

- (1) The covenant is an everlasting covenant (see Gen. 17:7; cf. Heb. 13:20)

The difference between the "old" and "new" covenants is not between the covenant as it was established with Abraham and the covenant as it finds expression in the New Testament. Rather, it is between the covenant of which Moses was the mediator and the covenant of which Christ is the mediator. The covenant established or confirmed with Abraham was not disannulled by that which came 430 years later at the time of Moses (see Gal. 3:15, 17). The Abrahamic covenant is an everlasting covenant.

- (2) Circumcision is the sign (token) of the covenant in the O.T. (see Gen. 17:11)

- (3) Infants received circumcision as the sign of the covenant in the O.T. (see Gen. 17:12)

- (4) Circumcision and baptism are equated (Col. 2:11, 12)

This passage reads literally:

"In whom also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made by hand, by the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, being co-buried with Him by baptism, by which [or 'in whom'] also you were co-raised through faith, the working of God, the one raising Him from the dead."

As the context shows, the words "circumcision" and "baptism" are used interchangeably and thus are equated. Paul begins with the word "circumcision" and then changes to the word "baptism". But it is clear from the context that the significance or meaning of the two words is the same. Paul says that the Colossians were circumcised by being co-buried with Christ by baptism. And it is the circumcision of Christ, i.e., circumcision into Christ.¹ And circumcision into Christ means circumcision into His death, because it is followed by one's being buried with Christ. And circumcision means also baptism into Christ, i.e., baptism into His death. Compare this with Ro. 6:3, 4, where baptism into Christ's death is followed by one's being buried with Him. What is said of circumcision in Col. 2 is said of baptism in Ro. 6. So this too shows that the two are equated.

Of course it is spiritual circumcision (not physical circumcision) and spiritual baptism (not water baptism) that are mentioned. It is the thing signified by the sign and not the sign itself that is under discussion, in the case of both circumcision and baptism. But since they are equated with reference to the thing signified, they are equated as signs.²

To substantiate this, note:

Abraham believed and then was circumcised (Ro. 4:9-11).
Many of the Corinthians believed and then were baptized (Acts 18:8).

This shows that the signs of circumcision and baptism have the same significance or meaning, or are equated. Both are outward signs of the inward grace of faith, or are signs of justification by faith.³ But they are not signs of this only. They are primarily signs of the covenant.

(5) Baptism is the sign of the covenant in the N.T.

The reason that in the N.T. circumcision is not the sign of the covenant is because it has been replaced by its N.T. counterpart: baptism. Baptism is now the sign of the covenant; so the sign of circumcision is no longer necessary. The meaning of baptism as a sign is identical with the meaning of circumcision as a sign. And therefore baptism can take the place of circumcision as a sign without the loss of the meaning of circumcision as a sign. In this connection, in Acts 7 the expression the "covenant of circumcision" appears. This indicates that circumcision is so tied in with the covenant that either it or an identical replacement is necessary in the concept of the covenant.⁴

(6) Infants are to receive baptism as the sign of the covenant in the N.T.

It is true that in the N.T. baptism is mentioned in connection with faith, which of course infants do not exercise. Baptism in the context of faith does not refer to infants. It refers only to believers. So if we take the teaching of the N.T. alone as a basis for the proper subjects of baptism, obviously infants would be excluded.

But the N.T. is not the whole Bible. There is the O.T. as well. The Bible is a unit, and the covenant is one. And the basis for covenant-teaching is laid in the O.T., where it properly belongs. For the O.T. came first. It is there that we find the covenant established in its time-setting, and it is there that we find mentioned the ones to whom covenant blessings belong. And infants are among them. So unless our view of the covenant and infants relation to it is rooted in the O.T., it can hardly be the Biblical view.

Believing and then receiving the sign is a great aspect of the covenant. But the covenant involves more than this. It embraces the physical seed as well as the spiritual seed.⁵ The children of believers, as well as the spiritual children of Abraham by faith in Christ, i.e., as well as the believers themselves, are in the covenant.

Ishmael and Isaac were circumcised in terms of a physical relationship to Abraham, who was a believer.⁶ And this is exactly why children or infants are baptized in N.T. times: they are baptized in relation to believing parents, even though they may never participate in anything other than the outward or temporal blessings of the covenant (as was the case with Ishmael). Being a child of a believing parent is sufficient reason for receiving the sign of the covenant. The sign may later in one's life signify also justification by faith (as in the case of Isaac), in

relation to the spiritual or eternal blessings of the covenant; but the fact that a child has a believing parent is sufficient in itself to give the child the right to the sign.

