Lectures on Baptism #1

The Covenant of Grace, the Biblical Covenants, and Baptism

Introduction: The Reformed advocacy and defense of infant baptism is centered in their argument from "the covenant." Everything else, important though it be to the paedobaptist case, is secondary. The doctrine of infant baptism is an "implication" drawn from the "Covenant of Grace" (J. G. Vos). Randy Booth tells us what all paedobaptist acknowledge: The question of whether or not there is a single covenant of grace, extending through both the Old and New Testaments, is central to the baptism debate" (*Children of the Promise*, p. 34). If you can establish the continuity of God's covenant of grace for both Testaments, then, according to paedobaptists, their doctrine of infant baptism is proved. Or, to put it another way, covenant theology requires infant baptism (and those who are theologically astute will see this). Matters in the paedobaptist argument from the nature of the church, the relationship between circumcision and baptism, and various NT passages called forth in support of infant baptism are all dependent on the paedobaptist view of the covenant.

- Louis Berkoff, in his *Systematic Theology* establishes that the covenant of grace is the biblical doctrine of how God brings redemption to fallen man. In his section on baptism, he applies the doctrine of the covenant of grace to prove the propriety of infant baptism. His statement is a good summary of the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism.

> Berkoff begins by conceding "that there is no explicit command in the Bible to baptize children, and that there is not a single instance in which we are plainly told that children were baptized" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 632). This is not a factor against infant baptism in the Reformed view, but only an indication of the importance of the covenantal argument for it.

>Berkof outlines the argument for infant baptism from the covenant of grace as follows:

1. The covenant made with Abraham was primarily a *spiritual* covenant, though it also has a national aspect, and of this spiritual covenant circumcision was a sign and seal.

    - by "spiritual" he refers to the covenant of grace.

2. This covenant is still in force and is essentially identical with the "new covenant" of the present dispensation.

    - here he stresses the unity and continuity of the covenant in both dispensations.

3. By the appointment of God infants shared in the benefits of the covenant, and therefore received circumcision as a sign and seal.

    - he says that the covenant is an organic concept moving along organic and historical lines; thus, as infants shared in the sign and benefits in the OT so do they in the NT. They are not now excluded from church membership.

4. In the new dispensation baptism is by divine authority substituted for circumcision as the initiatory sign and seal of the covenant of grace.

    - if children received this sign and seal in the OT, surely they cannot be excluded in the NT.

- Robert Reymond, in his *New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, states that Reformed paedobaptists believe that the baptism of their children "is a justifiable deduction from three undeniable biblical truths:

1. infant males received the sign and seal of the covenant of grace under its Old Testament administration;

2. the covenant of grace has a continuity and organic unity, the people of God are essentially the same in all ages...; and,

3. one can find no repeal in the New Testament of the Old Testament command to place the sign of the covenant of grace upon covenant children" (p. 944).

- Undeniably, the concept of the covenant of grace is foundational to the doctrine of infant baptism.

- The doctrine of the covenant of grace in covenant theology is opposed by dispensational theology.

- In the last 100 years or so, the debate over baptism has often been (at least in this country) between dispensational baptists and covenant theologians.

> Paedobaptist covenant theologians stressing an almost complete continuity between OT and NT has defended infant baptism by appeal to the OT and circumcision, and sharply criticized dispensational baptists for their failure to see this continuity.

> Baptist dispensational theologians stressing an almost complete discontinuity between OT and NT have defended believer baptism by an exclusive appeal to the NT and have sharply criticized Reformed paedobaptist for their failure to see this discontinuity.

> Note: I believe that both positions are unbalanced and that there is a better way than that set forth by either the Reformed paedobaptists and the dispensational baptists.

- The paedobaptist rhetoric is often focused on dispensationalism, implying that there are only two options in the debate over baptism: paedobaptist covenant theology, or baptist dispensational theology.

> Randy Booth is a prime example. In his chapter on "How Should We Interpret the Bible?," he outlines the options in the following two headings: 1) "The Reformed or Covenantal Method"; 2) "The Dispensational or Baptistic Method."

> Booth concludes his chapter: "A covenantal method of interpretation, if consistently held, will lead to an understanding and acceptance of baptizing infants of believers as members of the covenant of grace. The dispensational method of interpretation, if consistently held will inevitably lead to an individualistic and baptistic understanding of baptism. Has God had one plan of redemption (covenantal), or has he had more than one plan (dispensational)? This question must be answered if we are to go on in our study of baptism" (*Children of the Promise*, p. 28).

- But there are baptists who fully subscribe to the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of grace—who are covenantal, not dispensational in their approach to Scripture. These are often called "Reformed Baptists." Some called Reformed Baptists would better be called Calvinistic Baptists because while they affirm the 5 points of Calvinism, they are not covenantal in their overall theology. Perhaps those baptists who are fully committed to the covenant of grace and biblical covenantalism should be referred to as "Covenantal Baptists."

> The historical roots of the Reformed baptists are not that of the German Anabaptists, but that of the English Puritans and Separatists. These English baptists were committed to the great doctrines of the Reformed faith, and this is evident in the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, which is based on the Westminister Confession of Faith and follows it nearly verbatim (except in the sections dealing with the church and the sacraments, and the relationship of the civil magistrate to the church).

> Note: Booth, in passing, mentions that there are some Baptists who are not dispensational, but does not interact with their view, and leaves the reader with the impression that you are either covenantal paedobaptist or dispensational baptist.

-The debate between Reformed paedobaptists and Reformed credobaptists is not over wether there *is* a covenant of grace that unifies the Testaments, but over *how* that covenant of grace is revealed and administered in history through the biblical covenants—Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New—and the impact that that revelation and administration has in reference to baptism.

> For example: WCF Chapter 7 "On God's Covenant" and LBC 1689 both affirm in nearly identical language, the need for and the nature of the covenant of grace. They only differ on the historical manifestation of the covenant of grace and the biblical covenants.

> So, the difference is not over the covenant of grace (a category of systematic theology), but over the relationship of the biblical covenants to the covenant of grace and to one another (a category of biblical theology)

- There are 4 divisions of Theology:

1. Exegetical Theology: deals with the study of the biblical text; biblical introduction; hermeneutics and exegesis; biblical theology.

2. Historical Theology: deals with the origin and development of the Christian faith in church history; study of history, history of doctrine, creeds, etc.

3. Systematic Theology: takes the material from the first two and arranges it in a logical and systematic fashion.

4. Practical Theology: this is the application of theology to the life, ministry, and worship of the church.

- Biblical theology is rooted in exegesis (a critical analysis and explanation of the meaning of the text of Scripture). Geerhardus Vos defines it as "that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible" (*Biblical Theology*, p. 5).

1. Revelation is historical, i.e., revealed in history and must be understood according to its place in that history.

2. Revelation is progressive: there is a forward movement in revelation; God's person and works are more fully revealed as the Scriptures unfold in the historical process of revelation. Revelation is progressive in that it builds upon previous revelation and takes it forward. The NT is considered the final revelation from God and authoritative for the understanding of the OT and God's covenant of grace.

3. Revelation is organic: necessary interrelation and connection of the parts of revelation that is similar to living things; e.g., as a seed grows into a plant or tree....

> The covenantal baptist believes that the Reformed paedobaptist has not sufficiently recognized the historical character of revelation—the progressive and organic development from the OT to the NT in the revelation and administration of the covenant of grace. As the dispensationalist has swung to an extreme of discontinuity, the Reformed paedobaptist to an exaggerated continuity (at least in reference to their understanding of the visible church and baptism).

- in terms of the nature of the visible church and the covenantal signs, the paedobaptist reads the OT as if it were the NT and the reads the NT as if it were the OT (to use Paul Jewett's phrase; *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*).

- thus, OT Israel is essentially the same as the NT church, and OT circumcision is the virtual

equivalent of NT baptism.

- Please understand, then, that the choices in the baptismal debate are not (as some paedobaptists imply) two, i.e., dispensationalism or covenant theology, but three: 1) Dispensational/Anabaptist theology; 2) Covenantal baptist theology; 3) Covenantal Paedobaptist theology.

- My purpose in the remainder of this lecture is to sketch from *a* Reformed baptist perspective a biblical understanding of God's covenants. In particular, it is my purpose to set forth a biblical theology of the covenants of Scripture.

> This is based on a commitment to covenant theology and with a view to the baptism debate.

> This explanation of the relationship between the biblical covenants seeks to be sensitive to the historical character of revelation and is oriented towards biblical theology rather than systematic theology.

> One must guard against imposing your systematic theology on the text of Scripture rather than allowing the text of Scripture to impose itself on your systematic theology. We must allow exegetical theology to explain for us how the covenant of grace was progressively revealed and administered in the biblical covenants.

I. The Definition of "Covenant"

- O. Palmer Robertson says that, "Asking for a definition of 'covenant' is something like asking for a definition of 'mother.' A mother may be defined as a person who brought you into the world. That definition may be correct formally. But who would be satisfied with such a definition" (*The Christ of the Covenants*, p. 3).

- A covenant may be defined as a solemn, binding agreement between two or more persons; a "mutual commitment" (DOTTE, I-752) between persons that is sealed by an oath. This agreement, commitment, involves both promises and responsibilities by the covenantees. A covenant involves a solemn pledge or promise to fulfill stated conditions and carry out certain obligations.

> The actual nature of the covenant's structure depends on the relationship of the covenantees: a covenant between equals; between a superior and inferior; between God and man.

> The concept of a covenant is of divine origin. God has chosen to relate to man on the basis of covenant, both redemptively and administratively. As I will seek to show in a moment, there are two types of biblical covenants: promise and administrative.

> God has also ordained that men shall relate to one another on the basis of a covenant in the more important relationships in life.

> You might say that "covenant" is an inescapable concept because it is the divinely appointed means whereby God relates to men and men relate to other men in the carrying out of God's redemptive plan and man's dominion mandate.

- Because the concept of covenant is so important biblically, it has been extensively studied as to its origin (human or divine) and structure (its parts). As to the later, there have been various proposals. For our purposes we will adopt the 5 point covenant model set forth by Ray Sutton (*That You May Prosper*) and developed by Gary North in his many books.

- We may say then, that the Biblical Covenant is a divinely created bond consisting of 5 parts: transcendence, hierarchy, ethics, sanctions, continuity (See "The Biblical Covenant Model").

- There are also 3 covenantal institutions (a divinely created bond consisting of 5 parts) established by

God to carry out His plan and government in the earth: family, church, and state.

> Note: one of the errors of the Reformed paedobaptists is the failure to discern the significance of these covenantal institutions—specifically, here, the family and the church—when seeking to define the status of children of believers in the NT era. It seems that the only way that they can conceive of a child being related to God covenantally is through membership in the church. But what about membership in a Christian family, does that not establish a covenantal standing for a child independent of the church? —especially when we believe that the family is the covenantal institution charged with the responsibility for raising and training children. We will consider this matter further in our 3rd lecture.

II. Covenant Theology

- Covenant theology makes the covenant the organizing principle of God's dealings with men:

> "The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to him as their creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been please to express by way of *covenant*" (LBC 1689, 7-1).

> "Moreover, man having brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a *covenant of grace*, wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained to eternal life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe" (LBC 1689, 7-2).

> "Covenant of grace" is a theological designation that brings together the biblical teaching on God's redemptive plan, as "trinity" is a theological designation bringing together the biblical revelation on the members of the Godhead.

- Covenant theology teaches the following concerning salvation:

1. Covenant of Redemption: formed between the members of the divine trinity in eternity. Here the plan of redemption was established. The Son promised to obey the Father's will and become incarnate and to die for sinners. The Father promised to give the Son a people and to exalt him as Lord of all. The Spirit promised to reveal the Word of redemption and apply the benefits of redemption.

2. Covenant of works: parties were God and Adam, who represented all his posterity. The promise was life and favor for obedience (specifically, in relation to the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil). The penalty was disfavor and death for disobedience.

3. Covenant of Grace: see LBC above.

- Promise of God to save lost men from sin and its effects.

- Parties to the covenant: two views:

1). God and elect sinners. Christ is not a party in the covenant of grace, but its mediator.

2). God and Christ as the representative of the elect. There are two Adams; Christ is the Second Adam who represents His people. Christ as the representative is also the mediator of the covenant.

- Condition for reception of the promise: faith, which includes repentance and submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

- Eternal damnation to those who reject the free offer of the Gospel.

* How does a commitment to this covenant theology require or lead to the doctrine of infant baptism? Nothing in this formulation says that the parties in the covenant of grace are *the elect and their seed.* We are not talking about the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant here, but the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of grace.

* Actually, the covenant of grace, if anything, points to believer baptism, because the actual participants in the covenant of grace are the elect—those who believe in Jesus Christ as their redeemer and Lord. Baptism is the outward sign of those who are in Christ by faith, which according to the NT is the only way one can be joined to Christ (cf. Matt. 24:24, 31; Luke 18:17; Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; Titus 1:1).

- Even though paedobaptists confess as covenant theologians that the covenant of grace is with Christ and his elect people, they still make statements such as: Children of believing parents are "members of the covenant of grace" or are "in the covenant of grace." What does this mean? That they are parties of the covenant of grace and therefore elect?

- Covenant theologians, when discussing the covenant of grace in a soteriological context, limit it to the elect. But when they discuss the covenant of grace in the context of the church or baptism, they claim that the covenant of grace is with believers and their children. How is this so? One reason is the fundamental error of equating the biblical covenant with Abraham with the theological designation of "the covenant of grace" (a category of systematic theology); they are not one and the same!

4. <u>The Biblical Covenants</u>

- How do the biblical covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, New) correlate with the covenant of grace? There is often a lot of imprecision at this point. And it is certainly not helpful when paedobaptist simply speak of "the covenant."

- Generally, the biblical covenants are seen by Reformed theologians as expressions of the covenant of grace.

1. The Abrahamic Covenant is a statement of the covenant of grace. Robert Reymond explains that the covenant of grace came to expression in the salvific promises of the Abrahamic covenant. He continues, "This is just to say that the Abrahamic covenant, in the specific prospect it holds forth of the salvation of the entire church of God, is identical with the soteric program of the covenant of grace, indeed, is identical with the covenant of grace itself" (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, pp. 517-518).

> Most Reformed baptists would have no problem with this statement. The problem begins when paedobaptists drop out "salvific promises" and "in the specific prospect it holds forth of the salvation of the entire church of God," and make a shift to saying, without this necessary qualification, that the Abrahamic covenant *is* the covenant of grace. I believe that Reymond himself does this later in his theology where he calls circumcision the sign of the covenant of grace, when it is really the sign of the entire covenant that God made with Abraham, including the promises of a numerous physical seed and the land of Canaan. This is a troubling error.

> Berkof recognizes that the Abrahamic covenant "has a national aspect," but states that it is "primarily a *spiritual* covenant." But he seems to forget this dual aspect of the Abrahamic covenant and goes on to call circumcision (the sign and seal of the Abrahamic covenant) the sign and seal of the covenant of grace, i.e., a sign and seal of

the spiritual aspect only. Repeatedly, paedobaptist make this subtle shift. Why? This shift is necessary to support their contention that circumcision is equivalent to baptism and OT Israel is the same as the NT church.

> Most paedobaptists treat the Abrahamic covenant as a "pure gospel covenant."

2. The Mosaic covenant is partly a covenant of works and partly a covenant of grace. As a covenant of works, blessings are tied to obedience to the law. As a covenant of grace, it contains typological institutions that reveal Christ. (cf. A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, pp. 376-377). Not all Reformed paedobaptists would express the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to the covenant of grace in this fashion. Some see the Mosaic covenant as a continuation of the covenant of grace established with Abraham and his seed.

3. The Davidic covenant is an expression of the covenant of grace.

4. The New covenant is the realization of the covenant of grace.

- This analysis is, to some degree, helpful, but it is also incomplete. How do the biblical covenants relate to the covenant of grace (God's redemptive plan) and to one another?

III. The Promise and the Biblical Covenants

- I have devoted a good deal of study to the subject of the biblical covenants, but the most helpful treatment that I have read is *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants*, by Thomas Edward McComiskey (Baker Book House, 1985).

> McComiskey, a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary (Th.M.) and Brandies University (Ph.D.), was professor of OT and Semitic languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He held to covenant theology, but with some departures from its standard formulations, particularly in regard to biblical theology.

> This book is endorsed on the back jacket cover by Tremper Longman (prof. of OT at Westminster) as "a marvelously written and profound book which deals with some of the most crucial issues in biblical theology."

> McComiskey argues in his book that there are two types, or categories, of divine covenants in the Bible: Promise Covenants and Administrative Covenants.

- Let us consider the chart on the covenants that was distributed. I am indebted to McComiskey for the overall scheme and the categories (and generally in other important ways), but the development of these categories and the application of them to the issue at hand are my own (he cannot be charged...!)

> This chart represents a great amount of biblical material; all we can do here is to summarize.

> This is an exercise in biblical theology (as opposed to systematic theology).

(1). The Promise

- The idea of "promise" is at the center of the covenantal idea: a covenant entails a solemn pledge or promise sealed by an oath.

- In terms of systematic theology, we say that the covenant of grace is God's pledge or *promise* to save His elect from sin through faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

- In the NT, "promise" and "the promise" are used to refer to the redemption promised in the OT that is now fulfilled in Christ.

> the NT connects the promise to the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. This promise was set forth in the law, the prophets, and the writings—the entire OT gives witness to God's promise of salvation. cf. Ps. 77:8.

> cf. Acts 13:23, 32; 26:6; Rom. 4:14-16; 9:8; Gal. 3:14-29; 4:28; Eph. 2:12; 3:6; 2 Tim. 2:1; Heb. 6:13-17; 9:15; 10:36.

> The revelation of the promise began with the Word of God to Adam and Eve right after the fall in Gen. 3:15, 29; a redeemer of the seed of the woman would come to crush the head of the serpent and free man.

> This promise of redemption through the seed of the woman was progressively revealed in the OT—who would save man (he would be of the seed of Seth, Shem, Abraham, David), and how he would save man (through a blood sacrifice offered by a priest/king).

> The promise exists independent of the biblical covenants, i.e., it predates them and is superior to them (it is the basis of these covenants). The promise was not given a covenantal formulation in history until Abraham, about 2,000 years after the fall. See also how the promise was made to Abraham in Gen. 12, but it was not sealed by covenant until Genesis 15.

> The promise that God will bless all nations through Abraham's seed (which Paul tells us is the promise of the gospel), for the first time, is sealed and guaranteed by a covenant.

> Faith has always been the means whereby men inherit the promise of salvation (Gen. 15:6)

> The covenant of grace is the theological term that has been coined by systematic theologians to designate the essence of the promise: salvation by grace through Jesus Christ.

(2) <u>The Promise Covenants</u>.

- Eph. 2:12 refers to "*the covenants of promise*" of which the Gentiles are strangers; but in 3:6 Paul speaks of the Gentiles now being "partakers of *his promise* in Christ by the gospel."

- There are two "promise covenants" in the Bible: the Abrahamic and Davidic. The following 6 points describe the nature and significance of these covenants:

1. The promise covenants set forth the gracious plan of God to redeem men from sin.

2. Condition for inclusion in the “promise” is faith, and faith alone (but not a faith that is alone).

3. The promise covenants are fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham and the Son of David. He brings them to realization and applies the fruits of His obedience unto death to His people.

4. Therefore, men inherit the promises of these covenants only by being “in Christ”—joined to Him in faith.

- Note how the biblical covenant model applies to the promise covenants"

> Transcendence: God establishes the covenant and He alone takes an oath to fulfill the promises of the covenant. cf. Gen. 15:17; Heb. 6:17.

> Hierarchy: Jesus Christ submits to the Father's will and serves as the divine agent to fulfill the promise. He also is the head of man and His representative as the second Adam.

> Ethics: Jesus Christ is in all things obedient to the will of the Father, and perfectly keeps the law on behalf of His people.

> Sanctions: Jesus Christ endures death, the penalty for the breaking of God's law, in His own person and for His people

> Continuity: By His resurrection and ascension Christ establishes forever His ministry as priest and His rule as king, and this ensures the salvation and dominion of His people.

5. There is one “promise,” which is by the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, giving full continuity to the flow of redemptive history and the way of salvation.

6. Note: At their initiation the Promise Covenants also contained specific promises for Abraham and David, and also for their physical descendents (due to certain preparatory and typological aspects of these covenants).

- The covenants with Abraham and David express the promise, and are true promise covenants, but they are not pure *gospel* covenants. They also contain personal promises for Abraham and David and for their more immediate physical descendents. These are spiritual covenants, primarily, but they contain literal and national aspects as well.

- For example, the promise of numerous seed for Abraham had a true physical dimension, as did the promise of the land of Canaan. The promise that David would not lack a son to sit on the throne had an initial, literal fulfillment. These promises were related to the nation of Israel as a necessary part of the period of preparation for the Messiah. They may have had typological significance, but they were national promises to Israel in the land of Canaan.

***** The promise covenants are an expression of the covenant of grace to Abraham and David in a specific redemptive-historical context. They are not, using the categories of systematic theology, identical with the covenant of grace.

- The paedobaptists are in error because they fail to see this, or fail to apply it consistently.

(3) <u>The Administrative Covenants</u>.

- These covenants administer the promise to the people of God—the church.

- To administer is to direct, manage, govern, furnish help to. The people of God need to be governed, directed, and helped in fulfilling their duty to worship and serve their God. These covenant do just that. There are 5 points that I would like you to note in regard to the administrative covenants:

1. The administrative covenants teach the redeemed man his duties (both moral and cultic) as a member of God’s covenant people.

- They govern the life and faith of the covenant community—the church.

- They give direction in terms of laws and principles, and give help through the means of grace.

2. The stated condition for prospering in the administrative covenants: obedience—blessing for obedience, cursing for disobedience (cf. Deuteronomy 28).

- The covenant sanctions are a form of discipline to produce holiness in the church and the lives of God's people. "Excommunication" is for those who will not profit from discipline and will not repent.

3. These covenants show man how to “be thou perfect” (Gen. 17:1). The terms for being “perfect” are both moral and cultic.

a. Moral: standards of ethics; moral law; remains unchanged, though it may be clarified and expanded in the progress of revelation.

