

*A Baptism that Saves!*

**The Reformed and Sacramental Doctrine of Baptism  
Argued and Clarified**

by Preston Graham, Jr.

©1999 by Christ Presbyterian Church, New Haven, CT 06510

All rights reserved. This book may be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form, with permission from the publisher if beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law.

Printed in the United States of America

Set in Palatino

## CONTENTS

### Introduction

1

### Chapter One

A Brief Comparison: Where We Agree And Disagree  
With The *Reformed* Baptist On Baptism

### Chapter Two

The Reformed Theological Framework for a  
*Sacramental* Doctrine Of Baptism

### Chapter Three

The Reformed Hermeneutic:  
The Principle of *Continuity* Between The Covenants Worked Out In Baptism

### Chapter Four

A Challenge to Scrutinize Our Bias And  
Four Questions For The Baptist to Consider

### Chapter Five

Some Practical Advice Inferred From  
The Reformed Doctrine Of Baptism

We should receive all of those received by Christ into the  
body of Christ with full Christian charity.

Practical advice regarding *hope* for our baptized children?

Practical advise about the reformed doctrine of baptism and  
its impact upon Christian ethics.

Some practical advice on child discipleship

### Chapter Six

Distinguishing Unconfirmed from Confirmed Faith  
Leading to Admission To The Lord's Table

### Addendum:

Those Before Us On the Topic of Baptism  
Together with An Abbreviated Bibliography



## Introduction

It wasn't that long ago that I was a Baptist. Having professed faith the summer before I went off to college, I have very fond memories of my first Baptist pastor and the many wonderful people that were involved in helping me grow as a young Christian. To this day, I suppose I would still seek out the counsel of my first Baptist pastor in a time of crisis. I can hardly think of anyone that I have more respect for in the world. At college, it was a Baptist campus minister that had a deep impact in my being grounded in the faith and giving me a vision for serving Christ. After college, I can remember the "young married" class that my wife and I were involved with in the Baptist church while we were on staff with a para-church organization in a University context. The pastor was a good man committed to expositional preaching. We remain good friends with several of the people that were in that class. When I later went back to Grad. school, I helped begin a Baptist ministry on a college campus and again I have nothing but fond memories.

I mention all this personal history if but only to say that I really do believe God is using the Baptist tradition just as He used it in a very powerful way in my life. And the reader will understand why it was with "kicking and screaming" that I became a Presbyterian. I suppose the whole trek began when I was in seminary and I promised myself to leave no rock unturned. As my faith was systematically being "reformed" (not that I was self-consciously not reformed before) it was the "baptism issue" that kept me in the Baptist church for as long as I remained-- and I suppose my natural sympathies for my past. So what happened? Well to put it simply, I came to realize that my Baptist convictions regarding baptism were simply not "reformed."

Now I know that many will not want me to say it this way. In fact those Baptist I most respect as Baptist will likely take offense that I have said it this way. There really is nothing "personal" meant by this. But I do think the terms "Reformed Baptist" form an oxymoron that needs to be exposed. For if once we consider the Baptist view of baptism *as within* that interconnected system of faith known as the reformed faith, it becomes clear that the doctrine is an aberration. What I am not saying is that the "Reformed" Baptist person does not confess any or even most doctrines of the reformed faith. But that they are inconsistent to their otherwise reformed theology in holding to their view of baptism when related to the reformed system as a whole. E.g. The non-sacramental, anti-infant baptism view of baptism cannot be reconciled with the historic reformed faith as that system of doctrine which begins and ends with the sovereign grace of God as working through election, effectual calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. Even the rhetoric of "believers baptism" exposes their great fallacy when compared to the reformed doctrine of effectual calling!

Now please don't misunderstand me at this point. I am not saying that a Reformed Baptist is an "Arminian." Quite the contrary, I simply believe a Reformed Baptist is inconsistent when he/she talks of their peculiar doctrine as if within the Reformed Faith. It was this realization that led me to become a Presbyterian. But does it matter some might ask? Well ask any Baptist and you will have the answer. For if I learned anything as a Baptist, it is that baptism is one of their distinguishing marks. And this is at least one reason why it matters since it prevents unity among a people that ought most to find unity of faith. It also matters in that one's view of baptism is related to a covenant formation that is either corporate/ecclesial or primarily individual-- the latter finding greater plausibility for modern Western persons perhaps, but in contradistinction from the classical reformed view. In so far as one's identity as a Christian is concerned, this will play out in some very important ways-- either as one who is identified with Christ as a corporate person first or as a private person first. The ethics that are derived from one or the other are quite opposite. I would therefore pray that the reader who considers themselves sympathetic to the "Reformed Baptist" view will dare to "break ranks" if but this one time to peer under that rock. You may be surprised!

A few words about method-- my hope is to avoid the all too typical practice of erecting a "straw man" for the sake of argument. I have chosen what is commonly believed to be the most "reformed" statement of the Baptist position as articulated in the 1689 London Baptist Confession in comparison with the Westminster Confession of Faith (1664) as my two primary sources. This is a particularly useful comparison in that the LBC is an adaptation of the WCF--- which makes it all the more obvious what points were viewed as problematic for the Baptist. Only those sections that pertain to the questions at hand have been included here. After briefly noting the agreements and disagreements as compared to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1664), I will present a summary argument for the sacramental view of baptism as applied to children of believing parents. Most significantly, I will show this view as the most natural extension of both the Reformed Theological Framework and the Reformed Hermeneutic regarding the relationship of the Old and New Covenants. I will conclude with four "questions" for the "Reformed Baptist" to consider. An addendum on Child training in a covenant text has also been included at the end.

**Chapter One**  
**A Brief Comparison: Where We Agree And Disagree**  
**With The "Reformed" Baptist On Baptism**

**The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith**  
Chapter 29: Of Baptism

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him; of remission of sins; and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12; Galatians 3:27; Mark 1:4; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:4)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance. (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:36, 37; Acts 2:41; Acts 8:12; Acts 18:8)

**Westminster Confession of Faith**  
Chapter XXVIII: Of Baptism

- I. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ,[1] not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church;[2] but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace,[3] of his engrafting into Christ,[4] of regeneration,[5] of remission of sins,[6] and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life.[7] Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world.[8] ([1] Mt.28:19, Mk.16:16, [2] 1 Cor.12:13, Gal. 3:27-28 [3] Rom.4:11, Col.2:11-12, [4] Gal.3:27, Rom.6:5, [5] Tit.3:5, [6] Acts.2:38, 22:16; Mk.1:4, [7] Rom.6:3-4 [8] Mt.28:19-20)
- IV. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ,[11] but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.[12] ([11] Mk.16:15-16, Acts 8:37-38 [12] ] Gen.17:7-9; Gal.3:9,14, Col.2:11-12, Acts 2:38-39; Rom.4:11-12)
- V. Although it is a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance,[13] yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it:[14]or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.[15] ([13] Lk.7:30, Ex.4:24-26 [14] Rom.4:11, Acts 10:2, 4, 22, 31, 45, 47, [15] Acts 8:13, 23)
- VI. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered;[16] yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.[17] ([16] Jn.3:5,8 [17] Gal.3:27, Titus 3:5; Eph.5:25-26; Acts 2:38, 41)

Basic Agreement:

1. We agree that baptism is an essential element of Christian discipleship as instituted by Christ. Compare:  
LBC-- "Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ...  
WCF-- "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ..."
2. We agree that only those authorized by the visible church is authorized to baptize.

LBC #28-- 1. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver, to be continued *in his church* to the end of the world.  
2. These holy appointments are to be administered by those *only who are qualified and thereunto called*, according to the commission of Christ.  
WCF # 27-- of which may be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the Word *lawfully ordained*.

3. We more or less agree to the meaning of baptism as a "sign" as representing union with Christ and the order of salvation that flows forth from this. Yet even here, the LBC excludes the language "covenant of grace" and "regeneration"-- not an altogether insignificant exclusion as it will be shown.

Compare :

LBC-- "a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him; of remission of sins; and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.

WCF--" but also to be unto him a sign... of the covenant of grace, of his engrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life."

Disagreements:

1. We call baptism a "Sacrament," the Baptist's call it an "ordinance"-- Is this mere hair splitting? Notice that with sacrament comes the reformed language of *covenant of grace* whereas with ordinance there is no mention of *covenant* or *grace*. Notice that while the WCF will teach that grace is "conferred" through baptism such as to be an instrument or "means" of grace, the LBC will not use any language even approaching the issue of grace being somehow communicated or "effected" through baptism. This as was shown is also reflected in the LBC excluding the language of "covenant of grace" and "regeneration" as even to it's signatory aspects noted above.

And lest there be any confusion about what the WCF is saying and *not* saying at this point notice carefully the language included in the WCF and not mentioned in the LBC. The result will be to not only distinguish the *reformed* view from the Baptist view, but also to clearly distinguish the *reformed* view from both the Lutheran and especially the Roman Catholic position. Thus, the WCF qualifies that,

- 1) grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.
- 2) The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.

In effect, as a sacrament according to the WCF, baptism is a means of grace *as conditioned* upon God's perfect and immutable decree of election unto salvation. An "ordinance" according to the LBC is a symbolic "drama" or event that signifies saving grace but the application of it is *conditioned* upon the recipients experience so that baptism doesn't directly "effect" that saving grace.

This is as good a time as any throughout this essay to distinguish the WCF (reformed) doctrine from the Roman Catholic doctrine. In short, the qualifications noted above refutes any notion that the elements themselves confer anything upon the recipient in so far as grace is concerned. To say it bluntly, the element of water can do nothing other than get a person wet apart from the efficacious agent (the Holy Spirit) that works through baptism. There is no mystical power imparted to the external symbols enabling them to produce effects which are in any way independent from God's personal and sovereign benediction. The elements of baptism then are not the agents of grace, but rather the occasion of grace when accompanied by the effectual calling of God by the Holy Spirit. The *agent* of grace is the Holy Spirit whereas the *means* of

grace are the elements themselves when administered in the context of a true church and as conditioned upon the sovereign grace of God in election through effectual calling. Therefore, if the Baptist doctrine denies the *means* of grace in Baptism, the Roman Catholic doctrine denies the personal *agent* of grace in Baptism. If the Baptist see nothing being *effected* by means of the elements in baptism properly administered then the Roman Catholics see the elements themselves effecting grace in baptism. The reformed position then carefully navigates between either extreme affirming the very real "means of grace" of the sacraments as conferred by the personal agent of grace with respect to the Holy Spirit.

2. Thus, the language of *seal* in the WCF is absent in the LBC. This is very significant in so far as baptism under the WCF is a covenantal transaction by God toward man whereas it is at best a covenant remembrance by man before God under the LBC. A *seal* indicates a transaction which then requires some mediated presence of God whereas a *sign* only requires a message as attached to the medium about God. A seal, in so far as a real and true transaction is taking place, assumes a society into which the person is being transacted. Baptism is about the formation of a covenant community. Thus the WCF language of "for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church" -- in this case that visible church which is not equal with but organically connected to the "one holy catholic church" of every age and place including heaven. There is no mention of entrance into a covenant community or "visible church" in the LCB. Baptism as such is related more to the individual experience and condition than the formation of a covenant community.

Therefore, the *seal* of baptism both "marks out" a person in the outward sense of entering him/her into the covenant community while to the elect conferring upon them saving grace as by the Holy Spirit unto regeneration. (Although remember the qualifications at this point) In so far as the WCF view of baptism is "sacramental," there is accordingly "in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other" not by any power in the elements themselves but by the sovereign grace of God accomplished by the Holy Spirit. This is the very thing denied by the LBC in so far as they are only a sign with no mention of them being a seal.

3. And, as the above two differences would anticipate, the administration of the sacrament/ ordinance is distinguished in that the WCF is after the principle of "effecting" salvation as a means of grace and the formation of a covenant community whereas the LBC is after the principle of indicating faith as merely a sign. (As will be shown later, "faith" for the Baptist is reduced to what we will call "confirmed faith" as distinguished from "unconfirmed faith." We will argue that this is to artificially reduce the concept of "faith" as from the reformed view of effectual calling.) The recipients of baptism then are distinguished as follows:

LBC-- Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance.

WCF-- 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.

#### Summary:

While many people in both camps would tend to reduce our differences to this issue of proper administration, I would suggest that the far more significant issue is # 1 and #2, out of which will follow # 3. E.g. If in fact baptism is a covenant transaction by God effecting salvation to man and the formation of a covenant community-- then the proper recipients would be viewed in that light. However, if baptism is a memorial such as not to "effect" salvation in any special sense but rather to remember it as evidenced in a person's life, then of course the proper recipients of baptism will be viewed in this light. One applies baptism in so far as it will effect salvation, the other applies baptism in so far as it is a testimony of salvation in the believer.

Again, both camps would hold that it is something given to the church by God to do-- but for very different reasons! Our question is which position is most "reformed" when compared to the reformed system as a whole and the reformed hermeneutic as especially applied to the relationship of the Old and New Testament scriptures.

## Chapter Two

### The Reformed Theological Framework for a *Sacramental* Doctrine Of Baptism

What follows is a presentation of the Reformed framework from which to think about baptism as briefly argued from scripture. In that our reformed framework for baptism is sacramental, it will take issue with the narrow way that Baptists define "faith" as if to disqualify that kind of faith that is unconfirmed. We too believe in "believers" baptism yet so as to include all believers including those who have not yet been "confirmed" as through an examination of a "credible profession of faith." The sacramental aspect is a promise driven principle rather than a recipient centered principle. Our reformed framework will take issue with the Baptist's idea of conversion as if it were a once and for all kind of thing. (as suspiciously familiar to those theologies that stress decisions in conversion rather than the saving faith as effected by the renewing power of the Holy Spirit) Our idea of effectual calling will include that kind of regeneration that is gradual in so far as a person is *being* renewed such as to ordinarily result in a credible profession of faith, but not necessarily. And those *being* renewed are not then without faith but rather they are without confirmed faith. We want to reclaim the idea of "believers baptism" such as to include *all* believers as indicated by what God is doing (based on his promises to the church) less than by what a person is doing necessarily. And finally, our reformed framework will take issue with the Baptist conception of an entrance rite into the church being related less to God's activity by his presence in baptism and more related to the perceived condition of a recipient. All of these reformed distinctives are related to the idea that God mediates his presence through sacraments-- no less the sacrament of baptism.

Therefore, we believe the most crucial aspect of this debate regards the *sacramental* issue. To say it plainly, it seems very difficult to construe scripture such as to say anything less about baptism other than that God is in a very real sense "present" in baptism, not merely to watch it, witness it or even to receive praise from it, but also and most especially to transact his covenant by means of baptism to those effectually called by Him before the foundation of the world by His sovereign grace in election. In short-- God is, in a very special and real sense, effecting salvation through baptism to the elect according to the reformed *sacramental* framework. And as this will be applied to the proper recipients of baptism, we see no reason why children are not included in this promise of election as entrusted into the covenant family in the covenant community of faith.

Before we see this in scripture, notice how this is related to reformed theology. E.g. The *sacramental* view most accords with the idea of God's initiating covenant as by his sovereign decree in election as effecting this through effectual calling. This is because instead of God "watching / witnessing" the transaction represented by baptism, He is present as mediated through the sacrament to initiate and effect the covenant. *He is God the covenant actor not merely God the covenant witness and this as related to the whole order of salvation as held by the reformed tradition.* We therefore don't think of baptism as something we do but rather something God does-- at least in an ultimate sense. While we or our children are physically getting wet, God is washing the elect with the Holy Spirit unto regeneration in effectual calling. (remember the WCF qualifications according to the principle of God's sovereign grace)

Consider then the following scriptures that by a plain reading will clearly depict baptism "effecting" salvation rather than merely signifying salvation (although it certainly does this as well) and ask yourself, why impose a meaning that is not most natural and obvious to the language itself.

**Matt. 28:19**

*As you go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them...*

**Titus 3:5**

*He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*

**1Pet. 3:21**

*And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you--not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*

**Gal. 3:27**

*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

**1Cor. 12:13**

*For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

**Mark 16:16**

*The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.*

**Acts 2:38**

*Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

**Acts 22:16**

*And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.'*

**Rom. 6:3**

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

**Luke 7:30**

*But by refusing to be baptized by him, the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves.)*

Now if you read these passages as if you have never even thought about the issue before, try telling yourself that each passage does not seem on the surface at least to treat baptism as somehow effecting something-- namely salvation from sin in its various dynamics. So what is the most simple and honest reading of "be baptized and have your sins washed away" except that baptism is in some sense effecting your sins being washed away? And again, if this were the only passage that seemed to imply this, we may then see if there is a less natural albeit grammatically possible way of reading it. But then we read Peter's exhortation to "be baptized... *so that* your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the Holy Spirit." What does the contingent and future language most naturally say except that baptism is in some sense viewed as transacting to the person being baptized the gift of the Holy Spirit? Or we read that God "saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." What "water" is this except the waters of baptism? And what does it do except "effect" in some sense at least "rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."

As we will see, this is language that most everyone will concede is "effectual calling" language-- namely that God is enabling an elect person to embrace Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. And again, what's the most honest and natural way of reading "and baptism... now saves you." Our point is that while these passage should not be taken to the extreme position that salvation is effected *necessarily* or even *immediately* by baptism-- in that even baptism is conditioned by God's sovereign grace in election-- we should not then react in yet the other extreme and conclude that baptism has no real and saving presence of God such as to transact salvation through it. It is, plain and simple, a sacrament whereby God is effecting the regeneration by his special and saving presence of the Holy Spirit. And wouldn't you expect this as from the Reformed doctrine of sovereign election unto effectual calling? That is, the reformed doctrine of baptism assumes that God is the actor in and through baptism after the principle of his sovereign election-- less that God is the witness as it where.

