

INFANT BAPTISM

VS.

BELIEVERS' BAPTISM

Rev. A

December 27, 1998

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PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE STUDY FORMAT

The purpose of the Bible study format is to pursue the edification of believers and the unity of Christians.

The **edification** of believers is sought by helping Reformed Christians gain a clearer understanding of why infants are baptized from a Reformed perspective. Conversely, this material strives to help eliminate wrong reasons for baptizing infants. Infants should not be baptized because it is believed their parents' faith has saved them. Saving faith must be and always is personal. Infants should not be baptized because we presume they are saved. There is nothing to be gained by such a presumption. Infants should not be baptized because of tradition. Tradition is a tool to aid our understanding of God, it is not an end unto itself. Infants should not be baptized because the waters of baptism wash away their (original) sin. The physical waters of baptism do not save. Infants should not be baptized if neither of the parents is a Christian.

Infants of believers should be baptized because 1.) God is reaching out to them through His covenant and desires them to be saved and 2.) as Creator and Judge of the universe, God rightfully has a claim on their lives.

The **unity** of Christians is sought among the Baptist readers of this material. It is hoped that even though perhaps most Baptist readers will not come to embrace infant baptism, they will at least see that it is possible to practice the baptism of infants without destroying the essence of personal saving faith. Should the material succeed in this goal, then these Baptist readers will know that Christ has in fact redeemed some of the members of Paedo-Baptist churches - believing Baptists have brothers and sisters in Paedo-Baptist fellowships.

If a reader has been gifted by God in the area of teaching and has a strong interest in advancing true doctrine, that reader is encouraged to obtain the point by point debate presentation of the material on baptism. We look forward to having fellow believers join in the dialogue.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

BAPTISM

Baptist definition: an ordinance reserved only for those who have publicly accepted Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

Reformed definition: the New Testament sign of the Abrahamic covenant.

CHURCH

Baptist definition: the community of *believers*.

Reformed definition: the community of *God's people* including believers and their children. The church does include some unbelievers in its membership.

ORDINANCE

Baptist definition: a practice instituted by Christ . . .

PAEDO-BAPTISM

The practice of baptizing infants. "Paedo" is from the Greek *paido* which means "child." This is also the origin of such words as pediatrics and pediatrician.

DISCIPL

Baptist definition: a believer.

Reformed definition: the word comes from the Greek which means "learner." To be a disciple does not require faith, although faith is the ultimate goal of being a disciple. Young children are also "learners" or disciples.

FOR INFANT BAPTISM

Baptism is correctly understood and practiced only when it is seen in its proper relationship to the Abrahamic covenant. (This is true of the baptism of an adult believer as well as the baptism of an infant.) In the New Testament, Baptism takes the place of circumcision from the Old Testament. Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. Baptism is the New Testament sign of the Abrahamic covenant. Just as circumcision was given to the children of the covenant in the Old Testament, so too, baptism must now be given to the children of the covenant in the New Testament.

LESSON 1. THE NATURE OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

The Abrahamic covenant is a special relationship initiated by God. It is dependent solely on grace not on law. The covenant *contained the Gospel*. There is blessing for those who obey the covenant and curse for those who break the covenant. God referred to the covenant as a marriage. The Abrahamic covenant included his physical descendants. Note: as always, these Scripture passages must be read thoroughly in order to understand the following comments.

It is necessary to understand exactly what the Abrahamic covenant is since this defense of the practice of infant baptism is based upon the Abrahamic covenant. The best source of knowledge of what the Abrahamic covenant is can be found in Genesis chapters 12, 15, and 17.

Genesis 12 records for the first time this promise which God gave to Abraham (actually Abram):

²“I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
³I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all people on earth
will be blessed through you.” (NIV)

This promise, which is solely of grace and not human works, will become the core of the Abrahamic covenant.

The actual giving of the covenant by God to Abraham takes place in the second section of Genesis 15. We will now turn our attention to the matter of the relationship of grace to law in the Abrahamic covenant.

The rite of ratification of the Abrahamic covenant as recorded in Genesis 15 points to grace. The ceremony which is recorded in this chapter is a rather unusual rite for 20th century observers. In the ancient Near East it was used to ratify covenants (contracts) between kings. The participants would cut the animals in half and lay the halves opposite each other. Then, in order to ratify their specific covenant, they would both walk between the halves. This was a graphic portrayal of the participants' vow to keep their parts of the covenant or else suffer the consequences of being cut in half themselves. This ceremony of cutting animals in half was so closely bound to the concept of a covenant that the Hebrew words for "to make a covenant," if translated literally, are actually "to cut a covenant." It is important to try to understand as clearly as possible what that ceremony would have meant for someone like Abraham.

There is in all this one major aspect which indicates that this covenant is a work of grace and not a matter of law. Quite often in a covenant or contract like this both parties would commit themselves to obligations. For example, when a stronger king would subjugate a less powerful king he would promise to provide military protection in return for taxes paid. In an instance like this, both parties would walk between the halves of the animals and invoke upon themselves the curse for not keeping their part of the covenant. The interesting thing about this particular covenant initiated in Genesis 15 is the fact that Abraham was definitely a spectator in the event. God alone took on an active role in passing between the halves. Therefore, what God was saying was that Abraham ultimately had no responsibility in this matter. It all depended on God. And just as God cannot cease to exist (i.e. be "cut in half" for not fulfilling His obligation), so, too, the promise contained in this covenant would most certainly be fulfilled. Therefore the Abraham covenant is purely of grace, its existence is not dependant on human works.

As a special relationship between God and the covenant members, there is one very important fact to understand about the Abrahamic covenant. This is the fact that the covenant *contained the Gospel*.

