

The Sacraments: A Reformed Perspective

[Brian Schwertley](#)

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Sacraments

The sacraments are an important and unique means of sanctification within Christ's church. The study of the sacraments is important because: (a) They were instituted by Christ Himself (Mt. 28:18-20) and are church ordinances in which all believers are required to participate. (b) Christians need to understand what they are observing and doing. They need to know why the sacraments are important. A biblical understanding of the sacraments will help us fully benefit from what we are doing; will help us avoid taking sacraments for granted and will help us avoid ritualism or externalism. The sacraments are a means of grace. However, they are not a means of grace apart from faith, and faith presupposes knowledge and understanding. (c) There are many erroneous and dangerous views of the sacraments within professing Christendom. The biblical or Reformed view of the sacraments must be defended against the assaults of ritualism, sacramentalism or sacerdotalism as well as Anabaptism and American individualism. While the sacraments are in a sense very simple, they are also deep and profound. As we study the sacraments we will first consider the sacraments in general. Then we will turn our attention to the specifics of each sacrament: baptism and the Lord's supper.

What Does the Term Sacrament Mean?

The word "sacrament" is used almost universally among Christians to describe the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper. The term, which is not found in our English Bible, comes from the Latin word *sacramentum*. ("It is derived from *sacro, āre, to make sacred, dedicate to gods or sacred uses*"¹). In ancient times the word referred to a pledge of money by two parties which occurred in a sacred place. In ancient Rome various gods were invoked when swearing a solemn oath. "But it is used peculiarly to denote a military oath by which soldiers bound themselves by a certain rite and prescribed words to the state and the magistrate, that they would strenuously perform what the emperor had commanded and would not desert the military standard."² The post apostolic church employed the term to signify any sacred rite or mysterious doctrine. "Hence everywhere in the [church] fathers you will find the sacrament of the Trinity, of the incarnation, and of faith, and in the general whole Christian religion comes under this name."³ In the Latin Vulgate the word is used to translate the word "mystery" (Gk. *mysterion*) in a number of passages (e.g., Eph. 1:9; 3:9; 5:32; Col. 1:27; 1 Tim. 3:16; Rev. 1:20; 17:7) even though the word mystery is never used to describe baptism or the Lord's supper.

Perhaps the best New Testament definition of a sacrament is found in Romans 4:11 where Paul describes the Old Covenant sacrament of circumcision. He writes, "And he [Abraham] received the *sign* of circumcision, a *seal* of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised." The best modern definition is found in the Westminster Larger

¹ A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1860, 70] 1972), 588.

² Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elencic Theology* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 3:338.

³ Ibid.

Catechism which affirms that “[a] sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his church, to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another; and to distinguish them from those that are without....The parts of a sacrament are two; the one an outward and sensible sign, used according to Christ's own appointment; the other an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified” (A. 162 and 163). Berkhof’s brief definition is helpful. He writes, “A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which by sensible signs the grace of God in Christ, and the benefits of the covenant of grace, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers, and these in turn, give expression to their faith and allegiance to God.”⁴

The Word of God and the Sacraments as Means of Grace

In the Westminster Standards the sacraments are listed among others as a means of grace. The Larger Catechism reads: “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation” (A. 154; see Shorter Catechism A. 88). Our understanding of the sacraments will benefit if we examine the sacraments in relation to the Word.

The Word and the sacraments have a number of things in common.

- (1) Both were instituted by God as a means of grace.
- (2) Both point men to the person and work of Christ.
- (3) Both can only benefit man if they are appropriated by faith. “This is the only way in which a sinner can become a participant of the grace that is offered in the Word and in the sacraments.”⁵
- (4) Both are applied to the heart of man by the Holy Spirit. Ridgeley writes, “As God works grace by and under them, they are called means of grace; as he seldom works grace without first inclining persons to attend on him in them, and wait for his salvation, they are called the ordinary means of grace; and as they have not in themselves a tendency to work grace, without the inward and powerful influences of the Holy Spirit accompanying them, they are distinguished from it, and accordingly styled the outward means of grace.”⁶ Shedd writes,

They are a means of grace, dependent like the other means upon the accompanying operation of the Holy Spirit and consequent faith in the soul of the recipient. Says Calvin (Inst. IV. xiv. 9), “All the energy of operation belongs to the Spirit, and the sacraments are mere instruments which without his agency are vain and useless, but with it, are fraught with surprising efficacy.” “The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the work of the Spirit.” Westminster Confession, XXVII. iii. Matt. 3:11, “I indeed baptize you with water, but he shall baptize with the Holy Ghost.” 1 Cor. 11:28, “Let a man examine himself and so let him eat.” Rom. 2:28, “Neither is that circumcision which is outward.” 1 Pet. 3:21, “The antitype whereunto, namely baptism, doth also now save us (not the

⁴ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 617.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 616.

⁶ Thomas Ridgeley, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (Edmonton, AB: Canada [1855] 1995), 2:433.

putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁷

(5) Both the *preached* word and the sacrament of the Lord’s supper are public ordinances. That is, they are only lawfully found in public worship and are only lawfully conducted by ordained ministers of the gospel. “In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee” (Ex. 29:24, KJV). Turretin writes, “The less principal is that they may be badges of a public profession and of divine worship by which they who belong to the visible church are distinguished from other assemblies. Hence it is evident how great is the philanthropy (*philanthrōpia*) of God, who, letting himself down as it were to us creeping upon the ground, wishes to seize not only our minds but also our external senses with the haste and admiration of his grace, inasmuch as he subjects it to the bodily senses, to the hearing in the spoken word, to the touch and sight in the sacraments.”⁸

The Word of God is indispensable to public worship and must be read, preached and sung (i.e., the Psalms) at every service. Although the sacraments are commanded by God and thus are necessary, they are not absolutely indispensable to every public worship service. Even Reformed churches which practice weekly communion acknowledge this fact. (Only churches which adhere to a sacerdotal concept of the Lord’s supper would disagree with this statement.)

As a commanded aspect of public worship like the reading and preaching of the Word the sacraments are strictly regulated by Scripture. That is, nothing is to be detracted from the ordinances instituted by Christ (e.g., substituting water or grape juice for wine in communion) and nothing is to be added to these ordinances from the mind of man (e.g., the ritualism and pomp of Anglo-Catholic churches [i.e., high church Episcopalianism] and Romanism).

The Word and the sacraments also have important differences.

(1) The word of God is absolutely essential and indispensable to salvation while the sacraments are not. A person can be saved without the sacraments, but they cannot be saved without the teaching of the Bible. The thief on the cross was saved by believing in Jesus even though he was never baptized. Trusting in Christ as He is revealed in Scripture is sufficient for salvation. Cults who teach that baptism is necessary for salvation are wrong. Further, the church in the time of Moses existed and functioned in the wilderness for forty years without the Old Covenant sacraments of circumcision and the Passover (Josh. 5:5-12). The church cannot exist at all without the Word of God.

(2) The Holy Spirit uses God’s Word both to produce and strengthen faith while the sacraments only serve to strengthen faith. The sacraments are not converting ordinances but are means used to further sanctification. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to give birth to the new spiritual life implanted in regeneration: “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Pet. 1:23).

(3) The Word is the primary means of grace while all other means of grace are secondary to the Word. This point is true because the Word *defines* the sacraments. Apart from the teaching of the Bible the sacraments are meaningless. The sacraments are dependent upon the Word, but the Word is not dependent on the sacraments. Consequently, the Reformed churches do not allow the Lord’s supper to be served apart from the preached word and words of explanation. Churches which place the administration of the sacraments above the preached word as though the sacraments are more special and convey some unique superior grace are ignorant of the teaching

⁷ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889), 2:564.

⁸ Turretin, 3:343.

of Scripture. “[W]hile the Word can exist and is also complete without the sacraments, the sacraments are never complete without the Word.”⁹

(4) The Word of God is to be read and addressed to all men calling upon them to repent and believe while the sacraments are to be administered only to people who are in the visible church. Turretin writes, “He wished that ‘the power and efficacy of grace might be more strongly implanted in our minds.’ The word is addressed indifferently and promiscuously to all, but the sacraments single out individuals and far more powerfully and efficaciously move the heart; not only because ‘a sign stimulates the soul thrust through the ear of that which, to the eyes, are subjects of faith’; but also because the special application of the sacraments shows that the blessing of grace belongs to each one using them well.”¹⁰ Anyone, even a rank pagan or notorious sinner, can come into a church building and hear the Word of God read and preached. But, only professing Christians who are members of a church can partake of the Lord’s supper. The Word is open to all while the sacraments are for God’s family alone.

The Two Main Aspects of the Sacraments

The Reformed standards identify the two aspects of the sacraments as sign and seal. These two aspects are taken directly from Scripture where circumcision is called a sign and seal (Rom. 4:11; cf. Gen 9:12, 13; 17:11).

(1) What does the Bible mean when it refers to the sacraments as signs? It refers to the fact that sacraments are perceived by the senses of the body, especially by sight. Sensible signs are perceived by our physical senses. With the Lord’s supper, for example, we see the bread and the wine. The bread and the wine are visible symbols. In communion we see, touch and taste the bread and the wine. With baptism there is the sprinkling of water. The water is seen being sprinkled or poured out upon the person being baptized. The person being baptized sees the water being sprinkled and feels the water on his body.

As signs, the sacraments have two elements. There are the external symbols used: the holy supper uses bread and wine; baptism uses water. Also, there are the actions or sacred rites which are connected to the symbols. With baptism the minister sprinkles or pours water upon the recipient. In the Lord’s supper there is the breaking of bread and the distribution of the bread and the wine. There is the consumption of the bread and wine together in fellowship as the family of God.

The physical sensible element of the sacraments raises a good question. Why did God give His church sacraments when the Word by itself is all that is needed for faith and life? While the Bible gives no explicit answer to this question, there are some logical reasons from Scripture and our own experience why the sacraments are of great benefit for the church. First, as creatures who are both physical and spiritual, who have bodily senses that are windows of the soul, that have been corrupted by sin, it is fitting that God should use the senses to help our infirmities and sanctify our souls. “As by the word he insinuates his truth into our ears, so by the sacraments he exhibits it to be seen in some measure by our eyes, so that his word may become as it were visible. Hence not by one sense (to wit hearing), but by many (namely, sight, touch and smell) he wishes to seal the certainty of his grace in our minds, so that we may be carried from sensible and earthy to intelligible and heavenly things.”¹¹

⁹ L. Berkhof, 616.

¹⁰ Turretin, 3:343.

¹¹ Ibid.

Second, as sinners who are ignorant and slow to apprehend spiritual truths, God, by the sacraments, helps our ignorance and slowness.¹² Because the sacraments are sensible signs, they are very effective in stimulating our souls and confirming our faith. With a greater use of the senses they are effective in moving the heart.

Sacraments are called signs not only because they are observable by the senses but also because they are symbols which point to something beyond themselves. By earthly visible signs God wants us to focus our attention and faith upon what the sign points to and represents.

In the Lord's supper the bread and wine represent the atonement, the sacrificial death of Christ. The wine which represents Jesus' blood is separate from the bread. Our Lord's blood was separated from His body by sacrifice. The Savior's blood was poured out as an offering for sin. In the Lord's supper there is a visual and sensible sign of the gospel. Christ suffered in the place of His people and died in their stead. The Lord's supper teaches a substitutionary atonement and all the manifold aspects of that work: expiation, propitiation, reconciliation and redemption.

The Lord's supper also points to our union with Christ, to the fact that all of our spiritual nourishment comes from Him. The bread and wine are consumed indicating that we are sanctified by the Spirit of Jesus within us and the knowledge we receive from the written Word. All our spiritual sustenance flows from the person and work of Christ. The Lord's supper teaches us about salvation in the broad sense of the term as deliverance from the guilt and the power of sin. The Lord's supper points to all the benefits secured by the sacrificial death of Christ (regeneration, justification, sanctification and glorification).

In the Lord's supper there is also a corporate element where the body of Christ, that is, the local body of believers, is acknowledged or discerned. Communion is a meal where believers ought to be sitting at tables facing each other as a spiritual family. In communion the love, fellowship and unity of the people of God is recognized. We must not overlook the fact that the Lord's supper is a meal: a time of fellowship, remembrance and celebration. The church is God's family. The church as a corporate body is nourished together, remembers Christ's work together and celebrates His victory together. While there is a solemn aspect of the supper in the fact we are meditating on the torn flesh, the intense suffering and spilt blood of the Savior. There is also a celebratory aspect of the supper as well; for we are communing not just with each other but also with the risen Messiah. He is spiritually present at the meal and nourishes us by His Spirit and Word. Interestingly in 1 Corinthians 11:24 and following where we are commanded to eat and drink in remembrance of Christ and what He has done, believers are warned (v. 29) not to eat or drink without discerning the Lord's body. Paul says that people who do not discern the Lord's body are partaking in an unworthy manner. In context the Lord's body very likely refers to the assembled church—the local body of believers. The Lord's supper is an ordinance that ought to sanctify both individually and corporately. When we understand various aspects of communion (the horizontal and vertical aspects) we will understand why this ordinance should not be neglected or treated as an unimportant after-thought.

The Lord's supper corresponds to the Old Covenant sacrament of the Passover in which the slain spotless lamb and the sprinkling of blood represented the atoning death of Jesus; and, the consuming of the paschal lamb represented the spiritual nourishment received from the Lord. The Old Testament church looked *forward* to the Messiah to come while we *look back* to a perfect sacrifice, a completed redemption. Thus, the Passover used the blood of lambs while the Lord's supper is bloodless and uses wine.

¹² Ibid.

Baptism points to regeneration and the washing away, or removal, of a person's sins. In regeneration the Holy Spirit changes a person's heart causing it to be spiritually alive, cleansed, with a love for Christ and spiritual truth. This truth is especially evident in Old Testament passages which discuss what physical circumcision points to. "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer" (Dt. 10:16). "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Dt. 30:6). "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts" (Jer. 4:4). Paul concurs, "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..." (Rom 2:28, 29). In Philippians the apostle writes, "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3; c.f. Col. 2:11).

The sprinkling of clean water points to the sprinkling of Jesus' blood or sacrificial death. In the Old Covenant era the high priest on the day of atonement mixed the blood from the sacrifice with water and sprinkled it on the mercy seat and on the covenant people. This sprinkling pointed to the cleansing power of Jesus' blood or the expiation of sin by the Messiah's death. The guilt of sin is covered, removed, washed away, cleansed and thus the penalty of sin has also been forever removed. A. A. Hodge writes, "The inward, spiritual grace, thereby signified is—(1.) Primarily, spiritual purification by the immediate personal power of the Holy Ghost in the soul; and hence, (2.) Secondarily, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, hence the union of the baptized with Christ, hence regeneration, justification, sanctification, perseverance to the end, glorification, etc., —*i.e.*, all the benefits of the New Covenant."¹³

The connection between baptism as a sign of regeneration and the forgiveness of sins in the New Testament is unmistakable. Note the following passages. In 1 Peter 3:20-21 reads: "...eight souls, were saved through water; also to which an antitype doth now save us—baptism, (not a putting away of the filth of flesh, but the question of a good conscience in regard to God,) through the rising again of Jesus Christ" (*Young's Literal Translation of the Bible*). Peter refers to baptism as a figure of a believer being saved by the resurrection of Christ. The apostle's parenthetical comment regarding "not a putting away of the filth of flesh" is made to make sure the readers of his epistle would not confuse baptism as a sign with what baptism represents, the removal of a person's sins or the cleansing of the heart in regeneration. In John 3:5 Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." The religious use of water to Nicodemus, a Pharisee, would without question be one of purification. Sprinkling with water and the washing with water in the Old Testament symbolically represented God's internal purification of the sinner. This passage is not an explicit reference to baptism but to an aspect of what baptism represents. In Acts 2:38 Peter said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Acts 22:16 reads, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." These passages so strongly tie the sign with the thing signified that they have been used as proof texts for baptismal regeneration. Such an interpretation, however, is erroneous and will be considered below when we examine false views of the sacraments.

Baptism corresponds to the Old Covenant sacrament of circumcision which pointed to regeneration or the circumcision of the heart. "In Him you were also circumcised with the

¹³ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1869] 1958), 329

circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ” (Col. 2:11).

In both baptism and the Lord’s supper we must focus our attention on the spiritual graces that are signified both in order to have a deeper understanding of the person and work of Christ and to avoid turning the sacraments into meaningless rituals or even worse magic idols.

The Sacraments as Seals

When people consider the sacraments as signs they have no problem understanding the meaning of a sign. When considered as a seal, however, people have a more difficult time understanding what is meant by the term seal.

Before we examine how the term seal is used in Scripture an examination of how the English word is used will be helpful. When we speak of a seal we usually use the term in a number of related ways. There is the seal that is pressed on melted wax to seal a contract, a scroll or a letter. The seal is used to guarantee the contents of the letter or scroll. Those of us who are older remember the *Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval*. This sticker certified or guaranteed that a certain product met a standard of quality. Synonyms for seal in the dictionary are: “confirm, establish, ratify, close, fasten, shut.”¹⁴

Boice writes,

What is a seal? We do not use seals very often today, but we have enough examples to illustrate their meaning and importance. Suppose you want to go abroad. You have to secure a passport issued by the government of the United States. You apply for it, submitting two recent pictures of yourself. When it comes you find that one of the photos has been affixed to the passport with a seal: the great seal of the United States. It is stamped into the passport in such a way that it is impossible to remove or alter the photo without damaging and thus invalidating the document. This seal indicates that the authority of the United States government stands behind the passport in affirming that the person whose picture appears there is a true citizen of the United States. The other use of seals with which we are familiar is the affixing of these to a legal document by a Notary Public. The notary asks us to swear that the representations in the document are true and then affixes his or her seal to validate the transaction.¹⁵

The Scriptures use the term seal in much the same way we do today. The general idea of a seal in the Bible is the confirmation of a truth, covenant, contract or message by a token or physical sign. The physical sign is a proof, guarantee and reminder of a message, promise, contract or covenant. When a seal is observed the communication, promise or covenant should come immediately to mind.

A brief examination of some biblical passages which use the term will help us understand how it applies to the sacraments.

In the Old Testament, contracts were sealed in order to guarantee the legitimacy of their contents. In Jeremiah 32:10 ff., a deed or contract is sealed when purchasing a piece of land. When the princes, Levites and priests establish a covenant in Nehemiah (9:38, 10:1) the covenant is sealed. When Kings sent official letters they placed their seal upon it. The seal symbolized the king’s authority (see 1 Kings 21:8; Est. 3:10-12; 8:2, 10). Such correspondence must be obeyed.

¹⁴ Jean L McKeachie, gen. ed., *Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged* (New York: Collins World, 1978), 1635.

¹⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 1:457.

In the New Testament the term seal is used in the sense of a guarantee. God seals the elect. Paul writes, “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’” (2 Tim. 2:19). Paul tells the believers at Corinth that they are the seal or visible sign of his apostleship. “For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord” (1 Cor. 9:2). When John the Baptist spoke of Christ’s revelation of God he said, “He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true” (Jn. 3:33 KJV; the NKJV says “certified”). The Son of God has given His personal attestation to that great truth.

The term “seal” when applied to the sacraments refers to the fact that they *seal, confirm, or certify* God’s promises in the covenant of grace and Christ’s love to the church—the elect. At the institution of the Lord’s supper Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). Our Lord gave the ordinance a personal character. He made it a seal or token of His love. He wanted us to have a visible sign to certify his love of us and our loving remembrance of Him. Communion certifies our participation in the covenant of grace, our union with Christ and our saving relationship with the triune God.

Once we understand the Lord’s supper as a sealing ordinance we begin to fathom the seriousness of being barred from communion as an act of church discipline. Unbelievers, heretics and scandalous persons are not permitted to partake of the certification of our love and fellowship with Christ. If professing Christians had a deeper meaning of this sacrament then they would tremble with fear at the thought of being cut off from the table. Sadly, today many believers take communion for granted as rather quaint, unimportant ritual.

In the sacraments God by sensible signs promises to give us the benefits of the covenant of grace and further sanctify us if we trust Him and live in accordance with our faith in Christ. When we receive the sacraments we actively assume all of the obligations of Scripture that are part of salvation in the broad sense of the term. We bind ourselves to fulfill them.

In the Lord’s supper the “cup” (which is a term for the wine within the cup) represents Jesus’ blood or death which ratifies the New Covenant. Thus our Lord says, “This cup is the New Covenant in My blood” (Lk. 22:20). The cup or wine represents Christ’s bloody sacrifice and thus it is a visible confirmation of the covenant. In communion the benefits of *the once and for all sacrifice* of God’s Son are signified, sealed and applied to believers.

In Romans 4:11 Paul says that “circumcision [is] a seal of the righteousness of the faith.” In the context it is clear that circumcision (or its New Covenant counterpart baptism) does not regenerate or save anyone because circumcision sealed the righteousness of faith Abraham had *before* he was circumcised. “In Gen. 17:11 God calls it a ‘token of the covenant.’ But this rite was more than a sign or token. It was also a pledge, a seal or confirmation of the righteousness of faith; not the means of begetting faith, much less the efficient cause of it; nor a seal of faith itself; no: but a seal or assurance of the righteousness, which had been imparted to him long before his circumcision, even when he believed God...”¹⁶ “In the case of Abraham, Paul says that circumcision was ‘a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.’ That is, after Abraham had believed God and God had imparted [i.e., imputed] righteousness to him, God gave the seal of circumcision to validate what had happened. In the same way, baptism is a seal that the person being baptized has been identified with Jesus Christ as His disciple...”¹⁷ “Circumcision is thus treated as a subsequent and external seal of that righteous status which Abraham already possessed as God’s free gift.”¹⁸

¹⁶ William S. Plumer, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1870] 1971), 166.

¹⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*, 1:457-458.

¹⁸ F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1963] 1985), 10.

The Efficacy of the Sacraments

Having defined the term sacrament, examined the similarities between the sacraments and the Word of God as means of grace and considered the sacraments as signs and seals we will now consider the sacraments as means of grace in more detail. In doing this we need to examine the question of how the sacraments are efficacious—how the sacraments operate as means of grace. How do the sacraments sanctify? Do they have some intrinsic power? Do they work mysteriously upon the soul?

As we examine the efficacy of the sacraments we will sharpen our own definition by refuting common erroneous positions. There are many things to note regarding the power or efficacy of the sacraments.

(1) The power or efficacy of the sacraments does not reside in the sacraments themselves. It does not reside in the water of baptism or in the bread and wine of communion. The Reformed standards emphasize this point in contra-distinction to Romanism and to a certain extent Lutheranism. Papists believe that “the sacraments contain the grace which they signify. That this grace-conferring energy is inseparable from a genuine sacrament, and that as an objective fact, they contain it at all times, and present it alike to all subjects irrespective of character.”¹⁹ A Roman Catholic would not refer to the sacraments as means of grace but as grace itself. According to the papal church, as long as the sacraments are conducted by a canonically authorized priest (i.e., a priest lawfully ordained in the Roman Catholic Church by a bishop in communion with the pope) and the priest has a lawful, proper intention in administering the sacraments, the sacraments always have an inherent power in themselves to effect grace.

For example, Romanists teach that the bread literally becomes Christ’s flesh and the wine is literally His blood. Therefore, they have intrinsic-automatic power to change the human soul. Everyone who is baptized is regenerated and justified. All persons who consume the eucharist are automatically transformed. The Latin phrase used by theologians to describe the idea that the sacraments have intrinsic power and work automatically is *ex opere operato* [i.e., by the outward rite itself]. This doctrine is set forth explicitly by the Council of Trent:

6. If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain that grace which they signify, or that they do not confer that grace on those who place no obstacles in its way, as though they are only outward signs of grace or justice received through faith and certain marks of Christian profession, whereby among men believers are distinguished from unbelievers, let him be anathema.

¹⁹ A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 592. R. L. Dabney writes, “In the scholastic jargon of Rome, means of grace naturally divided themselves into two classes—those which do good *ex opere operato*, and those which only do good *ex opere operantis*. The former do good by the simple performance of the proper ceremonial, without any act or movement of soul in the recipients, accommodating themselves intelligently to the grace signified. The latter do good only when the recipient exercises the appropriate acts of soul; and the good done is dependent on those exercises, as well as on the outward means. Of the latter kind of means is preaching, &c; but Rome holds that the sacraments all belong to the former. Her meaning then, is that the mere administration of the sacrament does the appointed good to the recipient, provided he is not in a state of mortal sin, whether he exercises suitable frames or not. So Council of Trent, Sess. 7, Canon, 6-8. But Romish Theologians are far from being of one mind, as to the nature of this immediate and absolute efficacy” (*Systematic Theology* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1871) 1985], 739).

7. If anyone says that grace, so far as God's part is concerned, is not imparted through the sacraments always and to all men even if they receive them rightly, but only sometimes and to some persons, let him be anathema.

8. If anyone says that by the sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred *ex opere operato* [i.e., by the outward rite itself], but that faith alone in the divine promise is sufficient to obtain grace, let him be anathema.²⁰

Romanists inconsistently teach that, in the case of adults, faith is needed; that atheists and professed infidels do not benefit from the saving power of the sacraments. But, they define faith as mere assent to the teachings of the church. “[I]t is true the recipient must be a believer; but whether he has what St. Peter calls ‘precious faith of God’s elect,’ or the same kind of faith that Simon Magus had, makes no difference.”²¹ Thus, one can observe members of the mafia and other scandalous sinners partaking of the mass.

The Roman Catholic position on the Lord’s supper was solidified at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Theologians refer to their view of communion as transubstantiation. Erickson writes, “Transubstantiation is the doctrine that as the administering priest consecrates the elements, an actual metaphysical change takes place. The substance of the bread and wine—what they actually are—is changed into Christ’s flesh and blood respectively. Note that what is changed is the substance, not the accidents. Thus the bread retains the shape, texture, and taste of bread. But what it essentially is has been changed. All who participate in the Lord’s Supper, or the Holy Eucharist as it is termed, literally take the physical body and blood of Christ into themselves.”²² This bizarre, mystical view was developed by Thomas Aquinas who based his metaphysics in a large part on Aristotle the Greek heathen philosopher.

If one observes a Roman Catholic mass, one will notice that the priest places the “host” (a little piece of bread) directly on the tongue of the recipient. Also, one will observe an altar boy holding a gold or silver plate underneath the mouth of the recipient to catch any crumbs. The purpose of this is to make sure that any pieces of “Jesus” do not fall onto the floor where they can get dirty or be stepped on. Such is the absurd, superstitious nature of transubstantiation.

The Lutheran doctrine also holds that the sacraments have an inherent power or efficacy apart from the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. Berkhof writes,

The Lutheran Reformation did not entirely rid itself of the Roman Catholic conception of the sacraments. Luther did not regard the water in baptism as common water, but as a water which had become, through the Word with its inherent divine power, a gracious water of life, washing and regeneration. Through this divine efficacy of the Word the sacrament effects regeneration. In the case of adults Luther made the effect of baptism dependent on faith in the recipient. Realizing he could not make it so in the case of children, who cannot exercise faith, he at one time held that God by His prevenient grace works faith in the unconscious child, but later on professed ignorance on this point. Later Lutheran theologians retained the idea of an infant-faith as a precondition for baptism, while others conceived of baptism as producing such a faith immediately.²³

Similarly, the Lutheran idea of consubstantiation which asserts that Jesus according to His human nature, that is, His real flesh and blood, is in, with and through the elements of bread and

²⁰ John Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1973), 425-426.

²¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:512.

²² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 1115-1116.

²³ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 627.

wine places an inherent power in the Lord's supper. Although Lutherans reject the Roman Catholic doctrine that the sacraments effect grace *ex opere operato*, they still teach that the sacraments intrinsically have a grace-conferring efficacy. Thus, there is a sense in which every person with or without faith receives what the sacraments objectively have. But the sacraments only take effect in people who have the genuine faith that can receive them. Their intrinsic power only works for good upon believers. Charles Hodge writes,

Lutherans are wont to refer to the analogy between the Word and sacraments. The difference between them and the Reformed as to the sacraments, is analogous to the difference between the two churches as to the Word. The Reformed refer the supernatural power of the Word, not to the literal Word as written or spoken; not to the mere mortal truth therein revealed, but to the cooperation, or as Paul calls it, the demonstration, of the Spirit. The Lutherans, on the other hand, teach that there is inherent in the divine Word (not in the letters or the sound but in the truth), a supernatural divine virtue, inseparable from it, and independent of its use; and which is the same to believers and unbelievers; sanctifying and saving the former, because of their faith, and not benefiting the latter, because of their voluntary resistance. So the sacraments have an inherent, divine power, certain of producing saving effects, if they meet with faith in those who receive them.²⁴

That the sacraments in themselves apart from a work of the Holy Spirit and the faith of the recipient contain no special grace that is appropriated by the receivers has been concisely proved by the early Presbyterian theologian John Brown of Haddington. He writes,

1. It is not their nature to contain or produce inward grace, but to signify and seal that which God brings along with them. The rainbow gave God's full security against a second universal deluge; but it did not hinder the waters from rising, rain from falling. Seals annexed to the patents or donative letters of kings do not confer anything, but merely confirm the royal grants contained in the sealed writs. 2. If the sacraments of themselves conferred or produced inward grace, it must by some natural power of the corporeal signs, or by some spiritual power infused in them, –both of which are equally absurd. 3. Common sense loudly proclaims, that *material* signs can never produce purification, or nourishment, in a soul. 4. Scripture declares, that mere partaking of sacramental signs is of no avail for securing salvation, Rom. ii. 25-29. Gal. vi. 15. v. 6. 1 Pet. iii. 21. 1 Cor. xi 27-29. 5. All the blessings which are sealed by the sacraments to believers, are ascribed to the mercy and grace of God, not to the operation of the outward signs, Isa. i. 18. xliii. 25. Ezek. xxxvi. 25-31. Phil. ii. 13. 6. Faith and repentance are pre-required, as necessary to render sacraments effectual for salvation, Mark xvi. 16. 1 Cor. xi. 27-29.²⁵

In recent years a new form of baptismal efficacy has arisen that achieves the same end as *ex opere operato* but in a clever indirect manner. The Auburn Avenue theology (the Federal Vision, Monroe Doctrine, etc.) says that the water of baptism does not have any intrinsic magical power. But, since baptism makes a person a member of the church and being a member of the church (according to their view) automatically unites a person to Christ; and, thus procures all the benefit of Jesus' redemptive work, then it is proper to say that the ritual of baptism is always efficacious and has true saving power. The Auburn Avenue theologians achieve a similar end to

²⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:505.

²⁵ John Brown, *The Systematic Theology of John Brown of Haddington* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002), 533.

Romanism but do so through their unique ecclesiology rather than intrinsic efficacy.²⁶ Having said this, there are other statements by these theologians with regard to baptism and the Lord's supper that could be interpreted in an old-fashioned sacramentalist manner.²⁷

The important thing to note regarding this theology is the separation of a genuine faith from the efficacy of the sacraments. The external form of the sacrament, or the sign, and the application of the sign by a minister of the gospel are *never* efficacious apart from a work of the Holy Spirit and the faith of the recipient. This point is proved by Acts 8 where in verse 13 Simon Magus is baptized by Philip the evangelist; but who in verses 21 to 23 is told by Peter that he is not saved at all. If the Auburn Avenue doctrine was true, then Simon Magus was truly saved but the within the space of a few hours apostatized and lost his salvation. Such thinking is absurd.

(2) The power or efficacy of the sacrament does not depend on or derive from the person who administered the sacraments. When God appoints or authorizes certain persons (teaching elders) to administer the sacraments He does not bestow any special supernatural powers upon that person which renders the sacraments effectual. If the efficacy of the sacraments was dependent on the worthiness of the person administering them, then one would know if the sacraments were effective or lawful because the person distributing them may be a secret hypocrite or even unregenerate. Such a concern would take away from the sacraments and one's attention to the person and work of Christ and unduly focus on the officiating church officer. Fortunately, the strengthening of our faith and our sanctification does not depend on the virtue, holiness, qualifications or special priesthood of the man dispensing the sacraments. This point was a matter of great debate early in the Reformation because people wanted to know whether or not their baptism at the hands of an ignorant, immoral priest was a valid baptism. The Reformers decided unanimously that Trinitarian baptism was valid because it did not depend on the character or intent of the priest. Further, at that time they regarded the papal church as a visible church as regards its being, although a scandalously corrupt church.

(3) The biblical view of the sacraments which is taught in the Westminster Standards is that first and foremost the efficacy of the sacraments depends on the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, the efficacy of the sacraments depends on the faith (biblically defined) of the recipient. The work of the Holy Spirit is said to be primary because: a) The faith of the recipient is originally (regeneration) and continually a work of the Holy Spirit. b) The Holy Spirit applies the Word and sacraments to our hearts making them effectual.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments is emphasized in the Westminster Standards. Larger Catechism Answer 161 reads: "The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered, but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing

²⁶ Auburn Avenue apologist Peter Leithart writes, "If baptism initiates into the church, the question about baptismal efficacy is not what power is in water, but what the church is—what *is* this community into which baptism inducts me? If, as I have argued above, the church is the saved community and the people in fellowship with the Father through the Son in the Spirit, then baptism as the entry rite into this community, must give the baptized a share in this community and this fellowship. If the church is the family of God, baptism, by inducting people into the church, makes them children of their heavenly Father. If the church is the body of Christ, then baptism makes the baptized member of the body a branch of the vine. If the church is the temple of the Spirit, then baptism makes the baptized a pillar or stone of that temple and himself a temple indwelt by the Spirit" ("Trinitarian Anthropology: Toward a Trinitarian Re-casting of Reformed Theology" in E. Calvin Beisner, ed., *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros and Cons* [Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004], 70-71).

²⁷ See Brian Schwertley, "A Defense of Reformed Orthodoxy Against the Romanizing Doctrines of the New Auburn Theology" in Wayne Rodgers, ed. *The New Southern Presbyterian Review* (Cummins, GA: Chalcedon Presbyterian Church, Summer 2004), 51-55.

of Christ, by whom they are instituted.” The Confession says: “The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither does the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that does administer it:²⁸ but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers (27:3).” Calvin concurs: “But the sacraments properly fulfill their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in. If the Spirit be lacking, the sacraments can accomplish nothing more in our minds than the splendor of the sun shining upon blind eyes, or a voice sounding in deaf ears. Therefore, I make such a division between Spirit and sacraments that the power to act rests with the former, and the ministry alone is left to the latter—a ministry empty and trifling, apart from the action of the Spirit, but charged with great effect when the Spirit works within and manifests his power” (IV, XIV, 9).²⁹

A good way to understand the power of the sacraments is to compare them to God’s Word. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God in precisely the same manner as the sacraments. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to teach us about Christ, to strengthen our faith and sanctify our hearts. The Holy Spirit applies the Word to our hearts, enlightens our minds, causes us to believe and applies Scripture to our lives. The Bible teaches us; it is didactic. However, apart from the Spirit’s work in us, it is a dead letter with no intrinsic power or real ability to save or sanctify. Likewise, the sacraments serve a didactic function. They do not have any secret mysterious power or intrinsic efficacy. They present truths in visible, tangible, sensible form. Only when the sacraments are accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit who opens our minds and enables us to understand and receive what they teach by faith are they efficacious. Although the sacraments function spiritually like the Word they are not exactly the same; for the sacraments depend upon the Word while the Word is served by the sacraments. Calvin writes, “Yet when words precede, the laws of covenants are by such signs ratified, although they were first conceived, established, and decreed in words. The sacraments, therefore, are exercises which make us more certain of the trustworthiness of God’s word. And because we are of flesh, they are shown us under things of the flesh, to instruct us according to our dull capacity, and to lead us by the hand as tutors lead children. Augustine calls a sacrament ‘a visible word’ for the reason that it represents God’s promises as painted in a picture and sets them before our sight, portrayed graphically and in the manner of images” (IV; XIV; 6).³⁰

When Reformed churches teach that the Holy Spirit accompanies the sacraments and sanctifies believers they set themselves apart from the sacramental views of Romanists, high church Episcopalians and Lutherans, as well as the mere memorial view of the Lord’s supper that is common among modern evangelicals. The sacraments are true means of grace.

The crucial role of the Holy Spirit in applying the sacraments as means of grace is clearly taught in Scripture. Note the following passages: “I indeed baptize you with water unto

²⁸ Rom. 2:28-29 says, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” 1 Pet. 3:21 reads: “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

²⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill ed., Ford Lewis Battles, Trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1284.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 2:1281.

repentance.... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 3:11). “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 11:12). “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. 2:29). “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.” (Gal. 6:15). “There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:21).

