Sam. 7:12), the Seed to whom the land and the priesthood were promised. Galatians 3:16 makes this clear when it emphasizes the importance of the singular, “seed,” and informs us that the seed is Christ:

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

For our purposes, however, this is also a serious error since it obscures the fact that the covenant seed in the Old Testament as well as in the New is both Christ, and also those who are in Him, including the elect children of believers. Never was the covenant seed determined by natural and national boundaries. It always was and always will be a spiritual seed.

The translation of this word, therefore, is of critical importance in maintaining the identity of the Old and New Testaments, the old and new covenants, the covenant people, and the sign of the covenant. By its mistranslation the NKJV obscures up this identity.

(2) Along the same lines, the NKJV in Acts 7:38 mistranslates the word “church” as “congregation.” No one would ever realize, therefore, reading the NKJV, that Acts 7:38 speaks of the “church in the wilderness.”

This, too, is of critical importance not only against dispensationalism’s separation of Israel and the church, but also against the Baptist insistence that Israel and the church are not completely identical. They have to make some separation to maintain that the covenants with Israel and the church, the old and new covenants, have some real and substantial differences. Thus they maintain their position that there is also a real and substantial difference between the Old and New Testament signs of the covenant, both in relation to their modes and subjects.

The NKJV in that way hides an important paedobaptist argument: one covenant, one people of God, one church, one sign of the covenant.

(3) In I Peter 3:20, 21 the NKJV has the following translation: “Who formerly were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

No one, reading this translation without knowing otherwise, could see that this passage is saying that the flood was a type (or as the NKJV has it, an antitype, which is the same thing) of baptism. By putting a period at the end of verse 20 and moving the word “also” the NKJV obscures the meaning of this important passage and leaves us without a specific and clear reference to the flood as a picture of baptism, a picture which is important because it was not a baptism by immersion (the only ones immersed were the ungodly), and because it was a family

baptism.

These are not our only problems with the NKJV, but good examples of its unreformed bias and good reasons also, therefore, for Reformed believers and paedobaptists to avoid it.

Chapter 21

Conclusions

Scripture, taken as a whole, in both testaments, establishes by precept and by example both sprinkling and pouring as the proper mode of baptism and family baptism as the norm in determining who are the proper subjects of baptism. This conclusion goes hand-in-hand with a proper emphasis on sovereign, particular grace and an emphasis on one, everlasting covenant of grace. Without a clear view of these the basis for family baptism as well as for sprinkling is compromised.

Baptism, therefore, and infant baptism especially, when properly understood, both in its mode and subjects stresses and teaches the objectivity of the gospel, the initiative of God in salvation, the sovereignty of grace, the surety of God's promises, the centrality of Christ, and the unity and infallibility of the covenant. It is no wonder, therefore, that the sacrament of baptism has been such a cause of division in the church of Christ through the ages. The divisions over baptism are really only a reflection of longstanding disagreements and divisions over these other matters.

We have written on these issues not to further the divisions that already exist, but in the hope that the God of all grace, the great God of the covenant, will use what has been written to bring unity and peace amongst those who now disagree, but who will undoubtedly be united in the everlasting kingdom of Christ.

As Jay Adams says:

The evidence is conclusive; the meaning and mode of baptism are plainly set forth in the Scriptures; the rest depends upon those who care to know and follow the truth.

Little more needs to be said. Probably most who read will yet continue in their former views, but for the man with an open mind - not a mind open to all the vain disputations of men - but a mind open to all the Word of God, this discussion may carry some weight. He will see something more of the matchless grace of our God, who in His Love, mercy and wisdom sent His Son to die in the place of His own that they may have everlasting life through that Anointing Who is from the Father. Through His baptism we are cleansed from sin and identified with Christ. To be baptized by the Spirit is to be indwelt by the Almighty God, the Holy Spirit, Who alone can truly baptize anyone "into Christ."⁶¹

⁶¹Adams, *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism*, p. 50.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Different views of baptism

We have suggested at various points that the views of many Paedobaptists are inadequate or even unbiblical and that this presents serious difficulties in defending the doctrine of infant baptism. While it has not been the purpose of this book to present and criticize the different views of infant baptism, we do include the following charts by way of summarizing those views in contrast to our own.