Galatians 3:8 reads:

The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." (underlining added)

The words "All nations will be blessed through you" are taken straight from the Abrahamic covenant and make up a very foundational concept of the covenant. Those words are found in the initial giving of the promise that formed the basis of the covenant in Genesis 12:3.

There is a two-fold aspect of blessing and curse involved in the Abrahamic covenant due to the nature of covenants. There is blessing for those who obey the covenant and curse for those who break the covenant. (See the maledictory oath as described by Meredith Kline in his book By Oath Consigned.) At the very least this blessing equals living with the people of God. Conversely, the curse is to be excluded from that people (ref. Genesis 17:14). This is the very least because in the Old Testament times salvation was essentially limited to the Jews. Therefore, to be excluded from the Jewish nation was more than a matter of nationality, it was very close to if not equal to the guarantee of the lack of eternal salvation.

The covenant formed such an intimate relationship between God and Abraham's descendants that God referred to it as a marriage. Jeremiah uses the term "husband" for God quite consistently and "adulteress" for unfaithful Israel. Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1, 6, 8, 14, 20; 31:32.

The Abrahamic covenant included Abraham's physical descendants. Abraham's descendants received the sign of the covenant at infancy. God would not have made a covenant

with one person and then give another person the sign for that covenant *if that second person was himself not a member of that covenant.*

“I am the Lord thy God . . .” were words often spoken to the Israelites in the Old Testament. This relationship was the result of the Abrahamic covenant. It was based upon physical lineage because it was true for every member of the nation of Israel and not just the believers.

God was not their God always in a salvific sense, but salvation was the ultimate goal. Ezra 9:2. The Israelites were the “holy race” because of the Abrahamic covenant.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In New Testament terms, what forms the very core of the Abrahamic covenant (ref. Genesis 12:2-3 and Galatians 3:8)?
2. Why did God institute the Abrahamic covenant (ref. Genesis 15; note verses 2-3 and 8-9)?
3. According to Ancient Near Eastern practices, what did the cutting of the animals into halves signify (Genesis 15:9-10 and 17)?
4. Do members of the Abrahamic covenant obtain or merit their membership in the covenant as a result of works?
5. A member of a church of the Reformed tradition was once heard saying with respect to a youth of her church who was sowing his wild oats, “Don’t worry, he’s a child of the covenant. He’ll come back.” Will all members of the Abrahamic covenant ultimately be saved?
6. What is the advantage of the Abrahamic covenant (ref. Romans 3:1-2)?

LESSON 2.

BAPTISM REPLACES CIRCUMCISION

The key to covenantal theology is the belief that baptism is the New Testament equivalent of Old Testament circumcision and as such replaces circumcision. The following gives an overview of how that conclusion is reached.

Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. Baptism is the New Testament sign of the Abrahamic covenant (the reasoning for this is given below). Just as circumcision was given to the Old Testament children of the covenant, so too, baptism must now be given to the New Testament children of the covenant.

First we will discuss the fact that the Abrahamic covenant still exists in the New Testament. Then we will take a look at the fact that baptism and circumcision fulfill the same function and symbolize the same thing. Next it will be pointed out that Colossians 2-11-12 equate circumcision and baptism. And, finally, the previous three sections will be pulled together and it will be shown how they prove that baptism must be given to the children of believers.

A key verse in this connection is Acts 3:24-25:

²⁴“Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. ²⁵And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’” (underlining added)

We must take note of the *present tense* of the verbs in this passage: “you **are** heirs of . . . the **covenant** . . .” In order for them to be heirs of the covenant in the New Testament age it is mandatory that the covenant still be in existence. Reference to Abraham shows this is not the Mosaic covenant with its sacrifices which have been abolished that is being referred to here.

Galatians 3 also gives evidence of the existence of the Abrahamic covenant in the New Testament: “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’” In this passage we learn that the promise to Abraham, “All nations will be blessed through you” is dependant upon the justification of the Gentiles by faith. Hence a very important aspect of the Abrahamic covenant is being fulfilled **today**. If the Abrahamic covenant is in the process today of being fulfilled, how could we say that this covenant no longer exists? (See also Romans 4:16-17.) This is also direct evidence for the existence of the Abrahamic covenant in the New Testament.

I Corinthians 7:14 tells us that if one parent is a believer, the children are holy. How else could these children be holy if it was not for the Abrahamic covenant? Unless Baptists can give another reason why the children of believers are considered holy, we must conclude that it is because of the covenant.

There are two major similarities between baptism and circumcision which attest to their essential equality. When the two perhaps most important aspects of two rites are the same, namely, what they symbolize and their function it is only reasonable to expect the two rites to be essentially the same.

It is the responsibility of those who believe that they are *not* equal to provide specific reasons to prove such.

Baptism and circumcision both primarily symbolize purification. Both of them point to the need for spiritual purification. As such, both rites are physical signs which point to the same spiritual blessings.

A main emphasis of Old Testament teaching with respect to circumcision is the fact that just as physical circumcision removes impurities from the body, so too, we need to remove the spiritual impurities from ourselves. The Old Testament is also very clear in stating that physical circumcision is not to be equated with spiritual circumcision. New Testament insights on the true meaning of circumcision confirm this. Hence we can see that circumcision is a physical sign that points to the need for spiritual purification.

The removal of spiritual impurities is compared by the Scriptures to the physical act of circumcision. Jeremiah 4:4 reads:

⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done - burn with no one to quench it.

See also Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6.

The Old Testament distinguishes sharply between physical and spiritual circumcision, giving spiritual circumcision the greater place. Jeremiah 9:25-26 indicates this:

²⁵ "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh - ²⁶ Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the desert in distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart."