Christ then, when commissioning His church to "make disciples" (the only command and the main verb) qualifies his command by two or three (however one reads "going") instrumental clauses (Adverbial instrumental participles) which includes "by baptizing them..." Baptism here is not merely a "sign" of making disciples, it is an instrument together with the preaching ministry of the church which then effects salvation to those called by God! Why read this in any other way than in its most natural way? Surely we wouldn't think of preaching as anything less than a "means of grace." Therefore, while preaching is not in itself a sacrament (in that it lacks the symbolism associated with a "sign" that is one mark of a sacrament), it is clearly done in the sacramental context that is provided by the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's table. (We could of course show the very same "effecting" and "presence" language although directed at covenant renewal as associated with the Lord's supper. This will again be denied by the Baptist confession.)

And so we read "the one who believes and is baptized will be saved" and take it at face value given the strong analogy of faith provided by these other scriptures. Sure, we see baptism associated with faith-- but how exactly? Why the Baptist assumption that reads "and" in Mark 16:16 as if indicating a temporal chronology such as to see baptism as following faith? For the passage seems clear enough, that belief is identified with baptism, but along side of baptism as preceding salvation. This "faith" we believe is the work of God's spirit in effectual calling and can be BOTH unconfirmed (as in the case of any infant or mentally underdeveloped person) and confirmed (as in the case of those who will be brought to a self-conscious and credible profession of faith). It should be noted as well that this reading "temporal" order into a phrase will cut both ways such as in other texts that have baptism "preceding" faith (see for instance Col.2:10-11) Our point is that these clauses are not temporal at all, but rather instrumental such that baptism is clearly shown to be related to faith and discipleship not only to signify it but also to effect it.

We should therefore find another principle from which to determine the proper recipients of baptism other than one that denies effectual calling as transacted by baptism. We believe that baptism not only signifies the gospel as by faith, but effects the gospel by God's sovereign grace. God is in a very special way present as mediated by the sacraments of baptism in order to effect salvation to the elect. True faith is being given through baptism (which can include both confirmed and unconfirmed types of faith-- both of which can be spurious, both of which can be genuine-- thus the WCF qualifications). Baptism is a *sacrament* and functions within the order of salvation doctrines in a way that is consistent with the *reformed* faith.

### Chapter Three The Reformed Hermeneutic: And The Principle of Continuity Between Covenants Worked Out In Baptism

Once it has been established that baptism is in fact sacramental-- that a covenant transaction from God to His people is effecting salvation-- we will want to observe that this is not so new or unexpected as given the full counsel of God in redemptive history. In fact, we think it rather plain that the apostles, given their task of setting the foundation of the church upon the cornerstone of Christ, established a foundation that was in continuity with God's redemptive plan, albeit distinguished from the previous Mosaic administration of that plan at crucial points.

We will see this principle of succession as worked out through baptism in several ways-- as relating to a "presence" theology of the church and worship, as related to a definition of the covenant community, as related to a common meaning as attached to the entrance rite of circumcision and baptism, and as related to the gospel itself which is being transacted by both circumcision and baptism respectively. We will in short see that baptism in its day functioned and signified exactly the same way that circumcision did in its day and within a community that is defined in exactly the same way. Rather than the standard "proof-texting" approach to demonstrating, we will here construct the more comprehensive "biblical theology" approach of reading the Bible as a unified redemptive history. This assumes the "reformed hermeneutic" that is often described by the language "covenant theology."

Our task then is to Biblically defined this reformed "hermeneutic" such as to see continuity in God's saving activity in the Old and New Covenants-- especially regarding his saving activity being mediated through the sacraments of circumcision and baptism respectively. In doing this, we will especially want to know if the New Covenant scriptures gives us any indication that children of member parents are "insiders" rather than "outsiders" since we know that children of member parents were "insiders" in the Old Covenant church. And if children are "insiders" it will be all the more curious that there is nothing to recognize them as such when the entrance sacrament in the Old Covenant church *did* recognize them. All of this pertains to a reformed hermeneutic with respect to the Old and New Covenant church and will prove extremely important toward understand baptism as an entrance sacrament applied to all who God has set apart as "insiders" of his covenant community. Toward understand this continuity principle consider then the following Biblical evidence.

#### **1. The Covenant Community of Faith Is Distinguished by God's Presence in both the Old and New Covenant As Mediated Through Sacraments:**

In redemptive-history, ever since Adam and his posterity were excommunicated from "before the face of God" (Gen.3:8) until the elect are reunited back into God's immediate presence (as told in Revelations 21:3-4 using language derived from Leviticus 26:9ff), God has in a provisional way *mediated* his saving presence as through divinely appointed sacramental rituals, governments and confessions in every redemptive era. King David certainly understood the omnipresence of God in the world, yet he still longed for that *saving* presence that was mediated through the ordinances and worship of the old covenant. (Pss. 84:2) Orthodoxy in the Old Testament era was described in terms like "dwelling place", "living God", "tabernacle" even as covenants were initiated and sealed through rites whereby God manifested his presence to his people.<sup>1</sup> The New Covenant, although under new apostolic forms, proves no exception as promised by Christ in Matthew 28:18-20, "I am with you until the end of the age." For in the

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example Gen.15, 26:24, Exodus 29:42 where the tabernacle is also described as the "dwelling place" of God in Deuteronomy 12:5. See also Ex. 29:42, 40:34, Lev. 22:3, Ps.76.2, Pss 76:2, Num.35:34

words of Calvin about the Lord's table in the context of authorized confessions and government, "his word cannot lie or deceive us: Take, eat, drink: this is my body which is given for you; this is my blood which is shed for forgiveness of sins..."<sup>2</sup> Why then a bias against "sacrament" in worship such as to negate its mediated and "effecting" presence?

It seems that nothing short of a gospel that mediates a regulated and divinely appointed *presence* will sufficiently satisfy an authentic gospel! I am tempted at this point to reclaim the cliché "full gospel"-- as developed in Ephesians where "Christ fills all in all." And clearly what is *not* meant here is the filling by an individualized Holy Spirit, but rather that kind of filling that is explicitly stated in the passage, "for the church which is his body..." (Eph.1:22, see also Eph.2:19-22 and then Eph.4:10ff) This church made visible in its sacramental worship, confession and pastoral oversight. (see 1 Tim.1-3)

Would we believe that God is less present for us today and would it be any less regulated or corporate? How then do we account for language that seems clearly to indicate that God IS present in transacting and effecting His saving grace to us-- thus Christ's very real, albeit spiritual presence as mediated through a very real "means" or instrument as regulated by God rather than men. This language includes "koinonia" (1 Cor. 10:16-17) as applied to the Lord's supper such that to eat the bread is to in some sense "participate" with Christ and be nourished/renewed by Him. This surely makes more sense of Christ's command to eat the bread and drink the wine and then to say "this IS my body... this IS my blood." It would be a stretch it seems to see in this language merely the idea of "represent or signify" regarding our fellowship with Christ without actually effecting our fellowship with Christ.

This framework shows forth God, in His mediated presence acting and effecting the elect unto salvation as through the appointed means of sacramental worship. It is NOT then, necessarily the case that those who should receive baptism have already been effectually called as evidenced by a "confirmed faith." Rather we believe that the person may be getting saved as through the baptism of water and the Holy Spirit! All of this then is from a very simple framework about worship-- that it is for the church God's presence with us to transact his salvation from him to us, not vice, versa. This seems to make the best sense of what it means when Christ says "Lo, I am with you until the end of the age"(Mt. 28) when compared to Eph. 1:22, "with respect to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

We must then think about all this as from some "framework" concerning our understanding of the sacraments themselves-- and if we do believe that baptism is the mediated presence of God to effect salvation (even regeneration) in a real sense, then we will administer Baptism from this reference point as well.

## **2. The Gospel Is The Same In Both the Old And New Covenants:**

How many times will the apostles argue that our New Covenant faith is one and the same as Abraham's?

### **Acts 3:25**

*You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, 'And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'* (notice this language of "families" rather than merely individuals-- for a later time)

### **Gal. 3:8**

*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you."*

---

<sup>2</sup> See John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book.IV. Chapter.7.1,3,5)

Most would agree for instance that when God transacted the covenant with Abraham as through the OC sacrament of circumcision, that it was relevant in a direct sense to the New Covenant. The following was said in the context of instituting circumcision, which we know was maintained under the Mosaic context as well.

**Gen. 17:7**

*I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God."*

**Gen. 17:9**

*God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.*

Clearly then the New Covenant ought not to be contrasted with the Abrahamic covenant but rather viewed as a succession to that covenant. And of course, children were entered into the covenant community in Abraham's day as by an entrance sacrament. That the entrance sacrament was succeeded by baptism is again clear in so far as baptism is not only directly associated with circumcision in scripture, but also is shown to function as both a sign and a seal in full continuity with the sign and seal of circumcision as will be shown in # 2 and #3 below. All of this of course relates to the reformed hermeneutic of seeing at least some degree of continuity -- and especially as here related to the gospel itself as preached beforehand to Abraham. Our gospel, which includes God's activity of forming a covenant community, is one and the same as the gospel preached before hand by Abraham!

### **3. Baptism Signifies Exactly What Circumcision Signifies In the Old Covenant**

If baptism replaces circumcision as the entrance rite into the covenant community, we would expect as with the same gospel that baptism would signify the same meaning. And in fact this is the case. For as a "sign," there is no doubt as from the teachings of the apostles that baptism today means precisely what circumcision meant in it's day, albeit signified by different elements (as is also the case with the Lord's supper in relation to Passover) So we see Peter relating "baptism" to the waters of both the Red sea and Noah's flood as signs of passing through a great judgment ordeal. Apart from God's saving covenant, this would be to pass through judgement into punishment. Yet within God's saving covenant, this meant passing through the judgment waters into salvation even as God protected them from the covenant enemies. And of course, the sign of "water" was then exactly that of the sign of a "knife" in the cutting ceremony of circumcision. Even the waters of Noah's flood are described as a "berith" which is the word for covenant making as derived from the verb "to cut." See for yourself as you reflect upon the following passages of scripture as with the brief commentary noted below.

**Read Genesis 3:24**

*Commentary:*

The sword imagery is first depicted in Genesis 3:24 where the judgment sword was given to the cherubim after Adam and Eve's expulsion from the sanctuary of the garden. Meredith Kline states, "In the hour that God drove man into exile it was indicated that any future return to God's dwelling place and the tree of life must involve a passage through the flaming sword of God's judgment." (Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, p.85) This image is later placed upon the great curtains which guarded the Holy of Holies from intrusion. However, on the day of Atonement the blood from a sacrificial substitute was sprinkled upon the cover of the ark as representing the passing through God's judgment into his Holy presence by means of a representative substitute. Therefore, participation in the rite of circumcision as depicted in Genesis 15, 17, and 22 represented a confession to be under the judicial authority of God. To be circumcised was ceremonially representative of gaining an entrance into that covenant community that had access in a specially revealed way to safe passage through the flaming swords of judgment into God's

blessed presence.

#### **Read Genesis 9:11**

*Commentary*

In Genesis 9:11 the Genesis flood is referred to as a "cutting off of the flesh" curse of the covenant. This is the same word "berith" used to depict God's covenant as signified in the OT by the cutting ceremony of circumcision. Clearly, the water is here being related to circumcision as described in Genesis 15, 17 and 22 where the practice of circumcision is intended to *signify* the judicial authority of God's sword.

#### **Read Isaiah 43:1--4**

*Commentary*

This passage speaks of god's redemption in terms of passing through waters with God into salvation. It prepares for the New Covenant use of water in baptism.

#### **Read 2 Peter 3:5-7 and 1 Peter 3:18-22**

*Commentary*

Both relate the idea of judgment by water as observed in Genesis flood to the day of judgment. But in 1 Peter 3:21, Peter states that "this water (referring to the flood) symbolizes baptism that now saves you ...by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

#### **Read 1 Cor 10:1-2**

*Commentary*

In a similar fashion, the exodus through the Red Sea is spoken of by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:1-2 as a baptism in water. Paul writes, "our fathers...all passed through the sea, and ... were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."

#### **Colossians 2:11-12**

*Commentary*

The New Testament evidence for relating baptism to circumcision is supported by Colossians 2:11,12 where circumcision is used as an analogy for baptism. In general, Paul is asserting that circumcision in its day signified the same realities which baptism signifies in the present day. In essence, the "water" of baptism signifies the same reality as the "knife" in circumcision. This is as clear as any New Testament verification of dual OT sign-- knife and water-- both signifying judgment, both with its corresponding rite of the old and new testament respectively.

My point of course is to notice that circumcision in its covenant context signified the same realities as baptism in our covenant context. This is something that the Baptist will want to avoid in that it will imply the obvious-- why not then administer it to the same recipients?

#### **4. The Seal Of Baptism In The New Covenant Functions Like The Seal Of Circumcision in The Old Covenant**

That Circumcision was BOTH a sign and a seal in the Old Covenant is clear if but by the explicit language of Paul to this point.

#### **Rom. 4:11**

*He received the **sign** of circumcision as a **seal** of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, 12 and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.*

As a "seal" we see that circumcision transacted the covenant while also signifying the covenant. Yet this didn't violate the Abrahamic principle of justification by faith then-- so why should it now? (And of course, nor did it stop Abraham from giving it to infants on the eighth day after

their birth.) For if someone wanted to distinguish baptism from circumcision along the lines that baptism is more related to the faith of a believer in this sense-- clearly then they would need to be consistent and say this would hold true for circumcision if we read what Paul had to say about the matter.

Here again, we discover continuity with circumcision. We see that circumcision, like baptism, is an initiatory rite or "entrance *sacrament*." And so as expected, it is applied in a way that initiates, less renews/ confirms, the covenant. And this happens not so as to diminish justification by faith, but rather to initiate it as by the presence of God in His covenant community whereby he is actively saving the elect by his grace. This is again all the more clear given the fact that baptism is clearly associated with circumcision by Paul.

**Col. 2:11**

*In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; 12 when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*

And again, we see the sacramental aspect of baptism in plain view as that which *like circumcision* not only represents salvation, but also functions in some sense to initiate/ effect salvation. We are said to be both buried and raised with him in baptism through faith in the power of God. As noted earlier, here we have a case that if read temporally would place baptism as preceding faith. My point is that the "temporal" reading is wrong in any case if in relation to faith necessarily. Rather the point is that Baptism is related to effectual calling whereby a person is enabled to embrace Christ so as to be vicariously buried and raised with Christ before God. Paul's point in Rom. 6 will then be that baptism as "effecting" our vicarious status with God will also effect our manner of living before God. Unfortunately, some have totally missed this point in trying to force Rom. 6 into teaching a profession of faith kind of precondition to the administration of baptism. Rather we could just as well take this passage and exhort our children (as Paul is exhorting the church at large) to walk in newness of life as this includes a credible profession of faith (what we will call a confirmed faith) in Christ. This would be in perfect harmony with Paul's logic, as derived from the "seal" of baptism that effects salvation. (AS any good preacher will do, Paul exhorted his readers to do that which he knew would happen only if God makes it happen by effectual calling. And of course only God knows who are the elect such that the exhortation would be reciprocated with confirmed faith.) See then how baptism is shown to "effect" our relation to Christ in his death and resurrection such that we are exhorted to live out this effect in newness of life.

**Rom. 6:3**

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

Therefore, in all these passages, we see that the sacramental element of baptism is in continuity with the sacramental element in circumcision. All this seems to place the burden of proof upon those who would deny baptism to children. And if this isn't enough, why then are children treated as "insiders" to the covenant community rather than outsiders in the New Covenant as was the case in the Old Covenant? Why for instance does 1 Corinthians 7:14 name children as "saints" even for the faith of but one believing parent? Or, as Christ is the head of the Church, why then would Christ make such a clear point as to name children as participants in the Kingdom of God? (Lk. 18:16) John Calvin comments that "if it is right for infants to be brought to Christ, why not also to be received into baptism, the symbol of our communion and fellowship with Christ?" It might be said that not one of these passages directly relate to baptism? Yet they do speak to the issue indirectly in that they all seem to treat children of adult members as the Old covenant treated them-- as insiders. And given the clear continuity of

baptism with circumcision, where is the scripture that tells us not to baptize children? Why the bias against baptizing children and where did this come from if not redemptive history as recorded in scripture?

### **5. The Membership Of The Covenant Community Includes Children of Member Parents in Both the Old And New Covenant**

When we consider the question of community formation-- clearly children were included within the community under the Old Covenant as entered by circumcision. And we would all surely agree that the entrance sacrament administered in the New Covenant community of faith is more inclusive with respect to the constituents of the covenant community than under the Old Covenant. For as we compare those who should be given the "entrance sacrament" now in the NC in comparison to the OC, why the Baptist reversal in membership into the Covenant community of faith (OC And NC church) in the opposite direction expected? E.g. Under the OC, the membership of the covenant community of faith included the children of member parents. (*Gen.17:10-12*) And yet the New Covenant shows itself to be more inclusive, not less, when it comes to admission into the covenant community. So for instance in Galatians 3:27-28, New Testament professor David Gordon notes, "since the New Covenant unlike the Old, includes women, slaves and Gentiles without any additional rites or cleansings, it would be surprising for it to exclude those included in the Old Covenant (children of believers) and would be even more surprising if it excluded them without any mention of the exclusion."

Now if this were all we had to talk about-- merely an expected inclusion of children in the New Covenant as from the context of the Old Covenant-- it would beg the question why there is NO command NOT to include children in the New Covenant. The burden of proof would be against the Baptist position at this point. Yet there is ALSO clear evidence that children are in fact considered "inside" the community of faith in the New Covenant. The only evidence a Baptist will offer is the apparent association of faith with baptism in the accounts noted in Acts-- but as we will see, there is nothing at all that would necessarily exclude the faith that is not yet confirmed as in the case of children. Try then to consider the following observations with new eyes and I think you will be convinced.