The Sacraments as Badges of Profession

The sacraments also serve as visible badges of membership in the Christian church. That is, they put a visible difference between members of the visible church and the heathen world. This point is especially true of circumcision and its New Testament counterpart baptism. Thus the term uncircumcision or uncircumcised is sometimes equivalent to pagan. Note the following passages: “And they said to them, ‘We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a reproach to us’” (Gen. 34:14). “And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it” (Ex. 12:48). The person who is baptized and partakes of the Lord’s supper is set apart from the world and has all the external privileges of membership in the visible church. The sacraments should be seen as great gifts of God for His own family. The world is outside of the wedding feast of the lamb.

The Number of the Sacraments

According to the word of God there are only two sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s supper. This fact is acknowledged by virtually all Christian denominations. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that there are seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, penance, orders, communion, marriage and extreme unction. While papists sometimes make feeble attempts to justifying the five sacraments that they have added to Scripture by appealing to the biblical passages (e.g., confirmation, Acts 8:17; penance, Jas. 5:16; orders, 1 Tim. 4:14; marriage, Eph. 5:31; extreme unction, Mk. 6:13, etc.), it is generally acknowledged that these church ordinances have grown out of the soil of church tradition without any divine warrant. We know this is true because Christ only instituted two sacraments, not seven.

There are a few Anabaptist groups that regard feet washing as a sacrament. These sects, however, are mistaken because: (a) Foot washing was never designed to convey grace; (b) It merely was a symbol on a special occasion designed to demonstrate the need to serve and love one another; (c) The wearing of sandals on streets of dust does not exist in most modern cultures; therefore, obedience to Jesus’ example can take many form

Chapter 2: Baptism—The Covenant of Grace and Covenant Continuity

The topic of baptism is for many believers a difficult and divisive issue. There is disagreement among professing Christians regarding the meaning, the mode and the proper

recipients of this sacrament. In our study we will endeavor to answer the many important questions surrounding baptism. Also we will defend the Reformed position on baptism because we believe it is the position supported by Scripture.

This topic is especially important in our day when the Reformed position is by far the minority view among evangelicals in the United States. Why are baptistic views so popular in modern America? There are a variety of ways why believer's baptism dominates evangelical thought and practice.

First, for many the baptistic position seems to be the logical alternative to the sacramentalism of Romanism, high church Anglicanism and Lutheranism. People who have been raised in or are familiar with such communions have never been presented with solid divine warrant or biblical proof for high church definitions of baptism. Such people often conclude that the only two alternatives are practices that are based on church tradition and believer baptism which is at least proof-texted. Most evangelicals are not aware of the Reformed position or the biblical argumentation that lies behind it.

Second, the whole acceptance of aberrant theologies by "evangelical" Christians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has contributed to the rejection of covenantal Reformed thinking and has provided a theological foundation for believer's baptism. The two doctrines that have done the most to promote believer's baptism are dispensationalism and Arminianism.

Dispensationalism destroys the unity of the covenant of grace, makes the New Covenant church something completely new (plan B, a parenthesis in God's dealings with Israel) and thus servers the organic unity between the church in the Old Testament and the church in the New Covenant era. It completely separates the covenant made with Abraham from its organic connection to and fulfillment in Christ and the New Covenant. Dispensationalism's errors destroy the continuity of the covenant of grace and thus eliminate key foundational arguments for infant baptism. For example, if the New Covenant church is something completely new and has nothing to do with Abraham or the Old Covenant church, then baptism has little or nothing to do with circumcision as an Old Covenant ordinance.

Arminianism with its exaltation of and emphasis upon an act of the human will (e.g., a self-generated faith and decisional regeneration) in appropriating salvation comports well with the idea that baptism must follow an individual's choice. Reformed theology with its emphasis on God's sovereignty in salvation, the Holy Spirit's role in regenerating hearts and causing faith and the promises made to the children of believers is incompatible with the Arminian idea that God cannot change a heart unless that person allows God to do so. The sovereignty of God and the Reformed doctrine of salvation are crucial to infant baptism.

Third, the rise of modernism or "Christian Liberalism" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contributed to the acceptance of baptistic views in a few different ways. The rejection of biblical inerrancy and the idea that the Bible is essentially a fallible human document renders all church ordinances negotiable and non-authoritative. Most denominations that apostatized practiced infant baptism. Without the authoritative Word, infant baptism has no exegetical foundation. It is a church tradition done for sentimental, sociological or pragmatic ecclesiastical reasons only. Further, many or most of the fundamentalists who were diametrically opposed to modernism were Baptists. In many people's eyes conservative, biblical Christianity and baptistic fundamentalist dispensationalism are essentially one and the same thing.

Fourth, a sociological factor that contributed to the rise of baptistic views was American individualism. Religious Jews who lived in biblical times in accordance with Scripture viewed families covenantally as an organic whole. The children of believers were in the covenant and

served the same God as their parents. Modern Americans view individual choice as a *summum bonum* (a supreme good). Therefore, each child is often left to determine his own future as an individual rather than fulfill the covenantal bond of the household as a God-glorifying home. (When we turn our attention to the proper recipients of baptism, these areas will receive further analysis in conjunction with the presentation of divine warrant for the Reformed position.)

The Institution of Baptism

The official institution of baptism by our Lord is found in the Great Commission, “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘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). Although Christ did institute baptism during His ministry before His death and resurrection (e.g., Jn. 3:22, 26; 4:1, 2) we do not know the relation between this baptism and the trinitarian baptism of Matthew 28. Further, the uniqueness of the baptism of the Great Commission is supported by the fact that it is rooted in the special authority received by the divine-human mediator (the theanthropic Messiah) at the resurrection. This special authority over everything in heaven and on earth is founded upon a completed redemption. Jesus was a king before His resurrection, but after His death on the cross and His victorious resurrection He is king *with power*. He rules over everything and the token of entrance into the kingdom of grace—His church—is baptism into the name of the triune God. Before the resurrection our Lord told His disciples: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt. 10:5-6). After the resurrection the apostles are ordered to baptize and disciple all the nations (Mt. 28:19). Obviously the baptism prior to the resurrection was not applied outside the boundaries of Israel.

The Great Commission teaches us a number of things regarding baptism. First, baptism under normal circumstances preceded discipleship. Everyone who believes in Jesus and wants to be under His subjection; who wants to follow the Savior-King as an obedient pupil, learner and servant must submit to Christian baptism. Baptism and the discipleship that follows presupposes membership in a local Bible-believing church with elders that are following and teaching the whole counsel of God or all the things that Jesus commanded. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13).

Second, the command to baptize is given to ordained ministers of the gospel. The command was given specifically to the apostles and continues throughout history through their successors, the teaching elders of the church. David Dickson writes,

[3.] Christ has instituted a ministry of teachers and rulers of his Church to continue from his resurrection to the end of the world; for he says, *Go ye, make disciples, of the world...* [4.] The community of ministers and rulers of the Church respective have all the nations of the earth under their charge to gather disciples to Christ out of them.... [6.] The community of believers, or the body of covenanted and baptized disciples, are not the subject of this authority granted for gathering of Churches, administration of doctrine, sacraments, discipline and other public ordinances: but the community of ministers, teachers, and rulers, contra-distinguished from the body of disciples which is taught and governed; for it is said, *Go ye, my ministers, make ye disciples, baptize ye and teach ye them...* [9.] The ministers of the gospel, teaching and ruling

elders respective, are the true successors of the apostles in the dispensation of the doctrine, sacraments and discipline appointed by Christ, for they are appointed in the same patent with the apostles, and spoken to in the person by Christ, saying, *I will be with you to the end of the world.*³¹

Matthew Henry concurs,

The commission he gives to those whom he sent forth; *Go ye therefore*. This commission is given, (1.) To the *apostles* primarily, the chief ministers of state in Christ's kingdom, the architects that laid the foundation of the church. Now those that had followed Christ in the regeneration, were *set on thrones* (Luke xxii.) (2.) It is given to their successors, the ministers of the gospel, whose business is to transmit the gospel from age to age, to the end of the world in time, as it was theirs to transmit it from nation to nation, to the end of the world in place, and no less necessary. The Old-Testament promise of a gospel ministry is made to a succession (Isa. lix. 21); and this must be understood, otherwise how could Christ be with them always to the *consummation of the world*? Christ, at his ascension, gave not only apostles and prophets, but *pastors and teachers*, Eph. iv. 11.³²

The Bible teaches that the Great Commission was delivered specifically to the eleven apostles (see Mt. 28:16; Mk. 16:14-15; Ac. 1:1-2, 8; 9:15); that those who preach the gospel must be sent (Rom. 10:14-15; Ac. 13:1-4). Further, every example of gospel preaching in the book of Acts involved ordained officers (Ac. 6:8-7:53; 8; 15:22, 32, 40ff; 13:2-4; 14:14). Although some of these men are first identified as deacons (e.g., Stephen, Philip) further study indicates that these deacons were also evangelists who could preach and work miracles (cf. Ac. 6:8; 1 Th. 2:2, 6; Rom. 16:21; 2 Tim. 2:2, 15; 4:2, 5; 1 Tim. 1:14; 4:6; 6:20; Col. 4:10). George Gillespie writes, "We have clear and convincing examples in the New Testament, that the sacraments were administered by public ministries, called and appointed thereunto, as baptism by John (John i. 33, 'He hath sent me to baptize'), and frequently by the apostles in the story of the Acts. The Lord's supper, administered by Christ himself (whose example in things imitable we are bidden [to] follow, who also himself then commanded *touto poiete, this do*); and by the Apostle Paul, Acts xx. 7,11. So 'the breaking of bread' is joined with 'the apostles' doctrine and fellowship,' Acts ii. 42.... So that a lawful minister may in faith administer, and the receivers may receive from him in faith, the sacraments having Scripture warrants for so doing; but there is neither any commission from Christ to such as are not church officers to administer the sacraments, nor can there any clear example be found in the New Testament, of administering either the one sacrament or the other by any person who can be proved not to have been a minister lawfully called and ordained. Therefore such persons cannot in faith administer, nor others in faith receive from them, either baptism or the Lord's supper."³³

Third, the church is ordered to baptize the nations. Whole nations are to be baptized, brought under the subjection of Christ and disciplined. The idea that the Bible is a book to be used only for private, family and church devotional use; that the earth, culture and civil governments are somehow outside the realm of Christ's comprehensive authority is a reduction of Christianity. It is totally unscriptural.

³¹ David Dickson, *Matthew* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth [1647] 1981), 414-415.

³² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: McDonald, n. d.), 5:446.

³³ George Gillespie, "A Treatise of Miscellany Questions" in *Works* (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Water Revival, [1649, 1846] 1991), 2:37.

Fourth, Christian baptism is a baptism into the name of the triune God: “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19). This formula teaches us that baptism primarily signifies and seals our union with Christ in His life, death and resurrection, which secures our personal relationship with the triune God of Scripture. God is one God revealed in three persons. Christian baptism signifies union with the Savior. This mystical union secures all the benefits of Jesus accomplished redemption. (The meaning of baptism will be analyzed in more detail below as we compare baptism to circumcision).

In the book of Acts baptisms are administered “upon” (Ac. 2:38), “into” (Ac. 8:36; 19:5) or “in” (Ac. 10:48) the name of Jesus. This fact raises the question of whether or not the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 is always required or perhaps can be alternated with the name of Jesus. The orthodox churches have almost universally held the position that the Trinitarian formula must be retained. Theologians and commentators have dealt with the baptism in Acts in a number of different manners. The Presbyterian commentator J. A. Alexander writes, “*In the name of Jesus Christ* is not the formula by which they were to be baptized, and therefore different from the one prescribed by Christ himself (Matt. 28, 19), but a description of the rite as Christian, and not merely Jewish, much less heathen, baptism, or an unmeaning form, connected with no religious creed whatever.”³⁴ Theologian Robert L. Reymond offers this explanation: “I would suggest that Luke is simply giving an abbreviated form of the words in the baptismal ceremony, highlighting by his use of Jesus’ name alone both the fact that it is through Jesus’ mediation that one enters into union with the triune God and the fact that these persons were being admitted to the Christian Church.”³⁵ F. F. Bruce writes, “Here *en* [in] is to be understood instrumentally: the name of Jesus is an attendant circumstance of the baptism. According to 22:16 the person baptized called at his baptism on the name of Jesus (cf. v. 21 above), probably by way of confessing faith in him; the baptizer also pronounced the name of Jesus over the person baptized (cf. Jas. 2:70, so that the baptism was doubly associated with ‘the name of Jesus.’”³⁶ Interestingly, only anti-trinitarian cults such as the United Pentecostal church insist on baptism in the name of Jesus and forbid trinitarian baptism. Although the explanations given for the use of the name of Jesus in the book of Acts are not completely satisfactory, the only safe and wise thing for the church to do is use the formula given by the explicit command of our Lord.

The Proper Recipients of Baptism

The Westminster Confession says: “Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents, are to be baptized” (28:4). The teaching that the children or infants of believers ought to be baptized is called paedobaptism. This is the position that we will be defending as scriptural. It is very important that Reformed believers be able to offer people a solid biblical defense of our creedal position. If we cannot do so then our position will become nothing more than a church tradition.

As we study biblical reasons why the baptism of infants is appropriate, it is important that we have a solid understanding of the biblical concept of divine warrant. Many Baptists demand an explicit authorization from the Bible as the only satisfactory justification for the practice of infant baptism. They would like us to produce either an explicit command or at least an explicit historical example from Scripture of an infant being baptized before they will accept

³⁴ J. A. Alexander, *Acts* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857] 1963), 85.

³⁵ Robert L. Reymond, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 927.

³⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 129.

paedobaptism. Although the desire for biblical proof for a church practice is commendable, Baptists who follow such a line of thinking do not understand that some doctrines and ordinances are deduced from Scripture by good and necessary consequence. That is, when various passages of Scripture and biblical teachings are analyzed logically they lead to a certain conclusion. There are many crucial Christian doctrines and practices that are based not on any one direct statement but on a careful application of logical deduction upon Scripture: the trinity, the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ, the first day Sabbath and women participating in the Lord's supper. Therefore, a doctrine that is "deduced by good and necessary consequence" from Scripture is not less true or important than a direct statement from Scripture. The legitimacy of using logical inference from the Bible to formulate doctrine or practice is taught in God's Word in the following passages: Matthew 19:4-6, 22:31 ff., Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37 ff., 1 Corinthians 11:8-10, etc. As we examine the many biblical teachings relating to infant baptism we will see that even though there are no explicit commands to baptize babies, the scriptural evidence for the practice is strong and abundant.

The Unity of the Covenant of Grace through Both Covenantal Administrations

One of the main reasons people do not believe in infant baptism is a failure to understand the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Old Covenant people of God and the New Covenant church. People have been taught that the New Testament and the church are something completely new and different and thus fail to recognize the great continuity between the testaments. Reformed theologians recognize that God's plan of salvation from the fall throughout all human history is the same. There is one covenant of grace that begins with the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15 that is made very explicit with God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17:7 ff. and is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. There is one promise, one way of salvation, one means of entering the covenant, one church, one Savior and one instrument for laying hold of salvation. The major difference between the old and New Covenants is a difference of *administration*. Although baptism is a new ordinance, it has its roots in the Old Testament rite of circumcision. (We will carefully compare the two ordinances below.) Because there is one covenant of grace with one Savior, one church, one salvation and so forth, when we interpret Scripture we must assume continuity regarding salvation, faith, life and even worship unless New Testament teaching specifically annuls or alters a practice or ordinance. For example, the ceremonial law has been fulfilled in Christ and thus is no longer binding.

That there is one covenant of grace with two different administrations is succinctly set forth in the Westminster Standards: "This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the Gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament" (WCF 7:5). "Under the Gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles;

and is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations” (WCF 7:6).

The essential unity of the two dispensations or covenantal administrations is easily established by Scripture. Note the following considerations.

An examination of the various covenantal administrations including the various Old Testament covenants that are concerned with the administration of grace and the New Covenant reveal an underlying unity of all various covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenant). In contradistinction to classical dispensationalism, the various covenants between God and His people after the fall build on each other, develop organically and look to Christ. Each successive covenant builds upon the previous covenant relationship between God and His people and continues the basic redemptive word of promise given to Adam after the fall and made explicit in the promise to Abraham. As redemptive history unfolds and divine revelation progresses the person and work of Christ becomes clearer and more detailed until it reaches its fullest realization in the New Covenant. The covenants and covenant preaching after Abraham look back to the original covenant promises to Abraham (e.g., Ex. 3:16, 17; 6:4-8; Ps. 105:8-12, 42-45; 106:45) and often look forward to the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant in Christ. O. Palmer Robertson writes,

The New Covenant, promised by Israel’s prophets, does not appear as a distinctive covenantal unit unrelated to God’s previous administrations. Instead, the New Covenant as promised to Israel represents the consummate fulfillment of the earlier covenants. This organic relation of the New Covenant to the covenants of Abraham, Moses, and David finds explicit development both in the Old Testament prophecies concerning the covenant and in the New Testament realizations of this consummating covenant. From either perspective, the New Covenant may be understood in no other way than as a realization of the prophetic projections found in the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants.

Jeremiah’s classic prophecy clearly relates the New Covenant to its Mosaic predecessor (cf. Jer. 31:31 ff.). This “New Covenant” with the “house of Israel and with the house of Judah” will not be like the Mosaic covenant in its externalistic features. But the law of God as revealed to Moses shall be written on the heart. While the substance of the law will be the same, the mode of its administration will be different. The form may change, but the essence of the New Covenant of Jeremiah’s prophecy relates directly to the law-covenant made at Sinai.

In the following chapter, Jeremiah combines a reference to the New Covenant with allusion to the ancient covenant made with Abraham. God will “faithfully plant” his people “in this land” (Jer. 32:41). But at the same time he will “give them one heart and one way” that they may fear him always (Jer. 32:39, 40). By the intertwining of these references, the prophet combines the Abrahamic with the New Covenant. These two covenants unite to form a single expectation for God’s people.³⁷

A passage which strongly supports covenant theology is found in Romans chapter 14. Paul writes, “Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father

³⁷ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 41.

of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (vs. 9-13).

Paul says that the true seed of Abraham are not the natural descendants of Abraham but rather everyone whether circumcised or uncircumcised who has faith in Christ. Further, the apostle interprets the promise to Abraham in terms of Jesus’ worldwide salvation and rule. (Paul, writing under divine inspiration, completely contradicts dispensational teaching.) John Murray writes,

The clause, “that he should be heir of the world” is explanatory of the promise given to Abraham and his seed; it tells us what the promise was. We do not find any promise in the Old Testament in these express terms. What is it? We naturally think of the promise to Abraham that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3) and the correlative promises given later (cf. Gen. 13:14-17; 15:4, 5, 18-21; 17:2-21; 22:15-18). In the light of Pauline teaching as a whole, however, we cannot exclude from the scope of this promise, as defined by the apostle, the most inclusive messianic purport. It is defined as the promise to Abraham the *he* should be heir of the world, but is also a promise to his seed and, therefore, can hardly involve anything less than the worldwide dominion promised to Christ and to the spiritual seed of Abraham in him. It is a promise that receives its ultimate fulfillment in the consummated order of the new heavens and the new earth.³⁸

In Romans 4:16 Paul says that Abraham is the father of us all (i.e., both Jewish and Gentile believers). The covenant given to Abraham was not an exclusively Jewish covenant for a former dispensation but extends to all believers in all nations throughout history. The New Covenant is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. (Also, keep in mind that the Hebrew word for “new” (*hadash*) used in Jeremiah 31:31 does not mean “brand new” like a “brand new” car that was just manufactured; but “renewed” like an old car that has been refurbished. Therefore, the New Covenant renews and completes the previous covenants but does not replace them.)

Another important section of Scripture that supports covenant theology is found in Galatians 3. In verse 7 everyone who believes in Christ, irrespective of nationality, is identified as the “sons of Abraham.” Verse 8 directly connects the promise to Abraham regarding all nations being blessed to all Gentiles who are justified by faith in Christ. The apostle says that “God...preached the gospel to Abraham.” Then in verse 16 Paul writes, “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.” Stott writes,

To what divine promise is he alluding? God promised an inheritance to Abraham and his posterity. Paul knew perfectly well that the immediate, literal reference of this promise was to the land of Canaan, which God was going to give to Abraham’s physical descendants. But he also knew that this did not exhaust its meaning; nor was it the ultimate reference in God’s mind. Indeed, it could not have been, for God said that in Abraham’s seed all the families of the earth would be blessed, and how could the whole world be blessed through Jews living in the land of Canaan? Paul realized that both the “land” which was promised and the “seed” to which it was promised were ultimately spiritual. *God’s purpose* was not just to give the land of Canaan to the

³⁸ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 1:148.

Jews, but to give salvation (a spiritual inheritance) to believers who are in Christ. Further, Paul argues, this truth was implicit in the word God used, which was not the plural “children” or “descendants,” but the singular “seed” or “posterity,” a collective noun referring to Christ and to all those who are in Christ by faith (verse 16).³⁹

As Paul continues his discussion of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise in Christ he writes, “And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect” (Gal. 3:17). The apostle teaches that the law of God cannot overturn the covenant of grace with Abraham because the law cannot justify; it can only show us our sinfulness. Everyone who believes in Jesus, who does not trust in his own good works or law-keeping receives eternal life and the promise of God to Abraham. Interestingly the verb *kecharistai*, “hath granted” (KJV), in verse 18 is in the perfect tense indicating that the promise to Abraham in the past still holds good in the present. The fact that in Scripture there is an essential unity of the two dispensations is reflected in a number of crucial areas.

First, the mediator of both covenantal administrations is Jesus Christ. Paul applies a passage spoken to Israel directly to the whole Christian church. “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins” (Rom. 11:26-27; cf. Is. 27:9). Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6). “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe... Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness...there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith” (Rom. 3:21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 30).

Second, the church in the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament is *one church*. When the apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to discuss the conversion of the Gentiles, James applied an Old Testament prophecy regarding the tabernacle of David to the ingathering of the Gentiles into the church. “Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: ‘After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things’” (Ac. 15:14-17). James not only specifically applied Amos 9:11-12 to the New Covenant church but also said that all the prophets (plural) agree. Christ is building His temple, His church, His people, and all nations are flowing into it.

The middle wall of partition (the ceremonial law) has been removed (Eph. 2:14). God has made two peoples into *one* (Eph. 2:15) Gentiles are fellow citizens and full members with the Jews in God’s household. God is building both Jewish and Gentile believers into *one* temple (Eph. 2:11-22). After the resurrection, ascension and Pentecost there is neither Jew nor Greek, for Christians are all *one* in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28). Gentiles who believe in Christ are called the true sons of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). The apostle Peter takes Old Testament titles for Israel and applies them directly to the church: You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...who once were not a people but are now the people of God (1

³⁹ John R. W. Stott, *Only One Way: The Message of Galatians* (London: Inter Varsity, 1968), 88.

Pet. 2:9-10; cf. Ex. 19:5-6). Paul calls the church “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). He says of believers, “We are the circumcision” (Phil. 3:3); that in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, what is important is the new birth (Gal.6:15).

In Romans 11 Paul uses the metaphor of the one olive tree to describe the one church throughout history. The New Covenant church is one with the Jewish forefathers because it is grafted onto the same Abrahamic root by faith (Rom. 11:17-19). There are not two different trees or roots but only one. Everyone who is regenerated and believes in Christ is organically connected to the one tree. “The doctrine involved in this argument is the one pervading this passage, that the provisions of God’s redemptive grace for Jew and Gentile have their base in the covenant of the fathers of Israel. To use Paul’s figure here, the patriarchal root is never uprooted to give place to another planting and thus it continues to impart its virtue to and impress its character upon the whole organism of redemptive history.”⁴⁰

Because everyone who believes in Jesus is united to Him, and because Christ dwells in His people, they are the temple of God. Paul says, “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (2 Cor. 6:16). Here the apostle takes Old Testament passages (Ex. 29:45; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 31:33; 38; Ezek. 37:26-28; Zech. 8:8) that emphasize Israel’s special covenant relationship with God and applies them directly to the New Covenant church. Some Old Testament prophecies that use this special covenant language clearly speak of a coming time when the church is not distinctly Jewish but multinational. Paul writes, “As He says also in Hosea: ‘I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, you are not My people, there they shall be called sons of the living God’” (Rom. 9:25-26). The apostle under divine inspiration introduces this passage by saying that it applies “not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles” (Rom. 9:24). There is to be genuine acceptance of the true religion and spiritual gospel worship among all the nations. “‘For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 1:11). “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD’S, and He rules over the nations” (Ps. 22:27-28). “All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name” (Ps. 86:9). “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, and His enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him” (Ps. 72:8-11). Rather than the radical distinction between Israel and the church that we find among dispensational thought the Word of God seamlessly transitions from the Old Covenant to the new.

Third, the children of believers are members of the covenant in both dispensations and receive the same promises. When Mary was at Elizabeth’s house she broke forth in praise regarding her unborn son. In doing so she applied many Old Testament promises to the New Covenant era. Mary said: “For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him *from generation to generation*” (Lu. 1:48-50). This passage is clearly a reference to Psalm 103:17-18 which reads: “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His

⁴⁰ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:90.

righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them” (Ps. 103:17-18). Jeremiah says that covenant blessings are for those who fear God and their children. “They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me” (Jer. 32:38-40).

Isaiah also spoke of covenant continuity between parents and their children. “‘As for Me,’ says the LORD, ‘this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,’ says the LORD, ‘from this time and forevermore’” (Is. 59:21). Through Ezekiel God says that His blessings are for the children of believers and their children *forever*. “David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore” (Ezek. 37:24-26). God’s promise to be a God to the seed of believers is also taught in the reasons annexed to the second commandment: “...but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Ex. 20:6; cf. Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 12; etc.). This promise emphasizes a central thrust of God’s dealing with His people—that God’s covenant love is not simply individualistic but is extended to covenant families and is to be passed down from generation to generation. Calvin writes, “God gives a promise to extend his mercy to a thousand generations; which also frequently occurs in Scripture, and is inserted in the solemn covenant with the church; ‘I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee’ (Gen. 17:7)... He also gives us a cursory intimation of the greatness of his mercy, which extends to a thousand generations, while he has assigned only four generations to his vengeance” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 2, 8, 20-21).⁴¹

The covenant continuity expressed in the second commandment is taught in Psalm 78 which says: “For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments” (vs. 5-7). Hanks writes, “When God, in so many places, enjoins upon believers to instruct their children in the ways of the Lord, they have the sure Word of God that they are instructing children of God, God’s own elect people. And the instruction they give is then not some kind of missionary enterprise within their own families, but is instruction which is based upon the sure knowledge that God’s promise is to save them and their children. They instruct covenant children. And their instruction will be fruitful.”⁴²

In Malachi 2:15 God tells us that He instituted marriage and the family for believers because “He seeks godly offspring.” The main purpose behind covenant people getting married

⁴¹ John Calvin as quoted in Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 301.

⁴² Herman Hanks, *We and Our Children: The Reformed Doctrine of Infant Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free, 1981), 55-56.

is the biblical rearing of Christian offspring. Jehovah has never changed His view of the God-fearing family and He clearly has never changed His view of covenant headship. The structure of the family as a covenantal unit with the man as head of the family is a creation ordinance (Gen. 2:21-22; 1 Cor. 11:8; 1 Tim. 2:14). This creation ordinance is explicitly recognized as binding in the New Testament: Wives are to submit to their own husbands in the Lord (Eph. 5:22); children are to be obedient to their parents (Eph. 6:1-2). The New Testament church explicitly follows the covenantal view of the family established at creation: women are not permitted to speak or have authority in the church (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-14); wives and children must submit to the head of their household in the Lord (Eph. 5:22; 6:1-2; 1 Pet. 3:1); wives are to follow the example of Sarah's submission to Abraham (1 Pet. 3:5-6); whole households are baptized and brought into the church (Ac. 16:15, 33); the promise to Abraham is continued to the children of believers in the New Covenant (Ac. 2:39). Therefore, we see not only covenant continuity in the visible church but also observe that the church is recognizing and acknowledging an even older covenantal institution—the family. The God-given purpose of the family has never been abolished. But, because of the fall and God's creation of a New Covenantal institution—the church—covenant families live and function under the authority of the church.

The role of the family in God's kingdom must never be ignored or underestimated. R. L. Dabney writes, "The affection, authority, and influence of parents are so unique, that when we properly consider them, it seems incredible God would have omitted them as parts of His Church instrumentalities, subject to the sanctifying rules of His house. Parental love is the strongest of the instinctive affections, and the most godlike in its permanence, forbearance, and disinterestedness. Parental authority is the most remarkable and absolute one delegated by God to man over his fellow man. Consider: it authorizes the parent to govern the child for a fourth of his life as a slave; to decide virtually his intelligence, culture, and social destiny, and even to elect for him a character and religious creed; thus seeming almost to infringe the inalienable responsibilities and liberties of the immortal soul! And last: the parental influence is so efficacious, especially in things moral and religious, that it does more than all others to decide the child's everlasting fate. Can it be that God would omit such a lever as this, in constructing His Church, as the organism for man's moral and religious welfare?"⁴³

All of these passages are related to Genesis 17 where God explicitly identifies children to be members of the visible church along with their parents. "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:7). Erskine writes, "The same principle was again and again announced when the children of Israel, under the Mosaic law, were still more definitely separated from the rest of the world. The law of circumcision was more than a mere civil regulation. The act was a religious transaction belonging to the Church, of which the terms of membership (viz., faith) were the same as under the later dispensation. 'He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised.' Rom. iv. 11. 'For the promise....was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.' Rom. iv. 13."⁴⁴

God's command to Abraham is the crux of the whole issue. John Murray writes,

The infant seed of those who are believers by confession and profession should be baptized and thus bear the sign and seal of the covenant of grace. This is the divine institution: it is one of the

⁴³ R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1878] 1985), 783-784

⁴⁴ Erskine N. White, *Why Infants Are Baptized* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1900), 39.

ways by which it has pleased God to administer the covenant of grace in the world; it is one of the ordinances by means of which it pleases God to fulfill His covenant purposes from age to age and from generation to generation. It is this fact of divine institution that constitutes the sufficient ground for administering and receiving the ordinance. When we ask the question: why do we baptise infants or upon what *ground* do we dispense baptism to them? It is sufficient for us to know and to answer that it is the divine institution. God has ordained it as one of the provisions whereby He administers His grace in the world. When the church practices this institution and complies with the divine command, no further judgment respecting the secret purpose nor respecting God's secret operations in the heart of those baptised is required as the proper *ground* upon which the ordinance is administered. To require any further information than the divine institution would go beyond the warrant of Scripture. It is true that in administering this ordinance we plead the promises which God has attached to faith and obedience, and we rest our faith and hope upon God's faithfulness. But our faith in God's promises would not appear to be placed in its proper relationship to infant baptism if it were conceived of as the *ground* for baptising infants. The ground is rather the institution which God has established and revealed, namely, that to the infant seed of believers the sign and seal of the covenant of grace is to be administered. Hence to aver that baptism is dispensed to infants on the ground of presumptive election or presumptive regeneration appears to be without warrant and also introduces perplexity into the question at issue.⁴⁵

Murray's approach to the issue of infant baptism is the correct one. Instead of debating difficult issues such as presumptive regeneration or how the meaning of baptism is compatible with its application to infants we must acknowledge that God has explicitly told the church that infants are to receive the covenant sign and seal.

The only way to avoid this conclusion is to: (a) prove that the covenant of grace has nothing to do with the New Testament (We have already demonstrated the essential unity of the covenant and thus dispensed with this argument); (b) argue that the meaning of circumcision and baptism are radically different or at least different enough to warrant a major difference of practice between the two covenantal administrations (This argument will be dealt with below.) (c) argue that even though there is one underlying covenant of grace the difference of administrations is the reason why infants are no longer given the covenant sign. (This kind of argument is essentially the one adopted by "Reformed" Baptists who accept covenant theology. This argument is intimately related to the previous one and will be addressed below as we examine the difference between baptism and circumcision.)

In our next chapter we will consider some of the arguments for infant baptism and will interact with some of the common objections against these arguments.

Chapter 3: Additional Arguments for Paedobaptism

The fact that the Bible teaches that there is an essential unity of the covenant of grace is foundational to the doctrine of infant baptism. (There is one method of salvation and one church that exists through both covenantal administrations. Believers are "the seed," "the children of Abraham," the "true Israel" [Mt. 3:9; Rom. 4:12-17; Gal. 3:7]. God always intended to bless all nations in Abraham [Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; Gal. 3:8-9]. The New Covenant church is not a new, separate tree but is grafted onto the *one* olive tree.)⁴⁶ Covenant theology and paedobaptism

⁴⁵ John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), 56-57.

⁴⁶ "Well: what about this olive-tree? Was it cut down? No. Was it rooted up? No. Just the contrary is stated. It remains where God planted it. "Thou," says the Apostle, "Thou partakest of the root and fatness of the olive-tree." *Branches* may be excluded but the *trunk* remains firmly rooted in its original soil, and able to make new branches

are also supported by a number of exegetical and theological arguments. Note the following considerations:

(1) That the promise of the covenant of grace is not only for the generation that receives it, but also their children is explicitly set forth by Peter in Acts 2: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (vs. 38-39). Peter preaching in the New Covenant says plainly that the promises of the New Testament include the children of believers. “The phrase *for you and your children* is an echo of God’s promise to Abraham to be a God to him and his descendants for generations to come (Gen. 17:17).”⁴⁷ J. A. Alexander writes, “The promise was addressed to themselves and to their children, as in the covenants of the Old Testament, an expression favouring the supposition that their children were to be baptized with them, but not necessarily requiring it, as some, though less naturally, understand these words of later generations. But Peter is here dealing with the contemporary race, as represented by his hearers, and would therefore seem to mean by their children those already in existence, and especially those present upon this occasion.”⁴⁸

The Baptist response to this passage is to argue that the phrase “as many as the Lord our God shall call” indicates that the passage is not concerned with visible church membership or external covenant privilege but rather with the external and internal call of God to sinners where the gospel is preached and hearts are drawn to Christ by the Holy Spirit. Baptist apologist Paul K. Jewett writes, “The paedobaptist ear is so attuned to the Old Testament echo in this text that it is deaf to its New Testament crescendo. It fails to perceive that the promise is no longer circumscribed by *birth* but by the call of God, by the anointing of his Spirit which secures the *new birth*, according to the covenant as newly administrated in Christ. The children of the New Covenant are those who, having received a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 36:26), become children of God (and of Abraham) by faith.”⁴⁹ Another Baptist author David Kingdon concurs. He writes, “What that call involves is plain to see, the inward work of the Spirit who enlightens the mind and renews the heart....Plainly the mention of children in this context provides no warrant whatever for infant baptism.”⁵⁰

The Reformed Baptist interpretation of this passage must be rejected for the following reasons. (a) It completely ignores an important principle of biblical interpretation which is: What did Peter’s statement mean to the original audience? The apostle was not speaking to modern individualistic Americans but to Jews and Jewish proselytes. When they heard the phrase “to you and your children” they would have immediately been reminded of God’s promise to Abraham

out of Gentile grafts. Strip the argument, and you have the naked doctrine, that the visible church stands still in the Abrahamic Covenant. If you say, dear Objector, that the root is not in this soil, but in some other, you cannot get rid of the fact that, in that case, the Jews could not be considered *natural* branches at all any more than Gentiles, which is contrary to the Apostle. Now as the cutting off of branches does not destroy the root, so the excision of the Jews did not destroy the Old Testament Church. And as the ingrafting of new branches presupposes vigorous life in an old trunk, so the establishment of Gentiles in the room of excommunicated Jews, proves the **IDENTITY** of the New Testament *Church of God* with the Old Testament *Congregation of the Lord*, rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant of Circumcision.” (W. R. Gordon, *The Church of God and Her Sacraments* [New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1870], 34-35).

⁴⁷ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 107.

⁴⁸ J. A. Alexander, *Acts* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857] 1963), 86.

⁴⁹ Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism & The Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 122.