Conclusion

Since in O.T. times children or infants received circumcision as the sign of the covenant, they are in N.T. times to receive baptism as the sign of the covenant. If baptism is viewed as first and foremost a sign of the covenant (and not simply as an outward sign of an inward grace, or as a sign of justification by faith, i.e., as a sign to be given to believers only), and if baptism is seen as the N.T. counterpart or equivalent of O.T. circumcision, then the propriety of infant (or covenant) baptism is easily recognized.

Notes

- ¹Here the word "Christ" is an objective genitive: circumcised into Christ. Cf., for example, the expression "faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 3:22), in which the word "Christ" is an objective genitive: faith in Jesus Christ.
- ²In Acts 2:38 Peter says: "Repent, and be baptized." Peter was preaching to those who had doubtless been circumcised. He calls them "men of Israel" (verse 22). Why were they commanded to be baptized when they had already been circumcised, if baptism and circumcision are equated? It is because this was a transitional period, a period of overlapping, in which baptism was gradually taking the place of circumcision. And thus it was proper to receive the new form of the sign, even though the old form had already been received.
- ³Baptism as an outward sign of an inward grace refers to believers only. To restrict the significance of the sign, to this, as the Baptists do, is doubtless based on the instances of baptism recorded in the N.T. But this amounts to making instances of baptism which apply to one group of persons (believers) serve as rules against baptizing another group of persons (infants), to whom the instances do not refer. And this is unwarranted. An appeal for the baptism of believers (which paedobaptists also accept) is in no way an appeal against the baptism of infants, who are not under consideration in these instances.
- ⁴It is contended in Baptist circles that outward circumcision is the type of which inward circumcision is the antitype and thus that outward circumcision has been fulfilled in inward circumcision. This means that outward circumcision is no longer necessary because it has been fulfilled in inward circumcision, not because it has been replaced by baptism (its N.T. counterpart). But, in answer to this, it must be insisted that either baptism is the identical replacement of circumcision or there is no replacement and the covenant is without a sign in the N.T. dispensation. This is the dilemma facing those who deny that the sign of baptism is identical in meaning with the sign of circumcision.
- ⁵It is held in Baptist circles that in the O.T. the promise to Abraham referred to both his physical and spiritual seed but that in the N.T. this promise refers only to his spiritual seed.

How is this to be answered? It is true that in the O.T. the promise to Abraham referred to both his physical and spiritual seed. Both were embraced in the covenant promise. But is the promise to the physical seed of those who walk in the steps of the faith of Abraham no longer in effect? The teaching in the N.T. concerns the inward blessings of the covenant as they relate to the spiritual seed of Abraham, not the outward blessings as they relate to the physical seed of those who are of Abraham's spiritual seed. But the fact that the outward blessings of the covenant are not under consideration in the N.T. does not mean that they are no longer in effect. And it is unwarranted to conclude from examples in the N.T. in which a contrast is seen between the physical seed and spiritual seed that the physical seed are excluded from the covenant-promise, as it concerns outward blessings. When Paul says, for example, in Romans 9: "They

are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed; he is not implying that the physical seed are excluded from the covenant-promise with reference to outward blessings. This is simply not under consideration. Paul is speaking only in terms of the inward blessings of the covenant, from which the physical seed (the children of the flesh) are of course excluded.

⁶ It is true that in the O.T. those born into the nation of Israel were entitled to the outward blessings of the covenant. But this was because they were viewed as the physical seed of Abraham, with whom the covenant was established. They were the physical seed of believing Abraham; and this entitled them to the outward blessings of the covenant, which included the sign of the covenant. And it is on the basis of the covenant-relationship established with Abraham that the physical seed of believers in the N.T. dispensation are entitled to the outward blessings of the covenant, including its sign. Those who contend that the outward blessings of the covenant were confined to those of the nation of Israel and thus are no longer in effect forget that the covenant-promise emphasis (as it relates to outward blessings) was on the physical seed's relationship to Abraham and not on their relationship to the nation of Israel.

Addendum

Paedo-baptists have made a mistake when they cite the following passages in the N.T. as supplementary evidence for infant baptism, which on close examination really do not supply such evidence at all:

Luke 18:15-17

The word translated "infants" here is a different word from that translated "little children" in the parallel passage in Matthew (19:13 and "young children" in the parallel passage in Mark (10:13). However, it probably does not refer to babies but to young children (or those partly grown), as the Mark translation has it; for we read in Luke that Jesus called them (the infants) to Himself. And also the words "come" (verse 16) and "receive" (verse 17) are used with reference to them. These words can hardly refer to infants, but they can refer to young children.

And also in a similar passage (Matthew 18:1-6) Christ mentions the "little ones who believe" in Him (verse 6). Infants do not believe; so the translation "young children" or "little children" (or simply "children") would seem to be a proper translation, instead of "infants", in the Luke passage. And thus the passage cannot really be cited as supplementary evidence for, or as implying or supporting, infant baptism. In fact, baptism is not under consideration in the context.