Let us begin with the practice of the New Covenant apostles as applied to households and see if this doesn't make sense given redemptive history. Of course, none of us can rightly determine from the many passages that record household baptisms anything about the age of those baptized. Moreover, whereas in some cases the text might seem to suggest that everyone in the household were "believers," there are other passages that tell us nothing at all about the faith of those baptized. And again, even where it does, we have no reason to assume that the faith was of the "confirmed" type rather than the "unconfirmed" type. Why should we reduce the word "believer" to include only those who have a "confirmed faith" rather than an unconfirmed faith? E.g. I could certainly use the language of scripture to describe my household of three kids and a wife as all "believing" in Christ, albeit some (my wife and I) have confirmed faith and have been admitted to the Lord's Table while others (my three children) have yet to be admitted to the Lord's table for covenant renewal by a confirmed faith. But ask any one of my children and they would tell you that they *believe* in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Whose to say that this "faith" that is developing in them as from their election into a covenant family was not transacted in some way as related to baptism? So then, try reading the following passages from this reformed perspective of affectual calling and see if the passage doesn't in fact make more sense. Namely that baptism was administered using the sacramental principle in that the confirmed faith of even one parent is all that is in view for the whole family to be baptized.

**Acts 16:15**

*When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us... 33 At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay.*

**Acts 18:8**

*Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized.*

Each of these passages illustrate a reformed distinctive-- that the fundamental social "unit" of the church is the family rather than the individual. (A single person is then considered one family unit given his/her providence with respect to marriage.) And wouldn't this make sense given the history of redemption in the Bible? For beginning with Adam all the way into the New Covenant, the fundamental constituent making up the church of the Old and New Covenant has not been the individual but the family treated as one unit. This is supported if by the simple observation that the church was derived from the family in redemptive history and continues to define the church after fall.

So in Gen.2:24-27, God's image was "male and female" as then joined together to establish the marriage which established the first family. And before the fall of humanity, both the state (civil) and the church (spiritual) were *within* the first family. In Genesis 2:15, the dual aspect of the first family is revealed in the mandate to "guard" and "cultivate" the garden of God. E.g. The family was given the "cultic" or "churchly" task as related to the sacramental presence of God represented by the sacramental tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (the word trans. "tend" in some English Bibles is the Hebrew word that is also translated "guard" that is also applied to the role of the priest in relation to the temple worship. It is used in Gen.3:24 to describe the "priestly" role of the angels in guarding the garden from intrusion by those cast out of the presence of God-- a scene that was embroidered upon the curtains guarding the "holy of holies" in the temple.) The family is the beginning of the church such as to represent its fundamental social unit. We then would agree with Samuel Davies:

The great Author of our nature, who has made us sociable creatures, has instituted various societies among mankind, both civil and religious, and joined them together by the various bonds of relation. The first and radical society is that of a family, which is the nursery of the church and state. This was the society instituted in Paradise in the state of innocence, when the indulgent Creator, finding that it was not good for a man, a sociable creature, to be alone, formed a helpmeet for him and united them in the endearing bonds of the conjugal relation. From thence, the human race was propagated; and when multiplied, it was formed into civil governments and ecclesiastical assemblies...

As we move through redemptive history, wasn't the family (which of course included their children) again shown to be the fundamental building block used by God in the Abrahamic context to establish his covenant community of faith? Wasn't this again the principle used to organize Israel under the 12 tribes/families? And don't we see this same principle working out in the New Covenant as illustrated by household baptisms-- which contrary to what you would expect from a Baptist position say nothing about the condition of the dependants except that they are members of a parent who convert to Christ? And if the church consists not so much of individuals but of households, then why would we exclude some members of the household merely for the fact that their faith is unconfirmed? At least, why would we do this with NO command to do this given that all of previous redemptive history included "unconfirmed" faith as "insiders" in the community of faith as indicated by their being circumcised. (it should be noted here that while circumcision was given only to the males-- in so far as males were the representatives of families-- then all members were "covered" by this.)

Again, we see this reformed principle of covenant formation playing itself out such as to define the community of faith and consequently the application of its entrance rite. It is not until after

the enlightenment that this principle was eroded in our civil society even, much less our church societies. This is why historically the church, as with the state, defined itself by families and why children, even if "represented by one member parent" were given member status in both as well. (voting patterns, giving patterns and even seating patterns reflected this in most churches in this country in its early years.)

The point here is that the church is derived from the family in a redemptive historical analysis and even into the New Covenant is patterned after the "household" model. It is for this reason that Paul refers to the "church of the living God" as the "household of God." Even the male authority in the home is then applied to the role of men in the church in so far as it is a qualification for being an officer that they rule their family well. (1 Tim. 3) Therefore, Paul could argue "for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?"

All of this suggests that God's "sociology" is primarily related to the formation of a covenant community by the addition of families-- less individuals This focus on covenant community is illustrated in the Old Covenant by the temple itself that was identified by God's presence in the Holy of holies. . E.g. this *presence* was identified with the corporate identity less the individual identity. So where is the "temple" in the New Covenant? Here again, I think many today will be surprised. As noted by Richard Hays, when Paul speaks of presenting your bodies (plural) as a living sacrifice... it is the corporate order that is to be the successor to Israel that Paul has in mind. Or when Paul speaks of God's building (1 Cor.3:10) for instance, he says it is a place where God *dwells* (as was the description of the OT temple/tabernacle). "Do you not know," he asks, "that you (plural) are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you (plural)?" (3:16) As Hayes notes, "to read this last sentence as though it spoke of the Spirit dwelling in the body of the individual Christian would be to miss the force of Paul's audacious metaphor: the apostolically founded community takes the place of the Jerusalem temple as the place where the glory of God resides."

Understanding this sets up a whole way of thinking about ethics and human responsibility such as to be less related to the individual and more related to the community. Pauline ethics, for instance, "is fundamentally ecclesial in character" according to Hayes. "We begin to grasp his moral vision only when we understand that he sees the church as inheriting the corporate vocation of God's covenant people, Israel." Again, "the primary sphere of moral concern is not the character of the individual but the corporate obedience of the church."<sup>3</sup>

So then, Baptism as such is more related to what the community does and less to what an individual does-- the recipients more identified as they are identified in the community and less as what is happening to/in them per se. (not that this is unrelated as we will see) In so far as the church consists of families, and families consist of both parents and their children, then children ought to be members of the church and entered by means of God's initiating sacrament!

How would all this change our view of the individual whose identity is identified with the identity of the community less his/herself as distinct from the community? How would this change our understanding of baptism if then related to the formation of a community less the formation/exercise of an individual? In short, Paul and the apostles should be read *against* the present post-enlightenment trend as preoccupied with the individual's personal relationship with God and with the moral responsibility of individuals and *for* the formation of a community and it's responsibility to its members! "Hence, the will of God is always to be discerned by and

---

<sup>3</sup> Richard B. Hays, "Ecclesiology and Ethics In 1 Corinthians" (obtained off the Web, this was a lecture delivered... )

for the community, not by individuals in isolation."<sup>4</sup> This will be the resulting spirituality of those raised and nurtured by a church that is reformed by definition, and as such, will "consider the interest of others as more important than yourself" since this is to take our corporate identity seriously.

This way of reading the Bible is a reformed way in that the modern church is viewed as succeeding Old Covenant Israel which then includes the succession of sacraments. Sacraments, as the mediating presence of God which forms the church, is given to those considered "inside" the church as discerned by the definition of that community less the experience of that person. Likewise, baptism, like the Lord's table, is an event for the formation and renewal of the community of faith upon the promises of God, less (although not entirely unrelated) to the subjective realities in the individual per se. The reformed view then sees the sacraments as God effecting the community of which then the individual is related to that community. The question then, from this perspective, is not merely driven by the experience of the individual but the promises given to the community-- and of course, the haunting question for a Baptist to consider is "are children included in the promises given to the church? Of course a passage like Acts 2:58-39 seems to resolve the issue very clearly, *be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ... and this promise is for you and your children...*

Therefore, the reformed idea of covenant as applied to baptism will not merely ask the question, what is the subjective reality of an individual, it will ask what is the relation of the individual to the church which then gains them access or not to the communities promises and rites. In other words, given this covenant theology reading of the church and its sacraments, of vital question for us is "who doe's God include as "insiders" of the church such as to gain access to the church's rites whereby God transacts his covenant privileges? And then of course there is 1 Cor. 7:14 where the child of even one believing parent is described as "hagios" or "saint"-- a term used to describe those elect of God in His covenant community.

Perhaps then on this point we should make one final note. It would seem very strange to us that when we get to heaven, we will discover there from the old covenant church those who were effectually called as through the power of God working through the sacraments in young children but none from the New Covenant church that God effectually called as through the sacraments in young children. It would seem very strange that the church as defined on earth was not in continuity with the church as defined in heaven. Sure, our earthly church is a fallible church-- but should this change the very definition of constituency with respect to the church? Sure, I will expect both the wheat and the tares within the church, but this of course is true no matter how you administer baptism! But I would not therefore change the membership categories of the church as compared to the heavenly church. In so far as I believe that some children who have yet shown evidence of a confirmed faith on earth WILL be in heaven, then I am comfortable with this being true in that "heaven on earth" that we call the church!

## A Summary

Both from the perspective of a "reformed hermeneutic" and a "reformed theological framework," a sacramental view of baptism as applied then to all believers including their children is shown to be most consistent. The sacramental doctrine of baptism (as an initiatory rite that effects salvation in a very real and special sense by the presence of God) is most consistent with the *whole* counsel of God's word and the reformed faith, especially our doctrine of effectual calling unto salvation as directed by the sovereign grace of God in the formation of the community of faith. While you may hold to other reformed doctrines, we believe you do

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

this *in spite* of the fact that you hold yet another doctrine concerning the sacraments that is inconsistent with these reformed doctrines.

This brings us to the following challenge and questions that needs some thoughtful consideration if you are a Reformed Baptist. They are raised "rhetorically" but I hope not in the negative sense of that term. They are intended to represent both the seriousness of the issue and the level of conviction that we have about it, but NOT such as to be polemical or in any way to suggest that our unity, though fractured at this particular doctrine, is fractured at the many other points in which we heartily agree. Far too often, we act as if to disagree at one point is to then negate all that we do agree about. My genuine hope is that some may actually set aside a prejudice long enough to really consider the things that have been said here. For what its worth, I was on the "other side" of this debate for still most of my "Christian" life. I am sympathetic with what may seem a whole new way of looking at something that may at first feel very uncomfortable and perhaps even play into fears concerning some one or another unhealthy religion. It may take some time but I believe the truth will in fact be shown to that which is most according to the sovereign grace of God in both word and deed.

## Chapter Four

### A Challenge to Scrutinize Our Bias And Four Questions For The Baptist to Consider

Baptist have always pointed to the conversion stories in the New Covenant as if to support their *peculiar* doctrine. It is said that because converted people are baptized, this evidences a *new* principle regarding the recipients of the entrance sign. We have raised the question as to why this assumption. Why assume this especially given a reformed, sacramental view of Christian baptism as taught in scripture? And why this new assumption when compared to the gospel preached beforehand? (Heb.1:1-2) To illustrate our point, consider the following questions that have been raised by John Sartelle in his wonderful little book, *What Christian Parents Should Know About Infant Baptism*. He asks,

1. When a person believed in the God of Abraham and trusted in Him in the Old Testament, what happened?

He was circumcised.

2. What was the outward event that represented the clean heart in the Old Testament?

Circumcision

3. What was the outward sign that marked a person's entrance into the community of believers in the Old Testament?

Circumcision

"Now," he states, "let me ask you the same questions replacing the words "Old Testament" with "New Testament";

1. When a person believed the God of Abraham and trusted in Him in the New Testament, what happened?

He was baptised.

2. What was the external event that represented the clean heart in the New Testament?

Baptism

3. What was the outward sign that marked a person's entrance into the community of believers in the New Testament?

Baptism

So why should we view the conversion/baptism stories of the New Testament any differently than the conversion/circumcision stories of the Old Testament? What evidence within the scripture would then bias against the unconfirmed faith of member children? What principle is driving this bias if not the anti-sacramental principle of a decisionistic theology suspiciously coinciding with the anti-supernatural and individualistic views of post-enlightenment culture?

In short, we find it difficult to believe that given the anti-infant baptism position, the new covenant represents an all together different sociology with respect to the community of faith that was practiced under all preceding covenant administrations. Given the historic constituency of the covenant community as consisting of the children of believers, we would expect explicit commands against infant baptism if the terms of entrance where changed with the sign itself. This is to say that we find it easier to believe in infant baptism than anti-infant baptism so as to place a burden of proof upon our Baptist brothers and sisters to "prove" from explicit commands of scripture the contrary. When Abraham, after his expression of faith in Genesis 17, was commanded to circumcise all male members of his household, we don't believe that Abraham was justified by his act of obedience any more than that his household was justified necessarily by Abraham's act of faith in having them circumcised. Rather, we believe that circumcision corresponded to Abraham's recognition of total dependence upon God for his salvation together with his children-- and that in so far as Abraham would raise his children under the influence of the covenant promises-- God was promising Abraham a spiritual

progeny after him through faith. Today, we baptize our children with the same promise in view-- that God has preserved for himself a people of faith. We believe that God uses the visible means of grace as instruments in his saving work and that baptism represents the promise that within the church, our children are offered a salvation as through the faith given to Abraham and all succeeding generations after Him. This gift of faith, we believe, is the special work of God in calling some to share in the promises once given to Abraham and now enjoyed in Christ! Baptism, in a very special sort of way, connects us today under the New Covenant with all that saving and redemptive history. We therefore read in Acts 2:39, after relating baptism as a means of grace unto regeneration, "for the promise is to you and to your children... as many as the Lord our God will call." This is our point exactly-- that the call of God that is effectual unto salvation is a call that is genuinely conferred through baptism, although not necessarily or immediately, and that this is a work that is not only "to you" but also "to your children."

So herein lies the initial challenge for the Baptist. I can remember hearing at least some of these arguments many times but was never satisfied at first. Why? Put simply, I was holding to an unchallenged *bias* while demanding explicit proof-texts to the contrary. Where did this bias come from? Perhaps I felt more comfortable given my past theological assumptions. Perhaps also these assumptions were at least partially the product of my social context within an egalitarian and individualistic oriented society. I suppose my *bias* was also informed by my honest fears concerning "dead" religion as this was related in my mind to infant baptism. But like many issues this side of heaven, God doesn't give us so clear and uncontested proof as from some explicit command in scripture-- or we wouldn't be having this conversation in the first place. Rather our doctrines are often formed as within a whole interrelated system of doctrine that is always kept in tact as a whole. Therefore, it was when I realized that I had formed a "bias" that was itself being held outside of the "system" of reformed belief and scrutiny that I began to see things differently. E.g. It was when I realized that if the Biblical evidence established a system "bias" in the "reformed" way that I should then read the particular "problem texts" as from the context of a reformed bias. This is in short what some theologians have called the analogy of faith-- not merely comparing an interpretation of one scripture with other scripture, but comparing a particular "doctrine" with that system of doctrine that is believed true according to the scriptures. In the end, I was not being very honest with the issue or allowing God to really reform by mind. And once it was decided that my "bias" must suffer the scrutiny of scripture, I was convinced. For both my newly discovered principles of the reformed faith and a consistent way of relating the Old Covenant with the New Covenant was such as to tip the scale to that doctrine which most fit the pattern of sovereign grace and covenant community building.

Therefore, the above rational supporting infant baptism will never satisfy you if you are unwilling to give up the "bias" such as to stop looking for absolute, intellectual certainty as from the burden of proof that is set against infant baptism. Rather, the "reasons" for infant baptism are presented so as to satisfy a "burden of proof"-- or, to ask the question, "what makes *most* sense given the Biblical data as interpreted by the reformed tradition?" You must ask yourself, which doctrine of baptism is the most natural extension of the reformed faith as evidenced in the teachings of scripture? If at the end of the exercise, you are left with an intellectual certainty of say even 60%, you are then permitted to *act* and *believe* in infant baptism with 100% conviction. For about faith itself-- to stand on the side of one belief with less reason than to stand on the side of another belief with more reason is to take a leap of faith that is all the more unacceptable to sound doctrine. I have found that it takes more of a leap of faith to believe in the non-sacramental, anti-infant baptism doctrine than the reformed doctrine of baptism. And this settled it for me! Consider then the following four questions in light of the above arguments and clarification. Perhaps they will be a final straw.

#### Four Questions:

1. Is it insignificant that every other major tradition in Church history holds to the paedobaptism position? Admittedly, this question doesn't have the force of conviction, nor should it! But at the very least it should cause us to sit up and take note-- that according to any reasonable comparison with other traditions considered to be within the true "one holy catholic church"-- the "Baptist" position is an anomaly. As compared to the Reformed, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Congregationalist, Presbyterian and Methodist, among others.) While not one of these traditions are without their unorthodox branches, which of course would also include the Baptist tradition, they all to some degree represent the true church. So why such a great parade of witnesses to the contrary doctrine held by the Baptist?

2. Is it true that our worship, unlike every other worship of every other redemptive historical context is without a sacramental presence? This of course gets to the issue of a sacramental framework from which we will think about the question of baptism-- a framework raised by the distinction between "ordinance" and "sacrament." Our "sacramental" framework administers the sacraments as they are God's means to effect something (which of course assumes his saving presence) rather than merely a way to signify something. Why then the bias against sacrament when God was so very careful in every age to "mediate" in a regulated fashion his saving presence as through various "means" of grace? Is there perhaps an over-reaction to the Roman Catholic dogma?

3. Is it true that the only "believers" in the world are those who have come to a self-conscious "credible profession of faith?" Stated differently, are there no children in heaven? Are there no people who are mentally under developed in heaven? And if you believe that there are, don't we recognize the continuity between the church on earth and the church in heaven? E.g. Our distinction between "invisible" and "visible" pertains to *our* fallible vs. *God's* infallible definition of the exact constituency of the church. It is not as some would confuse it a distinction as to its essence as consisting of both the young and old. Is there no hope that heaven will consist of some who were underdeveloped in this world such as to express a credible profession of faith, but who were all the same effectually called into heaven? Does effectual calling, in other words, extend to that kind of conversion that is gradual as accompanied by a developmental principle?