> Note on Fred Malone's critique of theonomy in his otherwise helpful book, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone.* He confuses these categories of moral and cultic, and claims that the same hermeneutic that leads to theonomy leads to infant baptism. Theonomy is concerned with moral law and ethics.

b. Cultic: prescribed rites and ceremonies; the primary focus of OT rites was to typify the coming redemptive work of Christ; the primary focus of the NT rites are to portray the completed redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

***** This division of duties is very important to our consideration of circumcision and baptism; these are not moral laws but cultic acts. Circumcision must be understood in a typological sense, i.e., it is fulfilled in Christ and His redemptive work, as are all the other rites and ceremonies. Circumcision is no more fulfilled in baptism, than Passover is fulfilled in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 5:7). These may, in some sense, be analogous, but they are different rites serving different administrations of the promise, and cannot be equated without doing violence to the meaning of either.

4. There exists both continuity and discontinuity between the administrative covenants that must be discerned by the biblical text.

***** This is at the heart of the baptismal debate between Reformed baptists and Reformed paedobaptists. The paedobaptists do not recognize the discontinuities that exist between the administration of the promise in the age of preparation and the administration of the promise in the age of fulfillment.

5. There are 3 administrative covenants.

- These administer the promise and govern the obedience of the covenant people.

- Two covenants administer it in the age of preparation and one in the age of fulfillment.

- They do not annul or supersede the promise, but are added to it to enable the church to inherit all the blessings of the promise covenants. Gal. 3:7

(1). The covenant of circumcision.

> this is a covenantal administration of the promise. It governs the obedience of Abraham and his seed, and provides a necessary help to perpetuate the knowledge of the promise, to confirm the promise, and to fulfil the promise (i.e., through the separation of Israel into a distinct people to prepare the way for the coming redeemer).

> "This is *my covenant*, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. 11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. 12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. 13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken *my covenant*." (Gen. 17:10-14)

> "And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs" (Acts 7:8).

> Abraham had both moral law and cultic requirements in this administrative covenant. Moral law:

- "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26:5).

- "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19).

> The cultic requirement was circumcision. It functioned as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant, and both the act and the recipient were related typologically to Christ and the age of fulfillment in Him.

> Circumcision was incorporated into the Mosaic administration.

(2). The Mosaic Covenant.

> According to God's purpose and plan, the family of Israel grew into a nation.

> The Mosaic covenant was designed to administer the promise to Israel as a nation in the land of Canaan. In these new circumstances, it guided Israel and enabled them to fulfill their purpose in God's plan to prepare the way (and the world) for the redeemer.

> The Mosaic covenant contains an extensive revelation of the moral law of God. These moral laws remain binding in the New Covenant administration.

> The Mosaic covenant also contains a rich and elaborate array of ceremonial institutions and rites. All of which are typological and point forward to Christ and the church.

> Even though circumcision was incorporated into the Mosaic covenant, another covenantal sign was added:

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my *sabbaths* ye shall keep: for it is a *sign* between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. 14 Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. 15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. 16 Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual *covenant*. 17 It is a *sign* between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed (Ex. 31:12-17).

* The significance of the Sabbath sign may be this: There are two kinds of duties in the administrative covenants: moral and ceremonial. As circumcision is a sign of a ceremonial nature, sabbath keeping is a sign of a moral nature (the Sabbath represents the moral law, the 10 Commandments).

(3). The New Covenant

- This is also an administrative covenant. This is seen by the fact that the New covenant replaces the Mosaic administration (Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 26:28; Heb. 8:6-13).

- The New covenant is designed to administer the promise during the age of fulfillment. It governs the life and obedience of the international body of Christ. It reflects the new circumstance in God's plan of redemption where Israel is no longer the covenant community, and Canaan and Jerusalem are no longer the center. The NT church is a "new man," i.e., Jews and Gentiles made into the household of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

- The New covenant represents a major change in the administration of God's promise, because the promise has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ! The types and shadows have given way to the realities they pointed forward to. In terms of the promise itself and the basic moral law, there is full continuity with the OT, but in terms of the composition (fabric; anatomy) of the church, and the sacraments there are some major discontinuities.

> This is the essence of the Jeremiah prophecy! (cf. Jer. 31:31-34). The significant change is not a new law but that *all the members* of Israel (i.e., the new Israel of God, Gal. 6:16; the composition of this new Israel was not revealed in the OT, it was a "mystery" Eph. 3:3-9), would *know* the Lord. This corresponds to Paul's teaching in Gal. 3 that the true seed of Abraham consists of believers; these believers are the body of Christ, and these believers inherit the promise.

- The NT Scriptures are written to believers and to the churches to fully reveal Christ and explain His work, and thus enable the church to glorify God and carry out the Great Commission.

- The New covenant administration incorporates the moral law of the OT and further explains and applies it (Matt. 5:17-19).

- The New covenant administration abrogates all the OT rites and ceremonies (Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 10:1; 1 Cor. 7:19) and institutes only 2 new ones: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are new rites designed for the NT church living in the age of fulfillment; they point to Christ's work and reflect the composition of the new Israel, i.e., the spiritual seed of Abraham.

> The Biblical Covenant model is reflected in these administrative covenants.

<u>Conclusion</u>

- This discussion has sought to demonstrate that there are not only two possible positions in the baptismal debate: 1) Dispensational baptist and, 2) Reformed paedobaptist; but also 3) Reformed baptist

> there are also non-Reformed paedobaptists who argue for infant baptism on other grounds.

- This presentation of the covenant and covenant theology demonstrates that a full commitment to covenant theology neither requires nor proves infant baptism. If anything, covenant theology, with its center in the covenant of grace, implies believer baptism, for the covenant of grace is between God and the elect, not between God and the elect *and* their seed.

- Another aspect of biblical covenantalism that should be kept in mind when considering the issue of baptism and the status of children is the fact that there are *three* covenantal institutions.

- The biblical theology of the covenants reflected in the categories of Promise and Administrative covenants provides an important key to understanding the flow of redemptive history and the continuity and discontinuity in that history.

- All of these things lay the essential foundation for what will follow in our lectures on circumcision and baptism, the visible church, the status of children of believers, and the NT teaching on baptism.

Lectures on Baptism #2

Baptism and Circumcision

Introduction: In our first lecture, we considered God's covenant, covenant theology, and a biblical theology of the covenants in Scripture. We began with these subjects because of the Reformed paedobaptist contention that infant baptism is based on "the covenant," i.e., the covenant of grace and the continuity of God's covenantal dealings with men. In that lecture we sought to demonstrate:

> That covenant theology as a category of systematic theology does not prove or require infant baptism. The parties of the covenant are God and the elect. Turretin states the parties are God and "believers" (*Institutes of Elenectic Theology*, 2:208). Actually, the covenant of grace, implies believer baptism (if anything). Why should not the final NT administration of the Promise represent the actual parties in the covenant of grace in its rite of admission into the church?

> The debate between Reformed baptists and Reformed paedobaptists is not over the question of whether or not there is a covenant of grace that unifies God's redemptive plan and the Testaments, but over how that covenant is revealed and actualized in history through the biblical covenants. This is a question of biblical theology—the actual process of revelation and implementation of the covenant of grace in history. Our contention is that paedobaptists, in their argument for infant baptism, fail to recognize adequately the progressive flow of redemptive history, and the organic development of the covenant of grace from OT to NT.

> That there are two kinds (categories) of covenants in Scripture: 1) Promise—Abrahamic and Davidic; 2) Administrative—Circumcision, Mosaic, and New. A neglect to recognize this leads to confusion and flawed interpretation and conclusions, especially in regard to the relationship between OT circumcision and NT baptism.

- We now turn to this area of the baptismal debate: the relationship of baptism to circumcision.

- There are three basic answers to the question of this relationship (See chart for explanation)

1. The Baptist - Anabaptist view sees circumcision and baptism as entirely distinct from one another. Stresses a full discontinuity between them.

2. The Paedobaptist view sees baptism as replacing circumcision and that they are virtually the same ordinance—what is said of OT circumcision can be said of NT baptism. Stresses a near complete continuity between them.

3. The Reformed baptist view sees baptism as analogous to circumcision. Baptism does not simply replace circumcision, rather it supersedes it. Stresses that there is some continuity but a greater discontinuity between them. They are different ordinances for different covenantal administrations.

- The paedobaptist argument from circumcision is based on their view of "the covenant" and is a cornerstone in their case for infant baptism. If the covenant of grace is the foundation, circumcision is one of the cornerstones.

- Berkof outlines the argument for infant baptism from the covenant of grace and circumcision as follows:

1. The covenant made with Abraham was primarily a *spiritual* covenant, though it also has a national aspect, and of this spiritual covenant circumcision was a sign and seal.

2. This covenant is still in force and is essentially identical with the "new covenant" of the present dispensation.

3. By the appointment of God infants shared in the benefits of the covenant, and therefore received circumcision as a sign and seal.

4. In the new dispensation baptism is by divine authority substituted for circumcision as the initiatory sign and seal of the covenant of grace.

- Paedobaptists claim that circumcision and baptism are essentially the same rite, and to be administered to the same persons (believers and their children) for the same reasons (to indicate membership in the church). Only the outward form and practice of the rite has changed—one was a bloody rite, the other is not; one was only administered to males, the other to both males and females.

- The Hiedelberg catechism asks:

> Q. 74 - Should infants, too, be baptized?

> A. Yes. Infants as well as adults are in God's covenant and are his people. They, no less than adults, are promised the forgiveness of sins through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith. Therefore, by baptism, the mark of the covenant, infants should be received into the Christian church and should be distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism" (*Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, p. 44).

- The basic presupposition of the paedobaptist appears to be this: If you are going to understand baptism and its proper administration you must study what the OT says about circumcision because they are essentially one and the same ordinance. Since baptism merely replaces circumcision as the sign of the covenant, it must, fundamentally, be administered as circumcision was administered in the OT.

- Is such a view biblically or hermeneutically justified? I think not!

> *Circumcision is a ceremonial rite of the OT.*

- Therefore, to understand what circumcision is and what it signifies we must *begin* with the exegesis and study of the OT texts that deal with circumcision. We must ask: When God gave circumcision to Abraham and Israel, what did His Word reveal concerning it? What do other OT Scriptures contribute to our knowledge of circumcision as an OT ordinance?

- It is only after we have answered these questions that we can proceed to see what the NT says about circumcision. We must ask, on the basis of NT exegesis: What has taken place with this aspect of OT faith in view of the coming of Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant?

* Does the NT announce the fulfillment (typologically speaking) of circumcision in Christ?

* Does the NT ratify circumcision and take it over intact?

* Does the NT modify or given new significance to circumcision?

* Does the NT abrogate circumcision?

- When this exegetical procedure is followed, it will become evident that NT baptism is not simply OT circumcision in a new form. Nowhere in the NT is it stated, or implied, that baptism is a mere replacement of OT circumcision—the same rite in a different form, signifying all the same things.

> *Baptism is an ordinance of the NT.*

- Therefore, to understand baptism, we do not begin with the OT teaching on circumcision, but

with the NT texts on baptism, because it is a NT ordinance established by Jesus Christ and His Apostles.

- If the NT makes a connection between circumcision and baptism, we must take this into account, but the NT must define the connection and its significance. I believe that the NT does make a connection between circumcision and baptism, and that they are in some sense analogous. But this is a far cry from the paedobaptist claim that they are essentially the same rite and that baptism replaces circumcision.

I. Old Testament Teaching on Circumcision

- We will only be able to briefly cover this material.

(1). Circumcision was first instituted in Genesis 17.

> No covenant sign of the promise existed to mark God's people for the first 2,000 years of history; yet, God's promise (Gen. 3:15) and people (Gen. 4:26) were in the world. Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Melchizedek did not receive circumcision, though they were believers and constituted the chosen line of descent from Adam to Abraham (except for Melchizedek). Faith in the promise was necessary, but a sign of the covenant was not.

- Note: If God's covenant is with believers and their seed (as paedobaptists never tire of stating) then for 2,000 years this was so without any covenant sign being given to their children. This proves, at least in principle, that a covenantal relationship can exist between God and the children of believers without any sign being given to them. It is enough, that they are members of a family that has faith in God's promise.

> It is also important to note that in the period before Abraham, God was dealing with all peoples and nations on the same basis. But after the flood and tower of Babel, God choose one man and his seed (descendents), one family (which grew into a nation), to prepare the way for the Redeemer. After the Redeemer appeared, God once again dealt with all nations on a equal basis.

- Since one family, one people related by blood, had been chosen for this unique task of bringing the Savior into the world and preparing the way for Him, it is significant that a physical sign was given to mark Abraham's physical descendents. Because of their task, Israel needed to be marked and kept separate as a people. Circumcision was well-suited to accomplish this, and it did.

> The time of Abraham's call in Gen. 12 unto the making of the covenant in Gen. 15 was about 5 years. From Gen 15 unto the covenant of circumcision in Gen. 17 was 19 years. Faith and the promise existed with Abraham for 24 years before he was circumcised.

(2). Circumcision was an administrative covenant.

- We discussed this in our last lecture.

- Note this relationship:

> In Genesis 15, the promises to Abraham were made sure to him by the covenant that God made with him. This was a promise covenant. No sign was instituted.

> In Genesis 17, the covenant of circumcision is instituted for Abraham and his seed. This is an administrative covenant.

- It begins in 17:1 with a summary of Abraham's duty as a man of faith in God's promise: "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."

* These are commands calling for Abraham's obedience: 1) live a life in the constant awareness that I am your God—give me your love and worship; 2) live a blameless life by obeying my commandments—both moral and ceremonial (e.g., circumcision).

- Gen. 17:2-8 reiterate and further explain the promises of God to Abraham sealed by covenant in chapter 15.

* "make my covenant" (v. 2) - i.e., "give", fulfill my promises, make them a reality.

* "establish my covenant" (v. 7) - cause it to stand, ratify (cf. Gal. 3:16-17).

- Gen. 17:9-14 institute the covenant of circumcision. (cf. Acts 7:8)

* vv. 9-10 show that circumcision is an administrative covenant. You do not "keep" the promise, you inherit it by faith; you keep the law of the administrative covenant.

* v. 11 "token of the covenant" - a visible sign or mark; a pledge of the promises of the Abrahamic covenant.

> Thus, circumcision was a physical sign where God pledged the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, and was by Abraham a pledge to God to obey His precept: "walk before me, and be thou perfect".

> What promises were signified? All of them! (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:5, 7; 17:5-7). Not just the spiritual promises, but the physical ones as well.

> Circumcision is *not* the sign of the covenant of grace, but of all the promises that God made to Abraham—that he would be great, be the father of many nations, have a multitude of descendents, who would inherit the land of Canaan, and from whom would come one who would bless all the nations of the earth.

> Of these promises, only one had direct reference to the covenant of grace. The rest were necessary to prepare for the coming Redeemer, and may have had typological significance (NT must reveal that), but this does not mean that the promises to Abraham were all spiritual. The OT traces the fulfillment of the physical aspects of the promise to Abraham; these were very important in the outworking of God's redemptive plan, and circumcision was a sign, not only of the coming seed who would bless all nations, but of these other aspects as well.

(3). <u>Circumcision was administered to all the males in Abraham's household</u>.

- Gen. 17:10, 12-13 reveals that 1) every male child born to Abraham and his descendents were to be circumcised on the eighth day. The physical descendents of Abraham, beginning with him, then Isaac, then Jacob, and the 12 tribes etc.; 2) Every male bought with money or those born to such. Thus, circumcision marked out the household of Abraham and included his servants. It was not strictly one of physical descent, because it called for the circumcision of the servants in his house. But its primary purpose was to keep the seed of Abraham (his descendents) and household of Abraham separate as a distinct people with a particular calling. The line leading to Christ was not, neither could it be, traced through a line of a foreign slave who was bought and circumcised.

> Exodus 12:43-44, 48-49 - provides for a foreigner who desires to join with Israel and eat the Passover to do so through his circumcision and all males in his household. This indicated that non-Jews could become part of Israel if they expressed a desire to do so and were circumcised. But, again, none of these foreigners could become the line leading to Christ. The only foreigners in the line of Christ were uncircumcised women, e.g. Ruth.

- Why was the covenant sign only given to males?

> Because the seed who would bless all nations was a male descendent.

> Because Adam, a man, was the source of our moral corruption; circumcision points to the removal of our sinful nature inherited from Adam.

- Did not the promises of the Abrahamic covenant apply to females? Yes, of course, even thought they had no covenantal sign. Word of promise was sufficient.

- Note: paedobaptists constantly make the statement that the covenant sign in the OT was given to "believers" and their children. No!

> It was not given to their "children", but only to male offsprings. Half their of children were not given the sign.

> It was not reserved for "believers." The text of the OT makes no such requirement. It establishes the sign for all the male descendents of Abraham. This is the only stated condition. No test of "faith" in the parents was required before a son could be circumcised. Circumcision was conferred on the basis of physical birth upon the children of a circumcised *father*. It was a genealogical matter only.

(4). Circumcision was incorporated into the Mosaic Covenant.

- It continued as a sign of the covenant with Abraham in the administrative covenant established at Sinai. cf. Ex. 12:43-44, 48-49; Lev. 12:3; Josh. 5.

(5). Circumcision pointed to the spiritual reality of a circumcised heart.

- The OT gives circumcision a spiritual reference when it speaks of a circumcised and uncircumcised heart.

- The sign of circumcision was not only God's pledge to Abraham, but Abraham's pledge to God to walk before the Lord and be blameless (Gen. 17:1).

- Note the following Scriptures:

> Lev. 26:40-42 - "If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; 41 And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: 42 Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land."

- Here, an uncircumcised heart equals those who stubbornly refuse to obey God's law and break His covenant (cf. Lev. 26:14-15).

> Deut. 10:15-16 - "Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. 16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked."

- Here, a circumcised heart equals a heart that loves God and keeps His commandments (cf. 10:12-13).

> Deut. 30:6 - "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."

- Here it is said that God will circumcise their hearts so that they love and obey Him.

> Jer. 4:3-4 - " For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow

ground, and sow not among thorns. 4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings."

- Here, it is used in the context of a call to repent and keep God's covenant.

> Jer. 9:25-26 - "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised; 26 Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart."

- Here, an uncircumcised heart means an unbelieving heart, even as the Gentiles.

> Ez. 44:6-9 - "And thou shalt say to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, 7 In that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations. 8 And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things: but ye have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves. 9 Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel."

- This text indicates that the circumcision of the flesh was not enough; the Lord also required a circumcised heart.

- The circumcised heart as it is used in these passages indicates a heart that loves the Lord and keeps His commandments. It does not expressly speak of regeneration, for twice Israel is called upon to circumcise their hearts. In that sense, it refers to repentance and turning from sin to keep the commandments of the Lord. However, Deut. 30:6 seems to refer to a promise of spiritual renewal that God will work in the hearts of His people.

- What is clear, is that circumcision was in Abraham a pledge of his heart to walk before God and be blameless, not just an outward, physical act. So the Lord calls on physically circumcised Israel to pledge their hearts to His worship and service in repentance and faith.

(6). Circumcision is not emphasized in the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

- All references appear in Genesis 17:9-14, 23- 27; 23:1 (Isaac); 34 (Shechem incident); Ex. 5:24-26 (Moses' son); Ex. 12:43-44, 48-49; Lev. 12:3; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jos. 5:2-9 (circumcision of those born in the wilderness); Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26; Ez. 44:7-9.

- It was an external rite, and there was danger in emphasizing it. We note the perverted emphasis that arose during the intertestamental period concerning this sign.

- By the time of the NT, it was seen as one of defining aspects of a Jew's life, and his entrance pass to heaven; "All Israel have a portion in the world to come." We see this emphasis in the NT with the Judaizers who insisted on circumcision for Gentile converts to Christianity.

II. New Testament Teaching on Circumcision

- What has the NT done with circumcision? This is the question, for the NT is definitive for us when we consider the relationship between circumcision and baptism.

- Does the NT teaching on circumcision justify the paedobaptist claim that circumcision is replaced by baptism, that the rites are essentially the same rites, and that therefore the children of Christians should be baptized even as the sons of Israelites were circumcised?

- It would seem that if the NT provided the basis for this perspective on baptism and circumcision, it would be clearly discernible—a clear tie between the two would be established in various ways. But the truth of the matter is that the NT does not provide the basis for the assertion that baptism is substituted for circumcision, nor that they signify all the same things.

(1). <u>The NT abrogates circumcision as a sign of membership in the covenant people.</u>

- It is very clear from the NT that circumcision is no longer a covenantally significant sign, and it is not required of believers in Jesus Christ.

- Acts 15 and Galatians indicate that there were certain Jewish Christians who were saying that unless a person was circumcised they could not be saved. Faith in Christ was not enough for the Gentiles.

> Remember, the model here was that of Jewish proselytes who believed in the God of Israel and then joined Israel by circumcision, i.e., they identified themselves with the physical descendents of Abraham, with this particular people and nation. Apart from this identity, they could not be saved, because in OT salvation was of the Jews.

> The answer of the Jerusalem council was definitive: circumcision is not necessary for the Gentiles (whether the Jewish Christians, apart from Paul, would have said it was unnecessary for Jews is unlikely).

- Paul states, in the following Scriptures, his view of circumcision as a covenant sign:

> "Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Cor. 7:18-19)

> "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands.... Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace" (Eph. 2:11, 15).

> "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:5); "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal. 6:15).

- Since circumcision was particularly given for the purpose of keeping Israel as a distinct people in preparation for the Messiah, the need for circumcision ceased after the Messiah had completed his work on earth and established the New covenant. The New covenant is not centered on one particular people or nation.

- In the administrative New covenant, a new sign of membership in the church is established, which is baptism. It is *not* a sign of physical descent (no where is baptism given this signification in the NT) because membership in the covenant people is not based on physical descent any longer, but only on faith.

- Baptism is the initiatory rite of admission into the New Testament church; in this way it is analogous to circumcision, but it is not a mere substitution for circumcision. There is some continuity between the OT rite of initiation and the NT rite of initiation, but there are also significant discontinuities.

> If the NT intended for us to understand baptism as the equivalent of circumcision, as the paedobaptist contends, there is very little evidence to establish this. In fact there is only one text in the entire NT that brings the two together, Col. 2:11-12.

> In the debate over circumcision in the NT in Acts and Galatians, it is strange, if the paedobaptist perspective is correct, that we do not hear the argument that circumcision is unnecessary for

Gentiles because baptism has replaced it! If baptism is the equivalent of circumcision, it is the most obvious answer to the Judaizers demands that Gentiles need to be circumcised.

> Also, though not as significant, if baptism and circumcision are essentially the same sign, why was it necessary for Jews who believed in Christ to be baptized?

(2). <u>The NT teaches that circumcision was a covenantal administration, not the Promise itself.</u>

- Acts 7:8: "And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs."

