

A Study on Christian (Covenantal) Baptism

by Rev. Christopher Campbell

Class Outline:

- I. The History of Christian Covenantal Baptism
- II. The Meaning and Mode of Christian Covenantal Baptism
- III. The Objections to Christian Covenantal Baptism
- IV. The Blessings of Christian Covenantal Baptism

Class Goals:

- For those already convinced of the truth of covenantal baptism (that both parents and their children are already members of the visible church and therefore should receive the sign of membership), my hope is to provide you with the necessary historical and biblical framework to better understand what you believe and to enable you to explain it to others.
- For those who are new to covenantal baptism or unconvinced of its truth, my hope is that you will come to see both the biblical necessity and blessing of baptizing both believers and their children.
- My most important goal, however, is to see the children in our congregation blessed through the receiving of baptism. There is a real spiritual blessing that comes from baptism, and I do not want any child to miss out on all that God has for him or her.

Definitions:

- **Visible Church** – “The church we see every day all around us which contains some who profess to believe in Christ but really don’t. This church is recognized as having a certain external organization, with officers and formal public worship services.”
- **Invisible Church** – “The church as God sees it, composed of all those who ever have believed or ever will truly believe in Christ. There are no hypocrites in this church. It is the perfect church, the eternal church. This church will be seen only in heaven.”
- **Paedobaptism** – *Paedo* from Greek *Pais*, meaning “child” (also known as infant baptism, household baptism, or covenantal baptism) – The view that both believers and their children ought to be baptized as members of the visible church
- **Credobaptism** – *Credo* from Latin, meaning “I believe” (also known as believers only baptism) – The view that only those who are able to profess faith in Christ ought to be baptized and become members of the visible church.
- **Covenant** – An agreement between two or more people.
- **The Covenant of Redemption** – The covenant made in eternity between God the Father and God the Son to redeem all of the elect.
- **The Covenant of Works** – God’s covenant with Adam in the garden.
- **The Covenant of Grace** – God’s covenant with all those in Christ (application of the covenant of Redemption to the elect). First announced after the fall, in Genesis 3:15, and continued throughout both the Old and New Testament.

I. The History of Christian Covenantal Baptism

A. Baptism in the Early Church

i. Baptism at the time of the Apostles

1. The practice of the New Testament Church was household/covenantal baptism, which included children.
2. Covenantal Baptism was taught by Jesus
 - a. Matthew 28:19-20 – “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”
 - b. The process for making disciples was first to baptize and then to teach. Denying the right to baptism from children until they are taught reverses this process, which was specifically outlined by Jesus, by putting the teaching before the baptism.
3. Covenantal Baptism was promised by Peter in Acts 2:38-39 – “Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”
4. Covenantal Baptism was recognized by Paul as the continuation of the Old Testament sign of circumcision, which was applied to children (Colossians 2:11-12 – “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”)
5. Covenantal Baptism was applied by the Apostles:
 - a. Lydia’s household were all baptized when she believed (Acts 16:14-15 – “The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And she and her household were baptized.”)
 - b. Philippian Jailor’s household were all baptized when he believed (Acts 16:30-34 – “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household...and immediately he and all his family were baptized.”)
 - c. Crispus’ household were all baptized when he believed (Acts 18:8 – “Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household.”)
 - d. Stephanus’ household were all baptized (1 Corinthians 1:16 – “I also baptized the household of Stephanas.”)

QUESTION: Why is there no direct command to baptize infants? Because the direct command was unnecessary. The people of God knew who God was (the covenant making and keeping God) and they knew the covenantal promises of Scripture. They simply applied them.

ii. Baptism in the first three centuries

1. Paedobaptism has always been the standard Christian practice recognized by the main body of Christians, while anti-pedobaptism has always been a sectarian and minority view.
2. Warfield in *Studies in Theology*, page 402, states that infant baptism “is possibly hinted at in Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-167), assumed apparently in Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200), and openly proclaimed as apostolical by Origen and Cyprian (A.D. 200-257). It is certain from their writings that Origen and Cyprian were baptized in their infancy, which shows that infant baptism was practiced in the age of Irenaeus.
3. By this time the unbiblical teaching of baptismal regeneration had entered the church:
 - a. Justin Martyr said that the “washing with water in the Triune name has the effects of regeneration, illumination and remission of sins.”
 - b. Irenaeus spoke of baptism as the “seal of eternal life and our rebirth in God. It cleanses the soul as well as the body.”
 - c. Clement of Alexandria spoke of baptism “imparting regeneration.”
 - d. Origen (A.D. 200-257) stressed the inward spiritual efficacy of baptism.
 - e. Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) believed that baptism was necessary for salvation.
4. Tertullian opposed infant baptism, but not for the same reasons that Anabaptists/Baptists do. He opposed it because he believed that post-baptismal sins are harder to get rid of than sins committed before one’s baptism.