Clearly the major issue facing Baptists is the significance of effectual calling unto regeneration as related to the application of Christian Baptism. (LBC-- "Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance.") This, the reformed baptist will agree, is by effectual calling-- that work of God unto regeneration which enables a sinner to embrace Christ. The question that we would want to raise is about effectual calling itself-- is it necessarily immediate or can it also be gradual. Is effectual calling only to be associated with a "confirmed faith" (or a profession of faith using LBC language), or can it also be associated with "unconfirmed faith?"

Our position is that while respecting the difference between unconfirmed and confirmed faith as applicable to the entrance sign and renewal sacrament respectively, we do not therefore admit to the fact that unconfirmed faith is any less authentic as "faith" than "confirmed faith" with respect to the work of God's spirit in effectual calling. So we would ask the Baptist, why attach the administration of baptism to *only confirmed faith* which then equates "effectual calling" with a "profession of faith." As noted above, why can't baptism, as applied to an infant, represent the effectual calling that is working itself out by the Holy Spirit into the life of a child albeit in a progressive, gradual way? (Again, as qualified by God's sovereign grace in election) While I'm sure that it will not be appreciated by our reformed baptism friends, all this still seems to be slanted toward a "decisionistic" approach (even if qualified in a reformed way) to

effectual calling unto regeneration and conversion?

Here then is what might be the greatest problem with the Baptist position if under the banner of "reformed" especially-- e.g. that conversion is defined exclusively as a self-conscious decision if derived from their baptism position. I have heard it said that baptism is the "drama of decision." Why not "the drama of effectual calling?" To put it plainly, why is the faith expressed by the child as from his/her mother's womb any less sincere and expressive of effectual calling than the faith expressed by a person in later life? Why would we set ourselves up as judges between the two as if we could infallibly discern between true faith and false faith? E.g. the "decision" expressed by the adult is no less susceptible to spurious conversion as that of a child under the trustful influence of their parents it would seem. (I.e. the desire to find success or to be admitted in some one or another peer group is no less effective such as to lead to false conversion as than the child who will eventually deny the faith of his/her parents.)

To state it differently, it is hard to imagine that heaven will consist of no unborn children, infants, or those who are of such mental underdevelopment that they could never hope to "profess faith" in a manner that the Baptist would express it. And why then would that heavenly society on earth not look more like that heavenly society not on earth? In every other way, we discern from scripture that the church on earth reflects an organic union with the heavenly church--thus our "one holy catholic church." And this "union" is less related to "confirmed faith" and more related to God's sovereign grace as through election unto effectual calling. (Rom. 9) The effect of the Baptist doctrine will be to either conclude that none who are developmentally incapable of a credible profession of faith are in the heavenly kingdom of God. The alternative is to develop all kinds of extra-biblical categories of people that are some how related to the "age of accountability" or in the case of those who are older but mentally underdeveloped regarding them as "children" in some sense. All of this mess is derived from a faulty view of effectual calling we would argue as then related to baptism.

So here we see the great error, albeit held by many "reformed people"-- that a decisionistic paradigm is actually driving the anti-paedobaptist position even if inadvertently. While perhaps explaining the profession as arising from the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, our reformed Baptist still cling to an individualistic and behavioral manner of measuring effectual calling rather than as we would argue a manner that is first and last driven by the idea of sovereign grace BOTH revealed in a profession of faith AND in the birth of a child into a covenant community of faith. Our view admits that there is such a thing as confirmed faith that is rightly expressed in the covenant renewal sacrament-- i.e. that sacrament that presupposes the mental development such as to examine oneself in relation to the work of Christ. Yet to exclude all people who are "underdeveloped" as therefore not "effectually called" is we believe to negate the very doctrine of election at a fundamental level-- that related to God's election of "communities" as within his salvation plan to elect individuals. And his formation of communities, we would argue, was in fact decreed by God when he brings a child into a covenant family.

So for instance, someone might ask, why not just admit anyone to the church if effectual calling is unrelated to decision *necessarily*. Well here we show our hand as reformed people. We tie effectual calling less to the actions of a person and more to the actions of God in election. Again, whereas we do distinguish between confirmed and unconfirmed faith as relative to the renewal sacrament, the entrance sacrament is more closely related to the election of God in creation itself as God has chosen to enter a person into a community of faith. In short, we think it DOES mean something that God in his infinite wisdom did in fact elect some, even before the foundation of the world, into a covenant community context whereby they would be raised to taste of the heavenly means of grace as through their parents in the context of a gospel believing church. Since those born outside of the covenant context show NO evidence of being elect of

God without a profession of faith they are not then administered the entrance sign of baptism until they express a profession of faith. Whereas those born into the covenant context do show evidence of being elect of God-- evidence as from God's decision less ours in this case to enter them into the community by right of birth-- they are given the entrance sacrament. (This of course is the very same principle that determines our membership in various civil states as well-- that by right of birth rather than any one or another decision *initially*.) Said in a different manner, even as we certainly do NOT conclude that those born outside of the covenant community are necessarily NOT elect unto effectual calling unto conversion, we do not conclude that those born into the covenant community ARE necessarily elect unto effectual calling either. Our position, we believe, respects this perfectly even as it respects what in fact God has done in the decision that He made to bring a child into the world one way or another.

Therefore, we need to ask our Baptist brothers and sisters, why the bias against that effectual calling whereby daughters or sons are "enabled" by God to "embrace Christ" as from the womb when as soon as they can think to pray, they pray? Or why doubt the young child who will learn to trust Jesus to have God's approving love as if this isn't real faith? We assume until shown otherwise that it IS true faith because we believe in the power of God through effectual calling to save even those who are unable to self-consciously examine that faith. And we believe that in fact the true church does include even children such as these--" no less for the fact that their expression of this faith is underdeveloped! (Lk. 18:16)

4. Why the duplication of a *renewal* rite which is in effect what Baptist do when they administer baptism in the exact same way as they administer the Lord's Table.? Why a new criteria for determining the membership of the covenant community along the same rules as applied explicitly to the Lord's supper-- as after a self-conscious examination. (1 Cor. 11:27-28) Why the duplication of function in effect? Why then treat Baptism as an "entrance rite" on the one hand but administer it as a renewal rite on the other?

Yes or No-- Is the New Covenant church in succession to the Old Covenant church (Israel) or not? As it seems Paul clearly teaches in Romans 9 the church is the "true" Israel of God. Peter applies the description once given to Israel to the church in 1 Peter 2:9-10 when he calls her "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." (Ex.19, 23) While we all admit to the discontinuities between the "Old and the New" we also see in this the fulfillment and succession principle of the Old "types" and "foreshadowings" as accomplished by Christ and reinstated in new forms for the New Covenant context. It seems here that we can't have it both ways and say that our Lord's Table is in succession to the Passover as foreshadowed in the sacrificial system of both the pre-temple and temple worship while other major "sacrament" of circumcision has nothing to succeed it. That circumcision is clearly abolished is clear from the apostles teachings. And yet even as we would anticipate a successor, in fact we have passages like Col. 2:10-11 that clearly associate baptism with circumcision. So why assume there is no association and then administer baptism after a principle that is otherwise foreign to the rest of redemptive history? This we would suggest is to read more discontinuity into the Old and New than the scripture would provide reason to do.

This is all the more the case in so far as a comparison of the evidence that supports the continuity between the Lord's supper and Passover is made with the evidence which supports continuity between baptism and circumcision. For if we were to see discontinuity in either one of the two, we would in fact have more evidence to do this with the Lord's supper than baptism it would seem. Consider for instance the following comparisons:

- a. Whereas Passover was instituted under Moses-- a covenant context clearly distinguished by the apostles from the New Covenant by way of a negative comparison-- circumcision was instituted under Abraham and a covenant context clearly taught by the apostles to be in

positive comparison with the New Covenant. Therefore, it is exactly where one would expect a positive comparison that the Baptist make a negative comparison, and vice versa. Thus, the argument as by the "positive institution" of baptism.

b. Whereas the Passover meal is clearly abolished in the New Covenant as a covenant renewal sacrament and replaced by the Lord's table, circumcision as the OC entrance sacrament is clearly abolished in the New Covenant, yet according to the Baptist position is replaced by nothing. This conspicuous absence of a succession sacrament to the OC entrance sacrament is all the more conspicuous when it is considered that there are clear passages of scripture that do in fact make a positive comparison between circumcision and Christian baptism as that which in some manner effects the benefits of salvation under the New Covenant. Thus the argument as to the "seal" of baptism.

It seems then that we can't have it both ways-- If it IS argued that children are in some sense "members" of the NC Church-- why isn't there an "entrance" sacrament to mark them out from others as there was in the OC? And if according to some Baptists, "dedication" is allowed-- where is the Biblical institution wherein Christ as the only head of His church has provided us with an authorized rule of faith and practice for this particular rule and practice? (I find it interesting that some branches of Baptist church's seem to intuitively want to see their children "formally" related to the church such as to create a new "practice" in which to do this, one that is not instituted in the Scripture.) And if then one concludes that they are not members of the church, how would you bury your young children? Is there not any assurance that is related to them in so far as God setting them apart from the rest of the world?

So either we are left with a person who is a member yet without formal and sacramental recognition to this as was given in the OC church, or they are not members even though in all previous covenant context they were and against all intuition. And this is all the more significant when it is considered how the apostles saw clear continuity between the Abrahamic covenant where the children were given the entrance sacrament and with the New Covenant. Now of course these questions would be more than satisfied if but one passage could be noted that in fact excludes our children from the entrance rite of baptism into the covenant community of faith. But in the absence of such passages and in the presence of other passages that seem to treat baptism as a means of grace less only a sign of grace-- we are all the more concerned that some foreign principle other than any found in scripture is operating for our Baptist brothers?

## Chapter Five Some Practical Advice Inferred From The Reformed Doctrine Of Baptism

So having peeked under the rock, what have you discovered? I hope you will pray for God's mind on the topic. And if in fact you have been led to the conviction of the *reformed* view of Christian baptism, then I would urge you to consider the following practical advice.

### **1. Practical Advice to those received by Christ into the body of Christ with full Christian charity.**

I have noticed over the years that when a person discovers something new and exciting, they can tend to wear it like a rain coat-- or a repellent if you will. I would therefore encourage you to hold your new position with grace. We need to recognize that those who differ with us concerning this view do not necessarily differ concerning the fundamental teachings of the New Covenant. It is true that if logically applied, the non-sacramental view of baptism would seem to erode the very gospel itself. But people are not always logical. They *can* hold to a doctrine that if logically worked out would contradict other doctrines that might call to question their sincere faith even. But people are not always perfectly logical. So I believe it would be a mistake to conclude that for a person to deny a sacramental "means of grace" in baptism would therefore be to deny grace as initiated by God in effectual calling. As I have said, it would be merely to believe in effectual calling in spite of their peculiar doctrine.

It seems as though Paul recognized that people may in fact be inconsistent yet so as to be accepted as brothers and sisters in Christ. His point in Romans 14 is to distinguish between the "weak and the strong" yet not so as to reject the weak. Those who believed that eating meat offered to "idols" was to defile themselves were holding to a "weak" position according to Paul-- since this would logically assume that the false gods really existed. Paul says that logically speaking, idols don't exist such that the food offered them are offered to non-existing beings. How could something non-existing defile something that exists? Now I suppose that for the sake of polemics, it would have been convenient to say that for those who believed that foods offered to idols were in effect thinking that the idols do really exist. And I suppose that they could therefore logically conclude that they were denying the existence of God, or something like this. But Paul wouldn't allow for such rhetorically motivated "spins" to impact the unity within the church. He said, "therefore receive one another."

In our humble opinion, the Baptist are "weak" in their peculiar doctrine, but this is not to hold that Baptist reject the essence of the gospel necessarily. And those who Christ receives unto himself we should therefore receive into membership in the church in so far as they are willing to promote the peace and purity of our church under biblical authority. We therefore welcome our Baptist brothers and sisters to share with us in our Lord's Table while in this present age, since this is the ultimate and highest evidence of our genuine Christian affection for one another. We believe that while Baptism is a serious issue since it defines the covenant community itself and with it a whole lot about our spiritual ethic even, that it is not that kind of doctrine that necessarily excludes a person from Christ's atoning sacrifice for our sins. And we believe that those who Christ died for have rights to all the privileges of membership in the Kingdom of God-- and this includes access to the means of grace as *within* the church of Jesus Christ. For this reason, we ought not only to admit our Baptist brethren into our churches, but to treat them as with the charity they deserve. We should avoid the temptation put upon us by such controversies to become "single issue churches." Our sermons and our discourses ought necessarily to cover the breadth of reformed thinking and not get bogged down on any one issue in the church. I believe it is a sure way to have a very unhealthy church to become so

single minded upon anything save Christ and all that this means with respect to his complete work for the church as our prophet, priest and king.

I should note however one important "discrimination" with respect to our different views as worked out within the church. Because it IS required that the leaders of our churches have a "sound doctrine" as according to our system of faith, and since the Baptist's view of Baptism is not of "sound doctrine," and since if we were to logically apply their doctrine to the reformed system of faith we would in effect unravel it as a consistent system, we would therefore not be able to qualify a "Baptist" to hold a ruling office in our churches. And if in fact we cannot see our good brothers and sisters converted to the "reformed" view of Baptism, then we eagerly await for the full unity we will enjoy together in heaven.

## **2. Practical advice regarding our *hope* for our baptized children?**

Surely the reformed doctrine of baptism is "good news" for parents. For when we see God bring our child to Christian baptism, this in itself is an evidence that God IS at work in your children-- something that you will countless times remember through the course of their development. When that accident happens-- you will remember that God is at work in your child. When that rebellion begins to emerge as from their fallen natures, you will remember that God is at work in your child. Sure, you will want to steward these situations in such as way as to direct your child to God and His means of grace in prayer, word and sacrament. But you will take courage to know that nothing happens to your child that God has not decreed. And the promise you cling to is that these things are for good, not evil, to those called by God.

Your child was conceived for a purpose, and we know that purpose was good according to God's ultimate glory. Your child will experience unforeseen struggles and complications in this life, and we know that God's purpose in these things is ultimately good. You will no doubt feel inadequate as a parent, and you will remember that God is effectually calling your child even in spite of you. And moreover, that you are God's choice for your child that you then should enter into your parenting responsibilities with confidence that God will use your efforts for good. Our hope, in short, is that we are confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in those He as called, He will perfect until the day they meet the Lord. (Philip.1:6)

If your child meets the Lord before you do, you will be encouraged to know that his/her salvation did not rest upon their own decision per se if in fact they have not yet come to the place of a credible and self-conscious profession of faith. Rather you will know that their election is made sure by the decision God made for them, a decision that began with their being brought into the church by Christian baptism. Their baptism is of course no guarantee, but it is some assurance all the same and until we know otherwise, it is our confident hope!

To illustrate my point-- I was once asked by a grieving mother, having lost her second child-- where was God when this happened? Did he cause it or did he merely know about it? Was it Satan who took her babies or was it just fate? It was of course deeply grievous for her to consider that perhaps "Satan" had won the battle in a sense. Or that God, while he knew that her children had been taken from her, had not taken them from her in any real sense. These thoughts sent her into a tailspin of doubt and insecurity for her children and a deep sense that something good had been interrupted either by forces dictated by fickle fate or by the hand of a malevolent being. What hope is there for us in this? And so to her question, I was forced to decide if I really believed in our reformed doctrines of sovereign decree extending to all things what so ever that happen. Could I really tell her that in an ultimate sense, Yes, God took your child from this life? And would this be "good news" as within the greater message of the Gospel? I had no choice, "yes" I answered, "God was the one who ultimately decreed that your child would die." But what then could I say given our understanding of effectual calling as

conditioned upon God's sovereign grace? I could say that your child was conceived into the church and that this was itself evidence of God's election of her children. I could say that God's purpose for her child had not been thwarted and that her child died not one day too soon as according to the fulfillment of these purposes. I could assure her that in heaven, she could hope to be greeted by some who were effectual called into salvation but died before a credible profession of faith-- and this to the glory of God's sovereign grace-- and that there is every reason to hope that two of those who would greet her would be her children. And I could assure her that these children are in good hands even while God would in fact cause good things to come from the death of her children. Would this mother miss her children? Of course, but not as though they had been "tragically" taken in the ultimate sense, but in that they had for a while been removed from her immediate presence until that day whereby they could be reunited to the glory of God's sovereign grace! This is the theology of the reformed doctrine of baptism. This is good news put to hope.

If you are a parent, as you see your child then baptized into the Name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you will want to say in so many words-- my child is in God's hands-- He will perfect that which He began for his glory. It doesn't fully resolve the ultimate issue of their salvation, but it does bring us great hope and confidence.

### **3. Practical advice about the reformed doctrine of baptism and its impact upon Christian ethics.**

In a most profound way, the reformed doctrine of Christian baptism informs us as to the true nature of Christian ethics as always related to the formation of the covenant community of God. We see that the covenant is given not to individuals per se, but to the community of faith-- the church as whole. That our entrance into the church was not by something immediately or necessarily attached to our selves, but rather that promise that is attached to the church. Our entrance into the church was as one who had been entered first into a family community and then as represented by that original community into the church community. We are in short, meant to have a corporate identity less an individual identity-- which means that New Testament ethics is most profoundly ecclesial ethics in the way we order our lives relative to a community of faith.

The evidence is startling. How, for instance, would Paul define ethics? He summarized it as walking in love after the imitation of Christ. (Eph.5:1-2, Gal.5:13-14) How does Paul relate to persons except in so far as they are one among many members of the household of God? (Eph.2:19-22) Where is the temple of God today? It is not located in the individual as some would say, but in the corporate body of Christ. For those "being built *together*" for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."(Eph.2:22) Paul is so very clear at this point-- that our identity is related to the church under the headship of Christ.

We are therefore reminded by Paul that our spiritual gifts are not directed to self-fulfillment or as some would say "self-actualization." According to Paul, a Christian ought *not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think... so we being many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.* (Rom. 12:3, 5) This again was Paul's point in thinking about that perfect love in 1 Corinthians 13 that is given to the service and good of the whole body of Christ less the personal gains of the individual. The whole discussion of love then is framed within the discussion of the organic nature of the body of Christ. (Chapters 12 and 14) Indeed, I find it almost amazing that so many today will think of "ethics" in ways that almost entirely relates to personal holiness less that kind of holiness that is measured in how we live so as to be a blessing to the community of faith. I suspect that the same individualistic principle that makes anti-infant baptism so plausible to some is the same principle that works against an ecclesial ethic.