> Note how in Acts 7:5 the promise covenant is referred to: "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."

> Circumcision was a covenantal arrangement wherein God pledged His own faithfulness to fulfill His promises and bound Abraham to walk before Him and to be blameless. Circumcision was the covenantal sign of this binding agreement between God and Abraham.

> The circumcision of Isaac, not Ishmael, was for Abraham the definitive fulfillment of the promise of God to him that he would have a seed after him (cf. Acts 7:5). Circumcision itself did not make Ishmael a child of promise, only God's sovereign election can bestow the promise (cf. Rom. 9:6-13; Gal. 4:22-31).

- Rom. 4:1-22 teaches that Abraham was justified by faith apart from works, and before he received the covenantal administration of circumcision.

> Paul separates the Promise and Abraham's justification by faith (Rom. 4:13-22) from circumcision (Rom. 4:9-12); even as Genesis separates the covenant of promise (Gen. 15) from the covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17).

> It is faith in the promise that saves, not circumcision! The covenant of circumcision administered the promise to a man who was already justified, and governed his obedience as a child of God.

> Thus, Abraham becomes the definitive example to all—Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised—that justification is by faith alone; the promise is granted to those who believe.

> Rom. 4:11 is an important verse in the baptismal discussion.

- According to this text, circumcision is said to be a sign and seal of the Abrahamic covenant. Paedobaptists argue that since circumcision was administered to infants, it also served as a sign and seal to them as well, and this apart from any faith in them. It was God's promise to them as Abraham's descendents. Baptism replaces circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and so we see that faith is not necessary for it to be given to the children of believers. Infant baptism is a sign and seal of God's promises to the children of believers in the covenant of grace.

- But note what they have done. They have taken a verse that describes *Abraham's* connection to circumcision and have applied it to Abraham's *children*, and, then, to their own! The text is *not* giving a general statement about the nature of circumcision for all who received it! It is only applied to Abraham. Paul is using the specific example of Abraham to prove his point about justification by faith. Ishmael was circumcised the same day as Abraham, does Rom. 4:11 apply to him? Is this what circumcision was for Ishmael?

- "sign of circumcision" - (Gen 17:11, "a token") a pledge given by a visible sign that God would fulfill His promises to Abraham, and that Abraham would walk before God and be blameless.

- "a seal of the righteousness of faith" - a "seal" is a mark that confirms or authenticates; circumcision was a covenantal sign given to Abraham that attested to the fact that he had already been justified by faith and would receive the Promise. This is only applied by Paul to Abraham.

- If we are to take any example from this text in regard to baptism, why not take it from Abraham? Since Abraham is the archtypical believer, why not make his experience definitive for baptism in the NT? Since we are his children, should we not walk in his steps? First, we believe and are justified. Second, we receive baptism as the sign and seal of "the righteous of the faith which" we had yet being unbaptized.

- The response might be, but that does not fit the pattern of the rest of the circumcisions in the OT. That may be true, but the pattern that counts for us in the NT is that of our spiritual father Abraham. Should NT baptism be patterned after the example of Ishmael or Abraham? But even more than this, this pattern fits the explicit commands and practice of the NT in regard to baptism!

- Baptism is analogous to circumcision; it is not identical. We see the analogy between Abraham's circumcision and our baptism as believers. Our baptism is, unto us who have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith, even as circumcision was to Abraham.

- In the NT the term "seal" is not applied to baptism, but to that which the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the life of the believer—the Spirit of God seals us as the true children of God (cf. Eph. 1:13; 4:30 with Rom. 8:9-17; 2 Tim. 2:19). This ties in with Col. 2:11-12: those who have been baptized, sealed by the Spirit, are those who have the right to water baptism as a seal of the righteous of faith.

(3). <u>The NT teaches that the spiritual significance of circumcision is fulfilled in believers in Christ.</u>

- The NT builds on the OT teaching on the spiritual import of circumcision found in Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4.

* *Rom. 2:25-29:* this is based on the OT perspective that circumcision calls for a life of loyalty and obedience to the commands of God. The true Jew is not he who is merely circumcised outwardly, but inwardly; it is only the circumcision of the heart that really counts, i.e., having true faith.

* *Phil 3:3* - "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

- Believers in Jesus Christ are the true circumcision, i.e., they show forth what circumcised community of Israel was supposed to be. The church is in this sense, the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16).

* *Eph. 2:11*: here Paul is contrasting the former status of Gentiles with their new standing in Christ as members of the NT household of God.

- "circumcision made with hands" - i.e., the OT rite which conferred covenantal status as a member of the commonwealth of Israel.

- the implication here is that the Gentiles have now received a circumcision made without hands that grants to them their new covenantal status as members of God's people. This new status has been accomplished by the Holy Spirit (2:18, 22).

- Note that baptism is *not* mentioned here. This is strange, if baptism replaces circumcision.

* *Col. 2:11-13* - this is the only passage in the NT that brings together circumcision and "baptism."

- In the context, Paul is refuting the false teaching of certain Judaizers with Gnostic tendencies. Apparently, the Colossians were being taught that if they were to be "complete" as Christians they needed to receive circumcision.

- Paul's answer is an emphatic, NO! For by virtue of their union with Jesus Christ through the faith they have received from Him the true spiritual reality symbolized by circumcision—a circumcised heart. One performed without hands—a spiritual circumcision.

- "circumcision of Christ" - this is the circumcision that Christ performs for us.

> All that the OT rite could accomplish was physical, a removal of the foreskin, but the circumcision that Christ performs is that which the OT rite could only point to. Christ brings the reality.

> OT circumcision typified the spiritual circumcision Christ would bring; this is a new heart, regeneration! Jesus Christ fulfills the promise of Deut. 30:6-10

- v. 12 gives the means whereby Christ performs this circumcision of the heart.

> "buried with him" - speaks of actual participation in Christ's death.

> "in baptism" - lit., in *the* baptism. A particular baptism is in view here, the baptism that Christ promised—the baptism of the Holy Spirit! cf. Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13.

> as "baptism" is the means whereby Christ carries out His circumcision without hands, i.e., spiritual regeneration, this is not the rite of water baptism, but Spirit baptism.

> Through the gift of the Holy Spirit the benefits of Christ' death and resurrection become ours; we are born again, made new creatures in Christ!

> the baptism being spoken of here is a radical event! The action that replaces circumcision, according to this text, is not water baptism (another rite administered by hands that merely symbolizes but does not accomplish) but regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Water baptism has reference to Spirit baptism, but is only a picture of what Spirit baptism accomplishes.

- Reformed paedobaptists claim that this verse proves that circumcision and baptism are virtually the same thing; that baptism replaces circumcision as the external rite of initiation which grants infants the same things that circumcision granted male infants in the OT: membership in the visible church (an external covenantal standing) with the privileges that went with it.

- But the point of the text is that "the baptism" spoken of here does far more than the OT circumcision could do; this baptism removes the foreskin of the heart; it actually gives what circumcision could only symbolize.

- If paedobaptists claim this verse to defend infant baptism, then they ought also to claim that infant baptism is a regenerational event that saves—it accomplishes for the infant all things specified in vv. 11-13.

- Now, baptismal regeneration is taught by some paedobaptists (Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox; Lutheran, Anglican), but this is rejected by the Reformed Presbyterians.

> Note: There is a doctrinal shift taking place among some Presbyterians that seems to be moving towards a more radical view of infant baptism and the covenant; one that sounds enough like baptismal regeneration, that it is causing other Presbyterians to say that it is a denial of justification by faith.

- What then does Col. 2:11-12 teach concerning circumcision and water baptism?

1. Circumcision pointed to spiritual regeneration, and was a type of the baptism of the Spirit that Christ would give to His people. Spirit baptism at the hands of Christ is the antitype of OT circumcision performed by human hands.

2. Water baptism symbolizes the Baptism of the Spirit that unites us to Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (cf. Rom. 6)

* There is a connection between circumcision and water baptism, and it is this: both point to regeneration. Circumcision looks forward to Christ and the gift of the Spirit; Baptism declares that Christ has come and granted the Spirit to His people.

* Circumcision was given upon generation (8th day) to Abraham's descendents and symbolized the need for the regeneration that the Messiah, the Seed of Abraham, would accomplish for His people in the future. Baptism is given upon regeneration and symbolizes the baptism of the Spirit that Christ has brought to all who believe in Him—to Abraham's spiritual descendents (Gal. 3:26-29).

- Leonhard Goppelt (a leading German evangelical scholar) wrote, in his important work, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, the following on the typology of circumcision:

> "The testimony of Scripture with reference to Christ's office is that something infinitely greater is here. This is true also with reference to Christ's gifts—the symbols of grace, the sacraments. Nevertheless, even the shadow is an aid in perceiving the nature of that something greater, because the same Lord is back of them both. The Christian church is the true circumcision (Phil. 3:3). Paul does not simply assert, as the prophets did, that circumcision done in the flesh has no value without circumcision of the heart, without the surrender that corresponds to the sign (1 Cor. 7:19; Rom. 2:25-28; cf. Jer. 4:4; 9:25; Ezek 16:30). He is announcing the true circumcision for which the prophets longed. This is not merely an external symbol of membership in the people of God and of one's obligation to be obedient (Gal 5:3; Rom 4:11; Eph 2:11). This is the new creation by which we are incorporated into God's people, the new humanity, and by which we are made new people (Col. 2:11; Gal 6:5; Eph 2:11, 15) who serve God in Spirit and in truth (Gal 6:5; Phil 3:3). This circumcision which Christ performs (Col 2:11) is accomplished in baptism (Col. 2:12). It is the bathing in water for which the prophets longed and which would purify the hearts and renew them in the Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:25f.). The idea that the church must have a substitute for circumcision is not a conclusion drawn from the OT. It has happened the other way around: the new creation that Christ brought about in baptism makes circumcision a shadow of the future reality (cf. Col 2:16f.). What the prophets longed for is fully present. The old has passed away, including circumcision, and the fulfillment has begun" (pp. 144-145).

(4) <u>The NT teaches that circumcision is a type of specific NT realities.</u>

- Typology is a very important biblical concept for understanding the relationship between the OT administrative covenants and the NT administrative covenant.

- Typology refers to a divinely intended relationship (correspondence) which exists between specific persons, events, ceremonies, and institutions of the OT and specific.... of the NT. Typology is a form of prediction (prophecy) that foreshadows the coming of Christ and the age of fulfillment in Him.

- NT supports the concept of typology:

> "figure" (τύπος) - type, model, pattern, copy; (Rom. 5:14; Heb. 9:9; 11:19; 1 Pet. 3:21)

> "shadow" - a mere representation of something that is real; Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1.

- Col. 2:11-12, 17 establishes the typological nature of circumcision; here, a type of regeneration.

- But in Gal. 3:16-19, 26-29 we discern two more typological aspects of circumcision. (Note: All aspects are centered in Christ and His work in behalf of His people.)

> Gal. 3:16-19

- "seed" is singular, but the singular "seed" can be used in a corporate sense as well.

- Circumcision designated (identified) the "seed" of Abraham in whom the nations of the earth would be blessed, and through whom God would ratify this covenant promise.

- Paul applies the word "seed" in a singular sense to Jesus Christ, in vv. 8, 13-14, 16-17. Christ is *the seed* of Abraham.

- Therefore, in a typological sense, each individual male offspring of Abraham was a type of the Christ to come.

* This helps us to understand why it was a sign designed and applied only to males. The savior would be a direct male descendent of Abraham (cf. Matt. 1:1-16).

* Some of these male descendents also, as individuals, would be a means of blessing to all nations—Moses, Isaiah, David, Solomon, etc.—and thus served as a more pronounced type of Christ.

- In view of this aspect of circumcision, it is important to note Jesus' circumcision in Luke 2:21.

* Jesus circumcision marks the fulfillment of circumcision as to its purpose of preserving a line of descent from Abraham to Jesus—the Seed is here! Circumcision is therefore no longer necessary and will soon be abrogated.

* Jesus' circumcision is the last recorded, covenantally significant (OT era) circumcision in the Bible.

- I also find it interesting to reflect on John's circumcision in Luke 1:59.

* John was Jesus' forerunner preparing the way for His ministry in Israel.

* So John stands as a witness to the purpose of circumcision in Israel: to raise up a nation of men who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

> Gal. 3:26-29

- But Paul also uses "seed" in a corporate sense to refer to the descendents of Abraham; the true seed of Abraham are those who are *in* the Seed (v. 16) of Abraham, Jesus Christ. Status as the seed of Abraham is no longer based on physical descent at all! We are the children of God and the children of Abraham (3:7) to whom the promise of blessing applies, if we have faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 3:6-9; Rom. 4:12-13, 16; Luke 19:9).

- Therefore, the circumcised family (household) of Abraham is a type of the NT church. This church is defined by Paul as "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." We entered this church by being "baptized into Christ." As in Col. 2:11-12, the primary reference is to the baptism of the Spirit which joins us to Christ so that we are in Christ.

- The analogy between circumcision and water baptism is clear: all who were considered as members of Abraham's physical household were circumcised 8 days after birth; all who are considered members of the spiritual household of Abraham are to be baptized after their new birth (spiritual regeneration). Baptism is only for those of faith! For only such are counted as the children of Abraham in the NT era and heirs of the promise!

- From Gal. 3:6-29 and Col. 2:11-12 we see that there are 3 typological elements in circumcision:

1. Circumcision identified by type, the person of the Messiah—a physical, male descendent of Abraham.

2. Circumcision revealed by type, the power of the Messiah

- He performs spiritual circumcision; the gift of the Spirit; regeneration.

3. Circumcision delineates by type, the true people of the Messiah:

- Those who believe in Him and receive His spiritual circumcision. These are the true seed of Abraham to whom the promises belong.

- This defines the NT form of the church. Those who believe in Jesus Christ! This is the picture of the NT people of God revealed in Jer. 31:31-35: A covenant community of redeemed and regenerate people who all know the Lord!

- There is no teaching anywhere in the NT, when the church (the covenant people of the Messiah) is *defined*, that the church consists of believers and their seed. This is a paedobaptist invention.

- To state it another way:

> As circumcision is a type setting forth:	We baptize those:
- The Person of Christ	- who confess Jesus as Lord
- The Power of Christ	- who have experienced His power
- The People of Christ	- who are Abraham's spiritual seed

<u>Conclusion</u>

- The analogy between circumcision and baptism is this: all who were identified as Abraham’s seed in the OT administration received circumcision, and all those who are identified as Abraham’s seed in the NT receive baptism.

> Both are signs of incorporation given to the "seed of Abraham." Physical descent from Abraham entitled a son to receive circumcision; spiritual descent from Abraham entitles believers to receive water baptism.

- Here we have presented a covenantal argument based on the Scriptures of the OT and NT that shows that the paedobaptist argument for infant baptism from circumcision is false. Actually, the biblical data indicates that argument from circumcision really belongs to the credobaptist! It proves believer baptism!

- Let us conclude with the following excellent summary by Paul Jewett:

"It is our conviction, to be specific, that the troubled waters of Paedobaptism can be rendered a clear and flowing stream if one recognizes that the promise of the seed made to Abraham had a twofold reference. In the age of type and anticipation, it embraced not only those who shared Abraham's faith but also the whole nation of Israel, which descended from his loins according to the

flesh. In the age of fulfillment the promise embraces the true seed according to the Spirit, typified by the literal seed according to the flesh. This true seed of Abraham is "born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). If in the typical age of the Old Testament all the literal seed of Abraham are to be circumcised, then in the age of fulfillment all those who answer to the type as the true seed of Abraham are to be baptized. And who are they? The New Testament gives an unequivocal answer: those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham (Gal. 3:7). Therefore, those who are of faith are to be baptized—*which is precisely believer baptism.* Here, then, is the Thesean thread that will lead us out of the labyrinth of the theological debate in which we have been involved, while preserving the rich treasures of biblical thought stored in the perspective of "covenant theology" (*Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*, p. 236).

Lectures on Baptism #3

The Covenantal Status of Children of Believers

Introduction: In the course of these lectures, we are seeking to do two things: 1) Present a biblical, covenantal case for believer baptism; 2) Critique and refute the paedobaptist (particularly, the Reformed paedobaptist) arguments for infant baptism. In so doing, we seek to meet the Reformed paedobaptist on the field of covenant theology and using their own chosen lines of proof and defense show how these actually support a covenantal view of believer baptism. Dispensational baptists and Anabaptists do not appreciate the covenantal arguments of the Reformed paedobaptist and fail to engage them at crucial points in the debate. As Reformed baptists with a covenantal perspective on Scripture, we seek to meet their arguments head on (we have not even looked at the specific teaching on the institution and practice of baptism set forth in the NT). Therefore,

- In our first lecture we dealt with the theological and biblical doctrine of God's Covenant—the foundation of the Reformed paedobaptist position. There we sought to demonstrate that covenant theology does not at all *require* infant baptism, but, if anything, points to believer baptism. Secondly, we contended that a proper biblical theology of the covenants in Scripture reveals that there is both continuity and discontinuity in the flow of redemptive history. There are two types of covenants: promise and administrative. There is full continuity in the promise and means of redemption. The administrative covenants show both continuity and discontinuity. There is full continuity between the testaments in regard to the moral law. However, there is a discontinuity in the outward administration of the ceremonial and cultic duties. In the OT, these looked forward to Christ and functioned as types of Christ, His work, and His kingdom. When Christ came, these OT rites and ceremonies were abolished. The NT establishes new rites (baptism and the Lord's Supper) that reflect the new age of fulfillment that Christ has brought.

- In our second lecture, we sought to present the biblical teaching on circumcision and show its typological significance. This, we believe, gives a strong argument against infant baptism and supports the practice of believer baptism. We baptize all whom the NT identifies as the children of Abraham. Baptism, we stated, does not replace circumcision; i.e., baptism is not essentially the same thing as OT circumcision. It is analogous to it, but a new rite of initiation to reflect the reality of the church being those who have faith like Abraham and have received the circumcision of Christ.

- Now, in our third lecture, we come to another major aspect of the Reformed paedobaptist argument: As the male children of believers in the OT were included in the membership of the OT church and given the covenantal sign of circumcision, so children of believers in the NT are members of the church and are entitled to baptism.

Consider the argument for infant baptism set forth by Peter Bloomfield in his booklet *Covenant Baptism*:

> 1. There has only ever been one saving covenant between God and sinners. It is called The Covenant of Grace, or The Abrahamic covenant.
>
> 2. The church of God has continued throughout the Old and New Testament times. There has been a continuity of the church in every age. The visible church today is a continuation of what visible Israel was then.
>
> 3. Now, given this continuity in both COVENANT and CHURCH (covenant community) we come to this vital observation. The visible church has *always* included children of believers. Since the visible church and the visible sign have always included children of believers, then so it is now. By what process of reasoning do we exclude children today from the visible church which they have always belonged to?

4. There is also continuity of the sign of the covenant. The blood-sacrament of circumcision is replaced by the bloodless sacrament of baptism. There can be no doubt that baptism and circumcision signify the same thing.

Conclusion: Because of the continuity of the covenant, the church and the sign, we admit to baptism all those who belong to the covenant. This has always been professing believers and their infants. The covenant community has never excluded infants. The baptism of these infants (and these only) is the only consistent biblical practice.

- On the basis of this theology, baptist are charged with "excommunicating" children of believers from the covenant community. Paedobaptists say that because we teach that the infants of believers should not be baptized, that we have denied them the blessing of a covenantal standing in the church and the gracious privileges that go with it.

- As with other aspects of the Reformed paedobaptist view, this argument on the covenantal status and privileges of children of believers appears plausible, if not compelling—on the surface. But when we begin to probe their argument and their criticism of baptists, things are not quite so clear; in fact; in various ways, their thinking and arguments are muddled and confusing. As they saying goes, "The devil is in the details."

- There are three parts to this lecture: 1) The Nature of the church; 2) Paedobaptist views on the status of Children of believers and the efficacy of infant baptism; 3) A credobaptist, covenantal perspective on the status of children of believers.

I. <u>The Nature of the Church</u>

- According to paedobaptists, the unity and continuity of the church in all dispensations is a forceful argument for the practice of infant baptism. Infants in the OT church were members and received the covenant sign, so infants in the NT church are members and should receive the covenant sign.

- The foundation of this argument is the belief that the people of God, the church is essentially one in all ages. Yes, a Reformed baptist will grant the general truth of that statement, but insists we go further and ask: In what sense is the church one?

> If you speak of the church as the elect in all ages, i.e., the invisible church, yes, this church is one. and the same.

> However, if you speak of the visible church and its outward administration (members, officers, sacraments, places and times of worship, etc.), then there are some significant differences. In this regard, can it really be said that OT Israel and the NT Christian church are essentially one and same?

> Again, you see, we are faced with issues of continuity and discontinuity. As covenant theologians, we are committed to an overarching unity and continuity, but, as biblical theologians, we must be sensitive to the historical outworking of God's covenantal plan and the movement from promise to fulfillment, from OT shadows to NT realities.

> And again, as in other areas in this debate, Reformed baptists believe that our paedobaptist brothers have failed to accurately note the discontinuities between the OT visible church and the NT visible church in their zeal to defend infant baptism.

> Let us consider the doctrine of the church in it invisible and visible dimensions in view of the baptism debate.

(1). The Invisible Church

- The invisible church is the universal church composed of the elect in Christ in all places and in all ages.

- Berkoff states that Reformed theology,

> "...stresses the fact that the Church as it exists on earth is both visible and invisible. This church is said to be invisible, because she is essentially spiritual and in her spiritual essence cannot be discerned by the physical eye; and because it is impossible to determine infallibly who do and who do not belong to her. The union of believers with Christ is a mystical union; the Spirit that unites them constitutes an invisible tie; and the blessings of salvation, such as regeneration, genuine conversion, true faith, and spiritual communion with Christ, are all invisible to the natural eye" (*Systematic Theology*, pp. 565-566).

- J. S. Whale explains the invisible church this way:

> "The Church is, in one inescapable sense, the invisible church; the great company of the elect of God, stretching beyond the sight and measurement of any man or any God-given institution. God is not bound even by institutions of his own appointing. He alone knows who are his.... The first mark of the Church, then, is that it is more and other than a earthly society, a mere product of history. It is invisible, that is, a spiritual fact, originating and depending wholly upon the sovereign grace of God, which no power on earth can give, condition or take away. It is the whole company of the elect that have been, are or shall be, on earth and in heaven; one Body, whose sole Head is Christ" (*Christian Doctrine*, pp. 139-140).

- Considered from the perspective of the universal and invisible church, we can see the full continuity between the church in the OT and the church in the NT—truly they are *one*.