⁵⁰ David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham: A Reformed Baptist View of Baptism, the Covenant, and Children* (Cambridge, England: Carey Publications, 1973), 89.

and all the promises in the Old Testament related to covenant continuity between parents and their children that we discussed earlier. (b) There is no grammatical or exegetical reason to impose baptistic presuppositions on this phrase because of the expression “all who are afar off.” The word *makron* (translated “afar off”) refers to space, not time and simply indicates that the covenant promises will extend to the Gentiles. God is going to save Gentiles and their children as well as Jews. (c) If we accept the Reformed Baptist interpretation that Peter is discussing the need of an internal call, then the mention of covenant children is superfluous. Why would Peter even mention the children of believers? Further, (as noted) would not such an Old Testament covenantal statement be easily misunderstood to a Jewish audience? (d) The Reformed Baptist emphasis on the internal call or work of the Holy Spirit in conversion does not prove radical change in the treatment of covenant children in the New Covenant era for the internal call of the Holy Spirit was necessary in the Old Testament era as well. Although there is a greater effusion of the Spirit in the New Covenant administration, Old Covenant prophecies do speak of the Spirit’s power to transform its participants from within their hearts in the New Covenant era (Jer. 31:33; 32:40; Ezek. 37:14, 23), this fact does not somehow alter or abrogate God’s promises given to the children of believers. Reformed Baptist authors have not demonstrated how such passages exclude covenant children.

(2) The Old-Testament practice of including infants is reflected in the New Testament household baptisms. In Acts 16:15 we read that Lydia “and her household were baptized.” In Acts 16:33 the Philippian jailer “and all his family were baptized.” In 1 Corinthians 1:16 Paul says that he “baptized the household of Stephanas.” The point of these passages is not that we have an explicit reference to infant baptism.⁵¹ (In two of the passages we do not know the age of the children. The context of the passage about the Philippian jailer indicates that his children were probably older because it says he believed “in God with all his household” [Ac. 16:34].) The point is that whole households or families are still included in the covenant. Gordon writes, “*The house* means the FAMILY proper, exclusive of servants; and *family* means CHILDREN, exclusive of parents. Gen. 18:19; Numb. 16:27, 32; Ruth 4:12. This use of the term is transferred from the Old to the New Testament. ‘Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their *children* and (even) their own *houses* (families) well.’ 1 Tim. 3:12. ‘I will that the younger women marry, bear *children*, guide the house,’ or *family*. 1 Tim. 5:14. These passages interpret the meaning of others which speak of ‘houses’ in connection with the administration of Baptism, Acts 16:15, 34; 1 Cor. 16:15; showing to every candid mind that young children are *chiefly* meant whenever a family is spoken of.”⁵²

Murray writes, “There is ...the representative principle [regarding covenant households] which is imbedded in the Scripture and is woven into the warp and woof of the administration of

⁵¹ J. A. Alexander’s comments on the use of the household passages is helpful. He writes, “*Her household*, lit. *house*, supposed by some to mean her family, by others her assistants in her business. Both being mere conjectures, and entirely compatible with one another, there is nothing in the text to decide the controverted question, whether children were baptized on this occasion. Both parties reason in a circle from foregone conclusions; one contending that as infants are incapable of faith, there either were none, or they were excluded from the ordinance; the other, that as households include children, we have no right to except them from the general statement. *The real strength of the latter argument lies not in any one case, but in the repeated mention of whole houses as baptized....* The whole dispute, however, rests on grounds entirely independent of these cases, and every reader will interpret these according to his views of those. He who believes in the perpetuity of the patriarchal covenant, with a change in the accompanying seal, will need no proof that children were baptized with their parents upon such occasions; whereas, he whose very definition of the ordinance excludes children, will of course deny their actual reception of it in all given cases” (*Acts*, 2:113, emphasis added).

⁵² W. R. Gordon, 53.

grace in the world. When we appreciate this we can understand how readily the apostles would apply the principle in the dispensing of the ordinances of grace. Household baptism would be a perfectly natural application. And this would inevitably involve the baptism of infants comprised in the household whenever and wherever there were such.”⁵³

(3) In 1 Corinthians 7:14 Paul, writing under divine inspiration, teaches that the children of even one believing parent are *holy*. He writes, “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.” When Paul gives the reason why a believing husband or wife must not put away an unbelieving spouse he argues that the unbelieving husband or wife is sanctified or set apart in some special way because they are married to a believer. He arrives at this position by appealing to the fact that the children of such unions are not unclean, that is, they are not to be regarded as little heathen but as holy. The word “holy” (*agioi*) in this context does not entail subjective holiness. It does not mean they are regenerated or rendered morally pure, but that they are consecrated or set apart. “Any child, the circumstances of whose birth secured it a place within the pale of the theocracy, or commonwealth of Israel, was, according to the constant use of Scripture, said to be holy. In none of these cases does the word express any subjective or inward change.”⁵⁴ Therefore, “The children of these mixed marriages are universally recognized as holy, that is, as belonging to the church.”⁵⁵ The children of even one believing spouse are born within the pale of the church. Hodge writes,

The principle in question, however, was not a new one, to be then first determined by Christian usage. It was, at least, as old as the Jewish economy; and familiar wherever Jewish laws and the facts of the Jewish history, were known. Paul circumcised Timothy, whose father was a Greek, while his mother was a Jewess, because he knew his countrymen regarded circumcision in such cases as obligatory, Acts 16, 1-3. The apostle constantly assumes that his readers were familiar with the principles and facts of the Old Testament economy...The child of a Jewish parent had a right to circumcision, and to all the privileges of the theocracy. So the child of a Christian parent has a right to baptism and to all the privileges of the church, so long as he is represented by his parent; that is, until he arrives at the period of life when he is entitled and bound to act for himself. Then his relation to the church depends upon his own act. The church is the same in all ages. And it is most instructive to observe how the writers of the New Testament quietly take for granted that the great principles which underlie the old dispensation, are still in force under the new. The children of Jews were treated as Jews; and the children of Christians, Paul assumes as a thing no one would dispute, are to be treated as Christians.⁵⁶

The great objection to the use of this passage for infant baptism is that the same reasoning could be used to argue for the church membership and baptism of the adult believer. Are not both the unbelieving spouse and the children said to be sanctified or set apart in some manner? While there is no question that both are said to be sanctified, there are other biblical considerations that are brought to bear in the case of the adult unbeliever that does not apply to infants. Even though heathen spouses are set apart in such a manner that the marriage must be maintained, the word of God requires a credible profession of faith before any adult can be baptized and join the church. Such is not the case for infants of such unions. “Thus, from the divine appointment of the *family*

⁵³ John Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 69.

⁵⁴ Charles Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857, 59] 1959), 116.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

*relation, from the position of children under former dispensations, and from the distinct Scripture statements, we conclude that the children of church members fulfill the first condition prerequisite to baptism: they have membership as a birthright in the visible Church.*⁵⁷

(4) The New Testament completely supports the Old Testament teaching that God does not merely deal with people as individuals but also as families. Peter says that Noah and his entire family—“eight souls, were saved through water” (1 Pet. 3:20). The apostle even refers to this experience as a type of baptism (v. 21). We have already considered Acts 2:38-39 where the covenant promises of the Old Testament (e.g., Gen. 17:7; Dt. 29:10-13) are explicitly carried over into the new covenant era and the household baptisms (Ac. 16:15, 33, 34; 1 Cor. 1:16).

God has always treated families as covenantal societies, as an organic unity. In the Bible the household includes everyone who is part of the covenantal family unit. This point is true both positively and negatively. In Genesis 7:1 Noah enters the ark with everyone in his household. God saved Noah and his whole family. In Genesis 12:17 Jehovah plagued Pharaoh and his house. When God saved Abraham and set him apart his whole household received the sign and seal of the covenant of grace (cf. Gen. 17:12-13, 23, 27; Rom. 4:11). In Genesis 19:16 God saved Lot and his household from the destruction of Sodom. When God was displeased with Abimelech He closed fast all the wombs in his household (Gen. 20:17-18). In Exodus 12 God ordered the Israelites to kill the Passover lamb “according to your families” (v. 21); and, to spread the sacrificial blood on the lintel and two doorposts of *each house* (v. 22). Each family was ordered to stay in the house until morning (v. 22). Thus, God “struck the Egyptians and delivered our households” (v. 27). God saved the whole congregation of Israel (i.e., whole families) from their bondage in Egypt (Ex. 14, 21, 22, 29, 30). Paul says that all Israel was “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:2). In the book of Joshua, Achan as well as his whole house was destroyed because of his sin (7:20-21, 24-26). In Joshua 24:15, we read that Joshua spoke for his entire household when he said “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” In 2 Samuel 12:10 we read how David brought judgment upon his whole house because of his adultery and murder. We have already noted that covenant headship is built into the fabric of God’s holy law (Ex. 20:5-6; Dt. 4:9; 6:7; 7:9; Ps. 78:4-6; 103:17-18).

Jesus and the apostles continued the covenantal concept of the family. When Christ fed the multitudes, families were counted by covenant heads. “Now those who ate were four thousand men besides woman and children” (Mt. 15:38). When the apostles preached the gospel they specifically addressed the men—the covenant heads: “men of Judea” (Ac. 2:14), “men of Israel” (Ac. 2:22). His command to these heads of households was “Repent...be baptized.... the promise is to you and your children” (Ac. 2:39). When Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus he presupposed the covenant status of children when he included them among the saints (Eph. 1:1; 6:1). If the children of believers were not given covenant status in the new covenant era as paedobaptism teaches then: a) It would have been a radical departure from thousands of years of divine command and church practice; and, b) One could reasonably expect to find warrant for this radical change in the New Testament. Not only is there no evidence of a radical change but the status of covenant households and children remains the same.

⁵⁷ Erskine N. White, *Why Infants are Baptized*, 44. “Paul teaches that the sanctification of the believing partner extends to the unbeliever. He reinforces this by citing the position of the children of the marriage. If the believer’s sanctification extended no further than himself, his children would be *unclean*. The word is used of ceremonial uncleanness, ‘that which may not be brought into contact with the divinity’ (AG). This is an unthinkable position. Clearly Paul regards *now are they holy* as an axiom. Until he is old enough to take the responsibility upon himself, the child of a believing parent is to be regarded as Christian. The parent’s ‘holiness’ extends to the child.” (Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958], 110).

(5) The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) all record Jesus' specific teaching on the relationship of little children and babies of believers to God's kingdom. When the apostles rebuked parents for bringing their children and babies to Christ to receive a blessing, our Lord rebuked the disciples. The account in Mark reads: "And they were bringing to him children, that he might touch them, and the disciples were rebuking those bringing them, and Jesus having seen, was much displeased, and he said to them, 'Suffer the children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the reign of God'" (10:13-14, Young's Literal Translation of the Bible). Mark and Matthew have *paidia* (little children) while Luke has *brephe* which refers to infants or babies (cf. Lk. 18:15).⁵⁸ Covenant parents were bringing their little children and babies to the Savior so that He would bless them. "The disciples' attempt to turn the children aside because they were unimportant is one more instance of a persistent tendency to think in wholly human, fallen categories which Jesus had rebuked on earlier occasions (chs. 8:33; 9:33-37). The kingdom of God belongs to children and to others like them who are of no apparent importance because God has willed to give it to them. That is why these children are given access to Jesus..."⁵⁹ Our Lord uses this occasion to set forth these children as examples to the adults. "'Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.' And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them." (Mk. 10:15-16).

Baptists respond to this section of Scripture with two common responses: first, they like to point out that parents are to bring their children to Jesus not the baptismal font; and second, they argue that children are chosen only in a figurative or metaphorical sense to serve as examples for adults (e.g., child-like humility, etc.). To these objections we respond with the following considerations. First, if the children and infants of believers are not truly members of God's kingdom in some sense, then they could not be examples for adults. It would be absurd and deceitful for Christ to frame an example of something that was not really true. Murray writes, "To suppose that our Lord was not speaking directly of the little children and affirming their membership in the kingdom of God would do plain violence to the actual facts of the situation. It was with little children the disciples were concerned, it was with little children Jesus was concerned, the disciples to forbid them and Jesus to receive them. Little children were in the focus of attention and interest, and it is therefore of the little children themselves that Jesus proceeds to speak."⁶⁰ Second, although it is true that one cannot find an explicit reference to baptism in any of the accounts that is not the point asserted by paedobaptists anyway. The relevant point is that the Son of God Himself regards the infants of church members to be members of His kingdom. Such is not the case with the heathen. Most Baptists have a vague understanding of this point and thus present their infants before the pastor of their church to be dedicated unto Christ. Presbyterians have their infants baptized not because baptism makes them a member of the kingdom but because they already are. They are entitled to the covenant sign of

⁵⁸ Henry Barclay Swete writes, "*Paidion*, though used of a child twelve years old (v. 39, 42), could be applied to an infant eight days old (Gen. xvii. 12 [LXX]) or at the breast (4 Macc. iv. 25), or the child who is learning his first lessons at his mother's knee (2 Tim. iii 15). Those who were brought to Jesus were doubtless of various ages, from the infant in arms to the elder children still under the mother's care" (*Commentary on Mark* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1913] 1977], 219-220).

⁵⁹ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 360.

⁶⁰ John Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 63.

the kingdom of grace. “And it ought to be observed that Christ came not into the world to curtail privileges of his church, but to enlarge them.”⁶¹

The Biblical Connection between Circumcision and Baptism

One of the chief arguments against infant baptism is that there is a major difference or at least enough of a difference between these two ordinances to warrant a new and different practice (i.e., believer baptism) in the new covenant era. The basic argument of Reformed Baptists is that circumcision had an earthly, Jewish, national aspect that does not carry over into the new covenant era because these aspects ceased with the ceremonial law and Israel’s special covenant status as a nation.

Before we analyze the Reformed Baptist argument, let us first consider the essential unity of meaning between these two ordinances.

(1) Both ordinances point to regeneration or new birth. “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Dt. 30:6; cf. 10:16; Is. 52:1; Jer. 4:4; 9:26). “When you brought in foreigners uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh...” (Ezek. 44:7; cf. v. 9). “You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart...” (Ac. 7:51). An uncircumcised heart is a heart still enslaved to the filth and pollution of the flesh. “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn. 3:3, 5-6). “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” (Rom. 2:28-29).

(2) As an aspect of regeneration both ordinances represent the internal purification of the sinner and the washing away of sins. In Isaiah 52:1 the uncircumcised are equated with the unclean. “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (Ezek. 36:25). “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Ac. 22:16). “According to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5).

Both ordinances point to our union with Christ and our death to sin. “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart.... You always resist the Holy Spirit” (Ac. 7:51). “Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead...even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4; cf. vs. 5-18). “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands...” (Col. 2:11). “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27).

(4) Both ordinances point to the new spiritual life received in regeneration. “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:11-13). Jewett writes, “The use of

⁶¹ John Brown, *The Systematic Theology of John Brown of Haddington* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002), 538.

the aorist passive throughout the passage...makes it evident that to experience the circumcision of Christ, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, is the same thing as being buried and raised with him in baptism through faith. If this be true, the only conclusion we can reach is that the two signs, as outward rites, symbolize the same inner reality in Paul's thinking. Thus circumcision may fairly be said to be the Old Testament counterpart of Christian baptism. So far the Reformed argument, in our judgment, is biblical. In this sense 'baptism,' to quote the *Heidelberg Catechism*, 'occupies the place of circumcision in the New Testament.'"⁶²

(5) Both ordinances point to justification by faith. "And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe" (Rom. 4:11). "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism" (Col. 2:11-12; cf. vs. 13-14).

(6) Both ordinances are initiatory rites that indicate membership in the visible church. "And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant" (Gen. 17:14; cf. vs. 9-13). "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" (Mt. 28:19). "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized" (Ac. 2:38). "When they believed...both men and women were baptized" (Ac. 8:12). "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:4-5).

(7) Both ordinances point to an inward reality "He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart" (Rom. 2:29). "We are the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit" (Phil. 3:3). "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism" (Col. 2:11-12). "The people of God have been circumcised with a circumcision made without hands. This involves the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh through the circumcision of Christ. And this is the same as being buried with him in baptism and raised with him through the faith of the operation of God. Nothing could be clearer than this identification of circumcision with baptism."⁶³

(8) Both ordinances point to repentance or change of mind. "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskin of your hearts, you men of Judah" (Jer. 4:4; cf. 9:25; Lev. 26:41b). "Repent, and...be baptized" (Ac. 2:38).

(9) Both ordinances were required for adult converts to the true faith; both pointed to a new beginning and separation from the world. "And when a stranger [i.e., a non Jew] dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it" (Ex. 12:48). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.... And immediately he and all his family were baptized" (Ac. 16:31, 33). "'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him" (Ac. 8:36-38; cf. Rom. 6:3-22; 2 Cor. 6:14-18).

The Bible is crystal clear in its teaching that new covenant baptism is the counterpart and replacement for old covenant circumcision. "[U]nder the Old Testament, infants were

⁶² Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace*, 89.

⁶³ Herman Hanko, *The Reformed Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, 41.

circumcised as well as adults. Baptism occupies the place of circumcision in the New Testament, and has the same use that circumcision had in the Old Testament. Therefore infants are to be baptized as well as adults.”⁶⁴ Reformed Baptists who believe in covenant theology accept the idea enumerated above, that there is a correspondence between the meaning of circumcision and baptism with regard to regeneration and all its facets as well as justification and the forgiveness of sins. Reformed Baptists, however, argue that there are some significant differences between the two ordinances that warrant the rejection of infant baptism in the new covenant era. We will now turn our attention to these arguments in order to prove they are mistaken.

Chapter 4: An Excursus on the Baptist use of Jeremiah

One of the most common arguments by Reformed Baptists against the baptism of covenant infants is based on Jeremiah 31:31-36. It is argued that in this prophecy regarding the New Covenant we have a radical change of administration where there is a regenerate church membership; where no member of the New Covenant can fall away. Note the following examples. Jewett writes,

According to the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-36), the New Covenant, in contrast to the old, is one that *cannot be broken*. The fathers who came out of Egypt broke the first covenant the Lord made with them; but the New Covenant will stand as sure as the ordinances of day and night, for it shall be engraved on the hearts of the covenantees by the omnipotent finger of him who saves by his grace. How can the heirs of this new, unbreakable covenant break that covenant? Yet paedobaptists often speak of baptized children who grow up in unbelief as ‘covenant breakers’ who are ‘unfaithful to their baptismal vows.’ So constant are these terms in the discussion that they have become, as it were, technical terms in the literature. Paedobaptists evidently cannot get along without them, though it is not clear how they get along with them either, if they are to remain truly Reformed.⁶⁵

David Kingdon writes,

What indications are there in Scripture that the principle of “thee and they seed” is abrogated in the era of the New Covenant? First there is the promise of the New Covenant (Jer. 31-34). *According to v. 33 God will write his law on the hearts of his people. The emphasis is shifted from the external ceremonies and institutions of the Old Covenant to the possession of inward spiritual life. (See Rom. 2:29; Phil. 3:3.)* It is those who know the life of God within their souls to whom the promise, “*they shall be my people*”, applies.

The next verse indicates another point of distinction between the Old and New Covenants. Many who received the sign of circumcision were without the knowledge of God (Rom. 2:17-29), whereas under the New Covenant God declares ‘*they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them*’. In the New Testament this universal knowledge of God through vital communion with him in the Holy Spirit is predicated of the *visible* church of believers (cf. 2 Cor. 6:16).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, [1852] n. d.), 367.

⁶⁵ Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*, 152.

⁶⁶ David Kingdon, *The Children of Abraham* (Sussex, England: Carey Publications, 1973), 34.

John MacArthur also placed a great deal of weight on the Jeremiah passage when he debated R. C. Sproul on this topic:

You don't have a whole group of covenant people in which there is a little believing remnant in the New Testament, and if you ever do question that, then you need to deal with the text of Jeremiah 31:31-34, which is the watershed issue, I believe, on this whole discussion. In Jeremiah 31:31-34, he promises the New Covenant, and here's what Jeremiah says, "There's a covenant coming. It's not like the covenant you know; it is a New Covenant," and he says this, "Here's how it's different." And all of the options Jeremiah could have picked, of all the things that Jeremiah could have said, of all the choices that he could have made to distinguish the New Covenant from the Old, this is what he said (verse 34): "They shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." The essence of the New Covenant is everybody in it knows God savingly. That is, I think, the significant distinction between belonging to the Abrahamic Covenant ethnically and belonging to the New Covenant savingly. And so a sign that suited an ethnic covenant is not parallel to a sign that suits a saving covenant, and therein baptism is to be made distinct from circumcision, and again remind you that Scripture does make no such connection.⁶⁷

What are these Baptist apologists saying about the New Covenant that precluded infant baptism? They note the following differences. (a) There will be a shift from external rites to the possession of an inward spiritual life. (b) In the New Covenant administration everyone will know God savingly. In other words there will be a regenerate church membership in the visible church in the new dispensation. (c) The New Covenant unlike the Old cannot be broken. Obviously, in an era with a regenerate church membership, church members will not abandon the New Covenant.

The Baptist argumentation from these promises goes something like this. The Old Testament was primarily a time of external ceremonies without internal realities. Since infants cannot exercise faith, circumcision, at least for infants, was an external rite without any interior significance. The Old Covenant era was a time when most Israelites were unfaithful to the covenant. This sad reality was due to the fact that: unregenerate infants were circumcised and brought into the pale of the church corrupting it; and, the law of God was written on stones but not written upon hearts by the Holy Spirit. In the New Covenant era only people who first profess faith and are regenerated are admitted to the church. Everyone will be saved; will have the law written on the heart; and, will be faithful to the covenant.

Although many Baptists believe that Jeremiah 31:31-34 (and its New Testament counterpart Hebrews 8:8-13) contains a devastating refutation of infant covenant membership and thus the baptism of the babies of believers, their argument is based on a faulty understanding of the Old Covenant and an accompanying failure to understand what is distinctly new about the New Covenant. They, also, are guilty of a sloppy exegesis of the Jeremiah passage itself. Let us examine some of the major problems with their interpretation.

(1) A careful examination of the Jeremiah passage indicates that the prophecy does not radically redefine who is eligible for covenant membership in the church in the coming new dispensation. Note what the prophet says in Jeremiah 31:33, "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds,

⁶⁷ John MacArthur, *Baptism Audio Debate Series* (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Cassette 1998); as quoted in Jeffrey D. Niell, "The Newness of the New Covenant," Gregg Strawbridge, *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), 129-130.

and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” The phrase “house of Israel” which is a common phrase used throughout the Old Testament (e.g., “house of Jacob” Gen. 46:27 [i.e., Jacob’s family]; “house of Israel,” Ex. 16:31; 40:38; Lev. 10:6; 17:3, 8, 10; 22:18; Num. 20:29; Josh. 21:45; Ruth 4:11; 1 Sam. 7:2-3; 2 Sam. 1:12; Ps. 98:3; Is. 5:7; Jer. 2:4, etc.) refers to the whole covenant people of God including children and infants. It is virtually synonymous with the “congregation of the LORD” (e.g., 2 Chr. 20:13; 21:16; Joel 2:16; Josh. 8:35; Dt. 29:11, 12). Unless one is willing to *arbitrarily* redefine the designation “house of Israel” to exclude infants, one must admit that the infants of believers are included in the New Covenant administration.

(2) The Jeremiah passage also includes the statement “I will be their God and they shall be My people” (Jer. 31:33). This promise always included covenant children (cf. Ex. 3:10; 7:4, 14, 16; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 36:28; etc.). The Israelites, the congregation of the LORD or the visible church, included children and infants. These children have been set apart from heathen children by God, identified as “My people” and have been given special rights and privileges that other children do not have. If Baptists are going to use Jeremiah 31 to kick the children of believers out of the New Covenant, then they need to explain why words and phrases that have a well-established biblical meaning can be ignored or arbitrarily given a whole new meaning. This point is especially important given the fact that most Baptists are premillennialists who claim to hold a literal interpretation of Scripture. We ask our Baptist brothers one simple question: Would the Jews of Jeremiah’s day who heard this prophecy have regarded the phrase “My people” as one which *excluded* the small children and infants of believers?

(3) Baptists place a lot of weight on the interpretation that the New Covenant is internal and spiritual while the old is primarily external. While it is indeed true that the Old Testament worship and approach to God *ritualistically* was much more elaborate and complicated because of the ceremonial laws that pointed to Christ, it is a great error to teach that a true heart, internal, spiritual love and service to God was not an important aspect of the Old Testament religion. The first and foremost commandment of the law was and still is: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart” (Dt. 6:5-6). The author of Hebrews says that God killed the Israelites in the wilderness because they did not believe (Heb. 3). Paul says that Jewish circumcision that is not accompanied by regeneration is uncircumcision (Rom. 2:25). It is worthless. David said that he memorized Scripture and placed it in his heart so he wouldn’t sin against God (Ps. 119:11). God says that the righteous man has “the law of God in his heart” (Ps. 37:31). Old Testament saints would sing: “I delight to do Your will, O my God, and your law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8). If the Old Covenant religion was not concerned with regeneration and saving faith then why did God repeatedly condemn and judge the Israelites who followed the outward rituals but who didn’t believe, love God and obey Him from the heart (e.g., Am. 5:21; Isa. 1:14)? In the Old Covenant era, regeneration, an interior work of the Spirit, saving faith and repentance were just as important and were required of *all* of God’s covenant people in the same manner as in the New Covenant era. To argue otherwise is to ignore dozens of explicit Bible passages.

(4) We now come to the crux of the whole debate which is Jeremiah’s statement that in the New Covenant “they all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them.” It is this statement that is used to argue for a regenerate church membership in the New Covenant era. Once again note that according to Baptists this passages teaches: *no one* can break the New

Covenant (e.g., Jewett); *everyone* in the New Testament church has the internal spiritual reality including regeneration and the law of God on the heart; “everybody in it knows God savingly” (MacArthur). This Baptist interpretation of Jeremiah is fallacious and easy to disprove. Note the following arguments.

First, the Baptist view violates two very foundational principles of biblical interpretation: Scripture can never contradict Scripture; and, the clearer portions of the Bible must be used to interpret the less clear. Does the New Testament teach that the visible church is only made up of regenerate, truly saved church members? No. It teaches that in the New Covenant church there are true believers and there are hypocrites.

Jesus told the disciples that there would be tares among the wheat (Mt. 13:25). He warned the disciples about false prophets and hypocrites in the church by telling them His words to such false professors of religion on the day of judgment: “*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness*” (Mt. 7:23). Simon Magus, who made a profession of faith and was baptized by Philip the evangelist, was soon identified by Peter the apostle as an unsaved hypocrite who remained “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity” (Ac. 8:23). If everyone in the New Covenant visible church is regenerated and truly saved then why did our Lord set up church courts that could excommunicate apostates (cf. Mt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Tit. 1:11; etc.)? Paul warned the elders of Ephesus about “savage wolves [who] will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Ac. 20:29). Peter told the churches “there will be false teachers among you” (2 Pet. 2:1). The Bible talks about: those who endure for only a while (Mt. 12:21); some who depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1) and have strayed from the truth (1 Tim. 2:17). Paul talks about those: who have a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Tim. 3:5); who have itching ears who will attach themselves to false teachers (2 Tim. 4:3); who profess to know God but deny Him (Tit. 1:16). Peter speaks of apostates who had escaped the pollution of the world for a season (1 Pet. 2:20-22). The author of Hebrews speaks of apostates who had once been enlightened and tasted the heavenly gift (Heb. 6:4ff.). There are even examples of notable church leaders who apostatized such as Demas who left Paul because he loved the present world (2 Tim. 4:10); and, Hymenaeus and Alexander whom Paul delivered to Satan (1 Tim. 1:20). Examples could be multiplied. However, the point has been established that even during the days of the apostles not every church member was regenerated, had the law on his heart, or knew God savingly. Therefore, whatever the phrase “they all shall know Me” means, it definitely does *not* mean what the Baptists say it means. If it did, Scripture would contradict itself which is impossible.

While both orthodox Presbyterians and Reformed Baptists would like to have a regenerate church membership and both ought to do everything they can within the bounds of Scripture to have a born-again church membership, this side of heaven there is no such thing as a regenerate church membership. Church elders do not have the ability to look into the human heart. Therefore, they can only function in terms of a credible profession of faith. In the visible church there will always be wheat and tares, true professors and hypocrites. If one carefully studies church records, disciplinary cases and the numbers who apostatize in both Reformed Baptist churches and strict, truly Reformed or Presbyterian churches one will see that generally speaking Reformed Baptist churches have very similar rates of apostasy and excommunications as do the Bible-believing Reformed churches. If the Baptist interpretation of Jeremiah 31 were true, Reformed Baptist churches would not have cases of apostasy or excommunication. Further, if one of one of the problems of the old-covenant Jews regarding apostasy was the circumcision of infants then: a) Why do truly Reformed churches have such low rates of apostasy? (They are

as low, or lower, than Reformed Baptists churches); and, b) Why did God tell his people to do something that was spiritually bad for them? If Baptists could figure out that the circumcision of infants was a spiritual disaster then could not Jehovah who is infinitely wise do the same?

Second, if one follows the Baptist interpretation that this passage is literal and means a one hundred percent regenerate church membership, then one has a serious problem, for Jeremiah does not say “no more shall every man teach his fellow church member” but rather “No more shall every man teach his neighbor” (Jer. 31:34). If one follows the Baptist thinking on this passage consistently then one doesn’t simply have a regenerate church membership but a one hundred percent regenerate society. Since most Reformed Baptists are amillennialists, they would naturally reject such an interpretation.

What then does Jeremiah mean? After all, the New Covenant is superior to the Old. There are basically two different interpretations among Reformed scholars regarding the meaning of verse 34, “They shall all know me...” The majority interpretation is that Jeremiah is speaking hyperbolically. That is, he is speaking in a dramatic, poetic manner of the superiority of the New Covenant. What is different about the gospel era is that there will be a more widespread, comprehensive knowledge of God than under the old administration. Matthew Henry writes, “Many more shall know God than did in the Old-Testament times, which among the Gentiles were times of ignorance, the true God being to them an unknown God. The things of God shall in gospel times be more plain and intelligible...the knowledge of God in gospel times should vastly exceed that knowledge of him which they had under the law.”⁶⁸ Matthew Poole writes,

This must not be so interpreted as if under the gospel there should be no more need of ministerial teaching, for Christ himself sent out his apostles to preach; nor yet as if there should be no more need of brotherly teachings, by instruction or correction; the contrary is commanded, Col. iii. 16. It is only an expression signifying the increase of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord, that should be after the pouring out of the Spirit: we have such expressions 1 John ii. 27. The learned author of our English Annotations thinks this phrase signifies, that under the gospel there should be a greater measure of means and of knowledge, and of knowledge got by that means, and of clearness of understanding in persons, or ability to conceive things revealed, and a greater number of persons that should be enlightened with the saving knowledge of God.⁶⁹

The Old Covenant was given to a nation while the new is intended for the whole world, for every nation, tribe and tongue. “All that is national, temporary, preparatory, as far as preserving one nation as God’s people is concerned has disappeared.”⁷⁰ The Holy Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, both: young and old, slave and free, Jew and Gentile. All kinds of men are being brought to a saving understanding of Christ and are being disciplined in the knowledge of God.

Another interpretation which is the minority view is that the phrase “all shall know Me” refers primarily to the removal of the ceremonial Old-Testament priesthood in the New Covenant era. The ceremonial priesthood occupied a unique place in the old administration. The priests were specially consecrated to God. They had a special access and knowledge related to the sacrificial cultus that did not extend to the “ordinary” Israelite. They were a special class that mediated between God and the people; that had knowledge, an expertise in sacred things. In the

⁶⁸ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, n. d.), 4:607.

⁶⁹ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1706] 1962), 2: 382.

⁷⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1966), 271.

new administration this special class, with special knowledge and unique access has been abolished. Now everyone from the least to the greatest knows God in the same way. There is no longer a separation between the priesthood and the laity (cf. Dt. 33:8-10; Num. 1:51; 3:10; 12:32; 16:40; Mal. 2:8). An excellent representative of this position is Arthur Pink. He writes, "The apostle's object is obvious. It was to the Old Covenant that the whole administration of the Levitical priesthood was confined....But the introduction of the new Priesthood necessarily abolished that covenant, and put an end to all the sacred ministrations which belong to it. This is which the apostle here undertakes to prove."⁷¹ A little later Pink adds,

But at this point a difficulty, already noticed, may recur to our minds: Were not the things mentioned in Heb. 8:10-13, the grace and mercy therein expressed, actually communicated to God's elect both before and afterwards? Did not all who truly believed and feared God enjoy these same identical blessings? Unquestionably. What then is the solution? This: the apostle is not here contrasting the internal operations of Divine grace in the Old and N.T. saints, but as Calvin rightly taught, the 'reference is to the economical condition of the Church.' The contrast is between that which *characterized* the Judaic and the Christian dispensations in the *outward* confirmation of the covenant.⁷²

In the Old Covenant era the ceremonial intermediaries who brought to the people an intimate personal knowledge of Jehovah by their priestly acts and ceremonial teaching will no longer be needed because of Christ's completed redemption. This point is supported by the very next sentence. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34). While the new dispensation has teachers, it does not have priestly intermediaries. Both these interpretations of Jeremiah 31 are far better than one which contradicts Scripture.

But (a Baptist may ask) what does the Jeremiah passage mean when it implies that the New Covenant cannot be broken? Doesn't this promise teach that church members in the new dispensation cannot fall away? Doesn't this passage refute infant baptism because some infants grow up and reject Christ and go into the world? No. The Baptist interpretation is once again mistaken for the following reasons.

First, (as noted earlier) individual church members whether baptized as infants or as adults (with a credible profession of faith) fell away from the Savior in the New Testament and still apostatize today. The idea that no professing Christian in the visible church can be unregenerate or fall away is patently absurd.

Second, the context and the history of Israel after this prophecy indicate that Jeremiah is speaking of the New Testament church as a whole. The church would not end in total failure as did Israel. When the prophet penned this prophecy, God had already begun to punish His people with Babylonian oppression and exile. It would not be long before a great slaughter occurred and Jerusalem itself would fall. Further, Israel as a covenanted nation rejected their Messiah, killed the Prince of life, was destroyed by God in A. D. 70 and her covenantal kingdom privileges were given to the New Testament church (Mt. 21:43). While the church in the new dispensation would certainly have its ups and downs, it would be preserved by the power of the Holy Spirit and thus would not end in failure. The Baptist use of Jeremiah 31 is exegetically sloppy, contradicts clear portions of Scripture and fails to recognize the real differences between the covenants.

⁷¹ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 436.

⁷² *Ibid*, 454.

Chapter 5: Reformed Baptist Arguments Refuted

(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.”⁷³ Their birth alone made them citizens of Israel, entitled to the earthly blessings of the covenant nation irregardless 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 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

⁷³ Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace*, 102.

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.”⁷⁴

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,

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*

⁷⁴ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 1:88.

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.⁷⁵

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.”⁷⁶

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,

⁷⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 970.

⁷⁶ John Brown, *The Systematic Theology of John Brown of Haddington*, 538-539.

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.⁷⁷

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 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

⁷⁷ Grudem, 970-971.

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."⁷⁸ 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 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."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ John Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 539.

⁷⁹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:419-420.

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.”⁸⁰

(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, 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

⁸⁰ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 42.

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 (*baptizontes* 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.

Chapter 6: The Mode of Baptism

Among Christians there is not only a strong difference of opinion regarding who are the proper recipients of baptism, but also regarding the proper mode. Credobaptists insist that baptism is only properly administered by immersion in water, while paedobaptists teach that sprinkling or pouring is the biblical way to administer the rite. The Westminster Confession of Faith says that “dipping the person into water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.” (28:3).

Before we present the biblical case for pouring or sprinkling let us briefly consider the Baptist arguments for immersion. There are essentially three basic arguments. (1) According to ancient classical Greek literature the Greek word for baptize (*baptizō*) means “to dip, immerse, or plunge” something in water. Baptists will often quote from a Greek lexicon the *classic* usage of *baptizō* and then say, “Case closed.” (2) The prepositions associated with the context of baptism point to immersion. Mark says that the Jews were baptized “*in* the river Jordan” (Mk. 1:5). When Christ was baptized He was observed “coming up *out of* the water” (Mk. 1:10, NASB). After Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, “they came up out of the water” (Ac. 8:39). Further, some of the baptism narratives strongly point to immersion because of the need for great quantities of water. “Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there” (Jn. 3:23). “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’” (Ac. 8:36) (3) The symbolism of union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection points to baptism by immersion. Paul says that Christians were “buried with Him in baptism...raised with Him through faith” (Col. 2:12). In his discussion of sanctification the apostle writes, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4). Grudem writes, “When the candidate for baptism goes down into the water it is a picture of going down into the grave and being buried. Coming up out of the water is then a picture of being raised with Christ to walk in newness of life. Baptism thus very clearly pictures death to

one's old way of life and raising to a new kind of life in Christ. But baptism by sprinkling or pouring simply misses the symbolism."⁸¹

While at first glance these Baptist arguments sound impressive, a closer examination of these assertions will prove that these arguments are fallacious. Note the following.