So then when we baptize a child, we in effect mark this child as a member of the church, whose entrance is determined less by personal credentials and more upon that which defines the constituency of the church itself. Again, this is not to say that God is doing nothing relative to the individual, but rather that His doing it is RELATIVE to the means of grace that are given and performed within and by the visible church. In so far as discipleship is concerned, when Christ calls us by effectual calling, we are then entrusted in this life not to the ministry of any one or another individual, but into the ministry of the church. Today, so many would argue that they are being discipled by some one or another person-- this was the kind of talk that Paul rebuked in 1 Corinthians reminding them that all individual ministries are valid in their relationship to the church as a whole where Christ is the head. No where He said, "who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lords Jesus Christ. God is faithful by whom *you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*" (1 Cor.1:8-9) And in case this "fellowship" is though of in some abstract and "invisible sense," it is this same language that describes our fellowship with Christ in the context of the sacramental meal. But more to the immediate point, Paul will argue that our baptism was not into the name of Paul or Apollos, but rather we were baptized into the name of Christ. And of course, this was done by and within the household of God. It seems then that all "discipleship" should be viewed as the extension of a church that baptizes rather than any who would be self-appointed to teach and train up into godliness. Again, it was given in 1 Timothy clear instructions that those who would be teachers must be authorized as by the visible body of Christ according to some examination of a Biblical criteria. Again the ecclesial principle in ethics, here applied to the ministry of discipleship in general, teaching is particular.

Thank of the difference this makes. Instead of asking, "is it all right for me to do xyz" we are being trained after the corporate principle to ask "is it loving for me to do xyz?" So for instance, while we might could say under a legalistic and individualist kind of analysis that it is all right to spend that dollar on a bigger and better house, it might not pass the test of love for our related spheres of family, church and state to say that I can spend my money this way. Paul, therefore, given this ecclesial ethics applied to financial stewardship would argue that those who had too much would then not have too much since in their giving, those who had too little would have enough. This ethic, he argued, would not be derived from a individualistic legalism, but by the "sincerity of your love by the diligence of others" after a pattern of the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that through his poverty we might become rich." (2 Cor. 8:8-15.)

## Chapter 6: Child Discipleship From A Reformed Perspective<sup>5</sup>

Our reformed perspective teaches us to think of parenting as an exercise of Christian discipleship. So for instance, as parents, we cannot cast our vote in a ballot box to enter our children into God's eternal and heavenly covenant community unto Salvation. This "election" is given to God the *Father* alone to do. As parents, we cannot make an atonement for the sins of our children. This is reserved only for Christ, God's *Son* alone who was the perfect "God-man" to represent humanity to God and God to humanity as our only true mediator unto salvation. We can't even "give" our children faith-- again this is reserved for the *Holy Spirit* in effectual calling whereby He enables the elect to embrace Christ as their savior. So what can we do? What is our responsibility to God's decision to bring them into a Christian home and enter them by baptism into the covenant community of faith? The answer, I believe, is perfectly summarized by the Proverb, *train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.* (Proverbs 22:6) This is not a promise that to do the right thing with your child is to guarantee your child's future prosperity and faithfulness. Nor is it a promise that if for some reason is negated will necessarily guarantee your child's future destruction. Thankfully, God's power is sufficient in all circumstances to "make disciples of Christ." Yet the proverb is a "wisdom saying" to the effect that your parenting is an instrument that God uses to make your child into the person of God's election-- as within the covenant community, an election unto salvation as conditioned by God's sovereign grace.<sup>6</sup>

I think the word "train" is important. While training certainly includes "teaching", it goes well beyond this as well. Teaching relates to what a person knows. Training involves such things as manners, habits, wisdom, self-identity, and affections of the heart. A person may well know what to do, but will lack the love of doing it. A person may well assent to "the faith" but would not be sacrificially committed to it. A person may understand the grace of God but might not experience it for him or herself. While again these things are largely dependent upon God who is the giver of all good things and especially a true and saving faith, we as parents want to remember this fuller and more wholistic way of thinking about salvation as effecting the whole person to saving grace, not merely a rationalistic "world-view." Being a Christian effects the whole person such that child training will too.

*Child training affects a child's sleeping and waking, his laughing and crying, his eating and drinking, his looks and his movements, his self-control and his conduct toward others. Child training does not change a child's but it does change his modes of giving expression to his nature. Child training does not give a child entirely new characteristics, but it brings him to the repression and subduing of certain*

---

<sup>5</sup> For a much more comprehensive training with supporting documentation regarding Christian parenting, you may purchased from Christ Presbyterian Church, New Haven the tape series and study notebook delivered at the *Christ Presbyterian Church Training Weekend for Parents*. Other resources and a relatively thorough bibliography for parents is included in the notebook as well.

<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew may indicate that the proverb doesn't even mean this-- but that the language is actually "in his own way" which then is to say that if we train them in their own way, they will go their own way. Either way, whether as a negative or positive, the passage teaches that there is some correspondence to the way you train a child and the way the child will go under God's ultimate decree. This is my point such as then to meditate upon the meaning of "train" here.

*characteristics and to the expression and development of certain others to such an extent that the sum of his characteristics presents an aspect so different from its original exhibit that it seems like another character...*

H. Clay Trumbull, *Hints on Child Training*

So how should we approach our task as parents within the covenant home? What are some "hints in child training" as from the perspective of the reformed faith? While nothing even remotely comprehensive is offered here, I will borrow Trumbull's nice title and offer some "hints."

### **1. Remember that you are training Christians and not pagans as from the reformed perspective of effectual calling in the covenant family.**

First of all, to train a covenant child is to assume the covenant itself as related to your child. You are training a Christian, not a pagan. While you and I are acutely aware of the presence of original sin such that training is necessary as related to Christian discipleship, we are not training someone who is without faith, at least this is not our driving assumption. Their faith may be small. Their faith may be immature. Their faith may at times be shaken. But we are training them as covenant children who by God's grace are being renewed by the power of God that works within them. And this will make a huge difference in the way we train our children.

So, for instance, the child's motivation is the grace of God, not the fear of God's judgment. There is no punishment left for those covered by the sacrifice of Christ and called to him by effectual calling. While God disciplines those whom he loves even through the agency of parents, it is never punishment as if to condemn or destroy. In training a child, we are training them to respond to the grace of God, not out of a desire to escape the judgment of God, but because in Christ they have been graciously passed through the judgment of God that awaits them. It is true that the "fear of God" is the beginning of wisdom. But this must be put into the greater story of salvation as directing us and our children to repentance and faith in Christ. We certainly should teach them repentance and faith, but in the same manner that you would teach a Christian, assuming in them the ability given to them by God to do this. In other words, we are not talking to them as if "one day you will become a Christian" while always reminding them of ways that they have not yet done this every time they falter. Rather we are telling them that because God has loved them in Christ, and because God is working a new spirit within them, we should consider then how we might walk in a manner that is pleasing to him. (not in the sense of gaining his acceptance, but in the sense of bringing him glory and honor in this life as we await the life to come.)

Training our children then as covenant children will direct them to Christ for the forgiveness of sins as a precondition to their obedience, not vice versa. We need also then to demonstrate this in so far as we are God's representatives to them. We would never want our love and commitment to them to be conditioned upon their behavior. And this can be communicated in ways that we might not readily recognize. So for instance, we should be careful to put consequences in their life that are related to their being in our presence or having our parental care. It seems a dangerous thing then to discipline them by withholding from them such things as would be interpreted by them to be our love and affection for them.

I believe Ted Tripp's *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (for younger children) and Paul David Tripp's *An Age of Opportunity* (for teenagers) both properly direct us to remember that our goal is to lead our children to Christ and the grace of God for salvation, not empty moralisms and legalisms. E.g. While we will need to train them up behaviorally, we should do this in a manner that would help them appreciate and receive the grace of God in Christ. We should be very carefully not to communicate God's acceptance of them based upon their behavior. Their motivation should be more and more driven from their embracing the free, unmerited forgiveness of God as accomplished by Christ as then producing in us a cheerful and thankful heart. We should then be careful not to say-- "do this because God will approve of you more." Rather we should say: "do this because this will help you fulfill your desire to demonstrate your thankfulness to God." Or, "do this because it is to demonstrate your trust that God knows best and you trust him more than you trust yourself." Train them in the grace of God, assuming that grace in God's sovereign election for your child. It will make all the difference!

## **2. Remember the social ethic of the reformed faith such that you must consider child training as from the context of your family as a social system of inter-dependant social patterns.**

This perspective is a holistic approach to looking at things—which understands each part of family life in terms of the family as a whole. This means that your child is trained in large measure by the interactions and patterns in your home that you may not readily consider under the topic of child discipleship. Issues in communication, routines, and lifestyle should all be examined as from the lens of Christian faith. Here are a few of the kinds of things you might consider.

You will want first of all to consider how your family communicates together? Good communication will require both active listening and constructive talking. Good communication will speak to each other such as to build each other up rather than to condemn? Is there that kind of jesting and/or communication that puts people on the defensive or that encourages each other? Think, before you speak to your spouse how you are training your children. Is there a clear communication of forgiveness such that your child will be trained in the doctrine of grace in your home. We may say to our children a hundred times that we are saved by grace, but if they never see us ask forgiveness, then we communicate that we are still acting out of the fear of condemnation such that we are afraid to see our sins. How often do we compliment one another in the home? When we are dealing with conflict, do we "stuff" our emotions or "dumb" our emotions? Or do we speak the truth in love, focusing on the problem rather than the person as we do it? All of these things represent patterns of communication that train our children.

You will also want to consider the developmental aspects of a family and how the family system as a whole is impacted by the various stages of family development. Every family will go through different seasons of life that impact their interactions together. Are you self-aware of your season and do the things that complement the season. So for instance, what are the system dynamics that take place as a child is going through the "teen-age" crisis of become an adult with a parent who is now under going a mid-life crisis of re-evaluating their adulthood. The family "system" could be described as having a double inferiority complex-- both with respect to the teenager and parent. How might this be stewarded for the benefit of the whole family? Or perhaps

your family is at an earlier stage when children demand a lot of physical care at a time when a career is still very tenuous. What kind of planning should be done so that both the father and mother have some "time off?" Or as your child grows older and older, the predominant parenting style will move from telling, teaching, participating to delegating. And yet different parents will tend to be stronger at different stages. Have you thought about this in the way that you structure your family system?

You will also want to consider the roles within a family, both respect to the husband to wife and children to parents. The Biblical pattern is wonderfully healthy in so far as a family system is concerned. A husband/father who takes responsibility to lead and love his family, yet not so as to undermine the wife/mother but rather to honor and love her both as a wife and as a mother. A parental role that is clearly distinguished by its authority with respect to the children, yet not so as to be so rigidly expressed that the children are exasperated as person in relation to the parents. Ordinarily, clearly defined roles that are not too rigidly construed is shown to produce less rebellion in children than when roles are either too rigidly construed or vague with respect to differentiation. The interplay of authority is also an issue here. Is there an authority structure that brings order and dependability to the home, yet expressed in a way that is both loving and flexible when needed? Whereas the "father" is the "head" of the home, do both parents share in the discipline of the child in a way that complements one another and supports one another. Again, so much more could be said here.

Finally, consider the dynamic of individuality as together with cohesiveness in the family. Biblically, the church is defined as an organic body. AS a household of God, Paul describes the church after the family model as consisting of individual parts (obviously distinguishable with their own identities) yet connected within the inter-dependant relationship of the whole body. My point here is that the family household ought then to reflect a high level of cohesiveness yet not so as to diminish the separate identity of each members. To illustrate my point, the particular gifts, talents and interests of a child that are different from say the parent or other siblings ought not necessarily to be a threat to the family unity. Yet these "gifts" should be viewed as they are coordinated with the various giftedness and interests of the other members of the family. A healthy family will respect both the individuality of a particular member while also respecting the connectedness of each member one to another. This will result in the whole family supporting each other as in their individual callings rather than say requiring a kind of conformity that makes everyone the same with the same interests necessarily. And yet the diversity should be stewarded not so as to diminish the good of the family as a whole. Herein lies a biblical tension-- one that is positive in so far as there is an organic unity that results.

### **3. You will remember to commit yourself to the regular practice of family worship.**

While you as a parent can not duplicate the means of grace as authorized in the church, you will want to bring the various aspects of the church into your home as by the ministry of teaching, prayer and shepherding care. This will of course most symbolically be reflected in the regular habit of family worship. Notice that I said family worship and not religious instruction or "devotions." I'm not trying to be nicker-picky, but the idea here is that you as a family ought to have a regular time when you are together and for the purpose of worshipping God and resting in His Grace as

revealed in Christ. There needs to be a time when the child see the parent, not as teachers, but as subjects of our Great and Sovereign King. Family worship has a way of leveling the playing field so to speak in that both parents and children are related to God on the same terms. Family worship will also provide a vantage point from which to view all of life-- one with God having first place in everything. Family worship, more than anything we can do, reminds us of his providence and power over the affairs of everyday circumstances such as to reduce stress in the home and in the world of our children. Family worship, in so far as it is Christ centered, is grace centered even as we behold and serve a holy God. As noted below, there is a time for Christian instruction. There is a time for Christian service to others. But there ought to be a time when the family is privileged to come into the presence of God in worship. There are so many more advantages to this, but suffice it to say that this single practice may be the most important "practice" that you will do in child training.

One of the dangers in family worship is to be too creative or ambitious with respect to what we are trying to accomplish. Many well-intended parents have come with all sorts of noble minded agendas only to discover that the high-energy and high-creativity cannot be maintained over the long haul. One of the motivations for this is the fear of getting into a rut. Yet we should remember that perhaps the rut itself is not so bad. E.g. that just having a time to remember that God is God and we are his people is a huge advantage everyday. We do not necessarily need to learn something new for this advantage to be had. So let me encourage you to keep your family worship both simple and short. Perhaps a short reading of scripture, a hymn and prayer. Another practices that some use at our church has been to take the Sunday order of service (which is a covenant renewal pattern culminating in the Lord's supper every week) and taking different aspects of that order as a guide for each of the nights of the week. E.g. AS the order begins with praise, Monday night is spent predominantly reflecting upon the scripture and songs as related to the call to worship and praise at the beginning of the service. As this in turn moves us to confession, the second evening is spent reflecting on the confession of sin printed in the bulletin together with the pronouncement of absolution to those who embrace Christ as their savior-- together with the scripture passage that was read for this in worship. A hymn of thanksgiving is then sung. The next day given to the sermon text and the hymn that was sung in transition to the Lord's supper together with prayer. Thursday is spent reflecting on the affirmation of faith and the Lord's table in covenant renewal with the corresponding hymn of renewal and meditation upon Christ's atonement. Friday is spent with a focus upon the thanksgiving prayers, hymn of exaltation as relating to Christ's exaltation and the benediction. You get the picture. My point is that you should have some plan, not to exceed 10 -20 minutes in my opinion (less the family grows weary or begin to put it aside when in a hurry). Keep it simple and let is focus on worship as a family less on Christian education per se.

#### **4. You will want to train your child in the doctrines of the faith.**

Another important aspect of Child discipleship is what we call catechism training. Use your church confession, in our case the Westminster Confession and Larger and Shorter catechism, as they were intended as for the use of family discipleship (the shorter catechism especially). This is not the time or place to defend a confessional approach to family discipleship. But in the most simple way-- consider that your church as

representing a tradition of many ages is a better interpreter of Holy Scripture than you and I as individuals could ever hope to be. Use your church confession then to train up your child in the teachings of scripture! And if we can assign to our children the homework of math why would we be less concerned that they have a daily assignment (with you when young especially) of reviewing the doctrine of faith. I believe that the best way to catechize your child in the Christian faith is to have a time everyday to review the questions and answers-- encouraging the child to put them to memory. With younger children, you will need to do this with them verbally. With an older child, you may assign something along the order of 2-3 catechisms a month for memory, perhaps discussing each one as you go along. A good rule is to have the child take about 15 minutes each day to review the catechism questions, perhaps during the time set apart for other homework assignments. The key however, is to remain committed to this no less than your commitment to your child doing their math or English homework. Think of what we are teaching the children if we do anything less.

### **5. Remember to Train Your Child in Christian Manners.**

Another aspect of child discipleship is the often neglected manners. It seems a strange thing that we would disregard this aspect of child training under the idea that "children will be children." Sure, we should be patient with children. Sure, we should remember that they are not yet mature. But surely this shouldn't mean that we fail to train them in the right way. And think about it for a moment. Manners are simply the expression of putting others interest as more important than your own. To teach our children courtesy is to teach them that they are not merely individual, but corporate people. As such, our children should learn to socialize in a way that is genuinely respectful of the people around them. Something as simple as "don't smack when you eat" or "don't interrupt when someone is talking" is training them to "consider the people around you as you eat, talk, move, etc." This in turn establishes a corporate, less an individual, identity that is surely reflective in our understand of covenant communities as initiated by baptism. We should therefore teach our children not to put their hands into food at a public gathering. We should teach them to speak in a manner that is courteous such as to say "thank-you" and "please." And we do this not because we want to return to a Victorian society, but because we want to train our children in Christian charity. And manners might be one of the greatest means to accomplish this kind of charitable "ethos" as it were.

Having said this, we should note that the specific kinds of gestures that constitute our manners is to a large degree determined by the particular culture that we live in. We should teach our children then to know the culture that they are in and respect that culture in so far as what constitutes a "good" manner. In some homes, this will mean taking off your shoes for instance, whereas in others it will mean leaving them on. We should teach our children to observe people then with an eye toward doing that which most shows respect and consideration for them.