The New Testament also shows that the real meaning of Old Testament circumcision lies in the purification of the heart. Romans 2:28-29:

²⁸ A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

Reference also Philippians 3:3.

The New Testament also reveals an equation of uncircumcision and the sinful nature. Colossians 2:13a reads:

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.

See also Acts 7:51.

Baptism in the New Testament is a symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (ref. Romans 6:3-7). This fact is a very important aspect of the Reformed understanding of baptism. This will be covered a little later.

Another important aspect of baptism is the fact that it is a symbol of the removal or washing away of spiritual impurities.

Acts 2:38:

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins*. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Italics added.)

Acts 22:16:

¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and *wash your sins away*, calling on his name. (Italics added.)

I Peter 3:21a:

. . . ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also - *not the removal of dirt from the body* but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. (Italics added.)

In stating that baptism is not the removal of dirt from the body this passage is not teaching that baptism has nothing at all to do with purification. On the contrary, it establishes that very relationship. The negation is contained in the passage to indicate that the ultimate goal of baptism is *spiritual* purification rather than *physical* purification.

One valid question which needs to be raised in this context is how does one determine the main meaning of a word such as *baptizo* which is translated “baptize” as well as “purify” and “wash”? An accurate translation of the word would have major implications for determining what is the correct practice of baptism. How do we determine whether or not one aspect is more important than the other, or whether they might be equally important?

Let me offer what I believe is the answer in this case. When all the passages dealing with baptism are considered, the most important aspect that comes through is that aspect which is closest to the spiritual reality which the symbol represents. Which is closest, “being buried with Christ” or “purification”? “Being buried with Christ” is itself a picture of some reality. It is not a reality in itself. Therefore, immersion is a picture of a picture. Spiritual purification on the other hand, is the reality which we need. To *literally* be placed in a grave with the human body of Christ would do us no good, but to *literally* be purified, to have our sins washed away, is equivalent to salvation itself. That is the real thing which baptism points to.

The New Testament supports the explanation given above. When it reflects upon the meaning of baptism, it is the idea of washing or purifying that is most prominent. In Romans 6:1-7 a close tie is made between baptism and the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Immersion as a mode of baptism fits that passage very nicely and I do not wish for any reason to deny that picture. However, even in this passage, ultimately spiritual cleansing, spiritual purification is at the very heart of the meaning of baptism. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ would be of no avail to us if we would not be *washed* by His blood. Therefore, even though immersion fits nicely into what is going on here, purification is still what is at the very core of the meaning of baptism.

The primary function of circumcision and baptism are the same. Both circumcision and baptism are rites of initiation into the community of God’s people (i.e. respectively Israel and the New Testament church). They are both rites of initiation into the community of God’s people in the true or spiritual sense as well as in the earthly or outward sense. This is true for those joining the spiritual body of Christ (namely the group which is limited to all believers) as well as for those joining the visible expression of the body of Christ (namely, the organized church). These two are not the same.

This point is true from the perspective of Baptist theology as well as from the perspective of covenantal theology. It is perhaps most clearly seen from the perspective of adults baptized in

the New Testament and from the perspective of proselytes in the Old Testament. When an adult joined the Early Church he was baptized; when a male proselyte joined the nation of Israel, he was circumcised. Similarly, when an adult joins a Baptist or a Paedobaptist church today that adult is baptized.

It is important to note that circumcision and baptism are here both referred to as rites of initiation and not as the means of entrance. In the case of infants, another prerequisite is required before the rite can be administered, namely, at least one of the infant's parents must be a believer. Hence, in all cases the rite can only be administered when certain requirements have been met. As such, in each case the rite never causes the individual to be joined to the group, rather it is a celebration of the fact that the individual has already been added to the group (It is also important to distinguish between the visible and the invisible church at this point. An infant never joins the invisible church because of the faith of his or her parent(s). Rather, infant baptism signifies the fact that the infant has joined the visible church.)

This similarity between the two rites is indeed a significant one. The difference between Baptists and Paedobaptists is the fact that Baptists say it is only a rite of initiation into the body of believers and Paedobaptists believe that it is a sign of the Abrahamic covenant and hence also a rite of initiation into the visible church or the community of God's people.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is it crucial to the Reformed position to prove that the Abrahamic covenant still exists in the New Testament?

2. When Acts 3 reads "you are heirs of the covenant," what ramification does that have for the present discussion?

3. The phrase "All nations will be blessed through you" first appears in what passage of Scripture? Does Galatians 3 connect the Abrahamic covenant with the New Testament age? Why or why not?

4. I Corinthians 7:14 is an interesting passage. How are the children of believers holy? What does it mean that these children are "holy?" Is there another reason that could explain how these children are holy aside from the Abrahamic covenant?

5. How do we know from the New Testament that baptism represented purification?

6. Do the Scriptures relate circumcision to purification and baptism to purification in a similar fashion? Describe why or why not.

7. Would it be as likely for baptism to have taken the place of circumcision if circumcision symbolized something different than what baptism symbolizes?

8. During Ancient Near Eastern times powerful kings subjugated less powerful princes etc. Each member of the subjugated clan or community would often receive a sign of the covenant that was made between the parties. This served as a continual reminder of the existence of the covenant and of the obligations that each individual had to that covenant. How does the function of circumcision in the nation of Israel and the function of baptism in the New Testament church relate to the above?

9. According to Colossians 2:13a what does uncircumcision represent? According to I Peter 3:21a, what does baptism represent? How do these two compare?

