



infant

BAPTISM

Does the Bible Teach It?

GREGG STRAWBRIDGE

Infant Baptism
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Gregg Strawbridge, *Infant Baptism: Does the Bible Teach It?*

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Introduction

Does the Bible teach that the infant children of Christians are to be baptized? Or, was baptism only to be given to “believers” who consciously profess allegiance to Christ? Resolving this question took me over ten years of interaction. For those that find themselves in difficult circumstances over this issue, I can understand. By the end of that ten-year stretch, I understood the issue pretty clearly. I had even written a lengthy study guide to help people see both sides of the issue.¹ In 1998, I finally came to believe in covenantal infant baptism and had my young three daughters baptized. This was tough after ministering in a Baptist church for ten years. In the process of my change of conviction, I wrote a study called, *Covenantal Infant Baptism: An Outlined Defense with Critical Reviews* for the other elders of my church. They requested that I provide them with Biblical reasons for my change of views.

They probably got more than they bargained for. I am amazed that the online versions of *Covenantal Infant Baptism* and earlier revisions of this work have been so widely read. It

¹This was entitled, *A Handbook on Baptism: Essays and Resources*.

has been very gratifying to hear testimonies that these studies helped readers. And they're free!² I say to those that have contacted me that there is 1 blood, sweat, and many tears on every page.

In this short study I hope to provide you with a thorough Biblical study on the topics that were most critical for me in working through this issue. I will be defending that the Bible does indeed teach that the infant children of Christians are to be baptized.³ The view of baptism I will be defending is that which is supported by Reformed theology, as expressed in the great evangelical creeds and confessions in the 16th and 17th Centuries. I hold to those doctrines of grace which are expressed in the great Reformation confessions (Genevan, Helvetic, Belgic, Westminster, etc.) and catechisms (Heidelberg, Westminster Larger & Shorter). Many of the greatest minds of the Christian church have written and defended these confessions, including John Calvin, Zacharius Ursinus, Francis Turretin, Samuel Rutherford, Thomas Goodwin, Thomas Watson, John Owen, Richard Baxter, Jonathan Edwards, Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, Robert L. Dabney, Benjamin B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, Cornelius Van Til, and many, many others to this very day. I find my place here on the theological map, too.

²These and related publications are online at www.wordmp3.com/baptism.

³I will contrast the "Baptist" position (believer's, professor's, or confessor's baptism) with the "paedobaptist" or infant baptism position (*paidion* in Greek means "child" or "infant"). I will use "Baptist" to mean the "believer Baptist" *baptismal practice* of many denominations, not a particular denomination.

Isn't That Roman Catholic?

Surely, it need not be said that these confessional statements and the great defenders of them stand in opposition to Roman Catholicism's understanding and practice of baptism.⁴ These documents and their writers and defenders teach that according to the Scriptures *salvation is by the free grace of God alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone—sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solo Christo, soli Deo gloria!*

Infant baptism is not a distinctly Roman Catholic practice. A great number of Protestants practice infant baptism, perhaps even a majority. In light of Reformation teaching, it is most unfair (and fallacious) when Baptists accuse the Reformed view of really just believing what Rome teaches. But this has often been done. For example, one thinks of works like John Gill's, "*Infant-Baptism: A Part and Pillar of Popery*," or John Q. Adam's, "*Baptists the Only Thorough Religious Reformers*," in which it is said that infant baptism is a "human invention" and it is one of the traditions which the Protestant Reformers brought from Rome. On the contrary, the Reformed faith repudiates Romanism's errors, that's precisely why it's "*Reformed*" and "*Protestant*."

In terms of church history, the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are "Catholic" — meaning, universally held in the Christian Church. Yet, we all agree they are not distinctively Roman or popish. It is the same with the

⁴Roman Catholicism teaches that baptism by the Roman Church regenerates *in and of itself* and apart from faith. See the Council of Trent, 5th Session, decrees 4-5, from the year 1546.

doctrine of baptism and the inclusion of infant children of Christians. It is catholic, in that was the practice of the whole church from the earliest recorded church history, until the rise of Anabaptism [re-baptism] in the 1525. It is not distinctively Roman or papal and Reformed theology provides the clearest explanation of it. On history, consider the summary of Samuel Miller of old Princeton (1835).

If the doctrine of our Baptist brethren be correct - that is, if infant baptism be a corruption and a nullity - then it follows, from the foregoing historical statements, most inevitably, that the ordinance of baptism was lost for fifteen hundred years: yes, entirely lost, from the apostolic age till the sixteenth century. For there was manifestly [according to a Baptist historian], “no society, during that long period of fifteen centuries, but what was in the habit of baptizing infants.” God had no church, then, in the world for so long a period! Can this be admitted? Surely not by anyone who believes in the perpetuity and indestructibility of the household of faith.⁵

Is Baptism an Essential Belief?

Before considering the Biblical information on baptism, it will be important to remember the relative place of one's

⁵*Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable: and Baptism by Sprinkling or Affusion the Most Suitable and Edifying Mode* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1835), at www.swrb.com..

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view of baptism. Whether one holds the Baptist or the Reformed infant baptism position, it is not an *essential doctrine* or a *cardinal belief*. Among evangelical and Reformed believers, this discussion is an “intermural debate.” Or to use the language of Paul, baptism is not listed as a doctrine of “first importance” (*protos*) (1 Cor. 15:3; cf. 1:13). C.S. Lewis’ insightful metaphor is instructive. He writes of *mere Christianity*,

It [essential Christianity] is more like a hall out of which doors open into several rooms. If I can bring anyone into that hall I shall have done what I attempted. But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals. . . .even in the hall, you must begin trying to obey the rules which are common to the whole house. And above all you must be asking which door is the true one; not which pleases you best by its paint and paneling. In plain language, the question should never be: “Do I like that kind of service?” but “Are these doctrines true: Is holiness here? Does my conscience move me towards this? Is my reluctance to knock at this door due to my pride, or my mere taste, or my personal dislike of this particular door-keeper?” *When you have reached your own room, be kind to those who have chosen different doors and to those who are still in the hall. If they are wrong they need your prayers all the more; and if they are your enemies, then you are under orders to pray for them. That is one of the rules common to the whole house.*⁶

⁶Preface to *Mere Christianity* (Westwood, NJ: Macmillan/Barbour & Co., 1952).

As Lewis implies, and the Bible prescribes, it is the duty of every Christian to be diligent in study and charitable to those who cannot see it as we do. We should move to another room only when we believe it is the truer one.

While it is true that one's view of infant baptism is not *essential* as a doctrinal position, our practice in this area often affects our lives practically. Most Baptist churches will exclude from their membership those who were only baptized as infants. Moreover, there many aspects of faith and life which are shaped by the deeper foundations of infant baptism. These will be discussed later in the book.

Baptism in the Book

The early Anabaptists who first practiced re-baptism in 1525 said infant baptism is “a senseless, blasphemous abomination, contrary to all Scripture . . .”⁷ The Anabaptist Schleithem Confession, written under the leadership of Michael Sattler of Stauffen, Germany in 1527 “excluded all infant baptism, the greatest and first abomination of the pope.”⁸ One modern Baptist writer, surely representative of many more such writers, joins the above chorus in saying “baptizing babies is an unscriptural and anti-scriptural innovation, and an abomination of untold enormity.”⁹

Well, I do not have any trouble admitting that in the Bible the words “infant” and “baptism” are not found together. But, that is a long way from accepting the claim that such a practice is the “first abomination of the pope” or an “anti-

⁷“Letters to Thomas Muntzer: Grebel” in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, ed. George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1967), 81.

⁸See *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation*, Mark Noll, Ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) for a very informative introduction and discussion. Quotation from John Howard Yoder’s version prepared for *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973).

⁹T.E. Watson, *Should Babies Be Baptized?* (London: Grace Publications, 1995), 115.

scriptural innovation, and an abomination of untold enormity.”

Where do we start with the Biblical information to settle this difference? Let me illustrate the issue: I received a paper from a dear pastor, theologian and friend arguing against the infant baptism view. Here was his method. He provided a short summary of each New Testament passage on baptism concluding with, “No infants were baptized here.” It was as if he said, “O.K. here are the rules. We’ll look at all baptism verses and if the words ‘infant’ and ‘baptism’ show up then your position might be a possibility. But if they don’t then your view is wrong.”

There is no *explicit* statement about the “infant baptism” of a Christian’s child. That is granted. *But neither is there an explicit case of a Christian’s child who grows up and is baptized as a believer.* This fact must be acknowledged by both sides if we are to advance the debate beyond a shouting match. There is no explicit material on baptizing the children of Christians. This is really the issue. We all agree about what to do with adult converts. But what do we do with the children of Christians? We must think beyond a surface scan of the words of the Bible to resolve this.

Douglas Wilson’s thoughts are very helpful here:

During my years as a convinced baptist, my approach was the same as what I have heard numerous times from others. If you want to understand Christian baptism, the thinking goes, then simply look up every place that Scripture speaks to the subject—get a concordance and look up baptism, baptized, baptist, and so on. . . . We must also consider what the Bible teaches about children,

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generations, promises, covenants, olive trees, olive shoots, descendants. . .¹⁰

Consider this another way. We would not want to limit the authority of the Word of God to its explicit declarations. (Is abortion permissible because the word “abortion” is not in the text of the Bible? Of course not.) Is the doctrine of the Trinity judged to be false because the term is not in the Bible? No. The God-breathed Word is fully authoritative “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” both explicitly and implicitly (2 Tim. 3:16). If the Scripture was given “for teaching,” the question should be whether the Word *teaches* that the children of believers are to be baptized by virtue of their God-ordained relationship to a believing parent. (When the term “infant baptism” is used it is just shorthand to express this and the consequence - that those born into believing households are then to be baptized in infancy.)

It is true that there is no statement of “infant baptism” in just those terms. However, let us ask another question of the text of Bible: Is there any evidence of believers’ households being baptized because of the faith of the head of the household?—Considering this question, the Bible student is forced to conclude that there are clear statements about households being baptized. What do these passages *teach*?

¹⁰See his argument in *To a Thousand Generations: Infant Baptism—Covenant Mercy for the People of God* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996). This passage is cited from “Baptism and Children: Their Place in the Old and New Testaments” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003).

Examples of Baptism in the New Testament

Those who deny the validity of infant baptism are usually quick to cite the examples of baptism (often selected examples) in the New Testament to support the contention that “only believers were baptized.” Let’s consider all of the examples of Christian baptism recorded throughout the apostolic history of the church, beginning in Acts. Do these examples indicate that *only individual self-conscious, professing believers are to be baptized* or do they indicate that the *households of believers are to be baptized* because of the head of household’s faith? If the latter is true then one only needs to decide if those later born/adopted into believing households are to receive the sign of baptism.

The basic outline of Acts is indicated in the first chapter. The gospel of Christ goes forth: “You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8).¹¹ The patterns of baptism follow this expansion.

1. We find that the initial occasion of baptism in Acts was the Jews at Pentecost in Jerusalem. We are told that this festival gathering was of “devout men” (2:5), “men of Judea” (2:14), “men of Israel” (2:22), etc. Hence, it appears that *only men* were baptized on this occasion—“So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that

¹¹The *italized* print in Scripture citations (NASB) represent points I am seeking to emphasize.

day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).¹² This event was in fulfillment of the promised coming of the Spirit of God (John 15:26). In the context it is stated that this promise was given “for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself” (2:39).

2. We find that the gospel crossed into Samaria, following the pattern of expansion (1:8). Philip was “preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” and “they were being baptized, men and women alike” (8:12). This is the first passage in which the baptism of women is explicitly mentioned. Luke seems to emphasize that not only men were being baptized, but women, too. Perhaps this emphasis is because only men were baptized at the first new covenant baptism event at the Jewish Pentecostal feast. The Samaritan passage, however, is focused on the evil intent of Simon the Sorcerer who offered the apostles money to receive the miraculous powers they had by the Holy Spirit. The text says that “even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip” (8:13). According to Justin Martyr, Simon became a great heretic and an opponent of Christianity.¹³

3. The next person connected to baptism is a devout eunuch from Ethiopia who had “come to Jerusalem to

¹²Luke’s use of 3000 “souls” (*psyche*) need not be taken as a generic term for both genders, since he often uses this term to emphasize the spiritual nature of what is happening to the person(s) involved, e.g., 2:27, 2:43, 3:23, 14:22, 15:24.

¹³Justin’s (A.D. 110-165) reference to this is in the First Apology, chapter 26; however, some historians question whether Justin was right about this.

worship” (8:27). He was reading the passage around Isaiah 53:7, “Like a lamb that is led to slaughter . . .” “Beginning from this Scripture he [Philip] preached Jesus to him” (8:35). The eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” (8:36). Perhaps the eunuch’s emphatic request is because Philip explained the new covenant sign—a sign, not for Jews only, but for all nations, and especially for eunuchs. Only a few verses before the text Philip explained, we read, “Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him” (Is. 52:15). And only a few chapters later we read a new covenant prophecy, “Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, ‘The LORD will surely separate me from His people.’ Neither let the eunuch say, ‘Behold, I am a dry tree’” (Is. 56:3). This entire baptismal episode takes on more significance when it is remembered that eunuchs were shut out of the old covenant assembly (Dt. 23:1). Most, if not all, did not have the sign of covenant inclusion, circumcision.

4. In chapter nine we are told of the conversion of the Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul, after falling to the ground and being temporarily blinded, “arose and was baptized” (9:18). The Lord told the timid Ananias, the one who apparently baptized Paul, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake” (9:15-16). Hence, before the gospel proceeds to the Gentiles, the apostle to the Gentiles is converted and baptized.

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5. The gospel first crossed to pure Gentile territory with the episode regarding Cornelius in chapter ten. The household of Cornelius was baptized (10:48). The text of Acts tells us regarding the God-fearer Cornelius, “you will be saved, you and all your household” (11:14). The emphasis of the text is that the Gentiles could be saved, just as the Jews. The “unclean” people could receive the *Holy* Spirit and also be saved by Messiah Jesus. Remember that because of Peter’s prejudice, God provided him with a vivid object lesson—an unclean buffet—to orient him to accept Gentile believers. The very voice of the Lord declared, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (10:15).

6. “Lydia, from the city of Thyatira,” was saved by the grace of God, as “the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul” (16:14). Verse 15 tells us that after “she and her household had been baptized she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us.” We are informed in verse 40 that after their imprisonment in Philippi they went to Lydia’s house and “saw the brethren” “encouraged them and departed.”

7. In the same chapter (Acts 16), the Philippian Jailer’s household was baptized. Luke takes some time explaining this. Why? It appears that the Jailer was the first recorded baptism of an outright pagan. The eunuch worshiped in Jerusalem. Cornelius was a God-fearer and devout. Lydia “worshiped God” (16:14). But the Jailer was about to kill himself before Paul and Silas called out to him. This indicates

his Roman value system which called for suicide as the noble act in some situation, like the loss of one's prisoners.

In fear and trembling of the earthquake and perhaps knowing of the supernatural exorcism earlier in the city, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The answer is pregnant with Biblical concepts: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (16:31). The text goes on to say, "they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house" (16:32). "He was baptized, he and all his household" (16:33). We are told that Paul and Silas were brought into the house of the Jailer to eat and the Jailer "rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household" (16:34).

8. We find that many Corinthians were baptized. Acts 18:8 tells us that "Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized." In Acts we are not informed of any person's name who was baptized. But in 1 Corinthians, Paul says that he baptized Crispus, Gaius (1:14), and "the household of Stephanas" (1 Cor. 1:16). In Acts we find that Crispus "believed in the Lord with all his household" and since we learn that Crispus was baptized in 1 Corinthians, it seems valid to infer that his household was baptized with him.

9. In Acts 19, we learn that there was a group of disciples in Ephesus who were baptized into John's baptism. However, they did not know the fundamental message of John. So, it is doubtful that they were baptized by John himself. These "disciples of John" were made up of "about twelve men"

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(19:7). Since they lacked an understanding of the coming of the Holy Spirit, they were “baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” (19:5) after being instructed by Paul. “When Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied” (19:6). This account is positioned in Acts to show the relation of John the Baptist’s disciples and the apostolic gospel. Apollos also only knew of John’s baptism, and not the coming of the Spirit on the Church at Pentecost (e.g., the reality of baptism). On the other hand, concerning Apollos, it is not said that he was baptized in the name of Jesus. The lesson is that the true disciples of John become followers of Jesus in submission to the apostles, regardless of their baptism.

Considering who was baptized, in summary we find the following: (1) The new covenant promise came in its fulfillment “to you and your children” (2:39) at Pentecost. Only men are said to have been baptized, some 3000 of them. (2) In Samaria “men and women alike” (8:12) were baptized, including Simon (the apostate Sorcerer). (3) The eunuch (who had no familial household) was baptized (Acts 8:38). (4) Paul (who had no household) was baptized (9:18; cf 1 Cor. 7:7-8). (5) Cornelius’ household was baptized (10:48, 11:14). (6) Lydia’s household was baptized (16:15). (7) The Philippian Jailer’s household was baptized (16:33). (8) Many Corinthians were baptized, including Crispus’ household, Stephanas’ household, and Gaius (18:8, 1 Cor. 1:14, 16). (9) The disciples of John (adult men) were baptized (19:5).

These are the facts about those baptized. From this we learn that of the *nine narrative passages* on baptism, four contain household baptisms, four other cases consisted of

only adult men (Pentecost, eunuch, Paul, twelve disciples of John), and the other case is of Simon and the “men and women alike” in Samaria. On the Samaritan case, consider carefully the phrase used by Luke in 8:12, “men and women alike” (*andres te kai gunaikes*). This is the first case in which females are explicitly said to be baptized. Hence, it is important for Luke to emphasize that “*both men and women*” were baptized (hence the translation of the KJV, NKJ, ASV, RSV, NRS).¹⁴

Considering the *nine individuals* singled-out in the baptism narratives—*five had their households baptized* (Cornelius, the Jailer, Lydia, Crispus, Stephanas), two had no familial households for obvious reasons (eunuch & Paul). That leaves Simon, who actually turned out to be an unbeliever and Gaius, whom Paul baptized (1 Cor. 1:14). As for Simon, I think it is reasonable to conclude that he was an *atypical case* and was not likely a head of household. Certainly, his case would be a less than ideal basis for the Baptist view, since he turned out to be an unbeliever.

As for Gaius, in Romans 16:23 we read that “Gaius [is] host to me and to the whole church.” This implies that he was a man of some means. As such, he may have had at least household servants, if not a familial household. Gaius is mentioned with Crispus, who was a household head. Crispus, “believed in the Lord with all his household (Acts 18:8).” Thus, Crispus’ household was undoubtedly baptized with him. Yet Paul said in no uncertain terms, “I baptized *none of*

¹⁴Considering the use of the phrase itself, it is evidently employed to emphasize both genders in Luke-Acts, “male and female” – not adult males and females vs children, Acts 5:14, 8:3, 8:12, 9:2, 22:4.

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you except Crispus and Gaius” (1 Cor. 1:14). Paul could have been naming Crispus as head of a household, not as a mere individual. This could be true with Gaius. As would be perfectly intelligible to any first century Jew, Paul spoke of Crispus as representing the household in the administration of baptism.¹⁵ Therefore, if Gaius had a household, it is quite reasonable to believe that it was baptized, just like Crispus’ household.

I want to bring all this Biblical information together now. I believe, considering these facts, it is not an overstatement to say that *virtually every person who had a household had it baptized!* And in the non-household baptism cases, we can validly infer that the recipients did not have households (the eunuch, Paul) or the households were not present (in the case of Pentecost men and the twelve men in Ephesus). The exception turns out to be the Samaritans. There both “both men and women,” as well as Simon the Sorcerer were baptized. Looking at the facts of baptism in the New Testament, should Baptists really be eager to make the first explicit case of female baptism (“both men and women”) and the unbeliever Simon *the rule* rather than the exception to the pattern of the household baptism? Consider the facts:

¹⁵It is logically possible that Paul baptized only Crispus and Silas or someone else baptized the household, but it would be hard to imagine what circumstances required Paul to baptize only Crispus and then turn the baptismal proceedings over to someone else.