This first chart looks at the relationship between regeneration and baptism:

Basis for Infant Baptism	Main Proponents	Analysis
baptismal regeneration of all baptized children	Some early fathers, Augustine, Wesley, Romanism, Lutheranism, Anglicanism some Pentecostals	false
ecclesiastical regeneration of all baptized children (objective, outward regeneration)	Some Anglicans, Richard Baxter, J. Edwards, Federal Vision theologians	false
presupposed regeneration of all baptized children	Abraham Kuyper	false
subsequent regeneration of all (properly) baptized children	Charged to the PRC by NRC and HNRC theologians	false
conditional promise of regeneration to all baptized children	Alfred Barnes, most Reformed and evangelical Paedobaptists	false
greater hope of regeneration for baptized children	Matthew Henry	false
promised regeneration of (some) baptized children	The Protestant Reformed Churches	true

The following chart examines the relation between the covenant and baptism and the different views of this relationship:

Basis for Infant Baptism	Proponents	Analysis
conditional covenant with all baptized children	C. Hodge, J. G. Vos, P. Marcel, many Reformed and Paedobaptist evangelicals	false
external covenant with all members of the church and their children	J. Edwards, Federal Vision theologians, some Paedobaptist evangelicals	false
unconditional covenant with the elect and their children	The Protestant Reformed Churches	true

Appendix 2

Statements from the Reformed Confessions

1. Heidelberg Catechism.

Q. 69. How art thou admonished and assured by holy baptism, that the one sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is of real advantage to thee?

A. Thus: that Christ appointed(a) this external washing with water, adding thereto this(b) promise, that I am as certainly washed by his blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am(c) washed externally with water, by which the filthiness of the body is commonly washed away.

(a) Matt. 28:19. Acts 2:38.

(b) Mark 16:16. Matt. 3:11. Rom. 6:3.

(c) Mark 1:4. Luke 3:3.

Q. 70. What is it to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ?

A. It is to receive of God the remission of sins, freely, for the sake of Christ's blood, which he(d) shed for us by his sacrifice upon the cross; and also to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin, and(e) lead holy and unblamable lives.

(d) Heb. 12:24. I Pet. 1:2.

(e) John 1:33. Rom. 6:4. Col. 2:11.

Q. 71. Where has Christ promised us, that he will as certainly wash us by his blood and Spirit, as we are washed with the water of baptism?

A. In the institution of baptism, which is thus expressed: "(f) Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," "(g) he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." This promise is also repeated, where the scripture calls baptism the washing(h) of regeneration, and the washing(i) away of sins.

(f) Matt. 28:19.

(g) Mark 16:16.

(h) Tit. 3:5.

(i) Acts 22:36.

Q. 72. Is then the external baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?

A. Not at all: for the(j) blood of Jesus Christ only, and the Holy Ghost cleanse us from all(k) sin.

(j) Matt. 3:11. I Pet. 3:21.

(k) I John 1:7. I Cor. 6:11.

Q. 73. Why then doth the Holy Ghost call baptism "the washing of regeneration" and "the washing away of sins"?

A. God speaks thus not without great cause, to-wit, not only thereby to teach us, that as the filth of the body is purged away by water, so our sins are(l) removed by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ; but especially that by this(m) divine pledge and sign he may assure us, that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins as really, as we are externally washed with water.

(l) Rev. 1:5. I Cor. 6:11.

(m) Mark 16:16. Gal. 3: 27.

Q. 74. Are infants also to be baptized?

A. Yes: for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the(n) covenant and(o) church of God; and since(p) redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the(q) Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the christian church; and be distinguished(r) from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by(s) circumcision, instead of which(t) baptism is instituted in the new covenant.

(n) Gen. 17:7. Acts 2:39.

(o) I Cor. 7:14. Joel 2:16.

(p) Matt. 19:14.

(q) Luke 1:14, 15. Ps. 22:10. Acts 2:39.