B. Baptism in the Eastern Church (Greek or Eastern Orthodox)

- i. Baptism very specifically the act of a person’s death and resurrection in and with Jesus. Christian baptism is man’s participation in the event of Easter.
- ii. The person is immersed three times in the water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Through the act of immersion, the baptized person dies to this world and is born again in the resurrection of Christ into eternal life.
- iii. Before being baptized, a person—or his sponsors or godparents for him—officially proclaims the symbol of Christian faith, the Creed. Because the godparent speaks on behalf of the child, sponsors his entrance into the Church and “receives” the child out of the baptismal waters into the Church and cares for his spiritual life, the godparent himself must be a member of the Church.

C. Baptism in the Western Church (Latin or Roman Catholic)

- i. “The church does not know any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude.” “God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism.” “The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1257)
- ii. Both newly converted adults and children are to be baptized. (Catechism of the Catholic Church (1247, 1248, 1249, 1250, 1251, 1252)
- iii. Baptism of both children and adults, by the application of water itself, forgives all sins, automatically regenerates, infuses righteousness into them, which they must then maintain through good works in order to be finally saved. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1263, 1265, 1266)

D. Baptism at the Reformation

i. Lutheran Understanding

1. “Baptism is necessary to salvation, and that children are to be baptized, and that the baptism of children is not in vain but is necessary and effectual to salvation.” (Augsburg Confession Article IX)
2. Both children and newly converted adults are to be baptized. (Luther’s Small Catechism Q. 251)
3. Baptism of children, because God has promised in His Word to work by His Spirit simultaneously with the application of water, results in their immediate regeneration and justification. (Augsburg Confession Article IX; Luther’s Small Catechism Q. 245 & 248)

ii. Reformed Understanding

1. Baptism does not save a person. Only the blood of Christ, to which baptism points, is able to do that. (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 72)
2. Both children of believers and newly converted adults are to be baptized. (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 74)
3. Baptism of children brings them into the visible Church and gives them the right of property (right to lay claim to God’s promise of salvation in Christ). (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 74)
4. Baptism of children is a recognition of what they already are by birth (to at least one believing parent). (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 74)
5. Having been taught the gospel and showing a satisfactory understanding of true faith, they must claim the right of possession by being confirmed in their faith through the profession of faith before the church. (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 21)

iii. Anabaptists (Radical Reformation)

1. “Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with Him in death, so that may be resurrected with Him, and to all those who with this significance request it [baptism] of us and demand it for themselves. This excludes all infant baptism, the highest and chief abomination of the pope.” (Schleitheim Confession – 1527)
2. “Regarding baptism, we confess that all penitent believers, who through faith, the new birth and renewal of the Holy Ghost, have become united with God, and whose names are recorded in heaven, must, on such Scriptural confession of their faith, and renewal of life, according to the command and doctrine of Christ, and the example and custom of the apostles, be baptized with water in the ever adorable name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to the burying of their sins, and thus to become incorporated into the communion of the saints.” (D Article VII)
3. “We believe in and confess a visible Church of God, consisting of those, who, as before remarked, have truly repented, and rightly believed, who are rightly baptized, united with God in heaven, and incorporated into the communion of the saints on earth.” (Dordrecht Confession – 1632 – Adopted by Mennonites)
4. Problem was that they had no one qualified to baptize them, because none of them were properly baptized.

E. Baptism Post-Reformation

- i. Anglicans – “Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God. The Baptism of young Children is to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ. (The Thirty-Nine Articles, Article XXVII)
- ii. Methodists – “Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration, or the new birth. The baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church.” (Articles of Religion – 1794)

iii. Baptists

1. “A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers.” (non-baptized individuals, including the children of believers, are not church members).
2. “Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”
3. “Baptism is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith.” (Baptism is not a means of grace signifying what God has done but an act of obedience symbolizing what the believer has done).
4. “Baptism is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead.” (Baptism is a testimony of the believer’s faith, not a sign of God’s faithfulness).