Adult Conversion Baptisms	Household Baptisms
3000 (men) at Pentecost <i>(no household present)</i>	Cornelius and household
Samaritans - men & women Simon the Sorcerer	Lydia and household
Ethiopian Eunuch <i>(no household)</i>	Philippian Jailer and household
Paul <i>(no household)</i>	Corinthians: Crispus and household Stephanas and household
Disciples of John (12 men) <i>(no household present)</i>	
<i>Gaius (and household?)</i>	

The Objection to Household Baptisms

One can see the hands raising of our Baptist brethren to object. These important Biblical facts regarding the household baptisms are often dismissed by those denying infant/household baptism. In pointing out these facts to a defender of “believer’s baptism,” I received this response, “Since the New Testament teaches only believer’s baptism the only logical conclusion is that the people in these households

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were all believers.”¹⁶ I would not fault my brother’s logic here; only the method. He is undoubtedly correct—if the New Testament teaches only (mature, self-conscious, adult?) believers are to be baptized. However, *a better method would be to consider the Biblical facts about who was baptized before determining what the New Testament teaches!* According to the above believer’s baptism defender, “the Bible does not teach . . . household baptism.”¹⁷

This is a quite predictable response—that everyone in these households must have believed (i.e., since *we already know* that *only* believers were baptized). But think for a moment what this response requires us to believe—that in the individual baptism narratives, their writers (Luke & Paul) intentionally include more irregular and anomalous cases of baptism (households), than “regular” cases. So, *it just so happened* that all these “believers” were in the same households. And *it just so happened* that (shall we say, in this “large family -friendly” environment) every individual in these homes was not a little child. And *it just so happened* that in the non-household baptisms (excepting the Samaritans), there were only men present (Pentecost, eunuch, Paul, twelve disciples of John).

Now this “*just so*” story might be more convincing if the larger context of Acts were not considered. Remember the outline of Acts—the gospel was to go to Jerusalem, all of Judea, Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth. Surely

¹⁶Via email with Harold Smith. His defense of believer’s baptism can be found on the Internet at http://fox.nstn.ca/~nstn2705/bapt_q3.html.

¹⁷This last statement is a quote from Mr. Smith and was what prompted my dialogue with him.

Luke is instructing his readers about what Jesus *continued* doing in His church of all nations (Acts 1:1). When the gospel crossed to Gentile territory, beginning with Cornelius, *every baptism passage is a household baptism passage*—except where we are expressly told that those present were “twelve men,” who were Jews after all (Acts 19:7). The Gentile households of Cornelius, Lydia, the Jailer, Stephanas, and possibly Gaius (see the previous discussion) were all baptized.

Outline of Acts The Gospel Goes To...	Baptisms Follow This Outline
Jerusalem, Judea	3000 Men at Pentecost
Samaria	Enuch, Samaritans, Simon
Ends of the Earth Transition: Apostle Paul (Acts 9) First Gentile: Cornelius (Acts 10) God-fearer: Lydia (Acts 16) New Convert Gentiles: The Jailer (Acts 16), Corinthians (Acts 18)	Paul (apostle to the Gentiles) Cornelius’ Household Lydia’s Household Jailer’s Household Corinthians: Crispus Household Stephanus Household Gaius, 12 Men in Ephesus

Those who deny the validity of the covenant household view of baptism do not account for these facts. We must ask

whether the impressive number of household baptisms, concentrated in the period of Gentile expansion was an unrepeatably oddity of apostolic Christianity? Was it coincidence that *virtually all* of the newly reached Gentile households were baptized? Acts is a *selective history* of thousands of examples of baptism over the first few decades of the church. It would be incredible to believe that Luke recorded the only household baptisms in the entire apostolic period! On the contrary, Luke does not present these household baptisms as though they were extraordinary just because they were household baptisms. Rather, this was the routine practice of the apostolic church as the gospel went to Gentile families. The gospel and its outward sign went *to families* because it was *families* that were to be saved. “The covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Acts 3:25).

Most evangelicals know the answer to the Biblical question, “What must I do to be saved?”—“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.” But that’s not the answer in the Bible, rather, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, *you and your household*” (Act 16:31). Contrary to this, consider the *individualistic* practice of baptism in Baptist churches today. Have you ever witnessed a Baptist family baptism, with husband, wife, and children? I have served several Baptist churches which prided themselves as practicing “New Testament baptism,” but I never witnessed what is really, given all the facts, the pattern of the New Testament practice, household baptism.

The Baptist view is not familial, but individualistic. Considering the pattern of household baptisms, the

presumption of an individualistic Baptist perspective is questionable. I might argue that from Acts alone we have a significant disparity with the Baptist view. But I am not a “New Testament only” Christian. The pattern of a household reception of the sign of baptism is recognizable to the reader of the Scripture, if one begins with Genesis and moves forward. It might be easier to dismiss if this was the only information about households in the Bible. Baptist responses treat these household cases as mere isolated “proof texts” for which we grasp as straws in the wind—when in reality, Luke simply adds one more thread to the tapestry of God’s covenant redemption.

The pattern of Gentile household baptisms, especially as it relates to Luke’s purpose in showing the expansion of the gospel, should not be so quickly dismissed by Baptists. It is not as though we have a hundred cases of baptism and there are these exceptional, anomalous few household cases. *We have nine individuals identified*; five clearly have their households baptized; two do not have households (eunuch, Saul); one is dubious (Simon); and Gaius is left (1 Cor. 1:14, see the above discussion). This is not a promising set of statistics for Baptists.

The oft-repeated reply, “but every member of the household believed,” will not be persuasive to one who considers the exegetical particulars of the two cases which include statements about the households believing (the Jailer 16:31-34 & Crispus 18:8). We should ask whether the exegetical nuances of these texts support the individualist (baptist) thesis (every member believed) or the covenant family thesis (household members followed the leader according to their capacity).

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In the Philippian Jailer passage (16:31-34) and the Corinthian passage with Crispus (18:8), the Greek texts use singular verbs, not the plural verbs, to describe the action of believing. These texts *do not say*, the Jailer (or Crispus) “and (*kai*)” his household “believed” (with a plural verb). This would be one way Luke could have nuanced the text to indicate the equal action of each member in believing. This is something Luke surely could have said if he was seeking to distinguish the new sign from the covenantal household concept established in the previous millennia of Biblical history. Instead, these texts teach what any Old Testament believer might have expected: the Jailer, the household head, “rejoiced (singular verb) greatly, with all his house (*panoikei*, an adverb), having believed (*pepisteukos*, participle, *singular*) in God” (16:34, ASV); and Crispus, the household head, “believed (*episteusen*, verb, *singular*) in the Lord with (*sun*) all his household” (18:8). However, observe Luke’s careful language indicating that baptism is administered to each member of the Jailer’s household: “he was baptized, he *and* (*kai*) all his household” (16:33).

The pattern of baptism administration in Acts is persuasive to me. If Baptists simply answer the question, “How was baptism administered in the New Testament?” their view will be undermined by the mere facts of who was baptized in Acts.

Signed, Sealed, Delivered

The book of Acts supports the claim that all those under the familial leadership of a believer are to be baptized. This point is anchored in a study of the nature of Biblical signs and symbols. Since *the Bible is one book* and not two, and is the unfolding of God's redemptive plan, we must ask whether the symbol of baptism as an outward ritual is similar to other rituals in the older portion of Scripture. Rituals which involve a symbolic act, such as baptism, are connected to Biblical covenants between God and man. In virtually every case Biblical covenants include signs which visibly represent the realities behind the covenant promises.

Many Reformed theologians have observed that in the covenant with Adam (Hos. 6:7), sometimes called the covenant of works, or covenant of life, or covenant of creation, the tree of life is the visible sign (Gen. 3:22). Dutch theologian Wilhelmus à Brakel asks, "What else can be deduced from this than that it was a sacrament, that is, a sign and seal of life?"¹⁸ Louis Berkhof says, "We should not think of the fruit of this tree as magically or medically working immortality in Adam's frame. Yet it was in some way

¹⁸*The Christian's Reasonable Service*, (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 1:362.

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connected with the gift of life So the words of Genesis 3:22 must be understood sacramentally.”¹⁹

The language of covenant sign is first seen in the Noahic covenant. The rainbow is the “sign of a covenant between Me and the earth” (Gen. 9:13). In the Abrahamic covenant, circumcision “shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you” (Gen. 17:11) and for Abraham it was “a seal of the righteousness of the faith he had while uncircumcised” (Rom. 4:11). In the Mosaic administration of the covenant, the sacrifices and festival days are carefully defined and the covenant meal is given. In the institution of the covenant meal, Passover, the Lord said, “the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live” (Exo. 12:13).

In the new covenant, baptism and the Lord’s Supper signify its meaning. Baptism is a sign of entrance into the covenant (Mt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:38-39). In baptism one is visibly identified with the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with His people, and with His kingdom. The Lord’s Supper is a sign of communing in the covenant (Mt. 26:28). It is a “sharing [*koinonía*] in the blood of Christ” and a “sharing [*koinonía*] in the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 10:16).

The Bible often speaks of the signs interchangeably with the reality signified. For example, fallen Adam is not to eat of the tree of life “lest he eat from it and live forever” (Gen. 3:22).²⁰ Jehovah “will look upon [the rainbow], to remember

¹⁹*Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 217.

²⁰The “tree of life” prohibition in Genesis 3:22 makes sense when viewed with the other teaching on covenant signs in mind. It fits in the coherent covenant picture; it was a tangible sign and symbol of the promise of life. The fruit was the *sacramental* means of life (see also Rev 2:7, 22:2, 22:14). See Brakel and Berkhof.

the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature” (Gen. 9:16). The Lord told Abraham that circumcision “is My covenant” (Gen. 17:10). Of the Passover blood the Lord says, “when I see the blood I will pass over you” (Ex. 12:13). Jesus, in the Lord’s Supper, said the cup “is the new covenant” (1 Cor. 11:25). Peter says, “baptism now saves you” (1 Pet. 3:21). The Westminster Confession (27:2) describes this.

There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other” (Note the Westminster proof texts; Gen. 17:10; Mt. 26:27,28; Titus 3:5)

Please understand then that these God-ordained ritual acts are *not magical*, but they are *sacramental*. They are visible promises of God’s redemptive purposes to save and sanctify a people, His church (Eph. 5:25-27).

To realize the full blessings of such salvific promises, *an individual must be saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone* (Eph. 2:8-9, 1 Pet. 3:21, Titus 3:5). By grace, one must receive the *reality behind the signs and seals, Christ*. Of course, we know from Biblical and church history that not every person who partakes of such covenant signs also *has* the reality signified in the symbol. Nonetheless, these sacred actions mark a person for salvation, by grace, or for damnation when they are spurned (Heb. 10:28-30).

Signs and Substance

Perhaps one of the best illustrations of the truth that the sign does not guarantee the substance is the passage which follows.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that *our fathers* were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were *baptized* into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same *spiritual food*; and all drank the same *spiritual drink*, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; *and the rock was Christ.* (1 Cor. 10:1-4)

In the argument of the apostle, this is a powerful admonition against those in the Corinthian church who think they are “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) and have “knowledge” (*gnosis*) (1 Cor. 2:15, 8:1). Paul indicates the continuity of the faith from its Old Testament expression through the new covenant expression by referring to even that apostate and perverse generation of Israel as “*our fathers.*” Then, he illustrates their continuity with new covenant signs by singling out that they too were *baptized* and had spiritual *communion*. In fact, they ate of the “*same spiritual food*” and drank of the “*same spiritual drink.*” It is “the same” because it originates from the same source, Christ. Just as Christ is the reality in Passover (1 Cor. 5:7), “the living bread” (John 6:51)—the source of the water was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4; cf. John 4:14).

If some among the Corinthians claimed spiritual superiority, how much more could these Israelites! They were

not baptized with mundane water, but in a visible cloud of God's presence and the very Red Sea which parted before them. They didn't have a mere Paul or Apollos as their leader, but the more-than-legendary, miracle-working *Moses* whose very face had the residue of God's glory. In this sacramental type, these Israelites did not partake of ordinary food and drink. No, no, they ate of bread that descended from heaven itself and drank from *a rock* in a desert! What's more, the rock *was Christ!* Though this was true and much more, most were "laid low in the wilderness" (1 Cor. 10:5). Could these "spiritual" Corinthians even approach this visible, demonstrable, miraculous spirituality? Yet, the punch-line is that, as superior in spirituality as these Israelites were, "twenty-three thousand fell in one day" and others were killed by "serpents" and still others were "destroyed by the destroyer" (1 Cor. 10:8-10)!

Now for those that charge the covenantal infant baptism view with some kind of automatic salvation through baptism—even in the light of the brilliant, nuanced and definitive words about baptism in the Westminster Confession (see chapter 28)—the above text (1 Cor. 10:1-5) ought to settle the matter. Baptism does something, yes; but it doesn't automatically get it done. Our erring fathers in the wilderness drank from *a rock* which "was Christ" and still had hearts of rock. In the same way, no doubt many who have been baptized by immersion, backwards, wet from head to toe, or face down three times, or rolled over seven times, after telling the church that "they were saved"—are now in hell (cf. Simon the sorcerer).

Who's In?

The above discussion of the apostolic practice of baptism concludes that *household baptism is indeed the rule of the practice as the gospel goes to Gentiles. In every case of non-household baptism, there is clear explanation as to why each case was not inclusive of households (e.g., there were only men present).* This information is important in itself, but we must ask whether it represents a continuation of a pattern from the Old Testament or not. The test of whether new covenant baptism represents a radical departure from the way God “did it” in the Old Testament is a question of the continuity of an established pattern. Are other visible signs and symbols of God’s covenant redemption administered to households? Do other covenant administrations include a principle of “you and your children”?

Reviewing the Biblical teaching, we find that the covenant with Adam involved all of the children of Adam. “As in Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22, Rom. 5:12). The covenant with Noah included the “salvation of his household” (Heb. 11:7). The sacrifices of the patriarchs (including Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) were for the whole family. Job offered “burnt offerings according to the number of them all” (Job 1:5). Similarly, “Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal” (Gen. 31:54). Circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign of God’s covenant for “you and your descendants after you throughout their generations” (Gen. 17:9). Under Moses the Israelites were commanded to put the blood of the Passover lamb on their doors to preserve the firstborn in the household. Israel was to observe Passover “as an ordinance for you and your

children forever” (Ex. 12:24). Even in the promise to David, the Lord said, “I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to David My servant, I will establish your seed forever, and build up your throne to all generations” (Ps. 89:3-4).

Covenant <i>(Administration)</i>	Sign	Descendants Included
Creation/Adamic	Tree of Life	✓
Noahic	Rainbow	✓
Abrahamic (Other Patriarchs)	Circumcision Sacrifices Meals	✓ ✓
Mosaic	Passover (blood, then meal)	✓
Davidic	***	✓
New Covenant	Baptism (entrance) Lord’s Supper (continuance)	?

Therefore, the pattern of covenant administration includes a principle of family inclusion and successive generations in

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both covenant content and covenant recipients of the signs. Certainly old covenant signs and seals have a household administration.

What about the new covenant? Is the visible sign of entrance into the new covenant (baptism) to be administered to the households of a believers? If so, then just as in circumcision, those who come into that household by birth or adoption would also have a *right to the rite*. I have come to be convinced that there is much evidence for the continuity of this pattern.

From the very beginning the visible symbols and pledges were administered in a covenantally corporate and familial way. As has been demonstrated, baptism also follows this pattern (five of the nine cases of the individuals identified are household baptisms). Now it would be exceedingly unlikely in the “large-family-friendly” culture of the ancient world for the New Testament’s only cases of households, *five of them*, and none of the five included small children. And remember, the five cases of household baptism in the New Testament surely stand for thousands more (unless we suppose Luke and Paul give us the exceptions instead of the rule). However, *it would be a mistake to think that the above argumentation rests on whether infants were in these five households*. The importance of the household baptism line of argument does not depend on whether infants were in these households. It depends on whether households, *as households*, are to be baptized in the same way that previous covenant signs were administered corporately because of the believing head of a household’s leadership and authority.

This seems to be the pattern we have in baptism. This should not be lightly dismissed, considering the small number

of baptisms expressly recorded and the explanatory information in the others cases. But how much more significant is it when we recognize that Acts sits upon pedestal *of the whole of prior Biblical revelation*. The household pattern in Acts is the flowering bloom of the tree of Biblical redemption. It is not another tree, or individual blades of grass in place of that tree. Considered in the full light of the unfolding picture of the Christ of the covenants, the household baptisms are not mere proof-texts. They are *proof-positive* of the continuation of the ancient ways of God. Covenantal household baptism is just the new way of the old way.

Children and the New Covenant

Perhaps someone might say that the new covenant is different from previous covenants in just this sense: the promise of the new covenant excludes successive generations, *our children*. That was, indeed, my own argument as a Baptist. Let us ask, then, are the children of new covenant believers explicitly included in the new covenant promises? One important writer, defending a Baptist perspective says, “I would argue then that the principle of believers and their seed no longer has covenantal significance, precisely because the age of fulfillment has arrived.” He goes on to say, “Nowhere in the content of the new covenant is the principle ‘thee and thy seed’ mentioned.”²¹

If this were true, such a change in covenant recipients and covenant promises could hardly be more drastic! Covenant membership has always and ever included “you and your children” and covenant content is most fundamentally that the Lord is “God to you and your descendants” (Gen. 17:7, Dt. 7:9, 30:6, 1 Chr. 16:15, Ps. 103:17, 105:8).

²¹David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham: A Reformed Baptist View of Baptism, the Covenant, and Children* (Sussex, U K: Carey:, 1973), 34, 35.

Consider these new covenant prophecies. *Let the reader decide, on the testimony of many Scriptures, whether the children of believers are included in the new covenant promises.* So that no future Baptist writer will assert this hencefore, world without end, I have put in *italics the specific inclusion of believers' children—*

In the very first word about the new covenant was in **Deuteronomy 30:6-9:**

Moreover the LORD your *God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants,* to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. . . Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, *in the offspring of your body* and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers.

Jeremiah alludes to the above Deuteronomy passage throughout his prophecy. He emphasizes the inclusion of children in the new covenant promise.

Jeremiah 30:9: ‘But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. 10 ‘And fear not, O Jacob My servant,’ declares the LORD, ‘and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and *your offspring* from the land of their captivity. And Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and no one shall make him afraid.

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Jeremiah 30:18: “Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwelling places; and the city shall be rebuilt on its ruin, and the palace shall stand on its rightful place. 19 ‘And from them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of those who make merry; and *I will multiply them*, and they shall not be diminished; I will also honor them, and they shall not be insignificant. 20 ‘*Their children* also shall be as formerly, and their *congregation* shall be established before Me; and I will punish all their oppressors. 22 ‘*And you shall be My people*, and I will be your God.”

Jeremiah 31:1: “‘At that time,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will be the God of all the *families* of Israel, and they shall be *My people*.”

Jeremiah 31:17: [Though Rachel weeps for her children (destroyed in captivity), when they return] “‘there is hope for your future,’ declares the LORD, ‘and *your children* shall return to their own territory.”

Notice verse 36 of *the classic text of the new covenant*, the offspring of covenant participants are explicitly included.

Jeremiah 31:33-37: “But this is the covenant which I will make with *the house of Israel* after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within *them*, and on *their* heart I will write it; and I will be *their* God, and they shall be *My people*. 34 “And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to

the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” 35 Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day, and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: 36 “If this fixed order departs From before Me,” declares the LORD, “ Then *the offspring of Israel* also shall cease From being a nation before Me forever. “ 37 Thus says the LORD, “If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all *the offspring of Israel* for all that they have done,” declares the LORD.”

Jeremiah 32:15-18: “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land . . . who showest lovingkindness to *thousands* [of generations], but repay est the iniquity of fathers into the bosom of their children after them . . .”

Jeremiah 32:37-40: “Behold, I will gather them out of all the lands to which I have driven them in My anger . . . And they shall be My people, and I will be their God; 39 and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good, and *for the good of their children after them*. 40 “And I will *make an everlasting covenant with them* that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in *their hearts* so that they will not turn away from Me.

Jeremiah 33:22-26: “As the host of heaven cannot be counted, and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will

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multiply the *descendants* of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me . . . 26 then I would reject the *descendants of Jacob* and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.”

Other Old Testament prophecies about the coming age of the new covenant are equally clear that the children of believers are included.

Ezekiel 37:24-26: David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. 25 “Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, *their children, and their children’s children, forever*; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. 26 “Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. (NKJV)

Zechariah 10:6-9: “And I shall bring them back, Because I have had compassion on them; and they will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God, and I will answer them. 7 “And Ephraim will be like a mighty man, and their heart will be glad as if from wine; Indeed, *their children will see it and be glad, Their heart will rejoice in the LORD . . . They will remember Me in far countries, and they with their children will live and come back.*

Joel 2:1-29: Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! . . . So there is a great and mighty people; There has never been anything like it, Nor will there be again after it To the years of *many generations* . . . 15 Blow a trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, 16 Gather *the people, sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and the nursing infants.* Let the bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her bridal chamber . . . 27 “Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is no other; and *My people* will never be put to shame. 28 “And it will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your *sons and daughters* will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. 29 “And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”

Isaiah 44:3: For I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on *your offspring*, and My blessing on *your descendants*.

Isaiah 54:10-13: . . . Nor shall My *covenant of peace* be removed . . . 13 *All your children* shall be taught by the LORD, And great shall be the peace of *your children*.

Isaiah 59:20-21: “And a Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” declares the LORD. 21 “And as for Me, this is My covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of *your offspring, nor from*

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the mouth of your offspring's offspring," says the LORD, "from now and forever."

