

The Sacraments: A Reformed Perspective

Chapter 5: Reformed Baptist Arguments Refuted

[Brian Schwertley](#)

(1) The first argument against infant baptism is based on the idea that only physical attachment to Abraham's house by birth or purchase was required for circumcision. Personal faith was not even required for adult members of Abraham's house to receive circumcision. This argument is based on the fact that slaves bought with money were to be circumcised (Gen. 17:13); Abraham had over three hundred adult servants (Gen. 14:14). Therefore, many of these servants must have been circumcised without believing in the covenant God of Abraham. Further, there is nothing in the account about personal faith. While on the surface this argument seems to be clever and weighty, it must be rejected for the following reasons.

a) It is an argument from silence that is not based on the broad or narrow context of Scripture. In Genesis 14:14, we are told that Abraham's three hundred and eighteen trained servants "were born in his own household." These servants were raised under the direct supervision of godly Abraham. Are we supposed to believe that slaves under Abraham's authority were permitted to worship idols, that they were not trained or catechized to worship the one true God? An objective analysis of Abraham's faith and character renders the idea that these slaves were ignorant pagans totally untenable.

b) The fact that the requirement of faith is not mentioned in Genesis 17 is not significant when we consider the following. First, God's covenant with Abraham which the patriarch and his descendants or house members *are required to keep* (Gen. 17:7, 9, 10, 14, etc.) presupposed faith in Jehovah. Obedience to God's command presupposes the acceptance of God's authority. Abraham and his descendants were required to accept God's promise in complete faith. Second, Paul says plainly that circumcision was the sign and seal of the righteousness of the faith he had while still uncircumcised (Rom. 4:11) and that circumcision that is not accompanied by saving faith does not accomplish anything (Gal. 5:6). The Reformed Baptist argument from Genesis 17 presupposes that God has two meanings for circumcision: one that points to regeneration and faith and another that is merely an external ritual. Such a view contradicts the New Testament analysis of circumcision as well as the nature of the covenant. There is no biblical evidence that circumcision means one thing for believers and something else for adults who do not believe.

(2) Reformed Baptists will often point to the circumcision of Ishmael (Gen. 17:25) and Esau as evidence that circumcision must have an external aspect that does not apply to baptism because we know from further revelation that both Ishmael and Esau were not elect and were never regenerate. Regarding Ishmael, Paul says that the son of the bondwoman (Hagar) shall not inherit with Isaac, the son of the free woman (Sarah) (Gal. 4:30). In Romans 9:11-13, Paul says that Esau was hated and rejected by God even before he was born. Could we not then argue that for some people circumcision was simply an external sign of a physical connection with Abraham? No. Such an argument is fallacious for a number of reasons.

a) One must be very careful not to take the fuller New Testament revelation regarding Ishmael and Esau and apply it to the knowledge of the parents of Ishmael and Esau as if these parents knew they were circumcising babies who would definitely never believe and be saved. The account in Genesis reveals that Abraham had very high hopes for his son Ishmael to the point that it took a special direction from God before Abraham was willing to force Hagar and

her son out of the family (Gen. 21:9-14). In the case of Esau, Rebekah was told that the older son would serve the younger, that two nations were in her womb (Gen. 25:23). There is not a shred of evidence that Rebekah or Isaac believed that Esau was a wicked reprobate that would never be saved. On the contrary he was the favorite of his father who still wanted to bless him on his death bed (Gen. 27:37). Further, the parents of Esau were very distressed when he showed signs of apostasy by taking heathen wives (see Gen. 27 and 28). The Baptist appeal to Ishmael and Esau is not a good argument.

b) The appeal to Old Covenant reprobates like Ishmael and Esau fails to take into account that all believing parents have a biblical responsibility to apply the covenant sign to their children and raise them in the faith irrespective of the divine decree. Even if Abraham or Isaac had a special revelation informing them that a son would reject the faith and go into the world, they still had a responsibility to obey the perceptive will of God regarding their own children. They could not neglect the covenant sign any more than they could neglect Scripture reading, catechism, family rules and even physical nourishment. The Baptist argument, that if the actual things signified and sealed by circumcision are never to take place in the children of believers; that, therefore such children should not receive that sacrament or means of grace because the means of grace are never effectually applied by the Holy Spirit could also be said of the Word of God. The Baptist argument would logically lead to the total abandonment of children like Esau. Such a notion is absurd and unlawful.