*See Chart “Baptism Spectrum” on page 17.

II. The Meaning and Mode of Covenantal Christian Baptism

A. God Gave Us Two Sacraments for a Reason

- i. Circumcision/Baptism – “given when we are helpless babies showcases the work of regeneration as a sovereign work of God. Baptism is once for all commemorating a perfect and complete action.” (Robert Grossman, *Why We Are Given Two Sacraments*)
- ii. Passover/Lord’s Supper – participated in after we have professed faith, shows that we are the ones who believe (God doesn’t believe for us) and is repeated to show that we are yet imperfect and need to continue to grow in our faith. (Robert Grossman, *Why We Are Given Two Sacraments*)
- iii. “In the Baptist tradition baptism is viewed as a person’s profession of faith in Jesus Christ. We would agree that baptism is part of a profession of faith for those who have never been baptized. But it is primarily the sign of initiation into God’s covenant – it is the sign and seal of HIS promise to US. Baptists and Presbyterians [Reformed] both hold that the Lord’s Supper is a profession of a person’s faith in Christ. Therefore, in the Baptist tradition you have two signs that have the same meaning – one once-for-all and one perpetual. While there is overlap in the meanings of the signs, Presbyterians affirm that we have one sign about *initiation* and another about *continuation*.” (from Back Creek ARP Church online document *Why Do We Baptize Infants*)

B. To Understand the True Meaning of Baptism One Must First Recognize

- i. The Doctrine of the Visible Church
 1. “When the shift happens from the Visible Church to the Invisible Church, from Reformed Theology to Arminianism, and from the organic covenant concept of the Bible to an unscriptural individualism, the truth of infant baptism will be lost.” (J.G. Vos, *Baptism, Its Subjects and Modes*)
 2. The visible church is the body of those who profess the true religion, together with their children.
 3. The visible church is not necessarily composed exclusively of regenerate persons.

4. Membership is based on presumption, not proof of regeneration.
 5. The infant children of believers are members of the Church whether they are baptized or not, according to Reformed thought. Infants are not baptized to make them church members, but because they are already church members.
 6. Both Roman Catholics and Baptists make the mistake of assuming that all in the visible church are saved. The difference is that Roman Catholics include infants in that salvation, while Baptists do not. Both fail to see the biblical distinction between the visible and invisible church.
- ii. God's Sovereignty in Salvation
1. What better sign of God's sovereignty and initiative in salvation is there than seeing a helpless infant, who can do nothing for themselves, passively be baptized. (Ezekiel 16:4-8)
 2. On the other side, what better picture of the free will of man than believer's only baptism, which stresses what the person does (I have believed, I have made a profession, I have repented). Believer's only baptism has much more in common with Arminianism, or "I have decided for Jesus" theology than biblical, Reformed theology.
- iii. God's Continuity in Salvation
1. God never changes (Psalm 33:11 – "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations") and this includes the way God works in history to redeem people. Abraham was saved in the same way that we, and all the elect, are saved—by grace, through faith, in Christ.
 2. "In the Reformed theology the Covenant of Grace is God's appointed way of implementing the eternal Covenant of Redemption made between God the Father and God the Son." (J.G. Vos, *Baptism, Its Subjects and Modes*)
 3. "Covenant of Grace was first announced in Genesis 3:15 – The rest of the Bible is God's process of making explicit what was implicit in Genesis 3:15." (J.G. Vos, *Baptism, Its Subjects and Modes*)
 4. "The rest of the Bible is a footnote to Genesis 3:15." - Sinclair Ferguson
 5. God reveals one Covenant of Grace in two testaments
 6. Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament
 - a. With Abraham the covenant nation was formed out of which Christ would come.
 - b. The Clan of Abraham was the Visible Church and every male member claiming membership was required to have the outward token of the covenant, namely circumcision (Gen. 17:12-14).
 - c. At the time of Moses, the covenant was embodied in the nation of Israel.

- d. The Old Testament promises was given to all Israel (including the infants and other children) with whom God made the Mosaic covenant (Deut. 29) that they would be saved by divine regenerating (Deut. 30:1-6) and that the circumcision done without hands would be symbolized in the age of fulfillment as sprinkling with water (Ezek. 36:25).