Malachi 4:5-6: "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6 "And he will restore the hearts of the *fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers*, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.

In the New Testament, the apostles repeatedly included the principle of "you and your seed."

Luke 1:17: "And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children*, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Luke 2:49-50: For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name. 50 and His mercy is upon *generation after generation toward those who fear him*.

Acts 2:39: For the promise is *for you and your children*, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.

Acts 3:25: "It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, *'and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'*"

Acts 13:32-33: “And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled *this promise to our children* in that He raised up Jesus . . .

Romans 4:13-17: For the promise to Abraham or to *his descendants* that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith . . . 16 For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that *the promise may be certain to all the descendants*, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 (as it is written, “A father of many nations have I made you”) in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

These texts provide overwhelming, unambiguous, and persuasive Biblical support for the belief that the children of believers are included in the promised new covenant.

How many more verses are required to convince one that the new covenant includes the children of believers, beyond these fifty? Certainly no one can produce even one text which *explicitly excludes* them. These fifty and more *explicitly include* them. The whole message of the whole Bible requires that our children are a heritage. If baptism is the sign of inclusion in covenant with God, why are not the children of believers to be baptized? If they are promised its blessings no less than adults, then why are they not to receive the visible portrayal of the promise? The objection that “the principle of believers and their seed no longer has covenantal significance” or “nowhere in the content of the new covenant is the principle

‘thee and thy seed’ mentioned”—simply will not stand against the overwhelming refutation of the above passages.²² The very same language of the inclusion of believers’ children permeates both the old covenant administrations, as well as the new covenant.

Please brethren, the above texts are no mere “proof-texting” against this objection, either. They indicate a deep Biblical and theological theme which undergirds the entire mission of the Savior and His Commission to the church — all the families of the nations shall worship the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen!

The Greatness of the Baptism Commission

Before our Lord ascended to reign at the right hand of the Father, where He reigns NOW, He commanded the discipling of the nations. He predicted the advance of His good news “in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). He said to His disciples, “Go ye therefore, and *teach [disciple, or make disciples of] all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mt. 28:19 KJV). From this text there are those who claim that Jesus’ command excludes anyone from baptism who is not a self-conscious disciple. Hence, such interpreters claim that this Commission commands the discipling of “individuals from all nations, not the national entities” and the individual baptism

²²David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham*, 34.

of only “those who were made disciples.”²³ This a good theory to support the individualist cause in baptism.

Unfortunately for baptists, the grammar of this command does not support the individualistic thesis. Rather, the direct command (*mathāteusate panta ta ethnā baptizontes autous*) may simply be translated, *Disciple all the nations [and] baptize them (nations)*. The pronoun “them” (*autous*), grammatically refers to “nations” (*ethnā*), not “disciples,” since “make disciples” (from *mathāteuō*) is a verb.²⁴

If one thinks about the Commission both grammatically and culturally, a Jewish Rabbi of the First Century or before would not have been troubled if the text had said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, *circumcising* them [the nations] in the name of Jehovah, teaching them [the nations] to observe all that I commanded you.” A Rabbi (b. 0 A.D.) would not have thought this was a Commission to abandon infant circumcision for *exclusive adult circumcision*. In fact, this was precisely the practice of proselytism in the New Testament era.

To illustrate, in the events of Acts 15:3ff, we read there of “the conversion of the Gentiles” (v 3) and that some of “the Pharisees who had believed” demanded that “it is necessary to *circumcise them*” (v 5). Surely these Pharisees were not

²³Fred Malone, *A String of Pearls Unstrung: A Theological Journey Into Believers' Baptism* (Founders Press: Cape Coral, FL, 1998), 7.

²⁴“Nations” (*ethnā*) is in the accusative case and is thus, the direct object of the verb. In this verse, the verb, “disciple” (*mathāteuō*, in the imperative form), is a *transitive* verb, since it has an object. I am aware that “them” is masculine in gender and “nations” is neuter. This usage is called the *ad sensum* use (according to the general sense). See for example, M t. 25:32, “all the nations (*ethnā*, neut.) will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them (*autos*, masc.) from one another.”

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insisting on exclusive adult “believer circumcision” by demanding that those converted be circumcised. No way. When the Pharisees made a proselyte (Mt. 23:15) they considered their children to be proselytes, too. They considered “them” collectively to be “converts.” And as the children grew, they were to mature into a self-conscious ownership of their faith. If they grew up to be a reprobate, they were “put out of the synagogue” (John 9:22).

Remember, why did Jesus command baptism in the first place? Are there any hints in the Old Testament that the Messiah would baptize? When one studies carefully the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah, we see that the Word includes allusions to a cleansing rite administered to a corporate entity, nations. “He will sprinkle many *nations*” (Is. 52:15). Ezekiel 36:24ff, records a new covenant promise to the *nation* Israel says, “I will sprinkle clean water on *you*, and *you* will be clean . . . I will give *you* a new heart and put a new spirit within *you*; and I will remove the heart of stone from *your* flesh and give *you* a heart of flesh . . . *you will be My people, and I will be your God.*” In these foretastes of Messiah Jesus, it is “*nations*” or “*peoples*” that are cleansed. Predictably, then, the Commission to baptize is to baptize the corporate “*nations.*”

The Great Commission, in biblio-theological development, is the predictable Messianic restatement of multitudes of Old Testament commissions and promises and prayers for *all the nations to be made disciple-nations*—

- ▶ And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you *all the families of the earth* shall be blessed (Gen 12:3).

- ▶ Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall *all the families of the earth* be blessed (Gen 28:14).
- ▶ That *all the ends of the earth* may fear Him (Psa 67:7);
- ▶ *All nations* serve him (Psa 72:11);
- ▶ *All nations* whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; and they shall glorify Thy name (Psa 86:9);
- ▶ Praise the LORD, *all nations*; Laud Him, *all peoples!* (Psa 117:1);
- ▶ Kings of the earth and *all peoples*; Princes and all judges of the earth. . .Let them praise the name of the LORD (Psa 148:11-13).
- ▶ *All the ends of the earth* will remember and turn to the LORD, and *all the families of the nations* will worship before Thee (Psa 22:7).
- ▶ Then hear Thou from heaven, from Thy dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to Thee, in order that *all the peoples of the earth* may know Thy name, and fear Thee, as do Thy people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Thy name (2Ch 6:33).
- ▶ And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that *all the peoples, nations, and men of every language* might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed (Dan 7:14).

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These and about 100 other passages declare that *all nations* (and not merely some individuals from them) *are to be disciple-worshippers!* The Commission on earth and Song of Heaven are the same, [and they sang] “Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy ways, *Thou King of the nations*. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy; for *all the nations will come and worship before Thee*, for Thy righteous acts have been revealed” (Rev 15:3-4).

The Commission to disciple and baptize nations, in the Biblical thematic development makes sense of the apostolic practice of *household-baptismal-discipleship*. If one puts himself in the place of the (Jewish-Christian) apostles, is it credible to think that they saw the Commission as including *making disciples of families or households*? I believe that it is for the following reasons: (1) In Biblical usage, the term “nations” is equal to “all the families of the earth” (Gen 12:3, 28:14, Act 3:25; cf. Psa 22:14). (2) In a Biblical survey of the term “nations,” the terms “family” and “house” or “household” are explicitly and organically connected. For example, in the book that defines the *beginning* of family and nation, *Genesis*, “nations” is equal to “families.” “From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, *according to their families, into their nations*” (10:5). In Genesis 10:32, the terms “families” or “households” are semantically identical to nations: “These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.” These family-nations were further divided at Babel when separate languages came into existence. Add to that the interchangeableness of

“nation of Israel,” “house of Israel” and in the New Testament, the “household of God,” and “a holy nation” (1Pe 4:17, 2:9). (3) Therefore, if the command had been, “Make disciples of all families, *baptizing them . . .*”—would this not be warrant for the baptism of households under the leadership of a believing head of household? Perhaps the reader can see that “families of the earth” in Biblical-theological development from Genesis on, quite explicitly does have reference to “families” or “households.” *Perhaps this is why the apostles baptized them!*

Genesis 9-12: The Division of the Nations

- ◆ Noah’s Household Saved in the Ark (Gen 9)
 - ◆ Table of Nations from Noah’s Family (Gen 10)
 - ◆ Division of Languages/Nations at Babel (Gen 11)
 - ◆ Blessing to “Families of the Earth” (through Abraham) (Gen 12)
-

Acts 1:8: The Salvation of the Nations

- ◆ Blessing to “Families of the Earth” (through Abraham’s Unique “Seed”)
 - ◆ Pentecost “Undoes” Babel and Empowers the Disciples
 - ◆ Expansion of Gospel to “All Nations”
 - ◆ Gentile Households Baptized
-

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So, from the flood to Babel the division was made. But from Pentecost to the end of the age, the Kingdom advances with the power to undo the confusion of the nations by the Spirit's power through the one-Word, gospel. The language of the Great Commission emphasizes first generation contact with the "families of the earth," as would be expected after a study of a Biblical theology of missions. But the Great Commission's purposes are not limited to adults and neither are its grammatical categories. To divide parents from the little children for whom they are responsible is completely foreign to the Biblical concepts of family, headship, covenant, and even salvation ("you will be saved, you and all your household," Acts 11:14, 16:31). The command is to disciple nations and disciples nations include little children. It follows strictly, does it not, that Christ's Commission to baptize thus includes children?

Father Abraham Had Many Sons

The purpose of God in converting the nations (in missions) is part of God's covenantal promise to Abraham. *Abraham is truly the father of the missionary movement.* Father Abraham had many sons, as you know — "I am one of them and so are you. . . ." Recall that Peter preached to the Jews, "It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed'" (Acts 3:25). The promise of the gospel is that "the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of *the promise* in Christ Jesus through the gospel"

(Eph. 3:6). Whereas Gentiles were “separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and *strangers to the covenants of promise*, having no hope and without God in the world”—“Now,” writes the apostle, “in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:12-13). Gentiles may now participate as receivers of the “covenants of promise.” We have become Abraham’s children too! To understand this, one must stand in the sandals of that earnest God-fearing Gentile of Paul’s day who longed for acceptance in a world of religio-cultural exclusivism.²⁵

Amazingly, Gentiles may become “Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29). Paul teaches us that through faith the promise to Abraham “may be certain *to all the descendants*, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, ‘a father of many nations have I made you’)” (Rom 4:16-17). In other words, the promise is to “all the descendants” of both believing Jews and Gentiles, because Abraham is the “father of many nations” and in him all the “families of the earth shall be blessed” (Acts 3:25, Gen 12:3). A Cornelius, or a Lydia, or a Philippian Jailer, or a Stephanas, could now be like any of Abraham’s children. The repeated and amazing contrast between the new covenant and the previous administrations of the covenant is that now one does not need to enter the Jewish nation to *realize fully* the covenant blessings.

²⁵I have tried to paint this picture more vividly in the Appendix A: *Letter to Julius*.

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If one reads the book of Romans *backwards*, we see that all of the doctrinal instruction on equal (Jew/Gentile) condemnation (chapters 1-3), justification (chs. 4-5), sanctification (chs. 6-8), covenant history in its relation to the Jews (chs. 9-11), life application (chs. 12-13), *leads to the same theme*—the *joint-heir relationship of Gentiles and Jews* and the principles of their new life together (chs. 14-15) and Paul's continuing mission to the Gentiles (16:15-21).

Standing on The Promises

Consider Romans 5:17-12:

Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO THEE AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO THY NAME." And again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE." And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM." And again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE." [All caps are OT quotations]

In fulfillment of the above passage, did “*His people*” (Jews who believed) with whom the “Gentiles” were to “rejoice” (Rom 15:10), include their little children? Certainly if only Gentile children were excluded, it would have been most contrary to the principles of equality and acceptance of Paul’s previous chapter (Rom 14).

Gentiles In, Babies Out?

Perhaps it will be evident how very different the *Baptist understanding* is than what is above. As I see it, the consistent emphasis of the apostles is that Gentiles have been grafted in and have become true heirs of the (originally Jewish) covenant promises and realities, according to the very Abrahamic promises. This was very clearly predicted, though the religious and cultural pride of the Jews conflicted with the gospel fulfillment of this. In other words, just as the fulness of the promises belong to the Jews and their children, so too, the same promises predict the inclusion of the Gentiles and their children. Paul’s refrain throughout the epistles was *Gentiles are equal heirs with Jews*. For the apostles, the demonstrable proof of this was that uncircumcised (unproselytized) Gentiles (as households) received the Spirit just as the Jews did.²⁶ In their words, God “cleansing their hearts” gave them “the circumcision of Christ” which is “of the heart, by the Spirit” and is the “true circumcision” (Acts 15:6, Col 2:11, Rom 2:29, Phi 3:2). We also know that these Gentiles were baptized, and

²⁶If this seems striking I urge you to review, Acts 11:9, 14-15, 15:3-9, 16:30.

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in every explicit case of their baptism, it was of their households. *Every Gentile baptism expressly recorded, is a household baptism!*²⁷

On the other hand, the baptistic view sees that the real emphasis of the New Testament is not so much *Gentile inclusion* as it is *infant exclusion*. “The age of fulness,” in their view, demands that only individuals who are capable of self-conscious faith are permitted to be heirs of these promises. As Jewett says, “. . .the temporal, earthly, typical elements of the old dispensation were dropped from the great house of salvation as scaffolding from the finished edifice.”²⁸ Among the ruins of the scaffolding lies the fruit of the womb, which was so jealously included in past eras. To the consistent Baptist interpreter, a theology of the New Testament yields the conclusion that *both Jews and Gentiles no longer should consider their children members of the covenant*.

At the heart of the Baptist contention is the noble desire to protect future generations from a carnal and unbelieving church membership composed of only “children of the flesh.” The reasoning behind this, however, proceeds in a most unBiblical fashion: by excluding the infant seed, can we protect the church from carnality (??). On the contrary, to the Biblical mind, it is by the *inclusion* of the children in the covenant promises, which usher forth in parental and

²⁷The eunuch was a proselyte; Crispus is a Jew; and the 12 disciples of John are clearly Jews or at least proselytes (cf John’s ministry purpose); that leaves the following Gentile households: Cornelius, Lydia, the Jailer, Stephanas, and perhaps Gaius, see the discussion above.

²⁸Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 91.

congregational responsibilities, that the blessings of God's promised Word come about. Thus, it is my conviction that this view is not only out of sorts with the thematic emphasis of the New Testament, but also with the heartbeat of the entire Biblical revelation of redemption, and perhaps more directly, to the very means of grace in our children's lives.

Jesus' Baptism

Someone might ask, *Aren't we supposed to "follow Jesus in baptism"?*—*Wasn't He baptized as a believer?* Actually, we are never told in the Bible that we must imitate Christ in His baptism. In fact, we are told that Christ's baptism was "to fulfill (*plāroō*) all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15). I hope that no one else will claim that their baptism was for this purpose. Matthew uses "fulfill" (*plāroō*) 16 times. Except for the two cases in which it means "fill" in a quantitative sense (13:48 "full" & 23:32 "fill"), every other usage refers to "fulfilled" Scripture.²⁹ I will argue that in this case (3:15) it also refers to fulfilled Scripture, though it is an entire range of Scriptural typology, not a specific text.

The baptism of John was for a temporary and specific purpose (Lk. 1:17, Act 13:25). John was a Levitical priest, as was his father (Lk. 1:5). He was six months older than Jesus, and Jesus was baptized at the age of thirty (Lk. 1:36, 3:23). This means that John began baptizing when he was thirty years old, the appointed age for a Levite to serve as a priest

²⁹Matthew 2:15, 2:17, 2:23, 3:15, 4:14, 5:17, 8:17, 12:17, 13:35, 21:4, 26:54, 26:56, 27:9.

and perform ceremonial ritual washings (Num. 4:3). The prophetic purpose of John was to “go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘*To turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children,*’ and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk. 1:17, Mal. 4:6). John tells us very specifically his purpose for the baptisms: “*in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water*” (John 1:31). How would John know who the Christ (*the anointed one*) was? “He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit’ (John 1:33).

Thus, John’s baptism of Jesus involved a cleansing ritual for the purpose of recognizing the one anointed of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament typology, Levitical priests underwent a ritual washing for their cleansing (“sprinkle purifying water on them,” Num. 8:7). These ceremonial instructions for priests also speak over and over of “the priest who is anointed [with oil] and ordained to serve as priest” (Lev. 16:32, Ex. 28:41, Num. 3:3, etc.). The writer of Hebrews tells us, “For the Law *appoints* men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever” (Heb. 7:28). This means that the fulfillment of the oath of God’s Messianic promise comes in the “appointing” of a perfect high priest, who is of course, Christ (Heb. 8:5). The term “appoint” (*kathistemi*) is the same term used of *ordaining* elders (Tit 1:5) and deacons (Act 6:3), as well as the Levitical High priest, “every high priest taken from among men is *ordained* . . .” (Heb. 5:1 KJV).

Christ was thus ordained and “*designated* by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:10). But

when was He “designated” as this?—When He received, not the *symbolic* anointing oil of the Spirit, but the *reality of the Spirit*, at His baptism. Christ said of Himself, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He *anointed* me to preach the gospel . . .” (Lk. 4:18). When was *anointed*? At His baptism, when the Spirit *descended* upon Him (Lk. 3:21). Hence, the final and transitional Levitical priest, John, ordained the greater Melchizedekian High priest, Jesus. Suffice it to say, then, the adult baptism of a Christian believer is not “following the Lord in believer’s baptism.” Rather, as Peter proclaims, Jesus as *the* priest, “having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear” (Act 2:33). Whereas the shadows of the Levitical system illustrated that the priests were anointed for service with the symbolic oil, now Christ (literally, “the anointed one”) pours forth the *real oil* on the “royal priesthood”—the true temple (1Pe 2:9, 2:5).

Because John’s baptism was “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord,” Israel was to receive their anointed Messiah and were accountable to be identified with the Messianic kingdom of God (Lk. 1:17, Mt. 3:2). However, many in that generation rejected Christ and His kingdom. “But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected *God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John*” (Lk. 7:30). For this they would receive the most severe judgment (Mt. 23:36-39), ultimately the complete destruction of their Christless Judaism and its chief symbol, Jerusalem and its temple (70 *Anno Domini*). “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (Mt. 23:38).

Hence, John’s baptism was temporary (“John was completing his course,” Act 13:25). However, Jesus promises

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His presence in the baptism mandate “to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:19). This implies what the Westminster Confession says, that Christian baptism is, “by Christ’s own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world” (28.1). Therefore, the baptism of the Great Commission is different than that of John’s in purpose (preparation for Messiah), audience (for that generation of Israel), and even the duration (overlapping the time of Christ’s earthly ministry). Jesus’ Commission to baptize, then, follows through with John’s teaching: “[John said] I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Baptism and Circumcision

What is the relationship between baptism and circumcision? I believe that baptism is *greater than* (>) circumcision. It is just because of the initial teaching that Jesus' baptism relates to the Spirit, that we are led to see that in meaning and signification, the perpetual ordinance of baptism is very similar to circumcision. It is a symbol of a covenant promise and is an entrance sign. Baptism and circumcision symbolize the same reality, the work of the Spirit, essentially, spiritual regeneration. Yet, baptism is greater than circumcision.

Let me try to convince the reader of this in three points: (1) *Circumcision represented the work of the Holy Spirit which is the circumcision of the heart.* Stephen drew upon a very deep stream of the Biblical waters when he said to his persecutors, "You men who are stiff-necked and *uncircumcised in heart* and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did" (Acts 7:51). This teaching regarding the meaning of circumcision is very evident in many Old Testament passages (Lev. 26:41, Jer. 9:26, Ez. 44:7, 44:9, Dt. 10:16, 30:6, Jer. 4:4). The very promise of the new covenant

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included this metaphor, “the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants” (Dt. 30:6). Paul, who held the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen, learned this too (perhaps from Stephen). It permeates virtually all of his epistles (Rom 2:29, 4:11, 1 Cor. 7:19, Gal. 5:6, 6:15, Eph. 2:11-12, Phi 3:3, Col 2:11-12, 3:11). The reality behind physical circumcision is circumcision “which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter” (Rom 2:29).