10. What is the relationship of physical circumcision to spiritual circumcision (Romans 2:28-29)? What is the relationship of physical baptism to spiritual baptism (ref. Acts 2:38, 22:16 and I Peter 3:21)?

11. What does baptism represent - the death burial and resurrection of Christ or purification? Is it exclusively one or the other? Is there any connection between the two?

12. What is the difference between a rite of initiation and a means of entrance? What significance does that have for baptism and circumcision?

13. According to both Baptist and Paedo-baptist theology, what occurs at the time of baptism as far as the visible (physical) and invisible (spiritual) church are concerned? What about physical and spiritual circumcision?

LESSON 3.

COLOSSIANS 2 AND A CONCLUSION OF THE PAEDO-BAPTIST MATERIAL

Colossians 2:11-12 has been quoted for centuries by Reformed theologians in support of the practice of infant baptism. That passage reads:

¹¹ In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

What significance is the reference to circumcision and baptism in these two verses? What can we learn about the relationship of baptism to circumcision (if there is any) from this passage?

In the original, verses 8 through 15 were all one sentence. Therefore, to one degree or another these verses all consist of one thought. What is that sentence's message? The word translated "hollow" in verse 8 in the NIV is the Greek word for "empty." This is in contrast to the fullness of God that is available through Christ (verse 9). So in verses 8 and 9 the emptiness of the world is contrasted with the fullness which Christ offers. In verses 10-12 Paul goes on to describe the fact that Christians receive this fullness of Christ. Verse 13 then continues by telling how we as Christians were previously dead in our sins and the verses from the end of 13 through 15 tell of all the things Christ did. He made us alive with him, forgiving our sins, canceling the written code nailing it to the cross, he put off or disarmed the powers and authorities triumphing over them.

As far as the relationship of circumcision to baptism is concerned, we can gain some important insights from the above facts. Verses 8-15 are divided into basically three sections: 1.) the emptiness of the world versus the fullness of Christ (verses 8-9), 2.) Christians have fullness in Christ (verses 10-12) and 3.) what Christ did to save us (verses 13-15). Now we must note that when Paul says we were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision and we were baptized with a spiritual baptism, these are both stated in the same section. Together they form one and the same message. In this passage Paul is not saying circumcision stands for or means, for example, the Jews are a special people, and baptism represents personal salvation. There is no indication in this passage that the two are distinguished from each other. *In Colossians 2:11-12 circumcision and baptism both represent salvation.*

Paul uses both spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism to refer to salvation, he uses these two concepts to refer to the same reality. As a result of this we can see that the Apostle Paul considered spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism *to be essentially the same*. This passage is very significant proof that circumcision and baptism are equated in the Scriptures.

Now, someone could well ask, isn't circumcision one and the same with the works righteousness of Judaism? Galatians 5:2-4 reads,

² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

This passage, as well as others, clearly links circumcision with works righteousness. Can circumcision, then, possibly be connected to baptism?

The Colossians 2 passage can also shed some light on this matter. Verse 14 of this passage refers to the written code or ordinances. Yet, in Colossians 2 circumcision is not equated to or even linked to that code or the Law. On the contrary, circumcision is used as a picture of our salvation as described above. The circumcision that Galatians refers to is a twisted view that many of the Jews of Jesus' day had. The religion of the Pharisees was a religion of works righteousness, but God's intent for the Law and circumcision was never that anyone should attempt to earn their salvation by keeping the Law. On the contrary, the Law correctly understood was intended to be a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (ref. Galatians 3:24). Therefore, from this passage we learn that circumcision in its original intent from God was a good thing, it was not part of a false religion.

The conclusion of this matter is as follows. The Abrahamic covenant exists in the New Testament. As we saw in the Abrahamic covenant, God has a special relationship with believers and their children.

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament. The key aspects of what baptism and circumcision *symbolize* and the *function* they serve are the same. Baptism and circumcision are equated in Colossians 2:11-12. Combining this with the above leads to the conclusion that **baptism is now the New Testament sign of the covenant.**

When baptism symbolizes purification just as circumcision did, when baptism and circumcision serve the same function as a rite of entrance into the community of God's people and when the two are equated in Colossians we see a lot of continuity in the Abrahamic covenant from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Now, when baptism also symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ a powerful dimension of the covenant is revealed. The revelation of Christ's atonement is attached to the covenant. This is clearly very fitting because it is in Christ's atonement that the Abrahamic covenant realizes its culmination, its fulfillment.

These facts support the conclusion that baptism is the New Testament sign of the covenant. Even though it is not explicitly stated in the Scriptures that baptism is the New Testament sign of the covenant, the above evidence must be addressed by Baptists. If a convincing argument cannot be produced to prove the above wrong, then it is established as Scriptural that just as children of the covenant received the sign of circumcision in the Old Testament, now children of the covenant must receive **baptism**, the New Testament sign of the covenant.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is there an error in the interpretation of Colossians 2:11-12? If so, what is it?
2. Is there another way of reading Colossians 2:11-12 (perhaps even incorporating the interpretation given) that stops short of equating circumcision and baptism? If there is, what is that understanding of the passage?
3. Do you believe that Colossians 2:11-12 for all practical purposes equates circumcision and baptism? If not, why?
4. If baptism is the New Testament sign of the covenant, how does that differ from it being an indication of ones personal faith (the Baptist view)? How is the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3) fulfilled?
5. Do you believe baptism is the New Testament sign of the covenant? If so, why? If not, why?