(2) The Visible Church

- This invisible church manifests itself in a visible form in the institutional church, or, in visible assemblies (local churches) according to the will and appointment of God. As a covenantal institution, the church is a divinely created bond between God and men, and men with men, exhibiting transcendence, hierarchy, ethics, sanctions, and continuity. The visible church is a governing institution to which God has committed the Word, the Sacraments, and the Keys of the Kingdom of heaven. The visible church mediates the rule God on earth in the ecclesiastical sphere, even as the family and state mediate the rule of God on earth in their own appointed spheres.

- J. S. Whale sets forth the nature of the visible church as follows:

> "How is the Church recognized and known in this world of time and sense? Who are its members? To say that God alone knows would be to make the Church irrelevant. Thus, it is the second mark of the Church that, empirically considered, it is necessarily visible and institutional. This wonderful and sacred mystery is mediated to us through the visible and empirical; sacred Scripture; sacred rites and sacraments, the outward, visible and efficacious signs of inward and spiritual realities; sacred offices of Christian ministry; sacred seasons, buildings, forms. Life in the spirit is never disembodied; it is incarnate in a Body whose organs are the Word, Sacraments, and Ministry" (*Christian Doctrine*, p. 140).

- Berkoff says:

> "The invisible Church naturally assumes a visible form. Just as the human soul is adapted to a body and expresses itself through the body, so the invisible Church, consisting not of mere souls but of human beings having souls and bodies, necessarily assumes a visible form in an external organization through which it expresses itself. The Church becomes visible in Christian profession

and conduct, in the ministry of the Word and of the sacraments, and in external organization and government" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 566).

- The visible church is both an organism and an organization. As an organism it has spiritual life, spiritual gifts, and is a living body experiencing a common life. As an organization, it has forms of government, officers, standards of membership, property, times for meeting, and a defined ministry to its members and the world.

- Although there are aspects of continuity between the visible church of the OT and the visible church of the NT, there are also some very significant discontinuities as well, that must not be ignored.

> J. G. Vos in discussing the doctrine of the *visible church* as one of the primary reasons for infant baptism, surely overstates the unity of the visible church and confuses the two aspects of the church (i.e., visible and invisible) when he writes:

> "The New Testament clearly teaches that the Christian Church is not something different from Old Testament Israel; on the other hand, it is essentially the same as the real Israel of the Old Testament, and it is the real continuation of the true Israel of Old Testament times.... Thus the Scripture teaches the unity and continuity of the New Testament Church with Old Testament Israel. The form has changed, but the essence remains the same. The olive tree lives on: the commonwealth of Israel continues. This essential unity and continuity of the Christian Church with the Old Testament Israel is basic to the Reformed theology, but it is denied by many Baptists" (*Baptism: Its Subjects and Mode*, p. 17).

> Vos says that he is speaking of OT Israel as the visible church, but, in actuality, he is speaking of Israel in terms of the invisible church when he refers to it as the "real" and "true Israel"; i.e., the believing remnant within the visible church. In terms of the visible church, the Israel that was unfaithful at Kadesh Barnea, and was later wicked and judged by Assyria (Northern Kingdom) and by Babylon (Southern Kingdom; 70 year captivity) was the real and true Israel; the real and true visible church!

> As far as I have discerned, this type of thing, i.e., confusing categories and ignoring distinctions that need to be made, is a constant problem with paedobaptist rhetoric.

> Furthermore, when Vos says that "the form has changed," he is saying that the outward administration and structure of the visible church is different from OT to NT, and that is exactly the Reformed baptist position. Part of the "form" of the visible church are such things as the standards and qualifications of membership and the administration of the sacraments. In this one sentence, he has given up the whole essence of his argument for infant baptism from the nature of the visible church!

> The form of the visible church is significantly different in the NT than it was in the OT. Who will deny this obvious biblical fact?

> - In the OT, the visible church was limited to the confines of one family—the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To be a member of the visible church you had to be a member of this family by birth or be received into it by circumcision, i.e., identified as an Israelite through the sign that constituted you a member of Abraham's household.

> - In the OT, the visible church was limited to the land of Canaan; it had an elaborate system of sacrifices; a priesthood of the family of Aaron; a central sanctuary and altar where sacrifices had to be offered; sabbaths, feasts, and a divinely appointed calendar.

> - The NT form of the visible church is radically different: not limited to one family; no limits

geographically; no sacrificial system, priesthood, or central sanctuary; no divinely appointed religious calendar; it even meets on a new day for public worship: the Lord's Day. The NT church has a new external organization, new officers, new sacraments, new places of worship, and *new qualifications of membership.*

> In contradiction to Vos and the paedobaptists, Paul says the NT visible church is "one new man". This new form, Jew and Gentile in one body on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit was a "mystery" in OT times, i.e., it was not revealed explicitly until after Pentecost. (cf. Eph. 2:11-3:10).

- I submit to you the consideration that nothing in the fundamental Reformed doctrine of the invisible or visible church leads to the necessity of infant baptism. As qualifications for church membership and the administration of the sacraments are part of the *form* of the visible church, which form has undoubtedly changed (even Vos admits this), then there is no a priori reason to suppose that as infants were circumcised and admitted to the OT visible church that they are now to be baptized and admitted to the NT visible church.

> Actually, as there has been a change in the form and administration of the visible church in nearly every other aspect, the supposition is stronger that there has been a change in the qualifications for membership and the reception of the sacraments.

> That there has been a change in qualifications for membership in the visible church might even be expected because the forms of visible church of the OT were a reflection of its place in redemptive history prior to the coming of Christ (i.e., type and shadow), and the forms of the visible church in the NT are a reflection of its place in redemptive history subsequent to the coming of Christ (i.e., fulfillment and substance). Note significance of Luke 7:28.

- Nevertheless the paedobaptist, either ignoring these things or not taking them into account on the subject of infant baptism, asserts that "Since the visible church and the visible sign has always included the children of believers, then so it is now" (Bloomfield, *Covenant Baptism*).

- Based on such a view, the Westminster divines stated that the visible church "consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children...."

> But this definition cannot be applied to the OT visible church! The visible church of the OT consisted of the members of 12 tribes of Israel (the whole nation was the visible church, Ex. 19:3-6; Deut. 7:6-8) who had attained that status by birth. The only requirement for circumcision was that you were a legitimate descendent of Abraham, no profession of the true religion was required of parents by ecclesiastical authorities in Israel before their sons could receive circumcision. The only qualification for membership and circumcision was the father's standing as a circumcised Israelite.

- Note: Even in the darkest periods in Israel's history when unbelief, wickedness, and covenantal unfaithfulness abounded, none of the prophets ever called into question Israel's right to circumcision for themselves or for their sons. Apostate Israel still had the right to circumcise their sons.

- Would the Westminster divines allow for apostate Christians (i.e., those who were baptized) the right to baptize their children? If not, why not? If OT Israel and circumcision is the model for the visible church today, why require a profession of the true religion from someone who has been baptized when he comes to present his children or grandchildren for baptism?

* Contrary to the practice of circumcision in Israel, the Reformed paedobaptists would not baptize the children of an apostate Christian, nor would they baptize anyone's child unless at least one of the parents made a credible profession of faith. Is this not an implicit

recognition by the paedobaptist that the visible church of the NT is significantly and essentially different from the visible church of the OT? And if this so, does this not undermine their whole argument from the continuity of the visible church?

- I conclude that the standard paedobaptist rhetoric on the visible church and infant baptism is imprecise, flawed, and misleading. For instance:

> "As infants of believers were to receive the external sign of membership in the body of the covenant people of Israel, so infants of believers ought to receive the external sign of membership in the Christian Church, which is the continuation of Old Testament Israel" (Vos, *Baptism: Its Subjects and Mode*, p. 19). The "two cases," says Vos are "truly parallel." This is a prime example of reading the OT as if it were the NT and the NT as if it were the OT.
>
> > It is not true that "infants of believers" received the external sign of membership in Israel. The truth is that only male sons of circumcised Israelite fathers received the covenant sign. If the cases are truly parallel, then let the practice of infant baptism in Reformed churches conform to Israelite practice and dispense with a profession of faith in the parents and baptize on the basis of birth to a baptized Christian (and therefore a member of the visible church) regardless of his/her Christian practice or profession (as long as they were never formally excommunicated from the church)
>
> > But Vos, in contradiction to his own theology, cries against promiscuous infant baptism. He states: "The practice of baptizing infants of any and all parents who request the rite, regardless of their reasons and regardless of whether the parents themselves are professing Christians and members of the Church is becoming increasingly common in some circles." Vos would have it that only the infants of those parents with the right Christian profession and the right reasons should be baptized. But there is even more. Vos adds that even where parents are actual church members, if these "practically never attend church except for the Sabbath morning service at communion season, [they] have no right to baptize their children." Could such things ever have been seriously maintained in Israel as the necessary conditions for circumcision of male sons?

- One other consideration before we move on.

> > The credobaptist position is that the qualifications of membership for the visible church in the NT age of fulfillment are designed by God to reflect the membership of the invisible church. Now that we are in the time when "the ends of the world [ages] have come" (1 Cor. 10:11), the standard of visible church membership is to show forth that the covenant of grace is with God and the elect (cf. Matt. 24:24, 31; Luke 18:17; Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; Titus 1:1).
>
> > This views brings together the doctrine of the invisible church and visible church by saying that the visible church on earth ought to approximate the invisible church, i.e., a church where all the members profess repentance towards God and faith towards Jesus Christ.
>
> > This is not to say that men can determine who has true saving faith and who does not. As men we can only apply the biblical standards of membership imperfectly, and we baptize on repentance and faith at Christ's command. But having to applying the high standard of membership in the church is no more of a problem than having to apply the high standard of God's law for justice in society.

II. <u>Paedobaptist Views on the Covenantal Status of Children of Believers</u>

- All paedobaptists of all denominations agree that the children of Christian parents have the right to baptism. This is clear. But what is not so clear, is what infant baptism signifies and accomplishes for the child, the parents, and the church.

- What is the efficacy of infant baptism? What does it confer on the child who is baptized? There are two primary views:

(1). Infant Baptism regenerates and confers the blessings of salvation and membership in the church.

- Infant baptism confers salvation (at least until the child reaches the age of accountability).

- The baptized infant is not only made a member of the visible church, but a member of Christ and receives His saving benefits. This is the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

- Although there are notable differences in their conceptions of infant baptismal regeneration, the view is held by Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans/Episcopalians.

> According to Rome, the effects of infant baptism "are the removal of the guilt of sin and all punishment due to sin, conferral of the grace of regeneration and the infused virtues, incorporation into Christ and his Church, receiving the baptismal character and the right to heaven" (John Hardon, *The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism*, p. 232).

> According to Luther, infants should be baptized, "Because Holy Baptism is the only means whereby infants, who too must be born again, can ordinarily be regenerated and brought to faith." Baptism "works forgiveness of sins," "delivers from death and the devil," and "gives eternal salvation" to infants. (*Luther's Shorter Catechism*). In the order of baptism for infants in the Lutheran *Service Book and Hymnal* (p. 244, 1958) the minister is to pray at the beginning of the service: "Almighty and everlasting God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: We call upon thee for this child, and beseech thee to bestow upon him the gift of thy baptism and thine everlasting grace by the washing of regeneration...." And at the end: "We thank thee that thou dost graciously preserve and extend thy Church, and that thou hast granted this child the new birth in Holy Baptism, and received him as thy child and heir to thy kingdom...."

> According to the *Book of Common Prayer* in the service of baptism for an infant the minister is to call upon the people to pray to God "that of his bounteous mercy he will grant this child that which by nature he cannot have; that he many be baptized with Water and the Holy Ghost, and received into Christ's holy Church, and made a living member of the same." Then the minister should pray: "We call upon thee for this child, that he, coming to thy holy Baptism, may receive remission of sin, by spiritual regeneration...."

- In the official *Catechism* of the Church the child is asked his name and who gave him his name. His answer is instructive: "My sponsors in Baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven."

- The doctrine of baptismal regeneration arose early in the Patristic period and was the accepted doctrine of the church from Augustine until the reformation.

- It also should be noted here that in some segments of the Presbyterian church, a doctrine of baptismal regeneration is now being advocated. Rich Lusk, an advocate of "baptismal regeneration" states:

"While 'baptismal regeneration' has largely been eclipsed in the Reformed world, there are signs that biblical and traditional formulations are being revived. For several decades Norman Shepherd, former professor at Westminster in Philadelphia and CRC pastor, has argued for a covenantal form of baptismal regeneration.... In the PCA, Preston Graham has published a small work entitled *A Baptism That Saves*, in which he puts forth a baptismal regeneration position very similar to that of Westminster divine Cornelius Burges.... More sophisticated accounts of baptismal regeneration are now being developed by the likes of Joel Carver and Peter Leithart both with the PCA" ("Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition: Past, Present, and Future").

- Lusk himself says that by baptism (including infant baptism):

"...we are enfolded into the family of God and begin our enculturation in the life of the

eschatological kingdom. In baptism, God unites us to his Son, pours our his Spirit upon us. He weds us to Christ and ordains us to his royal priesthood. He forgives our sins and grants us new life" (Ibid.).

> This perspective has been called heresy by other Presbyterians.

(2). Infant Baptism does not regenerate, but confers the blessings of membership in the visible church and other external benefits and privileges.

- The reformers rejected the doctrine of infant baptismal regeneration. Therefore, they did not believe that infant baptism actually conferred saving grace.

- What then does infant baptism actually effect? What advantages are there in infant baptism? The answers given by Reformed paedobaptist are not unified, and, in my opinion, less than satisfying.

- There seems to be general agreement that infant baptism gives a child a unique status: 1) They are made members of the visible church; 2) They receive certain rights and privileges and partake of various external benefits of the covenant of grace.

- James Beeke (Dutch Reformed), in his book *Bible Doctrine for Younger Children*, teaches children of the church what their infant baptism does for them:

> "My baptism gives me the following outward blessings and privileges:
>
> 1. It confirms me as a member of God's church (the church visible).
>
> 2. It places me under God's Word. God has promised to bless His Word to save sinners. The Holy Spirit will apply God's Word to the hearts of many. It places me under the callings and invitations of the gospel.
>
> 3. It includes me continually in the prayers of the church.
>
> 4. It places God's mark on me. Baptism separates me from the world and places me in an outward relationship to God's covenant of Grace" (p. 102).
>
> * These reflect the answers to Q.74 of the Heidelberg Catechism, "Should infants, too, be baptized"
>
> * Note Beeke's chart on the covenantal standing conferred by infant baptism....

- The Directory for the Public Worship of God of the Westminster Assembly states:

> "...the seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church, have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it and to the outward privileges of the church.... [C]hildren by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers...."

- There has been a general agreement among Reformed teachers that infant baptism confers this outward standing in the visible church and with it various privileges and benefits, but it does not effect regeneration or the forgiveness of sins.

> Note: Some Reformed teachers believe that infants should be baptized "on the assumption (not the certain knowledge) that the children offered for baptism are regenerated and are in possession of the *semen fidei* (the seed of faith), and to hold that God through baptism in some mystical way, which we do not understand, strengthens this seed of faith in the child" (Berkoff, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 641-642).

- Another aspect of infant baptism is its benefits to the parent. To them it symbolizes the ground of their

hope that their children shall receive the mercy of God and salvation through faith in Christ. For them, it is actually a means of grace to strength their faith in the promises of God towards their children, and to strengthen their resolve to raise them in the Lord.

- Whatever is their precise understanding of the efficacy of infant baptism, and this understanding does vary, one thing is agreed upon: children baptized by believing parents have something that the children of believing baptist parents do not have; that in some way baptist parents have done a terrible thing in withholding baptism from their children until they make a credible profession of faith. The charge (explicit or implied) is that credobaptist parents, by denying baptism to their infants, have consigned them to the realm of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

> The paedobaptist perspective is that the child of believing parents is either, 1) placed in the church and made the recipient of covenantal privileges by baptism, or, 2) is excluded from the church and denied these privileges by a withholding of baptism.

> But are these the only two options? Is there another way to look at the matter of the status of the children of believers in relation to God and the church. I believe that there is.

III. <u>A Credobaptist View on the Covenantal Status of Children.</u>

- Here I want to give a credobaptist view from a covenantal perspective on the status of children of believers.

- When I say "a covenantal perspective," I do not simply mean covenant theology, but the perspective that God has chosen to mediate His rule and to relate to men by means of covenant, and that He has also ordained that men relate to one another by way of covenant. To this end, He has established 3 covenantal, governing institutions: family, church, and state.

- These institutions existed in OT Israel, but the distinctions between them are somewhat blurred for us by the fact that Israel itself was synonymous with the visible church.

- In approaching the subject of the status of children of believers in the NT administration of the Promise, we need to make a clear distinction between the family, church, and state; and particularly for our subject, the family and the church. What do we mean?

> In the OT administration the church was connected to one family—Israel. Though there were the smaller family units within Israel, it was still the case that the church was related by blood—they were all the descendents of Abraham.

> In the NT administration the church is no longer tied to any particular family (blood-related people). There is now a clear separation between the covenantal institutions of the family and the church.

> To be born into an OT Israelite family was also to be born into the OT visible church, because the families of Israel constituted the visible church.

> But no one family is identified with the visible church in the NT administration. A person may be born into families that are part of the church, but not into families that *are* the church.

> The church itself is not the kingdom of God, but only one aspect of it. All 3 institutions are part of God's kingdom.

- The family is the basic social unit and the most important to a child. It is the covenantal institution responsible for the nurture and care of children. It is God's plan to work in and through the parents and the family unit to prepare and train the child for his adult life and service in God's kingdom. The family is the child's most important covenantal institution, not the church.

> God mediates the blessings of His grace to children, first and foremost, through their believing parents. What is most important for a child is not membership in the covenantal institution of the church, but his or her membership by birth in a Christian home.

> Children of Christian parents in the NT administration are covenantally related to God through the covenantal institution of the Christian family. A Christian man as husband and father stands directly under Jesus Christ as the head of his household; and by his faith and commitment to Jesus Christ he brings his family as a family into a covenantal relationship with God. A faithful Christian home brings children into a external relationship with the blessings of the covenant of grace. It does not make them members of the church with a right to baptism, but it puts them in a most privileged position that will, by the grace of God, bring them to faith in Christ; at which time they will receive Christian baptism and be joined to the visible church.

> The paedobaptist equation that says an unbaptized child of faithful Christian parents is somehow consigned to the world and cut off from the grace of God because they do not have a covenantal standing in the church through infant baptism is simply wrong, and is due to their fixation with the OT administration of the visible church (where the family of Abraham was the church). Therefore, they emphasize the importance of membership in the visible church for their children, as though that is the defining issue, when, in reality, it is membership in the covenantal institution of a Christian family that is the most important to a child.

- It also should be carefully noted, that membership in a Christian family, also place the child into a close association with the visible church where his father/parents are members. Through the covenantal, federal headship of the father, the entire family is brought into a bona fide relationship with the institutional church, and comes under its care and ministry. Here is a perspective for you to consider:

1. A Christian husband/father secures membership for his family in the visible church through his covenantal headship over his family and his membership in the church. This represents the principle of membership by household secured by the covenantal bond between the church and the head of the household.

2. There is, therefore, a covenantal connection between the children and the church through the authority and representation of the father.

3. But the child's association with the church is not as an *individual*, but as a member of a Christian home; that home being Christian and eligible for membership in the visible church through the faith and baptism of the father (or of the mother and in many cases of both parents).

4. There is the church as a covenantal institution (visible church), and there is the church as the spiritual body of the elect in all ages (the invisible church). In the New Covenant, the status of children in the visible church is through their Christian parents; while their status in the invisible church is through their own faith (which is the gift of God). However, by faith and baptism children of Christian parents also become communing members of the visible church—they are recognized as believers who are *themselves in Christ*.

5. The Lord’s Supper is only for the members of the family who have received baptism, and who through faith can discern the Lord’s body. Fathers have a central role in determining the fitness of their children for baptism and the Lord's table.

- Whether or not this is the best way to express the relationship of a child to the visible church, it is an attempt to recognize the importance of the Christian family as a covenantal institution separate from the church, and to reflect a perspective on membership in a local church by family (rather than individuals) by the federal headship of the father. It also shows that the unbaptized child of believing parents, contrary to

paedobaptist imaginations, is not cut off from God or the church, and enjoys the privilege of godly parents who mediate to him or her the external blessings of the covenant of grace: prayer, the Word of God, Christian education, godly discipline, and loving nurture.

- Beasley-Murray wisely comments:

> "Admittedly, to define satisfactorily the relation of children in the nurture of the Church to the Body of Christ is not easy; but it is a mistake to permit an issue, on which the New Testament is almost silent, to becloud the doctrine of baptism, on which the New Testament speaks with clarity."
>
> "The Children of Christian parents, nurtured within the fold of the Church, are certainly not outsiders nor 'little pagans,' though they may be little terrors. But neither are they, in the fullest sense of the term 'in the church' in the sense of members of the Body, that is, *in Christ.* Nor should we regard such a view as an insult to our children. To be baptized into the Church is to possess Christ and the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:26ff), to be 'washed, consecrated, justified' (1 Cor. 6:11)...."
>
> "From the human angle, the children of Christian parents are the objects of the perpetual intercessions of their parents and recipients of the inestimable blessings that enrich a Christian home. Within the Church they are particpators in the gracious influences of worship, the proclamation of the Word of God, and the various means of Christian education.... [W]here Christian parenthood is regarded as a vocation from God, the blessing of God is not withheld, and often the prayers are wonderfully answered in lives guided unto Him" (*Baptism in the New Testament*, pp. 372-373).

- This last point made by Beasley-Murray raises another issue: Is it more conducive to bringing our children to faith in Christ (which is the earnest goal of all evangelical Christian parents) to baptize them as infants or to withhold baptism, in accord with the NT pattern, until they make a credible profession of faith in the gospel? It is our belief as baptists, that infant baptism has done much evil by giving a false assurance to perishing sinners that they are right with God. This problem is illustrated in the NT by the Jews who put their trust in their circumcision, apart from true repentance and faith.

- It should also be pointed out that membership in a Christian home that holds membership in the local church brings a child into a unique relationship to the covenant of grace (the Promise). The options are not simply "in" or "out."