7. The Covenant of Grace in the New Testament

- a. The New Testament was new in form, but old in essence.
- b. The New Testament clearly teaches that the Christian Church is not something different from Old Testament Israel but is the continuation of the true Israel of Old Testament times.
 - i. For example, Paul's figure of the *single* olive tree and the branches (Romans 11:16-24)
 - ii. Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2:11-13 where he explains that the Gentile Christians, who once were "strangers from the covenant of promise" have now been incorporated into "the commonwealth of Israel."
- c. On the Day of Pentecost a few weeks after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, there was another major advance. The body of Christian disciples together with the Jews who became Christians constituted the Christian Church, the true continuation of the covenant people of God which had existed on earth since the time of Adam and Eve.
- iv. Conclusion: The children of believers in the New Testament, just like the children of believers in the Old Testament, are members of the visible church, therefore baptism, the visible sign of church membership is their rightful privilege.

C. One Covenant of Grace Is Represented by Two Signs with One Meaning

- i. Circumcision was the covenant sign of entrance into the visible church (the people of God) in the Old Testament.
- ii. Baptism is the covenant sign of entrance into the visible church in the New Testament.
- iii. Baptism Replaced the Sign of Circumcision
 - 1. Circumcision was a bloody sign
 - 2. Water baptism is an unbloody sign
- iv. Baptism Retained the Significance of Circumcision
 - 1. Entrance into the visible church just as circumcision signified entrance into the visible church in the Old Testament.
 - 2. Outward Sign of Promise – HC #69 – "promise, that I am washed with His blood and Spirit from the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as certainly as I am washed outwardly with water."

3. Inward Reality Received by Faith – HC #70 – “washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ” and actually “have the forgiveness of sins from God through grace,” and “to be renewed by the Holy Spirit.”
 4. Promise is given to all in the visible church, but the inward reality is received only by those who have true faith.
 - v. Baptism Retained the Scope of Circumcision – Children were not excluded from the Old Testament sign, and nowhere in the New Testament is that scope changed.
- D. What Does Covenantal Baptism Signify and Seal?
- i. Recognizes that children are already members of Christ’s church by birth (1 Corinthians 7:14 – “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.”)
 - ii. Encourages the parents to raise their child as a Christian (Ephesians 6:4 – “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”)
 - iii. Encourages the child receive by faith what Christ has done (the washing or sprinkling of his blood for the forgiveness of sins) and the promise of God to pour out his Holy Spirit on his people (see Joel 2:28-29; Ezekiel 36:25-27)
- E. The Mode of Christian Baptism
- i. Questions about mode:
 1. Is a particular mode of baptism essential to the validity of the sacrament?
 2. Is the mode a divine appointment in Scripture?
 3. Is the mode of baptism significant or symbolic of the meaning of baptism?
 - ii. Historical modes of baptism
 1. Immersion
 - a. The early Baptists in Europe practiced pouring rather than immersion.
 - b. Insistence upon immersion is a quite modern development, which cannot be traced any further back than the English Baptists of the seventeenth century, that is about 300 years ago.
 - c. Arguments for Immersion
 - i. The early church immersed
 1. It is true that some in the early church did immerse
 2. It is also true that those who did immerse most often did so completely nude, and often with a triple immersion. I doubt our Baptist brethren want to imitate that practice!

- ii. Greek word *Baptizo* must mean immersion
 - 1. The word *baptizo* can mean immersion, but it doesn't always mean immersion.
 - 2. Lev. 14:6, 51 – one bird killed, the other *baptizo* (LXX) in the blood. Not enough blood to immerse.
 - 3. Luke 11:38 – A Pharisee marveled that Jesus had not washed (*ebaptisthe* from *baptize*) before dinner. It is highly doubtful that the Pharisee would have expected Jesus to submerge his whole body before eating.
 - 4. Hebrews 9:10-23 – *diaphorais baptismois* – “diverse baptisms”; “diverse washings” used to describe certain Old Testament rites, which were sprinklings.
 - 5. 1 Cor. 10:2 – All were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. If the Baptist argument is true, then it must mean that Moses and all the Israelites were immersed in the Red Sea, which they were clearly not. The Old Testament record clearly states that the Israelites got across without getting wet—on dry ground (Exodus 14:22)
 - 6. “The Israelites were baptized without being immersed, while the Egyptians were immersed without being baptized!” (J.G. Vos, *Baptism, Its Subjects and Modes*)
- iii. When Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10), therefore he was immersed.
 - 1. The Greek language of going up does not mean that Jesus came up out of the water (as if he was underneath it) but simply that Jesus came up the bank from the water.
 - 2. The Bible uses similar language when it speaks of going up to Jerusalem (Jerusalem was higher in elevation) and coming down from Jerusalem (to a lower elevation).
 - 3. If we press the language, then Philip baptized both himself and the eunuch: “both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.” (Acts 8:38-39)