AGAINST INFANT BAPTISM

LESSON 4. OBJECTIONS TO INFANT BAPTISM

OBJECTION #1 GENERAL COMPARISON - OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament there were many ceremonies and rites pointing forward to Christ. These rites embraced a broad range of people (all the members of the nation of Israel). The purpose of these rites is clearly seen in Galatians 3:24 where it says that the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (KJV). The purpose of the Law and these rites was to lead people through the darkness of their ignorance to Christ who would be more fully revealed in the future.

However, now that Christ has been revealed, there is no need for so many physical symbols to lead us to Him because we already have the fuller revelation.

Circumcision brought many peoples' attention to the future hope that the Messiah would come. Baptism, on the other hand, looks back in retrospect to that event. Therefore, unlike the Law and circumcision, baptism cannot lead people to a future hope (as far as revelation is concerned). The full revelation of Christ's redeeming work on the cross is an act of history. Hence, baptism must be reserved for those who have looked back to that event and have accepted it as a covering for their own sins.

The Lord's Supper is also an example of this truth. Children as well as adults partook of Passover which, like circumcision, was a rite that looked forward to the coming of Christ. The Lord's Supper, which was instituted on the night of Passover and which now in a sense takes the place of Passover, is similar to baptism in that it looks back in retrospect to the work of Christ. However, in the New Testament the Lord's Supper is very clearly reserved for believers only.

This line of thinking is very much in agreement with the fact that in Old Testament times the people had the Law but today we have the Spirit. Whereas in days gone by the Law acted as a schoolmaster, in the New Testament the Holy Spirit has been poured out and He now convicts the world of sin and brings us to Christ. The physical rites which do exist within the church have been raised to a new height and have been given greater meaning and significance. (B. Timmerman)

PAEDO-BAPTIST RESPONSE

This objection is a statement of the Baptist position given in broad strokes. It does list key aspects of Baptist theology. It is, however, weak in that it is limited to a statement of the position and lacks detail in *defending* the position.

For example, take the argument that baptism must be reserved for those who look back to the event of Christ's sacrifice and have accepted it as a covering for their sins because Christ's redeeming work on the cross has already taken place. This is a theological possibility but it is not immediately obvious. It is a statement of a possibility - what we need is proof that it is right.

A second example is the claim that the physical rites in the New Testament have been raised to a new height and have been given greater meaning and significance. This again is a claim - what we need now is proof to back it up. In the Old Testament there's physical circumcision and circumcision of the heart. In the New Testament there's physical baptism and being "buried with Christ" - the spiritual baptism. *Baptism has not been given greater meaning and significance.* From the Old Testament to the New Testament we have a clearer understanding of God's plan of salvation but baptism still has very strong parallels to circumcision in the physical and spiritual dimensions. Baptism has not been given greater meaning and significance.

On the other hand, the Reformed position takes the position that there is a lot of continuity from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from circumcision to baptism. The earlier material goes into detail to describe this understanding of Scripture.

Until this objection is expanded to include proofs to support its stated claim it should be considered inconclusive support for the Baptist position.

OBJECTION #2. BELIEVERS CAN NOT BE MEMBERS OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

This objection is well expressed by Rev. Alexander Carson in his book on baptism:

“ . . . the covenant of Abraham is not made with all believers. Indeed, it is strange there should be a necessity to make such an observation. The Abrahamic covenant is so evidently peculiar, that it is the most extravagant absurdity to suppose that it is made with every believer in every age. Let us take a look at this covenant, as it is recorded in Gen. xii. 1: ‘Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ Is it not absolute lunacy to suppose, that this covenant is made with all believers? Has God promised to every believer that he will make of him a great nation? Has God promised to every believer that he will make his name great? Is every believer to become as celebrated as Abraham? Has God promised to every believer, that the Messiah shall descend from him, or that in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed? Every believer, indeed, is to be blessed according to that covenant; but it is by having his faith, like Abraham’s, counted for righteousness, not by becoming, like Abraham, the father of any of the faithful.”

PAEDO-BAPTIST RESPONSE

It will be most helpful to focus on the following portion of the quote by Rev. Carson: “Is it not absolute lunacy to suppose, that this covenant is made with all believers? Has God promised to every believer that he will make of him a great nation? Has God promised to every believer that he will make his name great? Is every believer to become as celebrated as Abraham? Has God promised to every believer, that the Messiah shall descend from him, or that in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed?”

Given this line of reasoning we need to ask some questions. Has God promised to *every* Jew in the Old Testament that He will make of him a great nation? Has God promised to *every* Jew that the Messiah shall descend from him? The answers to these questions are also, No. Then are we to conclude that the Abrahamic covenant did not include any of the Jews in the Old Testament as well?

The nature of the Abrahamic covenant tells us otherwise. The fact that circumcision, the sign of the covenant, was given to each male infant indicated that they were members of the covenant. Meredith Kline in his book By Oath Consigned goes into these matters in wonderful detail. Part III also gives more of a background in this area. It’s clear from the fact that the Old Testament speaks of covenant breakers that the Jewish people were members of the covenant. After all, you can’t break a covenant if you aren’t first of all a member of it.

A distinction must be made between the promises given to Abraham and the participation of Abraham’s descendants in the fulfillment of those promises. It is true that promises were made to Abraham such as are not given to anyone else in exactly the same way. However, this does not eliminate Abraham’s descendents from being members of the covenant, nor does it eliminate believers and their children from participating in the covenant.

When examined, Rev. Carson’s position does not accurately reflect the teaching of Scripture.

