

The Reformed View of Infants and Children in the Church

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A Snapshot of the Reformed View

How might the truth, goodness, and beauty of the Reformed view of children be appraised? The *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) provides a rich summary.

What is your only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.¹

In this portrait of the Reformed faith, we belong to Christ in life *and* death; He has paid for our sins with his substitutionary atonement, and has set us free from the tyranny of the devil. One of the difficult Reformed doctrines is stated here in terms that surely no Christian can reject. The sovereign care of our heavenly Father protects us in all of life with the purpose of our salvation, a beautiful pastoral truth. As Scripture teaches, all things work together for my salvation (Rom 8:28). Note the immediate nature of assurance in the faith by the Holy Spirit. There is a call to growth, as well. He “makes me heartily willing and ready to live for Him.” The personal nature of this teaching has provided clarity, comfort, and strength to many believers. This may be the simplest and perhaps warmest summary of the not so cold orthodoxy of Calvinism. Another way to say it is simply, *God saves sinners*. It is God, not man, who does the saving. We need saving because, as the New England Primer said, “In Adam’s fall, we sinned

¹*Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), Question 1. This version is approved by the Canadian Reformed Church, available at <http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/en/>.

all.”² To paraphrase John Newton, we are all great sinners, but Christ is an even greater Savior.

This is the Reformed faith in a word. This is the faith into which we earnestly desire to draw our children and the children of our congregations, so that they might know the only true and Triune God which is life eternal.

Preliminary Qualifications

To orient the reader who may be unfamiliar with the Reformed point of view, here are a few preliminary remarks.

1. *Reformed is an adjective.* To situate the Reformed church in history is to remember that “reformed” is an adjective which originally referred to the reforming of the church, the Catholic Church. Of course the Reformation happened in the Western branch of the church. Since the church already existed in the world, it was not the purpose of the sixteenth century Reformers to create a fractured body. Unfortunately, we all know that organizational unity was fractured; may the effort of this book bring greater unity and purity to us all.

2. *Creeds and Councils are Useful.* The desire for both the peace and purity of the church is captured in such statements as the *Belgic Confession* (1561), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), the *Canons of Dort* (1618–19), and the *Westminster Confession and Catechisms* (1646).³ The Reformers had a conciliar view of the authority of the church, which accepted the usefulness of

²The first reading primer in America, published around 1687 by Benjamin Harris and constantly revised and republished.

³There were many more, such as the *Confession of Basel*, *First and Second Helvetic*, *Genevan Catechism*, *Gallican Confession*, *Thirty-nine Articles*, *Scotch Confession*, see Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, sixth edition, (Grand Rapids: Baker reprint of 1931 edition). These are the predominant Confessions used by Reformed churches today.

church councils and creeds, yet acknowledged their fallibility.⁴ Although I will refer to these historic doctrinal statements for clarity and historical accuracy, all of these Reformed statements teach our final authority is Scripture. This view is the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*.⁵ This principle does not exclude the subordinate usefulness of councils and creeds, contrary to those in the Baptist tradition(s) who have said, “No creed but Christ.”⁶ My Orthodox and Roman Catholic colleagues may appeal to their additional authoritative traditions, however, to be consistent with the Reformed faith, I must rest the truthfulness of my arguments on Scripture alone.

3. *Always Reforming*. The view that I will present is Reformed, but it may not sound like American Presbyterianism after the Great Awakening. American Christianity has been affected in a large way by the various revivals. They were not all bad, but they fundamentally altered the Presbyterian view of children. I am appealing much more to the Reformation’s historic point of view. Zwingli, Bullinger, and definitively Calvin reached deeply into the well of Scripture to defend the inclusion of children in the church, against Anabaptist views.⁷ In doing so they argued

⁴*Westminster Confession* 31:4, “All synods or councils, since the apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both.”

⁵For example the *Westminster Confession* 1:6 states, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture. . . .” On the matter of authority and history, section 10 says, “The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”

⁶This is a self-defeating statement since the statement itself is a simple creed. We cannot avoid creedal activity and we find it in Scripture itself (e.g., 2 Tim 2:11ff; Phil 2:5–11). What we need is *true* creeds, but by what authority may we know the truth of a creed? The Reformed view says Scripture is that highest authority.

⁷I address their arguments in “The Polemics of Anabaptism” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003).

their ecclesiology from the “covenants of *the* promise”⁸ made with Abraham. This provided a strong sense of the right of covenant (infant) children to be considered members of the church. However, revivalism’s effect caused conversion experience to be virtually the only ground for inclusion. In 1847 Charles Hodge addressed the problem of revivalism, saying:

It may be highly useful, or even necessary, just as violent remedies are often the only means of saving life. But such remedies are not the ordinary and proper means of sustaining and promoting health. No one can fail to remark that this too exclusive dependence on revivals tends to produce a false or unscriptural form of religion. The ordinary means of grace become insipid or distasteful. Perhaps however the most deplorable result of the mistake we are now considering is the neglect which it necessarily induces of the divinely appointed means of careful Christian nurture. Family training of children, and pastoral instruction of the young, are almost entirely lost sight of. We have long felt and often expressed the conviction that this is one of the most serious evils in the present state of our churches.⁹

4. *Reformed Tradition.* The Reformed faith has a core, but has always included diversity, sometimes in respect to topics under our main heading. The Reformed tradition is like a river with many streams flowing in and out. I am seeking to address the main channel. However, I will try to indicate where my own views may have diverged from the current course of the channel.¹⁰

5. *Defining Questions.* Our editors have posed several questions about the relation of infants and children to the church. In order to provide a context to answer these questions, I wish

⁸This translation of a phrase from Eph 2:12 reflects the Greek text’s definite article on “the promise” (*tēs epangelias*) which is first stated in the protoevangelium (Gen 3:15) and then substantially in the promise to Abraham (Gen 12, 15, 17).