(1) First, many people have been led astray by a superficial, incorrect understanding of the classical meaning of the word *baptizō* by Baptist writers. The foremost Baptist authority on this topic, Alexander Carson writes, "*BAPTIZO* in the whole history of the Greek language has but one [meaning].... It not only signifies to dip or immerse, but it never has any other meaning."⁸² This assertion has been thoroughly refuted by the scholar James W. Dale. Dale gives many examples from Greek literature where *baptizo* does not mean to dip or immerse. He writes, "Water poured into wine is said to baptize Bacchus... A drunken man is said to be a baptized man... A man who drinks at the fountain of Silenius becomes a baptized man... Cities, and all Asia, are represented as baptized by sleep, by the running away of bakers, by defeat in battle... A person bewildered with questions is said to be baptized."⁸³ *Baptizo* can refer to different actions whether dipping, sprinkling, pouring or even metaphorical or non-physical actions that lead to different kinds of conditions. Regarding the common, mistaken notion of *baptizo* having only one meaning we need to heed the words of Calvin. He writes, "It ought not to have any weight with us that an opinion has long and extensively prevailed. We must learn to form our judgment from the matter as it stands, and not from mistaken opinions of men."⁸⁴

(2) Second, one must be very careful when appealing to the classic Greek usage of a word to give a *fixed* meaning to a word in the New Testament. It is not uncommon to find words in the Greek Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures) and the New Testament that have been taken from classical Greek and then used in a unique way by the inspired writers of the New Testament and the translators of the Septuagint. Common words are taken and modified to suit a religious purpose. No one would argue that common Greek words such as *Theos* (God), *agape* (love), *pistis* (faith), *sarx* (flesh) or *ouranos* (heaven) have the same meaning for a heathen and a Christian. They obviously do not. Such is also the case with *baptizo*. Fairfield writes, "Suppose it were necessary to employ some word to express the idea of 'ceremonious religious cleansing in the use of water,' and no word was found in classic Greek exactly expressing that idea, what is to be done? Just what was done in numberless other cases: SOME WORD MUST BE CONVERTED TO THAT USE."⁸⁵

In order to demonstrate that *baptizo* does not necessarily refer to immersion in Scripture but can also refer to a religious cleansing by pouring or sprinkling water, let us examine the use of this word in the Greek Septuagint (LXX),⁸⁶ the apocrypha (the non-inspired books by the Jews in the inter-testamental period) and the New Testament.

a) In 2 Kings chapter 5 we read about Naaman the commander of the army of Syria who is ordered by Elisha to go and wash in the Jordan river seven times to cure his leprosy (v. 10). In verse 14 we read that he went down to the Jordan and dipped himself seven times in the river. In

⁸¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 968.

⁸² Alexander Carson, *Baptism, Its Mode and Its Subjects* (Evansville, IN: The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1969), 19.

⁸³ James W. Dale, *Johannine Baptism: An Inquiry into the Meaning of the Word as Determined in Usage of the Holy Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, [1898] 1993), 98-99.

⁸⁴ John Calvin as quoted by James W. Dale, 90.

⁸⁵ Edmond B. Fairfield, *Letters on Baptism* (Boston and Chicago: The Pilgrim Press, 1893), 27.

⁸⁶ The only other instance in which *baptizo* occurs in the Septuagint is Isaiah 21:4 where it is used figuratively to denote fear or terror.

the Greek Septuagint version the word “dipped” (Hebrew, *tawbal*) is translated *baptizo*. Although the Hebrew word used, *tawbal*, in ordinary usage means to “dip” or “immerse” (which in this verse would support to a degree the Baptist position) there is a good reason to believe that for the translators the word *baptizo* was chosen because it better conveyed the idea of a religious purification or washing.

When the Jewish translators wanted to convey the idea of dipping they preferred the word *bapto*. Of the sixteen times *tawbal* is used in the Hebrew Scriptures, fourteen times it is translated *bapto* (e.g., In Lev. 14:6, 51, a living bird is dipped in the blood of a slain bird; Lev. 14:16, the priest dips his finger into oil; Ruth 2:14, “dip your morsel in the vinegar”); once *tawbal* is translated *moluno* which means “to defile” (In Gen. 37:31 Joseph’s brothers *defiled* his coat by dipping it in the blood of a goat); and once it is translated *baptizo* in the case of Naaman in the Jordan.

Why did they use *baptizo* when they virtually always used *bapto* to convey dipping into something? The likely reason is that Naaman had been commanded to *wash, bath* or *cleans*e himself in the Jordan by Elisha. Thus, the translators of the Septuagint choose the word *baptizo* over *bapto* because they were not concerned about conveying the idea of dipping in this case, but the idea of cleansing. “We cannot believe that they translated the same Hebrew word fourteen times by *bapto* and once by *baptizo*, by mere chance and without a reason.”⁸⁷ When they wanted to convey the idea of defilement they choose *moluno* even though the word is not a literal translation of *tawbal*. Likewise, they choose the word *baptizo* over *bapto* in order to emphasize Naaman’s cleansing. “They knew that *baptizo* was understood by the Jews to mean ‘cleans,’ and for that reason, and for no other, they use it in this one solitary case.”⁸⁸

b) The Jewish authors of the uninspired *Apocrypha* (“In general it constitutes the excess of the LXX over the Hebrew Scriptures, with the material concerned being written during the last two centuries B.C. and the 1st century A.D.”⁸⁹) help us understand the meaning of *baptizo* to the Jews immediately prior to the writing of the New Testament canon. What is particularly interesting regarding the *Apocrypha* is that its use of *baptizo* proves that the Jews of this period did not equate the term with immersion but with purification by poured or sprinkled water.

In the book of Judith we have the courageous exploits of a Jewish widow who through deceit assassinates the enemy commander Holofernes by beheading. She was allowed in the enemy camp on the pretext of betraying military secrets and because the commander was attracted to her outward beauty. What is germane to our topic is the description of her religious purification which uses the term *baptizo*. “Holofernes’ attendants brought her into the tent; and she slept until midnight. Shortly before the morning watch she got up and sent this message to Holofernes: ‘My lord, will you give orders for me to be allowed to go out and pray?’ Holofernes ordered his bodyguard to let her pass. She remained in the camp for three days, going out each night into the valley of Bethulia and bathing in [lit. at] the spring. When she came up from the spring, she prayed the Lord, the God of Israel, to prosper her undertaking to restore her people. Then she returned to the camp purified, and remained in the tent until she took her meal towards evening.” (Judith 12:5-9 NEB). The word for bathing here is *ebaptizeto*. The picture here in Greek is not that of a woman taking a bath in a pond, stream or lake but of a woman going to a small spring and using the pure water to wash herself. “It was at a ‘fountain’

⁸⁷ Edmund B. Fairfield, *Letters on Baptism*, 58.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 59

⁸⁹ R. K. Harrison, “Apocrypha” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 76), 1:205.

(*pege*)—‘a spring’—not a lake. She purified herself *at* the fountain, not *in* it. The Greek preposition is *epi*.⁹⁰ Further, being a Jew it is likely that her purification took place under the eyes of a military escort. James W. Dale argues that this ritual washing could not have been immersion for a number of reasons. First, there is no doubt but that her washing was public. “It is in evidence that Holofernes, after he ‘took the fountains of their waters, *set garrisons of men of war over them.*’ (7:7) And it is in evidence, that the camp was just as close unto, or as deeply in, this fountain, as was the baptism of Judith. The very identical terms which bring her baptism into relation with the fountain, are employed to denote the relation of the camp to the fountain. ‘They encamped in the valley near Bethulia, *at the fountain—epi tes peges.*’⁹¹ A godly Jewish woman would not take a bath in the presence of heathen men.

Second, even if the spring was large enough for Judith to immerse her body, she would not have taken a bath in their drinking water. Dale writes, “But Dr. Carson knows that she *dipped* herself, and Dr. Fuller knows that she *bathed* herself, and Dr. Conant knows that she *immersed* herself,—where? Why, in the fountain from which the Bethulians got their drinking water, and from which ‘the garrison’ guarding that fountain, got their water. Well, that is certainly a little remarkable, that a lady should go and ‘wash her entire person’ in a drinking fountain! However, these learned men say, that they know that she did it. We must, then, set down this lady Judith as remarkably solicitous for her own ‘purification,’ and remarkably regardless of the purification of the waters for those who drank after nightly washings!”⁹²

Another example that is even more decisive than Judith is found in the Apocryphal book *Ecclesiasticus* or *The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* which reads: “*Wash (baptizomenus)* after touching a corpse and then touch it again, and what have you gained by your washing” (34:25). Here the Jewish writer uses the word *baptizo* to refer to the purification rite of Numbers 19 which was sprinkling. “Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him.... But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean.” (vs. 13, 20). If a man touched a dead body he had to find a clean person who would take ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, mix these ashes with running water in a vessel, take hyssop, dip it in this mixture and then sprinkle it on the unclean person (vs. 17-18). This sprinkling is to occur on the third and on the seventh day (v. 19). This baptism by sprinkling is specifically said by Scripture to make the unclean clean.

Baptist writers attempt to circumvent the import of these passages by pointing out that the purification ritual also includes an immersion. Verse 19 reads: “The clean person shall sprinkle

⁹⁰ Edmund B. Fairfield, *Letters on Baptism*, 68.

⁹¹ James W. Dale, *Judaic Baptism: An Inquiry into the Meaning of the Word as Determined by Usage of Jewish Patristic Writers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, [1869] 1991), 355.

⁹² *Ibid*, 358-559. But doesn’t the passage say that “she came up from the spring indicating she was in the water? No. Actually the language is consistent with her being at the spring not in it. Dale writes, “To enforce this interdict against pressing *anebe* into this water service, I would refer to Genesis 24:15, 16,—‘And behold Rebecca went out (*exeporeuto*) and went down (*katabasa*) by the fountain (*epi ten pege*) and filled her water-pot, and went up (*anebe*).’ All the leading words in this reference are identical with those in the passage under consideration. The preposition indicating the proximity of Judith and Rebecca is precisely the same. The verb which expresses the movement of these females, after their respective missions to the fountain were accomplished, is the same. If that word did not bring Rebecca ‘out of the water,’ how will it bring Judith? If that word carried Rebecca up out of the lower ground of the fountain, why shall it not do the same kind office for her sister Jewess?” (*Ibid*, 260).

the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean.” Does this passage indicate that the word baptism should only be connected with an immersion? No. It definitely does not for the following reasons.

First, Scripture specifically says that it is the sprinkling with ash mixed with water that makes the person clean. “He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him...” “He has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean” (Num 19:13, 20). This view is confirmed by the inspired author of Hebrews. “For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ...” (9:13-14).

Second, in this particular purification ritual the crucial element is the ashes of a heifer, a sacrificial animal. The sprinkling of the ashes mixed with a running or living water points to the expiation of sin by Jesus Christ.

Third, there is the distinct possibility that the pronoun “he” in verse 19 refers not to the person who touched a dead body but rather to a person who became unclean by touching the purification mixture. Verse 19 reads: “The clean person shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he [i.e., the man who applied the mixture] shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean.” Note how verse 20 reverts back to the unclean man who touched the dead body: “But the man who is unclean...” “The original clean person, who had used hyssop upon the unclean, was regarded as so far infected that he was required to become disinfected by washing his clothes and bathing himself in water; and then he would be clean at evening.”⁹³

Fourth, if we accept the interpretation which says that the washing of clothes and the whole body is part of this ritual or completes the ritual process, it still is not the central aspect of the ritual for it is done after the act which is specifically said to purify. It would appear that this washing is needed to remove the ashes which contain the blood of the heifer. In any case the most one could prove by appealing to this washing at the end of the process would be that baptism ought to be done by sprinkling and perhaps bathing in water as well. The fact that sprinkling is called a baptism cannot be denied without doing great violence to the common rules of language.

Fifth, the word used for “washing” does not necessarily mean washing by immersion. Joseph “washed” his face after weeping (Gen. 43:31). In Deuteronomy 21:6, certain persons are directed to “wash their hands over the heifer.”⁹⁴ This was done by pouring not immersion (see 2 Kgs. 3:11). The same word in the Septuagint is used of washing Dorcas after death (Ac. 9:37) and washing the stripes of Paul and Silas (Ac. 16:33). One should not *assume* that bathing (especially in the desert during the wilderness wanderings) was always done by immersion.

Sixth, the connection of baptism (*baptizo*) to the mode of sprinkling is confirmed by Josephus the Jewish historian who not only was very familiar with Jewish laws and practices but was fluent in the Greek language. He writes, “*Baptizing* by this ashes put into spring water, they sprinkled on the third and seventh day.” [*Jewish Antiquities*, Book iv: Chapter 4]. Fairfield writes, “The Greek word which he uses is *baptizontes*. Putting the words of the Son of Sirach by the side of those of Josephus, who wrote about two hundred and fifty years later, it will be seen that the word *baptizo* had for many generations been employed by the Jews who were familiar

⁹³ Edmund B. Fairfield, *Letters on Baptism*, 75-76.

⁹⁴ See James W. Dale, *Judaic Baptism*, 117-119.

with the Greek to express this idea of ceremonial cleansing by water. It had been so used for at least two or three centuries before Christ. If Christ had used it in any other sense, it would have been necessary for him to state that fact; they would not naturally have expected him to use the word in any other sense, nor would they have understood him if he had so used it.”⁹⁵

c) The Baptist contention that *baptizo* and its cognate must always refer to immersion is thoroughly disproved by the use of the term in the New Testament. Note the following examples.

First, in Luke 11:38 we encounter the aorist passive indicative of *baptizo* (*ebaptisthe*) to describe the extra-biblical Pharisaical tradition of a religious hand washing before meals. “He [Jesus] went in [to a certain Pharisee’s house] and sat down to eat. When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first *washed* before dinner.” Earlier in His ministry in Galilee the Pharisees had strongly criticized the disciples for eating with unwashed hands (Mk. 7:2-5; Mt. 15:2ff.). Because this hand washing was a religious ordinance made up by the Pharisees to “fence the law” and was not taught anywhere in Scripture, Jesus and the disciples refused to take part in it.

What is particularly interesting regarding these washings is that it is almost certain that they were done by pouring. John Murray writes, “It is distinctly provided in the Talmudic tractate *Yadayim* that water was to be poured over the hands to the wrist. Chapter II, Mishnah 3, reads as follows: ‘Hands become unclean and are made clean as far as the wrist. How so? If he poured the first water over the hands as far as the wrist and poured the second water over the hands beyond the wrist and the latter flowed back to the hands, the hands nevertheless become clean.’ It would appear that Edersheim is correct when he says, ‘Accordingly, the words of St. Mark can only mean that the Pharisees eat not “except they wash their hands to the wrist.”’⁹⁶

If we interpret the Greek word *pugmei* as *with the fist* (instrumental case) we still have a baptism or cleansing by pouring and rubbing, not immersion. Lane writes, “The washing was accomplished by pouring water on the hands, and this fact excludes all suggestions of immersing the hands from Mark’s reference in verse 3. The evangelist correctly specifies that a *handful of water* was required. The position of the hand was cupped, with the fingers flexed to allow the water to pass between them so as to reach all parts of the hands. By cupping the hand the entire hand could be washed with a very small quantity of water.”⁹⁷ When considering this ritual washing we need to keep in mind that: (1) Water in Palestine is not abundant. It was valuable. (2) The ritual washings occurred very frequently. Thus, a method had to be used that conserved water. (3) For ritual cleansings the Jews preferred running, moving or living water. (i.e., poured or sprinkled water.) (4) The water used could only be used once. They could not take a bowl full of water and have 10 people take turns dipping their hands in the same bowl. Each person had to have *unused* “clean” water. Pouring a little water on a cupped hand that could be rubbed over the entire hands satisfied the requirement for washing with a minimal amount of clean water.

The Middle Eastern practice of the nineteenth century before the introduction of plumbing may be illustrative of what occurred in earlier times. Fairfield writes, “The method of

⁹⁵ Edmund B. Fairfield, 81-82.

⁹⁶ John Murray, *Christian Baptism*. Murray quotes from *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Tohoroth* (London: The Soncino Press, 1948, 552; and, Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (New York: 1910), 2:11.

⁹⁷ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 246. It is very interesting that some of the early copyists substituted the Greek word *rantisontai* meaning “they sprinkle” for *baptisontai* “they wash” in Mark 7:4 (see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1871, 75], 93. John Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 18.). This substitution means that these early Alexandrian copyists likely regarded *baptizo* and *pantizo* as synonyms. They believed that the ritual purification was accomplished by sprinkling, not immersion.

washing the hands at the present day [c. 1890] as I found it in Syria and in Turkey is very suggestive of what there is every reason to believe was the custom in all Bible lands and Bible times. If you enter a house, the servant appears with a washbowl and pitcher. But you are never expected to pour water into the bowl and wash, as our habit is. The empty bowl is put in a place convenient for you to hold your hands over it. The attendant then pours the water on your hands, and you wash them with soap or without, and the dirty water falls into the bowl. It would shock every Oriental idea were you to dip your hands into the bowl unless you were without possible means of doing otherwise. The water poured from the pitcher becomes ‘running water,’ and your hands are cleansed in that way.”⁹⁸

Second, when the author of Hebrews defines baptisms or purifying he refers to sprinklings not immersions. As the author of Hebrews is demonstrating the superiority of the new covenant over the old he refers in chapter 9 to “various washings” (*diaphorais baptismois*, v. 10) of the old economy which have been superseded by Christ (see Heb. 9:1-16). The word used *baptismois* (literally, “baptisms”) is defined for us in the context (vs. 13, 19, 21) where the author describes at least three kinds of ritual cleansings from the Mosaic law.

In Hebrews 9:13 he combines two rituals. “For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh...” The first refers to the ritual on the Day of Atonement where the sacrificial blood is *sprinkled* on the mercy seat and before it (Leviticus 16:15); and, then on the altar seven times (16:19). He then refers to the purification ritual where a clean person takes ashes from a sacrificial burnt heifer, mixes them with water and *sprinkles* the mixture on the unclean person with hyssop. These old covenant rituals point to the atoning death of Christ which truly expiates sin, propitiates God and purifies hearts to serve the living God.

In Hebrews 9:19 he refers to another *sprinkling*: “Moses...took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people.” Here the author of Hebrews refers to Exodus 24:6-8 where Moses dipped wool and hyssop into the sacramental blood mixed with water and then *sprinkled* it upon the covenant people. They were ceremonially cleansed by *sprinkling*.

In Hebrews 9:21 he continues with his description of the Exodus 24 ritual, “Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry.” “[T]he fact that the people as well as the altar was to be sprinkled with blood indicates that even the keeping of the words and laws was to be based on the sacrificial blood.... The blood cleansed so that the ‘hearing’ and ‘doing’ became possible.”⁹⁹

When the author of Hebrews wanted to contrast the ceremonial purifying of the Old Testament dispensation with the true spiritual purification of Christ’s blood which is one of the things that baptism signifies and seals, he pointed to purifying by sprinkling not immersion. *Baptismois* or baptisms, then, can be done by sprinkling. Murray writes, “Baptism symbolises, represents, and seals the application to us of the blood of Christ for the removal of the guilt of sin. The figure used in the New Testament for this application of the blood of Christ is that of sprinkling (Hebrews 9:13, 14, 22; 10:22; 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:2). It would be strange if the baptism with water which represents the sprinkling of the blood of Christ could not properly and most significantly be performed by sprinkling. It cannot be too frequently insisted that according to Scripture cleansing from the guilt of sin is adequately and effectively administered by the mode

⁹⁸ Edmond B. Fairfield, 107.

⁹⁹ W. H. Grispem, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 239.

of sprinkling...¹⁰⁰ If the Baptist position were true, then the different baptisms referred to in Hebrews 9:10 would all have to be baptisms or cleansings by immersion. But the exact opposite is the case. Baptist arguments are arbitrary and completely ignore the context or the examples set forth in chapter nine. Baptist writers are forced by their own presuppositions to ignore the clear teaching of Scripture.

Third, when God baptizes His people with the Holy Spirit He does so by *pouring* not by immersion. This point is established from the account of baptism with the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts as well as other texts which anticipate this baptism or look back to this baptism. Acts 2:1-4, 18 and 33 read, “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound *from heaven*, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.... *I will pour out My Spirit* in those days.... Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He *poured out* this which you now see and hear.”

The Bible teaches that after Jesus’ redemptive work (His humiliation) He would be glorified and exalted. This exaltation included the resurrection, the ascension, the enthronement at the right hand of God the Father and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the church. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is anticipated in the gospels where Jesus tells the disciples that “It is to your advantage that I go away.... If I depart, I will send Him [the Holy Spirit] to you” (Jn. 16:7; cf. 14:16-18). The language of anticipation indicates that the disciples will not be dipped in the Holy Spirit, but rather the Holy Spirit *will come upon* the apostles. Luke 24:49 reads, “Tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high [i.e., from heaven].” Acts 1:8 says, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” “The verb is *eperchomai* and conveys the notion of ‘coming down upon.’”¹⁰¹

After the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter two, the disciples looked back to that event as the set pattern for all subsequent Spirit baptisms. Therefore, when Luke, writing by divine inspiration, makes a historical comment as to why Peter and John need to lay hands on the Samaritans he writes, “For as yet He [the Holy Spirit] had *fallen upon* none of them. They had only been baptized [with water] in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:16).” When Peter preached to the Gentiles, “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (Ac. 10:44). Thus, the Jews who were with Peter were amazed, “because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also” (Ac. 10:45). Then the Jews said, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized [*baptisthevai*] who have received the Holy Spirit *just as we have*” (Ac. 10:47)? When Peter recounted these astonishing events to the disciples in Jerusalem he said, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit *fell upon them* [the Gentiles], as upon us at the beginning” (Ac. 11:15). (Interestingly, the apostle Paul, writing many years later after the events at Pentecost, still referred to the “pouring out” of the Holy Spirit. “...He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom *He poured out on us* abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” [Tit. 3:5-6]).

If the Baptists were correct that baptism was only by immersion then would not the historical account in the book of Acts be quite different? Instead of the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples (Ac. 8:16; 10:44; 11:15) or coming on them (Ac. 1:8; 19:6), would it not rather say that the disciples were falling into or coming upon the Holy Spirit of God? Would not Luke’s

¹⁰⁰ John Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 24.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 23.

account say that the disciples were dipped or immersed into God's presence instead of saying the Holy Spirit was poured out (Ac. 2:18, 33; 10:45)? The Baptist position explicitly contradicts Scripture. But, what of the Baptist contention that the 120 disciples were immersed by the Spirit in the upper room? This silly argument is refuted by the fact that it "was not the rushing might wind that filled the house – but the sound."¹⁰² Further, even if the Holy Spirit did fill the room, the account plainly says that the mode was pouring from heaven. If the Baptist took his own argument seriously and not as a clever subterfuge, then would he not place the new Christian in an empty tub and then pour water into it until the recipient was immersed?

The disciples had absolutely no problem associating water baptism with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Peter said, "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit'" (Ac. 11:16; cf. Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Jn. 1:26). Thus we need to ask a few very pertinent questions: How would the New Testament apostles have understood the term *baptizo*? Would they have baptized with sprinkling/pouring or by immersion? The answer to this question is not hard to discern if we look at what the disciples would have examined to determine the answer. Note the following considerations and review.

(a) The apostles would surely have known about the old covenant promises and prophecies which spoke of forgiveness, regeneration and the baptism of the Holy Spirit by *pouring* or *sprinkling*. Proverbs 1:23, "Surely I will pour out my spirit on you." Joel 2:28, "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh." Isaiah 32:15, "Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high." Ezekiel 36:25-26, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you." Isaiah 52:15, "So shall He sprinkle many nations."

(b) The disciples would have been familiar with the various cleansing, purifications or washings by *sprinkling* in the Mosaic law. There was the *sprinkling* of blood on the altar and the people (Ex. 24:6-8; 29:16; Lev. 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 5:9; 7:2) around the altar; the *sprinkling* of blood and oil on Aaron and his sons (Ex. 29:21); the *sprinkling* of blood seven times before the LORD, in front of the veil of the sanctuary (Lev. 4:6, 17). There was the *sprinkling* of blood and water in the cleansing ritual regarding leprosy (Lev. 14:4-8; 51-57). There was the *sprinkling* of blood on the mercy seat and before it for atonement (Lev. 16:14, 15, 19). There was the special cleansing of the Levites by the *sprinkling* of water (Num. 8:7); the purification by *sprinkling* water mixed with the ashes of the heifer for the man who is unclean (Num. 19:9-21). Given all these passages one should not be surprised that the author of Hebrews chose the three *sprinkling* rituals as diverse baptisms (Heb. 9:13, 19, 21).

(c) The first Jewish believers probably knew of the example of bathing or purification by *pouring* or *sprinkling* in the Apocryphal sections of the Septuagint (e.g., Judith 12:5-9; Ecclesiasticus 34:25) where *baptizo* was used. They certainly knew about the Pharisaical practice of baptizing their hands by *pouring* water over them (Mk. 7:2-5; Lk. 11:38; Mt. 15:2ff.).

(d) The first disciples experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son *pouring* the Spirit out of heaven upon the church (Ac. 2:1-4, 18, 33; cf. 1:8; 10:44, 47; 11:15, 16; 19:6; cf. Lk. 24:49; Tit. 3:5-6).

Given the incredible amount of evidence from the Old Testament, the inter-testamental literature and the New Testament itself regarding pouring and sprinkling coupled with the fact that baptism signifies and seals forgiveness of sins, regeneration, purification and the baptism of the Holy Spirit all of which were symbolized or took place by sprinkling or pouring, it would be

¹⁰² Edmund B. Fairfield, 198.

extremely unlikely (a virtual impossibility) that the disciples would baptize by immersion instead of pouring or sprinkling.

Fourth, there is circumstantial evidence that favors pouring or sprinkling over immersion. How, for example, were the first great multitudes of believers “immersed” in Jerusalem? On the day of Pentecost “about three thousand” people were baptized (Ac. 2:41) and only a few days later another five thousand were converted (Ac. 4:4). Although it may be possible that such large numbers were immersed, given the circumstances, it is very unlikely for a number of reasons. First, Jerusalem and Israel was a very dry arid climate in which water was a precious commodity. “There is no natural body of water there or near there. ‘The Brook Kedron’ is ordinarily an almost dry water course.”¹⁰³ A trickle of water in a creek bed was unsuitable for immersion. Further, the ancient Jews did not have modern plumbing or running water in their homes as we do. The only suitable facilities in Jerusalem for immersion at that time would have been the reservoirs of pure water for drinking and cooking. The authorities and the population at large would have been outraged if three thousand dirty pilgrims were being immersed in their drinking water with their filthy clothes on. The converted Jews themselves, many of which were residents of Jerusalem, would not have polluted their own precious water source. It is possible that a rich believer volunteered the use of his bathtub. Some of the rich upper class people did have tubs and did have the funds to pay servants to transport water to their lavish homes for bathing (2 Sam. 11:2). Even if a rich believer invited the converts over to his home to be immersed in his tub: how was the water to be replenished? Clothes absorb a great deal of water and the disciples were not baptizing naked women; and, how did they have time to baptize so many people? If we allow two minutes per baptism it would take *one hundred hours* to baptize three thousand people. Even if all twelve apostles had bath tubs and were baptizing the new converts in different houses it still would have taken nearly eight and a half hours to baptize the multitudes. If baptism was performed by sprinkling, then a very large crowd could be baptized in a relatively short period of time.

Second, the three thousand converts were not carrying an extra change of clothes with them. If they were immersed then there would have been a lot of people walking around in soaking wet clothes, which would have been both uncomfortable and inconvenient. A sprinkling with water from a branch with hyssop would not have been a problem.

There are other examples that pose problems for the Baptist position. Erickson writes,

There are indications that the means used in New Testament times was not, could not have been, exclusively immersion. For example, would John have been physically capable of immersing all those who came to him? Did the Philippian jailer leave his post in the prison to go where there was sufficient water for immersion? Was water brought to Cornelius’s house in sufficient quantities for immersion? When Paul was baptized, did he leave the place where Ananias found him? These are questions which suggest that immersion may not have been practiced in every case.¹⁰⁴

Shedd writes, “In the account of the baptism of Cornelius and ‘all his house’ (Acts 10:2, the phraseology implies that the baptismal water was brought into the room. ‘Can any man forbid the water (*to udor*), that these should not be baptized?’ Acts 10:47. This phraseology would be unnatural, if the water in question were in a river, pond, or reservoir; but natural, if it were in a

¹⁰³ Ibid, 141.

¹⁰⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 1095.

vessel. No one would ‘forbid’ the Hudson or Connecticut River. It is improbable, that within the precincts of the jail there was either a stream or reservoir of water sufficient for immersing, in the dead of the night, ‘the jailer and all his.’”¹⁰⁵ Although these examples are circumstantial; nevertheless, they support the strong, irrefutable evidence presented earlier.

Other Baptist Objections

(1) One of the major Baptist objections to sprinkling is the idea that immersion perfectly represents union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. Passages such as Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12 are appealed to as proof texts for such a view. There are a number of problems with such an interpretation.

First, it assumes that Paul is making some kind of statement on the mode of baptism when he is only discussing the implications of union with Christ for definitive sanctification and a new holy life. The apostle does not say anything about being buried in water or being baptized into water. Rather he affirms that we have been baptized into Christ’s death, burial and resurrection.

Second, it ignores the parallel terms in the immediate context of the Romans 6 passage that cannot be adequately symbolized by immersion. The apostle not only says that believers have been “buried with Christ (v. 4) but also “crucified with Him” (v. 6) as well. It was during our Lord’s vicarious suffering on the cross that the guilt of sin was expiated and the liability of punishment was removed. There is not a mode of baptism whether sprinkling, pouring or immersion that literally pictures the crucifixion. Thus, once again, Paul is not arguing for a mode that *literally* portrays a crucifixion and burial. Further, Jesus did not arise out of the dirt in the same manner a person comes up out of the water in immersion. The Messiah was placed in a stone tomb; that is, a cave structure carved into the side of a rocky cliff (Mt. 27:60; Mk. 15:46; Lk. 23:53; Jn. 19:41). One could even roll a stone up against the opening. Jesus walked out of the tomb. He did not come out of the top of it like someone coming up out of a hot tub or swimming pool. Obviously, Baptists are reading into Romans 6 what is simply not there.

Third, baptism is a sign of many things that are included in our union with Christ: the cleansing from sin, regeneration, definitive sanctification, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As noted above, there are no modes of baptism that can adequately convey through symbolism every facet of Christ’s redemptive work. Interestingly, circumcision, and its counterpart baptism, is most often associated with regeneration in Scripture which is the beginning point of the application of redemption to the sinner.

Fourth, the portions of Scripture that are related to mode clearly point to sprinkling or pouring (e.g. Ex. 24:6-8; 29:16, 21; 3:2, 8, 13; 5:9; 7:2; 16:14, 15, 19; Num. 8:7; 19:9-21; Pr. 1:23; Joel 2:28; Isa. 32:15; 52:15; Ez. 36:25-26; Ac. 1:8; 2:1-4, 18, 33; 10:44, 47; 11:15, 16; 19:6; Tit. 3:5-6; Heb. 9:13, 14, 22; 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:2; etc.). Therefore, one should not use a statement that is not even discussing mode to overturn clear passages of the Bible that are.

(2) Another common Baptist argument is based on prepositions associated with baptism. Baptists will argue that the Greek word *en* means *in* and thus point out that *in* water implies immersion. Matthew 3:11 reads: “I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance” (ASV). This argument is fallacious for a number of reasons.

¹⁰⁵ William T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:584.

First, Matthew uses the same preposition (*en*) with both water and the Holy Spirit. Luke omits the *en* when referring to water and has *en* with reference to Spirit baptism. If *en* must be translated *in* and *in* implies immersion, then the disciples in Acts 2 would have to be immersed in the Holy Spirit. But how did Christ baptize the disciples? As we noted earlier, He poured the Spirit out on them (Ac. 2:17, 33) and the Spirit fell on them (Ac. 10:44; 11:15). If *en* does not mean *in* or imply immersions with reference to the Spirit, then it does not necessarily imply immersion with reference to water.

Second, the preposition *en* does not always mean *in*. Fairfield writes, “The preposition *en* often means ‘with.’ It is so translated in our Common Version more than a hundred times. Take one verse as a sample to illustrate its use in expressing, as the grammar says, ‘the manner, means, or instrument.’ It is found in 1 Cor. 5:8: ‘Let us keep the feast not *with* old leaven, neither *with* the leaven of malice and wickedness, but *with* the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.’ Three times in this verse *en* is translated ‘with.’ No English scholar, I think, would translate it another way.”¹⁰⁶ Blass and Debrunner write, “In the genuinely instrumental sense the dative has been sharply curtailed in the NT by the use of *en*.... (1) The following take *en* besides the simple dative: (a) ‘with the sword’..., (b) ‘to season with something,’ (c) ‘burn with fire’..., (d) ‘baptize with,...’¹⁰⁷

Third, in both Mark 1:8 and Luke 3:16 the word *en* does not even occur. Instead the word for water (*hydati*) is an instrumental dative which can only be translated *with water*. Given the fact that Mark 1:8 and Luke 3:16 are parallel passages with the Matthew 3:11 passage, the Matthew 3 verse 11 should also be translated “with water.” To do otherwise would violate standard hermeneutical principles as well as simple logic.

All of these proofs for “with” raise the following question. Would it make sense for a person to say, “I will immerse you *with* water?” Would not a better translation be “I will cleanse you or purify you with water.” The word baptize is suitable as long as we understand that baptize does not always refer to immersion but can also refer to cleansing by sprinkling or pouring. A comparison of the baptism with the Holy Spirit (which was by pouring) and the Greek grammar involved in these passages renders the Baptist argument null and void.

But (some may ask) doesn’t the fact that John the Baptist chose the Jordan river (Mt. 3:6; Mk. 1:5, 9) and Aion near Salim because of the abundance of water in those places (Jn. 3:23) point in the direction of immersion? Furthermore, doesn’t Matthew even say that John was *in* the Jordan (Mt. 3:6) which implies immersion? No, not necessarily. Even if we ignore the abundant evidence presented thus far that supports pouring or sprinkling, these passages are not detailed or specific enough to support either position. For example, Murray notes that even if John baptized by sprinkling large quantities of water, an *isolated* location would still have been necessary because of the huge crowds of people that came to him. He writes,

We know only too well that in Palestine water supplies were jealously prized and guarded, and we know how friction sometimes developed over the use of water supplies. To say the least, it would have been prejudicial to John’s ministry for him to have baptised except where there was abundant water. Large multitudes came to John’s baptism. It would have been disrupting to a local community and an interference with their needs for large multitudes to congregate around limited water supplies. Apart from actual water used for baptism, it would have been

¹⁰⁶ Edmund B. Fairfield, 123-124.

¹⁰⁷ F. Blas and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of The New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and ed. by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 198.

interference amounting to impropriety to deprive people of ready access to the water supply requisite for their daily needs.

Again, apart from the consideration of the water used in baptism and apart from the impropriety of interference with the needs of a local community, it would be necessary to seek a place of much water in order to meet the needs of those who congregated. Oftentimes the people who came to John's baptism came long distances. In many cases it is altogether likely that animals were used for conveyance. Those who came would therefore need water for their own use and for the use of the animals they may have brought. It is obvious that a place of much water would be indispensable.¹⁰⁸

But what about the fact that John was in the Jordan River? Why would he be in the river if he were not immersing the subjects of baptism? One cannot prove immersion from these statements because: (a) The prepositional phrase "in the Jordan" was a common manner of expressing location. To an ancient Jew "in" geographically can have the same meaning as "at." (b) Even if John was standing in the river (Mark 1:9 has *eis* "into" not *en*), this information does not say anything about mode. If John was baptizing by sprinkling and thousands of people were coming to him to be baptized, then it would make perfect sense for John to stand in the water and have people come to him in the water. This procedure would not only save a great deal of time but it would avoid turning the bank of the river into a muddy quagmire. (c) If John baptized Jesus in the exact same manner as he did the multitudes, which is extremely likely, he probably did it by pouring or sprinkling which was God's prior method of representing the anointing of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament the anointing of the high priest (Ex. 29:7; Ps. 133:2), and the kings (e.g., Saul, 1 Sam. 10:1; David, 1 Sam. 16:3; Jehu, 2 Kgs. 9:3) was by pouring oil over the head. The consecration of the high priest and his sons was by the sprinkling of the anointing oil and blood upon them and their clothes. At His baptism our Lord was anointed with the Spirit beyond measure (Jn. 3:34; Ac. 10:38). Which mode corresponds more with reality, pouring/sprinkling or immersion?