(3) Reformed Baptists argue that in the Old Testament believing was not a prerequisite to circumcision, only membership in the nation of Israel was required. They argue that if Israelite parents completely apostatized and rejected the faith (i.e., they completely failed to walk in the steps of Abraham), their children would still receive circumcision because they were members of the theocracy. “And so the parallelism between the two breaks down; baptism is not properly administered in all instances where circumcision was properly administered. In other words, New Testament baptism does not take the place of Old Testament circumcision in every respect.”¹ Their birth alone made them citizens of Israel, entitled to the earthly blessings of the covenant nation regardless of saving faith or the faithfulness of parents. Although it is true that under the old dispensation one had to become a member of the nation of Israel to join the church or the covenant community, the idea that circumcision had two different meanings or significations, one for non-believing citizen hypocrites and another for those who had true faith is totally untenable for the following reasons.

a) Membership in Israel as a full citizen involved a profession of faith in the true religion, the one true God and an acceptance of the covenant. “Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient’” (Ex. 24:7; cf. 24:8; Dt. 5:27-29; 6:1-3; etc.). The idea that apostasy was irrelevant to covenant membership in the nation is totally unscriptural. The people were required to circumcise their sons, to observe all various festivals, to go to the temple services at various times, to obey the weekly Sabbath, to offer sacrifices and lead holy lives unto God. The fact that Israel as a nation was often grossly deficient in observing the law and exercising discipline does not mean that apostasy and a lack of faith and obedience was irrelevant to citizenship and circumcision as Baptist apologists assert.

b) According to Scripture in the Old Covenant era apostasy was to be punished with excommunication. Members of the congregation of Israel who engaged in certain behaviors, who refused to repent were to be “cut off” from the covenant people. Israelites could be

¹ Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace*, 102.

excommunicated for refusing to circumcise their sons (Gen. 17:14); the improper observance of Passover (Ex. 12:15, 19; Num. 9:13); making their own holy incense (Ex. 30:33); violating the Sabbath (Ex. 31:14); eating a sacrifice while unclean (Lev. 7:20-21, 25, 27); refusing to make an offering to the Lord (Lev. 17:4, 9); offering an improper sacrifice (Lev. 19:8); eating the blood of a sacrifice (Lev. 17:4); homosexuality (Lev. 18:22); bestiality (Lev. 18:29); adultery (Lev. 18:20); incest (Lev. 18:17); sorcery (Lev. 20:6); child sacrifice or offering children to Molech (Lev. 20:3); allowing others to commit idolatry (Lev. 20:4-5); defiling the sanctuary (Num. 19:13); not observing the day of atonement (Num. 23:29); committing defiant, high-handed or presumptuous sin (Num. 15:30, 31); being or heeding a false prophet (Dt. 13:5 ff.); etc. The idea that one could be circumcised and remain a citizen of Israel while rejecting the religion of Israel is simply untrue.

Reformed Baptists base much of their argumentation on the presupposition that all that was necessary for circumcision under the old administration was a Jewish pedigree. If one's father or grandfather was a Hebrew and thus one had Hebrew blood in his veins, then he had a biblical right to circumcision. This idea which is foundational for much of their argumentation is *not based* on what God actually requires in His law word, but on the perversion of Scripture by the Jews which led to their complete apostasy. God's law makes it perfectly clear that faith, repentance, a profession of faith and obedience are integral aspects of the older administration of the covenant of grace. The Jews and not Jehovah were the ones who twisted Scripture and placed their hopes in their pedigree. They were the ones who made the true religion external, who did not really believe and thus did not obey the moral law. As noted above, *the law provided for the excommunication of apostates*. Therefore apostates and their children were supposed to be excluded from the visible church. But they were not. Thus, the whole nation became corrupt and had to be excommunicated by God. We must never develop our theology of an ordinance by the example of a corrupt people's abuse of it (even though that corruption was a part of God's providence); but rather, we must look to the specific requirements of God's revealed will. Reformed Baptists have greatly erred in this area because they have been misled by their own presuppositions.