⁹Cited in Robert S. Rayburn’s article, “Presbyterian Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture, and Covenant Succession” reprinted in *The Case for Covenant Communion*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2006). Hodges’ original quotation is found in “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 19.4 (Oct. 1847): 520–21.

¹⁰In terms of a short narrative of this, Zwingli began it, Bullinger and Bucer contributed, Farel saw a vision for it, Calvin nearly perfected it, Ursinus and Oliveanus expressed it, Beza codified it, Turretin explicated it and by the time of the Westminster Assembly, many debates of covenant theology and high Calvinism (surpralapsarianism) had coalesced in a compromise document which sought to retain the organic covenantal insights and the decretal understanding of God’s salvation work in history and the church. I think the Westminster standards err on the side of the decretal dimension of theology. Still, these documents carefully and clearly express many Christian dogmas.

to frame this conversation with four foundational topics: biblical covenants, the church defined, the inclusion of children in the sacraments, and spiritual formation by covenant succession.

Biblical Covenants

As indicated above it was through excavating the notion of biblical covenants the Reformers appealing to Scripture alone, began to argue for their vision of the inclusion of children especially in baptism. If we think through the covenants in the Bible, we can see consistent aspects of covenants: covenantal administrations have signs and the inclusion of descendants. When you go through the creation covenant,¹¹ the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, even the Davidic covenant, there are clear signs associated with these covenants: the tree of life, rainbows, circumcision, a sacrificial system, Passover, etc. But there are also clear statements to the effect that descendants are included. “As in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22). So also in the case of Noah; his household was saved. The Abrahamic covenant makes this perfectly explicit: The LORD will be “God to you and your descendants after you” (Gen 17:7).¹²

Covenant (Administration)	Visible Sign	Descendants Included
Creation/Adamic	Tree of Life	yes
Noahic	Rainbow	yes

¹¹Hosea 6:7 states, “But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant.”

¹²The following charts are taken from my *You and Your Household: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism* (Brownstown, PA: WordMp3, 2015), available through paedobaptism.com and also on Kindle.

Covenant (Administration)	Visible Sign	Descendants Included
Abrahamic (Other Patriarchs)	Circumcision Sacrifices/Meals	yes yes
Mosaic	Passover (blood, then meal)	yes
Davidic	Throne*	yes
New Covenant	Baptism (entrance) Lord's Supper (continuance)	?

The question might be raised: is this true in the new covenant era? I will argue that it is certainly the case. There are discontinuities between the old and new covenants, but not in the way children are to be nurtured or included. There are plain statements throughout Scripture promising the inclusion of children in the new covenant. For example, consider what follows the very classic statement of the new covenant:

“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 “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. . . . 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: “If this fixed order departs From before Me,” declares the LORD, “Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever.” 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. (Jer 31:33–37)¹³

The promise to Israel regarding the coming new covenant included their children as indicated in verses 35–37. Implicitly, it is included in “the house of Israel” and “Judah” as well, since this is contextually defined as the “families of Israel” (31:1) with “your children” (31:17).

¹³In this essay, I use the *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995).

Note the poetic nature of their inclusion above: the fixed order of the universe would have to fail, before “the offspring of Israel” are cast off. Certainly this is another way of saying, simply “Israel” will always be before Yahweh; however, Israel includes her children as is indicated in the context. In this case the repeated emphasis is on the “offspring.” There is no word in this passage which changes the Abrahamic promise’s inclusion of children; rather this inclusion is implicitly and explicitly confirmed. Neither is there any word, whatsoever, excluding believers’ children from inclusion in the New Testament.¹⁴

The Church Defined

The *Westminster Confession* says that the church “consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation” (25.2).¹⁵ And notice this: you need to be a member of the church for salvation. But then what does this imply for children? If being part of the visible church is normative, then children must be members of the church. For Baptists, this leaves little children in “no man’s land” in their identity with Christ the only Savior.

What does the Bible teach about the nature of the church and her children? In the establishment of the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17, He establishes a covenant with the

¹⁴Beyond Jer 31:35–36 there are many more explicit inclusions of children in the new covenant promises: Jer 32:37–40; 33:22–26; Ezek 37:24–26; Zech 10:6–9; Joel 2:1–29; Isa 44:3; 54:10–13; 59:20–21; Mal 4:5–6; and New Testament inclusions: Luke 1:17; 2:49–50; Acts 2:39; 3:25; 13:32–33; and Rom 4:13–17, among others.

¹⁵The *Westminster Confession* makes a distinction between the visible church and the invisible church. The invisible church is simply all those who will be saved, including elect infants.

explicit provision to be God to you and to your descendants after you. The promise to Abraham is recited in Romans, Galatians and other passages in the New Testament. But, Rom 4:16 clearly states that the inclusion of children is New Testament doctrine:

For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed 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 presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. 18 In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.” (Rom 4:16–18)

The promise is guaranteed to all the descendants (Jews and Gentiles). This is a reassertion that the Abrahamic covenant is applicable—not only to Jews, but also to believing Gentiles.¹⁶

What then were such early believing Gentiles to think of their children?

It is difficult to see how Gentiles could have thought of their children as excluded, especially when believing Jews clearly believed in their inclusion.¹⁷ The New Testament epistles to churches including Gentiles provides a compelling case for the explicit inclusion of children. For example, in Eph 1:1–2: “To the saints (*hagios*) who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” And then in chapter six, children are addressed. Saints in Ephesus include husbands, wives, and children. Are children *saints* (*hagios*)? Yes. Even more, note the greeting: “Grace to you and peace from

¹⁶If someone objects in terms of the “land promise,” please take note of Rom 4:13: “For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world (*cosmos*). . .”