Another passage that Baptist apologists refer to is Acts 8:38-39 where it says that both Philip the evangelist and the eunuch (the subject of baptism) went down "into the water" (*eis to udor*) and then came up "out of the water" (*ek tou udatos*). It is argued that going down into the water and then coming up out of it sound just like the ritual of immersion. The problem with this common Baptist argument is: a) It has Philip immersing himself as well as the eunuch ("*both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water.... They [i.e., both men] came up out of the water*") which is very unlikely and absurd. b) If Philip wanted to baptize the eunuch by pouring or sprinkling and didn't happen to have a branch with hyssop lying around, the easiest way to accomplish this task was for both men to step into the water so Philip could cup some water in his hands and pour it or sprinkle it on the head of the eunuch.

But (some may ask), if baptism could be accomplished by sprinkling why didn't the eunuch give Philip his water pouch so that Philip could sprinkle him immediately in the chariot. The problem with this objection is: a) It is an argument from silence. We do not even know if the eunuch had water available. b) Even if the eunuch did have a water pouch, it is unlikely that he would allow Philip to pour it over his head when traveling in the desert. The case of the Ethiopian eunuch simply does not contain enough information to establish mode. For the purposes of establishing divine warrant for a practice the only safe thing to do is to rely on the clearer passages of Scripture.

¹⁰⁸ John Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 28.

A study of the relevant material regarding *baptizo*, the methods of cleansing in the Old and New Testament (as well as the inter-testamental literature), the manner in which God anoints and baptizes His people as well as the historical examples in the book of Acts all support the Reformed position that baptism ought to be performed by pouring or sprinkling.

Chapter 7: How Should Baptized Infants and Children Be Regarded by the Church?

There are some important questions that often arise concerning infant baptism that need to be considered. Some common questions are: If baptism is a sign and seal of regeneration does it not then logically follow that the children of believers are regenerated during baptism? If the infants of believers are not necessarily regenerated at baptism, how then can baptism be said to be a sign and seal of regeneration? If not all children of believers are regenerated at their baptism, then how should the church regard covenant children?

Regarding the question of whether or not the children of believers are regenerated there have been three main streams of thought on this issue among Reformed theologians. Some of the early Reformed theologians speak in a manner that at the very least implies sacramental efficacy. Beza writes, “It cannot be the case that those who have been sanctified by birth and have been separated from the children of unbelievers, do not have the seed and germ of faith.”¹⁰⁹ Another early theologian Amandus Polanus says that the infants of believers should be baptized “because they have been purchased by the blood of Christ, have been washed from their sins, and possess therefore by the work of the Holy Spirit the thing signified.... Because the Holy Spirit is promised to them, they possess the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁰ This position, which is becoming more popular today with the rise of Shepherdism and the Auburn Avenue heresy, whose followers are sacramentalists, suffers from serious problems. First, such talk of the efficacy of baptism explicitly contradicts the historical examples in Scripture of people who were circumcised or baptized that did not receive regeneration or the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, Ishmael and Esau are notable examples. In the New Testament, we find Simon Magus (Ac. 8:9-24), Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20), and Demas (2 Tim. 4:10). Second, whenever baptismal efficacy is asserted, in every case whether by Romanists, Lutherans or high church “Reformed” thinkers (e.g., the Federal Vision), one must alter various clear doctrines in order to account for the fact that many people who have been baptized have fallen away and are not saved. One must redefine the meaning of regeneration, union with Christ, election and the perseverance of the saints.

The second view, which (like the first view) is held by only a few Reformed theologians, is that although the children of believers have a right to the covenant sign they are to be regarded as non-regenerated unbelievers until they exercise faith in Christ. R. L. Dabney, for example, repeatedly refers to baptized children as the “unregenerate members” of the church.¹¹¹ He writes, “In a word, the end of this church authority, under which Providence has placed them [covenant children], is to constrain them to live Christian lives, in order that thereby they may come unto the Christian graces in the heart.... If these baptized unregenerate members are fully adult, and

¹⁰⁹ Theodore Beza, *Confessio Christianae Fidei*, IV, 48 as quoted in Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 946.

¹¹⁰ Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, VI. 55 as quoted in Reymond, 946.

¹¹¹ Robert Louis Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust [1878] 1985), 795-797.

passed from parental control then the church-session must apply their restraint directly to them. The mere continuance of their unregeneracy, unfitting them for communion, will of course be no suitable ground for judicial prosecution. For the church is already uttering her standing censure against this, in their exclusion from the Lord's table."¹¹² If these unregenerate church members cannot be controlled by the session and engage in gross immorality or scandalous sins, they are to be excommunicated by the session.¹¹³ The great southern theologian James Henley Thornwell even argues that baptized children should be regarded as of the world, carnal enemies of God and under church censure until they exercise saving faith in Christ. He writes,

But in heart and spirit they [that is, the baptized covenant infants] are of the world. In this aspect, how is she to treat them? Precisely as she treats all other impenitent and unbelieving men—she is to exercise the power of the keys, and shut them out from the communion of the saints. She is to debar them from all the privileges of the inner sanctuary. She is to exclude them from their inheritance until they show themselves meet to possess it. By her standing exclusion of them from the Lord's table, and of their children from the ordinance of Baptism, she utters a solemn protest against their continued impenitence, and acquits herself of all participation in their sins. It is a standing censure. Their spiritual condition is one that is common with the world. She deals with them, therefore, in this respect, as the Lord has directed her to deal with the world.... Is not their whole life a continued sin? Are not their very righteousnesses abominable before God? Repentance to them is not the abandonment of this or that vice; it is the renunciation of the carnal heart, which is enmity against God: and, until they are renewed in the spirit and temper of their minds, they can do nothing which the Church is at liberty to approve as done by them.... *As of the world* they are included in the universal sentence of exclusion, which bars the communion of saints against the impenitent and profane. They are sharers in its condemnation. They are put, as impenitent, upon the same footing with all others that are impenitent. As rejecters of Christ, they are kept aloof from the table of the Lord, and debarred from all the rights and privileges of the saints. Their impenitence determines the attitude of the Church towards them; for God has told her precisely what the attitude should be to all who obey not the Gospel. What more can be required? Are they not dealt with, in every respect, according to their quality?.... Is it not equally clear that their condition, as slaves, determines their treatment in all other respects, until they are prepared to pass the test which changes their status? Is not this precisely the state of things with the Church and its baptized believers? Are they not the slaves of sin and the Devil, existing in a free Commonwealth for the purpose of being educated to the liberty of the saints?...But, until they come to Him, it as distinctly teaches that they are to be dealt with as the Church deals with all the enemies of God.¹¹⁴

The position of these southern theologians (like the previous position) has serious problems. In the Scriptures the children of believers are never treated as little pagans who are the enemies of Christ. The children were saved from the angel of death in Egypt (Ex. 12:12). They were delivered from the armies of Pharaoh by the supernatural action of God (Ex. 14:21ff.). The heathen were drowned. They are called holy by Paul (1 Cor. 7:14). Zechariah refers to covenant parents and their children as the apple of God's eye (Zech. 2:8). Perhaps these southern theologians were influenced by the Baptists and Arminian revivalists who were "highly

¹¹² Ibid, 796.

¹¹³ Ibid, 796-797.

¹¹⁴ James Henley Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1986), 341-348.

successful” (humanly speaking) during the nineteenth century. They certainly have gone beyond the teachings of Calvin and the Westminster Standards on the issue of covenant children.

The third view, which one could call mainstream Reformed thought and is the position of the Westminster Standards, is that the infants of believers are to be regarded as federally Christians and federally holy *before* baptism (see Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God); that baptism is only “made effectual to the elect” (Larger Catechism 161); that baptism is a means of grace only when attended by the working of the Holy Spirit and when received by faith (Shorter Catechism 91); that the time of regeneration is not tied to the moment of the administration of baptism but can occur before, during or after baptism (Confession of Faith 38:6).¹¹⁵

The Reformed view is that while baptism is a sign and seal of regeneration, God only regenerates the elect (those for whom Christ died; those for whom union with Christ is possible); and, He sovereignly regenerates a person either before, during or after baptism according to His good pleasure. The Scripture is very clear on this matter. John the Baptist was regenerated *before* he was born or circumcised (Lk. 1:41). The Bible indicates that Jacob was very likely regenerated many years *after* his circumcision (Gen. 32:24ff.). Lydia, Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch were regenerated *before* they were baptized (Ac. 8:37); 10:47; 16:14). Paul was regenerated long *after* his circumcision and *before* his baptism (Ac. 9:6ff.). Abraham was regenerated long *before* his circumcision (Rom. 4:11). Further, there are many examples in Scripture of people who were circumcised as covenant children who were *never ever regenerated*. Therefore, attempts (whether by Romanists, Lutherans, Anglicans or high church Federal Vision “Presbyterians”) to connect regeneration to the moment of baptism, in all cases or

¹¹⁵ Apologists for the Auburn Avenue theology who argue for an objective power in the sacrament itself (e.g., Peter Leithart, Rich Lusk) or “a type of *ex opere operato* connection to the new covenant” (Doug Wilson) often appeal to the writings of John Calvin as support for their position. Their quotes of Calvin, however, are not taken in their overall context. Calvin’s position was virtually identical to the Westminster Standards. He argued that the *Word of God and faith must accompany the sacraments*. “You see how the sacraments require preaching to beget faith” (4:14:4). The sacraments *do not sanctify in every case*. “Augustine’s statement is just as true: there can be invisible sanctification without a visible sign and on the other hand a visible sign without true sanctification” (4:14:14). That without a work of the Holy Spirit the sacraments accomplish nothing. “But the sacraments properly fulfill their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in. If the Spirit be lacking, the sacraments can accomplish nothing more in our minds than the splendor of the sun shining upon blind eyes, or a voice sounding in deaf ears. Therefore, I make such a division between Spirit and sacraments that the power to act rests with the former, and the ministry alone is left to the latter—a ministry empty and trifling, apart from the action of the Spirit, but charged with great effect when the Spirit works within and manifests his power” (4:14:9). Calvin quotes Augustine to the effect that *the sacraments are efficacious only toward the elect*. “Hence, that distinction (if it be truly understood), often noted by the same Augustine, between a sacrament and the matter of the sacrament. For the distinction signifies not only that the figure and the truth are contained in the sacrament, but that they are not so linked that they cannot be separated; and that even in the union itself the matter must always be distinguished from the sign, that we may not transfer to the one what belongs to the other. He speaks of their separation when he writes, ‘In the elect alone the sacraments effect what they represent.’ Again, when he writes thus of the Jews: ‘Although the sacraments were common to all, grace was not common—which is the power of the sacraments. So also the laver of regeneration [Titus 3:5] is now common to all; but grace itself, by which the members of Christ are regenerated with their Head, is not common to all.’ Again, he says in another place of the Lord’s Supper: ‘We also receive visible food this day, but the sacrament is one thing, the power of the sacrament another’ (4:14:14). He teaches that God has not resigned His office to the outward symbols; “that the inward grace of the Spirit, as distinct from the outward ministry, ought to be considered and pondered separately” (4:14:17). (All quotations are from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ford Lewis Battles trans, John T. McNeil, ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960]).

even as the God-ordained normal course of events, have clearly contradicted Scripture. Baptism does not confer the Holy Spirit, but it is the sign and seal that the Holy Spirit *has been, is or will be* effected.

When people separate the necessity of faith from the efficacy of baptism they enter the realm of sacramentalism and mysticism. Charles Hodge's comments on the necessity of faith and his comparison between baptism and the Word as a means of grace can help us avoid high church mysticism. He writes,

Baptism, however, is not only a sign and seal; it is also a means of grace, because in it the blessings which it signifies are conveyed, and the promises of which it is the seal, are assured or fulfilled to those who are baptized, provided they believe. The Word of God is declared to be the wisdom and power of God to salvation; it is the means used by the Holy Spirit in conferring on men the benefits of redemption. Of course all who merely hear or read the Word of God are not saved; neither do all who receive the baptism of water experience the baptism of the Holy Ghost; but this is not inconsistent with the Word's being the means of salvation, or with baptism's being the washing of regeneration. Our Lord says we are sanctified by the truth. Paul says we put on Christ in baptism (Gal. iii. 27). When a man receives the Gospel with a true faith, he receives the blessings which the Gospel promises; when he receives baptism in the exercise of faith, he receives the benefits of which baptism is the sign and seal. Unless the recipient of this sacrament be insincere, baptism is an act of faith, it is an act which and by which he receives and appropriates the offered benefits of the redemption of Christ. And, therefore, to baptism may be properly attributed all that in the Scriptures is attributed to faith. Baptism washes away sin (Acts xxii. 16); it unites to Christ and makes us the sons of God (Gal. iii. 26, 27); we are therein buried with Christ (Rom. vi. 3); it is (according to one interpretation of Titus iii. 5) the washing of regeneration. But all this is said on the assumption that it is what it purports to be, an act of faith.¹¹⁶

Thus, while we must reject *ex opere operato* concepts of baptism (and their high church "Presbyterian" counterparts) we must also reject the idea that baptized children are unclean, Christ-hating pagans. We must trust in the promises of God and regard our children as Christians and treat them accordingly. Peter Martyr Vermigli writes, "We assume that the children of believers are holy; as long as in growing up they do not demonstrate themselves to be estranged from Christ. We do not exclude them from the church, but accept them as members, with the hope that they are partakers of the divine election and have the grace and Spirit of Christ, even as they are the seed of the saints. On that basis we baptize them."¹¹⁷ The children of believers are members of the visible church; live under the promises of the covenant; exist under the care and privileges of the church and the special spiritual nurture of their parents or parent. Their baptism and church membership distinguishes them from the world. Because of their relationship to their parents and their baptism and church membership, they are responsible to trust in Christ, serve Him, renounce this evil age and fight against the world, the flesh and the devil. If they reject Christ and instead love the world they will receive greater judgment than children who were never baptized; who never had the privilege of Christian parents and church membership.

¹¹⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3:589. Francis Turretin concurs: "For the efficacy of a sacrament faith is required, devotion and an internal motion of the mind, both because the Scriptures expressly assert it (Mk. 16:16; 1 Cor. 11:27; Ac. 2:38) and because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6), and because the promise (which is continued in the sacrament) and faith are correlated...." (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997], 3:365.

¹¹⁷Peter Martyr Vermigli *Loci communes* as quoted in Robert L. Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 946.

The position of the Westminster Standards or what we have called mainstream Reformed thought not only best comports with the testimony of Scripture but also is perfectly in line with Christian experience. Anyone who has a Reformed church with a good number of Reformed families knows that many covenant children cannot point to a time when they did not believe in Jesus or to a moment when they had a conversion experience. In other words their whole conscious life is a life of trust in God's Word and the Savior. Whenever they came into contact with the truth they immediately loved it and embraced it. There are other children, however, who did not have any interest in spiritual things until later in life. These people (although raised in the covenant) can point to a time when they began to have a saving interest in Christ. Sadly, there are others who never really believed in Jesus, who as soon as they were able left the visible church to indulge themselves in a love of the world, in sinful pleasures and materialistic vanities. Such people were in the covenant externally and the visible church; but, their baptism was never efficacious. They were never regenerated, saved, forgiven or made members of the invisible church. As Paul says, (Rom. 9:18), the elect are saved and the rest were hardened. Unfortunately, there are usually some Esaus in the visible church.

Some Differences between Circumcision and Baptism

Although the essential meaning of baptism and circumcision is the same there are some important differences that need to be noted.

(1) Circumcision is an ordinance that involves the shedding of blood and pain while baptism only involves the sprinkling with water. Also, circumcision had to occur on the eighth day while baptism can occur at any reasonable time in the child's infancy. The bloody aspect of circumcision and the eighth day are ceremonial aspects of the ordinance that pointed to the future Messiah, the person and work of Christ. "The Old Testament sacraments pointed forward to Christ and were the seals of grace that still had to be merited while those of the New Testament point back to Christ and His completed sacrifice of redemption."¹¹⁸ Circumcision occurred on the eighth day (or the first day of the second week of the newborn baby's life) because the resurrection of Christ (which is the beginning of the new creation or regeneration) also takes place on the eighth day (the first day of the week). The eighth day was the day of dedication of the firstborn son (Ex. 22:29-30). Jesus is the first born or firstfruits of all who are regenerated and believe (1 Cor. 15:20; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 12:23). The eighth day (or the first day) was the day of cleansing from defilement (Lev. 14:10; 15:14, 29). Circumcision on the eighth day points to covenant members' union with Christ in His resurrection on the eighth day and all the benefits that flow from that union (cleansing from sin, regeneration, definitive sanctification, etc.) A secondary reason is physiological. A number of scholars note that on or after the eighth day the blood coagulates better and the procedure is much safer.

(2) Another obvious difference is that circumcision was only applied to males while baptism is to be applied to both males and females. The fact that only males received the sign should not be taken to mean that under the old dispensation the female children of believers did not receive promised blessings of the covenant, for they certainly did. The Bible does not give us specific reasons for this difference in the administrations. Therefore, the best one can do is to attempt to form some reasons based on logical inference from Scripture. First, the seed of Abraham (the Messiah) was to be his (Abraham's) direct descendant. Thus, the circumcision of

¹¹⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 619.

the male organ pointed to this fact. Once the Messiah was born, blood lines and genealogies were no longer of any importance. Second, it may also have reminded the people of the fact that sin and depravity passes from one generation to another. Thus, the ordinance once again pointed to the Messiah to come—the great deliverer from sin and death. Third, in the old dispensation one had to join himself to national Israel to become a member of the church. One had to leave behind his own unique tribe or nationality and become an Israelite. Thus, circumcision was fleshly. Fourth, in the old dispensation the sign had to be bloody and flesh had to be removed to symbolize the removal of the filth of the flesh in regeneration. The only unnecessary flesh, easily removed from the human body in God’s providence, is found on the male sexual organ.

With the coming of Christ genealogies and ceremonies involving blood are abolished and are no longer necessary. Therefore, in the new covenant era the bloodless sign is as easily applied to females as well as males. “Is it not one of the glories of the New Testament that there is now in Christ Jesus no longer male nor female, just as there is no longer Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, barbarian nor Scythian?”¹¹⁹

(3) There was a national aspect of circumcision that does not apply to baptism. When a person was circumcised in the old dispensation, they were not only joining the church but a particular nation with geographical boundaries, a temple, a king or political leadership, civil laws, specific tribes and a centralized cultus and priesthood. With the coming of Christ, Israel’s special status as a nation has been put away and thus baptism means entry into the church of Christ alone which is a trans-national organization. Baptism, which applies to all nations (Mt. 28:19), comports better with the extension of grace in the new covenant and the greater privileges of this new era. (The idea that this change somehow eliminates the covenant sign for infants is dealt with above).

Responsibilities That Accompany Baptism

The doctrine of infant baptism must not be held in isolation from the responsibilities that accompany this practice. Baptism carries with it certain obligations and duties on the part of Christian parents and the church as a whole.

Since children are members of the visible church and part of the covenant community, parents must raise their children up to believe in Christ, to obey His law and be faithful to God’s covenant. People who have their children baptized because of tradition and do not raise their children in the Christian faith are guilty of mocking God’s ordinance, taking the name of God in vain and treating baptism as a magic superstition. Baptism is the starting point of Christian discipleship (Mt. 28:19-20). Consequently, the practice of Reformed churches is for parents to make a vow before God (at the baptism of their child) to bring up their son or daughter in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). It is important to realize that the doctrine of covenant headship and the wonderful promises of God related to the children of believers all presuppose that the children of believers do not automatically become faithful Christians; that parents have a sobering responsibility to live the faith before their children and diligently teach their children the whole counsel of God. When parents are bad examples and neglect family worship; attend a mediocre church; miss public worship for frivolous reasons; send their children to state schools (i.e., public schools) which are secular humanistic indoctrination centers; and let

¹¹⁹ John Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 76.

their children watch hours of heathen trash of television every night, they should not be surprised when their children reject the faith.

Infant baptism must be rooted in the covenant faithfulness on the part of the parents. Believing parents are commanded to observe the law (Dt. 6:1), fear the Lord (6:2), keep all of God's statutes (6:2) and be careful to observe them (6:3). Baptized children need to grow up in explicitly Christian homes where Christ is first in all things. Parents are to love God with all their hearts (6:5) and must diligently learn God's Word and place it in their hearts (6:6). They in turn are to pass their total devotion to God to their covenant children. "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them" (Ps 103:17-18). Every time the parents in a church observe a baptism it ought to remind them of their solemn duty to their children before God.

We need to understand that the minds of young children are very malleable with regard to learning good or the ways of evil. God has chosen the agency of parenthood to convey the blessings of Christ to covenant children. God blesses the children of faithful parents because: a) He promises to do so, and b) Faithful parents are the normal means by which children are taught the "sum of saving knowledge." Christian parents must exhibit the truth of the gospel before the eyes of their children every day. They must discipline their children to follow the true Reformed religion. "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell" (Pr. 23:13-14). "Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction" (Pr. 19:18). The phrase "while there is hope" implies that if diligent discipline is not applied to children by their parents there will come a time (from a human perspective) when the child or young adult is beyond hope. The God-given opportunity to shape the child's character in a biblical manner has forever been lost. Such parents were unfaithful to the vows they took during the baptism of their child. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Pr. 22:6).

The baptism of children is an ordinance with important parental responsibilities. Baptized children still have sinful natures and thus must be diligently taught, catechized and disciplined to fear and love the Lord. The training of these baptized children is necessary to obey God's promises; for covenant continuity between generations and godly dominion over creation (the cultural mandate). Discipline and instruction are the ordinary means used by the Holy Spirit to cause devotion to God in covenant children. A biblical emphasis on parental obligations helps us avoid the empty ritualism of sacramentalist churches (e.g., "christening" without biblical follow-up and nurture) and the atomistic individualism of Baptist evangelical churches (where children usually go to public schools and are exposed to religion in Sunday school classrooms for one hour a week).

The church as a whole also has responsibilities toward baptized children and their parents. The elders are to provide leadership and training so that parents have the tools necessary to raise up a godly seed. One of the main reasons that elders engage in family visitations is to inquire about the progress of covenant children. If there are problems, the elders can offer counsel and help. If there is serious neglect, admonitions and even discipline is in order if parents obstinately refuse to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The pastor, elders, and all church members are to pray for covenant children and are to encourage them and the parents to fulfill their vows. Paul instructed older women who have a lot of sanctified experience to teach young women "to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands" (Tit. 2:4-5). The church's future is

dependent on our precious covenant children. We must not neglect our responsibilities to these little members of the covenant.

Chapter 8: The Lord's Supper

The other sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ is the Lord's supper. By the distributing and reception of broken bread and poured out wine the person and work of Christ is declared, remembered and sealed to believers. While baptism is the initiatory rite that begins discipleship in the visible church and points primarily to the work of the Spirit in regeneration and cleansing, the Lord's supper is the continuing rite; that is, a means of continuing sanctification in the body of Christ.

The Institution of the Sacrament

The institution of the holy supper is described in the synoptic gospels (Mk. 14:22-25; Mt. 26:26-29; Lk. 22:17-20) as well as 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. At a certain point in the Passover meal with His disciples (probably near the end of the meal) our Lord replaced the old bloody symbol which was fitting for the old economy with the bloodless symbol of bread and wine. Both Mark and Matthew say "as they were eating." All four accounts of the first supper say that Jesus "took bread." (The word bread [*artos*] refers to a loaf of leavened or unleavened bread. At the Passover meal a thin sheet of unleavened bread was used.) After the Lord picked up the bread He gave thanks. ("Like 1 Corinthians 11:24 Luke used 'thanks' [*eucharistēsas*], from which we get *Eucharist*, rather than 'thanks' [*eulogēsas*] or 'bless' as in Mark 14:22 and Matt. 26:26. There is little difference in meaning between these two Greek terms"¹²⁰). Then, He began breaking the bread into pieces. "The *breaking* of the bread to which reference is made in all four accounts, must be considered as belonging to the very essence of the sacrament."¹²¹ According to the Jewish Paschal tradition, the family-head "broke for each person present a piece and gave it to him, the bread passing from hand to hand until it reached all the guests. The distribution normally took place in silence."¹²²

After our Lord broke the bread and gave it to the disciples he said "take, eat; this is my body" (Mk. 14:22; Mt. 26:26; Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24) "which is given for you" (Lk. 22:19). The verb "is" (*estin*) mean "it signifies" rather than "it is identical with." The bread is a symbol of Jesus' body (*soma*) which was about to be sacrificed on the cross. After the bread was disturbed Christ said "do this in remembrance of Me" (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). The verb (*poieite*, present active imperative) indicates that this sacrament was to *continually* be celebrated. It is a perpetual New Testament ordinance. "This do, i.e., 'Do what I have just done; take bread, consecrate it, break it, distribute and eat it.'"¹²³ The phrase "in remembrance of Me" indicates that one of the main purposes of the Lord's supper is to remember what Jesus has done in our behalf. When we participate in the holy supper we meditate on what the Mediator has accomplished and profess our faith in Him as the sacrifice for our sins.

Then the Savior took a cup (This cup contained "the fruit of the vine" [Mt. 26:29] which according to Jewish tradition would have been red wine), gave thanks (in the same manner as He

¹²⁰ Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 542.

¹²¹ William Hendriken, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 909.

¹²² William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 505-506.

¹²³ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2nd Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857, 59] 1958, 59), 1:226.

had done over the bread) and passed the cup to His disciples saying: “This is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many” (Mk. 14:24), “unto remission of sins” (Mt. 26:28); “This cup is the new covenant in my blood (Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25), which is shed for you” (Lk. 22:20). “The language ‘blood of the covenant’ is an allusion to Exod. 24:8, where blood, designated by this exact term, was sprinkled over the people to ratify the covenant. To this phrase Jesus added a direct allusion to Isa. 53:12, where the Lord’s Servant ‘poured out his soul to death’ and thereby ‘bore sin for many.’”¹²⁴ Luke and Paul make it very clear that Christ’s shed blood or sacrificial death inaugurates, ratifies, and secures all the blessings of the new covenant. “This covenant is called *new* in reference to the Mosaic covenant. The latter was ratified by the blood of animals; the new, by the blood of the eternal Son of God.”¹²⁵ Only Paul’s account adds the sentence, “This do [present active imperative], as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor. 11:25). Before the words of explanation, Matthew’s account reads, “Drink from it, all of you” (26:27) while Mark notes, “they all drank from it.” Apparently one cup was passed from apostle to apostle. One cup per table (a real cup, not a plastic thimble; a cup of real red wine not Welch’s grape juice) was the practice of the original Presbyterians.

The institution of the holy supper sets forth an ordinance which is very simple, yet which has over time resulted in a number of different theories regarding this rite. While everyone except for a few radical modernists would acknowledge that Jesus Himself established the holy supper and that communion is a perpetual ordinance in the church; there is wide divergence over the meaning of the Lord’s supper, in particular the nature of the presence of Christ at or in the meal. Therefore, as our study proceeds we need to carefully study and understand the meaning of this sacrament.

The Names of the Holy Supper

There are various names attached to this special meal by Scripture and the post-apostolic church. These names shed light on the nature of the rite. (1) Paul refers to this ordinance as the “Lord’s supper” in 1 Corinthians 11:20. It is called a *supper* because it was first instituted immediately after the evening Passover meal. It replaced the paschal supper. Because the ordinance was established in the evening after supper and thus became “the Lord’s supper,” some Christians have argued that communion must only be celebrated in the evening at or around the time a supper would take place. Although the holy supper was established in the evening, both the post-apostolic and Reformed churches did not regard the time of the rite as essential to the meaning or practice of the ordinance. Some churches have communion at an evening service, while most have it in the morning. The exact time of this ordinance is circumstantial to its practice.

(2) Luke refers to communion as “the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42, 20:7, 46; cf. 1 Cor. 10:16). There has been some debate over whether or not the phrase “the breaking of bread” always refers to communion or simply refers to a common meal and not communion at all. This discussion has arisen because ancient Greeks and Jews would often describe getting together with people to eat a meal as a coming together “to break bread.” Even though this phrase “the breaking of bread” was a common designation for a regular meal, it is likely that Luke was referring to communion and not simply a meal or love feast. Turretin writes, “That not common

¹²⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 554-555.

¹²⁵ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 1:227.

but sacred and eucharistical bread is thus denoted appears both from the Syrian interpreter (who translates it in ‘the breaking of the Eucharist’) and from a comparison with Acts 20:7, where the disciples are said to have come together ‘to break bread’ (*tous klasai arton*) (i.e., to the celebration of the Lord’s supper). It is so called from the rite of Christ, who ‘broke bread...’¹²⁶

(3) Paul refers to the Lord’s supper as the “table of the Lord” in 1 Corinthians 10:21, “you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and the table of demons.” It is referred to as the table of the Lord because the bread and wine were placed on a table; and, it “is the table at which the Lord presides, and at which his people are guests.”¹²⁷ Paul’s point in this passage is that it is totally immoral and inconsistent for believers to commune with Christ the Savior and Lord and His holy people at communion and then commune with the devil’s followers at their special feasts. “The basis of Paul’s prohibition is twofold: (1.) His understanding of the sacred meal as ‘fellowship,’ as the unique sharing of believers in the worship of the deity, who was also considered to be present. (2.) His understanding, based on the OT, of idolatry as a locus of the demonic.”¹²⁸

(4) The church fathers called the holy supper “communion” (*koinonia*) from Paul’s explanation of the supper in 1 Corinthians 10:16, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the *communion* of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the *communion* of the body of Christ?” This is a common designation in our own day. The word communion is fitting, for the supper signifies and seals our union with Jesus in His death and resurrection and our communion with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. At the table God’s people have an intimate spiritual fellowship with each other that does not belong to the world—to those outside the wedding feast of the Lamb.

(5) The early church also called the holy supper “the Eucharist,” from the Greek word *eucharistesa* in 1 Corinthians 11:24, “when he *had given thanks*.” The holy supper is a time when we bless God (1 Cor. 10:16) and give Him thanks for the communion we have with our Lord’s sacrificial death and all the spiritual graces that flow from that redemptive work. It is also a time that we thank God for the sweet fellowship that we have with the people of God.

(f) Some of the early fathers referred to the holy supper as a “love feast” because in the apostolic church the Lord’s supper was connected with or immediately followed a fellowship meal of believers. This assertion can be deduced to a certain extent by 1 Corinthians 11:20 ff., in which Paul rebukes certain abuses which were connected to the Lord’s supper. The Apostle’s description of these abuses is very brief. Some were eating their meals ahead of others, some were getting drunk and some were left without adequate food. Apparently some rich believers were eating abundant amounts of food in the presence of poor believers (possibly slaves and poor freemen) and were not sharing with their needy brethren. This lack of charity, compassion and unity the apostle condemns with a stinging rebuke. Paul says that those people who are guilty of this infraction are despising the church—the body of Christ. Such people are not discerning the body. His solution is: “When you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home” (1 Cor. 11:33). Some commentators (e.g., Charles Hodge, Leon Morris) believe that Paul is eliminating the love feast (e.g., “satisfy your hunger at home”) and exhorting the Corinthians to come together *only* to celebrate the Lord’s supper. Other scholars (e.g., Godet, Gordon Clark) believe that the Corinthians are exhorted to wait for each other to celebrate the love feast and the holy supper together in unison. “The apostle

¹²⁶ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:423.

¹²⁷ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 1:195.

¹²⁸ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 463.

wished, that all seating themselves to eat together, the supper of each may become that of his neighbours; thereby it is [by] that the feast becomes a true agape.”¹²⁹ If one holds this interpretation the exhortation to eat at home if one is hungry would have the sense of, “If you are so hungry that you can’t wait to eat with your brothers then eat some food at home before hand so that you can wait.” “Paul wishes all to eat in common, so that the rich may assist the poor with their abundance.”¹³⁰

Turretin notes that the love feast eventually was discontinued. The Council of Carthage (A.D. 417 or 418) decreed that “the sacraments of the altar should be celebrated only by fasting men” (Canon 29).¹³¹ The Council of Laodicea declares; “It is not right to hold love feasts so-called in the basilicas or churches, nor to eat in the house of God.”¹³² These prohibitions are very likely rooted in unbiblical superstitious views regarding the Lord’s supper and the church building as a sacred site common at that time. The biblical connection of a love-feast that is apparently closely connected with the holy supper raises a few important questions. Should the Reformed churches of today have a love feast in connection with the Lord’s supper? Does Scripture require the love feast during public worship? While it is likely that at one time fellowship meals preceded the Lord’s supper, there is no indication in the Bible that the love feast is necessary or required. This conclusion is based on the following observations. The Lord’s supper is a means of grace that is commanded by Christ while the love feast is not. Times of fellowship and mutual love are required by Scripture. However, fellowship in the sense of a meal, feast, picnic, party or whatever can take many forms and can occur at many different times or places.

The Meaning and Purpose of the Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s supper was instituted by Christ to serve a number of purposes. These purposes are intimately connected to the holy supper’s meaning. The important aspects of communion are as follows.

(1) There is a commemoration of the sacrificial death of Jesus. This commemoration involves a number of things. First, there is a remembrance of what our Savior did: “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Lk. 22:19b; 1 Cor. 11:24, 25). The observation of the elements, the breaking of the bread, the cup of wine, the words of explanation, and the consumption of the elements focus our attention upon Christ crucified. “In this Ordinance, the Bread broken represents the *covenant sacrifice* of the Lamb of God; the Cup represents the covenant itself sealed.”¹³³ The wine is separate from the bread indicating that our Lord’s blood was poured out by sacrifice. The Lord’s supper serves a similar purpose to the Passover where the children of Israel were to commemorate and remember their miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt by God (Ex. 12:11-14; 24-27; 13:8-10; Dt. 16:1-8). Both the Passover and the holy supper involve a *corporate* remembrance. Both look back to real redemptive historical events. The Passover, however, is a type while Jesus is the antitype, the fulfillment of all sacrificial and redemptive types. In the Lord’s supper we “celebrate with grateful minds the immense love of Christ, who did not refuse to suffer a dreadful death for us and to pour out his blood.... He

¹²⁹ Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1877] 1977), 599.

¹³⁰ Francis Turretin, 3:425.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ W. R. Gordon, *The Church of God and Her Sacraments*, 106.

wished to give the most appropriate symbol of this in the broken bread and the poured out wine; and not only broken and poured out, but distributed to us that even from this it might be evident that all this was designed and obtained for us.”¹³⁴ The Lord’s supper reminds us of the personal nature of Jesus’ redemptive work. Christ died for my own sins in particular. He personally loves me and cares for me so much that He invites me to come to His feast, to dine with Him and His people. This reality ought to strengthen our faith and encourage our hearts.

Second, this supper involves a proclamation. By this celebration the saints proclaim (*katangellete*, 1 Cor. 11:26) Jesus’ sacrificial death until he returns, “that is, they declare the good news of their salvation that makes them all one.”¹³⁵ “The Lord’s death is preached in the celebration of the Eucharist.”¹³⁶ “[T]he Lord’s supper is, and was designed to be, a proclamation of the death of Christ to continue until his second advent. Those who come to it, therefore, should come, not to satisfy hunger, nor for the gratification of social feelings, but for the definite purpose of bearing their testimony to the great fact of redemption, and to contribute their portion of influence to the preservation and propagation of that fact.”¹³⁷ “Paul...understands by the *katangellein announes*, the individual and collective proclamation of Christ’s love in His sacrifice, and of the glorious efficacy of this act. Each one confesses that he owes his salvation to this bloody death.”¹³⁸ Matthew Henry writes, “We declare his death to be our life, the spring of all our comforts and hopes. And we glory in such a declaration; we show forth his death, and spread it before God, as our accepted sacrifice and ransom. We set it in view of our own faith, for our comfort and quickening; and we own before the world, by this very service, that we are the disciples of Christ, who trust in him alone for salvation and acceptance with God.”¹³⁹ Thus, we can see that neglecting this ordinance by the church or by individuals for whatever reason (whether a faulty interpretation of Scripture, a refusal to repent of sin, a purposeful neglect of the ordinance, a refusal to join the local church, etc.) is a serious violation of Scripture.