OBJECTION #3. BAPTISM IS NOT THE SEAL OF THE NEW COVENANT

Rev. Carson has a statement that is very helpful in giving expression to this position:

“ . . . baptism is not the seal of the new covenant . . . Is there any Jewish tradition more void of scriptural authority, than that which designates baptism and the Lord’s supper *seals of the new covenant*? There is not in the New Testament any single portion that can bear such a meaning. And what can the wisest of men know about these things, but what God has told us? He has not said that baptism is a seal. Circumcision was a seal of the righteousness of the faith of Abraham. This was God’s seal to the truth, till the letter was abolished. The Spirit of truth is the seal, and the circumcision of the heart by him is the thing signified by circumcision in the flesh. The circumcised nation was typical of the church of Christ, for the apostle says, ‘we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit;’ and ‘circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter.’ The circumcision of the Jews was the letter, of which the circumcision of the

heart in Christians is the spirit. The Christian, then, has a more exalted seal than circumcision - he has the Spirit of God, 'whereby he is sealed unto the day of redemption.' Ephes. iv. 30. When sinners believe in Christ, they are sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is 'the earnest of their inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.' Eph. i. 13. The seal, then, that comes in the room of circumcision, is the seal of the Spirit. Circumcision sealed God's truth to Abraham, and all who ever shall have the faith of Abraham. It was applied to the typical nation without respect to character; but the seal of the Spirit is applied to none but believers, and to believers of all nations as well as Jews. When the Holy Spirit himself, in the heart of the believer, is the seal of God's truth, there is no need of any other seal. Baptism represents the belief of the truth in a figure, and takes it for granted that they are believers to whom it is applied - but it is no seal of this. They may appear to be Christians to-day, and therefore ought to be baptized; to-morrow they may prove the contrary, and therefore they cannot have been sealed by baptism." (Carson, pp. 234-35).

PAEDO-BAPTIST RESPONSE

A crucial error has been made in the above quote by Rev. Carson. Reformed theology *does not claim that baptism is the seal of the new covenant.*

"The seal, then, that comes in the room of circumcision, is the seal of the Spirit." Rev. Carson is making a serious mistake here. He is bridging from the sign of the Abrahamic covenant to the seal of the new covenant. He is not comparing apples to apples. There are a number of covenants in the pages of Scripture. There's a covenant with Noah, one with Moses, David etc. etc. When Jeremiah 31:33 speaks of a new covenant that is not the covenant that Reformed theology teaches baptism applies to.

OBJECTION #4. THE OLD TESTAMENT CONSISTED OF THE LETTER, THE NEW TESTAMENT HAS THE SPIRIT

In this connection, there are several quotes from Rev. Carson's book that directly tie in with this aspect.

"The church of Israel had the circumcision of the flesh, - the church of the New Testament have the circumcision of the heart." (Carson, pg. 231.)

"That circumcision had no personal reference to the individuals circumcised, is also evident from the fact, that when a stranger desired to eat the Passover, all the males of his family must be circumcised. 'And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it.' Exod. xii. 43 [actually vs. 48]. Here there is no faith required in the person who desires to eat the Passover, nor in his adult males, whether children or slaves, who are to be circumcised as the condition of his eating the Passover. The circumcision

of his whole male family takes place as a matter of course. There is, then, no law that requires even a profession of faith in the God of Israel, in order to entitle a stranger to eat the Passover. There is no condition of either faith or character; and had he a thousand unbelieving children and slaves, he has a Divine warrant to circumcise them.” (Carson, pg. 228; concerning the Passover, reference page 233 also.)

“The child of a Jew must be circumcised without any respect to the faith of the parent.” (Carson, pg. 230)

“The Shechemites, also, as Mr. Haldane observes, were circumcised not only without evidence of faith, but even without a profession of it, which could not have been done with the approbation of Jacob, had it been unlawful. Here, then, persons are circumcised not only who had no evidence of being interested in the promises of the covenant, but who were shut out from its temporal promises most expressly. From the spiritual promises they were excluded as long as they continued unbelievers, but from the temporal promises they were excluded for ever. Persons, then, were circumcised who never could obtain an interest in some of the blessings of the covenant, of which circumcision was the token. How absurd, then, to make this the law of baptism!” (Carson, pg. 227)

“The circumcision of the slaves, which destroys the system of our opponents, is not only consonant to our views, but appears as suitable as the circumcision of the natural seed of Abraham by Isaac and Jacob: it is one of the patterns of heavenly things. . .

Such a circumcision, then, could not imply, that the individuals had an interest in the spiritual promises of the covenant. Indeed, the circumcision of slaves did not make them partakers even of the temporal promises. ‘Servants,’ says Mr. Haldane, ‘although circumcised, did not possess the privileges of the children of Abraham, nor were looked upon as the people of God. They had no share of the land, and there was no precept against selling them to another nation, when they would lose all privileges of Israel. This also manifestly appears from many considerations. In many of the laws, the distinction between Israel, who were the Lord’s servants, and the stranger, is stated. Thus they might lend on usury to a stranger, but not to their brother, Deut. xxiii. 20. They were not to eat what died of itself; they were to give it unto the stranger that was in their gates, that he might eat it, or they might sell it to an alien; and the reason given is, ‘For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God.’ Deut. xiv. 21. They might also buy bondmen and bondmaids, not only of the heathen round about them, but of the children of the stranger that sojourned among them, but they could not keep an Israelite a bondman. Lev. xxv. 39-46. Thus it appears, that a person being circumcised did not thereby become entitled to the privileges of the children of Abraham, or of God’s peculiar people.’” (Carson, pp. 226-27)

PAEDO-BAPTIST RESPONSE

Concerning the quote that Israel had the circumcision of the flesh and the New Testament church has the circumcision of the heart, we need to take a closer look at the Old Testament. The error here is clearly seen when one examines Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6 and Jeremiah 4:4. The Old Testament very definitely had a concept of the circumcision of the heart.