c) This point is driven home by John the Baptist. While John the Baptist is the prophet who prepares the way of the LORD (Is. 40:3 ff.), who sets the stage for the coming of the Messiah-King; we must remember that he was the last Old Testament prophet (Mt. 11:11-15). He was preaching to Old Covenant Jews. Note how his message contradicts the idea that being a real Jew was simply a matter of birth. "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'" For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire'" (Mt. 3:7-10). Because they believe the baptism of John was something new, Baptists tend to view this passage as a radical shift toward a New Covenant theology that requires faith and obedience as the essence of this New Covenantal administration. But John's baptism was an Old Testament rite. His preaching (although preparatory) was still Old Testament prophetic covenant lawsuit preaching. The problem with the Pharisees and Sadducees the Baptizer says is that they based their eternal security on their descent from Abraham. John an Old Covenant prophet rebuked them by essentially telling them, "If you really have faith then prove it by your works. Show me the root (the faith of Abraham) by the fruit." He adds that God can raise up true sons of Abraham out of

stones, further dashing their faith in their pedigree on the rocks of the genuine gospel. Clearly, the Reformed Baptist contention that physical birth was all that was necessary for membership in the Old Covenant visible church is wrong. It is the same interpretation that brought ruin to the Jewish nation.

d) When the apostle discusses the Jews in the book of Romans, he explicitly rejects the idea that circumcision had a legitimate double reference with one meaning for unbelieving Jews who were only the seed of Abraham according to the flesh and another for Jews who had saving faith and walked in the steps of Abraham. He writes, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God” (Rom. 2:28-29). Reformed Baptist apologists will often appeal to this kind of passage as a proof text to demonstrate a radical difference between the Old and New Covenantal administrations. Such a view, however, ignores the fact that Paul is not describing something new, but rather something that has always been true. The true Jews were the ones who not only had the sign of circumcision but also the faith of father Abraham. John Murray writes, “The outward in the case of the Jew is, ostensibly, natural descent from Abraham and the possession of the privileges which that relation entailed. The outward in the case of circumcision is explained as ‘that which is outward in the flesh’ (vs. 28), referring to that which is physically manifest. In saying the circumcision does not consist in this, the apostle is denying the existence of the ritual act or its abiding effect in the flesh. His thought is that the outward has no spiritual significance except as the sign and seal of that which it represents, and the *true* circumcision is that work of grace in the heart which the external rite signifies.”²

Everyone, whether an infant of believing parents or an adult convert who was circumcised in the old dispensation or who is baptized in the new dispensation, was or is a member of the visible church with certain privileges. However in both cases if a person does not evidence true faith and walks disorderly he or she is supposed to be disciplined. This fact was established in the previous point. Furthermore, many non-Jews who had absolutely no direct lineage to Abraham in the old dispensation believed in the true God, were circumcised and became part of the covenant people—the nation of Israel. All these facts render the idea false that a mere external participation in the covenant was an acceptable form of the true religion in the old dispensation. While the Old Covenant did have external aspects—real physical descendants, a literal lineage to Christ, a physical land with boundaries—real faith and obedience were always required of God’s people. Paul says that all our fathers (i.e., Israel) passed through the cloud in the sea and were baptized unto Moses (1 Cor. 10:1 ff.). But with most of them God was not pleased and thus destroyed them in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:5-11). Why? Because they did not really believe (Heb. 4:2-3) and they did not obey God (1 Cor. 10:5-10; Heb. 4:6). If a merely external, fleshly membership based on a physical lineage to Abraham was acceptable then a non-believing ritualistic people would have been acceptable to God, but such was never the case. “[T]he gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it” (Heb. 4:2).