> 1. Figure 1 seeks to illustrate the status of the children of believers in regard to the Covenant of Grace (the Promise).
>
> 2. By the use of these Greek prepositions we are attempting to illustrate the point that though the children of believers are not *in* the Covenant of Grace, they stand in a position that is defined by and oriented to the Covenant of Grace.
>
> 3. The preposition πρός (*pros*) refers to that which is near or facing. It is used: 1) to indicate motion, a moving towards something; 2) to indicate position in terms of closeness and proximity—near, at, or by the side of; 3) to indicate orientation towards something—with a view to, concerning, in view of. All three of these senses accurately define the position of the children of believers in regard to the Covenant of Grace.
>
> 4. The paedobaptist would have us reduce the relationship to a simple *in* or *out.* But this is simplistic, and does not recognize the distinctions that need to be made. The Greeks had more than these 2 prepositions (ἐν or ἐκ) to express the relationship between words and so we too need more than “in” or “out” to define the relationship of children of believers to God’s Covenant.

Conclusion

- In this lecture we have sought to define the relationship of children born to Christian parents to God, the church, and the covenant of grace.

- In the first section we surveyed the doctrine of the invisible and visible church in view of the baptismal debate. Our conclusion was, that the paedobaptist argument from the doctrine of the visible church is flawed, misleading, and simplistic. A better case can be made that the doctrine of the invisible church and visible church better lends itself to the view that in the age of fulfillment of the Promise through Jesus Christ the standards of membership in the visible church would show forth that the covenant of grace is with God and His elect, i.e., true believers (cf. Matt. 24:24, 31; Luke 18:17; Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; Titus 1:1)

- In the second section, we looked at the various paedobaptist views on the efficacy, or effect, of infant baptism. The Reformed church rejected infant baptismal regeneration, but settled for something ill-defined and less than satisfying: infant baptism confers an outward standing in the visible church and with it various external privileges and benefits. The Reformed baptist counters that the same is conferred on a child who is the member of a Christian family that holds membership in the local church without infant baptism.

- In the final section we expressed a Reformed, covenantal baptist perspective on the status of children of believers in regard to God, His church, and the covenant of grace. Reformed baptist are fully confident that their children have not been cut off from God and the church and consigned to the world by a refusal to baptize them; nor have they been robbed of any of the external benefits of the covenant .

- Covenantal Reformed Baptists believe:

1. The family is a covenantal institution in distinction from the church.

2. That God works in and through families to accomplish His purpose and expand His kingdom.

3. That God has given Christian parents special promises concerning His grace and mercy to their children. Yea, He uses believing parents to mediate His grace to their children.

4. That Christian parents are charged by God with the solemn duty of raising their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

5. That the children of Christian parents have a covenantal standing in the church through the faith, baptism, and headship of their father (or parents).

6. That baptism is given to the children of Christian parents in fulfillment of God's promises to be merciful to their seed; i.e., at such a time when the child gives credible evidence of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

7. That there is continuity of the highest degree between the OT and NT in regard to the family covenant, the duties of parents, and the promises of God concerning the children of those who are in covenant with Him by faith in *the Promise* of redemption through Jesus Christ.

Lectures on Baptism #4

Baptism as a New Testament Sacrament

Introduction: Many baptists (particularly those who are not covenantal in their theology) begin (and end?) the discussion of baptism with this perspective: Baptism is an ordinance of the NT, therefore to the NT alone we must look to understand and define it. Now there is a lot of insight in that statement. Why then, have we waited to the fourth lecture to look at what the NT actually says about baptism? If you are familiar with the debate over infant baptism, you know that Reformed paedobaptists build the case for infant baptism from 1) their doctrine of the covenant, 2) their contention that circumcision and baptism are essentially the same sacrament, and 3) their belief that as children in the OT were members of the visible church and given the covenant sign, so are the children of believers in the NT members of the visible church entitled to the covenant sign. Because of their approach to the issue of infant baptism, they contend that the specific NT revelation concerning baptism, important though it be for a missionary situation and for adult converts, is not determinative for the subject of infant baptism. This does not mean that Reformed paedobaptists give no attention to the NT in seeking support for infant baptism—they certainly do—but, only, that they look elsewhere to establish their fundamental argument for infant baptism. This is understandable, for they themselves confess:

> "It is true that there is no express command to baptize infants in the New Testament, no express record of the baptism of infants, and no passages so stringently implying it, that we must infer from them that infants were baptized" (B. B. Warfield, "The Polemics of Infant Baptism," p. 399).

Therefore, in approaching this conference on Baptism and the covenant which deals with the baptism controversy in the context of Reformed theology, I thought it best to begin where the Reformed paedobaptist begins. I believe that this approach not only gives us a good foundation to consider the NT teaching on baptism, it also, hopefully, will clear the way for a more receptive hearing and appreciation of the NT evidence on baptism from those who have been confused or largely convinced by paedobaptist arguments from the covenant, circumcision, and the visible church. How so?

> > Because the argument from the covenant, circumcision, and the visible church seems so convincing to some, they dismiss the baptist argument from the NT as secondary and as missing the point.
>
> > But if we can undermine the foundations of infant baptism by showing that one need not abandon covenant theology and that there is another way, in the context of covenant theology, to understand the covenant, circumcision, and the visible church that does not lead to infant baptism and is biblically and theologically based, then what ought to become definitive in the debate is the NT teaching on baptism itself.

In this and the final lecture, we will be focusing on the NT revelation concerning baptism. In this lecture, we want to survey the specific teaching of the NT in regard to baptism. In the final lecture, we want to consider the NT texts that the paedobaptists appeal to in support the contention that infant baptism is consistent with the NT and is an Apostolic ordinance.

- Let us then proceed to look at the "Baptism as a NT Sacrament." There will be three parts to this lecture:

1. The significance of baptism as a NT ordinance for the debate on infant baptism.
2. Survey the NT teaching on the institution, nature, and practice of baptism.
3. Consider the NT revelation on baptism in view of a Reformed theology of the sacraments.

I. <u>Baptism Is an Ordinance of the New Testament.</u>

- "There are only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the gospel, Baptism and the supper of the Lord" (WCF, 27:4). Two terms need to be defined.

> "sacrament" - expresses the idea of a religious rite that communicates the grace of God to worthy receivers, and is an expression of their faith and allegiance to Him.

> "ordain" - to appoint, decree, establish, or order. Hence, an "ordinance" is a specific religious rite appointed for the church by the express command and authority of Jesus Christ.

- Baptism is a new rite established for the NT administration of the Promise.

> It was specifically given to the church by Jesus Christ and His apostles.

> It is for the age of the fulfillment of the Promise and reflects the final stage in the history of redemption prior to the Second Advent of Christ.

> Therefore, our understanding of baptism and its practice *must ultimately rest* on the positive NT revelation concerning it.

> Baptism is not a carry over from the OT nor a continuation of an OT rite—not simply the rite of circumcision in new form or dress; even as the Lord's supper is a new rite and not simply the Passover meal in new form.

- We look for positive instruction for the Lord's Supper in the NT (cf. 1 Cor. 11:20-34), our practice of the Lord's Supper in not the Passover meal, and we do not look to the OT to understand how we are to observe it. Remember, Passover is not fulfilled in the Lord's Supper, but in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 5:7).

- There are analogies between Passover and the Lord's Supper, and their point of contact is Jesus Christ. So it is with baptism and circumcision (as we have already studied).

- OT ordinances, as types and shadows, can help inform our understanding of the NT ordinances, but these types cannot, yea must not, determine the nature and practice of the NT ordinances.

- The moral law continues unchanged, but the ceremonies do not.

- The paedobaptist's problem in all of this is that his basis for baptism rests on the OT and the practice of circumcision. It is not strictly an argument from the covenant, but from circumcision and its application to male infants in the OT. Remember Reymond's argument?

1. infant males received the sign and seal of the covenant of grace under its Old Testament administration;

2. the covenant of grace has a continuity and organic unity, the people of God are essentially the same in all ages...; and,

3. one can find no repeal in the New Testament of the Old Testament command to place the sign of the covenant of grace upon covenant children" (p. 944).

- But baptism is a NT ordinance! And strikingly, the NT does the following:

First, the NT does *repeal* circumcision. Second, the NT establishes baptism as a new rite and gives no command to apply it to "covenant children" (a term that nowhere appears in the NT).

- In our introduction, we quoted B. B. Warfield's (a paedobaptist) candid admission that:

> "It is true that there is no express command to baptize infants in the New Testament, no express record of the baptism of infants, and no passages so stringently implying it, that we must infer from them that infants were baptized."

> No exegete of the NT would care to deny this. The term "Express," employed by Warfield means to put into words or state in explicit language.

> Yet all three categories spoken of by Warfield can be claimed for the position of believer baptism:

- There are express commands to baptize believers/disciples.

- There are express records of the baptism of believers/disciples.

- There are passages that stringently imply that believers/disciples were baptized.

- The lack of express NT warrant for the practice of infant baptism is a weighty problem for those who profess to abide by the regulative principle of worship.

> "The light of nature sheweth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is good, and doeth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture" (WCF 21-1).

> All worship of God, including the sacraments and their practice, must be *prescribed* in holy Scripture. To prescribe is to set down a rule or instructions in writing. This writing must be found in Holy Scripture. Since baptism was not instituted until the writing of the NT Scriptures, is it not proper to demand some NT prescription for the practice of infant baptism?

> The WCF cites in support of the regulative principle the following Scriptures (among others):

- "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:32).

- "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mt. 15:9).

- "Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh" (Col. 2:23).

> Men are not permitted to devise new ceremonies nor add to the prescriptions for the ceremonies given in Scripture. If infant baptism is not revealed in the Scriptures that institute, regulate, and explain baptism, is it not an adding to the Word of God; a teaching of a doctrine that is the commandment of men; a show of wisdom, but really only will worship?

> Granted these are strong words. However, they are the very words used by Reformed teachers to condemn the inventions of Rome and other Protestant worship practices that they say have no explicit warrant in Scripture.

> Fred Malone writes: "What has the regulative principle of worship to do with infant baptism? Simply this: Baptism is one of the sacraments instituted by Christ, governed by the regulative principle, instituted by God, limited by His revealed will, and prescribed by Holy Scripture. This includes the subjects of baptism as well as its mode and meaning, yet the only subjects of baptism instituted by God through Christ, limited by His revealed will, and actually prescribed by Scripture,

as all agree, are professing disciples. If infants are included by erroneous use of good and necessary consequence, then paedobaptism is a normative addition never commanded" (*The Baptism of Disciples Alone*, p. 169).

II. <u>The New Testament Revelation concerning the Institution and Practice of Baptism.</u>

- The NT teaching on baptism includes, the baptism of John, Jesus' baptism by John, Jesus' institution of baptism in the Great Commission; the Apostolic practice of baptism, and the definition of baptism in the Epistles of the NT.

1. <u>John's Baptism was the Precursor of Christian Baptism</u>

- "Precursor" means to go before, harbinger, forerunner; indicating something to follow; preliminary.

- As the forerunner of the Messiah, John prepared the way for Jesus *and* the post-resurrection rite of water baptism instituted by Christ.

- John was a transitional figure in the history of redemption; he marked the beginning of the new age—the Messianic era. To carry out his transitional task and prepare the people of Israel to receive their Messiah, he was commissioned to preach repentance and baptize those who repented.

> Water baptism as a sign of repentance was new to Israel. There were ritual washings in the OT for the priests and those who had been made unclean for various reasons (Ex. 30:17-21; 40:12; Lev. 8:1-13; Lev. 14-17), but not a baptism of repentance connected with the confession of sin. These washing were for the members of the visible church.

> There was the practice of proselytes taking a bath as part of their entrance into Israel, but the origin and time when this practice began is disputed. Proselyte baptism is not the background to John's baptism, and of course it was never required of one born a Jew. It is a practice that has nothing to do with biblical revelation. (See Beasley-Murray for a helpful study of proselyte baptism and it relation to Christian baptism, *Baptism in the New Testament*, pp. 18-31.)

- We are told by our Reformed brothers that circumcision is the "precursor" of Christian baptism, and if one wants to understand baptism and its practice, he ought to study circumcision.

> I beg to differ with that perspective. If one wants to understand the practice of Christian baptism, he ought to study John's baptism. We are not saying the John's baptism is Christian baptism in the full sense, but that it is the forerunner of it; it introduces the practice of baptism for the Messianic age.

> There was an easy and natural acceptance of baptism by the disciples of Jesus when he commanded that they practice to them in the Great Commission. First, because they were baptized by John and knew well John's practice. Second, because early in Jesus' ministry the disciples baptized in conjunction with Christ's preaching. (cf. John 3:22, 26; 4:1-2)

> John's baptism is surely the forerunner of Christian baptism: same word is used of each; same practice; and same paired activities: preaching and baptism.

> John's baptism is not based on circumcision. He preaches to Israel, but specifically rejects their claim that because they are the descendents of Abraham they have a right to his baptism. It is significant that the closest antecedent to Christian baptism does *not* look to circumcision for its model, but rejects it.

i. Faith and repentance was the prerequisite for receiving John's baptism.

> Faith in the message that John was preaching would lead to conviction of sin and repentance.

> This repentance was expressed by coming to John to be baptized and confessing sin. Coming for baptism was a *response* to the Word of God. Only those who expressed sincere repentance were baptized.

> These conditions preclude the baptism of infants and there is no record of any being baptized.

ii. Physical descent from Abraham through Jewish parents did not qualify a person for John's Baptism.

> The Messiah was coming to Israel and to fulfill the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, and since all circumcised Jews were the children of Abraham and had an interest in the covenant, surely they had a right to John's baptism. No! Physical descent did not give the right to baptism! Only personal repentance did. God can raise up sons to Abraham from the stones!

> John's ministry is transitional from the OT to the NT, and, in his practice of baptism, we begin to see the transition from the OT administration where physical descent from Abraham made you a member of the visible church to the NT administration where physical descent does not confer membership in the church. Since it is here first introduced in the NT, let us take the opportunity to look at how this truth is stated elsewhere in NT.

- Jesus taught that those who are to be counted as members of His family are not those with blood ties, but all who hear the Word of God and do it (Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-22). He also told the Jews that because they sought to kill Him, they could not be counted as Abraham's seed, regardless of their claim to that title by birth (John 8:33-44); this prepares the way for the doctrine of Paul that the true seed of Abraham are not counted by birth but by faith.

- The Apostle John teaches at the opening of his Gospel that the right to be called the "children of God" is not based on man or physical descent:

> "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13).

- The Apostle Paul teaches that believing Jews and Gentiles now constitute the "household of God" (Eph. 2:19) and the "household of faith" (Gal. 6:10), signifying that they are one and the same. The same word οικειος is used in both passages. It refers to those united by kinship, or a common cause or belief. Their kinship is based on faith, not blood, and their common cause is the glory of God and the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

- Paul also teaches that the true children of Abraham are those of faith (Gal. 3:7, 29; Rom. 4:11), and status in the kingdom of God is ultimately conferred by election and not birth (Rom. 9:5-12).

- Paul further explains that our status as God's children is not based on birth but adoption through the gift of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-17). He makes the notable statement that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

> John's ministry paves the way for the full revelation of the truth that membership in the church is not by physical birth, but by spiritual rebirth. The covenant sign is bestowed on the basis of repentance.

iii. John's baptism was by immersion.

- The word chosen is βαπτίζω, which means to dip, plunge, or submerge.

- The text of Scripture supports the picture of immersion. John baptized *in* the Jordan river. Cf. John 3:23 where it says that John baptized in Aenon because there was much water there; and Matt. 3:6, 16 where we see Jesus coming up out of the water.

- The same word is used of Christian baptism in Acts, and the practice described there is similar to the practice of John (cf. Acts. 8:36-39); immersion also fits the picture of baptism in Christ in Romans 6.

- John's baptism is also the foundation for the practice of immersion.

2. Jesus' Baptism by John Supplies the Pattern for Christian Baptism.

- A pattern is that which is worthy of imitation and guides us in our own understanding and practice. Jesus Christ is the pattern of Christian living. As baptism is such an important part of the church's ministry and our Christian profession, we ought to take careful note of Jesus' baptism.

- We are not saying that Jesus' baptism is comparable to ours in what it signifies (the realities they represent are different), but that the pattern displayed is. What is this pattern? Consider the following:

> 1. Jesus' baptism was an assent to the divine authority of John for his message and mission. — Our baptism is an *assent* to the authority of Christ and His church.
>
> 2. Jesus' baptism was a commitment to enter into His Messianic calling in obedience to the Father. — Our baptism is a *commitment* to enter into the service of Christ and obey His will.
>
> 3. Jesus' baptism identified Him with the sinners He came to save. — Our baptism *identifies* us with the Savior of sinners who came to save us—we believe in Him.
>
> 4. Jesus' baptism proclaimed Him as the Son of God. — Our baptism *confesses* Jesus as the Son of God and Lord.
>
> 5. Jesus' baptism saw the Spirit descend upon Him for His Messianic work. — Our baptism is based on *the gift of Spirit*, and empowers us to serve Christ faithfully.
>
> * Jesus' baptism as a self-conscious act of faith and obedience to the Father's will has nothing in common with infant baptism, but believer baptism does.

- Beasley-Murray makes an important correlation between Jesus baptism and Christian baptism:

> "There is, however, one feature in the baptism of Jesus, the significance of which, for Christian baptism, is frequently overlooked. Our Lord recognized in the proclamation and activity of John the summons of his Father to fulfil His vocation, but in the nature of the case His submission to baptism among sinners was made *in freedom*. He dedicated Himself with a perfection of love and obedience that brought the approval of the Father and the presence of the Spirit—as later His perfect obedience in love on the cross received the response of the Father in resurrection and exaltation. Now it belongs to the essence of Christian baptism that the believer comes as receiver. He hears the summons of the Gospel, and in making the baptismal confession, 'Jesus is Lord' (Rom. 10:9), he casts himself on the saving grace of the Sovereign Redeemer. Yet that same baptismal confession could not be uttered without the baptismal candidate conjoining with humble trust a willing submission to the Savior Sovereign. He receives the Lord, and gives—himself. There is no little irony in the fact that the zeal with which many theologians claim the baptism of Jesus as the archetypal baptism has the end result of ensuring that the generations to come shall not approach their baptism in the spirit of free dedication that Jesus approached His. Is not this a matter to ponder and, if possible, to redress?" (*Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 66-67).

(3) Jesus Instituted Christian Baptism After His Resurrection.

- Baptism in the name of Christ—Christian baptism—was established by the authority and express command of Jesus Christ.

- It was not instituted until after His death and resurrection, which were both necessary to establish the New Covenant. It is an ordinance for the administration of the Promise during the inter-advent period.

- Christian baptism was instituted in the context of the Great Commission.

> Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-16; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8

> It was not instituted in connection with circumcision or any other OT rite. Jesus did institute the Lord's supper in the context of the Passover meal, but there is no such connection made between baptism and circumcision in the Great Commission. If baptism specifically "replaces" circumcision, why did not our Lord make any such connection?

> Matthew's account is the most comprehensive; but its terms are illuminated by the other statements of the Great Commission.

- "Teach all nations" - teach, lit. "make disciples," lead them into a relationship of being my disciples where they believe in me, learn of me, and obey my Word.

* This is the main verb of the commission, and it is in the imperative mode; a command!

* The other verbs are participles of manner and indicate the means the disciples of Christ are to employ to disciple the nations. As they are dependent on the main verb which is an imperative, these participles also carry an imperatival force.

- There are, therefore, 3 primary steps necessary to make men disciples of our Lord; the order is not arbitrary, but essential to the fulfillment of the command.

- "Go" - lit., "having gone"; this must be understood in reference to the words of the Great Commission given in Mark, Luke, and Acts where the disciples are instructed to go into the world and preach the gospel; "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel" (Mk. 16:15).

* "Having gone" indicates that the command in Mark proceeds the words of Matt. 28:19, and assumes the obedience of the disciples.

* The command to "go" is a command to preach the gospel and evangelize the lost.

- "baptizing them..." - here is the specific institution of baptism by our Lord. This is water baptism along the same lines as that which John practiced and that Jesus and His disciples practiced early in His ministry. We should assume a continuity between these baptisms.

* baptism follows going and preaching and is administered to those who believe. This is made clear by Mark 16:15-16:

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

* as with John's baptism, Christian baptism is administered to those who respond to the preaching of the Word of God with faith and repentance.

* by the institution of Christ, NT baptism is believer baptism—a baptism of disciples. This is the only baptism that Christ specifically instituted.

- "teaching them all things..." - the baptized believer is then to be taught all the commands of

Christ. The essence of discipleship is continuing in the Word of Christ and shaping all your thoughts and actions by its truth and precepts.

- "all nations" - This is significant. Discipleship is no longer linked to one nation, i.e., to Israel. The purpose of Israel has been fulfilled, and now the Abrahamic covenant promise that "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" is coming to pass. Baptism is for the age of the fulfillment of the promise!

> Thus, we note the following concerning Christian baptism:

1. It was instituted by Christ after His resurrection. Part of the NT administration of the Promise.

2. It is for all nations - there is no longer any national (family) identity tied to the covenant sign. This is a clear aspect of discontinuity with the OT and the sign of circumcision. These two signs are not essentially the same.

3. It is for those who believe the Gospel (not as a means of salvation).

4. It is part of one's commitment to follow Christ; it is a submission to the Lordship of Christ.

5. It is not for infants of believers.

* Not only is there absolutely no mention or hint of infant baptism here, such a practice is in direct contradiction to the words of Jesus. He commanded that those who believe were to be baptized, no more, and no less.

- Just as Genesis 17 gave the right to circumcision to infants in Abraham's household, so could it have been said here by our Lord, if this was His intention for baptism.

* To claim that no mention is given of infant baptism because Jesus commission envisions a missionary context for baptism is both dangerous and deceptive.

- Deceptive, because paedobaptists teach that when a man believes, his household (irrespective of age or faith) is to be baptized at the same time. This is the interpretation they give to the household baptisms of the NT. The household baptisms of Acts are clearly in the context of missionary baptism (we will consider these in the next lecture).

- Dangerous, because it adds to the Word of Christ, and takes away the authority of Jesus Christ Himself to define His baptism for His disciples.

(4). <u>The Apostles of Christ practiced Christian Baptism in strict accordance to Christ's Commission.</u>

- The pattern of the book of Acts is that the Apostles: 1) Preached the gospel; 2) Baptized those who believed in Christ; 3) Taught the believers in Christ. Exactly the pattern of the Great Commission!

> For example, look at Acts 2 and the beginning of the NT church: 1) Preached the gospel, 2:14-40; 2). Baptized those who believed, 2:41; 3) Taught the believers, 2:42.