The four remaining quotes above all argue that circumcision in the Old Testament was indiscriminately applied - it was according to the letter of the law. If circumcision and all that it represented was indeed indiscriminate and physical in nature, then circumcision would have belonged to each Jew simply as a result of birth. It would also not be possible for anyone or anything to take it away from them. However, what circumcision represented could be taken away from them. There are over two dozen references to this in the Old Testament in the Old Testament to ways in which a Jew could be “cut off” from Israel (Gen. 17:14; Ex. 12:15-19; 30:33, 38; 31:14; Lev. 7:20-21, 25, 27; 17:4, 9, 10, 14; 18:29; 19:8; 20:3, 5, 6, 17; 22:3; 23:29; 26:26; Num. 9:13; 15:30, 31; 19:13, 20; Ez. 14:8; Mal. 2:12). The Hebrew word “cut off” is the same word used for the “cut a covenant.” There is clearly a connection between these. The restrictions listed in the above Scriptural references show that according to the divine plan, Jews could lose the blessings of the covenant if they disobeyed God. This disobedience included sinning defiantly (Num. 15:30), defiling the sanctuary (Num. 19:13, 20) etc. etc. Therefore, circumcision and the associated blessings were not indiscriminately the possession of the Jews. We must remind ourselves of the importance of distinguishing between God’s appointed design for the nation of Israel and the way in which sinful man fell short of the ideal. Due to sinful men circumcision appeared to be an absolute, undeniable possession of all Jews.

The quote that brings up the Passover is one of the specific cases that needs to be considered. When that quote says that no faith was required, it is true that faith as we speak of it in New Testament times is not referenced. However, given the requirement of circumcision, it is very unlikely that any participated in the Passover for casual reasons.

When people are in a foreign land and culture they will often do things that conform with the culture in order to be gracious guests and not offend their host. However, due to the nature of the surgery that circumcision involved, the pain that was experienced especially for adults and the length of time required for recovery, to be circumcised before the Passover wasn’t exactly like washing ones hands before dinner.

In an age where each nation had its own gods, to be circumcised in Israel was much more of a profession of faith in the God of Israel than it might appear. In this very passage in Exodus for example, a number of Egyptians left Egypt with the Israelites (ref. Exodus 12:38). In so doing they rejected the gods of Egypt and followed Jehovah. That the Passover was taken very seriously is evident from Numbers 9:13. Failure to celebrate the Passover was grounds for being cut off from Israel.

The second quote states that the child of a Jew must be circumcised without any respect to the faith of the parent. The circumcision of Jewish children was not 100% automatic. That is, it was possible for Jews to lose that privilege. If a Jew was not obedient, according to God’s

revealed will he was to be “cut off” (ref. the above). Therefore the child of a Jew was not to be circumcised without respect to the faith of the parent.

The third quote refers to the Schechemites as recorded in Genesis 34. The circumcision of the Shechemites cannot tell us anything about the correct meaning of circumcision. As verse 13 of that chapter tells us Jacob’s sons were acting deceitfully. They were simply using the rite of circumcision to weaken their enemies so that they could kill them. Such an instance of circumcision simply cannot be used to learn something about the true meaning of circumcision.

The last quote claims that the circumcision of the slaves destroys Reformed theology. The reasons he gives are largely to be found in the second paragraph. The main reason he gives is that although they were circumcised the slaves did not possess the privileges of the children of Abraham, nor were they looked upon as the people of God.

The answer to this problem is to be found in *slavery* not in the Reformed understanding of the covenant. The institution of slavery was flawed, it was wrong right to its very core. It should not be surprising, then, to find problems when one examines the relationship of various aspects of Old Testament Israel as they related to slavery. For example, Mr. Haldane points out that there was no precept against selling slaves to another nation at which time they would lose all privileges of Israel, the people of God. There is something wrong with the idea of anyone being “sold out of the community of God’s people.” The problem, however, lies not in the question of whether or not the slaves were a part of God’s people. The slaves were a part of the nation of Israel, the nation of Israel was the community of God’s people, therefore, the slaves were at least in a minimal sense a part of God’s people. The problem with this whole scenario is the fact that *it is fundamentally wrong to sell people* in the first place.

We cannot use any evidence in this debate that involves slaves because the introduction of slavery introduces a major flaw into the equation. Because of the existence of that problem it is not possible to humanly sort things out and prove whether there is a problem with the Reformed understanding of circumcision. This section should be marked Inconclusive.

OBJECTION #5. CONCERNING THE TRANSITION FROM CIRCUMCISION TO BAPTISM

“If baptism came in the room of circumcision, it would not have commenced till the other had ceased; nor would it have been applied to circumcised persons. Why did John baptize the circumcised Jews before the manifestation of Christ? Why did Jesus baptize before the end of the Jewish dispensation?” (Carson, pg. 230)

PAEDO-BAPTIST RESPONSE

It is very difficult to say with precision what *should* happen during times of transition. Especially a transition brought about by something as major as the incarnation. Things would be nice in some respects if they would follow the course that seems most reasonable to us but that is not always the case. As a result of this, it is not possible to develop a theology of baptism from these portions of Scripture.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Practically all Christians are acquainted with the believe and be baptized verses. What more is required to prove that baptism looks back in retrospect to Christ's sacrifice and is to be reserved for those who have embraced that sacrifice?

2. Once the Reformed faith makes the claim that baptism is the sign of the covenant, can Baptist theology rest assured it conveys the correct understanding of God's Word until it proves baptism is not the sign of the covenant? Due to the fact that the believe and be baptized message is given to adults in the New Testament, can we be certain that is also God's will for everyone?