### **6. Christian Discipleship Requires Godly discipline in the home.**

Even as God the Redeemer mediates his special grace authority through the church with a spiritual discipline, even as God the Creator mediates his common grace authority through the state with a civil discipline-- so the parent mediates God's

authority as both in its civil and spiritual aspects in the home. Again, this is not the place to deal with the many controversies regarding discipline. But do you have clear consequences to inappropriate behaviors and mannerisms? Are those consequences fitting the "crime" and developmentally sensitive? The idea is never to break the will of a child. His/her will is the very essence of what will make for creativity and conviction as they grow older. But do you have a plan for how you will gently mold the world of your child that trains them to express their will in a manner that will make them more like Christ and positioned for faithfulness in their vocation as they mature.

I should say a few words about the different forms of discipline. I would suggest that a moderate and loving application of "spanking" for a young child is more loving and less "harsh" for a child than the many alternatives that are often suggested by those who condemn spanking as an appropriate form of discipline. This is because a child is developmentally "physical and manipulative" with respect to his/her learning. A "physical" consequence is quite simply easier for a young child to process in many cases. I have always thought it odd that we acknowledge that young children learn other things best when by tangible and physical means. So why wouldn't this be true for morals as well. The alternatives seem only to tempt parents to anger, frustration and neglect as a result of children that are out of control.

One form of discipline that I would avoid is sending young children away from your presence-- especially younger children. It seems that for a young child, separation from parents is in many respects the most harsh thing you could ever do. For a young child, you are their world to a large degree. You represent all that is secure and comforting. It is in my opinion far less severe to spank a child while remaining in their presence, than to send a child away from your presence. As child gets older, or for certain children, spanking will be inappropriate. And of course, the word "moderate" is important with respect to young children as the parent should be under control and principled in the manner that the child is spanked. For the most part, it doesn't (in my opinion) need to hurt so much (although it can depending on your child) as it is a medium that a young child can most readily understand. Again, I wish more could be said about this--and spanking is certainly not the only form of putting consequences for bad behavior into your child's life-- but your discipline ought to reflect a kind of love that at least tries to consistently apply a predetermined application of consequences in a principled way. As children grow older, the more we can help them take responsibility for their actions the better. We should look for consequences that are in some way related to the wrong actions. This is not always easy, but the principle is helpful. One thing is for sure, to not discipline a child is to relinquish the child to a world that seems chaotic, unprincipled and in fact unloving.

## **7. Remember that there is not substitute for spending time with your children.**

Clearly another important aspect of child discipleship is time. And with the chorus of others who have said it, the idea of "quality" time is way over-blown. A child can't turn on and off the way an adult does. I have tried the ole "coffee shop" approach with my kids-- and of course this has its place-- but for the most part the most significant moments of discipleship and training have come at the times least expected when the "pressure" was off so to speak. A child's heart is opened up after a good frolic on the

floor, or a baseball toss in the yard-- more so than by the admonition to "open up." Often, a child acts up merely because his/her emotional tank is empty. How many times have I discovered that my child's "attitude" was merely the result of neglect. Our children know that we "love" them (at least ordinarily), but do they know that we *like* them? Their self-identity and esteem is largely related to this latter category it seems. (I am of course using "love" and "like" in a loose way here.) They often act wrong for the fact that there are insecure or uncertain about their place in life. Therefore, in the words of Ross Campbell, keep your child's tank full!

We should recognize that with the decision to have children came the decision to enter a season of life that includes this sphere of calling. We will need to adjust our career goals to be good parents. Especially in an age where most peoples careers are not in the home, we will need to put breaks on our commitments outside of the home such as to respect the unique season of life that you have as a parent. We shouldn't forget that the season will pass, surely more quickly that we think. I have therefore encouraged people to think of life as consisting of three primary "spheres" of calling. (public, family, church) All three spheres represent our "work" and therefore a kind of ambition relative to them. We need to plan our work as parents no less than we plan our work as in our careers. If in God's providence we are granted children, we should respect that as God's guidance with respect to our goals and priorities. Have the long-sightedness to remember that the season is relatively short, you will soon have time to be more ambitious in your other spheres of life perhaps. But take the days off, take the family vacations and have a regular time with your children, some of which is planned, but other times that are what I describe as a planned, unplanned time to just "hang-out" with them. Ironically, its this hangout time that might produce your most quality of times as well.

## **8. Be careful not to spoil your child, but given them a mind for eternity.**

Even as we "fill their tanks" so to speak-- don't equate this with spoiling them. The Proverbs are crystal clear -- to give in to our child's every wish and especially as related to earthly enjoyments and toys is not helping them but harming them. We must train up a child, not leave them to their own devises!

Prov.22:15, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child.

Prov.29:15, "A Child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."

R. C. Ryle said it this way. *If you would train your children rightly, train them in the way they should go, and not in the way that they would.* The proverbs warns that too many good things given at too young and age are such as to curse our children, not bless them.

**Prov. 20:21**

*A possession (inheritance) which is acquired at an early age will not be a blessing in the end.*

Again, Ryle will note: *It is a great pity that the full and free gifts of a loving parent should prove a hindrance to a child's happiness, a barrier to his success in life; that the very abundance of the parents giving should tend to the child's poverty and unhappiness! Yet this state of things is in too many instances an undeniable fact.* We may think that to give into the child in order to give him/her a greater confidence or self-esteem among their peers is the way to go. But in reality, we are teaching them to put their confidence and esteem in those things that can be taken away. Christ said it very well and of course with the authority of God himself!

**Matt. 6:19**

*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Might we then train our children with a heart for eternity, what 1Peter 1:4 describes as *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*

**9. Give your child meaningful responsibilities in the home.**

My grandfather once noted his conviction that of all the things that have created rebellion in children is the lack of real, meaningful responsibility with respect to helping the family. My grandfather lived in a time when economics and family chores were hand in hand. Now, modern economy has taken the economy out of the home in most cases such that a "welfare" mentality is created in our children by the time they are teenagers. What is so negative is not simply that the family economy suffers, but that this creates a crisis in the child who needs to be needed. Children who don't share in the family economy will not share in the glory of a family's success. I remember building a deck off the back of our house and remembering my grandfather's advice. In some ways, my inclination was to tell my children to get away and leave me alone to the task at hand. But would they then enjoy the deck as much? Would they feel that they contributed to the family success? Would this help them to feel good about themselves and would this then help them to feel good about staying around the house as they get older? And so I carefully planned a way for my children to help. Now how many times do you think that they have reminded me that they helped build that deck? And every time they did, it was as if they were saying, "this is my house, I belong here and I am worth something to my family in a real and meaningful way." I think in large measure my grandfather was right. That one of the greatest problems for teenagers is a feeling of homelessness-- not because they did not have a home, but because they were never apart of building it. And doesn't this fit our conception of a covenant home where each member has a communal ethic as indicated by their assuming responsibility for the good of the whole? We should not forget that our children need to be needed, especially as they get older! They will certainly balk when we ask them to do things, but this is not because they don't need to be needed, it is simply a need they don't readily feel. And when they do that chore or help with that project, we should make sure to help them see just how meaningful their help was for the good of their family.

**Summary:**

So much more could and should be said about child discipleship. We could talk about the importance of our example. Most especially, our example in appropriating the forgiveness of God as indicated by our willingness to confess our sins to our children. We should talk about the importance of corporate worship-- having our children with us at the earliest possible age that they may see in us a devotion to Christ under submission to him-- even as they learn that when they grow up, God is waiting for them there. E.g. It is a great mistake when we think that we must always entertain our children into the kingdom of God. We take them out of our worship, only to be surprised that as they become teenagers and want to become adults, they discard God as with their childish ways since God for them was always presented in childishness. Being "bored" is not a sin. While we should bring down to their level in various other contexts, let them be members of the family of God when the family meets together. And perhaps also they will grow up realizing that they are not the center of the universe AND that their universe is a place where God is for adults as well as for children.

These hints are all related to the simple proposition according to our view of children that until they renounce the faith or by evidence of unrepentant sin they ARE believers in so far as they

pray as you have taught them to pray in Christ's name. This means that we treat them as those who are being renewed and assume this principle of effectual calling in them. This will make all the difference when it comes to training them in the way that they should go. This is our confidence, that God is at work in them-- so let's treat them like He is. Let's appeal to that new spirit within them that will produce a joyful obedience as not those "under the law" but those being trained by the law under grace! Let them grow up not defending their faith to their parents but learning more and more how to express that faith with a kind of confidence and cheerfulness that transcends that found in the circumstances of our world. In short, let them BE Christians, less prove themselves Christians. Assume the bias of a reformed parent and see how this will impact your own hope and confidence, but also the hope and confidence of our children! And pray!

## Chapter Six

### Distinguishing A *Confirmed* from An *Unconfirmed* Faith Leading To Admission To The Lord's Table

One of the more pertinent questions most frequently asked is "who ought to properly partake of the Lord's supper? Keep in mind that with the reformed view of effectual calling, we are not necessarily asking "who has faith" but rather "confirmed faith." The question is of great importance then to both the parent and the church as applied to covenant children especially. In a phrase, our answer is usually something like, "all who have a credible profession of faith." The simple intent of this paper is to explain exactly what we mean by this phrase.

It should be said from the beginning that we desire to walk a straight and principled line between being too restrictive on the one hand, or being too relaxed on the other. For one, we know that the Lord's table is for "sinners" who are in need of God's grace. We also understand that the Lord's table, in so far as it is an earthly expression of its heavenly reality, ought to be representative of the one holy and catholic church, as biblically defined.<sup>7</sup> Since this heavenly or "catholic" church consists of members that participate in various denominations on earth, we desire that our earthly communion at the Lord's table be "interdenominational" in character.<sup>8</sup> Another way of saying this is that we believe admittance to the Lord's table ought to be as wide as the gospel itself is wide. (Among other things, this means that people can join a church who do not necessarily understand or endorse certain "denominational" distinctions since membership is defined by our participation in the Lord's table.) Whereas we would not want to suggest that the only important doctrines are those doctrines that all denominations can agree upon, we do recognize that there are certain doctrines which are required so as to indicate a genuinely *Christian* faith over against say some other faith. Moreover, those who are admitted to the Lord's table do not necessarily need to know many of the teachings of Scripture that will eventually enable them to grow in Christian maturity. For this reason, the conditions for participating in the Lord's supper will be very different than say the conditions required for being a church elder or deacon.

On the other hand, enough evidence would be required so that the church does not irresponsibly mislead a person into thinking they are a Christian only to discover at judgment that they are not. While no person or church is infallible, it has been given to the church to declare what the Scriptures do teach about salvation and to apply these declarations as standards for who should be admitted to the Lord's Table.

Therefore, our interest in this chapter is to determine as best we can from scripture what conditions ought to be met in a person so as to be admitted to the Lord's table. Such conditions or "terms" ought to be as inclusive and as exclusive as the terms which are necessary toward being a true disciple of Christ. Another way to describe the object of this paper is to ask the question, "what makes for a credible profession of Christian faith" since this is in essence the same thing as asking, "what are the terms regarding admission to the Lord's Table?" The answer, to these questions may be discussed under three relevant subdivisions:

1. What do we know about *false* professions of faith so as to avoid confusion with a *true* profession of faith?

---

<sup>7</sup> I.e. The visible church that transcends denominational, temporal and geographical boundaries and holding to the fundamental doctrines of the historic Christian faith.

<sup>8</sup> As will be evidenced below, "inter-denominational" is not the same thing as "non-denominational" or "anti-denominational." True "denominations" differ not so much in the "marks" of the church (as consisting of three: government/discipline, sacraments and confessional preaching) but rather denominations differ as to the "forms" these three "marks" take in their expressions. In so far as their "forms" do not radically alter the gospel, the denomination remains a true church.

2. What constitutes a *Credible Profession of Christian Faith*?-- Which includes a discussion on:
  - a. How much does a person need to understand so as to have a distinctively *Christian* profession of faith?
  - b. What about a person's lifestyle is necessary so as to constitute a *credible* or *sincere* profession of faith?
3. What Should We Look For Developmentally In A Covenant Child For Communicant Membership?
4. What is the role of the local/visible church to the individual in the determination of a "Credible Profession of Christian faith" and admission to the Lord's Table.

### 1. Some Evidences Indicating "False" Conversions:<sup>9</sup>

Christ warned "that not everyone who says to me "lord, Lord" shall enter into the Kingdom of God." The following then describe three categories of "false" professions of faith.

- a. Decisions that are motivated by natural sympathies rather than those sympathies that are distinctively Christian in nature are not saving sympathies: Examples,
  - a. Want to please parents
  - b. Want to be included in the "group."  
(albeit a youth group or any other social acceptance)
  - c. Want to be "successful": This would be to confuse a natural sympathy, perhaps even a selfish one, with a genuine sympathy for Christ and His Kingdom. I.e. Becoming a Christian in order that God will "bless" me in worldly ways such as becoming more popular, more wealthy, a better athlete, etc.

- b. Decisions motivated merely by aesthetic experience are not necessarily evidence of true Christian conversion:

Decisions that are more the result of an esthetic experience are those that are perhaps contrived by a combination of drama, music, and/or some natural artistry whereby an emotional experience is confused with genuine conversion. While all true conversion will effect the emotions in some way, true Christian conversion is always characterized and governed by a distinctly Christian content of knowledge that leads to true repentance and faith. Therefore, simply "making a decision" is not necessarily evidence of a genuine Christian conversion by itself. Almost every religion has some corollary. There must be some accompanying truth about ourselves in relation to God that are believed and are distinctively Christian in nature.

- c. Conversions motivated from a natural sorrow rather than a Godly sorrow don't indicate true conversion: (2 Cor.7:10)

These are decisions that are moved merely by the fear of punishment for sin and not also a genuine desire to be made more and more holy. This would indicate that a person has not yet understood the nature of sin and its violation to God's holy affections. It would be seeking a salvation from the punishments of sin only but not necessarily a salvation from sin itself.(Romans 7:24; 8:2) This often leads to real difficulties in the areas of Christ's lordship in a person.

### 2. Evidence of a Credible Profession of Faith:

A Credible Profession of Faith is often described in the Bible as representing both repentance and faith.

---

<sup>9</sup> See for instance Luke 8:4-8, 11-15 or the book of 1 John for the kinds of "false conversions" and the evidences thereof.

**Acts 20:21** as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus.

**Heb. 6:1** ¶ Therefore let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God,

As such, true conversion consist of both a negative and positive element. *Repentance* is turning away from something that is understood to be a false confidence whereas *faith* is to embrace which our true confidence unto salvation-- in the Christian sense then turning away from self-confidence and idolatry so as to embrace Christ as the only Redeemer from sin and its misery. James reminds us, both repentance and faith have a cognitive and behavioral dynamic. For instance, James notes, "I by my works will show you my faith." This means that for those whom God has called into everlasting life through faith in Christ, God will also enable them to persevere in faith as evidence by growth in Christian faith *and* practice. Faith, therefore, is more than merely assent, since it presuppose a willingness to trust and act upon what is known. Likewise, even as repentance presupposes a certain element of knowledge about what is considered to be wrong, it is only fully "repentance" when a person's practice is reflected in a turning away from that which is considered to be bad. So as to more fully understand both the cognitive and behavioral dynamic to what constitutes a *credible profession of Christian faith*, we will consider each in its own turn.

**A. How much does a person need to understand so as to have a distinctively Christian profession of faith?**

Notice that what is not being asked is what a person must understand so as to be an officer, or even a mature Christian. Rather, the question gets at that knowledge that a person should self-consciously understand so as to demonstrate "satisfactory evidence" to being a true Christian disciple. In summary, a person should understand and believe the following five things:

Note: How these elements of the gospel are articulated is less important than that they are in some manner understood. I have footnoted the appropriate Shorter Catechism number from our church standards (Westminster Confession and Shorter and Larger Catechisms) for further reference and clarification.

1. That there is a God and He is our Sovereign Creator such that we are responsible to Him for all our actions:<sup>10</sup>

**Acts 24, 25**, The God who made the world and everything in it is he who is Lord of heaven and earth... he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things... indeed he is not far from us.

2. That all have sinned against God including the recognition as to how we have personally sinned against God with respect to specific sins against God's commands:<sup>11</sup>

**1 John 1:8-9**, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.

3. That Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human such as to qualify as the only true Mediator between God and humanity:<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Shorter Catechism Question# 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

<sup>11</sup> Shorter Catechism Question# 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 84

<sup>12</sup>Shorter Catechism Question# 21

**1 John 2:23**, Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? No one who denies the Son has the Father, everyone who confesses the Son has the Father.

**1 John 4:2**, By this you know the Spirit of God, every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

4. That Jesus Christ accomplished everything necessary to bring to us our salvation from sin and misery:<sup>13</sup>

a. He has revealed God and his will to us for our salvation. (A prophet in representing God to us)

**John 1:1,14**, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

**Heb. 1:1**, Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.

b. He has become our substitute in taking upon himself our penalty for sin and bringing us into a righteous judicial status with God. (Our priest in representing us to God!)

**1 John 1:7**, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin...

**1 John 2:1b-2**, if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins...

c. He is our ruler and king to govern and protect us.

**1 John 2:3**, Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says "I have come to know him, but does not obey his commandments is a liar and in such a person the truth does not exist.

5. God's promise of salvation is by grace through faith in Christ<sup>14</sup> such that we do not trust in our own ability to satisfy God's righteous standard, but trust in Christ to do this for us.

**1 John 1:25**, And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.

**Eph. 2:8**, For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

**Romans 5:1**, Therefore since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.

In summary, faith means that we trust God's provisions alone for the forgiveness of sins. The Biblical idea is to "rest" completely upon God that we no longer depend on our own righteousness but on the righteousness of Christ. God's provision has been accomplished by Christ since Christ took our penalty for sin and kept the law for us.