- The texts that record baptism in Acts:

> Acts 2:41; 8:12-13; 8:35-38; 9:17-18; 10:47-48; 11:15-18; 16:14-15; 16:32-34; 18:8; 19:4-5.

> The pattern in all these baptisms is the same: the one Christ set forth in the Great Commission!

- There is not a single record in the book of Acts of the baptism of some one known or believed to be unbeliever or of an infant.

* John's baptism, Jesus' baptism by John, Jesus' institution of baptism, and the apostolic practice of baptism in Acts all indicate that the NT ordinance of baptism is for believers, for disciples.

(5). The NT Epistles define baptism in accord with Christ's Institution.

- The teaching of the Apostles in the epistles of the NT confirms the understanding that baptism according to the institution of Christ is for believers.

1. Baptism in water is an outward sign of Baptism by the Spirit.

   - Water baptism and Spirit baptism were first brought together in the preaching of John, cf. Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33.

   - A comparison of Acts 1:5 with Acts 2, Acts 10:44-48 and 11:15-17 yields the understanding that the baptism of the Spirit is the gift of the Spirit bestowed by Jesus Christ upon His people—His disciples who believe in Him.

   - Water baptism is clearly tied in with Spirit baptism in Acts 2. In the NT, these two are so closely joined that it is sometimes hard to tell precisely what baptism is being spoken of, or if both are being spoken of—one the reality and the other the sign. Nevertheless, it is only the spiritual reality of the baptism of the Spirit that confers new life in Christ and makes us part of His true spiritual Body.

   - Paul teaches that the baptism of the Spirit places a person into the Body of Christ—the Church; 1 Cor. 12:13; John 3:5; Gal. 3:27.

   - By the baptism of the Spirit we are joined to Christ and made members of His mystical Body, the invisible church. By baptism in water, on profession of faith, we are joined to the visible church. Only those who have been joined to Christ by the Spirit and made members of Christ have claim to the outward rite that signifies this spiritual membership (cf. Rom. 8:9-14).

   - Therefore, without a profession of faith, it would be impossible for the church to give the outward sign of union with Christ. Though that profession may be false (and as mere men we cannot know that), we must baptize according to the instructions of our Lord (Mark 16:15-16). But the inability to infallibly determine if the profession of faith is genuine, is far different than baptizing when there is no profession of faith!

2. Baptism signifies our union (participation) in Christ's death and resurrection.

   - This truth cannot be separated from the baptism of the Spirit which joins us to Christ and applies the benefits of redemption to us.

   - Rom. 6:1-4, Gal. 3:27, and Col. 2:12 speak of an actual reality experienced by those "baptized." Certainly water baptism does not confer these realities, only faith can do that. However, what is evident is that our water baptism signifies that we believe these realities are ours through the grace of God and the gift of the Spirit. The truth signified in baptism is sealed only to true believers.

   - It is impossible to see, apart from the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, how baptism can signify these realities in an infant.

3. Baptism signifies that we are in Christ, and, therefore, Abraham's spiritual seed and heirs of the promise.

   - Galatians 3:26-29 states: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

- Note how faith and baptism are brought together in this passage. It is by faith and baptism that we are counted Abraham's seed and heirs of the Promise. The whole context of Gal. 3 is that by faith in Christ we are Abraham's true seed, and only as such are we "baptized into Christ."

- But what baptism is spoken of here? Calvin gives a helpful explanation that applies here and to other passages where Paul speaks of baptism:

> "...[I]t is customary with Paul to treat of the sacraments in two points of view. When he is dealing with hypocrites, in whom the symbol awakens pride, he then proclaims loudly the emptiness and worthlessness of the outward symbol, and denounces, in strong terms, their foolish confidence. In such cases he contemplates not the ordinance of God, but the corruption of wicked men. When, on the other hand, he addresses *believers*, who make a proper use of the symbols, he then views them in connection with the truth—which they *represent*. In this case, he makes no boast of any false splendour as belonging to the sacraments, but calls our attention to the actual fact represented by the outward ceremony. Thus, agreeably to the Divine appointment, the truth comes to be associated with the symbols" (Commentary on Galatians, p. 111; emphasis added).

- By reference to the spiritual reality and the symbol of that reality, it is evident that only *believers* are baptized into Christ and only they can have a right to the symbol.

4. Baptism is the answer of a good conscience towards God.

- 1 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."

- This is a very important text, for it defines baptism in terms of the one being baptism—to him it is "the answer of a good conscience toward God." Can this be said of an infant?

- The word "answer" can mean either, 1) an appeal or formal request; or, 2) a pledge. It means either "an appeal to God for a clear conscience" or "a pledge to God proceeding from a clear conscience" (BAGD., p. 362). This cannot be done in baptism by unbelievers or infants.

- cf. Hebrews 10:22-23 :"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. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)" Many believe that there is a reference to baptism here.

- William Shirreff comments on this passage are excellent:

> "...[B]aptism is the symbol of salvation to every one who is baptized, with the answer of a good conscience. The exclusion of infants from baptism is as decisively intimated here as there exclusion form the Supper is in 1 Cor. xi. Why are infants debarred from the Lord's Supper? Because, it is answered, they cannot discern the Lord's body, or examine themselves. And why are infants debarred from baptism? Because they cannot have the answer of a good conscience. Whatever is urged in answer to objections in the one case may be urged in answer to objections in the other" (*Lectures on Baptism*, p. 230).
>
> "There is a peculiarity in this text which renders each of these remarks more emphatic. I refer to the general or comprehensive mode in which the truth is expressed in 1 Pet. iii. 21. He speaks of "*baptism*" and of "*us*" as though it were one and the same in every case. Apply this peculiarity to the qualifications of the baptized, and it teaches us that every one

must have the same qualifications; there is no exception of infants, or of anyone else. It is baptism in every instance; the nature of the ordinance is always the same; and the answer of a good conscience is universally required. The same principle is recognized in Rom. 6:4, and in Gal. 3:27: and all of them exclude the distinction between infants and adults. THERE IS BUT ONE BAPTISM—THE BAPTISM OF BELIEVERS" (Ibid., p. 231-232).

5. There is only one baptism.

- It is undeniable that infant baptism is a different kind of baptism than believer baptism. To see this all you need to do is look at the order of service for Holy Baptism in paedobaptist churches, and you will find that there are *two:* one for infants and one for professing believers.

- There is no reason to belabor this point, for it is obvious to any who have eyes to see.

- There are different subjects (a professed believer, and an unconscious infant); different basis (birth into a Christian home, and a personal profession of faith); different responsibilities and privileges granted (infants who are not responsible after their baptism for anything for years and normally are not permitted to take the Lord's supper, and believers who are responsible to all the commands of God and standards of the church and are permitted to take the Lord's Supper); different active participants (parents of the infants present the child, answer questions and take vows, and the individual believer who presents him or herself, answers questions and makes testimony, and vows for himself). The only thing that is the same is the water rite.

- Yet, the Apostle Paul assures us that there is only *one* baptism in the church!

"There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).

* "one" refers to that which is a single entity with a focus on uniformity of quality—one and the same kind or type.

- The answer cannot be that paedobaptists use the same mode for both to signify the same promises to both. Such an answer is mere sophistry, and ignores the truth of the matter (which is reflected in paedobaptist writings) and the practice of two baptisms in paedobaptist churches. The differences between infant baptism and believer baptism are clear to all who are not blinded by a prejudice that will not yield to reason.

- It would be far better for the paedobaptist to admit that he has two baptisms and try to reconcile Eph. 4:5 with that fact, then try to deny it in hopes of having his practice called into question by Eph. 4:5.

III. <u>Believer Baptism Is in Full Accord with the Reformed View of the Proper Reception of the Sacraments</u>.

- At the heart of the Protestant reformation was the rejection of the sacramentalism of Rome.

1. The number of the sacraments: Rome said 7, the Reformers said there were only 2—baptism and the Lord's Supper.

2. The necessity of the sacraments for salvation: Rome said yes; the Reformers said no.

- On baptism WCF says: "Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed to it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated" (28:5).

3. The efficacy of the sacraments: Rome said they actually confer the grace they signify; the

Reformers said that they are means of grace which become effectual "only by the blessing of Christ and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them" (SC. Q. 91).

4. The proper reception of the sacrament:

- Rome said faith is not required, only the intention to receive them. The most important thing is the proper administration by the Priest.

- Reformers said that the Word of God and faith in the receiver are necessary for the proper reception of the sacraments. They are effectual only "in them that by faith receive them." They said that, "A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers" (SC. Q. 92).

- Reformed baptists contends for nothing else but this! —"by faith," and "believers."

- How did the reformers apply their theology of the sacraments to Baptism and the Lord's Supper?

1. They swept away the mass and its superstitions, and returned to the simple observance of the Lord's Supper for worthy receivers.

"Q97: What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's supper? A: It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves" (SC. Q 97).

- Infants were excluded from the Lord's supper because they could not meet the Scriptural standards for worthy receivers.

- This was a consistent application of their theology of the sacraments, and the Reformed baptist heartily agrees.

- Note: There is a growing number within Presbyterianism who are advocating paedocommunion. This may make them more consistent with there theology of paedobaptism, but it removes them one step further from the Reformed theology of the sacraments; yes, from the Scriptures themselves (cf. 1 Cor. 11).

2. They required a profession of faith for adults, but retained infant baptism.

Q95: 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; but infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized" (SC).

- Infant baptism was practiced in the Roman Catholic Church as a means of salvation for the infant.

- The reformers retained infant baptism as a ordinance of the church. Lutherans and Anglicans retained a belief in baptismal regeneration (though they tried to square it with their evangelicalism to some degree). Presbyterians rejected baptismal regeneration, but were divided over the efficacy of infant baptism, i.e., Why do we do it, and what does it effect for the child?

- How did they justify infant baptism, in view of their insistence that the Word of God and faith must be present in the receiver if the sacramental grace is to be conferred?

1. The faith of the parents (and/or the church) suffices for the baptism of the child.

- The faith of the Christian parent(s) supplies what is lacking in the child and makes the ceremony of infant baptism valid.

> "Once we recognize that faith is a condition for baptism, and that baptism is not a demonstration of faith by the person baptized, the question can be asked, Whose faith is required? As we look now at the relevant biblical teaching, we will see that the faith of parents fully suffices for the baptism of their children" (James W. Scott, "The Biblical Basis for Infant Baptism," *New Horizons,* July - August 2000).

- But is there such a doctrine of vicarious faith anywhere in Scripture? If the faith of parents can suffice for baptism, why not for the Lord's Supper? And where do we stop? Can there be any substitution in the matter of faith (cf. Heb. 11:6: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him").

2. Faith exercised at a later time in life validates an infant's baptism.

- Ronald Ward states: "Calvin is quite clear in stating that Baptism has no efficacy where there is no faith in the recipient and no discernment of the meaning of the sign. 'From this sacrament we gain nothing, unless in so far as we receive in faith.' 'Baptism is an appurtenance of faith, and therefore it is later in order,... if it be given without faith whose seal it is, it is both a wicked and exceedingly gross sacrilege.'" (*Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, p. 184).

- How then did Calvin reconcile this insistence on faith for the recipient with infant baptism? He taught that where there is no faith baptism can retain a latent efficacy until faith is present. Ward explain Calvin's view this way: "The absence of faith in the person being baptised does not take away from the fact that through the very administration of Baptism grace may be offered, even though it is not accepted, and the validity of that offer is kept open before the one who has been baptised unless it is deliberately renounced. Calvin admits the ultimate validity of a Baptism that has lain neglected, or whose significance has not been perceived, when later on the baptised person comes to realize the meaning of the sign and claims the grace contained it" (Ibid., p. 185).

- Is this a reconciliation of the problem posed by infant baptism or an evasion? See his statements quoted above. How does such a doctrine square with the NT teaching on baptism, and Calvin's own excellent exposition of baptism in his *Institutes* (and I am not note talking about his appendix on infant baptism)? It is another example of the artifices that the defenders of infant baptism must employ to defend it.

- And why limit this view on later faith to infants. Why not apply it to adults as well, who give some signs of interest in the gospel? Why not agree with Rome and say that the only requirement to receive baptism is consent of the will with an intention to receive it, in hopes that "a seed of faith" (Calvin) will be implanted, and that they will seriously consider the grace offered them? Why not look at baptism as a converting or evangelistic ordinance?

> "Here is the essential decisive issue for doctrine: can one be satisfied or not with the different expedients which have been resorted to on this question?" (Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, p. 45).

3. Infant baptism is only a half-sacrament.

- This is not so much an answer to the necessity of faith in the reception of baptism, but of the necessity of a personal profession of faith for full church communion and the right to the Lord's supper.

- All those who practice infant baptism recognize, that at some point, a person baptized as an infant must give a personal profession of faith in Christ before the church to confirm their standing as a Christian and member of the church.

- This led to the establishment of the practice of a rite of "confirmation," where in a public ceremony, of some sort, the child (often age 12) would confess their faith before the church, and then receive their first communion. The Roman Catholics called this a sacrament, the Lutherans and the Anglicans a "Service of Confirmation."

- Believer baptism admits the one baptized to the fellowship of the church and the right to all its privileges, including the Lord's Supper and discipline. It is a complete sacrament of initiation into the church. But infant baptism only admits the one baptized to a partial standing in the church; it is a half-way covenant. This is evident in the declaration of a Lutheran minister at the confirmation of one of its youth that was baptized in the church as an infant:

> "Forasmuch as you have made confession of your faith and have received Holy Baptism, I do now in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great King and Head of the Church, admit you to the fellowship of the Lord's Table, and to participation in all the spiritual privileges of the Church" (*Service Book and Hymnal*, p. 246).

- The Presbyterians reject "confirmation," but practice the essence of it anyway. They have to, if they desire to keep their church membership free of those who make no profession of faith. The Directory of the Public Worship of God of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has a service for "Public Profession of Faith in Christ." Before anyone is permitted to make this public profession of faith they are to be examined by the session to be assured the candidate has an active faith in Jesus Christ, relies upon His merits alone, and is determined to lead a Christian life.

> * The minister first says; "Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, we thank our God for the grace which was given you, in that, having come to years of discretion, you have accepted God's covenant promise which was signified and sealed unto you in your infancy by holy baptism."
>
> * After the public profession is made the minister declares: "Beloved, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I welcome you to all the privileges of full communion with God's people, and in particular to participation in the sacrament of the holy supper...."

- Where in the Bible is there a warrant for such a ceremony? Or for such a requirement beyond baptism for full communion with God's people? But such a service or public profession is necessitated by the unbiblical practice of a baptism that is a half sacrament, i.e., the practice of infant baptism where there is no faith confessed by the one baptized.

- What paedobaptists who are also paedocommunionists require for their children who have come to years of discretion, I know not. But I do know this, in both of their practices, they deny the Reformed confessions, and more importantly, they deny the requirements set forth in Scripture.

- Earlier, I mentioned that infant baptism was a half-way covenant. It is a half-way covenant in that the infants, until they come to "confirmation," are only half-way in the church which is a covenantal institution formed by covenant. They only have limited privileges. But what happens when a child grows up in the church, never renounces his baptism, but never professes faith (or never does so to the satisfaction of the elders), is never admitted to the full communion and the Lord's Supper, but he marries and has child, and he then presents his child for baptism. Should the church baptize the child of such a member? Can a half-way member have his

children baptized? This problem, which all evangelical paedobaptists have to face in one degree or another, was what led to the well-known "half-way covenant" among the New England Puritans.

- Edmund Morgan states the problem they faced this way:

> "When an unconverted child of a church member produced a child of his own, the minister was presented with a problem, the complexity of which had not been foreseen by the architects of the New England system [a restricted church membership to visible saints *and* infant baptism]. The new father (mother) had been in some sense a member of the church. Was he still? If so, was he a member in a different sense than before? What about the child? Was the child a member? Should the child be baptized?
>
> "The questions were difficult to answer, because every answer generated several more questions. If a child who grew to physical maturity without receiving faith was to be considered no longer a member of the church, how and when should his expulsion take place? The fact that he has acquired a child before he acquired faith was no sign that he would not eventually attain faith. Should the church meanwhile cast him out? If so, upon what grounds could it be done?.... Admonitions and excommunications were still applied only for misconduct or for openly expressing heretical ideas; no one suggested that anyone be excommunicated for failure to display signs of saving faith. When therefore a child of a member grew to maturity without faith but without misconduct, it was impossible to find grounds for expelling him. To excommunicate him for having a child in lawful wedlock was palpably absurd. On the other hand, if he remained a member, his child must be entitled to baptism, and if so, why not that child's child too, and so on until the church should cease to be a company of the faithful and should become a genealogical society of the descendents of the faithful" (*Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, pp. 127-128).

- Morgan continues:

> "Had they been willing to abandon infant baptism, they might at least have avoided the embarrassment of trying to adjust spiritual growth to physical. As it was, they had chosen to apply in time and in space a conception of the church that could never fit those dimensions. Given both infant baptism and the restriction of church membership to visible saints, it was impossible for the Puritans either to evade the questions just posed or to answer them without an elaborate casuistry that bred dissatisfaction and disagreement" (Ibid., p. 128).

- The Puritans decided that a half-way member could have his children baptized. Then the children baptized by half-way members had their children baptized and so on until the New England churches did become "a genealogical society of the descendents of the faithful."

> But credobaptists stand squarely on the reformational theology that the Word of God and faith in the receiver are necessary for the right use and reception of the sacraments by *all.* We make no exceptions, because the Word of God makes no exceptions!

> We admire Calvin's doctrine of the sacraments and baptism set forth in his *Institutes*, but deplore his Appendix on infant baptism.

> We affirm wholeheartedly Calvin's insistence that faith and self-examination are necessary for the reception of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, but scratch our heads when he turns around and he permits infants to baptized, while condemning, in the strongest terms, those who would make no exceptions to the rule of faith which he himself taught; *he* said of baptism: "if it be given without faith whose seal it is, it is both a wicked and exceedingly gross sacrilege."

> I pause to quote Karl Barth on this inconsistency in Calvin and the Reformers*:*

> "The statement may be hazarded that the confusion, with which Luther and Calvin and their followers on both sides have thrown themselves in this matter, is hopeless. One has to admit that—unlike the moderns—they gave themselves really fiercely to the answering of this burning doctrinal question. But it still has to be said that the actual information which one gets from them on the decisive point, is, in fact, as incredible as its exegetical grounds are unsatisfactory. One may read the 15th and 16th chapters of Book IV of the *Institutio* one after the other and convince oneself where the great Calvin was sure of his subject and where he obviously was not sure, but visibly nervous, in a hopeless confused train of thought, abusing where he ought to inform and when he wants to convince, seeking a way in the fog, which can lead him to no goal, because he has none.
>
> "From the standpoint of a doctrine of baptism, infant-baptism can hardly be preserved without exegetical and practical artifices and sophisims—the proof of the contrary has yet to be supplied! One wants to preserve it only if one is resolved to do so on grounds which lie outside the biblical passages on baptism and outside the thing itself" (*The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, p. 49).

Conclusion

- The fact that baptism is a NT ordinance, and, therefore, is to be determined by the Scriptures of the NT;

- The fact that the baptism of John, Jesus' baptism by John, the institution of Christian baptism by Jesus, the practice of the Apostles, and the teaching of the Epistles all require believer baptism; and

- The fact that believer baptism is in full accord with the biblical and confessional teaching that faith is necessary in those who receive the sacraments,

- Leaves the creobaptist fully persuaded that not only are we *not* committing a sin by refusing to baptize our infants, but, rather, we are walking in obedience to the command of our Lord that only those who repent and believe the gospel are worthy receivers of the holy sacrament of Christian baptism. This is the doctrine of the NT.

Lectures on Baptism #5

A Consideration of Various Paedobaptist Arguments

Introduction: In our first four lectures we have endeavored to present a positive, biblical case for the practice of believer baptism (credobaptism; disciple baptism) from a Reformed, covenantal perspective. At the same time, we have also offered a critique of the infant baptism (paedobaptism) view. It is inevitable, yea necessary, for both the paedobaptist and the credobaptist to consider the arguments of the other when presenting their own case (hopefully, this can be done in an objective sense in the search for truth, and not in a personal sense of deriding and demeaning the Christian brothers with whom we differ—though we may not agree on infant baptism, we still owe one another the proper measure of honor and respect due to fellow servants of the same Lord and members of the same body of Christ; cf. Rom. 14:2-13).

> Note: My own experience has been that the paedobaptists are more passionate (I didn't say more confident) about proving their position. Why is this? Here is my conjecture:
>
> > If the credobaptist is correct and baptism is only to be administered to those who "by faith receive" it, then they who have only be baptized as infants have never been baptized in accord with Christ's command; thus, they are not properly baptized Christians, and they are denying true Christian baptism to their children if and when their children come to personal faith. This is a serious circumstance for any who take the commands of God seriously—and our Reformed paedobaptist friends do!
>
> > But credobaptists practice a baptism that *all* agree is valid and true to NT teaching. The problem for the credobaptist, if he is wrong about infant baptism, is that he is delaying the baptism of his children unnecessarily and depriving them of certain "blessings" for a time (unless baptismal regeneration is true). But when his children are baptized on profession of faith, their baptism is surely a valid baptism and in accord with Christ's institution. (e.g., I have 10 children, 7 of which have been baptized.) Though we realize, that if infant baptism is a practice consistent with biblical teaching, we have not followed it, we also know that the baptism of our children on profession of faith *is* a valid baptism.

But as I was saying, it is necessary on a subject like this to consider the arguments of those on the other side of the issue. If you are going to make a persuasive and convincing case, to some degree you must answer the arguments and point out the inconsistencies of your theological opponents. This we have sought to do, with in the limits imposed by a conference such as this, as we discussed the covenant, circumcision, status of Children, and baptism as a NT ordinance. In this final lecture, we want to take a look at various paedobaptist arguments that have not yet been specifically addressed. Our considerations will have to be brief, but hopefully these will be sufficient to indicate the weakness of these arguments.

I. Arguments from Specific New Testament Texts

- Although the paedobaptist constructs his argument for infant baptism primarily from the OT and circumcision, he knows that it is very important for his position to support it from the NT; after all baptism is recognized by all as a NT ordinance instituted by Christ!

- They admit that there is no explicit NT Scripture that commands infant baptism or supplies an example of infant baptism, but argue that the doctrine and practice of infant baptism can be *deduced* from the NT.

- Thus, the hermeneutical principle that is employed to justify infant baptism is stated in the WCF:

> "The whole counsel of God, concerning things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men." (I-6)

- Infant baptism is not expressly set down in Scripture, and therefore must be deduced from Scripture.