(4) The most common argument against infant baptism by all Baptists (whether Reformed or not) is that the examples in the New Testament of actual baptisms taking place show that baptism was administered only to people who could make a credible profession of faith. Baptist scholar Wayne Grudem writes,

² John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 1:88.

After Peter's sermon at Pentecost we read, "*Those who received his word were baptized*" (Acts 2:4). The text specifies that baptism was administered to those who "received his word" and therefore trusted in Christ for salvation. Similarly, when Philip preached the gospel in Samaria, we read, "*When they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women*" (Acts 8:12). Likewise, when Peter preached to the Gentiles in Cornelius' household, he allowed baptism for those who had *heard* the Word and *received the Holy Spirit*—that is, for those who had given persuasive evidence of an internal work of regeneration. While Peter was preaching, "the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word" and Peter and his companions "heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God" (Acts 10:44-46). Peter's response was that baptism is appropriate for those who have received the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit: "Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people *who have received the Holy Spirit* just as we have?" Then Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:47-48). The point of these three passages is that baptism is appropriately given to those who have received the gospel and trusted in Christ for salvation.³

There are a number of problems with this argument. a) It fails to take into consideration that in the case of gospel preaching *to adults* the requirement of a credible profession of faith would be required even if baptism did not exist and Old Covenant circumcision was still in force. If a person was preaching to unbelievers in the old dispensation, what would they require before a man could be circumcised and join himself to Israel? There would have to be a profession of faith, trust or reliance on the God of Israel and the Messiah to come. This would require a certain amount of knowledge of the holy Scriptures. This would involve a turning from sin, from false gods to the true and living God. The book of Acts describes the first preaching of the gospel, the establishment of new churches and the baptizing of the first converts to Christianity. The requirement of a profession of belief in Christ in this context of evangelism proves only that in the case of adults a credible profession is required.

In order to further demonstrate that the Baptist argument is fallacious, consider for a moment what Old Covenant preachers would be required to do if they were sent out to preach and make converts among the heathen nations. They would be told to preach or teach and then to circumcise people who made a credible profession of faith. They would sound almost identical in their preaching to the apostles saying things like "repent and be circumcised" or "believe and be circumcised." The Baptist appeal to these kinds of passages is an argument from silence which assumes what it sets out to prove. The command to baptize people who were capable of professing faith in God does not refute infant baptism any more than the Old Testament requirement of the circumcision of foreigners who confess their faith in the God of Israel refutes infant baptism (e.g., Ex. 12:48).

b) It is essentially an argument from silence that ignores the broader context of Scripture. Arguments from silence can be misleading and fallacious. John Brown writes, "For almost two thousand years, from Abraham to John the Baptist, we have not one instance of the circumcision of an infant *on the eighth day*. Will it therefore follow that no infants were circumcised, or none on the eighth day, all that time? There is no instance of baptism in the churches of Antioch, Iconium, Rome, Thessalonica, or Colossae. Were therefore none of their members baptized? It is not common for historians to give particular instances of that which is altogether common."⁴

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 970.

⁴ John Brown, *The Systematic Theology of John Brown of Haddington*, 538-539.

c) It ignores the many passages that imply infant baptism such as Acts 2:39; 16:31, 33; Mark 10:13-14; Luke 18:15; 1 Corinthians 7:14; Matthew 28:19 (whole nations include infants) and the clear identification in Scripture between baptism and circumcision (e.g., Col 2:11-12; Gen. 17:10-14; Rom. 4:11; Rom. 6; Dt. 30:6; etc.). Given the biblical teaching on circumcision, baptism, regeneration and covenant headship, the opponents of infant baptism need to produce clear evidence from Scripture that baptism should not be given to the infants of believers.