(2) *Baptism represents the work of the Spirit in regeneration, also.* The very first words we read about baptism in the New Testament say this. John said, “I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk. 1:8). Peter connects baptism with “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). He says of Cornelius’ household, “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” (Acts 10:47). Paul alludes to the image of baptism in Titus 3:5 when he says “He saved us . . . by the *washing* of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”

(3) *The reality represented in circumcision and baptism is explicitly connected in Colossians 2:11-12.*

In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by *the circumcision of Christ*; having been buried with Him in *baptism*, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Paul is speaking of the true meaning of both circumcision and baptism when he speaks of a “circumcision made without

hands” and a “baptism in which you were also raised up with Him through faith.” *A person who has been heart-circumcised has been Spirit-baptized and a person who has been Spirit-baptized has been heart-circumcised.* What can this teach if not that *these two ritual acts signify the same reality?* Other doctrinal passages affirm this meaning for baptism. Romans 6:3-4 teaches that by work of regeneration those “baptized into Christ Jesus” “have become united with Him in the likeness of His death” and “His resurrection.” Galatians 3:27 tells us that those “baptized into Christ have clothed [themselves] with Christ.” First Corinthians 12:13 likewise indicates the work of the Spirit is the reality behind baptism, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” These passages affirm that baptism symbolizes the work of God’s Spirit in our spiritual union with Christ which takes place through regeneration. Peter teaches us that baptism is the antitype of the salvation of the household of Noah, as well as the symbol of a clean conscience. “There is also an antitype (*antitypos*) which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1Pe 3:21 NKJ).

So then, baptism is surely a sign, an *antitype* (1Pe 3:21). Baptism is most certainly representative of the work of the Spirit (Col 2:11-12, Mk. 1:8, Acts 10:47, Tit 3:5). It is commissioned to be a ritual which identifies one with the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Mt. 28:19-20, Acts 10:48). Its meaning is unmistakably the Spirit’s work in cleansing us and thereby uniting us with Christ and His body (Rom 6:3, Gal. 3:27, Col 2:11-12, 1 Cor. 12:13).

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The argument against this is stated in this way, *regeneration* (not baptism) is the antitype to circumcision. David Kingdon says:

These New Testament texts demonstrate that circumcision in the Old Testament is the type of which inward circumcision, *i.e.*, regeneration, is the antitype. If this is so, how can it be argued that baptism is equivalent in meaning to circumcision, when circumcision is clearly related to regeneration? No NT proof can be found for the contention that baptism and circumcision are identical, and we are therefore precluded from inferring that baptism should be applied to infants. If we put circumcision in parallel with baptism are we not ignoring the fulfillment of circumcision in regeneration?³⁰

Having argued the case as it is (above), the answer to this is obvious. The *meaning of baptism is regeneration*, even as it is with circumcision. The very first word on the subject says this: “I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk. 1:8). To pose such a question as how “baptism is equivalent in meaning to circumcision, when circumcision is clearly related to regeneration?” —is just to set oneself up for unmistakable refutation. Circumcision means regeneration; baptism means regeneration. Therefore, baptism is the new covenant replacement of circumcision.

Are circumcision and baptism *identical*? It is rather obvious that the *rituals* of circumcision and baptism are very

³⁰*Children of Abraham*, 34.

different, though they both have reference to purification. The *reality* or meaning of these rituals is essentially the same—the work of the Spirit in regeneration. The *recipients of circumcision* were primarily the households of ethnic Israel (males only, in the nature of the case). The *recipients of baptism*, in the New Testament, are believing households within every nation. Surely it need not be repeated that going through the *ritual* of either is not the same as possessing the *reality* signified by the rite. This is true for *adults*, no less than little children. Baptism is a (visible) sign and seal of inclusion into the visible covenant community, a community not of one nation (Israel), but made from *all nations*. Therefore, it functionally replaces the Abrahamic rite of circumcision, and is thus its *sacramental equivalent*.

	Circumcision	Baptism
Ritual	Cut flesh	Cleanse flesh
Reality	Circumcise of Christ Circumcise the heart Cut off “flesh”	Baptism by Christ Cleanse the heart Wash the conscience
Recipients	Primarily Jewish nation/All in such households (males)	Expanded to every nation/All in the household (males and females)

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The temptation for Baptists is to assume that since the reality signified in baptism is only true in regenerate people, that it is only proper to give this sign to those who demonstrate their regeneration. Reasoning this way, one entirely overlooks what has just been Biblically proven, that circumcision fundamentally signifies the same reality as baptism.³¹ As Calvin says, “For what will they bring forward to impugn infant baptism that may not be turned back against circumcision?”³² Please let no one say that salvation was different in the Old Testament. The Abrahamic covenant is Paul’s proof-text for justification by faith alone (Rom 4:3, Gen 15:6)! Moreover, Abraham’s circumcision was the sign and seal of his justification by faith. He “received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised” (Rom 4:11). But Isaac, who possessed the same Spirit-wrought reality, was circumcised as an infant. So then, the sign of an internal spiritual reality can be received when one is conscious of the reality, like Abraham. Or, it can be received before one is conscious of the reality, like Isaac, and every other believing Jew. Baptism can be received with understanding (in the case of an adult) or it can be “remembered” with understanding (as in the case of an infant). In both cases, it represents the inward work of the Spirit which we hope to be true in both. Baptists often argue that it is more certainly true of the “believer” (professing faith) than the infant (even when raised in the discipline and

³¹Lev. 26:41, Jer. 9:26, Ez. 44:7, 44:9, Dt. 10:16, 30:6, Jer. 4:4, Rom. 2:29, 4:11, 1 Cor. 7:19, Gal. 5:6, 6:15, Eph. 2:11-12, Phil. 3:3, Col. 2:11-12, 3:11.

³²*Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster), 4:16:9, 1331.

admonition of the Lord). This is a very unconvincing point to me, having grown up around baptistic churches which regularly practice repeat-baptism two or three times on their own members.

It is not that I don't sympathize with the noble motives at the heart of the Baptist contention for a pure church. Baptists wish to protect the church from an unregenerate and ungodly membership. But it is difficult to see how putting out the most trusting, malleable, and teachable group (little children) "purifies" God's people. *It has been my experience that the adults are the ones who cause all the trouble.* Shouldn't we rather exercise Biblical discipline on "professing" adults who are unrepentant, according to Christ's own command (Mt. 18:15-20)? We have an expressly stated directive from our Lord to purify the church of those who act as unregenerate. But we have no such express declaration to remove the little children of believers from the church, though they have been included since the beginning. The exclusion of believers' children is *inferred* by Baptists (illegitimately, I believe) as the means of purifying the church of unbelievers. It is most unfortunate that many Baptist churches explicitly exclude the little children of believers in order to purify the church, and yet never practice the biblical means of church discipline to remove those who truly make the church impure by their unrepentant scandalous offenses. Of course the indictment cuts both ways, since it is probable that no Baptist church would even exist if not for nominalistic churches practicing the infant baptism.

Objections to Baptism in Place of Circumcision

As it stands even today, baptism, *in fact*, replaces circumcision. Baptism *is* the *entrance sign*, and before the new covenant, it wasn't the entrance sign, circumcision was. I assert, therefore, it is quite unreasonable to deny that *baptism is the functional equivalent of circumcision*. Let us, nevertheless, consider objections to this point. Can the position that *baptism is the functional equivalent of circumcision* (BFEC) be denied?

(1) Can this view (BFEC) be refuted on the basis of the *meaning of circumcision*? Was circumcision intended to mean something other than circumcision of the heart by the Spirit? I believe that the above material is compelling as an answer. When one insists that the meaning of circumcision is "carnal" or "not spiritual," etc., so as to prove that the *reality* signified in circumcision and baptism is radically different, the above Biblical information has not been adequately considered. Those who object to the parallelism of circumcision and baptism seem to ignore the pervasive Biblical teaching regarding the circumcision of the heart and its equation with the work of God's Spirit (Rom 2:29, 4:11, 1 Cor. 7:19, Gal. 5:6, 6:15, Eph. 2:11-12, Phi 3:3, Col 2:11-12, 3:11, above et al). It will be important for us to get our view of circumcision from what Scripture teaches it to be. Its meaning is expressly stated to be spiritual ("circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit"; "a seal of the righteousness of faith," Rom 2:29, 4:12).

(2) Perhaps someone will object that circumcision was a *nationalistic sign* (i.e., whereas baptism is a *non-national, spiritual sign*). (Observe that this objection must first

overcome the above material on the essential spiritual meaning of circumcision, regardless of its national overtones.) This objection rests on the false presumption that Israel was a mere nation and that the multi-ethnic church of the new covenant is not a “nation” in any sense. Both of these assumptions are false. Those who were shut out of the “commonwealth of Israel” were “separate from Christ” (Eph. 2:12); hence, the nation was no *mere* ethnic political entity. To Israel belonged “the promises” (Rom 9:4). Secondly, the new covenant people of God are “a holy nation” which stand in continuity with the people of God before (1Pe 2:9; cf. Ex. 19:6). In fact, Jesus teaches us that “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you [collective unbelieving Israel], and be given to a nation [multi-ethnic spiritual Israel] producing the fruit of it” (Mt. 21:43).

Even from the Biblical account of who was circumcised, we find a compelling response to the above objections. We are told that “In the very same day Abraham was circumcised, and Ishmael his son” (Gen 17:26). The thirteen-year old *Ishmael* was certainly not in the nation *Israel*, yet he was circumcised because of God’s very command on the very day that Abraham himself was circumcised. It would be strikingly inconsistent if the very same ritual act, administered the very same day was “a seal of the righteousness of the faith” (Rom 4:12) for Abraham, but for teenage Ishmael it was a mere sign of being a physical, albeit virtually bastardly, descendant of Abraham. Imagine what Abraham would have said in performing circumcision on Ishmael or other non-Israelite offspring. Considering what circumcision meant to Abraham, could he have said or thought anything like what follows?

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Child of my flesh and not of any spiritual relation, this rite of circumcision is performed on you only and exclusively and arbitrarily because you are my physical offspring. Do not mistake that there is any spiritual significance to this act *whatsoever*; it calleth you not to any spiritual obligation; it calleth you not to any recognition of the covenantally faithful God who only relates to man by way of covenant; think not that by it you are being called upon to believe in a God who circumcises hearts or saves the fallen sons of Adam from natural heart-uncircumcision; nay, nay, it calleth you not to keep the way of the Lord; think not that I am declaring that you are the Lord's; you are my mere flesh and blood, without a relation to the God who has granted me justification by faith.³³

Further, we find that the New Testament indicates that circumcision was given to proselytes from other nations on the basis of their reception of the Biblical faith (in the pre-new covenant form). Therefore, not only the express teaching about the meaning of circumcision, but even considering who was circumcised is a clear refutation of the *nationalistic objection*.

(3) Another important objection to the sacramental equivalence of circumcision and baptism is what I will call *the Judaizer Objection*. It has become fairly popular and is stated succinctly by Carl B. Hoch, Jr., a Baptist professor, in his interesting book, *All Things New: The Significance of Newness*

³³As far as I know this has not been found in any of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

for Biblical Theology. In a discussion of Colossians 2:11, he says, “That baptism has not replaced circumcision can be easily seen from the fact that Paul did not attempt to refute the Judaizers’ demand that Gentiles be circumcised with the statement, “They have no need of circumcision; they have been baptized! You all know that baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant!”³⁴ This objection is convincing to many, and has begun to appear frequently in recent anti-infant baptism literature and debates.³⁵

What can be said in response to this argument? First, let us observe that this argument is an *argument from silence*. That is, it rests upon the silence of what *isn’t said, as reported in the text*. We should not dismiss the value of such reasoning. Such considerations are very valuable. But for an argument from silence to be compelling, it must take into consideration, as much as possible, the *known beliefs of those involved* and what *was actually said*, touching upon the issues disputed.

In this case, the argument is (a) based on something believed about the Judaizers, that they required circumcision for salvation. And (b) that if (hypothetically), the apostles, especially Paul, had responded to the Judaizers by saying, “You all know that baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant!”—that such an answer would have been taken as a sufficient refutation of the Judaizers’ view.

Let us consider this as fully as possible. In Acts 15:1-2 we read,

³⁴ *All Things New*, 290.

³⁵ Cf. R.C. Sproul-John MacArthur recorded debate, available through Ligonier Ministries.

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And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “*Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.*”² And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

The Judaizers, in insisting on Gentile circumcision, presumed that circumcision as a God-authorized covenant sign (Gen 17) was *not ritually replaceable*. (Remember that this “custom of Moses” was not *exclusive adult* circumcision; it was of infant males, too, if any were involved.) The answer that was stated to the Judaizers was that these Gentiles had received, not merely a symbol and sign of cleansing their uncleanness, but the *reality*. Consider carefully the words of Peter to the Council, “And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He *also did to us*; and He made no distinction between us and them, *cleansing* their hearts by faith” (15:8-9). That baptism signified the Holy Spirit’s work is clear from the episode of Cornelius’ household baptism (10:48), as recalled by Peter (consider carefully):

And he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, *you and all your household*.¹⁵ “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning.¹⁶ “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be *baptized with the Holy Spirit*.’¹⁷ “If God therefore *gave to them the same gift as He gave to us* also

after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" 18 And when they heard this, they quieted down, and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted *to the Gentiles also* the repentance that leads to life." (Act 10:14-18)

The text goes on to say, "And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were *amazed*, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the *Gentiles also*" (10:45). Peter reasoned in the most compelling manner in saying, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized *who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did*, can he?" (10:47) Notice the emphasis on "*the same gift*" and "the *Gentiles also*" and "*just as we did.*" Why were they amazed? Because the circumcised believers did not realize that the uncircumcised, "unclean" Gentiles would remain mere Gentiles and yet receive the salvific blessings of their Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. They expected that the Gentiles would be grafted in, but in so doing they would be circumcised proselytes.

In the fullest consideration, the apostles refuted the Judaizers with a twofold argument. First, the Gentiles possess what we Jews possess, even apart from the external sign. Therefore, the ritual is *unnecessary* for receiving what is of infinitely more value, *the reality*. Stephen had made it clear that possessing the sign of cleanness, by no means guaranteed a clean heart (Act 7:51). And certainly by the time of Acts 10, all the apostles had seen that the religious leadership of Israel were "circumcised, yet uncircumcised" (Jer. 9:25). Second, the apostolic apologetic takes into consideration the prophetic fulfillment of that which comes to pass in the new covenant.

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This point is easy for us to see. But it was perhaps more difficult to grapple with then, since there was a transitional generation who fully partook of the older covenant administration and the developing new covenant forms as well. James speaks to this point in the Council and it pervades all of the New Testament epistles:

Simeon [Peter] has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. 15 “And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, 16 ‘AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, 17 IN ORDER THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME.

This is just to say that in the new covenant era, the Gentiles, *apart from becoming ritual Jews* (proselytes), will be part of the “tabernacle of David,” the true temple of God, His people. Now, without becoming Jews in terms of ceremony, the Gentiles—

- ▶ “rejoice *with* His people” (Rom 15:10)
- ▶ “are no longer strangers and aliens” but “are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household” (Eph. 2:19).
- ▶ are included in “the commonwealth of Israel” and partake in “the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12).

- ▶ “are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise” (Eph. 3:6).
- ▶ since “all the nations shall be blessed in you [Abraham]” (Gal. 3:8).
- ▶ who is “a father of many nations” (Rom 4:18).
- ▶ “for all the nations will come and worship before Thee” (Rev 15:4).
- ▶ because Christ “didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God” (Rev 5:9-10).

All of this flows from that initial covenant promise with the patriarch, which the Christ-rejecting Jews denied. As our Lord teaches us, “And I say to you, that *many shall come from east and west* [Gentiles], and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom [Christ-rejecting Jews] shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” [Let us remember to pray for the Jews.] Paul bases this covenantal expansion on the very exemplary covenant member: Abraham is both “father of all who believe without being circumcised [Gentiles, like Cornelius’ household], that righteousness might be reckoned to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised [that is Jews who believe]” (Rom 4:11-12).

Upon further consideration, then, the apostles, especially Peter in this case, *actually did teach* that these converts were not in need of circumcision precisely because they were *truly*

baptized. Their “Gentile uncleanness” had been removed by the *reality*, not the *ritual*, a reality portrayed in circumcision *and* baptism. When Peter retells of Cornelius’ reception he says, “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be *baptized with the Holy Spirit*’” (Act 11:16).

Back to the objection stated. The reason why it was not stated in the words Dr. Hoch did—“You all know that baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant”—is because to simply assert this would have been *begging the question*. The great “dispute”³⁶ was whether the Spirit-baptized Gentiles, who had what circumcision signified, needed to have ritual circumcision too. This was evaluated in light of (first) the demonstrable way that God provided the Spirit to Gentile households, like Cornelius’. Such cases were calculated by God Himself to demonstrate that the ritual of circumcision, *in fact, was unnecessary* to receive the fulness of salvation and the observable manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

And secondly, the apostles appealed to the Scriptural promises of the inclusion of the Gentiles, *as Gentiles*. The Messianic new covenant, with its expansion beyond Jerusalem to the remotest part of the earth (Act 1:8), predicted the inclusion of the *uncircumcised* Gentiles. (Remember Paul’s argument that Abraham is the father of the circumcised and the uncircumcised, Rom 4:11-12).

³⁶In 15:2, “great dissension and debate” (literally “not small”) and 15:7, “much debate.”

On the other hand, the Judaizers did not see that “circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit” (Rom 2:29) and that the reality symbolized is more important than the external sign (Gal. 5:6, 5:16, 1 Cor. 7:19). They were not objecting to Gentiles’ baptism (and that of even households as in the case of Cornelius), but to their *mere* baptism. They wanted them to be cleansed *and* cut, even as the believing Jews were both circumcised and had received the new sign of Messiah (Act 10:45). After Peter’s rather vivid object lesson (of eating that which is “unclean” 10:15), and the decisive Acts 15 Council, the apostles argued that the converted Gentiles were not in need of flesh circumcision because they had what is truly greater, *a circumcised heart*.

Therefore, baptism was, in its essential qualities the ritual replacement of circumcision for the newly reached Gentiles. But, *it is not an exact replacement of circumcision for the Jew, in that transitional time*. Without adequate consideration of the transitional generation, one simply cannot make sense of the book Acts.³⁷ With the temple standing and the expansion of the gospel in Jerusalem and Judea, the apostolic work to reach the Jews necessarily involved the continuity, for a time at least, of old covenant forms. They worshiped in the temple (Act 2:4). Paul even took a ceremonial vow in which a sacrifice was offered (21:26). But all of this was before the demonstrable refutation of Christless, Messiah-rejecting, Judaism by God’s hand of judgment in the year, *Anno Domini* 70.

³⁷Think of the post-belief reception of the Spirit with the Samaritans; the demonstrable reception of the Spirit with Cornelius’ household, etc.

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During this transitional generation, it was certainly permissible for Jews and proselytes to be both circumcised and baptized (Act 16:3). The heart of the apostle is evident, “And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews” (1 Cor. 9:20). On the other hand, the Judaizers’ view was both a misunderstanding of the nature and requirements of salvation in the Old Testament, and the transitional era in the new covenant. It was a challenge to the heart of the Great Commission gospel for baptized Gentiles *to be required* to be circumcised. Why? Because the Judaizers turned the ceremonial shadows which were intended “until a time of reformation” (Heb. 9:10) into a legalistic end in itself. This amounts to a denial of justification by faith, illustrated by Abraham, himself justified prior to circumcision. What circumcision was *intended to be* for the Jew (Rom 2:29, 4:11) and those who became ritual Jews (proselytes) in the antecedent age, baptism now does for *all nations*.

Therefore, regarding the *Judaistic objection*, I believe that (a) above is true, but that (b) is false. It is true that (a) the Judaizers required circumcision for salvation; but it is not the case that if the apostles had said, “baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant!”—(b) *that such an answer would have been taking as a refutation by the Judaizers*. For an argument from silence to be compelling, it must take into consideration what *actually was said* and the *known beliefs of those involved*. What I have argued thus far is that this objection does not adequately consider what was *indeed said* in response to the Judaizers. Namely, the Gentiles *have the reality* that circumcision and baptism signified.

Moreover, *Judaizer objection* does not adequately account for their *known beliefs*.

Given the known beliefs of the Judaizers, if the situation had really been (as the Baptist must argue) that in the new covenant there was *no covenant sign of inclusion for children whatsoever*, it is a much louder silence that the Judaizers did not protest even more! If they protested against Gentile adults (and children) not having to be circumcised (a sign of inclusion for the whole household), how much more would they have protested that *their own children were no longer considered in covenant with God!*

If we stand in the sandals of the First Century Jewish (and proselyte) followers of Jesus, it is *incredible* (truly *unbelievable*) to think that a believer's little children would not to be considered part of the people of God. Imagine the shock of Crispus, the synagogue leader (Acts 18:8), who believes (on Friday, let's say) that his children are in covenant with God, part of the people of God, and members of the synagogue of God. Then, on the Sabbath after Paul preaches, he finds out that—in the fulfillment of the promised seed of the women, through the covenant promises, in the fullness of time, in the era of great David's greater Son, in the Messianic kingdom and the light to the Gentiles and the glory of His people Israel—*now his little children have no part in the people of God!*

Or imagine the new proselyte family who have recently undergone the painful passage to covenant membership only to discover upon hearing of Messiah that in the new covenant his children are afforded less of a place than they were in the shadows of Judaism. From the original audience's mindset, this view of new covenant, Messianic-synagogue membership would be more than disappointing. It would be *inconceivable*. And more so when the First Century Palestinian religious

practices are considered. It appears from history that Jewish proselytism involved the practice of *proselyte household baptism*.³⁸ After a family had committed to be Jewish proselytes, the males of the household were circumcised and the final act which “cleansed” their Gentile uncleanness was a ritual washing, a baptism of the entire household, including infants.³⁹ Thus, if such a practice were common, the Baptist case requires a *double discontinuity* of both the inclusion of their children in the covenant membership and their inclusion in the common practice of Gentile (proselyte) baptism.