Acts 2:38, 39

A key word in the passage is "repentance". Those who repent receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. And this promise is to those to whom Peter spoke and to their children or posterity, if they repent. But infants do not repent; so they are not under consideration in the passage at all.

Household baptisms

In Acts 16, when the Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas what he must do to be saved, they said: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (verse 31). The key word here is "believe". If the jailor believed on Christ he would be saved, and so would his household (if they believed). So this excludes infants. This is shown further in verses 32-34. There we read that Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to the jailor and to his household. The fact that Paul and Silas spoke to the household, as well as to the jailor, shows that infants were not under consideration; for they could not have responded to the word which was spoken. Also, the jailor's household, as well as he, believed. The emphasis is on his believing, but it is clear that his household believed also (for they were rejoicing along with him). And as a result, he and all his household were baptized.

In this connection, in Acts 11:14 the angel told Cornelius that Peter would "tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved". It was through hearing the word that Cornelius and his household would be saved. This obviously does not refer to infants, for they do not respond to the word. In Acts 10:44-48 the same incident is mentioned and it is indicated that they received the words spoken by Peter (which

infants could not have done); for the Holy Spirit fell on them and, as a result, they were baptized.

Acts 16:14, 15, about Lydia, if taken by itself might seem to imply infant baptism; for only Lydia is mentioned as attending to Paul's words, and yet her household was baptized with her. But in the light of what has been said about the other household baptisms, it would be unwise to build a supplementary case for infant baptism on this passage.

The other instance of household baptism (1 Cor. 1:16), the household of Stephanas, says nothing in itself with reference to the baptism-debate. But the "house of Stephanas" is mentioned in 1 Cor. 16:15, and it says that "they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints". This could hardly refer to infants.

So to cite household baptisms as supplementary evidence for infant baptism is hardly warranted. And there is no necessity to do this. For the case for infant baptism is not at all dependent upon supplementary evidence.

1 Cor. 7:14

This verse is often appealed to by paedo-baptists in support of infant baptism. The appeal goes something like this: "Children are holy (or are set apart from the unclean) through their relationship to a believing parent. This relationship is a covenant-relationship. And since the sign of the covenant in the N.T. is baptism, infant baptism is implied in this verse."

The main problem with this interpretation is that the unbelieving spouse is also holy or sanctified. To say that he/she is holy through a marriage-relationship and that the children are holy through a covenant-relationship is to bring in a distinction which can hardly be warranted. But if the unbelieving spouse, as well as the children, is holy through a covenant-relationship, then it would be logical to assume that the unbelieving spouse should also receive baptism as the sign of the covenant. And of course this poses a problem.

So evidently a proper interpretation of the verse lies in another direction. It seems clear in the verse that the sanctification or holiness (or the setting apart from the unclean) is in terms of a marriage-relationship and not a covenant-relationship. The unbelieving spouse is sanctified by the believing spouse in the marriage-union. This means that the union is lawful.

The case of a marriage between two believers is one thing. But the case of a mixed marriage, that between a believer and an unbeliever, is another thing. Those who are believers may marry only in the Lord, i.e., believers may marry only believers. A believer who enters into

a marriage-relationship with an unbeliever is entering into an unlawful relationship in the eyes of God. But a spouse who becomes a believer after entering into a marriage-relationship is not to leave the unbelieving spouse. The marriage is considered lawful in the eyes of God. The fact that the children are considered clean or holy (or lawful offspring) shows that the union is lawful. Paul is showing here that the children are lawful offspring, and thus he is indicating that the union from which they came is lawful.

Since Paul is talking about a marriage-relationship and not about a covenant-relationship, the subject of the covenant is not under consideration. And thus baptism, the sign of the covenant in the N.T., is not implied. And therefore this verse has no bearing on the subject of infant baptism.

Child-communion as it relates to the question of infant baptism

Baptists contend that those who baptize children should, to be consistent, also admit them to the Lord's Supper; for children partook of the Passover (the O.T. counterpart of the Lord's Supper). The requirement to partake of the Passover was the ability to eat solid food (see Exodus 12:4-- "every man according to his eating," or "each according to his eating," or what he was able to eat). This, of course, excludes those in infancy; but it would not, in itself, exclude little children.

But there may have been a further requirement: to partake one was to have been of sufficient age to enquire into the significance of the Passover (see Exodus 12:26, 27) and therefore of sufficient age to exercise faith. It is difficult to determine with certainty whether this was a requirement for admission to the Passover. But it must be mentioned that the teaching of infant baptism would not necessarily be fortified by a teaching of child-communion, for the two sacraments would not be analogous: infants are to be baptized, but only children beyond infancy could partake of the Lord's Supper.