(5) The second most popular argument against infant baptism is based on the meaning of baptism. It is argued that since baptism is a sign of the seal of the righteousness of faith (Rom. 4:11); regeneration ((Ezek. 36:35; Jn. 3:5; Tit. 3:5); the remission of sins (Mk. 1:4; Ac. 2:38); baptism in the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:26, 33; Ac. 1:5; 2:2, 17; 11:15-16); and spiritual purification (Ezek. 36:25; Jn. 3:6) that leads to a true inner and progressive sanctification (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; Mt. 7:18), then it cannot be applied to infants because they are incapable of exercising faith in Christ. Grudem writes,

The New Testament authors wrote as though they clearly assumed that everyone who was baptized had also personally trusted in Christ and experience salvation. For example, Paul says, “As many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Paul here assumes that baptism is the outward sign of inward regeneration. This simply would not have been true of infants—Paul could not have said, “As many *infants* as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ,” for infants have not yet come to saving faith or given any evidence of regeneration.

Paul speaks the same way in Romans 6:3-4: “Do you not know that *all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus* were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death.” Could Paul have said this of infants? Could he have said that “all infants who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized unto his death” and “were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead”? But Paul could not have said those things about infants, then those who advocate infant baptism must say that baptism means something different for infants than what Paul says it means for “all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus.” Those who argue for infant baptism at this point resort to what seems to the present author to be vague language about infants being adopted “into the covenant” or “into the covenant community,” but the New Testament does not speak that way about baptism. Rather, it says that all of those who have been baptized have been buried with Christ, and have been raised with him, and have put on Christ.⁵

Although this argument appears to make a lot of sense, it must be rejected for a number of reasons.

a) The greatest problem with this type of argument against infant baptism is that when it comes to the spiritual realities that baptism represents (e.g., regeneration, forgiveness of sins, union with Christ, inner purification, etc.), circumcision represents *the exact same thing* (see comparisons of the two above). Therefore, the argument against infant baptism that is based on the meaning of baptism would equally apply to the Old Covenant rite of circumcision. Thus, such an argument would prove too much (i.e., It would also disprove the application of circumcision to covenant children which we know was explicitly commanded by God and practiced by God’s people) and thus is worthless.

b) Although there is no question but that circumcision and baptism symbolize an inward heart change, one should never assume that as a matter of fact a real change has occurred in

⁵ Grudem, 970-971.

every single case. The visible church is made up of wheat and tares, of true believers and hypocrites. There are many adults who have made a profession of faith and been baptized who never were regenerated or had saving faith. Infants in the old dispensation were circumcised by the command of God irrespective of any promises of when such an infants would be regenerated. High church pastors make a big mistake when they assume that baptism, *ex operato*, imparts regeneration. Baptists also err greatly when they attempt to secure a pure regenerate church membership by reading human hearts which is impossible. God tells us what baptism signifies and teaches that the infants of believers are to be baptized. Therefore, we must obey His requirements regardless of the difficulties we may have regarding the when and where of regeneration.

c) Grudem and other Baptists who appeal to passages such as Romans 6:3-4 and Galatians 3:27 fail to take into account that *only* the baptism in the Holy Spirit truly unites us to Christ. Therefore, these passages either refer to Spirit baptism; or (as Calvin asserts), Paul is speaking of what baptism as a symbol represents *only* in the case of true believers who are actually united to Christ by the Spirit. Once we understand what Paul is teaching in these passages we can avoid Grudem's fallacious conclusions. The apostle is teaching that everyone who is regenerated and baptized in the Holy Spirit is united to Him. He is not teaching that everyone who was baptized with water was baptized into Christ's death. If he was, then we should not be Baptists or Presbyterians but Romanists or Lutherans, for such a view supports baptismal regeneration which is clearly unbiblical. Further, if we are only permitted to baptize people who are already regenerated, then we could not baptize anyone with a clear conscience for only God knows the heart. Also, it is improper hermeneutically to interpret these passages in a manner that contradicts what the Bible says about the infants of believers.