To add, imagine the overwhelming status of inferiority that Gentiles would have felt if the Jews’ children were considered members of the Christian synagogue (Jam 2:2) and part of the “household of God,” while Gentile children had neither sign nor membership.

It should be admitted that both Dr. Hoch’s argument and my argument are *from silence*. The reader must weigh which argument is most convincing based on the mind-set of the original audience. What must be decisive, though, is *their* mindset, not *our* biases. *Which silence is loudest, given what we know of their thinking and what was, in fact, said?* With the clearly stated objections of the Judaizers, their known beliefs, and what we know of their frame of mind, if the apostolic practice and teaching excluded the infant children of Jews

³⁸Even the best Baptist defender, Paul K. Jewett, admits that “the majority of scholars suppose a pre-Christian origin of the practice” of household proselyte baptism (*Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*), 64.

³⁹Infants born into a proselyte context after the initial cleansing did not need to be baptized, since they were clean by virtue of being born into a “clean” household.

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(and Gentiles), it is very remarkable that no hint of this discussion arises in the pages of the New Testament.

Covenant, Church, and Kingdom

Granting the fact of silence on infant baptism (and the later baptism of Christian children), perhaps the most direct way to settle the question is to ask whether believers' children are Biblically designated as part of what baptism signifies membership in. Baptism signifies inclusion into the (1) covenant, (2) the church, and (3) the kingdom. We must ask then whether the children of believers are considered as part of the covenant, church, and kingdom, in the Bible.

(1) The children of believers are surely promised to be part of the covenant *generally* and the new covenant *specifically*. When God revealed the covenant to Abraham He said in Genesis 17:7, "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you." Lest someone say—"But that was the Old Testament"—Paul interprets this in *the New Testament* when he teaches that the promise was made "certain *to all the descendants*, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, 'a father of many nations have I made you')" (Rom 4:16-17).

The new covenant certainly includes believers' children in its promises, in the very same language of the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant. How can Baptists credibly maintain that the new covenant does not include the children of believers in light of the numerous explicit statements to the contrary?⁴⁰ The Covenant Lord promises to “*circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants*” (Dt. 30:6); that “*the offspring of Israel also shall [not] cease from being a nation before Me forever*” (Jer. 31:36-37); that the covenant is “*for the good of their children after them*” (Jer. 32:39); that He will not “*reject the descendants of Jacob*” (Jer. 32:26); that “*their children will see it and be glad, their heart will rejoice in the LORD . . . they with their children will live and come back*” (Zec 10:6-9); that His Spirit shall not depart “*from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring*” (Is. 59:21); that “*He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers*” (Mal. 4:6); that His mercy continues to be “*upon generation after generation toward those who fear him*” (Lk. 2:50)—because “*the promise is for you and your children*” (Acts 2:39)!

(2) The children of believers are addressed as part of the (visible) church, just as baptized adults are. Paul begins his letter to the Colossians, “*To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae*” (v 2). Later he addresses “*wives*” (3:18), “*husbands*” (3:19), “*children*” (3:20), “*fathers*” (3:21), “*slaves*” (3:22), and “*masters*” (4:1). In the same way he addresses “*the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus*” (Eph. 1:1). In chapter five he addresses

⁴⁰I refer the reader to the several pages of citations above.

“wives” (5:22), “husbands” (5:25), “*children*” (6:1), “fathers” (6:4), “slaves” (6:5), and “masters” (6:9). It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Paul addressed the children of believers as part of “the saints and faithful brethren” (Col 1:2).

Someone might respond, “But how can (unregenerate) little children be “saints”—“called ones”? To this I ask, “How *unregenerate adults* be saints?” In the same epistles addressed to the “church” of “saints,” there are repeated calls for self-examination. “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves” (2 Cor. 13:5).⁴¹ In the epistles, church members collectively are addressed without stipulating, “Oh, and some of you are probably lost.” Or, in more theologically precise language we might say *visible church* members are addressed. *Visible saints* are addressed.

Just as visible members are addressed in the epistles, Paul teaches that the child of even one believer is not “unclean,” but “saintly”—“holy.” In dealing with the problem of mixed marriages (1 Cor. 7:12-16), he writes, “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now *they are holy*” (1 Cor. 7:14). When this Greek term for “holy” (*hagios*) is used of people, its regular and consistent rendering is “saint.”⁴²

In the baptism debate, Baptists have been virtually inoculated against the use of this verse (1 Cor. 7:14). The usual vaccine is that it means a believer’s child is *legitimate*, rather

⁴¹E.g., 1 Cor. 1:2/6:9, 2 Cor. 1:2/13:5, Gal. 1:2/5:21, 2 Pet. 1:1/1:10.

⁴²See Rom 1:7, 8:27, 12:13, 15:31, 1 Cor. 1:2, 6:1, 6:2, 14:33, 16:1, 16:15, Eph. 1:1, Col. 1:2, etc.

than illegitimate. The “legitimacy” position fails to be convincing, at least to me, for several reasons. Two unbelievers can have both a “legitimate” marriage and “legitimate” children. Paul’s statement, however, is that “otherwise” (*epei ara*)—an emphatic contrast (i.e., *if one of the parents was not a believer*)—“your children would be unclean (*akatharta*), but now they are holy” (1 Cor. 7:14).

It is even more unconvincing when Baptists *appeal to rabbinic, Jewish sources* regarding the “marriage covenant” to prove that the children of believers *do not* occupy the place of covenant members (as in the Old Testament and Judaism).⁴³ Or, when it is argued that “Paul is here employing the concept of ritual holiness found in the Old Testament,” though the children are not *covenantally set apart*.⁴⁴ These appeals are made as though the Jews saw Gentile children from a “legitimate” marriage as being “clean” or “holy” (!). It is extremely unlikely that this former Rabbi, Paul here teaches a “ritual holiness” of the Old Testament or Judaism, but that such a child is *not covenantally set apart*. On the contrary, the New Testament makes it clear that Jews considered Gentile households as *unclean (akatharta)*, regardless of the legitimacy of the Gentile marriage. Peter had to be instructed both by a vision and by the demonstrable salvation of Cornelius’ household that “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (Act 10:15). “God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean (*akatharta*)” (Act 10:28).

⁴³E.g., Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*, 136.

⁴⁴David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham*, 90.

(3) The children of believers are included in the kingdom of God. One Baptist defender states, “Therefore, based on Jeremiah 31:31-34 and its description of regeneration in the new covenant participants, and in light of Christ’s definition of the entrance requirements to the kingdom (John 3:5, 6) and church (Mt. 16:16-18), I cannot say that children of believers are ‘in’ the new covenant or church or kingdom or ‘God’s people’ until they show, by outward confession, evidence of regeneration.”⁴⁵ Would it not be a more reliable method to develop one’s conclusions regarding the *status of children* fundamentally from passages which actually *address the status of children*? The above writer has built his case on *inferences* (though he denies that paedobaptists are to use inferences for their position). He is inferring that the children of believers are to be put out from texts which do not even address the status of children. He selects part of Jeremiah’s prophecy—notice that the other eight passages in Jeremiah where children are included have been omitted, and only one line down, in verses 31:36-37, the “offspring” are emphatically included, *twice*. Jesus’ dialogue with an adult Pharisee (in John 3) and the adult apostolic confession of Peter (Mt. 16:16) are pressed into service. Please consider that the method used here will yield unwarranted conclusions, to say the least. For example, “If *anyone* will not work, neither let him eat” (2 Thess. 3:10)—Are little children to work for their food, too?

Rather, let us discover what the text says about children in the places where the status of children is *actually addressed!*

⁴⁵Fred Malone, *A String of Pearls Unstrung: A Theological Journey Into Believers’ Baptism*, 19.

First consider the explicit inclusion of children in Christ's kingdom, made explicit by the King Himself.

And they were bringing even their babies (*brepbos*) to Him so that He might touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. 16 But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such (*toiouton*) as these. 17 Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all."⁴⁶ (Lk. 18:15-17)

The single most important grammatical detail is the "such" (*toiouton*)—Does it include the children or not? Is Jesus saying the kingdom belongs to those who have childlike attributes, or is He saying that it belongs *to these children and others* with these childlike attributes? Paul K. Jewett (baptistic), in one of the most scholarly and convincing defenses of the baptistic position, deals fairly with the "such" in this passage. He writes,

The Greek (*toiouton*) by no means implies the exclusion, but rather the inclusion, of the ones mentioned. When the Jews cried out against Paul (Acts 22:22), 'Away with such a one (*toiouton*)!' they could hardly have meant, Away with someone *like* this man Paul. Rather, they meant, Away with Paul and everyone of his kind! By the same

⁴⁶In the Mark 10:14 parallel, this is the only occasion where Jesus was "indignant." He was *enraged* (*aganakteo*).

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rule, when Jesus bade little children to come to him, ‘for such is the kingdom of heaven,’ he most likely meant, ‘The kingdom belongs to these children and all others who are like them in that they have a childlike faith.’ The truth that the kingdom belongs to the childlike should not prejudice the affirmation that it also belongs to children.”⁴⁷ It might be added that when Christ says, “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God *like a child* shall not enter it at all” (Lk. 18:17)—He is saying that children do, in fact, “receive the kingdom.”

It was the Covenant Lord Himself who set a (*literal*, not a figurative) child before His disciples and said,

And whoever receives one such (*toiouto*) child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea. . . . *See that you do not despise one of these little ones*, for I say to you, that *their angels in heaven* continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven. (Mt. 18:2-10)

Is not Jesus in a position to know who is in His church and kingdom and who is protected by the holy angels?

The argument in a nutshell is simply this: God established His Church in the days of Abraham and put children into

⁴⁷*Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Eerdmans, 1978), 60.

it. They must remain there until He puts them out. He has nowhere put them out. They are still then members of His Church and as such entitled to its ordinances. Among these ordinances is baptism, which standing in similar place in the New Dispensation to circumcision in the Old, is like it to be given to children.⁴⁸

One and the same Covenant Lord put the infant seed of believers in His visible church in Abraham's day. They have not been put out—they have not been put out *by God*, that is.

The Dimensions of the Covenant

Some of the confusion of who is “in” the covenant, church, and kingdom is alleviated when we properly define the covenant and distinguish between its internal and external or legal dimensions. A covenant *proper* is the *treaty words* or *stipulations* of God's relationship to His people—“the words of the covenant” (*dabar berith*) (Ex. 3:28, Dt. 29:1, Is. 59:21, Jer. 11:3, 11:8). When one speaks of being “in” the covenant, a non-Biblical phrase is introduced. While Scripture speaks of entering “into the covenant” (Dt. 29:12, 2 Kgs. 23:3, 2 Chr. 15:12, Jer. 34:10), the Bible (in the original or English translations) does not speak of a person or group being “in the covenant.” The reason for this is that *the covenant*, technically speaking, is the *treaty words*. The point here is not to be super-scrupulous. There's nothing wrong with using “in the

⁴⁸Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Polemics of Infant Baptism*, 9:408.

covenant” as shorthand to mean “under the stipulations of the covenant.” Often however, a subtle shift takes place when one speaks of being “in the new covenant.” It goes like this, the new covenant promises the regenerating work of the Spirit, so how can someone be “in the new covenant” and not be regenerate? This question presupposes a view of the covenant which limits the terms of the covenant to only one of its chief components, while ignoring the other stipulations.

It is not only those who are Reformed paedobaptists who believe that the new covenant involves stipulations beyond the promise of regeneration. Carl B. Hoch, Jr., argues that “it would appear reasonable to assume that the new covenant is also a suzerainty-vassal covenant [like the Mosaic covenant in structure and form]. One would expect the new covenant to have a preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, and cursings and blessings formulae like the old covenant.”⁴⁹ The original codification of the covenant with Moses included such stipulations. But to discover all the information on the new covenant, one must gather it from an inductive study of the redemptive plan in both testaments. As Dr. Hoch says, “Unlike the old covenant, you cannot point to a passage in the New Testament and say, ‘This is the new covenant in its entirety.’ This requires a hypothetical reconstruction of the new covenant form along the lines of the reconstruction of the old covenant form from the Old Testament materials.”⁵⁰

What is the relationship between the church, covenant, and kingdom? The covenant is the *words* defining God’s

⁴⁹*All Things New*, 93.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 92.

relationship to His people. The church is the *people* under the obligations of covenant (words). And the kingdom is the *reign and domain* of Christ with, through, and over the visible church.

The New Testament indicates that the visible church, which is the *covenant community*, consists of both regenerate and unregenerate members. This is hardly controversial. But beyond this, many passages indicate that the new covenant has stipulations for judgment—“The Lord will judge his people” (Heb. 10:30, Mt. 16:19, 1 Cor. 11:29-30, 34, 1Pe 4:17). Such stipulations for judgment are directed to visible covenant community members—who are yet unregenerate. Also, many passages teach that the kingdom (in its present administration) includes both regenerate and unregenerate individuals (Mt. 8:12, 13:24-31, 41, 47-50, 21:43, 25:1-13, Lk. 13:28, Rev 11:15). Jesus says this in rather plain language: in the judgment, “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will *gather out of His kingdom* all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 13:41-42).

What can be said to our baptistic brethren who have a covenant community (the church) with both regenerate and unregenerate; but a covenant membership of only regenerate individuals (?)—a kingdom rule of Christ over wheat and tares, but wheat alone are addressed in the new covenant stipulations (?)—an ecclesiology (study of the church) which admits visible and invisible realities, but a (covenant) theology which admits only regenerate membership? Such a view is incoherent, as well as unable to account for all the Biblical information about the covenant, church, and kingdom.

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Now if the new covenant prophecies include “the offspring”—and if their restatements and quotations in the New Testament also expressly say the promise is “for you and your children”—and if the apostolic writers address believers’ children as part of the saints and church—and if Jesus own explicit and direct statements grammatically and exegetically include children in His kingdom—On what grounds may we deny them the entrance sign to the visible, covenant community of God’s people?

Covenant Responsibilities: Family Worship

When the first Gentile households were given the sign of covenant membership, they, just like Abraham, were commanded to bring their children “up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). An elder in the church, as well as the spiritually mature person, is one who “manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity” (1Ti 3:4). A ritual act, even though it be ordained of God, is of no use if the *spiritual reality* is not foundational to the sign. What is the *spiritual reality* behind the sign of entrance into the covenant? For Abraham, the Lord says, “For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him” (Gen 18:19). Yes, this is the Old Testament—but oh how practical it is this very day! We must heed that ancient command, “You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you

walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Dt. 6:7). Do you command your children to keep the way of the Lord? Do you teach them diligently to love the Lord *their* God (Dt. 6:4)? Without the reality of leading one’s home *to Christ, in Christ, and for Christ*, the water of baptism is worse than useless, *it is condemnatory*.

The close and endearing connection between parents and children affords a strong argument in favour of the church-membership of the infant seed of believers. The voice of nature is lifted up, and pleads most powerfully in behalf of our cause. The thought of severing parents from their offspring, in regard to the most interesting relations in which it has pleased God in his adorable providence to place them, is equally repugnant to Christian feeling, and to natural law. Can it be, my friends, that when the stem is in the church, the branch is out of it? Can it be that when the parent is within the visible kingdom of the Redeemer, his offspring, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, have no connection with it? ⁵¹

The Scripture declares that, “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and *all the families of the nations will worship* before Thee” (Psa 22:27). Joshua nobly said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (24:15). A baptized child should be a child being brought up

⁵¹Samuel Miller, *Infant Baptism: Discourse 1* (Presbyterian Board of Publication, from a sermon in 1834).

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in the discipline and admonition of the Lord, whose parents vow, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Every person that grows up in a Christian home should be taught God's Word from their earliest times. Just like Timothy, each Christian child should be exhorted to "*continue in the things you have learned* and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that *from childhood (brephos)* you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2Ti 3:14-15).

Infant baptism does not relieve parents or guardians, as the case may be, of that solemn responsibility to instruct, warn, exhort, direct and protect the infant members of the Christian church committed to their care. . . .The encouragement derived from a divine promise must never be divorced from the discharge of the obligations involved. It is only in the atmosphere of obligation discharged, in a word, in the atmosphere of obedience to divine commandments, that faith in the divine promise can live and grow. Faith divorced from obedience is mockery and presumption.⁵²

I surely pray that regarding family worship, baptists, as well as those who baptize their children, will take this practice to heart and home. However, I must point out the radical inconsistency of teaching a *noncovenant member, nonchurch*

⁵²John Murray, "Why We Baptize Infants" (in *The Presbyterian Guardian*, Vol. 5 1938).

member, nonkingdom member, nonChristian, to praise, confess, follow, and pray to Christ as *their Savior*! In other words, *in reality* the children of sincere believers, seeking to obey Ephesians 6:4, *are* treated and required to act as *visible members of the church*. It makes perfect sense to educate them as Christians, to think the thoughts of God, to confess the holy faith, to walk with Christ all the days of their life—but this only makes sense if they are counted as part of God’s people. It is contrary to nature and Scripture for a believer to treat one’s little children as though they are excluded from Christ as unbelieving pagans. The sign which demonstrates that they are part of God’s visible people is baptism.

Certainly, one could seek to carry out family worship in a way consistent with the Baptist view of the children of believers, except that it would not be family *worship*, it would be family *evangelism*, exclusively so. On the other hand, the paedobaptist has *family worship* which is inclusive of evangelism in the deepest sense, it is *discipleship* from daylight til dawn. Just as worship in the congregation has an evangelistic component, calling all to self-examination (those within and without of the visible church). Family worship, just as congregational worship, calls the “worshippers” to be sure one has the reality behind the water.

The Dimensions of Baptism

Of course by the children’s inclusion into the *visible* church one should not *presume* that they are regenerate and are necessarily part of the *invisible* church. Certainly *by* baptism regeneration is not to be presumed. (Again) This is

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true with adults, no less than with children. What Baptist would say that because someone was baptized in their church, that they are (somehow by that) regenerated? But many Baptists would quickly say or insinuate that we believe that infant baptism saves the infant (!).

The problem here is that of the relationship of baptism to the life of a Christian. The Baptist view sees the significance of baptism as primarily a *testimony* of one's (past) personal experience of salvation. So the value of an infant's baptism is completely dismissed—since they weren't saved then, and even if they were, it was not a testimony of their experience in salvation. They didn't "decide to follow the Lord in believers' baptism" and stand in the water and tell those enthusiastically on-looking that "well I used to be. . .but now I'm saved." Of what value could the baptism of a helpless, unreasoning, decision-less, infant be—an infant in need of grace, but utterly unable to even ask for it or make the smallest contribution to salvation? —Perhaps the reader can see now, infant baptism actually affords a very accurate picture of that salvation which is *by grace alone*. According to the Reformed faith, faith is a response to the *prior grace of God, is it not?*

The Reformed and covenantal view sees baptism in a much more objective relationship to the Christian life. For the professing convert, he certainly must *profess*; but that's only the beginning. Such a person is to vow to bring all their life in conformity with whom they have vocally and visibly identified, the Triune God. Baptism testifies of that. Baptism testifies of what God has done in His gracious covenant to bring salvation. And to whom is this salvation brought? As a parent, he is to "Believe in the Lord Jesus," trusting God for

the blessed result, “and you shall be saved, you and *your household*” (Act 16:31, 10:14).

In the case of an infant who is baptized and then raised in God-consciousness, with vibrant family discipleship, vital community fellowship, and vigorous public worship—baptism is the simple symbol of that life to be manifested in heart, home, and church. It is to be *recalled and invoked* by father, mother, brothers, sisters, and pastors, “Child, you are ‘engaged to be the Lord’s!’”⁵³ Just as the preachers of the Bible (Old and New Testaments) called for those who were circumcised in flesh to be circumcised of heart; so it is that we are to call those baptized (whether our children or ourselves or others) to live out the realities behind the cleansing emblem.

This means self-examination (2 Cor. 13:5, 1Pe 4:17). It is not those who have the *sign* of the kingdom that inherit it (regardless of *when* they received it); it is those who have the *King* that inherit it! (1 Cor. 6:9-11, Gal. 5:21). Paul, in systematically explaining the gospel, called Christians to live out the reality behind their baptisms (Rom 6:3-7). Paul says, “knowing this [our union with Christ’s work, which is sacramentalized in baptism] . . . we should no longer be slaves to sin” (Rom 6:6-7).