**B. What about a person's lifestyle is necessary so as to constitute a *credible* or *sincere* profession of faith?**

Those whom God has saved through faith in Christ, are also more and more made to be holy. It should be noted up front that one aspect of this holiness will be growing in our knowledge of sin such that grace abounds all the more! (Rom.5:20) Yet we should also expect to see God gradually perfect us in holiness even as we anticipate the final consummation of this

<sup>13</sup>Shorter Catechism Question# 23, 24, 25, 26,

<sup>14</sup>Shorter Catechism Question#29, 30, 85, 86, 87

perfection not in this life but in the life to come. Therefore, a second element of true Christian conversion is a life characterized by turning away from sin as it is defined by the Bible and a life characterized by turning more and more to Christ for help in being saved from actual sins themselves. This sanctification, no less than justification, is a free and unmerited gift of God. It is not so as to enjoy greater privileges, it is one of the great privileges of our adoption. That is to say that true Christian salvation is not only a salvation from the penalty of sin (or "justification"), but also a salvation from sins. As taught in Titus "for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, *instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires.*" It is grace that saves us from the condemnation of sin, and the grace that even now begins its work in us to save us from sins and their corresponding miseries. According to the Bible this latter salvation from sins has already begun in so far as we are being made more and more into the likeness of Christ's holiness (sanctification). Yet in the present age, we know that our salvation is not yet complete until we are joined with Christ in the age to come whereby we will be perfected in holiness (our glorification). The scripture describes such a life as being:

1. Characterized by a life of obedience:

**1 John 5:2**, By this we know that we love the children of God,, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.

2. Characterized by a life of perseverance so that even as we grow to see our sin more and more we also continue to embrace Christ for the forgiveness of our sin. God "perseveres" for us even as this is worked into us through the gift of grace as by the Holy Spirit. Whereas "assurance" can at times diminish since it this is related to our own subjective state as related to God, our salvation is never diminished nor does God's perseverance for us diminish. Subjectively speaking, assurance grows more and more over time as we walk faithfully in Christ and see God's grace working in us to enable us to embrace Christ.

**Heb.4:14**, We who are partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.

**Mat.10:22**, He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved.

**1 John 2:28**, And now little children, abide in him, so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming.

Of course a young Christian would not have much in terms of this kind of evidence, yet it is important to emphasize that ultimately, *the crucial test of true conversion is endurance to the end.* In so far as a person puts their hope and trust in Christ alone for salvation, and is not willfully disobedient to Christ (see below), that person is assured of his/her salvation. But while God's election is sure so as to never be thwarted, our subjective assurance can at times be shaken when we are in willful disobedience to God.<sup>15</sup> Another way of saying this is that while a person cannot lose their salvation, since our salvation rests in the sovereign work of God in and for us, our subjective assurance can be shaken at times in so far as we fail to persevere in the faith. The idea is that those who God saves, do persevere till the end-- and this itself is God's doing. While perhaps one aspect of the Holy Spirit's work is to confirm in us our salvation, that confirmation is at least partly related to His work of enabling us to persevere in the faith. A persevering Christian is characterized not by the absence of struggle against sin, but rather such a struggle that indicates a sincere willingness to be made more and more holy.

It needs to be made clear at this point that a credible profession of faith is NOT a perfect

---

<sup>15</sup> Compare Chapters 27 "Perseverance of the Saints" to Chapter 28, "Assurance of God's Grace and Salvation" and especially section 3 in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

and sinless life. Rather a credible profession of faith is represented in a person who has recognized their sin and consequently the need for God's grace and forgiveness-- and whose sincerity is evidenced by an ultimate *will* to be sinless while at the same time struggling against sin and sinful desires. In other words, a credible faith is characterized by a life void of *willful* sinning. *Willful* sinning is characterized by behaviors which involve premeditation. For example, it is one thing for a person to struggle with lustful desires (which would be handled with great care and intentionality), it is another thing to actually act upon those desires so as to go out and purchase pornography or even worse, engage in sexual sins. Admittedly, the distinction between "willful sin" and "struggling against sin" is sometimes hard to distinguish-- all the more reason to be in consultation with those who are authorized in the church to give oversight to the communion table so as to help a person not bring further condemnation upon themselves as noted in 1 Cor.11:27. (see below on the relation of individuals to the church) Our point here is that there is evidence of sincerity as indicated a person who is genuine in their desire not to sin and genuine in their resting not in themselves but in God for the forgiveness of sin.

### **C. What Are the Developmental Considerations for Covenant Children Being Admitted AS Communicant Members?**

We again need to remember that what we are not necessarily looking for is a "decision" as if this happens at one specific time or moment. Nor are we looking for "faith" as if in contrast to a previous state of unbelief. When informed by our Reformed doctrine of effectual calling as through the regeneration of God, we know that God's saving grace may in fact begin in your child while in a state of infancy and is gradually effected into the life of the child. We are therefore looking for a *confirmed* faith over against just "faith." In short, we have the instructions of Paul as relating to the proper participation of the Lord's Supper to apply here. E.g. *let a man examine himself* (1 Cor. 11:28)

Our question then with respect to our children is not only related to a credible profession of faith, but are they capable of self-examination with respect to it? This is in large measure a developmental issue and not just a spiritual issue. Has the child come to an awareness of him/herself as distinct from his/her parents? Ordinarily, this happens during the teenage years, and perhaps along side of the child working through his/her personal identity with respect to their religious convictions. We should therefore give them some time to sort all this out! I suspect that many a reformed parent is still motivated, if but unconsciously, by the false idea that "I am waiting for my child to become a Christian-- sooner than later." The parent is still emotionally tied to the revivalistic notion that a person is not "saved" until they make a public and personal profession of faith. I have tried to dispel this myth even as this is proved if by the simple fact that John was filled with the Holy Spirit before even his birth. (Luke 1:15) Your covenant child is saved as by the waters of regeneration! (until such evidence as would suggest otherwise.) So why the rush if motivated by a desire for them to be saved? This is not to suggest that we don't want them to participate in the Lord's Supper. We know that it IS a spiritual benefit for the renewal of faith. But as a renewal rite, it ought to be attached to a person's self-awareness of their spiritual condition as related to Christ's death and resurrection.

I am afraid that many well-intended parents actually push their child to hypocrisy by pushing them to make a public profession of faith with respect to communicant membership. For example, I suspect that if I asked my young teenager to be examined today for communicant membership, that out of his love and respect for me and his sincere faith at this point regarding the saving work of Christ, that he would probably be willing to do it. But would this be right for him at this point? Might this push him to a kind of

religion that is related to the Lord's table but not with personal sincerity and genuineness? Might this create the kind of plausibility structure that makes it easier, not harder, for a person to play the religious games without sincerity, leading eventually to a crisis of faith in an attempt to be authentic. Therefore, I would not desire for my child to be examined by the elders until it becomes my child's own desire and after he has a developed conviction that his faith is distinguished from the faith of his parents. And sometimes, this requires some time to sort out. Through his interactions with unbelieving friends, through temptations that will increasingly be out of the range of parental oversight, and by simply becoming more self-aware, my teenager will discover a nature within himself that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's effectual calling less parental influence. Over time, the child will discover that he/she both believes in Christ, and recognizes the implications of this with respect to his/her living "in the world but not of the world." (at least in a categorical sense) While the child could never hope to anticipate the kinds of trails and struggles that away them in the future, they can understand that this is part of what it means to take up their cross and follow after Christ. And I want my child to be aware of this as they partake of Christ at his table.

It seems then that what Paul was after in 1 Corinthians was for believers to examine themselves with respect to the meaning of the Lord's Table as compared to their ultimate hope and their manner of life. Notice for instance that Paul's exhortation to self-examination is related to idolatry and schism. (Chapter 10) He states in summary, "Therefore, my brethren, flee from idolatry... Is it not the cup of blessing that we bless a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Cor. 10:14, 16-17) All of this gets at the very simply requirement that those admitted to Christ table ought therefore to be capable of discerning the Lord's body and blood as related to themselves and the cost of discipleship.

All of this raises the question of how to determine this kind of self-conscious faith? For one, speaking as a member of an elder's board, I always encourage the parents to let the child communicate their desire to the pastor or one of the elders of the church rather than the parent doing this for them. We are looking for an adult faith as indicated by the adult activity of taking personal responsibility for the things they do. Secondly, I will seek to discern a personal and self-conscious faith by asking some of the following kinds of questions. (It should be noted that the questions ought to be asked while carefully distinguishing these questions from a kind of works-righteousness kind of program. E.g. What we are not saying is that confirmed faith is because of these things, but rather these things are some of the signs of a person being self-motivated and self-conscious in their faith) So for instance:

1. Do you ever read the Bible without your parent telling you? Do you pray?
2. Would you come even if your parents didn't make you?
3. How do you see yourself in relation to the Lord's Supper? E.g. Are their particular sins that you see being put to death in Christ for your being forgiven? Are their particular challenges that face you in following after Christ? Etc.
4. Have you ever had the opportunity to tell a friend about what it means to be a Christian? Have you ever been in a situation where being a Christian put you in a social bind or caused tension with your peers? How did you handle this?

Again, the point of these questions is NOT to suggest that anyone is a Christian because they say yes to any of these things. Nor are we looking for what might be a mature faith or response as related to the above questions. Rather we are looking for some evidence of sincerity as related to the ability to examine themselves with respect to the faith. These are simply the kinds of questions that might help a parent and/or session distinguish a self-awareness about a child's Christian faith in relation to their own convictions and lives.

**D. What is the relation of the local/visible church to the individual in the determination of a "Credible Profession of Christian faith?"**

Perhaps the first issue needing to be resolved pertains to whether or not a person may simply admit themselves to the Lord's table, or whether they should be admitted by an authorized government of the church? In the present context where faith is often understood in largely individualistic terms, more and more seem to hold to the former, although this would be almost unheard of in church history. That a person ought to be admitted by some authorized government representing the church is clear from scripture, if only by the simple fact that scripture gives the church authority to excommunicate (*un-admit*) someone in certain situations. New Testament professor, T. David Gordon, explains this in the following way:

What is excommunication? It is the church barring someone from the table. How can the church have power to bar from the Table, if it does not have power to admit to the Table? If we come to the Supper solely by our own volition, then how can we be removed by any other means? Admission to and exclusion from the Supper are by the same means; either our own individual volition or the volition of the church. Then, look at 1 Cor.5. Paul does not say the man is to remove himself, but that the church is to remove him. How can the church have the duty to remove from its membership if it does not have the duty or admission?

Therefore, the language of "admission" is often used in the historic creeds when describing a persons relation to the Lord's table.<sup>16</sup>

A second question, however, is whether or not a person should be a member in good standing of some gospel believing church so as to participate in the Lord's Table?<sup>17</sup> Perhaps another way of stating the question is whether or not the church is an essential element of the gospel so that to have a credible profession of faith one would necessarily need to be a member in good standing of some local church? Again, the historical standards are rather clear on this question. For instance, the Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that "the visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law)... is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, *out of which there is no*

---

<sup>16</sup> In the Heidelberg Catechism #82 for instance, the language is "Are those to be *admitted* to the Lord's Supper who show by what they say and do that they are unbelieving and ungodly?" (This confessional statement serves as the ecclesiastical standard for the *Christian Reformed Church* today) In Catechism #85, the relation of church in the admission and exclusion of people from the table is made even more explicit. It states, "Those who, though called Christians, profess unchristian teachings or live unchristian lives... such persons the officers exclude from the Christian fellowship by withholding the sacraments from them." Similiar conditions are noted also in the Westminster Larger Catechism #173 which states: "May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, be kept from it? Answer: Such as are found to be ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ hath left in his church, until they receive instruction and manifest their reformation. Therefore, in the Presbyterian Church in America Book of Church Order, it is stated that it "must be left to the prudence of the Session, whose office it is to judge, after careful examination, the qualifications of those who apply for admission to sealing ordinances." (BCO 57.2)

<sup>17</sup> By "good standing" I mean not having been suspended from the Lord's table by an authorized church government for reasons of Christian discipline.

ordinary possibility of salvation."<sup>18</sup> That this statement represents the teaching of scripture can be demonstrated in at least four ways.

**First**, the simple fact that there was always a visible church throughout the various redemptive periods of Biblical history ought to incline a person to be suspicious of any recent notion that treats the visible church as a non-essential element of Christian discipleship. For example, as to the origins of the visible Church-- as an existing community, in its unique and separate organization-- we can at least trace it back to Abraham according to the gospel writers-- for here stands the unique transaction whereby God constituted him the "father of many nations" under an "everlasting covenant" with a *special visible seal so as to mark*<sup>19</sup> the people of God as set apart from all other people in the world. For this reason, the Apostle Paul (in Romans 4. 11,17, and in Gal. 3:7-9) expressly declares, that the New Testament Church of believers is the true successor to the covenant with Abraham even as we participate in the graces of God through faith. And surely no Christian can conceive that such a government, whose uninterrupted existence can be historically traced back at least a thousand years beyond that of the oldest governments in the world, could have been self-originated, or a mere accident in the world's history! Nor could we suppose that such an organization is dispensable as a means of God's grace to his people. Indeed, the visible church has been and always will be an essential element of God's redemptive plan for his covenant people, the pillar and bulwark of the truth as revealed by the living God!

**Secondly**, since one aspect of a *credible* profession of faith is that the person be committed to obeying the commands of God in the New Covenant-- many of which presuppose a "formal" relation to the visible church-- membership in the church is therefore essential to a credible profession of faith. That is, if a command is given in scripture that would be virtually impossible to keep without church membership, then the good and necessary inference from scripture must be that scripture requires some form of an accountable commitment to the visible church. (call it what you may, we call it "church membership.") Two examples of what I mean can be summarized as follows:

A. The responsibilities of the church-governors for the flock

**Heb. 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, *for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account.* Let them do this with joy and not with sighing-- for that would be harmful to you.

**Acts 20:28** Keep watch over yourselves *and over all the flock*, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. 29 I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears.

**1 Peter 5:1-3**, I exhort the elders among you *to tend the flock of god that is in your charge*, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it...

How could the church officers (I.e. Elders and Pastor) practically be faithful to the above commands unless there is some definable "flock... under your charge?" In other words, how can a conscientious shepherd watch over a flock that he couldn't define in terms of membership? And how can officers know whether or not a person or family desires to be the recipients of this pastoral oversight unless they give some verbal profession to that effect. Call it what you will, membership, verbal commitment, etc., without it, there would be no way to keep the above commands-- thus making God's word nonsensical and absurd.

B. The responsibilities of the flock to the church-governors

**Heb. 13:17** *Obey your leaders* and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing-- for that would be harmful to you.

**1Tim. 5:17** Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who

---

<sup>18</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 25, section 2.

<sup>19</sup> Under the Old Covenant, the "seal" which marked the visible community of God was circumcision. Under the new covenant, this "seal" was replaced by the seal of baptism. The two are related as accomplishing the same thing and meaning the same thing in such passages as Col.2:20ff.

labor in preaching and teaching;

How would the flock of God practically keep the above commands without a definable and "visible" group of "leaders. Certainly these passages are not saying that it is necessary to "obey" and "submit" to every self appointed leader of every Christian organization. Therefore, by necessary inference, these passages imply that a person is committed to some definable society with a definable number of leaders. Otherwise, the command is meaningless with no real practical implications.

From these passages, in order for a person to have a "credible" profession of faith, he/she would need to be in some "formal" relation to some authorized church government so as to keep the above commands. Moreover, these commands render the visible church, as consisting of some lawful government, an essential element for Christian discipleship.

**Thirdly**, the church is revealed to be an essential element of Christian discipleship by the simple fact that Christ has chosen to mediate his three-fold redemptive offices of prophet, priest and king through the visible instrumentality of the church. Notice, for instance that by Christ's own authorization in Matthew 16:18-19, the church is given the responsibility of "binding and loosing" which at the very least must include the authority to determine terms of communion. Notice also that this is said to be taking place on "earth" while also being recognized and sanctioned "in heaven." No more clearer language could be used to affirm the biblical propriety, even mandate, for ecclesiastical authority and church discipline.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, this passage asserts that Christ and Christ alone is both the founder and administrator of the church and that His earthly administration of authority is to be mediated through the form of government built by the apostles.

Furthermore, in Matthew 28:18ff, Christ taught that *all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. As you go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* How then is Christ "with us" till the end of this present age? Not insignificantly, the answer is provided in the great commission *to the church* :

1. As our Prophet: *teach them* (by the authorized preaching of God's word)
2. As our Priest: *baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, (baptism represents an entrance into the fellowship (communion) of the community which is sanctioned by the Triune God.)
3. As our King: *to obey* (which presupposes that teaching is in the context of accountability by some form of government approved of by God)

The three-fold office of Christ as mediated through the visible church is further indicated when one considers what the bible teaches about the church's ministry of word, sacraments and pastoral care. Also notice how Paul understands these things in his letter to Ephesians. For instance, in Eph. 1:22, Paul states that "he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head of *all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*" The term "head" clearly denotes "power"-- not just "governmental authority," but also that ministerial "power" that Christ mediates "for the church." Power in this sense includes "influence" so as to accomplish redemption. Concerning this "church" for whom Christ headship is exercised, Paul notes in Eph. 2:19-20 that it was *built* upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. And concerning how Christ, the head of the church, actually "fills all in all," he writes in Eph.4:10, that "He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might *fill all things... and he gave gifts to men... for the building up of the body of Christ.* " The specific gifts which

---

<sup>20</sup> Similiar language of "binding and loosing" is used in Matthew 18 to describe church discipline.

are then mentioned by Paul pertain to the leadership gifts of the church so as to represent the church's authorized ministry. The leadership offices are further described and distinguish by their Biblical qualifications in the pastoral letters such as in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2.