(2) The consumption of the bread and wine symbolizes our union with Christ and our participation in all the redemptive benefits of that union. Paul writes, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 10:16)? The word communion (*koinonia*) (from the verb *koinoneo*, “to partake of”) in this context refers to our participation in the body and blood of Christ by faith during the holy supper. This does not mean we literally eat or share in Jesus’ real flesh and blood but that by the Holy Spirit we are mystically united to the Savior in His suffering, death, burial and resurrection. A person who truly believes in Jesus, who has the Spirit of Christ within him (Jn. 6:56), who worthily partakes of the holy supper, communes with the Lord and His redemptive work by faith in a special way. The Lord’s supper is a true means of grace. It really gives spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. This point is stated beautifully in the Westminster Larger Catechism which reads: “As the body and blood of Christ are not corporally or carnally present in, with, or under the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper, and yet are spiritually present to the faith of the receiver, no less truly and really than the elements themselves are to their outward senses; so they that worthily communicate in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, do therein feed upon the body and blood of Christ, not after a corporal and

¹³⁴ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Eclectic Theology*,

¹³⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The Epistle to the Corinthians*, 554.

¹³⁶ Martin R. Vincent, *Word Studies In The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1887] 1946), 3:252.

¹³⁷ Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians*, 1:229.

¹³⁸ Frederic Louis Godet, *Community on First Corinthians*, 590.

¹³⁹ Matthew Henry, *Commentary in the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: McDonald, n. d.), 6:564.

carnal, but in a spiritual manner; yet truly and really, while by faith they receive and apply unto themselves Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death” (Answer to Question 170).

“[T]he virtues and effects of the sacrifice of the body of the Redeemer on the cross are made present and are actually conveyed in the sacrament to the worthy receiver by the power of the Holy Ghost, who uses the sacrament as his instrument according to his sovereign will.”¹⁴⁰ The spiritual nourishment that we need is both symbolized and truly received during our participation in the holy supper.

(3) The coming together as a body to eat the bread and drink the wine also symbolizes our unity, love and fellowship with other believers in the kingdom of Christ. “For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). “The design of the apostle is to show that everyone who comes to the Lord’s supper enters into communion with all other communicants. They form one body in virtue of their joint participation of Christ.”¹⁴¹ Paul is not teaching that Christians become that body when they partake of the holy supper, for earlier (1 Cor. 12:13) he says that all believers were baptized into one body by their baptism with the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Lord’s supper symbolizes and affirms what the Holy Spirit has already done as a consequence of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ. Our union with Christ in His suffering, death, burial and resurrection is what brings us together under a common Head and makes us members of the same body. The Lord’s supper symbolizes salvation and its effects both individually and corporately. Our growth in grace helps us live consistently with our unity in the Spirit. That is why not discerning the body (the local church and its members) during the love feast immediately prior to the holy supper was such a hypocritical farce in Paul’s eyes. The apostle’s strong rebuke (1 Cor. 11:22) presupposes this aspect of communion.

How is Christ Present in the Lord’s Supper?

Although the scriptural account and meaning of the Lord’s supper are somewhat simple, there are major differences of opinion between branches of professing Christendom regarding its nature; in particular the presence of Christ in the rite. During the history of the church, four major views have developed regarding the relation of Jesus’ presence to the bread and the wine of communion.

(1) As we noted earlier in our discussion of efficacy the Roman Catholic Church holds to transubstantiation, that is, the bread and wine *actually become* the body and blood of the Savior. When the priest utters the words “*hoc est enim corpus meum*” (“this is my body”) while elevating the host (the round white wafer) during the Mass, a miracle occurs and the bread and wine are transformed into the real flesh and blood of God’s Son. This unbiblical and absurd doctrine has roots that go all the way back to some of the early church fathers. Berkhof writes,

While some of the early Church Fathers (Origen, Basil, Gregory of Nazianze) retained the symbolic or spiritual conception of the sacrament, others (Cyril, Gregory of Nyssa, Chrysostom) held that the flesh and blood of Christ were in some way combined with the bread and wine in the sacrament. Augustine retarded the realistic development of the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper for a long time. While he did speak of the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ, he distinguished between the sign and the thing signified, and did not believe in a change of substance.

¹⁴⁰ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1869] 1958), 363.

¹⁴¹ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 1:190.

He denied that the wicked, though receiving the elements, also received the body, and stressed the commemorative aspect of the Lord's Supper. During the Middle Ages the Augustinian view was gradually transplanted by the doctrine of transubstantiation. As early as 818 A.D. Paschasius Radbertus already formally proposed this doctrine, but met with strong opposition on the part of Rabanus Maurus and Ratramnus. In the eleventh century a furious controversy again broke out on the subject between Berenger of Tours and Lafranc. The latter made the crass statement that "the very body of Christ was truly held in the priest's hands, broken and chewed by the teeth of the faithful." This view was finally defined by Hildebert of Tours (1134), and designated as the doctrine of transubstantiation. It was formally adopted by the fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Many questions connected with this doctrine were debated by the Scholastics, such as those respecting the duration of the change of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the manner of Christ's presence in both elements, the relation of substance and accidents, the adoration of the host, and so on. The final formulation of the doctrine was given by the Council of Trent, and is recorded in *Session XIII* of its *Decrees and Canons*. Eight Chapters and eleven Canons are devoted to it.¹⁴²

The Romanist doctrine of transubstantiation must be rejected as unscriptural for the following reasons.

a) When Jesus instituted the Lord's supper and said to the disciples "This is My body," He was still standing right there in front of them. How (we ask) could His human body which was a real, finite, flesh, blood and bones body be in two separate places at the same time? Keep in mind that Romanists are not saying that the host is *part* of the Savior but that "Christ is whole and entire under each species."¹⁴³ Obviously, our Lord's reference to His body and blood was symbolic. Examples of Christ using figurative and symbolic speech are numerous: He referred to Himself as a door (Jn. 10:4), a temple (Jn. 2:19), a vine (Jn. 15:5), a shepherd (Jn. 10:4), and bread (Jn. 6:35). He referred to the Holy Spirit as water (Jn. 4:14). When He instituted the Lord's supper he called the cup the new covenant (1 Cor. 11:25).

b) The doctrine of transubstantiation is dependent upon a repudiation of the teaching of Scripture regarding the true humanity of Jesus. Every week the Roman Catholic Mass is conducted in hundreds of thousands of different locations all over the earth. Is the human body of our Lord at the right hand of God in one location as Scripture teaches, or is it in hundreds of thousands of different church services at the same time? Further, the hosts consumed all over the earth would fill a cargo ship. With relation to space and expanse this is beyond the limits of a real human body.

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was (and forever remains) fully God and fully man, two distinct natures in one person; yet these two natures are not mixed or confused in any way. In other words the human nature of our Lord does not take upon itself any divine attributes such as omnipresence or omnipotence. This view, set forth by the church at the Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451, is accepted by Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. Yet transubstantiation attributes divine attributes to Christ's human nature.¹⁴⁴ His human body, His flesh and blood cannot be all over the world in the Eucharist at the same time without having the divine attribute of omnipresence. Therefore, the Bible teaches that Jesus is spiritually present—not physically present—in the holy supper.

¹⁴² L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, 41), 645.

¹⁴³ Ludwig Orr, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 397; as quoted in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 992.

¹⁴⁴ The mixture of the divine and human natures of Christ into one nature (Apollinarianism) was condemned by Pope Damasus. A church council at Rome (377), synods at Alexandria (378) and Antioch (379), and a council at Constantinople (381), as well as decrees issued in 383, 384 and 388, all condemned Apollinarianism as a heresy. See J. N. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 289-297.

c) The doctrine of transubstantiation ignores the role of faith in appropriating Christ and His benefits. Nowhere does the Bible teach that we are sanctified by cannibalism. In fact God's law forbids the consumption of blood (see Lev. 3:17; 7:26; 17:10, 12; Ac. 15:20). Eating literal flesh and drinking literal blood accomplishes nothing other than physical nourishment. What Christians need is a spiritual union with the Savior, spiritual nourishment. Believers are sanctified by the Holy Spirit as He applies the outward means to the heart, which receives what the sensible signs signify by faith. Transubstantiation is mystical, magical, pagan nonsense.

d) Transubstantiation is disproved by parallel passages regarding the holy supper that can only have a figurative sense. Note how Paul describes the sacrament in 1 Corinthians 10:16, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" Turretin writes, "Here Paul (explaining Christ's words) for the body and blood of Christ substitutes the communion (*koinonian*) of both. This evidently cannot be understood properly and literally (*kata to rheton*), but only figuratively and sacramentally. Then by parity (as the victims are called the communion of the altar, v. 18), they who eat of the sacrifices are said to be communicants (*koinonoi*) or partakers of the altar; and the sacrifices to idols are called the communion of devils, and those who eat things sacrificed to idols are said to have fellowship (*koinonoi*) with devils (vv. 20, 21), not otherwise than tropically and sacramentally, to signify the mystical fellowship of those eating the victims and idol sacrifices with the altar and devils. Therefore in no other sense is the bread and cup called the communion of the body and blood of Christ."¹⁴⁵

e) Transubstantiation is disproved by the analogy of Scripture which explicitly refutes the concept of the mass wherein Jesus is sacrificed again and again. According to the Roman Catholic Church, in the mass a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice to God is offered.¹⁴⁶ That sacrifice is identical with the cross inasmuch as Christ is both priest and victim. The only difference lies in the manner of offering, which is bloody upon the cross and bloodless on the altar.¹⁴⁷

The Bible teaches that Christ's sacrifice was perfect, complete, final—a one-time event never to be repeated. The Savior "does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this *He did once for all* when He offered up Himself" (Heb. 7:27). "He entered the Most Holy Place *once for all*, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12); "not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another. He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, *once* at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself...so Christ was offered *once* to bear the sins of many" (Heb. 9:25-28). "But this Man, after He had offered *one sacrifice for sins forever*, sat down at the right hand of God.... For *by one offering* He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:12, 14). "Christ, having been raised from the dead, *dies no more*.... He died to sin *once for all*" (Rom. 6:9, 10).

The Romanist doctrine of transubstantiation is an attack at the very heart of biblical Christianity, the sufficiency of the atoning death of Jesus. The Papal church denies this crucial

¹⁴⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:474.

¹⁴⁶ A propitiatory sacrifice satisfies the justice of God and removes the penalty for sin.

¹⁴⁷ "If anyone says that in the mass a true real sacrifice is not offered to God...let him be anathema" (Council of Trent, 22nd sess. can. 1). "If anyone says that...Christ...did not ordain that...other priests should offer His own body and blood, let him be anathema" (can. 2). "If anyone says that the sacrifice of the mass is not a propitiatory [sacrifice]...let him be anathema" (can. 3). Cf. the New York Catechism and the Creed of the Pope Pius IV.

doctrine by supposedly re-sacrificing Christ every day in the ritual of the mass. The Roman Catholic mass (which is the central pillar of their system of salvation) is totally unbiblical and sinful for it is a denial of the efficacy of the Savior's suffering on the cross and death. Further, the Romanist practice of worshipping the host as God even though it is nothing more than a cracker is rank idolatry.

(2) The Lutheran view of the Lord's supper is called consubstantiation. "Luther rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation and substituted for it the related doctrine of consubstantiation. According to him the bread and wine remain what they are, but there is in the Lord's supper nevertheless a mysterious and miraculous real presence of the whole person of Christ, body and blood, in, under, and along with, the elements."¹⁴⁸ With Romanists, Lutherans teach a real local presence of Jesus in communion. Therefore, when a believer eats the bread and drinks the wine he is not merely appropriating Christ by faith but is eating the Lord's body and blood "with the bodily mouth."¹⁴⁹ Although the Lutheran view avoids the Romanist idea that the bread and wine appear as bread and wine even though they have been magically changed in every molecule, it nevertheless is absurd and unbiblical for the following reasons.

a) The most serious theological charge against it is that it destroys the doctrine of the incarnation. The Lutheran view is dependent on the idea that Jesus' human nature is present everywhere ("ubiquitous"). But according to Scripture, our Lord's human nature was, and remains, a true human nature and thus is finite; and (as noted above) Christ ascended to heaven and sits at God's right hand (Jn. 16:28; 17:11; Ac. 1:0-11). "In all things He had to be made like His brethren...to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

b) It is a doctrine made up to support a human theory with absolutely no support from Scripture whatsoever. "[T]heologians ever since Luther's time have suspected that he taught the ubiquity of Christ's human nature, not because it is found anywhere in Scripture, but because he needed it to explain how the view of consubstantiation could be true."¹⁵⁰

c) It contradicts the words of institution. Jesus said, "This is My body" (Lk. 22:19). Grammatically this statement can only mean two things: This *signifies or represents* My body; or, this is My literal body. The meaning is determined by the context and other related portions of Scripture. It cannot mean "this accompanies my body." The Romanist position (while thoroughly unbiblical) is more consistent exegetically.

d) Like the Romanist doctrine, it views the holy supper as a means of sanctification in a physical, carnal manner which is totally inconsistent with the testimony of Scripture. The efficacy derived from our union with Christ is spiritual. It is effected by the Holy Spirit and appropriated by faith not by the physical teeth, stomach and intestines.

(3) Another view of the holy supper, which has been attributed to the reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), is that the elements are symbolic representations of Christ's redemptive work and nothing more. In other words they are bare representations by which believers remember Jesus' death and commemorate His work. They are memorials, and not a true means of grace. Mathison writes, "Zwingli completely rejected the idea of the sacraments as means of grace. For Zwingli, 'the sacraments merely testify in public that grace *has been* received.' In other words, a sacrament is a sign of *past* grace, not of *present* grace. The supper is a memorial, not a means. Zwingli's view of the presence of Christ in the Supper is also important. Zwingli's idea, as Gerrish explains it, 'that the true Body of Christ is present to faith (*fidei contemplatione*)

¹⁴⁸ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 652.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 994.

means that while the worshipers thank God for His benefits in His Son, everything Christ did in the flesh becomes as *if* present to them.’ Zwingli also put heavy emphasis on the idea that the Supper is ‘a public confession which identifies a man with the Christian community.’¹⁵¹ There is evidence that Zwingli to a certain degree changed his views on the holy supper to accept a spiritual presence. Bromley writes, “Zwingli had no intention of denying a spiritual presence [of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper].... This presence certainly means that the communion is more than a ‘bare’ sign, at any rate to the believing recipient... For in the sacrament we have to do not merely with the elements but with the spiritual presence of Christ himself and the sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit.... Zwingli does not dispute that Christ is truly present in the Supper. What he disputes is that he is substantially present, present in the substance of his flesh and blood, present after his human nature...he had no wish to deny the presence of Christ altogether, and the reality of the spiritual presence of Christ involves something far more than a bare memorialism. The Supper cannot be merely a commemorative rite when the one commemorated is himself present and active amongst those who keep the feast.”¹⁵²

The idea that the Lord’s supper is a bare symbol, a memorial only, is common among evangelicals and Baptists. The memorial view is likely an overreaction to the abuses of Romanism and Lutheranism. Erickson writes, “We need to be particularly careful to avoid the negativism which has sometimes characterized this view that the Lord’s Supper is essentially a memorial. Out of a zeal to avoid the conception that Jesus is present in some sort of magical way, certain Baptists among others have sometimes gone to extremes as to give the impression that the one place where Jesus most assuredly is not to be found is the Lord’s Supper. This is what one Baptist leader termed ‘the doctrine of the real absence’ of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵³

(4) As we examine the Reformed position on the holy supper it is important to acknowledge and understand that the doctrine of the Lord’s supper held by John Calvin (1509-1564), Martin Bucer (1491-1551), Peter Martyr Vermigli (1500-1562), Theodore Beza (1519-1605) and the early sixteenth century confessions (First Base, 1534; First Helvetic 1536, The Gallican, 1559; The Scots, 1560; The Belgic, 1561) was modified by later Reformed theologians and confessions to a position somewhere between Calvin and the mature Zwingli. Therefore, in order to fully understand the Reformed teaching on this topic and our own creed (the Westminster Standards) we must examine the different Reformed positions and attempt to faithfully ascertain why certain changes were made.

The earlier Reformed view is best and most completely represented by the French reformer John Calvin. What separates Calvin from later Reformed positions is his concept of the spiritual presence. Although Calvin rejected transubstantiation and consubstantiation he did teach that the whole Christ, including His human flesh and blood is given in the holy supper. Calvin did *not* believe in a local or corporeal presence in the bread and wine. He did *not* believe that Jesus’ body had to leave heaven to be present in the Eucharist. But, rather, the Holy Spirit brings our own souls up to heaven, to Christ’s real presence to spiritually feast upon His whole

¹⁵¹ Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin’s Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 63.

¹⁵² Geoffrey W. Bromley, “Zwingli and Bullinger” in *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 24:179, 183; as quoted in Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 921, footnote 23.

¹⁵³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1122-1123.

person. Calvin scholar Ronald S. Wallace summarizes Calvin's doctrine of the Eucharist. He writes,

(i) *The body of Christ*, in which he wrought our redemption and apart from which we cannot be saved, in being communicated to us in the sacrament *remains*, throughout the participation, *in heaven*, beyond this world, *and retains all its human properties...*

(ii) *Communion with the body of Christ is effected through the descent of the Holy Spirit, by whom our souls are lifted up to heaven*, there to partake of the life transfused into us from the flesh of Christ...

(iii) Partaking of the flesh of Christ in the supper is thus a *heavenly action*, in which the flesh is *eaten in a spiritual manner...*

(iv) The presence of the body of Christ in the Supper, though it may be called a *real presence* and a *descent of Christ* by the Spirit, is nevertheless also a "*celestial mode of presence*" and leads to no localization of the body of Christ on earth, no inclusion of it in the elements, no attachment of it to the elements...¹⁵⁴

Gerish summarizes Calvin's view of the holy supper as follows:

1. The Lord's Supper is a divine gift. It is not merely the reminder of a gift.
2. The gift that is given is Christ himself. In addition, it is the whole Christ that is given.
3. The gift is given through signs, which are intimately connected with the reality that is signified and which guarantee the presence of the reality that is signified.
4. The gift is given by the Holy Spirit. When Calvin says that Christ is "spiritually present," he means that the body and blood of Christ are made present by the mysterious power of the Holy Spirit.
5. The gift is given to all who communicate, but those who receive the Supper without faith receive it to their condemnation.
6. The gift evokes gratitude, and this is the eucharist sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise.¹⁵⁵

Calvin's view of the Lord's supper is very difficult to understand and perhaps even incomprehensible. Many one-volume systematic theologies do not adequately convey his teaching on the eucharist because of over simplification and even misunderstanding. Some of the distinctives of his theory are as follows. a) When Calvin asserts a spiritual presence of Christ he does not merely mean that the Savior is present according to His divine nature or present in His Spirit but truly present according to both natures (human and divine). b) When Calvin speaks about eating the Messiah's body and drinking His blood, he is not simply saying that we are to look at His person and work by faith. He taught "that eating is a result of faith, not faith itself. In other words, faith is the instrument by which we truly eat and partake of the body and blood of Christ."¹⁵⁶ Calvin says we are partakers of His humanity, His flesh and blood. c) Calvin asserts that in the holy supper our souls or hearts are ascended or lifted up to Jesus in heaven. He also says that we partake of His flesh by the agency of the Holy Spirit. d) He teaches that we "are made partakers of the [real] substance of the flesh and blood of Christ,"¹⁵⁷ "that by the gift of the Spirit he transfuses into us the vivifying influence of his flesh,"¹⁵⁸ the "ascended Christ becomes one with us in the Supper."¹⁵⁹ What exactly Calvin means by these statements is difficult to

¹⁵⁴ Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburg: Oliver and Boyd, 1953), 203-210. As quoted in Keith A. Mathison, *Given For You*, 29.

¹⁵⁵ B. A. Gerrish, "John Calvin and the Reformed Doctrine of the Last Supper," in *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*, Vol. 10, *Calvin's Ecclesiology: Sacraments and Deacons*, ed. Gamble, 232 as quoted in Keith A. Mathisen, 47.

¹⁵⁶ Keith A. Mathison, 31.

¹⁵⁷ Calvin's Institutes, 4: 17; 7.

¹⁵⁸ John Calvin, *Second Defense of the Pious and Orthodox Faith*, 282. As quoted in Mathison, 33.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 148 (33).

understand. One thing is sure—he does not mean that the Savior’s flesh and blood is infused or literally merged into the believer in some way.

What then does Calvin mean? Is he saying that by faith and the work of the Spirit our union with Christ in His death and resurrection is strengthened in the holy supper? Is he saying this is necessary to assert a real physical presence (i.e., a metaphysical presence) in order to increase the sanctification we have through the mystical union? Of the major theologians, Dabney more clearly explains and critiques Calvin’s view. He writes, “His view seems to be, that not only the mediatorial Person, but especially the corporeal part thereof, has been established by the incarnation, as a sort of duct through which the inherent spiritual life of God, the fountain is transmitted to believers, through the mystical union. His arguments are, that the body of Christ is asserted to be our life, in places so numerous and emphatic (Jn. i:1, 14; vi:27, 33, 51-59; Eph. v:30; 1 Cor. vi:15; Eph. iv:16); that exegetical fidelity requires of us to understand by it more than a participation in spiritual indwelling and influences purchased for believers by His death; that the incomprehensibility of a spiritual, though true and literal, substantial conjunction of our souls with Christ’s flesh in heaven, should not lead us to reject the word of our God; and that faith cannot be the whole amount of the vital union of believers to Christ, inasmuch as it is said to be by faith. The union must be more than the means which constitutes it.”¹⁶⁰

Although it is important for Christians to understand the importance of the incarnation and the fact that our initial and progressive sanctification does indeed come from our union with Jesus in His life, death and resurrection; does the holy supper, as Calvin appears to assert, take us mystically beyond where the Word and faith can take us? Is there any biblical evidence that the eucharist gives a soul contact with the corporeal substance of His slain body and shed blood in heaven? There are a number of reasons why we must reject certain aspects of Calvin’s view of the supper. As we criticize certain of the views of the great reformer, keep in mind that we do so not because we are rationalists; or because our thought is rooted in enlightenment thinking but because we believe the reformer has gone beyond the teaching of Scripture.

(1) Our first criticism regards Calvin’s distinction between faith and eating as a result of faith. Calvin rejected the idea that eating and drinking were believing, that we feast on the Savior by faith and asserted that we really do partake of the body and blood of Christ. Yet although Calvin asserted this, he also insisted “that faith is the instrument by which we partake of the flesh

¹⁶⁰ R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 810. Robert L. Reymond succinctly notes the Reformed opposition to Calvin’s view. He writes, “While Reformed churches generally follow Calvin’s lead in his insistence that Christ is ‘really, but spiritually present’ to believers in the Lord’s Supper, not every Reformed theologian follows Calvin’s exposition in its every detail. For example, Charles Hodge refers to Calvin’s view as ‘peculiar,’ William Cunningham with less restraint charges that Calvin’s doctrine is ‘unsuccessful,’ ‘about as unintelligible as Luther’s consubstantiation’ and ‘perhaps the greatest blot in the history of Calvin’s labours as a public instructor,’ and Robert Lewis Dabney declares that it is ‘strange’ and ‘not only incomprehensible, but impossible.’

Cunningham makes his comments because of what he perceives to be Calvin’s ‘effort to bring out something like a real influence exerted by Christ’s human nature upon the souls of believers...an effort which, of course, was altogether unsuccessful and resulted only in what was about as unintelligible as Luther’s consubstantiation.’

Dabney writes that Calvin, in his desire to heal the rift between Lutherans and Zwinglians, taught that ‘the humanity, as well as the divinity of Christ, in a word, his whole person, is spiritually, yet really present, not to the bodily mouth, but to the souls of believers.’ He goes on to state that the Westminster Assembly, while not repudiating Calvin’s phraseology in a marked manner, did ‘modify all that was untenable and unscriptural about it.’” (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 961-962). Other notable theologians who modified Calvin’s peculiar view are Francis Turretin and John Dick.

and blood of Christ.... There is no ‘oral manducation’ of the body of Christ.”¹⁶¹ Calvin seems to be saying that the supper is objective, that the true or real body and blood is received while at the same time asserting that it is only received by faith. How we ask is faith needed if Jesus is objectively and actually present? This doesn’t make a lot of sense. How can the Savior be carnally present and spiritually present at the same time? It appears that Calvin’s attempts at finding an agreement between the Reformed and the Lutheran positions of the holy supper have led him into incomprehensible paradox. If we feast on Christ by faith spiritually we do not need physical proximity. Commenting on the Westminster Standards Dabney writes, “Note first: that they say believers receive and feed spiritually upon Christ crucified and the benefits of His death; not with Calvin, on His literal flesh and blood. Next, the presence which grounds this receiving, is only a presence to our faith, of Christ’s body and blood! Hence we construe the Confession we think fairly, to mean by the receiving and feeding, precisely the spiritual actings of faith in Christ as our Redeemer, and on His body slain, and blood poured out, as the steps of His atoning work; so that the thing which the soul actually embraces, is not the corporeal substance of His slain body and shed blood, but their Redeeming virtue.”¹⁶²

(2) Our second major objection regards the nature of our union with Christ and sanctification as it relates to Calvin’s insistence on a real physical presence (albeit in heaven). When Calvin teaches a real physical presence in his definition of a spiritual presence and argues that this real physical presence is necessary for sanctifying efficacy, he contradicts the teaching of Scripture on the union of Christ and places the Lord’s supper above the Word as a means of grace.

When a person is regenerated by the Holy Spirit and saved, he or she is united to Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, all true believers continue in a living organic relationship with the Savior (cf. Jn. 15:5). This mystical union “enables us to appropriate on our part what is given unto us in Christ, and to enter ever-increasingly into conscious enjoyment of the blessed union with Christ, which is the source of all our spiritual riches.”¹⁶³ Because of this union, Jesus is the source of our life, our sanctification and salvation in the broadest sense of the term. The union is organic (Jn. 15:5; 1 Cor. 6:15-19; Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:15, 16; 5:29, 30), vital (Gal. 4:19, 20; Rom. 8:10, 2 Cor. 13:50), personal (There is a true yet mystical bond with Christ, Jn. 14:20; 15:1-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17, 18) and mediated by the special work of the Holy Spirit. As part of His reward for His redemptive obedience the divine-human Mediator receives and pours out the Holy Spirit on His church, His people. “Through the Holy Spirit Christ now dwells in believers, unites them to Himself, and knits them together in a holy unity, 1 Cor. 6:17; 12:13; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 3:2, 3.”¹⁶⁴

The doctrine of the mystical union raises a number of questions. If believers are united to Christ at the very moment of the start of their spiritual life and this vital union continues throughout the Christian life, is this union dependent upon or based on the human soul being in actual contact with the flesh and blood of Christ? If not, then according to Calvin (if we understand him correctly) communion achieves a vital union unique and superior to that achieved through the Word. If Calvin is just emphasizing the fact that our communion or union with all the redemptive aspects of His ministry (life, death, and resurrection) cannot be separated from communion with the glorified Lord Himself, then we heartily agree. The work of Christ is

¹⁶¹ Keith A. Mathison, 281.

¹⁶² R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 816.

¹⁶³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 449.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 450.

not something that should be viewed abstractly apart from the person of Christ. Indeed, Reformed believers can speak of the real presence of the Savior in the holy supper precisely because His person and work cannot be detached from each other. It is the glorified Redeemer who through His Spirit applies redemption to the elect.

Therefore when we speak of the special presence of the Mediator during communion it should be understood that the eucharist is a strengthening of the communion that we already have. The special presence is not something qualitatively unique and different. Berkouwer writes, “The New Testament makes it clear that believers do not stand in true communion with Christ only in the Lord’s Supper. We hear of his promise to be with us until the end of the world, and of his being in the midst of us even though only two or three are gathered together in his name. Furthermore, many references are made to our communion with Christ. To be sure, it is a communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit, but this does not at all minimize the reality of our communion with Christ of which we read that Christ dwells in the hearts of men through faith (Eph. 3:17) and that nothing can separate the believers from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35).”¹⁶⁵ Therefore the Lord’s supper should not be viewed as some completely special mystical channel of grace (a view that dominates high church views of the sacrament) but rather, as one means of grace among others that strengthens our faith because it focuses our attention on our communion with the resurrected Messiah; who as a result of His crucifixion, death, and resurrection gives us His victory and all its fruits.

The holy supper, as defined and conducted according to the Word, is used by the Holy Spirit in the same way as the Word itself. The eucharist sets forth the central truths of redemption in a sensuous, vivid manner and emphasizes that the benefits of redemption are applied by a living glorified Savior who in the very present communes with us. Once again, our communion with Jesus is not something new, but it is signified, confirmed and strengthened in the holy supper. The problem with Calvin’s view is his focus on Christ’s heavenly corporeal presence. His idea, that our souls are transported to heaven to commune directly with the Savior’s corporeal presence, goes beyond the doctrine of the mystical union into an unprovable (i.e., exegetically) speculation. Further, the idea that our souls go up to be with the Mediator in His physical presence while we are still in our physical bodies and are completely unaware of a virtual change of location is untenable and absurd. “This communion is not a communion with Christ’s glorified ‘body’ and ‘blood’ as a substantial, isolated reality, but a communion with him in his offering and his true body and blood, with him ‘who has become flesh and was crucified in history and whose flesh is now in heaven.’”¹⁶⁶

(3) There is also the question regarding the Old Testament saints who were united to Christ, regenerated, saved and sanctified before the Son assumed a human nature. Dabney writes, “While the Old Testament believers had not the identical sacraments which we have, they had the same kind of spiritual life, nourished in the same way. (See Rom. iv: 5; Heb. xi, and especially 1 Cor. x: 1-4). Here the same figure is employed—that of eating and drinking. How could this be an eating of His flesh, when that flesh was not yet in existence?”¹⁶⁷ While it is true that our union with the Savior in a mysterious sense transcends time and space because the Bible teaches that we were united to Jesus in His life, death and resurrection and these historical events occurred two thousand years ago; still, the Old Testament saints could not feed upon a *literal* flesh and blood in their time when that flesh and blood did not yet exist. Our union with Christ is

¹⁶⁵ G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 240-241.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 235.

¹⁶⁷ R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 812.

indeed a mysterious and mystical doctrine. *Speculation* as to the exact nature of how this union operates (e.g., soul transportation) is not an adequate, theological platform to form a confessional doctrine of the Lord's supper.

(4) The central exegetical argument for a real corporeal presence, the bread of life discourse (Jn. 6:22-58), actually proves the opposite. Although Calvin teaches that John 6 is not a direct statement about the holy supper, he does tie this section of Scripture to the eucharist in a figurative manner. He writes, "I acknowledge that there is nothing said here that is not figuratively represented, and actually bestowed on believers, in the Lord's Supper; and Christ even intended that the holy Supper should be, as it were, a seal and confirmation of this sermon."¹⁶⁸

That John 6 is not a dissertation on the meaning of communion, either directly or indirectly, is indicated by the following considerations. First, the Lord is not discussing a means of continuing sanctification but of salvation itself. The immediate context indicates that He was preaching to unbelievers who were seeking a sign and were looking for a provider of physical needs (vs. 26-27). The thrust of the Savior's message is not the need to partake of the holy supper but "that you believe in Him whom He sent" (v. 29). The people need to come to Christ (v. 35) to satisfy all their spiritual needs. Our Lord rebukes them because they have seen Him "and yet do not believe" (v. 36). Everyone who comes to Him will certainly be saved (v. 37). They will be raised on the last day (v. 39); "that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up on the last day" (v. 40). In verse 44 Jesus discusses the need to be drawn to Himself by the Father (effectual calling). Then in verse 47 He emphatically emphasizes the gospel: "Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life." In verse 51 the bread that He gives is His body given over to a sacrificial death. His atoning vicarious death (not the Lord's supper) is "the life of the world" (v. 51).

With the focus on the gospel, the unbelief of the audience and the repeated emphasis on the necessity of believing in Christ for salvation, the eating and drinking of His blood in verses 53 to 55 refers not to eating the holy supper but the appropriating of Christ and His redemption *by faith*. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that people who consume the Savior have eternal life and will be raised [unto life] on the last day (v. 54). Those who do not consume the Savior have "no life" (v. 53). They are spiritually dead and damned. The Lord holds out two options: salvation by faith in Christ or unbelief and eternal damnation. If one wants this section of Scripture to be a proof text for a corporeal presence of Jesus in the eucharist in any way (in earth or in heaven) then one must be consistent and argue that the holy supper is absolutely essential and necessary for salvation.

Even if one finds a secondary allusion of some kind in this discourse to the holy supper, this section would teach not a literal eating but a spiritual consumption by faith. The eucharist sanctifies not because there is a literal presence or an actual eating of flesh and blood but because our faith in Jesus and the union and communion we do have with the Savior is strengthened. "It set forth the central truths of redemption, in a manner admirably adapted to our nature sanctified; and these truths, applied by the Holy Ghost, are the instruments of sanctification and spiritual life, in a manner generically the same with, though in a degree more energetic, than the written and spoken word."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 266.

¹⁶⁹ R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 814. Calvin even [inconsistently] argues with the main thrust of our interpretation of this discourse. He writes, "And indeed it would have been foolish and unreasonable to discourse

Second, in verse 63 Jesus makes sure His disciples do not misunderstand His words in a literal fashion. He says, “It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing.” The term flesh in this passage does not refer to the Savior’s body but rather human flesh in general. Our Lord is *not* saying that His incarnation, His assumption of a human nature is not important or necessary for the accomplishment of our redemption. It of course is absolutely necessary. But, what He is saying is that salvation does not come through physical eating, through nourishment of the physical flesh but through a work of the Spirit. This indirectly supports the contention that Christ is spiritually present in communion not physically present.

If Calvin is wrong and we (i.e., our souls) are not somehow brought into the corporeal presence of the Mediator in heaven during the supper, then what exactly do we mean when we say that the Savior is spiritually present in the holy supper? We mean that Jesus is present by and with His Spirit. The very presence of the Lord is a reality for us through the Holy Spirit. But, doesn’t this mean that Christ is replaced by the Spirit and is not truly present? No, not at all! We can only understand the Savior’s presence in a Trinitarian manner. The ascended theanthropic King who sits at the right hand of God, now works upon the earth and in His church by means of the Spirit. “Thus Christ’s promise to send another ‘comforter’ does not mean a ‘replacement,’ but must be understood in the light of the progress of Christ’s work (John 14:16). Just as the pneumatological never functions as a threat to Christology in the confession of the church, so the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit is no threat to the confession of his real presence.”¹⁷⁰

This view of the presence avoids the idea that the holy supper is a *mere* memorial, that the Savior is only present in our minds; and, it avoids bizarre speculative attempts to place us in a literal presence with the corporeal body and blood. Because the Mediator is truly present through the Holy Spirit and it is the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ, we can honestly say that Jesus is truly yet spiritually present in the holy supper in a special way. This view of the spiritual presence is the only view which steers clear of a mere memorialism and a literal presence which is impossible and not provable from Scripture.

Having observed the unique and exceedingly difficult high-church, Reformed view of Calvin, let us turn our attention to the modified but biblical position of the Westminster Standards. The Shorter Catechism reads: “The Lord’s supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ’s appointment his death is showed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace” (Answer to Question 96).

In this statement we have all the good elements of Calvin’s position without the speculation. Believers by faith are made partakers of His body and blood with all His benefits. The sacrament is a true means of grace. But we do not partake of the Savior in a corporal and carnal manner. This is no literal sense in which we “feed upon his body and blood” (L.C. 168). Thomas Ridgeley writes,

We are not to suppose that Christ is present in a corporal way, so that we should be said to partake of his body in a literal sense. But he being a divine person, and consequently omnipresent; and having promised his presence with his church in all ages and places, when met

about the Lord’s Supper, before he had instituted it. It is certain, then, that he now speaks of the perpetual and ordinary manner of eating the flesh of Christ, which is done by faith only” (*Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, 266).

¹⁷⁰ G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Sacraments*, 239.

together in his name; in this respect he is present with them, just as he is in other ordinances, to supply their wants, hear their prayers, strengthen them against corruption and temptation, and remove their guilt by the application of his blood, which is present as an object for their contemplation in a more peculiar manner in this ordinance. As for our feeding on or being nourished by the body and blood of Christ, these are metaphorical expressions, taken from and adapted to the nature and quality of the bread and wine by which Christ's body and blood are signified. What we are to understand by them is, our graces being further strengthened and established, and our being enabled to exercise them with greater vigour and delight, and our deriving these blessings from Christ, particularly as founded on his death. Our being said to feed upon him, in particular, denotes the application of what he has done and suffered, to ourselves.¹⁷¹

By faith believers in a spiritual manner feed upon the whole Christ and all His benefits. When Christians partake of the holy supper and exercise their faith when beholding and partaking of the elements, the Holy Spirit strengthens the worthy participants and increases their sanctification. The connection with the Savior is not a local or corporeal one but a spiritual one.