iv. Baptism is a sign of our identification with Christ in his burial

1. “Buried with him by baptism into death (Rom. 6:3, 4) and Col. 2:12 – “buried with Christ in baptism.”
2. Claim is that the primary meaning of baptism is burial and that only immersion can portray burial.
3. Incorrect for three reasons:
 - a. First, burial is not the only, or even the main or most important thing baptism represents. A more important meaning of baptism is washing or cleansing, but the main meaning of baptism is union with the Triune God, hence participation in the benefits of God’s plan of redemption through the mediatorial work of Christ.
 - b. Second, burial today in Europe and America is very different from burial in ancient Israel. We go down in the ground; they went into the side of the cave. Thus, burial was not underground. The body of Jesus was not lowered into the ground but carried horizontally into the cave and there laid to rest. In Romans 6:3-4 Paul was writing to Roman Christians, who would not have understood burial as we understand it today. Immersion would never have entered into their minds. This is anachronistic reading of Scripture.
 - c. Third, burial is only one of the figures used to denote the believer’s union with Christ. Also used is vine and branches, human body arms and legs, tree and branches.

2. Sprinkling

- a. Sprinkling is the most common in Presbyterian and Reformed churches
- b. There are several Old Testament promises of sprinkling/pouring with water and with the Holy Spirit but there is no prophecy of immersion upon profession of faith. (see Joel 2:28-29; Ezekiel 36:25-27)

- c. We are told the Messiah would baptize (sprinkle) the Gentiles (Isaiah 52:15) and that God would baptize (sprinkle) all His people (Ezek. 36:25)
 - d. Hebrews 10:22 – “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”
 - 3. Pouring
 - a. Supported by scriptural references to the Holy Spirit being poured out.
 - b. Joel 2:28 – “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh”
 - c. Titus 3:5-6 – “through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”
 - iii. The reality is that mode does not matter
 - 1. The amount of water does not matter
 - 2. The application of water in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is what does matter.
 - 3. Warfield – “No mode of applying the water is prescribed in the New Testament. In the record the New Testament gives of acts of baptism, the mode in which the water was applied is never described.”

III. The Objections to Christian Covenantal Baptism

- A. Objection #1: Infant baptism is wrong because there is no explicit command in the New Testament that instructs us to baptize infants
 - i. Granted, there is no place in scripture where it says, “Thus says the LORD, baptize infants.”
 - ii. There is also no explicit command for women to partake of the Lord’s Supper
 - iii. There is also no explicit statement of the Trinity in Scripture. This doctrine is understood by inference.
 - iv. “When the anti-pedobaptist demands explicit Scriptural warrant for infant baptism, he is making an improper demand. He is making a demand that he does not make for allowing women to partake of the Lord’s Supper or for the doctrine of the Trinity. If he is going to rule out infant baptism by that standard, than we should invite him to also reject the Trinity and women partaking of the Lord’s Supper.” (*Baptism, Its Subjects and Modes* – J.G. Vos)
 - v. “If it was the practice for the children of Christian parents to receive adult baptism on reaching maturity or adolescence, is it not passing strange that in the Pastoral Epistles there is not a word of instruction as to the proper age and qualifications for the administration of the ordinance?” (*Baptism, Its Subjects and Modes* – J.G. Vos)
 - vi. But, as we have seen, there is a command to baptize our children, when we read scripture as a unified whole.