What is sacramentalized in baptism is that precious spiritual union accomplished through our Savior’s unique

⁵³This phrase is from the Westminster Shorter Catechism 94. “What is baptism ? A. Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,(1) doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and *our engagement to be the Lord’s.*” (2) (1)Matt. 28:19 (2)Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:27

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baptism (Mt. 10:38-39). He drank of the cup of the wrath of God for us and was united and completely identified with our sin: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Baptism is a testimony, not so much of our *salvation experience*, though we pray this be *increasingly* so—rather it is a testimony of our *Savior’s experience*. He became vile so that we could be purified. He was contaminated so that we could be washed. He shed drops of blood so that we might feel water. He was cut so that we might only be cleansed. He became sin so that we could be *saints*. He said “My God, My God why hast thou forsaken Me” so that we might hear, “*I will be God to you and your descendants after you.*”

Objections to Infant Baptism

There are, I am sure, objections in the minds of many. Given the brevity of this study, let me examine what I take to be the central objection.⁵⁴ The basic structure of the Baptist polemic against infant baptism is that since we have (1) an explicit basis for “believers’ baptism” and (2) since there is no explicit warrant (an example or command) for “infant baptism,” and since (3) the new covenant is made with exclusively regenerate individuals (and believers’ little children cannot be assumed to be regenerate)—Therefore, the baptistic conclusion is: the children of believers are not to receive the sign of the new covenant until they confess their faith (and thus give evidence of their new covenant membership). I believe that this is the strongest form of the Baptist argument. It involves the explicit warrant for “believers’ baptism” and it includes the theological basis, the nature of the new covenant.

⁵⁴Other objections and critical reviews of anti-paedobaptist books may be found in the writer’s, *Covenantal Infant Baptism: An Outlined Defense* (www.wordmp3.com/baptism).

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It is important to observe the structure of the baptistic argument. The Baptist assumes (1) that the cases of adult converts being baptized are sufficient to deal with the question of the children of believers. (2) Though the Baptist lacks explicit warrant to put the infants of believers out of the covenant (there is no command or example which demands their exclusion), (3) their exclusion is *inferred* from what they take to be the nature of the new covenant.

The succinct answer to this central line of objection is (1) to recognize that a million cases of adult converts professing their faith prior to baptism prove nothing, of themselves, regarding the infants of believers (the question at hand). *I heartily concur with the practice of adult profession prior to baptism.* This is the view in every Reformed creed!⁵⁵ Most Baptist polemics just hammer away at the examples of adults, as though this settles the case—ironically, the childless eunuch with his crystal-clear case of prior belief becomes the paradigm for settling the question of infant children. But, in fact, we do not have anything like a million cases, do we? If *every New Testament case* of baptism was individualistic and of one who professed and was then baptized, such a point might be more forceful for the Baptist contention. But quite the contrary, virtually every person who could have conceivably had a household, had it baptized. *The explicit cases of baptism, when fully considered, are not evidence of the Baptist view.* (2)

⁵⁵The *Larger Catechism 166*, for example says, “Unto whom is baptism to be administered? A. *Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him*, but infants descended from parents, either both or but one of them professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are, in that respect, within the covenant, and to be baptized.”

Explicit warrant on the baptism of believers' children is lacking in both directions. There is no case of an "infant baptism" and neither is there a case of the "believers' baptism" of a Christian's child. This question must be settled by the proper application of Biblical teaching. It cannot be settled with a direct appeal to an express text. (3) The covenantal view possesses *explicit warrant* for the *inclusion* of children in the new covenant (Dt. 30:6, Jer. 31:36-37), church (Eph. 1:1/6:1-4, Col 1:2/3:20, 1 Cor. 7:14), and kingdom (Mt. 19:14, Mk. 10:14, Lk. 18:16). Moreover, the covenantal view can argue from *truly necessary inferences*⁵⁶—drawing upon both the continuity of the covenant promise (God to your children after you) and covenant people, as well as the examples of baptism (Cornelius' household, Lydia's household, the Jailer's household, Crispus' household, and Stephanus' household). Let us consider further, however, the two components of this argument.

The Explicit Warrant Objection

"I am not going to believe it until I read in the Bible that an infant was baptized." I actually heard a pastor say this once. Of course, it has already been admitted that there is no statement of "infant baptism" in just those terms. I believe that the Bible is perfectly clear that the children of believers

⁵⁶A *necessary inference* is a logically valid conclusion from true premises, such as: 1. the children of believers are covenant members; 2. covenant members are to receive the entrance sign of the covenant; therefore (this follows *necessarily* from the premises) the children of believers are to receive the entrance sign of the covenant.

are included in the new covenant promises, in the church, and in the kingdom of Christ. This is taught in the passages which actually address and refer to *children*.⁵⁷ Again, it may be true that there is no express statement about “infant baptism,” but this objection cannot be raised about “household baptism.” When the familiar response comes, that every individual in those households must have professed faith (contrary to a precise grammatical analysis of Act 16:34 & 18:8), the real trouble is why the term “household” (*oikos*) shows up in the baptism examples at all!⁵⁸ If baptism is only for individual believers, why would Luke and Paul present a pattern which could so easily mislead readers to think that baptism was for families, as other signs of covenant had been? Remember, the original audience was Jews, proselytes, and God-fearing Gentiles whose ideas about households, covenants, signs, and family unity come from the Old Testament and Judaism. What teaching in the New Testament would correct their “faulty” (?) belief that baptism would be for households, as in all the previous administrations of covenant signs and pledges (sacrifices, meals, circumcision, and Passover)? Surely, the examples of household baptism would not correct them!

It is true that there is no explicit statement about *infant baptism*, but there is even less about *infant exclusion*. And if the overwhelming and prevailing belief system of the original

⁵⁷Those denying infant baptism must do so by taking their presuppositions from the passages which don't even refer to the status of children in the church, kingdom, and covenant.

⁵⁸*Oikos* in the LXX (the Greek translation of the OT) is used of Noah's family (Gen 7:19), of Abrahamic covenant and those to be circumcised and taught (Gen 17:13, 18:19), regarding the families in Passover (12:27), and David's descendants in the Davidic covenant (2Ch 21:7).

audience expected the inclusion of their children, would not the burden of proof rest with those who deny that believer's children are to be included?

For those who need to read something about "*infants*," please observe that very little is said about "*infants*" *per se* in the New Testament. The Authorized Version only records one New Testament reference to "infants" and it teaches that they are included in the kingdom of God. "And they brought unto him also infants (*brepbos*), that he would touch them . . . for of such is the kingdom of God" (Lk. 18:15-16). The NASV includes only two New Testament references to "infants." One regards the "infants" of the Jews who were killed under Pharaoh (Acts 7:19). The other is supportive of the place of little children in Christ's kingdom. Jesus quoted Psalm 8:3 in reference to the "children who were crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' . . . 'Out of the mouth of *infants and nursing babes* thou hast prepared praise for thyself.'" So to require the Bible to say "infant baptism" not only overlooks the way the Bible uses its own terms, but also the foundational themes of the inclusion of believers' children in the covenant, church, and kingdom.

It seems most persuasive to baptists, almost without any other consideration, that since the Scriptures contain no explicit statements about "infant baptism," that such a practice is, to use T.E. Watson's words, "an abomination of untold enormity."⁵⁹ However, the lack of explicit statements alone should not be persuasive, for at least two compelling reasons: (a) other doctrines are embraced and practiced (by

⁵⁹T.E. Watson, *Should Babies Be Baptized?*, 115.

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Baptists and others) without explicit commands or examples. And (b) there are many practices explicit in the Bible which are not embraced by either Baptists or other evangelicals.

(a) For example, one could list practices permitted in many evangelical contexts *without an explicit New Testament command or example*: the baptism of believing children; the partaking of communion by women; the observance of Sunday as a day of rest; the recognition of Christmas and Easter as religious holidays; the use of musical instruments in New Testament worship; the church (corporation) owning property. (b) On the other hand, there are many examples of practices which *have an explicit New Testament command or example*, but are not practiced in many evangelical congregations: the washing of feet, the baptism of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands; the practice of charismatic/miraculous gifts to confirm the gift of the Holy Spirit; the immediate baptism of converts (even in the middle of the night); the miraculous use of physical objects for healing (the handkerchief); speaking in tongues/other miraculous gifts; the use of wine (containing alcohol) in communion (1 Cor. 11:21); greeting each other with a kiss. Now it is not my purpose to approve or disapprove of the continuing practice of any of these, but only to point out that *explicit example or command* is not enough to settle doctrinal belief or church practice.

I repeat: in this case—when deciding between covenantal infant baptism or baptizing the children of believers only after they grow up and profess their faith—both Baptists and paedobaptists should admit that there is no *explicit* Biblical material on this subject *in either direction*. From the Baptist point of view, we do not have an explicit case of the child of

a believer growing up, professing faith, and being baptized. This is a point that is not appreciated or even acknowledged from the Baptist side.

In an online discussion of a previous revision of this study, one critic said, “The Baptist has scriptures that demonstrate believers were baptized, Mr. Strawbridge has none that explicitly show infants were baptized.” This is reducing the question to “believers or infant” —and as I have tried to make plain, Reformed paedobaptists do accept and heartily concur with the “believers’ baptism” of adult converts. Reducing the issue to “believers” or “infants” is a *complex question fallacy*, *i.e.*, “Have you stopped beating your wife yet?” This mistake is lucidly discussed in D.A. Carson’s, *Exegetical Fallacies*,

Dichotomy is used incorrectly when a question is constructed so that it demands a choice between two answers which are in fact not exclusive or not exhaustive.⁶⁰

The baptistic reduction has the covenantal household position answering “yes” or “no” to this question, “Have you stopped baptizing believers and started baptizing infants yet?”

In both positions there is an overlap on the question of adult converts. We agree that the eunuch should have professed his faith prior to baptism. But since there is silence in the explicit case of believers’ children, how should we then proceed to resolve the true dispute with our baptistic brethren?

⁶⁰These are Fischer’s words, cited by Carson (Baker, 1984), 107.

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The Baptist proceeds by applying the rule of adult converts from paganism to the case of the little children of Christians. So they will point to the Biblical examples and commands directed to self-conscious, developmentally mature new converts. The Baptist says we must wait and see whether our children will grow up and profess their faith before we give them the sign of inclusion. On the other hand, the covenantal view maintains that the children of believers are to come under the household rule, like in the previous administrations of the covenant (i.e., circumcision). We believe that there is precedent for this (throughout the OT and especially in circumcision). Moreover, we find affirmation of this in the household baptism pattern. By God's grace and according to His Word, we have confidence that children raised in the discipline and admonition of the Lord will *profess* their faith, for we will instruct them to do so from infancy (2Ti 3:14, Eph. 6:4, Dt. 6:4). This is a most holy responsibility for Christian parents. We see infant baptism as an emblem of these responsibilities and their accompanying promises.

Conversely, it is crucial to realize that when the Baptist settles the case by appealing to the examples of adult converts, by doing so, *they are denying that the children of believers in the Old Testament and the children of believers in the New Testament occupy the same place.* They are denying that the children of believers are covenantally set apart in the visible people of God. They are denying that the responsibilities of Christian parents to “teach them diligently” (Dt. 6:4) and “to keep the way of the LORD” (Gen 18:19) are their *covenantal responsibilities.*

It is undisputed that in the Old Testament these duties were part of the covenant. These saints were to keep the covenant, in light of the promise that “the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep His covenant” (Psa 103:17-18, Ex. 19:5). Keeping covenant is simply a single term for the relationship of faith and works that the Bible presents in both testaments. Faith is the horse and works are the cart. In the Old Testament, Abraham was justified by faith and that justification was demonstrated by obedience (Jam 2:22-24). When Abraham “believed God” (Rom 4:2), he believed God’s covenant promise (Gen 15:5). When the Israelites in the wilderness “broke the covenant” they did so because they did not *believe*—“You neither *believed Him* nor listened to His voice” (Dt. 9:23).

Please hear me clearly, *I am not saying here that Baptists forsake these responsibilities*. Rather, if they are self-conscious and consistent with their espoused belief, they must realize that their *rationale and purpose is no longer the same as their Old Testament counterparts*. One Baptist writer makes the contrast quite practical. He offers a very consistent Baptist view of educational training:

Israelite children therefore were educated for their lives as God’s covenant people. . . .God’s [new covenant] people are in all the world and their children need to be educated to live in the world. It is a pluralist world, not one governed by the laws and teachings of God If children are to be educated to live in this world they will have to be educated as those around them are. . . .

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Nothing is clearer than that the entire education of Old Testament children was entrusted to their parents. They had been taught the basics by their own parents and their responsibility was to pass these on to their children. As has been seen, this involved telling them what it meant to be God's covenant people. . . .Education was very much a family affair. . . .Who educates the children of believers under the new covenant? . . . Education for life in the world means education with and by the world.⁶¹

This is a very consistent working out of baptistic principles. However, I pray, sincerely, that my baptistic brethren might be inconsistent, here. The writer clearly exposes his presupposition: "The comparative silence of the New Testament on children does not mean the Old Testament way is still in operation; it means we are in a totally new situation" (p. 34).

I would submit, however, that Deuteronomy 6:4-7 and Ephesians 6:1-4 are *parallel* passages. The New Testament does not treat the children of believers as though they are in a different relationship with God or their parents than they were in the Old Testament. Parents have the same duties to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4, Dt. 6:7). We certainly have more light in that task, more knowledge of the gospel. But our children must keep the same covenant law, "Honor your father and mother," just the same (Eph. 6:2; Ex. 20:12, Dt. 5:16). And obedience brings

⁶¹Eric Lane, *Special Children? A Theology of Childhood* (London: Grace, 1996). From pages 34, 35, 36, and 37, respectively.

the same blessing since it is “the first commandment with a promise, that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:2-3, Ex. 20:12, Dt. 5:16). (Please observe that “the land” is now much larger, “the world” Rom 4:13.) Christian parents must still say, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Jos 24:15). Reviewing what the New Testament says about believers’ children, I cannot see *any validity* to the conclusion that believers’ children occupy a different standing in the two testaments. God still “keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (OT: Dt. 7:9) because “His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him” (NT: Lk. 1:50). There is no difference in the OT or NT language about the children of believers. In fact, just to be literalistic about it, we still have at least 36,700 years of the covenant inclusion of children to go!⁶²

⁶²If a generation is 40 years, it has been about 3300 years since the Exodus when this promise was given. That leaves over 36,700 years to go! Obviously, “a thousand generations” doesn’t mean 40,000 years, but it is just a way to say the promise extends to *endless generations*.

Believers' Children in Both Testaments

	Old Testament	New Testament
Duties of Parents	"Command his children to keep the way of the LORD" (Gen 18:19)	"Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4)
Duties of Children	"Honor your father and mother" (Ex. 20:12)	"Obey your parents" (Eph. 6:2)
Blessings	"Live long in the land" (Ex. 20:12)	"Live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:3)
Children Must Obey the Word	"Your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes" (Dt. 6:2)	"Continue in the things [Scripture] you have learned" from infancy (2Ti 3:14-15)
Household Leadership	"As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Jos 24:15)	The jailer "rejoiced greatly, with all his household" (Act 16:34, ASV)
Promised Reality	"I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring" (Is. 44:3)	"For the promise [of the Spirit] is to you and your children" (Act 2:39)
Duration of Inclusion	"To a thousandth generation" with those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Dt. 7:9)	"His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him" (Lk. 1:50)
Sign of Inclusion	<i>"All the men of [Abraham's] household. . . were circumcised" (Gen 17:27)</i>	<i>The jailer "was baptized, he and all his household" (16:33) (Cornelius, Lydia's, Crispus', Stephanus' households, too)</i>

The New Covenant Objection

The second objection which must be considered is the new covenant objection. This objection has to do with insisting that the nature and recipients of the covenant have changed such that now, *every member of the new covenant is regenerate*. From this, it is inferred that until the children of believers demonstrate their regeneration, they should not be baptized. The focus of this objection is Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant (31:31-34), cited earlier.⁶³ A critic of covenantal infant baptism says it this way, “. . . the *true* contrast between the Old and the New Covenants is that now under the New Covenant, *all* who are covenant members experience these peculiar blessings [i.e., law written on the heart, know God, forgiveness, etc.] . . . *the new covenant is made only with the elect, with those who have experienced these blessings*” [emphases his].⁶⁴

While this objection seems persuasive, several facts of Biblical teaching militate against it. (a) The prophecies of the new covenant themselves explicitly and repeatedly include promises of the inclusion of the children of believers. The language of their inclusion is precisely the same as before.

⁶³See the Appendix B for a brief exposition of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and/or the author's, *Covenantal Infant Baptism: An Outlined Defense* for more.

⁶⁴*A Critical Evaluation of Infant Baptism*, Greg Welty (Reformed Baptist Publications: Fullerton, CA, [undated]), 4-5.

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Old Covenant Language	New Covenant Language
"To be God to you and to your descendants after you" (Gen 17:7)	"[By gospel faith] the promise may be certain to <i>all the descendants</i> [Jews & Gentiles]" (Rom 4:16)
"I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will <i>multiply</i> you exceedingly" (Gen 17:2)	"[When they return] I will <i>multiply the descendants</i> of David My servant" (Jer. 33:22-26)
"I will be with you and <i>bless</i> you, for to you and to your <i>descendants</i> I will give all these lands" (Gen 26:3)	"I will <i>pour out</i> My Spirit on your offspring, and My <i>blessing</i> on your descendants" (Is. 44:3) & "For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be <i>heir of the world</i> . . . [inclusive of Jews & Gentiles] through righteousness of faith" (Rom 4:13)
"That it may go well with you and with your <i>children after you</i> , and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time" (Dt. 4:40)	"I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good, and for <i>the good of their children after them</i> . And I will make an everlasting covenant with them. . ." (Jer. 32:39-40)
" <i>Your descendants</i> would have been [under Mosaic covenant] like the sand, and your <i>offspring</i> like its grains; Their name would never be cut off or destroyed from My presence" (Is. 48:19)	"But this is the covenant which I will make . . . If this fixed order departs from before Me, declares the LORD, "Then <i>the offspring of Israel</i> also shall cease From being a nation before Me forever. . . If this fixed order departs . . . then I will also cast off all <i>the offspring of Israel</i> " (Jer. 31:36-37)

In fact, almost every statement of these type of prophecies repeats the "to you and your seed" principle. (Please refer to the several pages of references above which abundantly demonstrate this.) Because of this, it seems more than a little implausible that the original audience of these prophecies, or

their New Testament counterparts, could have understood *from promises including their children, that their children actually were excluded.*

It is important to see that the new covenant objection rests on the *inference* of the exclusion of children from the covenant because of the alleged nature of the covenant. What could overturn such an inference, if not dozens of verses which explicitly include the children of those to whom the promise comes? It is not only implausible, but illogical that the first century audience of Peter's Pentecost address would have reasoned in this way: (1) "The promise is for you and your children" (Act 2:39); (2) the promise is of the foretold pouring out of the Spirit "on your offspring" (Is. 44:3); though they are explicitly mentioned in the promise, I should *infer* that my children are excluded from this promise. (?) This reasoning is both fallacious and contrary to the *explicit* teaching on whom the new covenant promises include.

(b) The future of the covenant likewise indicates that the children of believers are considered part of the covenant. Paul identifies ethnic Israel's re-grafting into the covenant in this way: "This is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins" (Rom 11:27). This Old Testament quotation is from Isaiah 59:21. It says,

"And as for Me, this is My covenant with them, says the LORD: "My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, *nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring,* "says the LORD," from now and forever."

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Whenever and however the fulfillment of this passage comes, surely these Jews will *not* think that their children are *excluded* from the new covenant!

(c) The apostolic teaching about the historical unfolding of the covenant expressly indicates that those in covenant with God can be “broken off.” Surely regenerate people (if all in the new covenant are regenerate) cannot be “broken off.” Paul teaches that in God’s covenantal dealings “some of the branches were broken off, and you [Gentiles], being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partakers with them of the rich root of the olive tree . . . Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, *neither will He spare you*” (Rom 11:15-21).

(d) If every individual under the stipulations of the new covenant is regenerate, we should not expect to find a passage which says that a person *set apart* in that covenant relationship is apostate. Yet, this is exactly what we have in Scripture—

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean *the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified*, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.” and again, “The Lord will judge *His people*.” (Heb. 10:28-30)

Only ten verses before, the writer cites the new covenant passage (Jer. 31:33f). In fact, the entire book of Hebrews

echoes this theme. Some individuals who have been “sanctified” [*bagiazō*, set apart or “consecrated”] in “His people” [the visible people of God] may commit apostasy.⁶⁵ Of course, these individuals were not regenerate. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the term *bagiazō* often referred to the *consecration* of the visible people of God (Ex. 19:10, 14, in the LXX; cf. Heb. 9:13-20). The imagery of Hebrews 10:29 is drawn directly from this ceremonial typology. Those who have been consecrated by the blood of the covenant in the visible church (Heb. 9:19-20) may “have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away” (Heb. 6:4-6). They did not “lose their salvation”—but they did become *covenant breakers*. To do this they must have been visible *covenant members*. Those who “shrink back to destruction” (Heb. 10:39), who “come short of the grace of God” (12:15), who are “like Esau” (12:16-17), who “neglect so great a salvation” (2:3), who “have tasted of the heavenly gift” “and then have fallen away” (6:4-6), who “harden [their] hearts” and “fall through following the same example of disobedience” (4:7, 11), and who “throw away [their] confidence” (10:35)—*are new covenant breakers*.