- The hermeneutical principle of good and necessary consequence is a valid one and should be embraced by all Reformed believers.

> > note: The LBC 1689 says, "...or necessarily contained in Holy Scripture...." which says essentially the same thing; perhaps the change is intended to emphasize that what is deduced must be that which can be demonstrated as what is truly there; not what persuasive and clever men can put there or only demonstrate as something possibly there.

- According to the requirement of this hermeneutical principle, the deduction must be:

> 1). good - valid, sound
>
> 2). necessary - *inherent* in the text; an unavoidable conclusion from the text; *logically compelling*; required, inescapable, essential.
>
> 3). consequence - conclusion, logical inference (i.e., arriving at a decision or opinion by reasoning from known facts or evidence.
>
> 4). deduced - infer from deductive reasoning.
>
> * the bar is set high here! the teaching, the principle, must be a valid, logically compelling conclusion based on the biblical text which has been interpreted in the grammatical/historical sense.
>
> * it is not that which is plausible, possible, or even probable, but compellingly necessary.

- My contention is that none of the NT texts brought forth by paedobaptists in an attempt to deduce infant baptism as the Apostolic doctrine and practice meet the criteria of this Reformed hermeneutical principle....

> > And the issue at stake is a very important one: the proper practice of one of the two ordinances of the NT. This requires a high degree of proof
>
> > "In arguing for infant baptism, it is not sufficient for us to say that infant baptism is merely *consistent* with Scripture, or that *a* biblical case can be made for it. In order for us to be satisfied that we are being biblical Christians, we must be content with nothing less than a clear biblical case *requiring* infant baptism. In a doctrinal matter of this importance, the standards of evidence are high." (Douglas Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations,* p.9)

- And so, each must judge for himself whether or not the paedobaptist arguments from good and necessary consequence (and *all* their arguments fall in this category by their own admission) are compelling, not merely possible, but that there is no other conclusion that should be drawn from the text, and that it supports and proves, without doubt, the doctrine of infant baptism.

> > Please keep this standard in mind as we proceed through these NT "proof-texts" for infant baptism. Do they require the practice of infant baptism?
>
> > Remember Romans 14:5, 22-23.

-Another hermeneutical principle that must be kept in mind is:

> "The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, (which is not manifold, but one) it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." (WCF I-9; LBC I-9)
>
> > the passages used as proof-texts by paedobaptist teachers must be judged by this criteria: do they comport with the doctrine expressed in other passages on baptism that speak more clearly; e.g., the Great Commission, explicit statements about the meaning of baptism, explicit apostolic examples. We interpret the unclear in light of the clear.

1. Jesus and the Children

- Matt. 18:3-6; 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17.

> "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 10:13-16)

- The argument is this: These passages teach that the children of believers are dear to Christ, and He counts them as members of His church. Therefore, they should be baptized in recognition of this and received into the visible church.

- Samuel Miller states: "The language of our Lord concerning little children can be reconciled with no other doctrine than that which I am now endeavouring to establish...." *i.e.,* that the infant seed of believers are the proper subjects of Christian baptism by virtue of their birth to believing parents (*Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable*).

- It is claimed that these verses make infant baptism an imperative (*The Waters that Divide,* p. 30).

- But consider the following:

(1). There is nothing at all in these passages about baptism; no water is present and no child is baptized; they are only blessed by the laying on of hands.

> > Bringing children to elders of the synagogue or to a famous rabbi for their blessing was a common practice.
>
> > As one writer noted, if anything, these verses might be used to support the practice of "confirmation" by the laying on of hands by the Bishop. No Presbyterian would want that!

(2). The context in which these passages appear all deal with the matter of entrance into the kingdom, *i.e.,* salvation, eternal life, *cf.* Luke 18:9, 14, 18, 26.

> > By entrance into the kingdom, Jesus means salvation, being born again (Jn. 3:5-6), not some sort of undefined standing in the visible church.
>
> > Thus, if this passage is pressed to make it apply to infant baptism (and it should not be), then what the children receive by being brought to Jesus in baptism is salvation and entrance into eternal life—baptismal regeneration.
>
> * the children are set forth in these passages as prime examples of the qualities of faith, love, and humility that are necessary for all who would enter the kingdom (in contrast to the Pharisees and

the bulk of the Jews who are proud and unbelieving); thus, if there is any teaching here on who should be baptized, it is those who display faith in Jesus.

(3). It is wrong to assume that the children in this passage are unconscious infants.

- "infants" (Luke 18:15), refers to a baby, infant or very small child. In Luke 18:15 the text indicates that the ones actually being hindered were not the adults trying to bring their infants, but the children themselves. It is used in 2 Tim. 3:15 "...from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures...." and thus indicates that in some cases the word is used of a young child who is able to be taught and know the scriptures

- More importantly, in the parallel passages the word "little children" (παιδίον) is used.

> παιδίον refers to a child, normally one below the age of puberty; it refers to a child capable of receiving discipline and instruction.

> It is used in Matt. 14:21 of children in general (" women and children"); in Mark 5:39 of a girl 12 years old; a cognate term is used in Matt. 11:16 of the children playing in the marketplace.

> The young children in these passages actually demonstrate love and trust in Jesus, and therefore are used by Him to teach the adults the lesson that humility and faith are necessary qualities in *all* who would enter the kingdom. "for of *such* is the kingdom of God"

(4). The lesson here, in regard to children, is not that they should be baptized as infants, but that they are important to Jesus and we should seek to bring them to Jesus Christ at an early age, and not do anything to hinder them from coming to Him—young children can come to faith in Jesus!

> What is the lesson here: bring unconscious infants to the water of baptism which means nothing to them; or bring our young children to Jesus by teaching, prayer, and the gospel so that they might consciously put their faith in Him?

> For some reason the disciples thought that either Jesus was to busy to be bothered by children or that He was not interested in them.

> But no! children are important to our Lord, and He would have those who have charge over them to bring them to Him for His blessing (salvation), and the church ought to encourage this.

> In the paedobaptist view, baptist parents are like the misguided disciples who try to hinder their children from coming to Christ for His blessing. Is this a proper analogy? Of course not. And paedobaptists know that baptist parents are as zealous as they are to bring their children to faith in Christ. In the end, bringing the children to faith is all that really matters.

- In short, there is nothing in these texts about baptism, and there is no compelling reason to import it and make it a proof text for infant baptism. If there is a lesson here for parents and the church, it is that young children can come to Christ and we ought to all in our power to bring them in faith to Him.

2. The Promise at Pentecost

"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)

- The paedobaptist argument is that at the birth of the church, Peter establishes for the NT the OT principle of the Abrahamic covenant that believers and their children are embraced together in the covenant. Therefore, as in the OT, children of believers are entitled to receive the sign of the covenant.

- John Murray states, concerning Acts 2:39: "It demonstrates that Peter, in the illumination and power of the Spirit of Pentecost, recognized that there was no suspension or abrogation of that divine administration

whereby children are embraced with their parents in God's covenant promise.... It is precisely because there is such evidence of the perpetual operation of this gracious principle in the administration of God's covenant that we baptise infants." (*Christian Baptism*, p. 68)

- In the covenant God made with Abraham, He promised to be merciful to his seed (Gen. 17:7); this, say paedobaptists, is the promise referred to in Acts 2:39. If you repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus, God will be merciful to you and your children and enter into covenant with you and your children.

- As we proceed to our response, I would have you remember our earlier lectures that dealt with the covenants and the status of children of believers.

- Please consider the following:

(1). Although baptism is present in the context, there is no record of any infants being baptized or instructions given to baptize such.

> In fact the actual wording of the command and the description of the baptisms supports believer baptism only.

> The command is "Repent [aor. act. imper., 2nd pl.] and be baptized [aor. pass. imper., 3rd. pl]"

- both verbs do not carry equal force. "Repent" is the primary command and "be baptized" is secondary and dependent on the first being fulfilled.

- thus, "Repent, and let all who do so be baptized." Both are necessary, but one is prior to the other, and the latter dependent on the former. As with the baptism of John, repentance must proceed baptism (here is the continuity that we should note).

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

> In view of the fact that this passage is being used as a proof-text for infant baptism, it is somewhat incongruous that the command to be baptized on the condition of repentance *excludes* infants, and the actual account of the baptisms that were administered at Pentecost say nothing of infants. On the latter point, note that nothing is said of infants in vv. 42-47 either; esp. v. 47.

> The whole argument for infant baptism from this text is based on a premise imported into the text; is it valid to import the assumption that you are trying to prove, and then turn around and say the text proves your assumption, *i.e.*, that infants of believers are to be baptized? In my opinion, paedobaptist do this repeatedly. Is it valid to say that Acts 2:39 proves infant baptism when the *text itself* excludes infant baptism by its command concerning baptism and by its express statement that only those who received Peter's words were actually baptized?

> "But you simply don't understand the covenant," is the reply. We have dealt with the covenant argument already. But if the theological argument of the covenant is your basis, at least do not seek to prove your argument by forcing it upon passages where it does not fit contextually or exegetically.

(2). The specific "promise" in view in Acts 2:39 is the promise of the Spirit to all who repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus.

- Peter preaches that by repenting of your great sin of rejecting the Messiah and by being baptized in Jesus' name (an expression of faith in Him) you will receive the same gift that we have just received—the gift of the Holy Spirit as promised by Joel (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-21), John (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5), and Jesus (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5; Acts 2:32).

- Contextually, the "promise" is the gift of the Holy Spirit, granted on repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Not "promise" as a reference to the Abrahamic covenant to be merciful to his seed; cf. Acts 13:32.

- Peter is not, in the context, discussing the covenantal status of children of believing parents, but declaring the wonderful news that the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit is available to all who repent and are baptized.

> The promise of the Holy Spirit is specifically said to be for 1) you, 2) your children, 3) all who are afar off, 4) as many as the Lord our God shall call.

> It is true that the things promised are ultimately dependent on the Promise—the covenant of grace—and are included in it, but that does not mean that the Peter is speaking specifically of the all the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant in Acts 2:39.

(3). The promise is offered here, but not actually conferred.

- Peter is addressing those who are guilty of rejecting Christ; those who cried, "Crucify Him!"

- "you" is plural; he speaking to them as a group, for as a group, i.e., as a nation, they have rejected Christ.

- "Your children" is also plural; Peter is not talking about the children of individual families, but the children of the nation of Israel.

> Children (τεκνον) - 1) the offspring of human parents; 2) descendents from a common ancestor, cf. Matt 2:18; 27:25; Acts 2:39; 13:33 (BAGD, 3rd ed. p. 994)

> This term should not be applied in an individualistic manner as the paedobaptists do; in context Peter is addressing a nation that is one family—the children of Abraham; Peter is not speaking to Christian, Gentile parents about their children.

> In view of the context, note the importance of Matt 27:24-25: "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children."

> They had cursed themselves and their children by laying Jesus' innocent blood to the nation's charge. Peter's response to their question in Acts 2:38-39 is to say that, in the infinite mercy of God, those so cursed can find forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit by repentance and baptism!

- "to those afar off"

> "and" (και) is used to link this group to "you" in the same way that it was used to link "your children" to you. We say this because "and" is used to argue that Peter joins the children in covenantal solidarity to their believing parents—"you and your children". If the "and" links "you" in solidarity to the "children", it equally links "you" in covenantal solidarity to "those who are far off."

> μακρον - 1) to be at a relatively great distance from; could refer to either Gentiles (cf. Acts 22:21; Eph. 2:17) or the Jews of the dispersion (diaspora), cf. Acts 2:5-11; or 2) to a position in time relatively far removed from the present time; in time to come; future generations. Contextually, I think that it is referring to the Jews in one or both senses.

- "as many as the Lord our God should call" - should go with "the promise"

> The promise is to as many as the Lord our God shall call. The question is what "call" is being

spoken of? The effectual call or the general call of the Gospel. Either could fit, but neither supports the paedobaptist interpretation of the promise. If the general call, Peter is opening the door to the truth that the promise is not just to Israel, but to all the Lord may choose to call, i.e., the other nations of the world. The promise is offered to whomever the Lord is pleased to call, and you should be thankful that He is now in mercy calling you. If the effectual call, Peter is saying that the promise is administered, not on the basis of birth or man's work, but by the sovereign call of God.

* the passage does not deal with, nor support the doctrine of infant baptism. It speaks to the Jewish nation in the context of their awful rejection of Jesus Christ. As a people they are guilty; and they of Judea, of the dispersion, and of future generations will suffer grievously for it—unless they repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus.

> This repentance is done by individuals, but it could embrace the nation, if all would heed the call; but no single individual can secure it for the "children" or for "those who afar off".

(4). Questions arising from the text for paedobaptists to answer.

- If your view of Acts 2:39 is correct, and the faith of the parents secures the "promise" for their children, and since, contextually, the promise includes the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, then,

> Are you saying that the parent's faith and the child's baptism actually secures the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit for their children? If not, then how can you say the faith of the parent brings the promise to his/her children in a way that is different than for others?

> For how many generations does the parent's faith secure the promise for their offspring and right to infant baptism? One? Two? Ten? Please justify biblically your answer.

(3) Household Baptism

- Acts 10; 16:14-15; 16:32-34; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16

- In the NT there are a number of recorded incidents where we are told that the apostles baptized a whole household. "Given the biblical understanding of what a household comprised, we may safely conclude that *if* there were any infants present in the household, they were most certainly baptized" (Randy Booth, *Children of the Promise*, p. 142). Thus, we have indirect, yet convincing proof that infant baptism was an apostolic practice.

- But how can we be so sure that the Apostles baptized infants on the basis of these household baptism, if it is true that, "We cannot prove conclusively that there were infants in these households" (Murray, *Christian Baptism*, p. 65)? I never fail to marvel at the ingenuity of the paedobaptists to overcome such difficulties:

> Here is Murray's answer: "Every consideration would point to the conclusion that household baptism was a frequent occurrence in the practice of the church in the apostolic days. If so, it would be practically impossible to believe that in none of these households were there any infants. It would be unreasonable to believe so. Presumption, therefore, of the strongest kind, even if we do not have an overt and proven instance of infant baptism.... this would inevitably involve the baptism of infants comprised in the household whenever and wherever there were such" (ibid., p. 66).

> So even though we have no statement in Scripture that these households had infants or that they were baptized, we can find the baptism of infants in the many household baptisms that are not recorded in Scripture!

- Consider the following:

(1). There is no explicit statement in any of the texts on household baptism that infants were baptized.

- This is, as I said, conceded by the paedobaptists; hence we must keep in mind that their argument for infant baptism from these texts is based on mere supposition. They come to these household baptism texts with their presupposition for infant baptism based on their understanding of "the covenant." Therefore, they find infants being baptized here, and then use this "evidence" from household baptism to support their view, even though they admit that no infants are actually said to be baptized in these passages.

- What does the Scripture say? What it actually says supports the believer baptism position.

(2). The actual wording of the texts on the household baptisms supports the contention that in the NT only those of faith were baptized.

- The biblical description of these households show that the members were capable of faith, and that in fact they did believe.

1. Household of Cornelius

   Acts 10:2 - "A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house."

   Acts 10:7 - speaks of one Cornelius' men being a "devout soldier."

   Acts 10:24 - indicates that family, kinsman, and friends were invited by Cornelius.

   Acts 10:33 - all present were there "to hear all things that are commanded of thee of God."

   Acts 10:44 - the Holy Spirit "fell on all them which heard the word."

   Acts 10:47-48 - these who heard the word and received the Holy Spirit were baptized.

2. Household of the Philippian Jailor.

   Acts 16:32 - Paul spoke the word to the jailor "and to all that were in his house"

   Acts 16:33 - Paul baptized the jailor and "all his."

   Acts 16:34 - says that the Jailor "rejoiced, believing in God with all his house."

3. Household of Crispus.

   Acts 18:8 - Crispus "believed on the Lord with all his house ... and were baptized"

4. Household of Stephanas.

   1 Cor. 1:16 - Paul says he baptized the household of Stephanas.

   1 Cor. 16:15 - says of the house of Stephanas, "they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints. The same house that was baptized is a house that is ministering.

5. Household of Lydia.

   Acts 16:14-15 - this text says nothing about anyone believing but Lydia, and no statement is given of any in her house believing.

   - Yet, Lydia does not appear to be a married woman; she is probably a widow or was never married. From the passage, it does not appear likely that her house had infants. It is interesting to note, that in 16:40 we learn of "brethren" in her house. From the actual statements of the other household baptisms, it would be safer to conclude that Lydia believed in God with all her house. Regardless, it is agreed by all that the passage does not say an infant was baptized.

* Thus these biblical passages actually give further support to the view that the Apostles only baptized professing believers.

* They continue the pattern first stated in John 4:53 of the nobleman whose son was healed by Jesus: "and he himself believed, and his whole house."

(3). Household baptism, from the paedobaptist perspective, proves much more than infant baptism.

- If these texts prove that infants should be baptized when the head of the household believes, they also prove that baptism should also be given to the spouse, older children, servants, or any other family member or individual who is part of the household.

> The doctrine of household baptism means that all the members of that household are joined in covenant with God and are members of the visible church by virtue of the faith of the head of the household and therefore are to be baptized—the head is commanded to see that they are. All the privileges of the covenant community are theirs; and for paedocommunionists, this would mean all should be entitled to the Lord's Supper.

> Most paedobaptists are not willing to apply "household" baptism beyond infant baptism.

> But those who are consistent, boldly advocate that all the household is entitled to baptism. Booth states: "We may conclude then, that *in every case where the apostles administered baptism to the known head of a family, they also administered it to his entire household*" (*Children of the Promise*, p.143; italics his). Others such as Bahnsen and Wilson conclude the same.

> But this would mean a significant shift in the debate with baptists, for it would no longer merely be about infant baptism but about *household* baptism; infants are simply one component in the household. It would be a debate between credobaptists and oikosbaptists.

> This also would create a confessional problem for Presbyterians, for the WCF says that the visible church consists of "all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children...." (XXV-1); while these are now saying it consists of such who profess the true religion and their households; a considerable difference in your conception of the church.

(4). The stated promise of God to these households is not membership in the visible church through baptism, but salvation.

- What is promised to the heads of households is not that their houses will come under the "blessings of the covenant" and that their children will be covenantally "holy" with a right to baptism, but they are promised *salvation* for their household.

> Acts 16: 31-32: "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."

> Acts 11:13-14: "And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved."

- The obvious explanation for those who believe that justification is by faith, is not that the head of the household will bring salvation (justification) to all his house by his faith, but that the Apostles will preach the word to whole house so that all may be saved by faith. This is exactly what happened in Cornelius' house and the jailor's house.

- These passages on household baptism do not teach that on the faith of the head all the members are to be baptized, but that God's election often embraces whole households. The family is an extremely

important part of God's kingdom, and He delights to work in families to display His saving grace by bringing its members to faith. Though He no longer has one chosen family (Israel) in the NT administration, He chooses to elect individual families, and He works through these families to glorify His name.

4. Your Children are Holy

- 1 Cor. 7:14

- In this passage Paul, states that the children of at least one believer are "holy." This does not mean that they are regenerate: "But it can be nothing less than the 'holiness' of connection and privilege. It is a holiness that envinces the operation of the covenant and representative principle and proves that the Christian faith of even one parent involves the embrace of the offspring in a relationship that is by divine warrant described as 'holy.' This is wholly consonant with the basis upon which the ordinance of infant baptism rests, just as it is counter to the moving principle of the antipaedobaptist contention" (Murray, *Christian Baptism*, p. 65).

- These "children are 'holy,' that is, in covenant with God; members of that church which the believing parent is, in virtue of his profession, united: in one word, that the infidel party is so far, and in such a sense, consecrated by the believing party, that their children shall be reckoned to belong to the sacred family with which the latter is connected, and shall be regarded and treated as members of the church of God" (Miller, *Infant Baptism,* p. 6). This is a "remarkable" passage in support of infant baptism according to Miller.

- But consider the following:

(1). There is no actual reference to baptism in the passage.

> So it cannot be regarded as a proof of infant baptism; at best this passage can only be claimed to be consistent with the paedobaptist view. Murray states that "It does not, of course, offer stringent proof of infant baptism" (*Christian Baptism*, p. 65).

> Some paedobaptist scholars based on the practice of proselyte baptism and on Jewish ritual language conclude that this passage shows that children born to Christian parents were *not* baptized because they were already considered "holy." Oscar Cullman states of 1 Cor. 7:14: "This passage proves neither child nor adult baptism. Both are unnecessary for the children of *Christian parents*, since Paul represents here the opinion that in their case sanctification through birth alone suffices. Even if this is not entirely certain, this is probably the correct exegesis of the passage" (*Baptism in the New Testament*, pp. 25, 44).

(2). The context of 1 Cor. 7:14 is not the covenantal status of children of believing parents, but the problem of a mixed marriage between believer and unbeliever.

- The question before Paul is whether a believer ought to separate from (divorce) his/her unbelieving spouse to escape spiritual defilement and an unequal yoke (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

> We cannot know for sure, but it seems that the question arose on the basis of such passages as Isa 52:11 and, perhaps, the example in Ezra:

> And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it. (Ezra 10:2-4)

> According to this OT example, covenant members were to divorce their heathen wives and their children because they defiled (made unclean) not only the member, but all Israel.

> Paul's response indicated that this OT example on mixed marriages does not apply to mixed marriages in the NT administration of the covenant. Here is a note of discontinuity between the OT and NT in reference to the family, God's covenant, and the covenant community.

- Paul's answer is that the believer should stay in the marriage, if the unbeliever is willing to abide in it, because the believer "sanctifies" the unbelieving spouse.

> This is a difficult statement to interpret; note it is not wise to appeal to such a difficult passage to establish your doctrine of baptism; look to those "that speak more clearly."

> It at least signifies that the marriage is legitimate for a Christian; it is not inherently defiling.

> In the OT, according to Ezra, it was defiling—the union with the heathen unbeliever defiled the marriage and Israel.

> In the NT, it is not defiling—the presence of the believer consecrates the whole marriage; neither does it defile the covenant community of which the believer is a member.

- Note: This indicates a greater degree, covenantally speaking, of separation between the family and the church in the NT era than in the OT. Although there was the nuclear family in the OT, the church itself was comprised of one extended family—the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

> If it were not the case, that the unbeliever is sanctified, then it would follow that the children of such a union would be "unclean," and Christians would need to separate from them as well (Ezra 10:3), but that is not necessary, says Paul, because they are "holy". It seems that Paul is confident that the "holiness" of children in a mixed marriage would be accepted by the Corinthians.