It is important to understand the implication of what has just been presented. That Christ is essential for the gospel, no sincere Christian would deny. That Christ's redemptive work consists of his being our prophet, priest and king-- again, this is more or less universally received by Christians. Yet we also see from scripture that Christ's three office work of redemption is mediated "for the church" in this present age through an authorized administration of church government, sacramental worship and confessional preaching. One must therefore conclude that the visible church, as defined by its biblically qualified ministry of the word, sacraments and government, *is an essential element to the gospel*. This being the case, a credible profession of faith would necessarily mean that a person ought to be in a practicing relationship to some gospel believing church or else they are not under the headship of Christ and his present mediation of his tri-fold office of prophet, priest and king. This is not to say that the church itself supplants Christ in these offices, nor that salvation is in any way intrinsic to the church, but that these offices of Christ are merely made visible and real to us through the work of the Holy Spirit through human agencies in this present age and until the Lord returns.<sup>21</sup>

**Fourth**, the church is shown to be an essential aspect to Christian discipleship by the explicit statement to that effect in 1 Timothy 3:15. There, Paul describes "*the household of God... the church of the living God*" as being "*the pillar and bulwark of the truth*." From the context, is clear that Paul means by "church" that visible society which consists of the preaching of sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1; 4:6-16), the exercise of government (1 Tim. 3), and the practice of corporate worship (1 Tim.2). Considering the importance of these three "marks" of the church, Paul had given very explicit instructions about each so that "you may know how one *ought* (or "how it is necessary") to conduct (Grk. "manage") the household of God..." How then could a person have a credible profession of faith but not be in some formal relation to the organization which is said to be the "pillar and bulwark of the truth?"

Therefore, the Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America rightly states about the Lord's Table that,

*since by our Lord's appointment, this sacrament sets forth the Communion of the Saints, the minister, at the discretion of the Session, before the observance begins, may either invite all those who profess the true religion, and are communicants in good standing in any evangelical church to participate in the ordinance; or may invite those who have been approved by the Session, after having given indication of their desire to participate.*

In other words, the session has the option of practicing what has been historically described as either "open" or "closed" communion. By "open" communion, it is meant that the session of one particular church can acknowledge a person's membership in another particular church so as to be sufficient toward participating in the Lord's table. By "closed" or "close" it would be required that each person be examined by the local session before they are allowed to participate regardless as to whether or not that person is a member of another gospel believing church. But either way, the person would need to be admitted by the church with some genuine relation to it so as to have a credible profession of faith. At *Christ Presbyterian Church*, "open" communion is practiced in so far as we honor the actions of any gospel believing church in admitting a person to the Lord's table. For this reason, we state in so many words before each administration of the Lord's supper that a person ought to have a "credible profession of

---

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:26, "for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *until He comes*."

faith and be a member in good standing of some gospel believing church." As concerning church membership, John Stott says it well when he affirms:

In all probability my reader already has links with a local church and indeed is preparing to become a full member of it. If by any chance you are not, however, I would like to urge you to remedy this as soon as possible. It is entirely anomalous, if not actually impossible, to claim membership of the universal, invisible church without belonging to a local, visible manifestation of it. I beg you also not to be an ecclesiastical gypsy, always on the move from church to church, and having no fixed abode! Instead, I hope you will join a church, settle down in it, introduce yourself to others, and always be in your place for Sunday worship...

John Stott, *Christian Basics*, p.128-9

### In Summary:

This chapter has tried to address the question concerning the "terms of communion" which is the same as determining what constitutes a "credible profession of faith" or "confirmed faith." It has been shown that there is both a "knowledge" and "behavioral" element to a credible profession of faith which includes having a relation to the visible church. It should be further noted that the power of the church consist not of the sword (coercion) but the power of the word (persuasion) working upon the conscience. For this reason, we consider it our duty to properly declare in public who should and who should not properly participate in the Lord's table as according to our best reading of scripture, but would not exert any kind of "force" so as to insure proper participation. Such coercive force, we believe, would include a physical withholding of the elements from a person who would choose to ignore our churches declarations concerning who ought to properly participate in the Lord's supper and who should not. Therefore, before each administration of the Lord's supper, we try to declare in as plain a words as possible what we believe to be the biblical conditions for participating in the Lord's Supper. However, we do not feel it is our responsibility to physically withhold or manually remove persons from the Lord's table if they should choose to participate. If, however, a person does choose to ignore or disagree with the church's understanding of the "terms of communion" in so far as they err, they stand before God individually without the church's culpability, even as Paul warns in 1 Cor.11:27, *whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.*

Finally, it is our sincere desire that everyone who is biblically qualified be enabled to enjoy the blessing of participating in the Lord's blessed meal together with the saints. We believe there is a real benefit to participation in the Lord's supper when accompanied by faith. Perhaps in the most sacred of ways, God confirms to us his covenant love through the Lord's supper, even as we are renewed in our covenant commitments to God. We are eager, therefore, to do all that is within our human power to assist a person in their coming to the Lord's table-- acknowledging of course that some things are simply not in our power to accomplish.

## Addendum: John Calvin and Charles Hodge on Christian Baptism Together with An Abbreviated Bibliography

### 1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 4, Chapter 16, Section 9ff.

(Calvin speaks of the benefits of baptism to both infants and their parents in section nine. The benefits to parents is quoted below. The benefits to children are namely that they are entered into the church such as to enjoy all the means of grace that are brought to them in that context. Later in section 17, Calvin directly responds to the Anabaptist conception of rebirth such as to be *only* related to a self-conscious profession of faith. As will be obvious, Calvin's conception of regeneration differed wildly from the Anabaptist conception of rebirth.)

Section 9: It remains for us to indicate briefly what sort of benefit comes from this observance, both to the believers who present their children to be baptized and to the infants themselves who are baptized with the sacred water-- lest anyone despise it as useless and unprofitable. Yet if it enters anyone's mind to jest at infant baptism on this pretext, he is mocking the command of circumcision given by the Lord. For what will they bring forward to impugn infant baptism that may not be turned back against circumcision? Thus the Lord punishes the arrogance of those who at once condemn what they cannot comprehend with their carnal sense. But God provides us with other weapons to beat down their stupidity. For this holy institution of his by which we feel our faith singularly comforted does not deserve to be called superfluous. For God's sign, communicated to a child as by an impressed seal, confirms the promise given to the pious parent, and declares it to be ratified that the Lord will be God not only to him but to his seed; and that he wills to manifest his goodness and grace not only to him but to his descendants even to the thousandth generation. (Ex. 20:6) God's boundless generosity, in his glory, then floods godly hearts with uncommon happiness, which quickens men to a deeper love of their kind Father, as they see his concern on their behalf for their posterity.

Section 17: They think that they are putting forward a very strong reason why children are to be barred from baptism when they claim that children because of their age are not yet able to understand the mystery signified in it, namely, spiritual regeneration, which cannot take place in earliest infancy. Our opponents therefore conclude that children are to be considered solely as children of Adam until they reach an appropriate age for the second birth. But God's truth everywhere opposes all these arguments. For if it is admitted that they are among the children of Adam, they are left in death, since in Adam we can but die (Rom.5:12ff). On the contrary, Christ commands that they be brought to him (Mt.19:14). Why is this? Because he is life. Therefore, to quicken them he makes them partakers in himself, while these fellows sentence them to banishment and death.

For if they hesitate in this saying that infants do not perish though they are counted as children of Adam, their error is quite sufficiently refuted by the testimony of Scripture. For since Scripture declares that in Adam all die, it follows that no hope of life remains except in Christ (1 Cor.15:22). Therefore, to become heirs of life we must have communion with him. Again, since it is written in another passage that we are all by nature subject to God's wrath (Eph. 2:3) and conceived in sin (Ps.51:5), which always involves condemnation, we must depart from our nature before God's Kingdom can be opened to us. And what can be said more clearly than that flesh and blood cannot possess the kingdom of God (1 Cor.15:50)? Therefore, let all that is ours be destroyed (which will not be accomplished apart from regeneration); then we shall inherit the Kingdom. In short, if Christ speaks truly when declares that he is life (John 11:25; 14:6), we must be engrafted into him in order to be freed from bondage to death.

But how (they ask) are infants, unendowed with knowledge of good or evil, regenerated? We reply that God's work, though beyond our understanding, is till not annulled. Now it is perfectly clear that those infants who are to be saved (as some are surely saved from that early age) are previously regenerated by the Lord. For if they bear with them an inborn corruption from their mother's womb, they must be cleansed of it before they can be admitted into God's Kingdom, for nothing polluted or defiled may enter there (Rev.21:27). If they are born sinners, as both David and Paul affirm (Eph.2:3; Ps.51:5), either they remain unpleasing and hateful to God, or they must be justified. And what further do we seek when the Judge himself plainly declares that entry into heavenly life opens only to men who are born anew (John 3:3)?

And to silence such gainsayers, God provided a proof in John the Baptist, whom he sanctified in his mother's womb (Luke 1:15)-- something he could do in others. And they do not gain anything here by this mocking evasion-- that it was only once, and that from this one instance it does not immediately follow that the Lord usually deals thus with infants. But we are not arguing in this way either. Our purpose is solely to show that they unjustly and wickedly shut God's power within these narrow limits to which it does not permit itself to be confined. Their other quibble has not more weight. They claim that in accordance with the usual mode of expression of Scripture, the phrase, "from the womb" is merely the equivalent of saying "from childhood." But we can clearly see that the angel, when he declared this to Zechariah, meant something else, namely, that John would while yet unborn be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us not attempt then to impose a law upon God to keep him from sanctifying whom he pleases, just as he sanctified this child, in as much as his power is not lessened.

### **Charles Hodge on the Efficacy of Baptism from his *Commentary on Ephesians*, pp. 320-325**

[The context here is Hodge's discussion of the cleansing referred to in Eph. 5:26 and whether it refers to (1) purification from guilt by expiation or (2) purification from pollution by the Spirit. Hodge argues for the first interpretation and then proceeds to tackle the issue of efficacy.]

In either view we are said to be cleansed (whether from guilt or pollution) by baptism. What does this mean? How does baptism in either of these senses wash away sin? The Protestant and scriptural answer to this question is, that baptism cleanses from sin just as the word does. We are said to be saved by the truth, to be begotten by the truth, to be sanctified by the truth. This does not mean:

1. That there is any inherent, much less magic, power in the word of God as heard or read to produce these effects.
2. Nor that the word always and everywhere, when rightly presented, thus sanctifies and saves, so that all who hear are partakers of these benefits.
3. Nor does it mean that the Spirit of God is so tied to the word as never to operate savingly on the heart except in connection with it. *For infants may be subjects of regeneration, though incapable of receiving the truth.*

In like manner when the Scriptures speak of baptism as washing away sin (Acts 22:16); or as uniting to Christ (Gal. 3:27); or as making Christ's death our death (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12); or as saving us (1 Pet. 3:21); they do not teach:

1. That there is any inherent virtue in baptism, or in the administrator, to produce these effects; nor
2. That these effects always attend its right administration; nor
3. That the Spirit is so connected with baptism that it is the only channel through which he communicates the benefits of redemption, so that all unbaptized will perish.

These three propositions, all of which Romanism and Ritualism affirm, are contrary to the express declarations of Scripture and to universal experience. Multitudes of the baptized are unholy; many of the unbaptized are sanctified and saved.

How then is it true that baptism washes away sin, unites us to Christ, and secures salvation? The answer again is, that this is true of baptism in the same sense that it is true of the word. God is pleased to connect the benefits of redemption with the believing reception of the truth. And he is pleased to connect these same benefits with the believing reception of baptism. That is, as the Spirit works with and by the truth, so he works with and by baptism, in communicating the blessings of the covenant of grace. Therefore, as we are said to be saved by the word, with equal propriety we are said to be saved by baptism; though baptism without faith is as of little effect as is the word of God to unbelievers.

The scriptural doctrine concerning baptism, according to the Reformed churches is:

1. That it is a divine institution.

2. That it is one of the conditions of salvation. "Whosoever believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). It has, however, the necessity of precept, not the necessity of a means sine qua non. It is in this respect analogous to confession. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10). And also to circumcision. God said, "The uncircumcised male child-should be cut off from his people" (Gen. 17:14) Yet children dying before the eighth day were surely not cut off from heaven. And the apostle teaches that if an uncircumcised man kept the law, "his uncircumcision was counted to him for circumcision" (Rom. 3:26).

3. Baptism is a means of grace, that is, a channel through which the Spirit confers grace; not always, not upon all recipients, nor is it the only channel, nor is it designed as the ordinary means of regeneration. Faith and repentance are the gifts of the Spirit and fruits of regeneration, and yet they are required as conditions of baptism. *But if faith, to which all the benefits of redemption are promised, precedes baptism, how can those benefits be said to be conferred, in any case, through baptism?* Just as a father may give an estate to his son, and afterwards convey it to him formally by a deed. Besides, the benefits of redemption, the remission of sin, the gift of the Spirit, and the merits of the Redeemer, are not conveyed to the soul once for all. They are reconveyed and reappropriated on every new act of faith, and on every new believing reception of the sacraments. The sinner coming to baptism in the exercise of repentance and faith, takes God the Father to be his Father; God the Son, to be his Saviour; and God the Holy Ghost to be his Sanctifier, and his word to be the rule of his faith and practice. The administrator then, in the name and by the authority of God, washes him with water as a sign of the cleansing from sin by the blood of Christ, and of sanctification by the Holy Spirit; and as a seal to God's promise to grant him those blessings on the condition of the repentance and faith thus publicly avowed. Whatever he may have experienced or enjoyed before, this is the public conveyance to him of the benefits of the covenant, and his inauguration into the number of the redeemed. If he is sincere in his part of the service, baptism really applies to him the blessings of which it is the symbol.

4. Infants are baptized on the faith of their parents. And their baptism secures to them all the benefits of the covenant of grace, provided they ratify that covenant by faith; just as circumcision secured the benefits of the theocracy, provided those circumcised by infancy kept the law. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration, that is, the doctrine that inward spiritual renovation always attends baptism rightly administered to the unresisting, and that regeneration is never effected without it, is contrary to Scripture, subversive of evangelical religion, and opposed to universal experience. It is, moreover, utterly irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Reformed churches. For that doctrine teaches that all the regenerated are saved. "Whom God calls them he also glorifies" (Rom. 8:30). It is, however, plain from Scripture, and in accordance with the faith of the universal church, that multitudes of the baptized perish. The baptized, therefore, as such, are not the regenerated.

The foregoing remarks are intended to show in what sense the Reformed understand this and similar declarations of Scripture. Christ purifies his church by baptism. That is the initiatory rite; which signifies, seals, and applies to believers all the benefits of the Redeemer's death. The apostle is speaking of the church, the body and bride of Christ, and of the effect of baptism on those who constitute that church, not of its effect on those who are not included in the covenant and are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.

#### **Other Resources:**

#### **Christian Sacraments and Baptism**

James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*. 2 vols. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960; Still Waters Revival Books, Edmonton, 1991.

Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned*

John Murray, *Christian Baptism*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974

Stuart Robinson, *The Church of God as an Essential Element of the gospel, and the Idea, Structure, and Functions Thereof*. Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1858.

J. C. Ryle, *Knots Untied*

Kim Riddlebarger, Lecture 3a, "The Biblical Case For Infant Baptism", and "Lecture 4, Baptist Objections to Infant Baptism and the Reformed Response (on the web-- [www.flash.net/~mww/31elect003.htm](http://www.flash.net/~mww/31elect003.htm))

Benjamin Warfield, "Christian Baptism," in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, ed. John E. Meeter. Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970: 325-31.

### **Christian Parenting and Discipleship**

Jack & Judith Balswick, *The Family, A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (The best Family Systems and Developmental Approach to Family that I have seen) Chapters on Parenting.

H. Clay Trumbull, *Hints On Child Training*

Theodore Tripp, *Shepherding A Child's Heart*

Paul David Tripp, *Age Of Opportunity, A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens*

J.A.Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* , Chapter 1 & 2 on Children Conversion. See also his *Thought on Family Worship*

Richard Baxter, *Baxter's Practical Works*, Vol. 1, Part II, Chapter 10, "The Duties of Parents For Their Children" (p.449ff)

*The Godly Family, A Series of Essays on the Duties of Parents and Children* (collection of mostly puritan tracts and sermons)

William and Colleen Dedrick, *The Little Book of Christian Character and Manners* , Christian Tutorial books, Port Angeles, Washington

John S. C. Abbott, *The Mother at Home*, G.A.M. Publications

R. L. Dabney, "Parental Responsibilities", *Discussions*, Vol 1, Banner of Truth

J.C. Ryle, *The Duties of Parents*, Triangle Press

Susan Hunt, *Heirs of the Covenant, Leaving a Legacy of Faith For the Next Generation*

### **For back cover-- quote from John Calvin**

For God's sign, communicated to a child as by an impressed seal, confirms the promise given to the pious parent, and declares it to be ratified that the Lord will be God not only to him but to his seed; and that he wills to manifest his goodness and grace not only to him but to his descendants even to the thousandth generation. God's boundless generosity, in his glory, then floods godly hearts with uncommon happiness, which quickens men to a deeper love of their kind Father, as they see his concern on their behalf for their posterity.

They think that they are putting forward a very strong reason why children are to be barred from baptism when they claim that children because of their age are not yet able to understand the mystery signified in it, namely, spiritual regeneration, which cannot take place in earliest infancy. Our opponents therefore conclude that children are to be considered solely as children of Adam until they reach an appropriate age for the second birth. But God's truth everywhere opposes all these arguments. For if it is admitted that they are among the children of Adam, they are left in death, since in Adam we can but die (Rom.5:12ff). On the contrary, Christ commands that they be brought to him (Mt.19:14). Why is this? Because he is life. Therefore, to quicken them he makes them partakers in himself, while these fellows sentence them to banishment and death.

For if they hesitate in this saying that infants do not perish though they are counted as children of Adam, their error is quite sufficiently refuted by the testimony of Scripture. For since Scripture declares that in Adam all die, it follows that no hope of life remains except in Christ (1 Cor.15:22). Therefore, to become heirs of life we must have communion with him. Again, since it is written in another passage that we are all by nature subject to God's wrath (Eph. 2:3) and conceived in sin (Ps.51:5), which always involves condemnation, we must depart from our nature before God's Kingdom can be opened to us. And what can be said more clearly than that flesh and blood cannot possess the kingdom of God (1 Cor.15:50)? Therefore, let all that is ours be destroyed (which will not be accomplished apart from regeneration); then we shall inherit the Kingdom. In short, if Christ speaks truly when declares that he is life (John 11:25; 14:6), we must be engrafted into him in order to be freed from bondage to death.