¹⁷Douglas Wilson argued we find no record of a dispute regarding the apostles excluding the believing Jews’ children from the covenant (so long established). This is a remarkable silence or simply not the teaching of the apostles. See *To a Thousand Generations: Infant Baptism ~ Covenant Mercy to the Children of God* (Moscow ID: Canon Press, 1996).

God.” Is this the appropriate greeting for one who is not a member of the church, not *in Christ*?

No. Is it proper to greet the children of the church in this way? Yes, just as Paul did.

Another even stronger example of the inclusion of children and their status is found in 1 Cor 7:14. The children of a believing parent are not unclean, “but now they are *holy*” (*hagios*). The same word is translated over fifty times in the New Testament as “saints.” They are *hagios*. Children are set apart as covenantally sanctified.¹⁸ Where did Paul get this notion? From the Abrahamic covenant.

What is the basis for our inclusion of children? The *Belgic Confession* in 1561 (Article 34) says, “We believe our children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as little children were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises made to our children.”

Notice this logic: Christ has shed his blood no less for washing the little children of believers than for adults. The idea is that if anyone is going to be saved, it is through what Christ did. And who can assert that no children are saved? The rationale is covenantal and grounded in the promise to Abraham. Similarly, the *Heidelberg Catechism* (Q. 74) speaks of this in regard to baptism saying, “Should infants also be baptized? Yes. Infants as well as adults are included in God’s covenant and people, and they, no less than adults, are promised deliverance from sin through Christ’s blood.”

John Calvin, wrote:

¹⁸In perhaps the most persuasive Baptist defense against covenantal paedobaptism, Paul K. Jewett even accepts this sanctification of children (1 Cor 7:14) as due to the “marriage covenant” as in the Jewish/Mishna sources. See his *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 136.

Hence it follows, that the children of believers are not baptised, in order that though formerly aliens from the Church, they may then, for the first time, become children of God, but rather are received into the Church by a formal sign, because, in virtue of the promise, they previously belonged to the body of Christ.¹⁹

In other words, because they are already covenantally included then baptism is applicable.

Baptism does not make them a member of the covenant. Rather it is a sign and seal of the covenant. This is a rather striking contrast to all of my other colleagues.²⁰

There is strong evidence that Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, Zacharias Ursinus (contributor/writer of the Heidelberg Catechism), among many others accepted that there is a “seed” of regeneration and faith, to use Calvin’s term, in infancy.²¹ For example, infant regeneration is explicit in the case of John the Baptist (Luke 1:39–44). Infant faith is set forth in Psa 22:9: “Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother’s breasts. Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother’s womb.” Also, Psalm 71:5–6 says, “For You are my hope; O Lord GOD, You are my confidence

¹⁹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.15.22. This translation by Henry Beveridge (1845) is available from Christian Classics Ethereal Library at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.vi.xvi.html>.

²⁰Orthodox and Roman Catholics differ from Lutherans and from Baptists on “how” baptism relates to salvation and church membership; but each of these other views miss the relevance and richness of the covenant as the ground of the ecclesiology of children.

²¹ See Rich Lusk, *Paedofaith* (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2005), Rayburn’s, “The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children,” etc.; as well as Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.16.20. Calvin writes, “In fine, the objection is easily disposed of by the fact, that children are baptised for future repentance and faith. Though these are not yet formed in them, yet the seed of both lies hid in them by the secret operation of the Spirit.” Also, “For if fulness of life consists in the perfect knowledge of God, since some of those whom death hurries away in the first moments of infancy pass into life eternal, they are certainly admitted to behold the immediate presence of God. Those, therefore, whom the Lord is to illumine with the full brightness of his light, why may he not, if he so pleases, irradiate at present with some small beam, especially if he does not remove their ignorance, before he delivers them from the prison of the flesh? I would not rashly affirm that they are endued with the same faith which we experience in ourselves, or have any knowledge at all resembling faith (this I would rather leave undecided); but I would somewhat curb the stolid arrogance of those men who, as with inflated cheeks, affirm or deny whatever suits them” (4.16.19).

from my youth. By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother's womb; My praise is continually of You.”

Speaking of children in a faithful home, Bryan Chapell expresses the life-long reality of faith in covenant children. “In this atmosphere, faith naturally germinates and matures so that, *it is possible, even common, for the children of Christian parents never to know a day that they do not believe that Jesus is their Savior and Lord*” (emphasis his).²²

Despite the verses above, many may say, there is no way a little child or infant can have faith. Consider Peter Leithart's argument in *The Baptized Body*, in the section entitled “Do Baptists Talk to Their Babies?”

Is “infant faith” absurd? “Faith” is the human response of trust toward God, a response of allegiance, in a personal relationship, and this has large consequences for our understanding of infant faith. The question of infant faith is not: “Are infants capable of receiving this jolt of divine power?” The question is: “Can infants respond to other persons? Do infants have personal relations? And the answer to this question is obviously yes. Infants quickly (even *in utero*) learn to respond to mother's voice; infants quickly manifest “trust” in their parents; infants quickly distinguish strangers from members of the family.²³

If you remove all of the scholastic discussions about the nature and content of faith, faith is trust, and trust is a response to a person. When you hold a baby, that baby can respond to a person—she can trust. The seed of the ability to express allegiance to someone is embedded in us from infancy. This is why Calvin used the term “seed faith” to describe the mysterious relationship infants may have to God.

²²“A Pastoral View of Infant Baptism” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, 26.

²³Peter Leithart, *The Baptized Body* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2007), 10.