(3). What is avowed concerning the child is also avowed concerning the unbelieving spouse.

- "sanctified" (ἁγιάζω) and "holy" (ἅγιος) come from the same Greek root meaning that which is set apart to God, consecrated, holy, sacred, or pure.

- This concept of consecration and holiness is applied by Paul to both the children and unbeliever. So if you claim that this text proves that children of believers are part of "the cleansed and consecrated community, the church," then you are making the equal claim for the unbelieving spouse. They both share the holiness of covenantal standing and privilege in the church and are entitled to baptism solely on the basis of the faith of the husband/wife or parent.

- But Paul is not talking about the relationship of this family to the church, but to one another. He is asserting that the presence of the believer sanctifies both the spouse and the children. And by virtue of this it cannot be claimed that the marriage is unclean; it is a God-sanctioned relationship.

(4). A believer in a mixed marriage sets the entire family apart unto God.

- According to BAGD (pp. 10-11) the words "sanctified" and "holy" in 1 Cor. 7:14 refer to the fact that the spouse and children are consecrated to God; that is, they are included in a circle, a union, that is holy, i.e., set apart as a family to God. The presence of the believer sets the whole family apart to God.

- The family is a covenantal institution under God. The believing husband or wife brings that covenantal institution into a relationship with God. The family's or the child's relationship to the church is not at all in view in 1 Cor. 7:14.

- The presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer exerts a gracious influence in the lives of the spouse and children that has the potential to lead them to salvation by faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 7:16).

* This text has nothing to do with baptism or the status of the children of believing parents in regard to the covenant community of the church. This passage is another weak reed for the paedobaptist to lean on.

* These 4 are the primary NT passages that are brought forth in an effort to support infant baptism from the NT. I will now proceed to note briefly some other texts that are employed in the service of infant baptism.

5. Acts 21:21

- We are told by some that this verse proves, "makes immediately apparent" (Wilson), that the Jewish Christians circumcised and baptized their infants. And since both Paul and James endorse the practice, we have apostolic sanction for infant baptism.

- The line of reasoning employed is clever, but extremely tenuous, in my opinion. Of course, all that the passage *speaks* of is *circumcision*, nothing about baptism.

- Paul did not oppose the continuance of Jewish practices and customs, if they were not made mandatory for the NT administration—as necessary for salvation and/or sanctification. Circumcision was one of these. It was a racial identity with Abraham and there was no harm in its continuance among the Jews, if it was not required of Gentiles. cf. Gal. 6:15.

- This was a period of transition, and the relationship between the OT administration and the NT administration was still being revealed and understood. Paul saw things clearly, others did not.

- Actually, this passage helps us to answer a paedobaptist argument that is used against believer baptism.

> It is said, that if baptists are right in their doctrine of baptism, then this means that children have been put out of the covenant. Such a drastic shift would have created a controversy and outcry which would certainly have found its way into the NT documents. But there is not a hint of it. Therefore, we can conclude that the covenantal status of children remained the same.

> This passage shows us why there was not outcry from the Jews—they continued to circumcise their sons just as they had always done. For them nothing had changed. (Note: Does not their continued practice suggest a view of believer baptism rather than infant baptism? I am told that Messianic Jews today continue to practice circumcision, but adhere to believer baptism).

> There would have been no outcry from the Gentiles because their sons never had circumcision, and their children never had covenantal status.

6. Romans 11:16-24

- The argument: The Israelites were connected to the olive tree by birth and circumcision. If they did not manifest fruit in due time, they were cut off. Since Paul is warning Gentiles in the Christian era, he must be building on the fact that Gentiles are connected in the same way—"*Children of believing parents grow on the tree*" (Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations*, p. 92). If these children do not bear fruit, they too will be cut off. So the branches represent covenantal standing conferred by an initiatory rite—OT circumcision, and NT baptism. If Jews were connected by circumcision at birth, so must Christians be connected by baptism at birth. The Master Gardener does not change His ways!

- An ingenious argument to say the least! But its very ingenuity (novelty and cleverness) makes it suspect.

- Consider the following:

(1). The context of Romans 9-11 deals with the problem of Israel's rejection of the Messiah. If Jesus is the Messiah, why haven't the Jews, the chosen people, believed on Him?

- Paul answers from three perspectives: 1) Divine sovereignty, 9:6-29; 2) Human responsibility 9:30-10:21; and, 3) God's Plan and Purpose, 11:1-32.

- In regard to God's plan Paul says: 1) Israel's rejection of Christ is not total, 11:1-10; 2) Israel's hardening is not arbitrary: salvation of the Gentiles, jealousy of the Jews; 3) Israel's fall is not final, 11:25-32.

- Rom. 11:16-26 must be seen in the full context of Romans—justification by faith apart from the works of the law; and that salvation is sovereignly administered. The contrast in this passage is between faith and unbelief (vv. 20, 23, 30). It is not legitimate in my mind to force the text to speak to the baptism issue.

> If it says anything about baptism and covenantal standing it is this: In the OT the Jews as natural branches were given covenantal status by birth (i.e., naturally). In the NT the Gentiles as wild branches were given covenantal standing in a different way, they were grafted in by faith (v. 20) by the direct agency of God (Rom. 9:6-29); and now so are the Jews (Rom. 10:1, 9-12)!

> This is the covenantal shift of administration that we have been advocating in these lectures: in the OT administration of types and shadows, covenantal standing was by birth into the family of Israel; while in the NT administration of fulfillment, covenantal standing is by the new birth into the new Israel, the blood-redeemed body of Christ who is *the* Seed of Abraham.

(2). Paul is dealing with two entities here: Israel and the Gentiles.

-"Thou" is singular here: i.e. a corporate usage, Israel considered as a distinct people.

- Paul's is explaining the current status of Israel as a people in relation to what God is doing among the Gentiles. The Jews have been cut off because of unbelief, and the Gentiles have been grafted in because faith. This does not negate the individual nature of repentance and faith, but only that Paul is dealing with the problem of Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. But it does caution us about using the passage to teach that "children of believing parents grow on the tree."

- The olive tree represents the church as the covenant community of God. Here in Romans 11 we see that it is the same tree, but a new administration. cf. Eph. 2:11-3:11; Jer. 31:31.

(3). The contention that this breaking off of the branches shows a covenantal connection through infant baptism that is brought to an end by the child's rejection of God's covenant is not required.

- I don't believe that Paul is dealing with individual apostasy in the passage. But if one wants to press this, then the baptist has a biblically valid explanation:

> The branches that are broken off represent that class that is 1) addressed in the Book of Hebrews (3:14); 2) those spoken of by Jesus in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13); those that Paul identifies as false brethren; those that John says: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19).

> All these texts refer to persons who made a profession of faith and entered the church, but later proved to be hypocrites.

> Baptists do not believe that membership in the visible church is limited to the regenerate, i.e., those that men can certify to having saving faith. We believe that membership in the church is for those who profess repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus and who give proper evidence of a desire to follow Christ in their life. Such are baptized and admitted to the fellowship of the Lord's Supper. Baptist standards of membership are not attempts to construct a church were all the

members are regenerate—such is beyond the ability of fallible men. These standards are based on the teachings of our Lord and Apostles that the church is a fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ intent on carrying out His Great Commission.

7. 1 Corinthians 10:2

- The argument: All Israel was baptized into Moses when they went through the Red Sea. This OT "baptism" would have included the infants and children of the Israelites. Here, then, is a biblical example of the baptism of infants of believing parents.

- Consider the following:

(1). The context of the passage is a warning against spiritual pride.

- Paul is using Israel as a example to warn the Corinthians: In spite of the many spiritual privileges enjoyed by the Israelites, with most of them God was not well-pleased, and they were overthrown in the wilderness for their unbelief and murmuring.

> To be baptized into Moses means they were joined to Moses and participated in the blessings attending the followers of God's appointed deliverer. This was accomplished at the Red Sea when they were delivered from Pharaoh and separated from Egypt.

- Paul's purpose in the text is not to teach on the covenantal status of the children of Christians!

- His focus in the text is on the "fathers" that were baptized.

> These are the same ones who were overthrown in the wilderness—all males 20 years and over.

> These are the ones he is using as his example. To press the passage to mean that Paul is here endorsing infant baptism is a serious distortion of the biblical text. It is the kind of approach that leaves us with a Bible that can be used to prove nearly anything.

(2). The paedobaptist use of the passage establishes much more than just infant baptism.

- The argument is that since infants of believers (how many of these "fathers" were "believers," I care not to venture a guess) were baptized into Moses, than infants of Christians have a right to be baptized into Christ.

- The same problem for paedobaptists presents itself here as it did in their argument for household baptism: all connected to the households of Israel, regardless of age or spiritual condition were baptized, not just infants.

- But there is more to contend with in this passage, for we are also told in Scripture that "a mixed multitude" also went out of Egypt with Israel and also passed through the Sea with them—were baptized into Moses (Ex. 12:38; Num. 11:4). According to the commentary on *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, ed. by J. H. Hertz, the mixed multitude were:

> "The mass of non-Israelite strangers, including slaves and prisoners of war, who took advantage of the panic to escape Egypt. They were not a desirable class of associates, as appears from Num. xi, 4, 5" (p. 259).

> On paedobaptist principles of interpretation and application, such a mixed multitude is endorsed by Paul for baptism here in 1 Cor. 10:2!

8. Ephesians 6:1, 4; Colossians 3:20-21

- The argument is stated fully by Murray: "In these passages, the apostle Paul includes the children among those who are addressed as saints.... It is necessary, therefore, to understand that the children are reckoned as saints in terms of the salutation in both epistles and that they are not regarded as belonging to any different category in respect of the Saviourhood and Lordship of Christ. Everything points to the conclusion that children, equally with parents and servants and masters, belong to the body of Christ and are fully embraced in the fellowship of the saints. If children were thus recognised and received in apostolic churches, they were recognised as possessing the status of which baptism is the sign and seal. If this is so, there is no reason why such children should not have received the sign and seal of their status and privilege" (*Christian Baptism*, pp. 63-64).

- Consider the following:

(1). The context of the passage is dealing with the matter of submission to one another in the Lord.

- There is nothing in the passage about baptism or instructions concerning its proper administration. The fact that it is used at all reveals the paedobaptist need to scour the NT in search of some texts to show that infant baptism is a NT ordinance.

(2). These texts do not necessarily provide evidence for infant baptism, even if we grant the legitimacy of the paedobaptist argument that the children addressed are "saints."

- The paedobaptist argument only proves that those who are old enough to hear, understand, and obey Paul's words are considered saints; since the proof of their status is that Paul *addressed them.*

> Do they contend that Paul was addressing infants?

> Paedobaptists argue that the NT requirement for faith for baptism does not apply to infants, because they are incapable of understanding or obeying them. Well then, infants are not responsible to obey their parents either, and Paul can't be addressing them.

(3). If then, the children addressed are old enough to hear, understand, and obey Paul's admonition, then they are old enough to obey the Gospel and be baptized.

- The term for "children" (τέκνον) used here covers a wide range of years, and applies to any children or young people still in their father's household. The 5th commandment never cease to be an obligation...

- The children Paul addresses are "in the Lord," so we may conclude that they were believers.

(4). All children are responsible to the moral law, and should be taught the duties of the fifth commandment.

- The fact that Paul addresses these children, does not prove that they are the "saints" of the salutation.

- It may be that the Ephesians and the Colossians took their unbaptized children to church with them, and Paul, knowing that, is instructing them to help bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

- Baptists also take their children to church, and hope that the ministers will note them and address a timely word of exhortation to them. Baptists do consider their children to be a part of the church (not as baptized communing members) through the covenantal headship and membership of their parents.

II. General Arguments

- We have already dealt with the theological and related arguments from the covenant of grace, circumcision, the nature of the church, these from specific NT texts. We conclude this lecture with a consideration of two arguments of a more general sense.

1. The Argument from Expanded Blessing

- The argument: If the OT children of believers were granted the covenant sign and membership in the church, it cannot be that in the NT era of expanded blessings that they are denied it. How could it be that the children of Christians are less privileged than the children of the Jews? Thus, on this principle of increased blessings for the NT era we have the right to baptize our children.

- This argument is closely related to the argument from the covenant; but as a separate argument it strength is found in its emotional appeal—children are very special to us and as parents we want to give our children every possible advantage.

- The supposition is that believer baptism denies children the advantage and blessings of baptism, so it should be rejected.

- Consider the following:

(1). What are the blessings that are supposedly being denied?

- *Not the blessing of Christian parents*. This is an essential and indispensable blessing that children need!

> > Is it the water of baptism or the faith and obedience of godly parents that mediates the blessings of God's covenant to children? If a child is brought for baptism by nominal or careless Christian parents, will the baptism suffice to communicate the blessings of the covenant?
>
> >To illustrate with a hypothetical situation: If paedobaptist parents had to part with an infant child or theirs prior to being able to have it baptized, and were given the following choices as to those who raise their children, whom would they choose: 1) A couple that believed in infant baptism, but were careless Christians who did not understand the biblical duties of parents and planned to send the child to public school, etc.; 2) A baptist couple who were godly Christians who were knowledgeable of and committed to the duties of parenting, including giving the child a Christian education, etc.

- *Not the blessing of being brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*. That is not dependent on baptism but parental obedience to teach, train, admonish, and pray for their children.

- *Not the blessing of being part of the covenant community in a real and significant way*. Baptist take there children to church. Their children are exposed to the ministry of the Word, the prayers of the church, the love and example of other members, and the spiritual gifts of the body, in the same manner as paedobaptist children.

- But, supposedly, they are denied the privilege of an external covenantal standing in the church (unless you believe in baptismal regeneration, it must be something external that is conferred); a position of privilege.

> > But, I ask again, What specific privileges are baptist children who are in godly homes and in faithful baptist churches denied? What advantages do paedobaptist children in similar circumstances have over them? What advantages do paedobaptist children who are in unfaithful homes and churches have over them? Or are such children the ones really at a disadvantage?
>
> > Does grace come to the child from infant baptism or from the *faith* of the parents and the church? Beasley-Murray states: "To say that a child needs the grace of God like mother-love is undoubtedly true; but the point at issue is whether that grace comes in infant baptism" (*Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 372).
>
> > The sacramentalist has an answer (wrong though it be!) for the baptist by confessing his belief that infant baptism cleanses the child from sin and regenerates him or her.

> But what does the Reformed paedobaptist say who rejects (rightly) baptismal regeneration? I've never heard a good, biblically based answer to that. They put forth the claim that it shows the child that they belong to God (in what sense?), have a place in His covenant community (what kind of place?), and that, "his promises have indeed been given to us. The baptism does not guarantee that we have possession of what is promised. That can only be guaranteed by faith. But the baptism can assure us that faith is enough" (Mark E. Ross, "Baptism and Circumcision as Signs and Seals," *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge, p. 109).

> Speaking of the unbaptized children in a Christian home, Beasley-Murray says: "Such children are brought up in the environment of faith and prayer, at home and in the Church, and are under the constant instruction of the Word of God. They are the most privileged children of all time, under the shadow of the wings of God and His Christ, being prepared in the midst of his people for his Kingdom of grace and glory. Recognizing to the full the blessings of such a situation, it is a mistake not to recognize its limitations. Birth in a Christian home is a priceless privilege, but it is not a guarantee of inheritance in the Kingdom of God. In the inscrutable providence of God, neither all the members of Christian families repent and believe the Gospel, to be incorporated into Christ and the Church, nor, mercifully, are all the members of unbelieving families doomed to irreparable loss. For election cuts across the distinctions created by the Church's institutions.... God is good, his Word is good, and his grace is ever about our children; our chief responsibility is to see that we, and they, hear the Word and live. For as Paul said, 'Neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation' (*Baptism in the New Testament*, pp. 343-344).

(2). Infant Baptism denies a child the true grace of Christian baptism that accompanies the reception of baptism in obedience to Christ and by faith in His promise.

- The true expanded blessing of the NT is the privilege to stand on this side of the cross, and to personally confess one's faith in and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ in baptism.

- Baptism is one of the ordinances of the NT that according to the Shorter Catechism are effectual means of grace "only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that *by faith receive them*" (Q91).

- "And let us not withhold from our children the joy and expanded privilege never granted to the children of circumcision: *that of obeying Christ's command to all men everywhere to be baptized as confessing disciples upon their own personal repentance.* Paedobaptist parents and pastors must realize that infant baptism robs infants of their responsibility and privilege to obey a clear command of Christ for themselves. Rather, let us proclaim the gospel of grace to our children, begging God for mercy upon them, trusting in His goodness, until they come to Christ on their own and receive the blessed baptism of disciples alone, publicly identifying themselves as followers of their dear savior" (Fred Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone*, p. 185).

- Note: many baptized as infants, later see the error of infant baptism when they come of age, and seek true Christian baptism as believers.

2. <u>The Argument from History.</u>

- The argument: Infant baptism, as can be seen from church history, has been the universal practice of the church since the days of the Apostles. It is inconceivable that such a testimony to the practice of infant baptism could be so early and widespread in the church, if it was not a tradition received from the Apostles.

> "This furnishes an argument of irresistible force in favour of the divine authority of infant baptism" (Millller, *Infant Baptism*).

> Dabney states more modestly: "This current and early testimony is relied on, not as proving by itself that we are warranted to baptize infants, but as raising a strong probability that it was an apostolic usage, and thus supporting our scriptural argument" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 792).

- Consider the following:

(1). Baptism is a doctrinal issue that can only be determined on biblical grounds.

- I find it surprising that the sons and daughters of the Reformers who valiantly fought to rid the church of the unwritten apostolic traditions claimed by Rome, should put so much stock in church tradition to establish a doctrine as important as the subjects of baptism. The way they frame their argument sounds suspiciously close to the argument of Rome—that there are Apostolic doctrines and practices not specifically revealed in the NT that were passed down by tradition from the Apostles.

- For Reformed believers the standard is this: "The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture" (WCF I-X; cf. LBC and Savoy Declaration).

- Historical theology has its place; it can help us in our theological task, give a broader and more historical perspective, etc., but it is not authoritative.

(2). Infant baptism is not documented in the church until the end of the second and beginning of the third centuries—A.D. 200-250.

- The earliest discussions of baptism reflected the catechumen and believer baptism. "For the time before this [A.D. 200 and 250] we do not possess a single piece of information that gives concrete testimony to the existence of infant baptism" (Kurt Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?*, p. 101).

- *The Didache* (dated sometime around the beginning of the first century) contains our earliest reference to baptism in the post-apostolic writings: "Now concerning baptism, baptize as follows: after you have reviewed these things [i.e., with the one to be baptized], baptize 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' in running water. (2) But if you have no running water, then baptize in some other water; and if you are not able to baptize in cold water, then do so in warm. (3) But if you have neither, then pour water on the head three times 'in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.' (4) And before the baptism, let the one baptizing and the one who is to be baptized fast, as well as any others who are able. Also, you must instruct the one who is to be baptized to fast for one or two days beforehand" (*The Apostolic Fathers*, 2nd ed.; ed by J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, p. 153).

- Infant baptism did not become the accepted practice of the church until the 4th and 5th centuries, largely due to the influence of Augustine.

(3). The basis for infant baptism from its earliest inception was found in the need of the child to be cleansed of sin.

- In other words, the doctrinal basis for infant baptism from its beginning was not "the covenant" but salvation by baptism; i.e., baptismal regeneration. No infant who died unbaptized could enter the kingdom of heaven.

- B. B. Warfield demonstrates this in his article, "The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation" (*Works, vol. IX, Studies in Theology*, pp. 411ff).

- The doctrine of the covenant as the basis for infant baptism was not fully developed until Zwingli and the time of the protestant Reformation.

- It is, therefore, misleading when Presbyterian paedobaptists claim the practice of infant baptism in the history of the church in support of *their* practice of infant baptism. The church from 200 -1500 baptized infants for an entirely different reason than the Presbyterians who have done so since 1500.

- When the church returned to *sola scriptura* at the Reformation, their were two lines of doctrine that developed in reference to infant baptism: one based primarily on the NT (the commands and practice of Christ and His apostles) and one based primarily on the OT (Abrahamic Covenant and circumcision).

- Anglicans and Lutherans still baptize for the salvation of their infants.

Conclusion

- We have examined the arguments derived from specific NT texts to prove infant baptism. Even if their arguments are possible, they certainly are not "necessary," and *that* is the standard of Reformed theology for deducing doctrines and practices not explicitly set forth. I do not believe that any of the texts they use in the NT to support infant baptism teach any such practice. All of the texts they use are wrested from their context and made to carry a load that the weight of close scrutiny will not bear.

- The paedobaptist is left in the unenviable position of not having a single NT text that unambiguously supports the practice of infant baptism as a NT ordinance. The paedobaptist interpretation of these texts is neither "good" nor "necessary"! As far as infant baptism is concerning, the NT is silent.

- We also considered the general arguments from expanded blessing and history. These too are found to be wanting in so far as being a compelling reason to adopt a practice on which the NT is silent.

- In our first lecture we made a case for a biblical theology of the covenants that supports believer baptism. In our second lecture we set forth an understanding of circumcision that we believe is more biblically accurate than the paedobaptist's view, and sought to show the relationship between circumcision and baptism from a covenantal perspective that requires believer baptism. In the third lecture we considered the status of the children of believers that is defined by their place in the covenantal institution of the family and is true to the NT doctrine of the visible church. In our fourth lecture, we gave the biblical case for believer baptism from the NT Scriptures. In our fifth, we examined and critiqued the paedobaptist arguments from the NT and found them flawed and inconclusive at best.

- Ultimately, each will have to make his own judgment concerning the subject of infant baptism. I challenge you to search the Scriptures to see if this thing called infant baptism be so. If you are convinced beyond all doubt (Rom. 14:22-23) and are "fully persuaded" in your own mind (Rom. 14:5) that it is a divine ordinance, then you will need to baptize your infants (households?). But if you are like many us who have made a diligent search of the Scriptures, read the arguments of the paedobaptists, and compared these with the Scriptures and found the case for infant baptism wanting, you will desire to proceed on the sure testimony of Scripture and the united testimony of all Christians everywhere that the baptism of professed believers is the NT ordinance of baptism and practice it for yourselves (if you have never been baptized upon profession of faith) and for your children.

- Although polemics are impossible to avoid in discussing a subject like infant baptism, we do not mean disrespect to our paedobaptist brothers any more than they mean it when they set forth their view and criticize baptists. Here in, I have set forth a reason for the hope that lies within me that believer baptism, and only believer baptism, is true Christian baptism.

Lectures on

Baptism and the Covenant

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