⁶⁵I am aware that a minority of interpreters take the implied “he” in “the blood of the covenant by which *he* was sanctified (*bagiasthe*, [3rd person, ‘he’])” as referring to Christ. My brief response is that (a) the grammar certainly does not necessitate that. (b) Such a view seems to be an *ad hoc* response to the theological difficulties of a baptistic Calvinism which are alleviated in the general Reformed view of the covenant with its internal and legal dimensions. (c) Nevertheless, the point above still stands apart from this question, since this apostate is part of “His people” (10:30).

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Jesus says it in this way with the vine/branch covenant metaphor, “Every branch *in Me* that does not bear fruit, He takes away. . . . If anyone does not abide *in Me*, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:2, 6). Those in view here are unregenerate covenant members, who turn out to be covenant breakers.

(e) Finally, asserting that only regenerate people are “in the new covenant” really amounts to saying that the older covenant administrations were with the *visible people of God*, but the new covenant is only with the *invisible people of God*. It is true that the fulfillment of the new covenant is seen only in regenerate people who walk by faith (something also true in the Old Testament by the way⁶⁶). However, it does not follow that the new covenant administration is to only the *invisible people of God* (only the regenerate). Indeed, how could signs and seals and laws and offices and discipline, etc. be only given to the elect? In fact, when Jesus inaugurated the covenant with these words, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins”—Judas, called a *disciple*, drank of that cup and became the *arch covenant breaker* (Mt. 26:27b-28). It follows necessarily, does it not, that those who partake of such visible signs of the new covenant are *visible members of the new covenant*?

⁶⁶I could marshal many texts to support this, but it will suffice to point out the entire chapter of Hebrews 11.

A Few More Questions

Do you believe that infant baptism saves the child? No. Neither does adult baptism save the adult. The relationship of baptism and salvation is that of a ring to a marriage. The ring is part of the reality of the marriage. But no one treats a ring, in and of itself, *as the marriage*.

Why baptize children if they do not understand the meaning of baptism? Baptism is like circumcision. For adults it is *entered* with understanding, for infants it is “*remembered*” with understanding. *In principle*, one cannot object that a sign of an inward reality be given to an infant, because it is so clear in the case of circumcision. Is it meaningful that my little children are citizens of the United States? Though they do not comprehend it now, they have all the rights and protections of a citizen, though under age. As they grow, they will learn their duties, along with all the rights and privileges that their citizenship afforded them, while they were yet unaware of it. So it is with baptism.

What about baptized children who grow up and forsake the faith? Apostasy is a reality for children baptized as infants, for believers’-baptized children, and even for adult converts who were baptized with the most ardent professions of their faith. It is the Biblical function of *church discipline* (Mt. 18:15-20), not baptism, which purifies church membership of those who willfully and unrepentantly deny the faith.

What if a baptized child has a dramatic conversion later, are they to be baptized again? A Christian (child or adult) should

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only be baptized once, since baptism signifies a reality that only takes place once, *regeneration*. We do not always know when regeneration takes place, especially in the case of children growing up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). The reason many re-baptisms take place is (wrongly, I believe) because baptism is viewed as meaningful only if the one baptized has a certain *prior experience* (i.e., baptism is a testimony to my conversion experience). In fact, according to official statistics, one prominent Baptist denomination reported that over 40% of its baptisms one year were for “*rededication*.”⁶⁷ I have argued (above) that this is a misunderstanding of baptism.

Shouldn't baptism be done by immersion? If we compare baptism with the Lord's Supper, whether the Lord's Supper is actually a “supper” (*deipnon*, an evening meal), is not essential to its purpose, meaning, or sacramental quality. In the same way, the *mode* of baptism, whether by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling, is surely less important than its meaning and recipients. Reformed Christians do not usually *require* a particular mode to be *necessary* for baptism. However, Biblical baptisms or “washings” in the Tabernacle were performed by sprinkling (*baptismois* in Heb. 9:11, see verses 9:13, 19, 22). And, the baptism of the Spirit is spoken of as the Holy Spirit “*poured* out upon the Gentiles” (Acts 10:45-47).

⁶⁷The number of rededication baptisms was around 60,000, according to the representative sample, *The Troubling Waters of Baptism*, Thomas Ascol, *Founders Journal*, available at www.founders.org.

If you believe in infant baptism, by the same principles aren't you bound to believe in infant communion? Certainly, a case that baptized covenant members are to be received at the Table as soon as they are able, is a consistent outworking of covenantal principles. It is the position of this writer that early communion for baptized children is perfectly consistent with Scripture. On the other hand, it is not a given that believing one forces the other. Consider that the Passover meal was simply not edible to infants. The question of paedocommunion involves (a) whether infants or toddlers, in fact, partook of the Passover meal, (b) if not, were there spiritual qualifications, such as asking and understanding, "What does this mean?" (Ex. 12:26), and (c) thus, whether the recipients of Christ's passover in the new covenant are qualified differently.⁶⁸ The Princeton Theologian B. B. Warfield said, "The ordinances of the Church belong to the members of it; but each in its own appointed time. The initiatory ordinance belongs to the members on becoming members, other ordinances become their right as the appointed seasons for enjoying them roll around."⁶⁹

⁶⁸For a good discussion on this from the non-paedocommunion point of view, see the response to this objection in John Murray's *Christian Baptism* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 73-76. For a contemporary representative of paedocommunion consult Steve Wilkins, whose tape series on the subject, *Unto You and Your Children*, can be obtained from Covenant Media Fellowship, 4425 Jefferson Ave., Suite #108, Texarkana, AR 71854, 800/553-3938.

⁶⁹*The Polemics of Infant Baptism* in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. IX (Baker, 1991 [1927]), 408.

Appendix A: A First Century Letter

A FIRST CENTURY LETTER TO JULIUS⁷⁰

Julius, my fellow God-seeker,

GRACE AND PEACE TO YOU. I have written to you briefly to tell you of my experience over the last two years since you have moved to Rome as part of Caesar's household. Dear friend, as you know, it started when I looked at the stars one night. Do not the heavens declare the glory of a creator God who made the heavens and the earth? The philosophers of Greece and Rome today grope for a unifying Logos amidst all the flux. But we know that there is one God, who is *Elohim*, *Adonai*, *Yahweh*.

After you departed, I struggled for several months about whether to become a Jew. I saw my now dear friend Crispus, the chief elder, proselytize several God-fearing families, like

⁷⁰This is an attempt to help the reader recapture the original context and audience of the New Testament revelation. What was the frame of mind of those in the first century who first heard about Christ? The more we comprehend this, surely, the closer we will be to the truth about b

⁷⁰aptism.

Gaius' family. I knew them before they were proselytes. They are now synagogue members. For enduring the solemn, but painful act of circumcision and the public ritual washing, they are now permitted to enter the blessed fellowship of the synagogue on the Sabbath to hear the Law and the Prophets.

Maybe it was fear of ridicule from my Roman friends that kept me from being circumcised and becoming a Jew. Or maybe it was the very thought of the act itself. But, for a few years I have hesitated. Deep in my soul I believed that the God who made heaven and earth and all peoples, nations, tribes, and civilizations would surely have not designed that salvation be in and to *one nation*—and a peculiar people at that.

Then one day a former Pharisee came into Corinth preaching Messiah Jesus of Nazareth. As this apostle of Jesus spoke, I knew that he was telling of the promised Christ, the one to be anointed of the Father. As I had studied the Scriptures, I began to see that this was how God was purposing to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham and his seed, the seed of the first woman. This Messiah would be more than a ruler and a king. He would somehow be a suffering Servant. This former Pharisee, Paul, explained all of this and so much more to many God-fearers and to the Jews and proselytes in the synagogue. The elders of the synagogue, however, rejected Messiah Jesus. So after pleading for his kinsmen, Paul, the defender of the Way, shook the dust of his feet and began proclaiming the good news to the Gentiles, even my own household.

Paul was asked to stay with our old friend Titius Justus, the devout God-fearer, still a Gentile even—And this Pharisee did! That's because "what God has cleansed, let no man call

unclean.” It’s amazing how God worked through this. With Justus’ house being next to the synagogue, over a few months, Crispus, the synagogue leader reasoned with Paul. Now he believes! For a year and a half now many Jews and Gentiles have become followers of Messiah Jesus.

Paul taught us that the purposes of the temple, the sacrifices, the priests, and all the clean and unclean laws were temporary. They were shadows of the good things to come. They illustrated the truths of the gospel of Messiah. Everything that we objected to about becoming a Jew had a *telos*, a consummated purpose, which was fulfilled in the coming of Messiah. He told us of the counsel at Jerusalem with James and Peter and how the whole church now understood that a Gentile does not have to follow these ceremonial laws to become a follower of Jesus.

Before I knew Messiah, I believed in the Scriptures and the God of the Jews with all my heart. But I was hesitant to adopt all the customs of the Jews and have my whole household circumcised. I could see that their ceremonies were of God, but somehow they seemed different than the law that is written on our hearts: to love God and to love neighbor. I also challenged Crispus many times that the customs of the strictest sect of Jews, the Pharisees, were not of the Scriptures, but of their own making. Paul has shown us that they have substituted the laws of men for that of the only true God. Judaism is not necessarily the faith of father Abraham. Not all Israel are truly Israel. I could tell you so much more of this dear Julius.

We have learned that we all stand as unclean in Adam, but we can be washed by the last Adam, Messiah Jesus of Nazareth. By the gospel of Messiah we can know true

forgiveness of sins and acceptance with both God and men. I had seen Crispus baptize proselyte families declaring, “You were once unclean, but now you are clean.” Now Crispus, the baptizer, *has been baptized* with his family by Paul the messenger of Jesus. When Crispus was washed, I knew that Jesus was not just a Messiah for the Jews. As the Scripture says, He came to baptize many nations. Before, I was considered unclean, though devout in fearing God. My children were considered unclean, unconsecrated, and excluded from the commonwealth of Israel. But now, just like Crispus’ children, my children are part of God’s covenant and have the sign of Messiah. He is not only the King of the Jews, but King of every people.

We have become heirs according to the promises made to Abraham. Paul has taught us that whoever believes in Christ, from any nation, is a child of Abraham. Now I stand like Abraham, I was washed with water which was a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith which I had while unbaptized—because I had believed and had known a washing of my heart a long time before I went to the river. I have known, not the circumcision of the Pharisees, but the circumcision of Christ. It was this to which Moses and all the Prophets testified. My children, though Gentiles, are like Isaac who received from birth the gracious symbol. They have been washed and they will know all their lives that they have been set apart for Messiah and in the name of the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are not unclean, now they are holy, just as the children of circumcision have been. In the same way that the devout Jews had been such an example of good deeds to family and of gentle care for children, now I must command my children after me to keep

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the way of Messiah Jesus. I read the Scriptures just as Crispus and know that the mercy of the Lord is to a thousand generations of those who fear Him. I can trust the promise of Jehovah that my youngest, *named for you*, will one day proclaim in the assembly his own heart washing.

Beloved Julius, seek out those in Rome who speak of Messiah. Now the blessing of God the Father, the Spirit, and the love of Messiah Jesus be upon you and your household.

Your Fellow God-seeker—no, God-Finder!
Stephanas

Appendix B: An Exposition of Jeremiah 31:31-34

Perhaps the reader is persuaded that there are serious Biblical difficulties with believing that the new covenant is only made with regenerate individuals, rather than with the visible Church collective, still—What does Jeremiah’s (31:31-37) prophecy mean?

31 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

In the historical context, Jeremiah consoles Israel that after the judgment of Babylon, his people will be brought back to the land (30:3) and experience blessings (31:23). The people are to be encouraged in the unfailing promise, that though they have played the harlot (3:1), the Covenant Lord still promises that the “offspring of Israel” will not be utterly cast off (31:36-37): “‘At that time,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people’” (31:1). God will make, literally “cut” (*karath*), a new covenant. Perhaps this vivid word-picture prefigures the

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eternal blood of the covenant (Heb. 13:20). Christ institutes the Lord's Supper, referring to this covenant in the words of the LXX, *kainos diatheke* ("New covenant"): "This cup which is poured out for you *is the new covenant* in My blood" (Lk. 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25). Because of the nature and time of this official institution, we learn from the New Testament that "*house* of Israel" and "*house* of Judah" are inclusive of those grafted into "the commonwealth of Israel" (Eph. 2:12; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7, 11:25ff).

Jeremiah uses the term "covenant" (*berith*) to refer to "the words of this covenant" (11:2) and the judgments of treaty violation, "I brought on them all the *words of this covenant*" (11:8, 34:18). The apostolic instruction on the new covenant confirms that judgments are associated with it: "For he who eats and drinks, *eats and drinks judgment* to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly" (1 Cor. 11:29; cf. Heb. 10:29-30). As befitting the context, however, in chapter 31, Jeremiah focuses on the consolational aspects, and thus only on the blessing stipulations.

32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, declares the LORD.

The "new covenant" will be different ("not like") than the covenant administration of the wilderness generation who broke the covenant. It is evident here that Jeremiah uses prophetic language which is general and hyperbolic, since Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb, etc. did not break the covenant. The contrast is clear, however, generally the

wilderness generation broke the covenant. And very literally, the covenant words were broken on the tablets of stone (Ex. 32:19). The contrast is full of Biblical imagery; the words of this covenant will be written on the heart. The law will not be on stones which Moses can break, it will be on the hearts of the people, which God can turn from stone to flesh (Ez. 11:19, 36:26). There is no warrant to absolutize this picture, since the law is written on the heart and in the heart before the new covenant (Dt. 30:14, Rom 2:14-15) and it is propositionally written as “Law” after the new covenant (Rom 13:9). The language of the prophet simply implies a spirituality in the essence of this promise, which is consonant with the manifest role of the Holy Spirit in the Church (post-Pentecost).

This manifestation of the Holy Spirit chiefly testifies of Christ. Jesus said, “the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me (John 15:26). Jesus rebuked the unbelieving leaders of Israel, saying, “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me” (John 10:45b). He loosely quotes from Isaiah 54:13, “It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’” Isaiah speaks of how “with great mercies I will gather you” and “the covenant of peace” (54:7, 10). The specific text says, “*your children shall be taught by the LORD*, and great shall be the peace of your children” (54:13). Moreover, this seems to be how the apostle Paul understood the implications of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:2-18): “But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Cor. 3:15-16).

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Jeremiah has many strong allusions or even citations of Deuteronomy, which emphasize heart (*leb* and *lebab*) renewal. Moses even said the word of the law is “in your mouth and in your heart” (Dt. 30:14; e.g., 30:1, 2, 6, 10, 14, 17, 32:46).

And the LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. 6 “Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. (Dt. 30:5-6)

Parallel to this, Jeremiah calls Israel to “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD and remove the foreskins of your heart” (4:4). Jeremiah warns of judgment to those “who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised” (9:25). In fact, judgment is imminent because, “all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart” (9:26). This strain of Old Testament thought is evident throughout the apostolic defense of Gentiles having the reality which is signified by circumcision (Acts 15:6, Col 2:11, Rom 2:29, Phi 3:2). Those Judaizers who rejected Jesus were like those spoken of in Jeremiah. The circumcision of heart motif is a pervasive refrain in Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, the two heralds of *both* judgment on covenant breakers and the consolation of the new covenant’s arrival.

33 “*But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,*” declares the LORD, “*I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*”

Jeremiah's *content of the promise* is the same. God condescends to be a God to His people. "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (31:33). "My people" is defined in the context as all "the families of Israel"—"they shall be My people" (31:1); "Thy people, the remnant of Israel . . . the woman with child and she who is in labor with child, together; a great company, they shall return here (31:7-8); "My people shall be satisfied with My goodness" . . . "Rachel" is comforted because "your children shall return to their own territory" (31:14-17). Since "My people" (*la am*) are explicitly inclusive of the children in context (31:1, 7-8, 14-17) and the "offspring of Israel" (31:36 & 37), there is no reason within the argument and context of Jeremiah to believe the central covenant promise has been altered to exclude them. Hence, the central covenant promise ("I will be their God, and they shall be My people," 31:33) is the very same as was given to Abraham and Moses, and throughout the Old Testament literature. The Covenant Lord will be "God to you and your descendants" (Gen 17:7, Ex. 29:45, Dt. 7:9, Dt. 29:13, 30:6, 1Ch 16:15, Psa 103:17, 105:8).

34 "And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

In the days preceding the destruction of Jerusalem, those who handled the law "did not know Me" (2:7-8). But now, "they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each

man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." This phrase "least to the greatest" is found two other times in Jeremiah. In 6:13, "For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain, and from the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely." And in 8:8-10, in a precise parallel, he accuses "the lying pen of the scribes" and "wise men" who "have rejected the word of the LORD" "because from the least even to the greatest everyone is greedy for gain; from the prophet even to the priest everyone practices deceit." It would appear, then, that the use of this phrase has reference to all classes of people. There is a special reference to those who "teach" in this phrase, marking off the breadth and depth of religious leadership, "prophet even to the priest." This section parallels the earlier promise, that after returning to the land and to the Lord,

"Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on *knowledge and understanding*. 16 And it shall be in those days when you are multiplied and increased in the land," declares the LORD, "they shall say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' And it shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they miss it, nor shall it be made again. (3:15-16).

Therefore, based on the biblical usage of this phrase, it means the knowledge of the Lord will be present in all classes of people, not merely priests. This prophetic image is correlated with the removal of Mosaic forms of mediation (the ark in the holy of holies). What a powerful word, foretelling the new covenant era! Of the most important symbol of the Mosaic

forms, the ark of the covenant, it is said “nor shall they remember it, nor shall they miss it, *nor shall it be made again*” (3:16). They shall not even speak of it: “they shall say no more, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD’” (3:16).

There is connected to this supersession of the old forms, a concept of the universal knowledge of God:

“At that time they shall call Jerusalem ‘The Throne of the LORD,’ and *all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem*, for the name of the LORD; nor shall they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heart” (3:17).

This is almost precisely parallel to 31:34. Jeremiah alludes to the blessings of the universal knowledge of God, “they shall all know Me” (31:34). Jeremiah’s words remind one of the familiar prophetic refrain, “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD” (Is. 11:9, Hab 2:14; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6, 5:19).

Such an interpretation (focused on the OT forms of mediation being removed in the era of the universal knowledge of God) seems to be confirmed by what follows, “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (31:34). From the Old Testament perspective this statement must have been striking. Every sacrifice and the spilling of blood was an occasion to remember sin. Now, sin will not be remembered. This implies that the mediation of repetitious animal sacrifices which reminded of the sin and the need for forgiveness will be somehow superceded. From our *Anno Domini* (“year of our Lord”) perspective, we understand very well how those forms of mediation are removed and how God is able to not be reminded of sin by

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perpetual sacrifices. Moreover, we see how this affects and relates to the universal extension of the knowledge of God. Because Christ rent the temple veil, there is no longer a court for the Gentiles. The new *spatial* location of the temple is the whole world, while the *spiritual* location remains [the heavenly] Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22, Jer. 3:17). We look back through the corridor of time and see the cross of our Covenant Lord, the mediator of the new covenant and to His sprinkled blood. Certainly, it is much easier to see this in Jeremiah after it has been shown to us through the lens of New Testament revelation, and particularly the epistle to the Hebrews.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Heb. 12:22-23)

The New Covenant Usage in Hebrews

Our view of the new covenant should be compared with the nuanced indications of what the infallible interpreter teaches about this passage. In Hebrews 8:6-12, the writer cites Jeremiah 31:31-34 to prove that a better covenant was promised than the Mosaic, with its temporary ministry of animal sacrifices and Levitical priesthood (8:1-13). The writer

explains that since “He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete” (8:13). This point is very relevant to his audience of Jewish Christians who are being tempted to return to the shadows. Moreover, the shadows were not the mere shadows in the antecedent age. Under the Christ-rejecting distortions of Pharisees and Saducees, Judaism was a false system with only the form of the older covenant religion, without its function (to reveal Christ) and without its substance (the temple was not indwelt with the Lord).