Children Dying in Infancy

But what about the question of a child dying in infancy? The well-known, “Five Points of Calvinism” (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints) are a rather truncated view of Reformed doctrine, but those five points are originally from the Synod of Dort (1618–19). The decisions of this famous Dutch showdown on Calvinism versus Arminianism are contained in the *Canons of Dort*. Consider Article 17:

The Salvation of the Infants of Believers

Since we must make judgments about God’s will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their parents are included, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy.²⁴

Calvinists should not doubt the salvation of their children that are lost in an early death. I had a poignant opportunity to exercise this doctrine a few years ago. A child was born in our congregation with a severe deformity. It was known that the child would not live long, if he lived at all. In consultation with the parents, I went to the delivery room prepared to do a baptism;—not to save the child because the child is in the covenant—rather to place the sign of the new covenant on that child. In the act of baptizing him, I was declaring with his parents that this was God’s baby. He died on the eighth day. He was named Hezekiah. He is in heaven.

The Reformed tradition strongly affirms the salvation of covenant children, children of one believing parent, who die in infancy. Loraine Boettner wrote, “Most Calvinistic theologians have held that those who die in infancy are saved. The Scriptures seem to teach plainly enough

²⁴This translation is from <http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/canons-dort>.

that the children of believers are saved; but they are silent or practically so in regard to those of the heathens.”²⁵

So what about non-Christian’s children? The Westminster Confession states, “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who works when, and where, and how He pleases: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word” (10.3). At first this may seem only tautological, no more helpful than, “bachelors are unmarried men.” However, the context is the chapter, “Of Effectual Calling.” This is an explanation of *how* God works by his grace, through the Spirit in such cases. The Spirit is capable (on a Reformed reading) to regenerate in the womb. Since the Reformed tradition is strong on the salvation of covenant children dying in infancy, another way to read the Confession here is apply it to all infants, regardless of their covenant inclusion. Assuming the Westminster divines were not apostatizing from previous Reformed views, and read in this way, its meaning would *emphasize* that there *are* elect children from among unbelievers. The Confession also provides for such cases as the mentally handicapped, i.e., “all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called.”

The Confession is careful not to be dogmatic about “all children,” yet leaves the possibility open, since all such children *could* be elect. Noted Reformed Theologians such as Charles Hodge, W. G. T. Shedd, and B. B. Warfield held out the hope of salvation for all unbelievers’s children dying in infancy.²⁶ In my own view, I can only say, I know that *elect*

²⁵Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1963), 143.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 143.

infants that die in infancy will be saved, and I believe in the mercy of God. But I cannot bring any text in the Bible to prove a universal hope that all unbeliever's children who die in infancy will be saved. But what I can say is: If you are a believer and you have a child that dies in infancy, claim the promises first made to Abraham and rest in His promises for the salvation of your child (Gen. 17:7).

But aren't children innocent? No. All have sinned (Rom. 3:23). This is not speaking of only adults, as every parent knows. Could children sin in the womb? Yes. I believe in the Calvinistic view of the fall and depravity. We are corrupted because of the fall (Rom. 3). As soon as we are able to sin, we do. Children are "in Adam." "As in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). Death is an alienation from the Triune God of Scripture. If all in Adam die, then all deserve alienation from God, or else this death is an unjust consequence. But nothing God does can be an unjust consequence since He is always righteous and the standard of justice. This is my most basic argument for the Augustinian conception of Original Sin. I would certainly like to think no "innocent" child goes to hell, just as I would like to think no "innocent native" goes to hell. But there are no "innocent" people in Adam. This is because we covenantally participated in Adam's sin, just as we who believe covenantally participated in Christ's redemption. We have union with Adam; but thanks be to God, we have union with Christ! This covenantal connection to Adam, to Christ, to the Body of Christ - is a trinitarian unity.

Despite the devastation of the fall and the severe consequences of sin, the gracious Triune God has determined salvation to every single person in His Church. It is my sincere prayer that all the "innocent natives," every single child dying in infancy, and every one of the aborted and discarded, rejected children of abortion may yet be saved by the mercy of the Lord. Certainly, no

more costly sacrifice for them must be made to secure their salvation. Absolutely, no more efficacious Spirit is needed to make them alive in their darkness. Finally, no more sovereign God is needed to irresistibly draw them in His grace.

Children and the Sacraments

Another question closely linked with this one is the question of children's inclusion in the sacraments of baptism and communion. First, I must defend the very notion of "sacrament." The *Shorter Catechism* Q. 91 says, "How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation? A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them." The *Westminster Confession* 28.6 says, "The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time."

Both of these Presbyterian and Reformed doctrinal statements make clear that our salvation is in some sense *conferred* through baptism (and communion). Many Presbyterians, influenced by American revivalism, are unaware that this is actually in their catechism or confession. Grace is conferred through baptism, but it is a qualified transmission. In his study of the confession and baptism, David F. Wright stated the "Confession teaches baptismal

regeneration,” adding the various qualifications.²⁷ The particular qualifications in the above passages are to *exclude the virtue of the water* (i.e., no magic water) and minister (priest), as well as protect the Calvinistic view of election, that the blessings of salvation only are finally obtained by the elect, by grace through faith.

Some attention should be given to the qualifying phrase “The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered.” What does this mean? It may mean that baptism’s efficacy does not necessarily happen at the time of baptism. This is often the way modern Presbyterians take it. However, another way to understand this is more in keeping the historical development of baptism’s meaning in Reformation history.