(r) Acts 10:47. I Cor. 12:13 and 7:14.

(s) Gen. 17:14.

(t) Col. 2:11-13.

2. Belgic Confession.

Article 15: Of Original Sin.

We believe that, through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind; which is a corruption of the whole nature, and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected even in their mother's womb, and which produceth in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof; and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of God, that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind. Nor is it by any means abolished or done away by baptism; since sin always issues forth from this woeful source, as water from a fountain; notwithstanding it is not imputed to the children of God unto condemnation, but by his grace and mercy is forgiven them. Not that they should rest securely in sin, but that a sense of this corruption should make believers often to sigh, desiring to be delivered from this body of death. Wherefore we reject the error of the Pelagians, who assert that sin proceeds only from imitation.

Article 34: Of Holy Baptism.

We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law, hath made an end, by the shedding of his blood, of all other sheddings of blood which men could or would make as a propitiation or satisfaction for sin: and that he, having abolished circumcision, which was done with blood, hath instituted the sacrament of baptism, instead thereof; by which we are received into the Church of God, and separated from all other people and strange religions, that we may wholly belong to him, whose ensign and banner we bear: and which serves as a testimony to us, that he will forever be our gracious God and Father. Therefore he has commanded all those, who are his, to be baptized with pure water, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost": thereby signifying to us, that as water washeth away the filth of the body, when poured upon it, and is seen on the body of the baptized, when sprinkled upon him; so doth the blood of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, internally sprinkle the soul, cleanse it from its sins, and regenerate us from children of wrath, unto children of God. Not that this is effected by the external water, but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God; who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass, to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, that is, the devil, and to enter into the spiritual land of Canaan. Therefore the ministers, on their part, administer the sacrament, and that which is visible, but our Lord giveth that which is signified by the sacrament, namely, the gifts and invisible grace; washing, cleansing and purging our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts, and filling them with all comfort; giving unto us a true assurance of his fatherly goodness; putting on us the new man, and putting off the old man with

all his deeds. Therefore we believe, that every man, who is earnestly studious of obtaining life eternal, ought to be but once baptized with this only baptism, without ever repeating the same: since we cannot be born twice. Neither doth this baptism only avail us, at the time when the water is poured upon us, and received by us, but also through the whole course of our life; therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received, and moreover condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, whom we believe ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as the children in Israel formerly were circumcised, upon the same promises which are made unto our children. And indeed Christ shed his blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful, than for adult persons; and therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that, which Christ hath done for them; as the Lord commanded in the law, that they should be made partakers of the sacrament of Christ's suffering and death, shortly after they were born, by offering for them a lamb, which was a sacrament of Jesus Christ. Moreover, what circumcision was to the Jews, that baptism is for our children. And for this reason Paul calls baptism the circumcision of Christ.

3. Canons of Dordt.

Chapter 1, Article 17.

Since we are to judge of the will of God from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children, whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.

4. Form for the Administration of Baptism.

The principle parts of the doctrine of holy baptism are these three:

First. That since we with our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, in so much that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, except we be born again. This, the dipping in, or sprinkling with water teaches us, whereby the impurity of our souls is signified, and we admonished to loathe and humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation without ourselves.

Secondly. Holy baptism witnesseth and sealeth unto us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. Therefore we are baptized in the name of the Farther, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. For when we are baptized in the name of the Father, God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us, that he doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us as his children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing, and avert all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized into the name of the Son, the Son sealeth unto us, that he doth wash us in his blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection, so that we are freed from all our sins, and accounted righteous before God. In like manner, when we are baptized into the name of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost assures us, by this holy sacrament, that he will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins, and the daily renewing of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Thirdly. Whereas in all covenants, there are contained two parts: therefore are we by God through baptism, admonished of, and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in him, and love him with all our hearts,

with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life.

And if we sometimes through weakness fall into sin, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and undoubted testimony, that we have an eternal covenant of grace with God.

To Infants of Believers.