d) The Bible teaches that regeneration can occur in the children of believers from even the earliest infancy. "But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God" (Ps. 22:9-10). God's care of David extended to his mother's womb. (This passage prophetically applies to Jesus who obviously did not need regeneration). "For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my youth. By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb" (Ps. 71:5-6). "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). An angel told Zacharias regarding his future son John the Baptist, "He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Lk. 1:15). "And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe [John] leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Lk. 1:41). Given these passages one should never assume that God does not or cannot impart His saving power toward covenant children. "If infants can be saved, what hinders them to have the *habits* of faith and repentance? As for the profession of them, it is only required of adult persons."⁶ Turretin's comments are excellent. He writes, "Infants cannot be capable of active sanctification or conversion (as to the sense and knowledge of the blessing); but they can be capacious of passive regeneration, as to the principle and the impression of the divine image, which ought to exert itself in its own time. And although it cannot be conceived by us how that grace operates in infants, its truth is not on that account to be denied. No more than the fact that even though we cannot perceive how sin can be in the soul, still this is nonetheless true. The work of God (although not coming under our comprehension) is not on that account unreal. If infants who are to be saved bring with them from their mother's

⁶ John Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 539.

womb inborn corruption, they must be purged of it before they can be admitted into the kingdom of God, into which nothing polluted enters. The way is easy and prompt to God as it is incomprehensible and wonderful to us.”⁷

e) Given the identity of meaning between circumcision and baptism with regard to their signification of union with Christ and the benefits that flow from that union, if baptism can only be given to adults with a credible profession of faith and not their infants, then would not Jews who were circumcised on the eighth day be required to be ritually circumcised again (or at least go through a confirming ritual) in some manner after they came to faith in order for it to have meaning for them? The fact that circumcision on the eighth day was enough tells us something about both circumcision and baptism. Rushdoony writes, “Circumcision on the eighth day removes the power of the rite from man to God: the young child is not capable of justifying, regenerating, or sanctifying himself: he is entirely passive in the rite. The fact of divine grace is thus set forth. Just as the covenant wholly represents God’s initiative and grace, so the sign of the covenant represents the same.”⁸

(6) Another common argument by Reformed Baptists is that Holy Spirit regeneration is the fulfillment of what circumcision signified under the Abrahamic covenant and not New Covenant water baptism. Thus, the antitype of circumcision is the new birth, not baptism. Therefore, it is exegetically illegitimate to argue that baptism has replaced circumcision in the New Covenant era. Thus, when we examine Scripture to determine the proper recipients of baptism we must ignore the Old Testament teaching regarding the covenant and circumcision and only focus our attention on the passages which discuss baptism. It is this argumentation which leads Reformed Baptists to the conclusion that infant baptism is a violation of the regulative principle of worship (i.e., *sola Scriptura* as it is applied to church ordinances). There are a number of problems with this argumentation.

a) While it is true that circumcision points to regeneration and that circumcision was ultimately fulfilled in Christ and thus abrogated in the New Covenant era, the essential meaning of both ordinances (as noted above) is identical. Circumcision was a sign of regeneration just like baptism is a sign of the new birth. Therefore, even though baptism is a new ordinance, the New Testament itself defines baptism as the new administration counterpart to circumcision. This point is set forth most clearly in Colossians 2:11-12 where Paul first points out that outward circumcision is fulfilled in “the circumcision made without hands;” that is, the union of the believer with Christ in His circumcision which is His sacrificial death on the cross. He then seamlessly continues his discussion regarding union with Christ but uses the term baptism. Then in verse 13 he uses the “uncircumcision of the heart” to describe Gentiles before their regeneration. Therefore, even though one can say that circumcision was fulfilled in regeneration which is a result of union with Christ; and, thus is not strictly speaking fulfilled in the ordinance of baptism; this argument doesn’t prove the Baptist position because baptism as a sign according to the New Testament serves virtually the same function. The main discontinuity is between the manner of the signs and not what the signs represent.

b) If the meaning of both ordinances is virtually the same; the promises to the children of believers is the same; the doctrine of covenant headship is the same; the blessing of Christ to the children of believers is the same; and the holiness or set-apartness of covenant children in both dispensations is the same, then why should we presuppose discontinuity between the application of the ordinances when all of the Scriptures, in both testaments, teach continuity? (Remember,

⁷ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:419-420.