Over against penance (needed to restore one after baptism), the Reformers called the church to a richer view of baptism for life-long grace, duty, comfort, and forgiveness. In other words, we must “improve” our baptisms through all of life.²⁸ The *Belgic Confession* (34) says, “Neither does this Baptism only avail us at the time when the water is poured upon us and received by us, but also through *the whole course of our life*” (emphasis mine). The *Scots Confession* (21) also says, “For baptism once received *continues for all of life*, and is a perpetual sealing of our adoption” (emphasis mine). The *French Confession* (35) concurs, “[Baptism] reaches *over our whole lives and to our death. . .*” (emphasis mine).²⁹ Most importantly for the

²⁷“Baptism at the Westminster Assembly,” in *Calvin Studies VIII: The Westminster Confession in Current Thought* (Davidson, NC: Davidson College, 1997), 80.

²⁸The *Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards* (1648), Q. 171.

²⁹This argument is drawn from Rich Lusk, “Baptismal Efficacy and Baptismal Latency: A Sacramental Dialogue,” *Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review* 32.1 (Spring 2006): 18–37; in response to a critique: William B. Evans, “‘Really Exhibited and Conferred . . . in His Appointed Time’: Baptism and the New Reformed Sacramentalism,” *Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review* 31.2 (Fall 2005): 72–88.

Confession's interpretation, the Westminster Directory (for the "Publick Worship of God," written by the same body) giving guidance to ministers teaching on baptism says, "That inward grace and virtue of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered"—at this point one expects to read, "but the Lord in His mysterious sovereignty saves when and where He willith." But what follows sounds like the previous Reformed confessions: "That inward grace and virtue of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; and that the fruit and power thereof reacheth to the whole course of our life." It goes on: teach them to "look back at their baptism ... to improve and make right use of their baptism and of the covenant sealed thereby betwix God and their souls."³⁰ Baptism is not simply one of the sacraments, whose grace may be lost with venial sin, rather this washing and regeneration extends through all of life, despite our sinfulness, so long as "that grace belongs unto" us.

Baptism in the Bible

I was guilty, as a Baptist, of thinking baptism started in the New Testament with John the Baptist. This was probably due to the mural of John baptizing in the baptismal of the Southern Baptist church I attended as a child. Like the stained glass of Medieval cathedrals, this art was calculated to impress upon young minds the teaching of our church. However, the headwaters of the baptismal flood begin in the garden and flow right on through the Old Testament, before the great waterfall of the new covenant era.

³⁰Citations found in *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1976), 383.

In the prototypical garden of Eden are found many of the themes that unfold in Scripture. Gregory K. Beale in his Revelation commentary frequently makes use of the garden's prototypical foundation for the meaning of the language in Revelation.³¹ Allen P. Ross writes that "it is no surprise that the instructions [for the temple] included many motifs and ideas from creation, notable Paradise. This was true not only of the tabernacle in the wilderness, but also of the Solomonic temple; and it is true also of the prophetic visions of the new creation to come."³² Gordon J. Wenham, commenting on Genesis 2:8–27 notes, "Indeed, there are many other features of the garden that suggest it is seen as an archetypal sanctuary, prefiguring the later tabernacle and temples."³³

Hence, the tabernacle and the temple draw upon Eden. They are stylized, architectural versions of the garden. Thus, the water God provides for refreshment and cleansing is a theme throughout all of the Bible. From Eden flowed rivers as boundaries. There are springs in the patriarch narratives. Israel (including children) passes through the Red Sea. A laver is at the entrance of the tabernacle for priestly cleansing. Joshua leads Israel across the Jordan into the Land. In the temple of Solomon an ocean and basins of water on chariots create a stylized river flowing out to cleanse the nations. Ezekiel (chapter 47) and Zechariah see visions of rivers flowing out in the new covenant (Zech 14:8). So we find in the New Testament that washings (*baptismos*) in the tabernacle, as well as crossing the Red Sea are explicitly called baptisms (Heb

³¹Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

³²Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 83.

³³Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* in the *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word, 1987) (electronic edition; OakTree Software: Accordance 8.1.1, 2008).

9:10; 1 Cor 10). There are many baptism(s) in the Old Testament. Even more, there are references to the coming new covenant baptism. The Messiah would come to baptize Israel and the world. Ezekiel 36:24 says: “I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean.” “He will sprinkle many nations” (Isa 52:15). The water flowing out to baptize the nations is promised in the old covenant.

Now enter John the Baptist. He was to go “in the spirit and power of Elijah” who divided the water of the Jordan (2 Kgs 2:8ff). John “prepared the way” for Jesus. John was in the wilderness beyond the borders of the Land where they “went out to him” (Mark 1:5). We must call to mind what had happened to Israel in the past to make sense of this.

In the Exodus, Israel “passed (Heb. *avar*) through the midst of the sea into the wilderness” (Num 33:8). Paul describes this as a “baptism” (1 Cor 10:2). Crossing the red sea is a “baptism.” Under Joshua, Israel was commanded to “cross (*avar*) this Jordan, to go in to possess the land” (Josh 1:11). Due to Moses’ anger, he did not get to “cross” over (Deut 4:22; 31:2). This “crossing” happens again when Elisha is given a “double portion” of the spirit of Elijah. “Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground” (2 Kgs 2:8). Then in the exile, Judah was expelled out of the Land, beyond the borders of the Jordan River (1 Chr 9:1; Josh 3–4).

In the era just before Jesus came, the Jews wanted to know if the exile was over. On the one hand, they were back “in the Land” from Babylon (at least many were). They had walls, a city and a temple. On the other hand, they were still oppressed by foreign powers (Herod and

Rome). Had God returned to Zion in fulfillment of the prophets (e.g., Isa 40:1–10)? John was “preaching a baptism of repentance” (Mark 1:4). This does not mean John was preaching, “You must be immersed.” Rather, given all the history to this point, John was preaching a “baptism” of the renewal of Israel. The baptism he preached showed this.