And although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as they are without their knowledge, partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ; as God speaketh unto Abraham, the father of all the faithful, and therefore unto us and our children (Gen. 17:7), saying, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." This also the Apostle Peter testifieth with these words (Acts 2:39), "For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Therefore God formerly commanded them to be circumcised, which was a seal of the covenant, and of the righteousness of faith; and therefore Christ also embraced them, laid his hands upon them and blessed them (Mark 10).

Since then baptism is come in the place of circumcision, therefore infants are to be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God, and of his covenant. And parents are in duty bound, further to instruct their children herein, when they come to years of discretion.

5. Westminster Confession of Faith.

XXVIII. OF BAPTISM.

I. Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ,(a) not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church;(b) but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace,(c) of his ingrafting into Christ,(d) of regeneration,(e) of remission of sins,(f) and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life.(g) Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world.(h)

(a) Matt. 28:19.

(b) I Cor. 12:13.

(c) Rom. 4:11 compared with Col. 2:11, 12.

(d) Gal. 3:27. Rom. 6:5.

(e) Tit. 3:5.

(f) Mark 1:4.

(g) Rom. 6:3, 4.

(h) Matt. 28:19, 20.

II. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the Gospel, lawfully called thereunto.(i)

(i) Matt. 3:11. John 1:33. Matt. 28:19, 20.

III. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.(j)

(j) Heb. 9:10, 19-22. Acts 2:41. Acts 16:33. Mark 7:4.

IV. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ,(k) but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.(l)

(k) Mark 16:15, 16. Acts 8:37-38.

(l) Gen. 17:7, 9 compared with Gal. 3:9, 14, and with Col. 2:11, 12, and with Acts 2:38, 39, and with Rom. 4:11, 12. I Cor. 7:14. Matt. 28:19. Mark 10:13-16. Luke 18:15.

V. Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance,(m) yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it:(n) or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.(o)

(m) Luke 7:30 compared with Ed. 4:24-26.

(n) Rom. 4:11. Acts 10:2, 4, 22, 31, 45, 47.

(o) Acts 18:13, 23.

VI. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered;(p) yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.(q)

(p) John 3:5, 8.

(q) Gal. 3:27. Tit. 3:5. Eph. 5:25, 26. Acts 2:38, 41.

VII. The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered unto any person.(r)

(r) Tit. 3:5.

6. Westminster Larger Catechism.

Q. 165. What is Baptism?

A. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,(a) to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into himself,(b) of remission of sins by his blood,(c) and regeneration by his Spirit;(d) of adoption,(e) and resurrection unto everlasting life;(f) and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church,(g) and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.(h)

(a) Matt. 28:19.

(b) Gal. 3:27.

(c) Mark 1:4. Rev. 1:6.

(d) Tit. 3:5. Eph. 5:26.

(e) Gal. 3:26, 27.

(f) I Cor. 15:29. Rom. 6:5.

(g) I Cor. 12:18.

(h) Rom. 6:4.

Q. 166. Unto whom is baptism to be administered?

A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him,(i) but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized.(j)

(i) Acts 8:36-38. Acts 2:38.

(j) Gen. 17:7, 9 compared with Gal. 3:9, 14, and with Col. 2:11, 12, and with Acts 2:38, 39, and with Rom. 4:11, 12. I Cor. 7:14. Matt. 28:19. Luke 18:15, 16. Rom. 11:16.

Q. 167. How is our baptism to be improved by us?

A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by

us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others;(k) by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein;(l) by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements;(m) by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament;(n) by drawing from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin and quickening of grace;(o) and by endeavoring to live by faith,(p) to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness,(p) as those that have therein given up their name to Christ;(q) and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.(r)

(k) Col. 2:11, 12. Rom. 6:4, 6, 11.

(l) Rom. 6:3-5.

(m) I Cor. 1:11-13. Rom. 6:2, 3.

(n) Rom. 4:11, 12. I Pet. 3:21.

(o) Rom. 6:3-5.

(p) Gal. 3:26, 27.

(q) Rom. 6:22.

(r) I Cor. 12:13, 25-27.

7. Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Q. 94. What is baptism?

A. Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost(a) doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement o be the Lord's.(b)

(a) Matt. 28:19.

(b) Rom. 6:4. Gal. 3:27.

Q. 95. To whom is baptism to be administered?

A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him;(c) but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized.(d)

(c) Acts 8:36, 37. Acts 2:38.

(d) Acts 2:38, 39. Gen. 17:10 compared with Col. 2:11, 12. I Cor. 7:14.

8. Second Helvetic Confession. Chapter 20.

The Institution of Baptism. Baptism was instituted and consecrated by God. First John baptized, who dipped Christ in the water in Jordan. From him it came to the apostles, who also baptized with water. The Lord expressly commanded them to preach the Gospel and to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). And in The Acts, Peter said to the Jews who inquired what they ought to do: Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37 f.). Hence by some baptism is called a sign of initiation for God's people, since by it the elect of God are consecrated to God.

One Baptism. There is but one baptism in the Church of God; and it is sufficient to be once baptized or consecrated unto God. For baptism once received continues for all of life, and is a perpetual sealing of our adoption.

What it Means To Be Baptized. Now to be baptized in the name of Christ is to be enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance of the sons of God; yes, and in this life to be called after the name of God; that is to say, to be called a son of God; to be cleansed also from the filthiness of sins, and to be granted the manifold grace of God, in order to lead a new and innocent life. Baptism, therefore, calls to mind and renews the great favor God has shown to the race of mortal men. For we are all born in the pollution of sin and are the children of wrath. But God, who is rich in mercy, freely cleanses us from our sins by the blood of his Son, and in him adopts us to be his sons, and by a holy covenant joins us to himself, and enriches us with various gifts, that we might live a new life. All these things are assured by baptism. For inwardly we are regenerated, purified, and renewed by God through the Holy Spirit; and outwardly we receive the assurance of the greatest gifts in the water, by which also those great benefits are represented, and, as it were, set before our eyes to be beheld.

We Are Baptized with Water. And therefore we are baptized, that is, washed or sprinkled with visible water. For the water washes dirt away, and cools and refreshes hot and tired bodies. And the grace of God performs these things for souls, and does so invisibly or spiritually.

The Obligation of Baptism. Moreover, God also separates us from all strange religions and peoples by the symbol of baptism, and consecrates us to himself as his property. We, therefore, confess our faith when we are baptized, and obligate ourselves to God for obedience, mortification of the flesh, and newness of life. Hence, we are enlisted in the holy military service of Christ that all our life long we should fight against the world, Satan, and our own flesh. Moreover, we are baptized into one body of the Church, that with all members of the Church we might beautifully concur in the one religion and in mutual services.

The Form of Baptism. We believe that the most perfect form of baptism is that by which Christ was baptized, and by which the apostles baptized. Those things, therefore, which by man's device were added afterwards and used in the Church we do not consider necessary to the perfection of baptism. Of this kind is exorcism, the use of burning lights, oil, salt, spittle, and such other things as that baptism is to be celebrated twice every year with a multitude of ceremonies. For we believe that one baptism of the Church has been sanctified in God's first institution, and that it is consecrated by the Word and is also effectual today in virtue of God's first blessing.

The Minister of Baptism. We teach that baptism should not be administered in the Church by women or midwives. For Paul deprived women of ecclesiastical duties, and baptism has to do with these.

Anabaptists. We condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that newborn infants of the faithful are to be baptized. For according to evangelical teaching, of such is the Kingdom of God, and they are in the covenant of God. Why, then, should the sign of God's covenant not be given to them? Why should those who belong to God and are in his Church not be initiated by holy baptism? We condemn also the Anabaptists in the rest of their peculiar doctrines which they hold contrary to the Word of God. We therefore are not Anabaptists and have nothing in common with them.

Appendix 3 Bibliography

To attempt a complete bibliography of all that has been written over the centuries on the subject of baptism would be a very large, and in this case, a profitless endeavor. We have, therefore, listed on the Baptist side of the question two of the more important works and one easily read contemporary work: on the paedobaptist side a few of those books, currently in print, that we have found particularly helpful and insightful.

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