⁸ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 42.

the command to “believe and be baptized” does not exclude infants from baptism any more than the requirement of circumcision of Gentile converts to the Old Covenant religion refuted infant circumcision.) While the simplicity of the Baptist argument is appealing to many, its failure to take into account the clear teachings of Scripture that are tangentially related to the children of believers and baptism is appalling.

For example, according to the Reformed Baptist view, the children of believers are not little pagans. However, they also are not part of the visible church either. What then is their status? The Reformed Baptist at this point really has little to say. He may argue that the children of believers are part of a covenant family and thus receive set-apartness and blessings from this relationship. But, if they are denied the sign of the covenant and are not members of the church, then at least with regard to the children of believers we must logically conclude that the New Covenant is inferior to the old. Reformed Baptists leave children in a type of limbo status where they are not quite pagans, but they are not in the pale of the church either. Such a view is so contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture that it cannot be true.

(7) Reformed Baptists point to the Great Commission where our Lord instituted New Covenant trinitarian baptism as proof that infants are excluded from baptism and the visible church. Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:18-20). The Baptist contention that Christ’s institution of baptism excludes the infants of believers must be rejected for the following reasons.

a) There is nothing in Jesus’ statement which explicitly, directly or even implicitly excludes the infants of believers from the visible church. Our Lord instructs His apostles to disciple the nations by baptizing and teaching them the whole counsel of God. Baptists have developed their argumentation from the Great Commission from the incorrect rendering of the Greek by the King James Version. The KJV translates the main verb which precedes the command to baptize (*baptizantes* is a present active participle which receives its imperatival sense from the main verb) as “teach” when it should be translated “make disciples” (NKJV, the Greek verb is *matheteusate*).

In order to make disciples of the nations, two things must be done. They must be baptized (v. 19) and they must be taught (v. 20). Why does the command to baptize *precede* the injunction to teach? (This order is significant for it contradicts Baptist presuppositions.) The likely reason that the Mediator places baptism before teaching is that baptism like circumcision is the initiatory rite which marks a person’s entry into the visible, institutional church. The church is the place where people are taught the whole counsel of God. It is where true discipleship occurs. The Great Commission does not exclude the holy, clean, sanctified children of believers (1 Cor. 7:14).

b) What we have just considered raises the question: Are infants and children of believers part of the visible church and disciples of Christ or are they part of the world and disciples of Satan? The answer to this question is obvious. The children of believers are holy (1 Cor. 7:14), blessed by Jesus (Mk. 10:13-14), members of the kingdom (Lk. 18:15), and are raised from birth with the teachings of the King. They are disciples of the Savior, not Baal. They are members of the church, not the world. The children of the New Covenant church receive all the privileges that the children of the Old Covenant received. The new and better covenant does not assign them to the world or to some third limbo status.

c) If one considers the teaching of the Great Commission within the broader context of Scripture one does not need to set up a wall of partition between parents and their children. Both covenantal administrations require faith and repentance before adults can receive the initiatory rites of circumcision or baptism. Therefore, even if we translate *matheteusate* as “teach” and insist that teaching must take place before baptism we have not proven any discontinuity regarding children in the new administration. Both administrations require unbelieving adults to be taught, to understand and to believe in certain doctrines before they are circumcised or baptized. Baptists are finding discontinuity in passages that do not teach a radical discontinuity at all.

A brief examination of the main Baptist arguments reveals that they are coming to certain passages with their presuppositions and are reading their assumptions into the text. We ask our Reformed Baptist brothers to return to their Puritan roots and forsake the anti-Reformational teaching of the Anabaptists. Although Reformed Baptist scholars have exercised great skill in attempting to wed the anti-covenantal, individualistic, anti-covenant headship theology of the Anabaptists to Reformed theology, we hope and pray that these men will learn that the two systems are really incompatible. They are like water and oil.

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