Theologian Colin Brown writes, “John was organizing a symbolic exodus from Jerusalem and Judea as a preliminary to recrossing the Jordan as a penitent, consecrated Israel in order to reclaim the land in a quasi-reenactment of the return from the Babylonian exile . . . (T)he purity and quantity of the water were of less significance than the historic, symbolic significance of the Jordan itself as the boundary and point of entry.”³⁴ Just as Deuteronomy looked to a time of renewal when they “cross the Jordan, being led by Joshua (Deut 4:21), so now on the verge of the Messiah coming, John was leading them in a symbolic exodus to enter the Land in renewal.³⁵ The rest of the New Testament draws upon various threads of this “crossing” image in baptism. We are “baptized” into Christ, through death and into resurrection life. We “pass” or “cross” into Him (Rom 6:3–4; Col 2:11–12).

New Covenant Baptisms

Consider all the biblical examples of Christian baptism, beginning in Acts. A strong argument can be made for the household inclusion in the faith, including children. The basic outline of Acts is indicated in the first chapter. The gospel of Christ goes forth: “You shall be My

³⁴Colin Brown, “What Was John the Baptist Doing?,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 (1997): 37–50. Available here: www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bbr/baptist_brown.pdf.

³⁵There may be a hint to this crossing when John and his disciples, “looked at Jesus *as He walked*” (John 1:36). This is an odd statement in the context of being a baptism spectator. But, if the baptism setting was a symbolic exodus, then Jesus may have been walking with a crowd of those identifying with this new exodus.

witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The pattern of baptisms follow this expansion: Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the world.

Adult Conversion Baptisms	Household Baptisms
3,000 (men) Pentecost (no household present)	Cornelius and household
Samaritans: (both men and women) Simon the Sorcerer	Lydia and household
Ethiopian Eunuch (no household)	Philippian Jailer and household
Paul (no household)	Corinthians: Crispus and household [inferred] Stephanas and household [Gaius below]
Disciples of John (12 men) (no household present)	
Gaius (and household?)	

In summary of the actual baptisms, we find the following: (1) The new covenant promise came “to you and your children” (Acts 2:39) at Pentecost. Only men (3,000) are said to have been baptized (Acts 2:5, 14, 41). (2) In Samaria “men and women alike” (Acts 8:12) were baptized, including Simon (the apostate Sorcerer). (3) The Ethiopian eunuch (who had no familial household) was baptized (Acts 8:38). (4) Paul (who had no familial household) was baptized (Acts 9:18; cf 1 Cor 7:7–8). (5) Cornelius’ household was baptized (Acts 10:48; 11:14). (6) Lydia’s household was baptized (Acts 16:15). (7) The Philippian Jailer’s household was baptized (Acts 16:33). (8) Many Corinthians were baptized, including Crispus, Stephanas’ household, and Gaius (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor 1:14, 16). (9) The disciples of John (adult men) were baptized (Acts 19:5).

These are the facts about who was said to be baptized. From this we learn: of *nine people* singled-out in the baptism narratives—*five clearly had their households baptized* (Cornelius, the Jailer, Lydia, Crispus [inferred], Stephanas), two had no households for obvious reasons (eunuch & Paul). That leaves Simon, who actually turned out to be an unbeliever, and Gaius listed with Crispus, whom Paul baptized (1 Cor 1:14).

As for Gaius, Rom 16:23 says, “Gaius [is] host to me and to the whole church.” This implies he was a man of some means (3 John 1 references him as “elder” assuming he is the same person). As such, he may have had at least household servants, if not a familial household. Gaius is mentioned with household head, Crispus (synagogue leader). Crispus, “believed in the Lord with all his household” (Acts 18:8). Thus, his household was undoubtedly baptized with him. Yet, Paul said in no uncertain terms, “I baptized *none of you* except Crispus and Gaius” (1 Cor 1:14). Given that culture, Paul probably spoke of Crispus as representing the household in the administration of baptism.³⁶ Also, the text goes on to say, “Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other (*allos*) (1 Cor 1:16). The referent to the pronoun *allos* is “household” (*oikos*). “I do not know whether I baptized any other [household].” Therefore, if Gaius had a household, it was baptized, just like Crispus’ household.

These important biblical facts regarding household baptisms are often dismissed. If household inclusion in the new covenant is not the point, did Luke and Paul intentionally include *more irregular and anomalous cases* of baptism (households), than “regular” cases? Beginning

³⁶It is logically possible Paul baptized only Crispus and Gaius, then someone else baptized the households. However, it seems unlikely Paul would baptize Crispus only to turn the proceedings over to someone else.

with Cornelius, *every baptism is a household baptism passage*—except where we are told those present were “twelve men,” who were apparently Jews (Acts 19:7).

Gentile Baptisms

As a prominent feature of Acts, we see the inclusion of Gentiles in the Jewish church. When Peter recalls the first case of Gentile conversion (Cornelius), it is framed with covenantal words: “And he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, *you and all your household*” (Acts 11:14). Then, 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 and Judea	3000 Men at Pentecost
Samaria	Samaritans, Simon, Eunuch
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) Ephesus (Acts 19)	Saul (apostle to Gentiles) Cornelius’ Household Lydia’s Household Jailer’s Household Corinthians: Crispus’ Household Stephanus’ Household Gaius, 12 Men in Ephesus

Acts is a *selective history* of thousands of examples of baptisms over the first few decades of the church. Surely Luke did not record the only household baptisms in the entire apostolic period. Rather, this was the normative practice of the apostolic church as the gospel went to Gentile families. The gospel and its outward sign went *to families* because *families* were to be saved (Acts 16:31b; also 3:25). This is clear in the Jailer’s case: “Believe in the Lord Jesus,

and you shall be saved, *you and your household*’ (Act 16:31, emphasis mine). I repeat, this is how Luke frames the first case of Gentile conversion (Cornelius): “And he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, *you and all your household*’ (Acts 11:14).³⁷