In Hebrews 10:16-17, the writer cites Jeremiah 31:33-34 again and even provides his very intention in quoting this prophecy, because “the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us. . .”(v 15). That is, the preceding argument in Hebrews is confirmed by Jeremiah. Namely, Jeremiah teaches that the “first order” of shadow-like sacrifices, which were intended as temporary, have been replaced by the second (final) order of the “once for all sacrifice” (v 10). It is a contrast of the singular, unrepeatable, sufficient sacrifice of Jesus with the “shadow of the good things to come” (10:1) in the Old Testament repeatable sacrifices. In the shadow sacrifices, “there is a reminder of sins year by year” (10:3) but now “their sins” will not require an annual day of atonement, rather, “their lawless deeds I will remember no more” —quoting Jeremiah’s prophecy (Heb. 10:17). Whereas the Old Testament sacrifices were a mediated means of receiving forgiveness which required repetition—now the covenant people of God have direct and unmitigated access to forgiveness. The one sacrifice accomplished the job: “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (v 14). Hence, to return to the shadows and the things imposed “until a time of reformation” (9:11) is to

forsake the final sacrifice and no longer have “a sacrifice for sins” remaining (10:26). It is to trample under foot, not the servant of the house (Moses) and the sprinkled shadow-blood of bulls and goats (9:13), but the very Son of God and His precious, once-for-all-shed blood which both sanctifies eternally (10:10) and consecrates the visible people of God (10:29-30).

In light of the above, to absolutize the prophetic words like, “they shall all (*kol*) know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them” is untenable. (In the first place this overlooks Jeremiah’s own use of the phrase “least to greatest.”) The “new covenant objection” really arises from the exegetical mistake of absolutizing such prophetic language, coupled with an inadequate Biblical theology of covenants, compounded by a misplaced emphasis on the discontinuity between older covenant and new covenant expressions of Biblical redemption. Neither the writer of Hebrews, nor any other New Testament writer interprets Jeremiah to mean that *only regenerate individuals are covenanted with*. Prophetic language often is hyperbolic and care must be taken when it is read in a quantitatively literal fashion. For example, God called “*all* the families of the kingdoms of the north. . .and they will come, and *they will set each one* his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about, and against all the cities of Judah” (Jer. 1:15). Read in a quantitatively absolute fashion, this would have been a physical impossibility.⁷¹ As has been

⁷¹One would think that Calvinists would be hesitant to establish their arguments from the use of “all” in a quantitatively absolute sense anyway. How much more in prophetic language! For other examples of the general use of “all” in Jeremiah see, 2:29,

adequately demonstrated, this was not Hebrews' purpose in the text cited and is inconsistent with the entire theme and refrain of the book.

Another compelling reason for denying the force of the “new covenant objection” may be observed in the very arguments of the apostolic writers against apostasy. If the new covenant is so radically different than older administrations of the covenant in its recipients, structure, and content, why does the New Testament,⁷² and especially Hebrews, draw so many strict parallelisms of the Old Testament covenant people and New Testament covenant people of God?—Especially in its calls for perseverance—allegedly, the very area of difference.⁷³

Consider these striking parallels, which presuppose a parallel covenant relationship:

- ▶ “For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable. . .how shall *we* escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Heb. 2:2-3).
- ▶ “‘TODAY IF *YOU* HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN *THEY* PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS’. . .Take care, brethren, lest there

3:17, 4:19, 12:9, 13:13, 15:4, 16:15, 21:14, 23:3, 24:9, 25:2, 31:24, etc.

⁷²For similar thoughts in other writers see Rom. 15:4-5, 1 Cor. 10:1-11, Jam. 5:10-11, Jude 1:5.

⁷³Please know that I believe in the perseverance of those who are regenerate, in both testaments. However, every *visible covenant member* may not persevere, in both testaments also.

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should be in *any one of you* an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God (3:8, 12).

- ▶ “Therefore, *let us* fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, *any one of you* should seem to have come short of it. For indeed *we have had good news* preached to us, *just as they also . . .*” (4:2).
- ▶ “Let *us* therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest *anyone* fall through following the same *example* of disobedience” (4:11).
- ▶ If under Moses one rejected the covenant. . . “how much severer punishment. . .” for *us* (10:28-29).
- ▶ “See to it that *no one* comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 16 that there be no immoral or godless person *like Esau*, who sold his own birthright for a single meal” (12:15-16).
- ▶ “For if *those* did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, *much less shall we* escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven” (12:25).

The “Remnant”

Jeremiah is permeated with language regarding “the remnant” (*sbarith*), literally the *remainder* of the people. The term “remnant” (*sbarith*) is sometimes spoken of in neutral and descriptive terms, stating the historical information about “all the remnant of the people” (Jer. 41:10, 16). In other passages, the remnant is spoken of in prophetically positive terms (23:3-6, 31:7-8). And in other cases, the remnant designation is spoken of in terms of judgment (11:23, 24:8). In

a full Biblical theology, it seems that it is the prophetic (new covenant) “*remnant*” who receive the fulness of the promises. For example,

Then I Myself shall gather the *remnant* of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and shall bring them back to their pasture; and they will be fruitful and multiply. 4 “I shall also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the LORD. 5 “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “When I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. 6 “In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, “The LORD our righteousness.”” (Jer. 23:3-6)

Of the 66 occurrences of the Hebrew term for “remnant” (*sharith*), more than one-third are in Jeremiah. Many others are in similar new covenant passages in the prophets. These passages regard both the physical remnant who returned to the land following exile (Hag 1:12, 14, 2:2, Is. 10:22), and their spiritual-prophetic counterpart (Zec 8:6, 11, 12).

The use of Paul’s teaching in Romans chapter nine should be addressed at this juncture. Paul says, “In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice” (Rom 11:5, cf. Is. 10:22). His teaching at this point in Romans assures the reader that, though a partial hardening has happened to Israel (i.e., they rejected Christ), there are still believing Jews. This

is evidence that the promise has not utterly failed (Rom 9:6). He writes, “For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (11:1), just as God kept for Himself, “SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL” in the days of Elijah (11:4).

Observe what he says though: to his “kinsmen according to the flesh,” to “Israelites,” “belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and *the covenants* and the giving of the Law and the temple service and *the promises*” (9:3-4). Let me repeat this: to the collective Israelites belong “the covenants” (*bai diathekai*) and “the promises” (*bai epangelai*). The Israelites, because of the covenant with Abraham, received the *covenant promises*; but they did not all receive all that the *covenant promises*. They were included generally and ostensibly in the covenant. Why aren’t they all saved then? The covenant included stipulations of blessing (for those with faith) and cursing (for those without the faith of their father Abraham). It is by the operation of grace that one who is included in the covenant promises is granted all that God requires to keep covenant and fully receive its salvific blessings. In terms of the Reformed view of salvation, only the elect ultimately are saved. Abraham *is given* a promise that God will be God to his descendants, yet Abraham is told in rather conditional language,

For I have chosen him, *in order that* he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; *in order that the LORD may bring upon Abraham* what He has spoken about him. (Gen 18:19)

There are covenant responsibilities which provide the regular means of God's grace (e.g., family worship). This was true for Abraham, as well as those who later have the faith of Abraham. According to the earlier sections of Romans, this includes Gentiles who have been grafted in (4:11-17; 11:17). In explaining why some do not receive the salvific blessings through embracing Jesus as Messiah, he says, "They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel" (9:6). Yet the promise has not failed because there is a remnant. "IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED" (9:27, quoting Is. 10:22). Later in chapter eleven Paul indicates a more overwhelming reason to believe that his word to the Jews has not failed: "For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will *their acceptance* be but life from the dead?" (11:15). In other words, Paul seems to indicate that there is both a remnant, then and through the ages, and there will be a rather demonstrable acceptance of Christ by the Jews following the "fulness of the Gentiles" "and thus all Israel will be saved" (11:25-26).⁷⁴ Please observe who is included in the fulfillment of the covenant promise Paul cites:

Thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "AND

⁷⁴I take (tentatively) "all Israel" in the sense of *all of true Israel*, including both Jews and Gentiles, after the fulness of the Gentiles comes and the collective "acceptance" of ethnic Israel. I believe this view is evident in the language of the Westminster Larger Catechism 191 ("fulness of the Gentiles" & "the Jews called") and its proof-texts, citing Romans 10:1 and 11:25-26. Moreover, prayer for ethnic Israel is part of the original Westminster "Directory for Worship."

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THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.” (Rom 11:26-27)

Observe the latter section of the original citation—

“This is My covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, *nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring’s offspring,*” says the LORD,” from now and forever.” (Is. 59:21)

The “spiritual” or “*true*” *children of Abraham* discussion often becomes fuel in the fires of the “covenant children” debate regarding who is “in” the new covenant. The essence of the argument from the Baptist view proceeds in this fashion. Only the elect (those who have the faith of Abraham) are included in the promises (illustration: Jacob & Esau). Therefore, (especially in the new covenant) only those that demonstrate their inclusion (by having Abraham’s faith) should be counted as covenant members (and receive the sign).

Paul K. Jewett (baptistic) argues,

Of course, the sign of this new covenant belongs to the covenantees. But who are they? Those who can say, “We have a Christian for our father,” just as the Jews said to Jesus, “We have Abraham for our father” (John 8:33f.)? Not so. The covenantees are not those who are *born* into the covenant, those whose father and mother have the law

“written upon their hearts,” but those who *themselves* have had this experience, having been born again by the Spirit of God. This subjective, inward, existential, experiential, spiritual change is the hall mark of the new covenant.⁷⁵

Jewett’s argument on the remnant is subtle. It involves a growing recognition of true Israel vs carnal Israel, concluding with an exclusively regenerate new covenant membership (pp. 227ff). The central point amounts to what has been answered in the above “new covenant objection.” More exegetically however, the present exposition of the new covenant does not confirm Jewett’s contention that the new covenant rejects the “offspring of Israel” (*contra* Jer. 31:36 & 37). It is also demonstrable that the covenant promise is still, “they shall be My people [inclusive of the children in context]” (Jer. 31:33; 31:1, 7-8, 14-15, 36-37). Such considerations should be primary, since the issue fundamentally regards the inclusion of new covenantees’ children. While Jewett is quick to charge infant baptism “with an error in biblical theology” (8), errors in exegetical theology preclude a proper biblical theology. Is it a proper exegetical procedure to ignore these explicit statements of inclusion only to draw a biblical theology from passages which do not address the express question that believers’ children are excluded? Or, is it a proper biblical theology procedure to argue their exclusion as “earthly and temporal” when the very text of the new covenant *expressly* includes them (31:36 & 37) (p. 91)?

⁷⁵*Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*, 228.

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I have sought to support the claim that it is simply not *exegetically demonstrable* that the only stipulation of the new covenant is regeneration, and that to all its members. It seems that there is a virtually explicit refutation of that position in Hebrews 10:28-30. In my estimation, Jewett's work is the best presentation of the Baptist case. Yet, it is a telling fact to discover that *he does not even mention* the contextual definition of "My people" or consider the numerous passages inclusive of children in the new covenant prophecies. Neither does he even cite Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:28-30, or other such apostasy passages as counter arguments to the claim of exclusively regenerate members in the new covenant.

"New Covenant Theology Movement"

The thrust of this "new covenant-remnant objection" is stated even more bluntly by "New Covenant" writer, John G. Reisinger. In his influential manuscript *Abraham's Four Seeds*, he writes, "The real difference between a historic Baptist and a Paedobaptist (those who baptize babies) is not the mode of baptism, but rather 'who is the *true heir* of God's promise to Abraham and his *seed*.'"⁷⁶ Later he exclaims, "How can a Christian parent claim that his physical children are included in the 'covenant with Abraham' when that covenant never even promised that to Abraham himself?" And, "Paedobaptists actually claim for their physical children

⁷⁶*Abraham's Four Seeds* (Webster NY: Sound of Grace, 1990), 3;
<http://www.soundofgrace.com>.

through the Abrahamic covenant more than Abraham himself could claim for his physical children in the same covenant.”⁷⁷

In response, to the more radical “remnant” theology of those who entitle themselves “New Covenant Theologians” several other points should be considered.

It is true that *mere natural descent* is insufficient to guarantee the fullest reception of the covenant promised blessings. This being true during the Old Testament, according to Paul, then how does this truth affect the question of the sign of covenant given to believers’ children? In the previous eras they received it, though it was still true that all who were authorized by God to receive the sign did not partake of the reality signified. Reisinger’s argument is not very coercive. It says that since only the truly spiritual seed received the promises (illustration: Jacob/Esau), then only the spiritual seed have a right to the sign (*contra* infant baptism). But this argument (from Paul’s statements about true Israel) is fallacious. Because, it is simply not true nor intended by God’s command that only the true “spiritual seed” (the elect) are to receive the sign of the covenant. The sign is a *visible sign*, for visible members of God’s people. It is not enough to prove that only the *elect are elected*. This is granted! But God, who knew about Esau, still commanded the sign of circumcision on him, even though he did not have a circumcised heart. What must be proved if the argument for covenant inclusion, leading to infant baptism is to be dismissed, is not the truth of election—but that only those that are elect are to receive the

⁷⁷Ibid., 60.

sign of the covenant. It is certainly not possible to prove this was God's intention in the Old Testament. The objector is in no better position with regard to the visible signs of the new covenant—cf. Simon the Sorcerer and Judas.

Consider the case in point further, Esau. Not denying the truth of election, the writer of Hebrews indicates that Esau was a covenant breaker, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God. . .that there be no immoral or godless person *like Esau*, who sold his own birthright for a single meal" (Heb. 12:15-16). Thus, one is still warranted in putting the sign on those of whom we do not have infallible assurance of their election. This point is truly compelling when it is observed that the writer uses the example of Esau to admonish his new covenant partakers to *persevere*. That we can only administer the visible signs to visible partakers (whoever they are, young or old) *is necessarily the case every time the signs were (and are) administered*.

Warfield rightly says, ". . . no one, however rich his manifestation of Christian graces, is baptized on the basis of infallible knowledge of his relation to Christ. All baptism is inevitably administered on the basis, not of knowledge, but of presumption."⁷⁸ So long as the candidate meets the initial qualifications of being under the terms of the covenant, the sign is authorized. I have argued that there is much biblical information to confirm the continuity of the household reception of the covenant sign of inclusion, (now) baptism. The "new covenant-remnant objection" does not compel me

⁷⁸*The Polemics of Infant Baptism in The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. IX (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991 [1927]), 390.

otherwise. Since Isaac was warranted by God's command in putting the sign on both his children, Jacob (the covenant keeper) and Esau (the covenant breaker), so believers today are warranted in putting the new sign of baptism on their children.

The point of Paul in Romans nine is perfectly clear in *both* testaments: it is not *mere physical birth* which grants one the *reception* of either the salvific blessings of the covenant. This is true in the previous covenant administrations. The Psalmist summarily teaches us that "the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on *those who fear Him*, and His righteousness *to children's children, to those who keep His covenant*, and who remember His precepts to do them" (Psa 103:17-18). If this is true in the Old Testament, it is perfectly clear that using this truth (not by *mere physical birth*) as an argument cannot prove *a change* of covenant structure, recipients, or mode.

Further, Paul is not arguing that individually elect persons are all that God has in view now, whereas before, He viewed the nation as sufficient to receive each blessing by *mere physical lineage*. He says, the Israelites received "the covenants" and "the promises" (Rom 9:4), though they did not all receive its salvific (or even temporal) blessings. Elsewhere these people are called covenant breakers (Psa 78:10), Esau being the apostolic example (Rom 9:13, Heb. 12:16). In the very passage under discussion, he actually parallels the Jews collectively (whose children were covenant members) and the Gentiles who were grafted in the covenant (Rom 11:13-27). We can be quite sure, as has been abundantly demonstrated above, that these believing "remnant" Jews considered their own children in covenant with God (Jer.

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31:7-9; Is. 45:25)—not only because this would have been almost inconceivable for a Jew to think otherwise—but because, exegetically, the *remnant included their children*.

Let us put to rest objections arising from the “remnant” theology with the following. Does the “remnant” include the children of believers?

(1) Exegetically, the original reference to “remnant” (those returning to the land after the exile) explicitly included children:

- ▶ Jeremiah 41:16: . . . all *the remnant* of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, after he had struck down Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, *that is, the men who were soldiers, the women, the children, and the eunuchs, whom he had brought back from Gibeon.*
- ▶ Jeremiah 43:5-6: . . . the entire *remnant of Judah* who had returned from all the nations to which they had been driven away, in order to reside in the land of Judah—the men, the women, *the children*. . .

(2) The very concept of remnant has reference to future generations:

- ▶ Jeremiah 44:7: ‘Now then thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, “Why are you doing great harm to yourselves, so as to *cut off from you man and woman, child and infant, from among Judah, leaving yourselves without remnant*. . .

(3) Even more, the spiritual fulfillment of the remnant concept explicitly and even emphatically includes the children of believers.

- ▶ Jeremiah 23:3: Then I Myself shall gather the *remnant* of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and shall bring them back to their pasture; and *they will be fruitful and multiply*.
- ▶ Jeremiah 31:7-8: For thus says the LORD, “Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob . . . O LORD, *save Thy people, the remnant of Israel*. ‘ 8 “Behold, I am bringing them from the north country, and I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth, Among them the blind and the lame, *The woman with child and she who is in labor with child, together*; A great company, they shall return here.
- ▶ Jeremiah 32:15-18: “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land . . . who showest lovingkindness to *thousands* [of generations], but repayest the iniquity of fathers into the bosom of their children after them . . .”
- ▶ Jeremiah 32:37-40: “Behold, I will gather them out of all the lands to which I have driven them in My anger . . . And they shall be My people, and I will be their God; 39 and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good, and *for the good of their children after them*. 40 “And I will *make an everlasting covenant with them* that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in *their hearts* so that they will not turn away from Me.
- ▶ Jeremiah 33:22-26: “As the host of heaven cannot be counted, and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I

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will multiply the *descendants* of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me . . . 26 then I would reject the *descendants of Jacob* and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.”

- ▶ Ezekiel 37:21-27: “Then say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Surely I will take the children of Israel *from among the nations, wherever they have gone*, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land. . . David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. 25 “Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, *their children, and their children’s children, forever*; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. 26 “Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. (NKJV)
- ▶ Is. 45:25-46:3 “In the LORD *all the offspring of Israel* will be justified, and will glory. . . *all the remnant* of the house of Israel. . .

In conclusion, I summarize what I take to be the interpretation of the new covenant prophecy, as indicated by Jeremiah’s uses of his own words in context, the parallel prophecies, and the definitive New Testament application, as follows:

The New Covenant—

(1) Is officially instituted by Christ and He claims that His own blood “My blood” is *the* blood of *the* covenant (Mt. 26:28, Mk. 14:24, Lk. 22:20, Heb. 13:20).

(2) Predicts that the shadow-forms of the Mosaic administration will be surpassed (Jer. 3:15-16; cf. 31:34b, Heb. 8:13, 10:18).

(3) Anticipates the coming of the Holy Spirit to testify of Christ (John 6:45, 15:26, 2 Cor. 3:2-18).

(4) Calls for the heart renewal of God’s people and promises the work of the Spirit to bring it about (Dt. 30:6, Jer. 4:4, 31:33).

(5) Confirms the same promise, “I will be their God, and they shall be My people. . . the offspring of Israel also shall [not] cease from being a nation before Me forever” (Jer. 31:33, 36-37; cf. 31:1, 7-8, 14-17).

(6) Promises the knowledge of God to His shepherds and the removal the Mosaic forms of mediation (e.g., the ark of the covenant, Jer. 3:15, 31:34).

(7) Pictures the universal knowledge of God (Jer. 3:17, 31:34, Is. 11:9, Hab 2:14).

(8) Looks forward to a time when there will not be repeated sacrifices to remind of sin (Jer. 31:34, 3:15-16, Heb. 10:3, 14-15).

(9) Is fulfilled in the *remnant* who receive the “Redeemer from Zion” (Jer. 23:3-6, 31:7-8, Rom 9:27).

Resources for Further Study

Countless books have been written on baptism. Many are focused on the mode of baptism, sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. Of course, mode is not the focus of this study. In what follows, I will suggest only a handful of books which are very edifying and readable. I believe that on both sides of the question, these books represent some of the best and most accessible studies. It is through searching the Scriptures and reflection on such books that I have formulated my arguments in the present study. If the arguments I have presented are good, know that for the most part they are hardly original, but any errors in them are entirely my own responsibility.

Books which Defend the Baptist Position

- ▶ *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*, Paul K. Jewett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).
- ▶ *Children of Abraham*, David Kingdon (Sussex, UK: Carey, 1973).
- ▶ *A String of Pearls Unstrung: A Theological Journey Into Believers' Baptism*, Fred A. Malone (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 1998).
- ▶ *Should Babies Be Baptized?* 3rd Edition, T.E. Watson (London: Grace, 1995).

Books which Defend the Reformed Infant Baptism Position

- ▶ *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, edited by Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003).
- ▶ *Christian Baptism*, John Murray (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980).
- ▶ *Children of the Promise*, Robert R. Booth (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1995).
- ▶ *To a Thousand Generations: Infant Baptism—Covenant Mercy for the People of God*, Douglas Wilson (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996).
- ▶ *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism*, Jay E. Adams (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1975).