3. Was every member of Israel a member of the Abrahamic covenant? If yes, how do we know? If not, how do we know? Was every Jew promised that the Messiah would be among his descendants? Since no New Testament believer can list Christ among his descendants, does that prove no New Testament believers are members of the covenant of Abraham?

4. Is baptism the seal of the **new** covenant or is the Spirit? What implications does this have for the Abrahamic covenant? What implications does this have for the practice of infant baptism?

5. Is the circumcision of the flesh limited to the Old Testament and the circumcision of the heart restricted to the New Testament? How do we know?

6. Does the Passover and Exodus 12 prove that circumcision was applied indiscriminately? According to the will of God as expressed in the Old Testament, was circumcision to belong to all Jews without exception and without question? Did the Jews faithfully follow God's will in this matter? Was circumcision then, according to God's will, supposed to be indiscriminately applied to all natural born descendants of Abraham - completely independent of obedience to God?

7. Were the children of all Jews to be circumcised regardless of the faith of the parents?

8. What role did circumcision play with respect to the Schechemites in Genesis 34? Is this a normative example of circumcision, i.e. a normal application of circumcision from which we can learn about the true meaning and use of circumcision? Or is this example an exception? Why?

9. When it comes to the matter of the circumcision of slaves, what is most crucial, that the slaves were **circumcised**, or that **slaves** were circumcised? Given the two instances of the Schechemites and slaves, is it proper to hold that in a fallen world, when we strive to understand the Scriptures we need to examine the context of a given passage of Scripture? In other words, will we be able to learn equally as much from all references to circumcision in the Scriptures?

FOR BELIEVERS' BAPTISM

LESSON 5. ARGUMENTS FOR BELIEVERS' BAPTISM

Some of the verses well known to many Baptists are the “believe and be baptized” passages. These include verses such as Mark 16:16 and Acts 8:36-37. Before we look at what the Scriptures teach concerning infant baptism we need to take a look at these verses.

If one believes deep in his or her heart these verses teach that it is mandatory for one to believe before being baptized, then no examination of the Scriptural basis of infant baptism can make a difference because infants cannot believe and therefore they cannot meet this requirement. Therefore it is necessary for us to take a look at these verses. Which is Scriptural? Baptists say faith is a necessary prerequisite to baptism. Paedo-Baptists say faith before baptism is not God’s design for the infants of believers. (Faith is, of course, necessary for salvation.) This section holds that the believe and be baptized verses cannot be used as evidence against infant baptism.

In order to properly understand any passage of Scripture it is mandatory to give careful consideration to the **context** of that passage. The context of Mark 16:16 is clearly the evangelistic command of the Great Commission. The audience of such an evangelistic charge is adults.

It is possible that the requirement to have faith before baptism as referenced in these verses is a requirement of everyone who is baptized. However, this is not necessarily the *only* possible understanding that God might have intended for these verses. It is a possibility that faith is a requirement only of those who fit into the same category as the original audience - namely adults.

How is one to know for sure? Let’s take a closer look at this matter.

Paedo-Baptists maintain there is a reason to delve deeper into this matter. It is not an attempt to simply hold on to human traditions; there is a Scriptural precedent for their understanding of these passages.

In Romans 4:11 we read:

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith . . .

For Abraham circumcision was a seal of the righteousness he had by faith. This is an Old Testament parallel to Mark 16:16. This is clearly a case of a sign which was the result of faith and was applied to a believer. ***Circumcision was for Abraham what baptism is for Baptists.***

Now the Scriptural precedent for infant baptism can be seen in Genesis 17:10, 12 when God *commands* Abraham to circumcise his infant offspring. At this point a seal of righteousness by faith is applied to the infant of a believer.

What are the ramifications of Romans 4 and Genesis 17? Since circumcision was a seal of faith applied to the infant of a believer, then it is possible that the same could be true of baptism. In other words, it is possible that baptism could legitimately be applied to an infant.

Do these verses in and of themselves prove infant baptism? No. By themselves they do not prove infant baptism because they are not sufficient to prove that baptism is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. What they do establish is the fact that it is not sufficient for Baptists to quote these “believe and be baptized” verses as proof that infant baptism is not Scriptural. Therefore, when these verses are quoted as proving infant baptism wrong because faith is a necessary prerequisite to baptism, that argument must be rejected as long as no further evidence from the Word of God is presented.

In order for Baptists to establish their position as Scriptural, they will need to go a step further. Even though at first glance, quoting verses such as Mark 16:16 sound like they prove the Baptist argument, the above material shows these efforts fall short. Since the Reformed position consists in the belief that baptism is the *New Testament sign of the covenant* just as circumcision was the Old Testament sign, in order for Baptists to prove their position they will need to go a step further and hear out the case for the Reformed position and then prove that baptism is not the New Testament sign of the covenant.

One of two things must happen. Either it must be shown that there is an error in the above thinking or else it must be acknowledged that Romans 4:11 teaches us that the “believe and be baptized” verses cannot be used as evidence in support of believer’s baptism.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Circumcision was first instituted with Abraham. Romans 4:11 tells us that circumcision was a seal of the righteousness Abraham had by faith. Is it correct, then, to conclude Scripture teaches that a person must *always* have faith before he can be circumcised?

How old was Isaac when he was circumcised (ref. Genesis 17:12; 21:4)? Did he have faith when he was circumcised? Why was he circumcised?

2. What does the Reformed position teach concerning the relationship of baptism to the Abrahamic covenant?

3. Are the “believe and be baptized” verses adequate by themselves to prove that believers’ baptism is the correct Scriptural teaching? If so, why?