In the case of the Jailer, the narrative is set up in a covenantal frame, “What must I [individual and singular] do to be saved?” The answer is covenantal. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you [individual] shall be saved, *you and your household*’ (Act 16:31). Luke takes some time on this pericope. Why? The Jailer was the first recorded baptism of an outright pagan. Previous Gentiles had been God-fearers, worshiping the true God of Israel. Philippi was a Roman colony. Many retired soldiers were rewarded with land there. It is likely this Jailer was a former Roman soldier, hence he was about to kill himself. Romans called for the “duty” of suicide in the face of grave failure, like the loss of one’s prisoners. In fear and trembling with an earthquake, no less, he cried out, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The answer is pregnant with biblical, covenantal concepts.

Further, the Exodus images and resonances of this passage should not be missed. This happened at midnight (16:25). Luke emphasizes the events of washing happened, “the same hour of the night” (16:33). This is an unmistakable Passover allusion (Exod 11:4–5). “Midnight” in

³⁷I have addressed the response, “But every member of the household must have believed,” more fully elsewhere: see *You and Your Household: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism* (Brownstown, PA: WordMp3.com, 2015) and on Kindle. In summary, the point is not that I know every individual did not personally have the capacity to “credibly profess faith.” Rather, the individuality of faith is not the exegetical point of the two cases which include statements about the households and faith (the Jailer 16:31-34 & Crispus 18:8). Consider the nuances of these texts. The Greek texts have singular, not plural verbs, to describe the actions of believing. These texts do not say, the Jailer (or Crispus) “and (*kai*)” household members “believed [plural].” 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, from the literal rendering of the 1901 American Standard Version). Crispus, the household head, “believed (*episteusen*, verb, singular) in the Lord “with” (*sun*) all his household” (Acts 18:8). However, observe Luke’s careful language indicating baptism is administered to each member of the Jailer’s household: “he was baptized, he and all his household” (*kai hoi autou pantes*, literally, “those of his all”) (16:33).

Hebrew literally means, “the division of the night,” or the point of release between darkness and light. Ironically, with the release of those in bondage (Paul & Silas), the Jailer’s house would be delivered by the blood of the Lamb to pass through the Red Sea of baptism with rejoicing.³⁸ By casting the Jailer’s deliverance (first pagan baptism) as a Passover/Exodus kind of event, Luke strengthens the image of the deliverance of children. It would hardly be a Passover without the salvation of the first-born. Children were also delivered through the Red Sea of baptism (1 Cor 10:1–4).

Covenant Succession

“Covenant succession” has been used in Reformed circles as a term for training our children as a chief means of salvation being realized in their lives. It is coordinate with the ecclesiological means of grace, such as the ministry of the Word (formally), prayer, and the sacraments. Robert G. Rayburn’s article on this topic is very helpful.³⁹ He shows how frequently Scripture shows the nurture of our children as a means of bringing about a life of covenant faithfulness. Just as in Abraham’s day, the realization of these promises is dependent on covenant nurture. As Gen 18:19 states, “For I have chosen him [Abraham], so that he may command his

³⁸The inclusion of Israelite children were essential in the Exodus, since this event unfolded the Abrahamic promise (e.g., Gen 18:19). Moses’ request to be released was to “go with our young” to “hold a feast to the LORD.” Pharaoh was willing to let the men go, but not “your little ones” (Exod 10:7–11). Then came “one more plague,” the death of the cherished first born child “at midnight” (Exod 11:29). “Then [Pharaoh] called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, ‘Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel’” (Exod 11:30–31). The children were essential then and now.

³⁹“Presbyterian Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture, and Covenant Succession” reprinted in *The Case for Covenant Communion*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2006). This interesting article draws largely on Lewis Bevens Schenck’s dissertation for Yale University (1940), *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant: An Historical Study of the Significance of Infant Baptism in the Presbyterian Church in America*.

children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.” In Moses day, the same command is given: “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” (Deut 6:7). As well in the time of renewal with Joshua, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh 24:15). And so in many other passages.

The Place of Believers’ Children: The Same 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” (Exod 20:12)	“Obey your parents” (Eph 6:2)
Blessings	“Live long in the land” (Exod 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” (Deut 6:2)	“Continue in the things [Scripture] you have learned” from infancy” (2 Tim 3:14–15)
Household Leadership	“As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh 24:15)	“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31)
Promised Reality	“I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring” (Isa 44:3)	“For the promise [of the Spirit] is to you and your children” (Acts 2:39)
Duration of Inclusion	“To a thousandth generation” with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deut 7:9)	“His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him” (Luke 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” (Acts 16:33) (Cornelius’, Lydia’s, Crispus’, Stephanus’ households, too)</i>

The place of children is not a matter of discontinuity between the old and new covenants, as the above chart indicates. So what do we do? What are the tools for covenant succession that we see

in Scripture? The following activities arise from Christian families ordering their lives to nurture their children in the faith. These are not meant to be in priority order. They are inter-related.

1) **Congregational Worship.** A formative influence on our children is full participation in Word and sacrament worship. There is a strong need for the unity of the family in worship. We should have our children alongside us in worship, receiving the benefit of all of the liturgy. Singing praise to God and learning to hear God's Word. This takes training our children. The spiritual formation that takes place in congregational worship significantly shapes their vision of God, Christ, and our faith. In our congregation, our service reflects the historic worship patterns of worship in the church, with a Reformational emphasis in the teaching. In such services there is a continual dialogue between the minister who is leading and the people, including little children. They say after the lectionary readings of Scripture: "The Word of the Lord," "**Thanks be to God.**" Very early children learn the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. They sing hymns and Psalms, they say, "**Amen,**" corporately. They learn the *sursam corda* - "Lift up your hearts," "**We lift them up unto the Lord.**" They sing the Lord's Prayer. These are formative.