Chapter 9: The Frequency of the Lord's Supper

The issue of how often the church ought to conduct the Lord's supper is one of wide disagreement within Reformed circles. Some believe that like the Passover the holy supper ought to be conducted only once a year. Some churches conduct communion only once every six months. Others argue that the eucharist should be given quarterly. This argument follows the seasons and certain Jewish feasts. Today, many Presbyterian churches have communion once a month.¹⁷² The once a month view is often based on pragmatic considerations such as: We want communion to remain special so we should not do it too often; weekly communion would not be practical. It would be cumbersome; if we celebrate the Lord's supper too often it would be taken for granted, etc. There are a few Presbyterian churches which celebrate the Lord's supper every week.

One of the reasons there is a wide diversity of practice on this issue is that Scripture issues no specific instructions of the frequency of communion. The only inspired guidance we have on this issue is the inspired history of the church. If the apostolic church which was led by the specially guided apostleship practice communion frequently, then we ought to follow their example. What do the Scriptures say? Can we even ascertain frequency from the inspired record?

¹⁷¹ Thomas Ridgeley, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (Edmonton, AB: Still Waters Revival, [1855] 1993), 2:523-524.

¹⁷² The monthly celebration of the eucharist was the practice of Calvin at Geneva. The great reformer writes,

“We are very pleased that the Lord's Supper is being celebrated every month, provided that this more frequent observance does not produce carelessness. When a considerable part of the congregation stays away from Communion, the church somehow becomes fragmented. Nonetheless, we think it is better for a congregation to be invited [to take Communion] every month than only four times a year, as usually happens here.

“When I first came here, the Lord's Supper was observed only three times a year, and seven whole months intervened between the observance at Pentecost and the Birthday of Christ. A monthly observance pleased me, but I could not persuade the people, and it seemed better to bear with their weaknesses than to continue arguing stubbornly. I took care to have it recorded in the public records, however, that our way was wrong, so that correcting it might be easier for future generations.”

(“To a Question About Certain Rites of the Church” in *Calvin's' Ecclesiastical Advice* [Louisville, KE: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991], 94.)

In Luke's account of the early church in Acts he notes "they [those who were baptized] continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (2:42). "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (2:46). If the expression "the breaking of bread" refers to the celebration of the Lord's supper or even the love feast that included communion, it would appear that the holy supper was celebrated frequently. In favor of the Eucharistic interpretation Kistemaker writes, "In the Greek, the definite article precedes the noun *bread* [v. 42] and thus specifies that the Christians partook of *the* bread set aside for the sacrament of communion.... The words *breaking of bread* appear within the sequence of teaching, fellowship, and prayers in worship services. Therefore, we understand the term as an early description for the celebration of Holy Communion."¹⁷³

In Acts 20:7, 11 the church at Troas came together "on the first day of the week...to break bread." In this section of Scripture there is no question that we have public worship service with teaching. On Sunday during the local worship service the word was preached and communion celebrated. John Calvin supports this interpretation. He writes, "Though the breaking of bread doth sometimes signify among the Hebrews a domestical banquet, yet do I expound the same of the Holy Supper in this place, being moved with two reasons. For seeing we may easily gather by that which followeth that there was no small multitude gathered together there, it is unlikely that there could any supper be prepared in a private house. Again, Luke will afterward declare that Paul took bread not at supper time, but after midnight. Hereunto is added, that he saith not that he took meat that he might eat, but that he might only taste. Therefore, I think thus, that they had appointed a solemn day for the celebrating of the Holy Supper of the Lord among themselves, which might be commodious for them all."¹⁷⁴

While the evidence gathered from Scripture points toward weekly communion, apparently the evidence is not strong enough to forge a uniform practice in Reformed Christendom. Perhaps the abuses of Rome and various high church opinions of the ordinance have influenced Reformed practice. Some of the current objections one hears regarding the weekly celebration of communion are as follows.

(a) If the eucharist is celebrated weekly it will lose its special character and be taken for granted. While this may be a problem for some, we would hope that prayer, the singing of praise and the preached word are not taken for granted and abused for they are practiced weekly. Also, we hope that people do not pray less, or listen to less sermons to keep them special. Such an argument doesn't make a lot of sense.

(b) If communion is practiced weekly, it will detract from the preached Word and may even lead to high church views of the sacrament. The objection fails to take into account that any biblical ordinance and practice can be abused and perverted if the pastor and elders do not do their job and teach the people properly and diligently regarding the various ordinances. It is ignorance and poor teaching that leads to bad practices, not a humble submission to Scripture. Further, a very infrequent communion service is more likely (logically) to lead to an exaltation of the sacrament above the preached Word. The old Scottish practice of a communion season with fasting, sermons on Saturday before communion as well as sermons following communion on Monday has no warrant from Scripture. Because communion was so rarely celebrated, it's practice developed into a sort of an extra-special super celebration. With this type of a rare occurrence it is very easy for congregants to view the holy supper as a kind of special oasis in a

¹⁷³ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 111.

¹⁷⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 2:235-236.

desert. But the eucharist ought to strengthen our faith through the signs of bread and wine and focus our attention on *our continuous communion* with the living Savior. We are not visiting a Person who is far off, who rarely communes with us; but, with the living resurrected glorified redeemer who is always present with us, who is always strengthening us with His redemptive benefits and glorified life.

While we must diligently oppose those who are in favor of weekly communion because of high church sacramentalist views of the eucharist, we must not forget that: the apostolic church very frequently celebrated communion and, the Lord's supper is truly a means of grace and was given to us by Jesus Himself for our own benefit. Let us not throw out the baby with the bath water.

(c) But doesn't the practice of weekly eucharist contradict our heritage, our Presbyterian tradition of infrequent communion? In a certain sense it does. But what is important in this matter? Is it whether or not that tradition is based on a correct interpretation of Scripture or was it a result of unique historical circumstances? A study of Presbyterian church history indicates that historical circumstance and not biblical exegesis was the driving force behind infrequent communion. D. M. Murray writes,

The Reformers wished to restore the Lord's supper to the service for every Lord's day, following Calvin's Genevan ideal, but this was not achieved in practice. The *Book of Common Order* (1564) recommended a monthly celebration and the *First Book of Discipline* said that Communion should be celebrated quarterly in towns and twice-yearly in country areas. Although mass had been said frequently, the people had long been accustomed to communicate only once or twice a year at Christmas and Easter. There were also not enough ministers available to cover all the parishes of the land. Since the Christian year was no longer observed, the Lord's Supper was celebrated at times other than the main Christian festivals. The Sunday service in the *BCO*, however, was based on the celebration of the Lord's Supper as the norm, with the prayers of intercession and the Lord's Prayer coming after the sermon, as would be the case on a Communion Sunday. The Westminster Confession reiterated the "high" doctrine of the sacrament of the Reformers, and the order of service in the Westminster Directory was still based on the celebration of the Lord's Supper as the norm of Sunday worship. With the troubled times of the mid-seventeenth century, however, Communion was celebrated even less frequently than before for several years. The practice developed of parishes grouping together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, as did the observance of a fast day held beforehand to prepare for the sacrament. The "fencing of the tables" was a common feature of the service whereby a warning was given to those who might communicate unworthily. More elaborate arrangements were made for the celebration of the "season," with the emphasis on the minister's catechetical examination of the congregation and Communion tokens being given to those considered eligible to participate. Two sermons would be delivered on the fast day preceding the Sabbath, two on the Saturday, and then several "sittings" of Communion would be held on the Sunday, with the minister assisted by visiting clergymen. A thanksgiving service with two sermons would be held on the Monday.

Once we truly understand the reason why the practice of infrequent communion arose in Presbyterian circles, the appeal to the reformers and the Second Reformation becomes all the more inadequate as a proper guide to our current practice. Further, the tendency of some to lean on tradition as a reason for a practice or as a source of authority in matters of faith, doctrine or worship is romanizing, unbiblical and dangerous.

The Proper Recipients of the Lord's Supper

An important very practical matter relating to the holy supper regards the question of the proper recipients of the eucharist. As we consider this topic we will first consider the areas in which most Reformed churches agree and then proceed to more difficult areas.

(1) The Lord's supper should only be participated in by people who profess faith in Christ. While baptism is an initiatory rite, the holy supper is a continuing rite for believers in Christ. The receiving of the bread and wine is symbolic of our receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ and His redemption by faith. The eucharist does not engender faith but strengthens the faith that Christians already have. Therefore, it is absurd and totally inappropriate to offer the elements to unbelievers. The elders of a church have a responsibility to fence the table from the heathen and scandalous sinners. (The issue of paedocommunion is dealt with in a separate chapter.)

(2) Communion should only be given to people who have been baptized into the name of the triune God. The eucharist is a means of sanctification for disciples of Jesus and baptism is the initiatory rite of Christian discipleship. Obviously anyone who truly trusts in the Savior will be happy to receive the sign and seal of the Mediator's ownership over their person and life. One of the things that baptism signifies is a person's membership and participation in the body of Christ. Since the Lord's supper and the partaking of the one loaf symbolizes and underlines our participation in the one body, baptism logically precedes communion. Further, since in the holy supper the believer feeds upon Christ to this spiritual nourishment, the initial sign of union with the Savior (baptism) must precede coming to communion. One must go through the door of baptism and become part of God's holy temple before he sits at the banquet table of the Prince.

(3) Communion must also be restricted to members of the local visible church. The Bible teaches that once someone believes and is baptized they have a responsibility to join themselves to a local body of believers (Ac. 2:41-47) and submit themselves to the elders of a particular church (Heb. 13:7, 17). Under normal circumstances, there is no such thing as being a member of the church abstractly or in the ethereal without a true covenantal commitment to an actual congregation. The sacraments are only to be dispensed by lawfully ordained ministers of the gospel (Mt. 28:16-20). The pastor and elders have a responsibility to fence the table and not distribute the elements to people who are unqualified for participation. Therefore, if someone wants to participate in communion who is not a member of *any* church, they must meet with the session or consistory of a local congregation, make a credible profession of faith and take a vow of church membership. This has been the teaching of all Reformed and Presbyterian churches from the very beginning. If anyone regardless of church membership or not can participate in the holy supper, then the judicial aspect of the eldership and church discipline are meaningless. A person who is not a member of the body should not receive the body of Christ. Diligent, competent sessions even fence the table by asking visitors a number of appropriate questions before they can participate in the eucharist.

(4) Another important qualification for communion is self-examination. Paul writes, "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged" (1Cor. 11:27-31). Self-examination has a number of elements. First, it refers to an examination of our treatment of and attitude toward other believers before and at the holy supper; and, by way of

application our relationship to other Christians outside of public worship. In our day when the love feast has been disengaged completely from communion one does not encounter professing Christians getting drunk and acting selfishly and inconsiderately at church. At church virtually everyone is on their best behavior. However, it is quite common for believers who are having problems with another's behavior, who have spoken unlovingly, who are still angry and unreconciled with each other to partake of the eucharist together. Such people are taking their unreconciled relationships and disunity to the eucharist which is a supreme display of unity, love and fellowship. This practice ought not to occur.

Jesus' words during the Sermon on the Mount are especially applicable to such a situation. "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Mt. 5:23-24). While this teaching applies to the whole Christian life, it should be even more carefully heeded as we examine our hearts before the Lord's table. Each and every Christian who thinks another believer has a just grievance or even a serious misunderstanding against him that has brought disharmony to the body needs to imitate Christ, regard the other person as more important than himself and seek a full reconciliation before partaking of the holy supper. "In a broad sense, then, 'Let a man examine himself' means that we ought to ask whether our relationships in the body of Christ are in fact reflecting the character of the Lord whom we meet there and whom we represent."¹⁷⁵

Second, we must examine our faith in Christ. Are we trusting in Jesus as He has been revealed in the Scriptures or are we trusting in a Messiah created by our imagination? On any given Sunday most people throughout the world who receive the elements are heretics who are trusting in a false Christ (e.g., Modernists, Roman Catholics, Arminians) that is only partially defined by the Bible. Therefore, it is important that we have true saving faith or trust in the Savior as well as biblical knowledge regarding crucial doctrines. It is for this reason that Presbyterian churches historically have had communicant classes. Contrary to popular opinion, doctrine is important. Faith can never be divorced from its proper object. A perfect, comprehensive or exceedingly detailed knowledge is not to be demanded or expected due to our limited capacities and the different levels of knowledge and maturity in Christ's church. "There is, however, a degree of knowledge which is not only attainable, but necessary to our right engaging in this ordinance. This does not consist merely in our knowing that there is a God, or that he is to be worshiped, or that there was such a person as our Savior, who lived in the world, was crucified, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and shall come again to judge the quick and the dead. For, a person may have a general notion of all these things, and yet be unacquainted with the end and design of Christ's death, or with the claim which a person may lay by faith to them. But without being acquainted with these things, there is a sufficient knowledge, such as the apostle calls 'a discerning the Lord's body,' which we ought to have in this ordinance."¹⁷⁶

The flesh and blood of the Mediator should never be given to heretics (e.g., Romanists, Socinians, Unitarians, full preterists, Arminians, Shepherdites and so on). "Further, we must inquire whether we have a great concern for his glory and interest in our own souls, and an earnest desire that his name be known and magnified in the world; and whether this desire be accompanied with using our utmost endeavors in our various stations and capacities in order to

¹⁷⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 997.

¹⁷⁶ Thomas Ridgely, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism*, 2:530-531.

the attainment of that end.”¹⁷⁷ Remember, that the instrument of faith connects us to Christ and His merits. Without faith we cannot feed upon Jesus, but can only incur judgment for hypocrisy. As we partake of the glorious Savior and His benefits our faith, love and devotion toward Him is increased. What a blessed means of grace!

Third, as we come to the table we must examine the state of our repentance. Sincere repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of behavior. We must not partake of the sacrament with impertinent hearts. In preparation for the eucharist we must not hold on to secret sins but cast them behind us. A genuine repentance is not partial, haphazard or surface only. All sin must be plucked out by the root and replaced with service and love toward God. “I thought about my ways, And turned my feet to Your testimonies” (Ps. 119:59).

Some questions we should ask ourselves are as follows.

“1. Have I turned from sin unto God, or am I yet living in my sins? Acts xxvi.18.

2. Have I turned from all sin, Ezek. Xiv. 6. from all gross sins in my practice, and from all sin simply, in my heart and affections? I my heart loosed from sin? And do I hate all sin? Psal. cxix.104.

3. If so, why have I done it? Is it only for the wrath annexed to it, or is it not because of the contrariety in it to God’s nature and will? Exek. xxxvi. 31.”¹⁷⁸

Ridgeley writes,

We are also to take notice of our natural propensity and inclination to sin, and the various ways by which this has discovered itself in our actions. Accordingly, we are to inquire whether we have sinned knowingly willfully, presumptuously, and obstinately; or whether we have been surprised into sin, or ensnared by some sudden and unforeseen temptation, and have committed it without the full bent of our wills; whether we have striven against it, or have given way to it, and suffered ourselves to be prevailed upon without making resistance. We must also inquire whether we have continued in sin, or unfeignedly repented of it; whether sin sits light or heavy on our conscience; or if our consciences are burdened with it, whether we seek relief against it in that way which Christ had prescribed in the gospel. We must also inquire whether there are not some sins which more frequently and easily beset us; what they are, and whether we are daily watchful against them, and use our utmost endeavours to avoid them. We must also inquire whether we have not frequently relapsed into the same sin which we have resolved against at various times, and in particular, at the Lord’s table, and thus have broken our engagements; and if so, whether we did not rely too much on our own strength, when we made resolutions against sin.¹⁷⁹

Fourth, in conjunction with all the preceding elements we need to meditate upon our love of Christ and how we may serve Him with a greater obedience. “Love to God is necessary in it, because therein is held forth the greatest display of God’s love in giving his own Son to the death for us. Here is that which of all things may warm the heart most, and make it burn with love to God and Christ.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 2:528.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Boston, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, (Edmonton, AB: Still Waters Revival, 1993), 2:494.

¹⁷⁹ Thomas Ridgeley, 2:528-529.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Boston, 2:495.

Fifth, as we consider self-examination it is important to note that professing Christians who are ignorant and deficient in doctrine, and/or scandalous in behavior must be excluded from the Lord's supper.¹⁸¹

Given the fact that many ignorant, heretical, foolish and scandalous persons are not aware of their own deficiencies, the local church session is responsible to fence the table from people that are clearly unworthy to participate. Any people who visit the church must meet with the session and answer certain questions before they are invited to the table. Some questions that need to be asked relate to church membership, a credible profession of faith, orthodoxy is essential in doctrinal matters and scandalous behavior. People who are not members of a church, who are living unrepentant lives or who hold heretical opinions (e.g., Romanists, Armenians, Pentecostals, open theists, full preterists, Shepherdites, etc.) must be excluded from the table.

Sixth, although self-examination is important and must not be neglected, it is important that weak and doubting believers understand that they should not exclude themselves from the Lord's supper. While those who doubt and even struggle with sin must bewail their state and pray for an increase of faith and sanctification, the holy supper is given to us to strengthen our faith and increase our holiness. Weak believers should come to the table in order to be strengthened by Christ. The eucharist *is* a means of grace.

All serious Christians are aware that they are deficient in many ways and do not serve the Lord as they ought to, as they would like. Nevertheless, we must avoid morbid introspection, or a legalistic mind set, or a kind of perfectionist attitude that would keep us from feeding on Christ. We must always keep in mind that it is *only* because of the Savior's sacrificial death and perfect sinless life (that we receive by faith alone) that enables us as God's adopted sons to eat at His banquet table. If we ever take our minds off of the righteousness of Christ and dwell on ourselves we will neglect this blessed ordinance.

¹⁸¹ Some people who argue for a completely open communion where virtually anyone can partake of the eucharist appeal to Judas at the last supper for support. This argument is destroyed by the Puritan theologian Thomas Ridgely. He writes, "It is further objected, that Judas was the Lord's supper when it was instituted by our Savior, though he knew that he was a hypocrite and a traitor, and that he would speedily execute what he had designed against his life. It is hence inferred that all ought to be admitted to this ordinance. The reason generally assigned for believing that Judas was presented at the institution of the ordinance is, that it is said, 'When the hour was come, he sat down, and his twelve apostles with him.' We likewise read afterwards that 'he took bread and brake it, &c. and also the cup after the supper, &c.; and then it is said, 'Behold the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.' This is supposed by the objectors, to have been spoken by Christ when they were eating the Lord's supper; and they hence conclude that Judas was there. We reply however, that it seems much more probable that he was not present when the Lord's supper was administered, though he joined with Christ and the other apostles in eating the Passover. The Passover and the Lord's supper were celebrated, the one immediately after the other, at the same table, or sitting; so that the hand of Judas might be with Christ on the table, in the former, though not in the latter. Hence, though these words, 'the hand of him that betrayeth me, is with me on the table,' are inserted after the account of both these ordinances being concluded; yet we have ground to suppose that they were spoken while they were eating the Passover, when Judas was present. Moreover, it appears yet more probable that he was not present at the Lord's supper, from the account which John gives of the matter. According to that account, our Savior tells the disciples that 'one of them should betray him;' and he then discovered that he meant Judas, by giving him the sop; and it is said, that 'having received the sop, he went immediately out.' Now it is certain there was no sop in the Lord's supper, as there was in the Passover, inasmuch as there was no flesh used in it. Hence, Judas went out when they were eating the Passover, before they began to partake of the Lord's supper; being, as we may reasonably suppose, in a rage that his hypocrisy should be detected, and that he should be marked out as a traitor, who was previously reckoned as good a man as any of them. We have not sufficient ground, therefore, to conclude, from the case of Judas, that wicked men ought to be admitted to partake of the Lord's supper."

How to Receive the Lord's Supper

During the administration of the holy supper believers need to reverently pay close attention to what is going on. We should be focusing our mind on the elements and the actions while we are meditating on the suffering and death of Jesus. During the eucharist we are not only to think upon our Lord's sacrificial death but also our union with Him and how this union nourishes us spiritually. As we partake of the holy supper we ought to be judged ourselves; "sorrowing for sin; in earnest hungering and thirsting after Christ, feeding on him by faith, receiving of his fullness, trusting in his merits, rejoicing in his life, [and] giving thanks for his grace" (Larger Catechism 174). As we share the elements with the brethren we must also keep in mind the unity of the body and our love and dedication to God's saints. The eucharist is a means of personal and corporate sanctification.

The Lord's supper is a very rich means of grace that proclaims the Savior's substitutionary death, our salvation by Christ's merits, our union and communion with Him and the spiritual nourishment that we receive from His redemptive work. It also shows us the unity and love we have with each other. It gives us a taste of heaven on earth. Our King is with us and He feeds us from his own banquet table. May God enable us to grow in grace and love as we behold our precious Savior. Amen.

Chapter 10: Paedocommunion

Introduction

Any study of the Lord's supper would not be complete without considering the question: Who are the proper recipients of communion? As one aspect of this question, we will consider the issue of paedocommunion. The term paedocommunion refers to the teaching that infants and toddlers of believing parents who are members of the church are entitled to receive the elements of the Lord's supper. A consideration of this doctrine is important for a number of reasons:

First, paedocommunion is a repudiation of the teachings of all the Protestant Reformers as well as all the Reformed symbols regarding the proper recipients of communion. As Reformed Presbyterians, we adhere wholeheartedly to the Westminster Standards which are explicitly anti-paedocommunion (see Confession of Faith, 29:1, 3, 7, 8; Shorter Catechism, Q 91, 96, 97; Larger Catechism Q 170, 171, 172, 174, 175, 177). The standard Reformed position (briefly stated) is that the elements of the Lord Supper are only to be received by church members who are old enough to examine themselves and receive the elements by faith.

Second, the teaching of paedocommunion has spread rapidly throughout both Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed circles in the last thirty years. If paedocommunion is contrary to Scripture and the Reformed Standards (which it clearly is), then Reformed believers need to understand the arguments for paedocommunion and refute them effectively based on proper biblical interpretation of Scripture (i.e., the historical-grammatical-theological method).

Third, the arguments for paedocommunion are often attractive to people who hold to covenant theology yet are untrained in biblical hermeneutics (i.e. the science of interpretation), theology and church history.

Fourth, the doctrine of paedocommunion often leads to or is connected with other false and dangerous teachings (e.g., sacramentalism [i.e., the sacraments operate automatically or

magically, *ex opere operato*], mysticism [e.g., the “creative” hermeneutics of James Jordan and the rejection of Reformed worship in favor of Eastern Orthodox concepts of worship] and the rejection of the biblical distinction between the invisible and visible church, etc.)

The Paedocommunionist Argument

In order to refute the paedocommunionist teaching one must first set forth the basic arguments for admitting infants and toddlers to the Lord’s supper. (The presentation of their basic arguments must be fair and given without unnecessary *ad hominem* attacks or without setting up straw men that are easily destroyed.) Then, once the paedocommunionist position is articulated and understood, it will be systematically refuted while setting forth the biblical position.

The basic arguments in favor of paedocommunion are simple, straightforward and (if one accepts the paedocommunionist’s fallacious presuppositions) logical. It is the simplicity of the paedocommunionist argument coupled with a woeful lack of theological knowledge in most Reformed churches today which accounts for the popularity of this doctrine.

The paedocommunionist argument is rooted in their application of covenant theology to the Lord’s supper. Regarding infant baptism, all Reformed believers are in agreement that baptism corresponds to and replaces circumcision. That is why the infants of believers are obligated to receive the sign and seal of baptism. The paedocommunionists apply similar reasoning to the Lord’s supper. They point out that the Lord’s supper corresponds to and replaces the Old Covenant Passover. Since (we are told) whole covenant families, including infants and toddlers, participated in the Passover meal, should not infants and toddlers also be permitted to partake of the communion meal? The connection between Passover and the Lord’s supper is the heart of the paedocommunionist doctrine. This argument is supported by other assertions. It is argued that 1 Corinthians 11:27-30, which discusses the need for participants to discern the Lord’s body (which is a common proof text against infants and toddlers participating in communion), is directed to adults not children. While adults need to examine themselves in order to avoid the gross abuses of the Lord’s table that were occurring at Corinth, infants are incapable of examining themselves and thus the apostle’s admonition does not apply to them. Similarly, while a credible profession of faith is required of adults before baptism, it obviously is not required of covenant children. Further, an appeal is often made to church history. It is asserted (erroneously)¹⁸² that for at least the first thousand years of its existence the new covenant church practiced paedocommunion.¹⁸³

While the central arguments in favor of paedocommunion appeal to many people, a careful examination of these arguments reveals a number of serious problems that disprove the overall theory.

¹⁸² Paedocommunion was practiced from the third to the eighth centuries. There is no evidence that it was practiced before that time. Most Eastern Orthodox churches still practice paedocommunion. Given the fact that by the third century sacramentalism was already deeply entrenched in many churches and the fact that all Reformed theologians teach that the means of grace require faith and a knowledgeable response to the signs to be efficacious, the paedocommunionist’s appeal to church history is rather puzzling.

¹⁸³ Peter J. Leithart, *Daddy, Why Was I Excommunicated?* (Niceville, FL: Transfiguration Press, 1992). See also Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1973), 44f, 752f, 794.

The Egyptian Passover and Progressive Revelation

The main argument in favor of paedocommunion is founded upon the connection of the Lord's supper to the original Egyptian Passover. The Passover in Egypt spoke of "a lamb for a household" (Ex. 12:3), or two households if more people are needed to consume the whole lamb (Ex. 12:4). The account says, "Then they shall eat the flesh on that night" (Ex. 12:8). The "they" probably refers back to "the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel" in verse 6. That children were present is obvious from the term "household" and from verse 26 where the children (literally "sons") are to ask the heads of the household, "What do you mean by this service?" (Ex. 12:26). Is this not conclusive proof that infants and toddlers should partake of the Lord's supper since they were present at the Passover? No, it is not. We will see that it proves nothing of the sort. There are a number of reasons why we must reject paedocommunionist assertions regarding the Passover.

An examination of the Bible shows that any attempt to form a one-to-one correspondence between the original Egyptian Passover and the Lord's supper is overly simplistic and simply wrong. The Lord's supper does not merely replace the original Exodus Passover, but also *all* the Old Testament sacrificial meals. The original Passover was a continuation of a larger sacramental system that predated it. It also went through clarifications and additions as revelation progressed. In order to prove infant and toddler communion, one must examine the Exodus Passover within its overall biblical context. Consideration must also be given to the Levitical Passover (i.e. the permanent Passover) which was in effect for centuries and was the Passover practiced during the life of Jesus. Consider the following germane sections of Scripture.

(1) In Exodus 12:43-49 those who can and cannot participate in the Passover meal are identified. The passage says that no uncircumcised person, no foreigners, servants or sojourners are to participate. However, circumcised servants and strangers who dwell with the covenant people that want to keep the Passover and who submit to circumcision are permitted.

(2) In Exodus 23:14-19; 34:18-25 as well as Deuteronomy 16:1-8 we learn that a number of the elements of the original Passover were unique and applied only to the original Egyptian Passover. First of all, the Egyptian Passover was an event that took place in the home (i.e. locally). God changed the location of this feast in subsequent passages to the future temple complex (i.e. "the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide"). Craigie writes, "The original Passover in Egypt had been performed by families in their homes; the blood sprinkled on the lintel and door posts had provided protection from the destructive wrath of the Lord (see Exod. 12:21-27). The continuing celebration and commemoration of the Passover, however, was to be enacted in one place, where the sanctuary of the Lord was located; the change from the original event to the commemoration of that event may be significant. In Egypt, the Israelites had been a number of families under the suzerainty of a worldly power. After the Exodus and forming the covenant at Sinai, Israel became a single nation, the family of God; thus the Passover became the act, symbolically speaking, of the one large family of God, celebrated in one place where the sanctuary or house of God was located."¹⁸⁴ Indeed, as redemptive history progressed, a number of things that fathers formerly did as part of family worship (such as offering sacrifice) were later restricted to a specialized priesthood. Therefore, those who argue that fathers should celebrate the Lord's supper in their own families or that fathers should distribute the elements to their infants and toddlers are being unscriptural.

¹⁸⁴ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 242.

Next, the command to appear before the Lord (i.e. make a pilgrimage to the central sanctuary) applied only to male members of the nation. This command likely applied to all those 20 years of age who had been included in the census (cf. Num. 1:3) as well as boys who had been successfully catechized (Prov. 22:6) and were at least 12 to 13 years of age (Luke. 2:41). What this requirement teaches us is that either: (a) The circumstances of the original Egyptian Passover were extraordinary and did not continue in the permanent Passover, or (b) perhaps women, girls and uncatechized boys did not participate in the original Passover meal. The original Passover narrative does not explicitly specify that women, girls and young boys participated in the meal. Such a view has always been inferred from the term “household” or simply assumed. Interpreters who believe that females and young boys did not eat the bitter herbs and roasted lamb often appeal to the question—“What do you mean by this service?” (Ex.12:26)—as evidence that small children were observers, rather than direct recipients of the roasted lamb. “Exodus 12:26 does not give evidence that the child himself partook...The question, ‘What mean ye by this service?’ would seem to indicate that the *child* [asking this question of the manducators] was *not* one of the *partakers*....The absence of explicit command in connection with the Passover, is more likely to support the fact that the [*children*] were *not included*....”¹⁸⁵ This interpretation has support from Joshua 4:6 where almost identical language is used to describe children inquiring about an act in which they did not participate. “That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What mean ye by these stones?’” The act is the carrying of stones out of the river Jordan to set up a memorial in the Promised Land. The stones were carried by a man from each tribe (Josh. 4:4-5; cf. Isa. 3:15; Ezek. 18:2; Ac. 21:13).

(3) In Numbers 9:6-12 we read how God made special provisions for men who were defiled (e.g., by touching a corpse) or away on a long journey (v. 10) during the time of Passover to keep the Passover at a separate time. Instead of celebrating the Passover at its regular time in the first month (*Abib*), these men could celebrate it in the second month (*Ziv*). What is interesting regarding this divinely inspired change is that it would have had little or no effect upon women who were ritually unclean because of menstruation. Not only does the account only mention men who were unclean, it completely ignores the fact that at any given time roughly 25% of women were unclean because of their menstrual period. “Additionally, because Israel observed a lunar month, the solution that God gave to Moses would have been absolutely no relief for menstruating women. They would have been unclean on the fourteenth of the following month as well.”¹⁸⁶ Further, it is extremely unlikely that ritually defiled women would even be allowed to prepare and serve the Passover meal to their families.

(4) Additional information is given regarding the Passover in 2 Chronicles 30. In this chapter, which describes a continuing reformation that is taking place under Hezekiah, we learn that: (a) God’s provision for delaying the Passover for a month because of special circumstances is used, in this case, to delay the Passover for the whole nation; and (b) The Passover is not a mindless ritual but is to be practiced with repentant hearts. The people are not to be like their fathers and brethren who sinned against God (v. 7), nor are they to be stiff-necked (v. 8, i.e. unrepentant), but are to yield themselves to Jehovah (v. 8, i.e. they are to submit themselves to

¹⁸⁵ Morton Smith, *Systematic Theology* (Greenville, S.C.: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), p. 686-691, as quoted in Frances Nigel Lee, *Paedocommunionism Verses Protestantism: How Trendy Theologizers Have Retreated from the Reformation* (unpublished paper).

¹⁸⁶ Richard Bacon, “What Mean Ye?” in *The Blue Banner* (Rowlett, TX: First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, 1996), http://www.fpcr.org/blue_banner_articles/meanye4.htm, sec. 4, 3.

God's authority). Faith in God and His Word, which leads to repentance, is a prerequisite for participation in the Passover.

(5) Another passage that sheds light on the Passover is found in Luke 2: "And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast" (vs. 40-43). Here we learn that although women were not required to attend the feast, they often accompanied their husbands on the journey. Gill writes, "Joseph was obliged to go three times a year, as were all males in Israel, at the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, Deut. XVI.16. The first of these is expressed here, *at the feast of the Passover*; but the women were not obliged to go up: for so it is said by the Jews [T. Hieros. Kiddushin, fol. 61.3.]...the Passover of women is voluntary."¹⁸⁷

We also learn from this chapter of Scripture that Jesus attended the Feast. "And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast" (v. 42). The context indicated that our Lord had reached an age when his parents understood that he had the wisdom, grace and ability to partake of the Passover (see vs. 40, 46-47). "At the age of twelve a young Jew became 'a son of the Law,' and began to keep its enactments respecting feasts, fasts, and the like. The mention of the age implies that since the Presentation Jesus had not been up to Jerusalem"¹⁸⁸ David A. Bass writes,

That this was Jesus' first trip to Passover is manifest from the context, and in this most commentators agree. J. Jeremias, in his landmark *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, throws some valuable light on this custom. He says, "...we may conclude (from Luke 2:41) that it was custom among people from a distance to bring their children when they reached twelve years of age" (p. 76). Before twelve years of age, they remained at home. The Talmud records a priest named Joseph (not the NT Joseph of the Holy Family) as full of excessive zeal for bringing his entire *oikos* (household), children and all, to the second Passover, held one month later in provision for those who were unclean at the first or otherwise unable to attend it (he would not have dared to have brought them to the Passover in the month of Abib). The Pesshita records that he was turned back (M.Pes.IX) that he might not set a precedent for such behavior! If, indeed, the Passover was instituted for the whole family-- women and children, as the paedocommunionists maintain--how Joseph and Mary and the pious Jews were misguided! But, it seems, the paedocommunionists are now here to set the test and tradition straight.¹⁸⁹

Hendriksen writes, "Jewish sources reveal no unanimity with respect to the exact age when a boy became a 'bar mitzvah' (son of the law), that is, when he attained the age of maturity and responsibility with respect to the keeping of God's commandments. The prevailing opinion may have been that at the age of 13 a boy should fully shoulder that responsibility but that in order to become prepared to do this it would be wise for the parents to take him along to the temple even earlier. We know at least that when Jesus became 12 years of age Joseph and Mary took him along to Jerusalem in order to attend the Passover festival. Though it is not stated in so many words that this was the first time he went along, is not this a reasonable inference?"¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament* (London, 1809), 532.

¹⁸⁸ Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898), 75.

¹⁸⁹ David A. Bass, *Paedocommunion: A Return to or Departure from Biblical Practice* (Internet article: <http://www.newgenecaopc.org/pb.asp>), 10.

¹⁹⁰ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 183.

Interestingly, the Hebrew Talmud (an ancient [c. 400 B.C. to A.D. 200] collection of rabbinical comments upon the Old Testament) says that males had their most intensive catechization at age 12 because they were soon to be regarded as men and admitted to the Passover table at thirteen years of age.

States the *Talmud*: “One trains the children a year or two before [age **thirteen**], in order that they may become used to religious observances” [M. Yom 8:4]....the *Talmud* describes the first manducations at the annual Passover Feast--by the grown-up boys of pious Israelites. These manducations occurred soon after those grown-up boys had become “Sons of the Law” when turning **thirteen**. This was after they at that time made their solemn vows, and were then admitted and conferred as Communicants. According to the *Talmud* after being catechized, and on the attainment of their manhood at puberty—“one says to his sons: ‘I am ready to slaughter the Passover for you who shall [now] first go up to Jerusalem” [Pes. 7:6 & 8:1-7].¹⁹¹

Although the Jewish Talmud is uninspired and often unreliable, with regard to the Passover its comments do in general reflect the scriptural data we have already considered (i.e. the Passover was restricted to men and mature boys).

(6) The institution of the Lord’s supper, which took place at a paschal meal, is also informative. The disciples went into Jerusalem in the evening to eat the Passover (Mk. 14:17). The meal had to be eaten in Jerusalem where God’s house stood. The accounts of the supper tell us that the disciples reclined at the table. This position reflected the Jewish custom at that time (M. *Pesachim* X.I). Lane notes some similarities and differences between a typical first century Passover meal and the Lord’s supper:

While a normal meal began with the breaking of bread, on this occasion Jesus broke the bread during the meal and following the serving of a dish (Ch. 14:18-20, 22). The Passover meal was the one occasion when the serving of a dish preceded the breaking of bread. The use of wine was generally reserved for festive occasions and was characteristic of the Passover (M. *Pesachim* X.1). Finally, the interpretation of the elements of the meal conforms to Passover custom where the *haggadah* (or interpretation) is an integral part of the meal. The cumulative evidence supports the claim made in verses 12, 14, 16 that the disciples prepared a Passover meal and that the external forms of the Passover meal were observed at the meal itself.¹⁹²

What is particularly important for this study is the fact that at this Passover only adult men were present. Although one could argue that this Passover meal was extraordinary (for in it our Lord instituted the first communion), there is nothing in any of the accounts to indicate that the disciples thought there was anything unusual about celebrating the Pascal meal apart from their families. (Remember, the disciples did not have prior knowledge that Jesus was going to institute a new sacrament. They prepared for the regular Passover meal.) The reason the disciples regarded everything as normal is simple. As we have seen from an examination of relevant Old Testament texts, only fathers and catechized sons who had reached puberty were required to attend (Ex. 23: 14-19; 34:18-25; Deut. 16:1-8; Prov. 22:6). Although wives sometimes did accompany their husbands to the three major centralized feasts (Lk. 2:41), there is no evidence

¹⁹¹ Francis Nigel Lee, *Paedocommunionism Versus Protestantism: How Trendy Theologisers Have Retreated from the Reformation*, 8, 9.