2) **Catechism.** They learn catechisms of the Reformed faith: the intentional training of children. In our congregation, we read through the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Shorter Catechism on a rotating basis to continually expose and encourage families to do so in their own homes. The Shorter catechism is also in our Christian school curriculum. We have begun monthly catechism questions for memorization, so that the congregation can know these truths by heart. We also have some classes and small groups directed to different ages for study and growth, as do most Reformed congregations. Most modern Reformed congregations hold

“communicants classes,” but do not have a rite of Confirmation. In so far as Anglicans participate in the Reformed view, most Anglicans continue the tradition of Confirmation. Confirmation is not inconsistent with the Reformed view, so long as the full covenantal membership of the child is not compromised. In this case, Confirmation would not be admitting the child into the Church, covenant, or kingdom, but rather a rite of passage into a deeper discipleship.⁴⁰ Confirmation may be an “unbiblical tradition” or a very biblical custom which aims to accomplish spiritual formation through another step of maturation. We have begun conversations in our own congregation of turning our youth discipleship class into this kind of “Confirmation” class. The goal would be to encourage the students to a deeper understanding and self-consciously embrace our faith.⁴¹

4) **Christian Schooling.** Education is worldview-shaping. Therefore, to form a fully Christian conception of reality, Christian schooling/homeschooling is a key process, over against a militant secular government school system. Psalms 127 holds out the vision, “Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will

⁴⁰Speaking strongly against the Confirmation rite, James B. Jordan writes “there is no passage anywhere in the Bible that commands, hints, or shows that children need to go through some ritual before they are included at any religious meal. There is neither ‘bar mitzvah’ nor ‘confirmation’ in the Bible,” *The Case for Covenant Communion*, 50. He argues against the pericope of in the Temple at age twelve as a such an indication, citing Jewish sources to indicate no such tradition of “bar mitzvah” until 1400 A.D.

⁴¹ I can illustrate my view of a “Covenantal Confirmation” with my own college experience. I had studied and played and wrote music from about the age of 10. But in my first semester of music theory I learned the names for all the sounds that I had experienced. I understood functional harmony, the sound of the tonic, or the dominant, but then I understood them with the right terms and relations. As we mature in our faith, we may know the music, then we learn the words.

not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate” (verses 4–5). We are to raise faithful warriors who by the grace of God use the tools imparted, their talents, and the timely opportunities to wage war and fight the good fight. This will require more than an hour of Sunday School to overcome a secular propaganda machine spewing a false view of reality every minute of the day. To shape our children’s worldviews, we must engage in grammar and secondary education that imparts the culture (*paedeia*) of Christ (Eph 6:4). I strongly favor the approach to education known as, Classical and Christian Education. I believe this combines the best of our civilizational resources with a mature biblical point of view.⁴²

Summation

1) How are infants and children impacted by sin? The Reformed faith holds that all mankind is guilty of Adam’s sin, including infants and children even prior to their intentional sin (Rom 5:14–21). The nature of human beings is corrupt because of the fall, therefore, all have sinned. This explains the universality of sin (Rom 3:23). This is why all people (regardless of age) need the gracious, salvific work of Jesus. As I have discussed, the Bible is a covenantal book. Therefore, the two covenant heads are Adam and Christ. We are born in Adam and receive the guilt and penalty (curse) of Adam’s sin. Likewise, those in Christ receive the forgiveness and life of Christ through His obedient life, substitutionary death, and glorious resurrection. If we are unable to receive sinfulness through Adam, how are we able to receive salvation through Christ? Both involve covenantal imputation. The case is placed as a parallel (1 Cor 15:22).

⁴²See my *Classical and Christian Education*, revised (Brownstown, PA: WordMp3.com, 2013), which is a booklet that explains this philosophy of education.

2) When and how are infants and children considered members of the church? Because of the covenant which God promised (Gen 3:15) and established with Abraham, the children of believers are included, even in the new covenant. The rites that follow this are baptism and communion which are signs and seals of the covenant.⁴³ Baptism makes a child an official member of the church and because of covenant inclusion, infants and young children have a right to the rite.

3) How does God treat those who die in infancy or childhood? Christians who lose a child in infancy should not doubt the salvation of their child. Should such a death take place after baptism, there should even be more confidence in God's grace in the child's life, since the child was signed and sealed in the covenant through this sacrament. For the loss of the children of unbelievers, we can only say that God is merciful. The judge of all the earth will do right, since He is the standard of righteousness. As I argued above, the Reformed faith holds out the possibility of their salvation, but no guarantee of their salvation.

4) When and how are infants and children instructed in Christian doctrine? God requires parents to be the primary teachers of their children (Deut 6; Eph 6:4). The use of congregational worship, catechetical teaching and classes, as well as family worship and Christian schooling all play a part in the spiritual formation of children.

⁴³The traditional Reformed pattern is infant baptism, but communion only on the basis of confession, generally in early teen years, though that varies from congregation to congregation. Often, first communion is given to a baptized child after a communicants class or in some contexts, a confirmation class. However, a growing number of Reformed churches accept children at the Table earlier, as well as paedocommunion. For example, Tim Gallant, *Feed My Lambs : Why the Lord's Table Should Be Restored to Covenant Children* (Grand Prairie AB, Canada: Pactum Reformanda Publishing, 2002). Also see the book I edited and contributed to, *The Case for Covenant Communion* (currently available at WordMp3.com).