¹⁹² William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 497-498.

that they ate the Pascal meal with their husbands.¹⁹³ “At this meal we see precisely what our Old Testament model led us to expect. Although Christ had shown supreme love for His female disciples and for children during His earthly ministry, at this Passover meal only adult males were invited. The meal did not take place in His hometown of Nazareth nor in His adopted hometown of Capernaum, nor even in His birthplace of Bethlehem, but in Jerusalem within sight of the temple.”¹⁹⁴

Before considering the Lord’s supper itself as a New Covenant ordinance, a review of the Old Testament teaching on the Passover is in order. (1) The original Egyptian Passover took place in the homes of the Hebrews. The localized nature of the original Passover, however, was temporary and extraordinary. The permanent requirements for the Passover are found in God’s law and are revealed in subsequent Old Covenant historical examples. (2) While the original participants of the first Passover within the home are not specified, the immediate context restricts the meal to circumcised Jews, their circumcised servants and strangers (i.e. foreigners) who submit to circumcision (i.e. they have converted to the true religion) and want to keep the Passover (Ex. 12:42-49). Even the original Passover (which was unique in a number of ways) does not offer support to infant and toddler communion because infants would not be able to consume roasted lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs. (3) God’s law teaches that the permanent Passover was *not* to be celebrated locally in the home, but rather in Jerusalem near God’s house (Deut. 16:2, 5-7). (4) The command to keep the Passover in Jerusalem applied only to male members of the nation (i.e. males who were successfully catechized and had reached puberty [Ex. 23:14-19; 34:18-25; Num. 1:3; 22:6; Prov. 22:6; Lk. 2:41]). (5) God made special provisions in the law for keeping the Passover at a different time (a month after the regular Passover) for men who were ritually unclean or away on a long journey (Num. 9:6-12). These provisions would be of no use to the majority of women who were unclean as a result of their menstrual cycle. (6) Faith and repentance toward God are prerequisites for participating in the Passover (2 Chron. 30:7-8). The Passover (like the Lord’s supper) is an ordinance connected with progressive sanctification and thus requires faith and understanding. The paedocommunionist understanding of the Passover presupposes a Romanist (*ex opere operato*) magical understanding of the feast. (7) Jesus likely attended his first Passover at the age of twelve (Lk. 2:41). (8) Our Lord and His apostles participated in the last Passover without their

¹⁹³ Although virtually every person this author has discussed paedocommunion with immediately goes to the comparison of the Lord’s supper with the first Passover as the main line of argumentation, some paedocommunionists are more sophisticated in their argumentation. For example, Peter Leithart argues from more general considerations such as the meaning of the covenant, baptism, and his assertion that Israelite children were invited to eat various sacrificial/sacramental meals. Interestingly, the passages that Leithart cites as proof that all covenant children should partake of the Lord’s supper actually prove nothing of the sort. He appeals to the original Passover (Ex. 12:3-4) which is ambiguous regarding the issue and which both sides of the debate use as a proof text for their position. Scholars and commentators are not in agreement as to the original recipients of the Egyptian Passover. Then Leithart appeals to the peace offering in Leviticus 7:15-21. Leviticus 7 discusses the priest’s portion of the sacrifice, but mentions nothing about infants eating the sacrificial meat. If portions of the sacrifice were taken home for the family to eat, one still needs to determine whether (a) infants partook of the meat, and (b) was the meal sacramental? The appeal to Leviticus 7 is full of assumptions that cannot be proven. Next, he cites Deuteronomy 14:22-29 which is simply a fellowship meal and thus proves nothing. Leithart also points to the Feast of Tabernacles in Deuteronomy 16:9-14, which is a time to rejoice and thank God for the harvest. This feast points to the coming of the Holy Spirit, not the Lord’s supper. Finally, Leithart cites 1 Corinthians 10:1-14 which refers to the eating of manna in the wilderness by the Israelite nation. Since such eating was not sacramental and since the purpose of the passage is to teach the need for persevering in faith and obedience toward Christ, we reject this as well as Leithart’s other proof texts.

¹⁹⁴ Richard Bacon, sec. 5, p. 4.

families in Jerusalem in accordance with God's law (Mt. 26:26-29; Lk. 22:17-20; Mk. 14:22-25).¹⁹⁵

Another reason why paedocommunion is unscriptural is that the Lord's supper replaces not only the original Exodus Passover, but also replaces all the Old Testament sacrificial meals. In the Old Covenant there were different sacrifices, sacrificial meals, with different recipients. For example, the Levitical Passover included circumcised Jewish men, circumcised slaves, converted circumcised foreigners and successfully-catechized, circumcised boys or young men (Ex. 12:43-48; 23:14-19; 34:18-25; Num. 1:3, 22:6; Prov. 22:6; 2 Chron. 30:7-8; Lk. 2:41). The covenant meal on Mount Sinai admitted only the male leaders of Israel (Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel, see Exodus 24:9-11). What is particularly interesting

¹⁹⁵ The fact that only men and older catechized sons participated in the permanent Levitical Passover, and that only men participated in the first Lord's supper naturally raises a question regarding the participation of women in communion. If women were excluded from the Passover and the original institution of the holy supper should they not also be excluded from the ordinance of communion in the New Covenant era as well? The answer to this question is that a study of the New Testament indicates that both men and women are obligated to attend the Lord's supper. One must keep in mind that the Lord's supper is a new ordinance. While it has a number of things in common with the Passover, there are also important differences. Also when discerning the participants of the holy supper one must not merely examine the original institution of the Supper but also how the supper was conducted by the local New Covenant churches.

There are a number of reasons why women have always participated in communion. (1) New Testament historical examples indicate that everyone present at church meetings who could examine themselves was permitted to partake. For example we read in Acts 20:7, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." On Sunday Christians came together to hear the Word preached and to celebrate the Lord's supper. Virtually all commentators take the phrase "the breaking of bread" in this passage to refer to the Lord's supper or the Lord's supper coupled with the *agape* fellowship meal. There are two reasons the expression "to break bread" is connected to communion: First, it is often mentioned in connection with public worship. It would be rather odd for Luke to make sure that his readers knew that the Christians had lunch after the service. Second, in Acts 2:42 the expression appears in a list that relates to public worship: teaching-preaching, Christian fellowship, celebration of communion, and the prayers of the saints. "In the Greek, the definite article precedes the noun *bread* and thus specifies that the Christians partook of *the* bread set aside for the sacrament of communion (compare 20:11; 1 Cor. 10:16). Also, the act of breaking bread has its sequel in the act of offering prayers (presumably in the setting of public worship). The words *breaking of the bread* appear within the sequence of teaching, fellowship, and prayers in worship services" (Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990], 111).

(2) The context of Paul's instruction to the Corinthians regarding the Lord's supper indicates that his instructions apply to men as well as women. In chapter 11 the apostle deals with proper behavior during public worship. First, he deals with the issue of head coverings for women. Women are required to cover their heads in the worship service because of the creation ordinance of the covenant headship of the man, the observance of angels and the shameful of uncovered heads. Immediately after dealing with head coverings, the apostle deals with appropriate behavior at the Lord's supper (v. 17ff.). (Note the sentence, "For first of all when you come together as a church" [v. 18]). When the apostle discusses the proper participation in communion the issue is not whether one is a male or female but self-examination and discernment of the Lord's body.

(3) In the New Covenant era both males and females are to receive the sign and seal of baptism. In the Old Covenant era only men were circumcised. "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12, cf. Acts 16:15, 33; Lk. 3:21; Mt. 28:19-20). Paul explains that some of the former distinctions between people in the Old Covenant have been changed by the coming of Christ. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27-28). While covenant headship is a creation ordinance and continues into the New Covenant era, some of the Old Covenant applications of this principle are abrogated by Christ. Females who have been baptized are communicant members of the church and partake of the holy supper. In the Old Covenant Levitical Passover the men partook of the Passover feast for themselves and their wives.

regarding this covenant meal is its parallels with the Lord's supper. In the covenant meal of Exodus 24, the heads of the nation (the Old Covenant church) eat in the presence of Jehovah. This occurs at the beginning of the establishment of what, for them, was a new covenant. Likewise, God in the flesh (Christ) eats a covenant meal with the heads of the new nation--the New Covenant church. This occurs only hours before the sacrificial death of Jesus. The guilt offering meal was only to be eaten by the male offspring of Aaron, the priests (Lev. 6:17-18). This restriction was also true of the sin offering (see Lev. 6:25-30; 7:10), the grain offering (see Lev. 6:16-17) and the trespass offering (see Lev. 7:6-7). All of the sacrifices point to Christ Himself who is our Passover (cf. Jn. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 10:19-22). Since the Lord's supper shows forth the death of Christ and thus replaces all bloody sacrifices and their sacrificial meals, it is exegetically illegitimate to *arbitrarily* select the biblical account of the Egyptian Passover meal as the *only* or *primary* text that sets forth the terms of communion for the Lord's supper. Simply put, the fact that there were different terms of admission to the different covenant meals, most or perhaps even all of which excluded infants and toddlers, the original Passover account does not justify overthrowing the teaching and practice of the whole Protestant Reformation. Further (as already noted), why should believers look to the Egyptian Passover yet ignore the requirements of the permanent levitical Passover which was repeatedly set forth in the law of Moses and practiced for several centuries? The paedocommunionist argument from the Egyptian Passover is arbitrary, inconsistent and ignores progressive revelation.

The Meaning of the Lord's Supper

The strongest argument against infant and toddler communion comes from the theological meaning of the Lord's supper itself. The power or efficacy of communion does not reside within the bread and wine, but rather is dependent upon the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit opening our minds and hearts, causing us to feed upon the whole person and work of Christ by faith. As mere bread and wine, the divinely appointed symbols produce no spiritual effect upon the believer. But when the Holy Spirit enlightens the mind of the participant to perceive the gospel truth that the appointed emblems "exhibit, signify, and seal," then and only then do they become means of sanctification. If progressive sanctification from the ordinance is dependent upon understanding and faith, then infant and toddler communion are useless. Those who receive the elements but do not understand what is going on and have no faith do not receive any benefit from them whatsoever.

The doctrine of paedocommunion *logically* rests upon a materialistic, magical, mystical, irrational, superstitious understanding of the Lord's supper. All the Reformed symbols reject the idea that the bread and wine have intrinsic power to change the soul, that people who consume the Eucharist are automatically transformed (*ex opere operato*). Such a view is usually based on the Romanist doctrine of the real presence or transubstantiation of the elements (i.e. the bread literally becomes Jesus' body; the wine literally becomes Christ's blood.) Sadly, the doctrine of paedocommunion has led many professing Christians to the apostate and heretical Eastern Orthodox Church.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Paedocommunionists like to point out that around the time that the church officially adopted transubstantiation (c. AD. 1100), it also abandoned infant and toddler communion. The idea, however, that Jesus is corporally present in the bread and wine goes all the way back to some of the ancient church fathers and grew in popularity throughout the middle ages. "The realistic and mystical view fell in more easily with the excessive supernaturalism and superstitious piety of the middle ages, and triumphed at last both in the Greek and Latin churches; for there is no

There are a few paedocommunist arguments that relate to the meaning of the Lord's supper that need to be considered. A very common argument is that the children of believers who are members of the covenant and the visible church are denied an important benefit of the covenant if they are not allowed to participate in communion. Paedocommunionist writers will often refer to the confessional understanding of communion as baptistic or individualistic and treating covenant children as if they were excommunicated. Such an argument must be rejected for a number of reasons.

First, the paedocommunionist argument could be applied to God Himself, who did not command the participation of infants and toddlers in the permanent Levitical Passover. Children in the Old Covenant were members of the covenant and the visible church. Yet, Jehovah Himself did not see any inconsistency in restricting the Passover to adult males and their successfully catechized sons. Is God "rationalistic," "inconsistent," "gnostic," "individualistic" or "baptistic" in his treatment of infants and small children under the Old Covenant order? No, of course not! Such thinking is blasphemous.

Second, the paedocommunionist argument does not take into account the differences between baptism and the Lord's supper. Baptism is a sign and seal of regeneration. Regeneration is an act of God upon the heart in which the individual is passive. All that is required for a baby to be baptized is that at least one parent be a professing Christian and a member in good standing of a lawfully constituted church. The baby does not need to understand what is going on to receive the sign and seal of baptism (many babies even sleep through the ritual). Baptism, like circumcision, is a sign and seal of what can take place in the past (e.g., John the Baptist, adult converts), the present (e.g., some elect infants) or even the future (e.g., the children of believers whom God sovereignly chooses to regenerate at a later time).

The Lord's Supper and Progressive Sanctification

The Lord's supper, however, is different in a number of ways. (1) The Lord's supper is not a one-time, initiatory rite like baptism, but is a repeated ordinance that, along with the Word, is used for spiritual nourishment or *progressive* sanctification. Unlike regeneration or initial sanctification, progressive sanctification requires knowledge, understanding and faith. "Although Baptism and the Holy Supper have the same covenant of grace as their context, and although both give assurance of the benefit of the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Supper differs from Baptism in this regard, that it is a sign and seal not of incorporation into but of the maturation and strengthening in the fellowship of Christ and all His members."¹⁹⁷ Calvin's comments on this matter are excellent:

material difference between them on this dogma" (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987 (1910)], 4:545). The church in the west abandoned infant and toddler communion because of their fear that Jesus' body would not be treated properly by very young children. The Eastern church did not abandon paedocommunion. (Some modern Eastern Orthodox congregations, however, do not practice it.) The fact that the western church abandoned paedocommunion because of foolish superstitious ideas does not detract one iota from the fact that paedocommunionists must logically hold to the position that the Lord's supper is an ordinance that *progressively* sanctifies apart from faith, knowledge or understanding. They need to explain how this progressive sanctifying process occurs without resorting to an *ex opere operato* conception (e.g., transubstantiation, consubstantiation) of the holy supper. What makes paedocommunionism so dangerous is its tendency to allow the leaven of Romanism into Reformed churches.

¹⁹⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 542.

Furthermore, they object that there is no more reason to administer baptism to infants than the Lord's supper, which is not permitted to them. As if Scripture did not mark a wide difference in every respect! This permission was indeed commonly given in the ancient church, as is clear from Cyprian and Augustine, but the custom has deservedly fallen into disuse. For if we consider the peculiar character of baptism, surely it is an entrance and a sort of initiation into the church, through which we are numbered among God's people: a sign of our spiritual regeneration, through which we are reborn as children of God. On the other hand, the Supper is given to older persons who, having passed tender infancy, can now take solid food.

This distinction is very clearly shown in Scripture. For with respect to baptism, the Lord there sets no definite age. But he does not similarly hold forth the Supper for all to partake of, but only for those who are capable of discerning the body and blood of the Lord, of examining their own conscience, of proclaiming the Lord's death, and of considering its power. Do we wish anything plainer than the apostle's teaching when he exhorts each man to prove and search himself, then to eat of this bread and drink of this cup [1 Cor. 11:28]? Self-examination ought, therefore, to come first, and it is vain to expect this of infants. Again: "He who eats unworthily eats and drinks condemnation for himself, not discerning the body of the Lord" [1 Cor. 11:29]. If only those who know how to distinguish rightly the holiness of Christ's body are able to participate worthily, why should we offer poison instead of life-giving food to our tender children? What is that command of the Lord: "Do this in remembrance of me" [Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:25]? What is that other command which the apostle derives from it: "As often as you eat this bread, you will proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" [1 Cor. 11:26]? What remembrance of this thing, I ask, shall we require of infants when they have never grasped it? What preaching of the cross of Christ, the force and benefit of which their minds have not yet comprehended? None of these things is prescribed in baptism. Accordingly, there is a very great difference between these two signs, as we have noted in like sign also under the Old Testament. Circumcision, which is known to correspond to our baptism, had been appointed for infants [Gen. 17:12]. But the Passover, the place of which has been taken by the Supper, did not admit all guests indiscriminately, but was duly eaten only by those who were old enough to be able to inquire into its meaning [Ex. 12:26]. If these men had a particle of sound brain left, would they be blind to a thing so clear and obvious?¹⁹⁸

Understanding the differences between regeneration and sanctification is important for understanding why there are different qualifications for baptism and the Lord's supper. Sanctification begins in regeneration when God implants a new spiritual nature in the subject of his grace. (Early Reformed theologians often refer to this starting point as initial sanctification.) Sanctification is definitive in the sense that it was secured by our union with Christ. It is progressive in the sense that it is a lifelong process whereby the Holy Spirit subdues sin and increases a believer's personal righteousness over time. Sanctification is a work of God *in* the believer. In sanctification the Holy Spirit works upon man in both a mediate and immediate way. For example, in regeneration (i.e. initial sanctification) the Spirit of God works immediately; that is, He works directly upon man's soul in planting a new spiritual nature. Regeneration is not dependent on any external means. The workings of the Holy Spirit directly upon the elect person's heart are beyond human comprehension and encompassed with mystery. In *progressive sanctification*, the Holy Spirit works medially or through means. He works upon *the conscious life of man* through the *means of grace* such as the Word of God, the preached Word (Jn. 17:17, 19; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:2; Rom. 10:17; etc.), the sacrament of the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26), the communion with God in prayer (Jn. 14:13-14) and the practicing of good works (Jn. 15:2; Rom.

¹⁹⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) 2:1353; 4:16:30.

5:3-4; Heb. 12:5-11). The Word of God is foundational to every means of grace in *progressive sanctification* (Jn. 17:17, 19; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:2; Ps. 119:9, 11, 15, 16, 33, 34; etc.). Once one understands that the Holy Spirit uses external means in the process of progressive sanctification, then one cannot accept the notion that babies and toddlers are progressively sanctified during communion unless one adopts the view that the bread and wine operate automatically (*ex opere operato*) and that Jesus is physically present in the bread and wine, one with the elements. Francis Nigel Lee writes, “The Paedo position would force us to embrace a Roman Catholic or Lutheran understanding of how the sacrament conveys grace...For anyone coming from the Reformed perspective, this ought to be a paramount concern. After all, people were burned at the stake during the English Reformation for the Reformed view of the Sacrament. The proponents of paedocommunion simply **must** answer the question of how grace is conferred in their new system....At best they are left with the Lutheran view; at worst, the Roman...”¹⁹⁹

When the differences between baptism and the Lord’s supper are understood, we see that a Christian father who does not give bread and wine to a two month old baby is no more neglectful than a covenant head who starts verbally catechizing his children only when they are able to understand the meaning of words. The only manner in which a paedocommunionist can argue against this objection to his position is either to equivocate on the meaning of the word sanctification (e.g., ignoring the distinction between initial sanctification [i.e. being regenerated and set apart by God] and progressive sanctification²⁰⁰ or resort to an unscriptural definition of communion (i.e. an *ex opere operato* or magical formulation). It is not an accident that some of the champions of paedocommunion want people to reject the attainments of the Reformation with regard to worship and justification in favor of a more Romish, medieval conception of these doctrines.

Participation and Proclamation

The Lord’s supper is different from baptism in that it requires active participation. Believers are commanded to “take and eat” (Mt. 26:26; 1 Cor. 11:24, Majority Text). The church is to “do this act” (*Touto poiete*). This ordinance involves observing, touching, breaking, eating, tasting, drinking and so on. Dipping one’s finger in the wine and placing it in a baby’s mouth is not active participation on the part of a suckling. Further, even the term “remembrance” (Lk. 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:24-25) refers to more than a mental activity on the part of the participants. To the Hebrew mind it involved both thinking and acting, or thinking that leads directly to appropriate actions. In the Old Testament, “often ‘memory’ and ‘activity’ go together. God

¹⁹⁹ Francis Nigel Lee, *Paedocommunionism versus Protestantism*.

²⁰⁰ Peter J. Leithart (in his book *Daddy, Why Was I Excommunicated?*) uses well-known theological terms in a unique and confusing manner. On page 23 he uses belief and regeneration as synonyms and assumes that infants have the ability to believe. Such a view is not only absurd, it also explicitly contradicts the apostle Paul’s assertion that faith in Christ comes by hearing the preached gospel (Rom. 10:17). Babies can hear but they cannot understand. Paul says that edification cannot occur without understanding (1 Cor. 14:6-17). Leithart correctly points out (p. 23) that “regeneration is not separable from sanctification.” But he then erroneously concludes that infants are being progressively sanctified. While it is true that sanctification is connected to regeneration, it is also true that in progressive sanctification the Holy Spirit uses external means (preaching, Bible reading, the Lord’s supper, meditation on God’s law, etc.) as the cause of growth. Christian adults who do not attend the means of grace can stagnate and even go backward in the process of personal holiness. This fact, however, does not mean that they were never regenerated. Among genuine believers setbacks are always temporary. Christian children are sanctified as they grow in the wisdom and knowledge of Christ.

‘remembers’ and ‘visits’ or ‘forgives’ or ‘blots out’. So also Israel is to ‘remember’ by erecting a ‘memorial’ or by reenacting a rite (cf. Exod. 13:9).²⁰¹ Like the Passover which was a “remembrance” to be kept by Israel, the Lord’s supper is to be remembered and celebrated by the New Covenant church. The church remembers by participating in the ordinance of communion through faith. Babies and sucklings, while in the covenant, are incapable of the appropriate mental activity and the corresponding active participation! This point does not mean that they are unholy or under discipline any more than were the Old Covenant children who did not accompany their fathers and older brothers to the Passover at Jerusalem. Although babies and toddlers are not mature enough to partake of the Lord’s supper, they still are permitted to sit with their families at the table. At the original Passover meal babies and sucklings could not eat roasted lamb, bitter herbs and unleavened bread. However, they were not regarded as excommunicated. They were part of the household. They sat around the table, protected from the angel of death by the blood on the doorposts and lintel. The repeated accusation that nonpaedocommunionists are treating their children as if they are excommunicated is *ad hominem* rhetoric.

The teachings of the New Testament regarding the Lord’s supper presuppose a level of mental maturity on the part of the participants that excludes infants and toddlers from active participation in the ordinance. The communion table involves *commemoration*, which requires the ability to meditate and reflect upon who Jesus is and what he has done on our behalf. “The believing and grateful remembrance of Jesus is most certainly the main part in this feast.”²⁰² Remembrance obviously involves faith in the person and work of Christ. Hodge writes,

In remembrance of me, i.e. that I may be remembered as he who died for your sins. This is the specific, definite object of the Lord’s supper, to which all other ends must be subordinate, because this alone is stated in the words of institution. It is of course involved in this, that we profess faith in him as the sacrifice for our sins; that we receive him as such; that we acknowledge the obligations which rest upon us as those who have been redeemed by his blood; and that we recognize ourselves as constituent members of his church and all believers as our brethren, We are thus, as taught in the preceding chapter, brought into a real communion with Christ and with all his people by the believing participation of this ordinance.²⁰³

Calvin concurs, “If, therefore, you would celebrate the Supper aright, you must bear in mind, that a profession of your faith is required from you.”²⁰⁴

The Lord’s supper involves *proclamation*. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). “It is a commemoration of his death, *for* it is in very nature a proclamation of that fact.”²⁰⁵ The apostle “understands by *Kataggellein*, *announce*, the individual and collective proclamation of Christ’s love in His sacrifice, and of the glorious efficacy of this act. Each one confesses that he owes his salvation to this bloody death.”²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 553.

²⁰² Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977 [1889]), 581-582.

²⁰³ Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, Pa: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1857]), 226.

²⁰⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 1:384.

²⁰⁵ Hodge, 229.

²⁰⁶ Godet, 590.

Self-Examination

The fact that Lord's supper is a proclamation of Jesus' sacrificial death leads Paul to warn the Corinthians of the necessity of self-examination (see 1 Corinthians 11:26-29). "Let a man examine himself" (1 Cor. 11:28). The term "examine" denotes a moral exercise that presupposes a certain level of mental maturity that excludes babies and toddlers. There is to be due preparation before partaking of the elements. In the immediate context, this examination requires discernment or taking proper cognizance of the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29). The narrow and broad contexts of this passage indicate that this self-examination extends to three different interrelated areas. First, the examination extends to our treatment of Christ's body, the church. This point is plain from the immediate context, which precipitated Paul's digression upon the holy supper. Some Corinthians had been guilty of treating poor believers as second-class citizens at the *agape* feasts which at the time were still held in conjunction with Communion. (The Corinthians were probably guilty of following the ancient Greek custom of having different places to sit in the house, along with different quantities and qualities of food as a result of one's social and economic status. In other words, the rich were eating like gluttons while the poor were going hungry.) Scripture indicates that this ethical examination extends to other areas such as reconciliation with a brother (Mt. 5:23-24) and a refusal to repent of immorality (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:1, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13). Self-examination requires knowledge of God's ethical requirements as well as faith in God's Word, otherwise this examination would be subjective and legalistic. This examination, however, is not to be a morbid introspectionism or an expectation of sinless perfection, for every Christian knows that it is Christ alone and His merits that render him worthy to come to Communion.

Second, this examination involves "discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor. 11:29) which, in context, refers to a proper consideration of the meaning and implication of the salvation purchased by Christ. This point is obvious from Paul's quotation of the original words of institution from Luke 22:19 where the Lord's broken body is set before our eyes as the atonement for our sins. Remembering Christ's passion and meditating on how Jesus delivered us from the guilt, penalty and power of sin are connected not only to the sanctifying nature of the ordinance, but also to the dire warnings connected to the abuse of the sacrament. Mistreating Christ's body, the church, by unloving behavior toward the brethren, is an implicit denial of what the supper points to. A proper discernment of Christ's body (that is, his person and work) leads to a proper discernment of his body, the church. The two are intimately connected.

Third, the context of 1 Corinthians 11:29 indicates that communion also involves a proper recognition of the elements set apart for holy use. The elements are set apart from a common to a sacred use. Therefore, it is wicked and dangerous to use them in a profane manner (e.g., getting drunk). For this reason many commentators view the conclusion of this chapter as an admonition to separate Communion from the love-feast or fellowship meal.

Once again note that the admonitions associated with Communion presuppose faith, understanding and recognition of biblical ethics. It is totally inappropriate to dismiss the implications of these admonitions by arguing that they only apply to adults because (as noted) the holy supper, unlike baptism, requires faith, knowledge and understanding for progressive sanctification. The attempt to parallel these ordinances does not work without a complete redefinition of Communion (i.e. a redefinition in an *ex opere operato* direction).

The Lord's supper also involves *communion*, which involves the ability to look to the resurrected Savior as spiritually present with his people, actively strengthening their faith and

encouraging their hearts. Christ communes with and sanctifies the souls of believers by faith. All the important mental functions and activities associated with Communion, such as self-examination, remembrance and discerning the Lord's body, are of such a nature that they require faith, mature thought and understanding.

James S. Candish's comments on this topic are very helpful, especially his emphasis on the necessity of faith:

Before coming to the Lord's table, there is needed, besides that self-examination by which we judge if we can rightly partake of it, also a stirring up of those dispositions and desires that are required for doing so, especially faith, repentance, and love. For we need to have these not merely as habits, which may go dormant in the soul for a season, but as acts of the soul in lively exercise. It is by faith that we are not only prepared to feed upon Christ, but actually do feed upon Him (John vi. 35, 47). Coming to Christ, believing on Him, eating His flesh and drinking His blood, are spoken of by our Lord as one and the same thing; and all alike are connected with having eternal life, living by Him, dwelling in Him and he in us. If then we would enjoy this blessing at the Lord's supper, we must not only have had faith at some former time, or have the habitual disposition to trust in Him, but be actually trusting in Him at the time we observe it. We must draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, *i.e.*, with undoubting reliance on Christ as our High Priest. So, too, our love must be in actual exercise. "This do in remembrance of me," are Christ's words, making the Supper the pledge of love between Himself and His disciples. But the very purpose of a pledge or token of love is to call forth into lively exercise the love that exists as a habitual principle in the soul. There is always filial affection in the heart of a right minded son towards his parents, though at times his thoughts and feelings may be necessarily engaged with other duties. But when he looks on a keepsake that he has received from them, the actual feelings of filial love wake up in his breast and fill him with emotion. So, while engaged in the ordinary duties of life, the child of God may not actually have present feelings of love to God and Christ, though that dwells in his heart, but when called to the Lord's table he should have these feelings in fresh and lively exercise.²⁰⁷

Given the biblical understanding of the holy supper, it should not be a surprise to discover that the Reformed churches have always insisted that the partaking of communion never be separated from the preached Word. Feeding on the Word of God is a necessary prerequisite for eating the body of Christ. Thus our Lord proclaimed, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (Jn. 6:63). Not only does the preached Word define the sacraments, giving them meaning, it also strengthens our faith. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Interestingly, the symbolism of the supper itself points to the importance of faith for nourishment or progressive sanctification. The figures of eating and drinking picture a Christian receiving Christ by faith. We are not talking about a mere intellectual assent to certain propositions (thus, the frequent charge of paedocommunionist that the confessional understanding of the holy supper is gnostic is totally untrue) but a trusting in Jesus alone for salvation and spiritual nourishment. Communion vividly sets forth the vital union effected by faith between Christ and the believer. Further, self-examination in all its aspects is founded upon one's faith, knowledge and understanding of God's holy Word.

Once one eliminates the need for faith, he also eliminates the need for the accompaniment of the preached Word. Thus, the paedocommunionist understanding of the

²⁰⁷ James S. Candish, *The Christian Sacraments*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 121-122.

Lord's supper logically should lead to the partaking of Communion apart from the Word. In other words, there would be no reason to abandon the Romanist practice of dispensing the elements to sick individuals apart from public worship. If the elements work *ex opere operato* apart from faith and understanding, then why not dispense the elements to individuals like magic pills? The paedocommunionist will simply ignore the abundant biblical evidence regarding the differences between baptism and the Lord's supper by arguing that: (a) all the admonitions relating to the Lord's supper are directed *only* to adults; and (b) the overall teaching of covenant theology proves that infants and small children should be included in the Lord's supper.

We have proved that these arguments are fallacious by noting the following: (1) Infants and toddlers did not participate in the permanent Passover feast. Thus the charge that paedocommunionists level against Christians who are faithful to the Reformed symbols could be leveled against God himself. If God did not command that infants and toddlers who were circumcised should partake of the Levitical Passover, then God would be just as guilty of violating the paedocommunionist's interpretation of covenant theology as confessional Reformed believers. (2) Baptism and the Lord's supper are different sacraments with different requirements. The Lord's supper is not an initiatory sacrament in which a person is passive but an ordinance of *progressive* sanctification. Paedocommunionists need to explain how babies and sucklings are *progressively* sanctified apart from knowledge, understanding and faith. Paedocommunionists must either redefine the biblical doctrine of sanctification or they must pervert the meaning of communion by adopting an *ex opere operato* formulation.

One paedocommunionist author attempts to circumvent the progressive sanctification argument by arguing that the Lord's supper does work *ex opere operato* (i.e. automatically) in the sense that the recipients do invariably receive blessings or cursing during the communion meal. Paul says that judgment comes upon those recipients who receive the body and blood of our Lord in an unworthy manner. This argument raises the question: How could infants and toddlers receive communion in an unworthy manner if they do not know their right hand from their left, if they have no ability to communicate, mistreat people or discern the body? A study of Paul's warning in context makes it abundantly clear that this caution applies to professing Christians who are capable of acting in an unloving manner toward the brethren. The modified *ex opere operato* argument still presupposes a magical, mechanical understanding of the supper.

Another common argument of paedocommunionists is based on the fact that the Lord's supper is a covenant renewal meal. The argument is as follows: If baptized children are included in the covenant and are members of the visible church, then obviously they have a right and obligation to participate in the covenant renewal meal that Jesus has instituted. Is it not sinful and wrong to keep the eucharist from Christ's little lambs? Although this argument is common and has sentimental appeal, it is easily refuted by Scripture. Were the children of believers part of the covenant and members of the visible church in the Old Testament economy? Yes, they certainly were. Did they then have the right to participate in every covenant meal that Jehovah had instituted? No. They did not participate in the covenant meal on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:9-11), nor did they participate in the permanent Levitical Passover (Ex. 23:14-19, 34:18-25; Num. 1:3; 22:6; Prov. 22:6; 2 Chron. 30:7-8; Lk. 2:41). Does this exclusion mean that they were excommunicated or regarded as outside the covenant by God? No, absolutely not. It was God Himself who instituted the various covenant meals and determined the appropriate recipients. If, under the old economy, God can say that infants and children are in the covenant yet cannot participate in certain sacred activities until they are able to understand what is going on, then He

obviously can do the same in the New Testament. We may not like it. It may not seem logical to us. However, we must submit to God's teaching, which is reflected in our Reformed symbols.

Another very common argument used by paedocommunionists against the historic Reformed position is that the restriction of communion to adult church members and successfully catechized children who have made a credible profession of faith is that the confessional understanding came about because of the influence of Greek philosophy and rationalism on Calvin and the early Reformers.²⁰⁸ This argument is refuted in two ways. First, it needs to be pointed out that this accusation is never supported by any actual evidence. If the Calvinistic Reformers and theologians were influenced by Aristotilianism, neo-Platonism or Thomism (regarding Communion), then one should easily be able to demonstrate that fact by showing quotations, similarities of thought and philosophical connections. Until this work is done, the idea that the Westminster divines were influenced by Greek thought in their understanding of the Lord's supper needs to be regarded as an *empty* accusation. Second, anyone that is familiar with the Reformed confessions and theologians of the past knows that their arguments were based on the exegesis of Scripture and not on esoteric philosophical considerations. Even this brief study has shown that the new covenant Lord's supper as understood by the Reformed symbols is thoroughly rooted in Scripture, not heathen philosophy. Perhaps the reason this accusation (that the historic Reformed view is Greek or rationalistic) is so frequently made by paedocommunionists is that their position is inherently irrational. The Bible teaches that progressive sanctification comes by God's truth (Jn. 17:17; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:2; Ps. 19:9 ff., etc.). To argue that infants and sucklings are progressively sanctified by crumbs of bread apart from any understanding is irrational. Although God is almighty and can do whatsoever He desires, He cannot contradict His own nature or Word.

Conclusion

Our study has revealed that the doctrine of infant Communion is faced with a number of insurmountable exegetical and theological difficulties. An examination of the Old Testament shows that "the strong support for paedocommunion" that allegedly is to be found there is lacking. Not only is there nothing tangible in the Old Testament to cling to for divine warrant, the relevant material *contradicts* paedocommunion. Sacramental ordinances designed for progressive sanctification required faith, knowledge and understanding in the Old Covenant just as the Lord's supper does in the New Covenant.

A brief examination of passages dealing with the Lord's supper in the New Testament demonstrates that the holy supper is a sacrament for progressive sanctification (i.e. spiritual nourishment and growth) and thus requires discerning the Lord's body, self-examination, faith, repentance and active participation. There is simply no way a Reformed Protestant can adopt paedocommunion without redefining the doctrine of sanctification. (Many, of course, adopt infant communion out of an ignorance of both doctrines. If a popular theologian or conference speaker promotes it, then it must be right.)

²⁰⁸ When one understands Calvin's view of the Lord's supper as well as that of the other early Reformers (e.g., Martin Bucer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Theodore Beza) one will see that the charge that these men were rationalistic in their views of communion is baseless. They taught that "by faith and the power of the Holy Spirit our minds, for which principally this is food, are lifted even to heaven to obtain the body and the blood present there" (Beza, at the Colloquy of Poissy). Whatever one may think of Calvin's view of the Lord's supper it is certainly not based on rationalism.

While the issue of paedocommunion may seem to be a minor doctrinal matter that is not worth arguing over, the adoption of infant Communion by Reformed churches has great potential for leading people to superstitious, sacramentalist views of Communion. It can be and, sadly, already has been a conduit to mysticism, Romanism and Eastern Orthodoxy for a number of poor deluded souls. Thus, let us hold fast to the doctrinal attainments of our covenanted reformation not because we have a love of tradition, but because the Reformed symbols are excellent expressions of scriptural teaching.

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