1. The Old Testament included the little ones:
 - a. Exodus – Sprinkled with blood on the door – the entire household was inside. The Baptist would have us leave our little ones outside to make a decision for themselves if they personally want to escape death.
 - b. Deuteronomy 29:10-12 – “All of you stand today before the LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, **your little ones and your wives**—also the stranger who *is* in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water—that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God
 - c. Deuteronomy 30:2, 6 – “return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, **you and your children**... And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart **and the heart of your descendants**, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.
 2. The New Testament included our little ones:
 - a. Matthew 19:14 – “Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”
 - b. Matthew 28:18-20 – in the making of disciples, baptism comes first, then teaching. Nothing here is said about faith or repentance as a prerequisite to baptism. The first step in making a disciple is baptism.
 - c. Peter in Acts 2:38-39 – Repent and be baptized, you and your children.
- B. Objection #2: Infant baptism is wrong because there is no explicit record in the New Testament of the baptism of infants
- i. There is also no clear example of women partaking in the Lord’s Supper, but this doesn’t mean they shouldn’t partake.
 - ii. There is no clear example of any children being baptized, but that doesn’t mean we must wait until they are 18 and older, does it?
 - iii. But, as we have seen, in the household baptisms we do see the inclusion of all without distinction.
- C. Objection #3: Infant baptism is wrong because there can be no certainty that infants are regenerate.
- i. If we need certainty, then no one should ever be baptized, for only God can know the heart! Simon the sorcerer was baptized in adult life upon his personal profession of faith, yet he turned out to be unregenerate.
 - ii. The reality is that, whether we baptize a person as an infant or wait until they are older, we are inevitably going to baptize some unregenerate people. There will always be wheat and tares, sheep and wolves, good fish and bad fish within the visible church.

- D. Objection #4: The Old Covenant people of God was a physical reality; the New Covenant people of God is a spiritual reality. Circumcision was a sign of ethnicity, baptism a sign of faith.
- i. Salvation was always by grace through faith in Christ.
 - ii. Circumcision, according to Romans 4:11, was a sign of the righteousness had by faith (in Christ).
- E. Objection #5: The Bible calls on people to repent and be baptized. Infants cannot repent; therefore they should not be baptized.
- i. Repent and be baptized does not specify who is to repent and who is to be baptized.
 - ii. In context, the command to repent recorded in Scripture was given to adults who were first-generation Christians, to those who have never previously been baptized – for instance, all the first-generation Christians that we read about in the pages of the New Testament. A more accurate characterization of this phenomenon would be that the NT pattern is to believe, and your household will be baptized.
 - iii. In Acts 2:38 Peter is addressing adults who had to repent (new adult converts) and in v. 39 Peter sets forth the general principle underlying Christian baptism—the promise is to you and your children.
 - iv. “When Christianity was new it was to be expected that most baptisms would be those of adults. Individual adults are won for Christ, often against the opposition of their families and relatives. These adults are baptized. But in the second and subsequent generations of Christians in the field, infant baptisms will outnumber adult baptisms.” (*Baptism, Its Subjects and Modes* – J.G. Vos)
 - v. The problem with this objection is that those making it view the church as stuck in the first century, as if God has not been actively building his church. This view sees every new generation as the Israelites would have viewed pagan nations to be converted. This view takes no account of God’s work in community. This view is very individualistic which is why I believe it is so prevalent in our country, as it aligns very well with American individualism.

IV. The Blessings of Christian Covenantal Baptism

A. The Blessings for Our Covenant Children

- i. Baptism does not save our children
 1. Heidelberg Catechism Q. 72 “Is, then, the outward washing with water itself the washing away of sins? No, for only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sin.”
 2. “No mere ritual will save anyone.” (*Why We Baptize Infants?*, Chapell)
- ii. Baptism is a means of grace God uses to bring our children to faith.
 1. Baptism is a means of grace that increases the faith of our children as each child remembers his or her baptism.
 2. Baptism is a means of grace that reminds our children of the privilege they have as members. Our children are treated as believers, taught to pray to God as Father, and to trust in Christ from an early age.
 3. Baptism is a means of grace that stresses the responsibility our children have to walk by faith:
 - a. Responsibility to exercise faith in Christ as they are instructed in His Word. – “Justification, which is by the blood of Christ, is complete and perfect in this life by imputation, for “there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 8:1.) (Zacharias Ursinus, Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism)
 - b. Responsibility to perform new obedience to Him, out of thanksgiving, according to His Word. – “Regeneration, on the other hand, which is effected by the Spirit of Christ, and which consists in a change of our evil nature to that which is good, is not perfected, but only begun in this life; yet in such a manner that this beginning does really take place in all the godly, and is experienced by them as long as they are in this life, because they truly and heartily desire to obey God in all things, and are greatly grieved on account of their defects, and remaining corruption.” (Zacharias Ursinus, Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism)
 4. Baptism is a means of grace that provides comfort to our children when they sin, that they also may receive forgiveness by the washing of Christ’s blood.
 5. Baptism is a means of grace that formally acknowledges the membership of each child in the Church and by doing so places the duty upon not only the parents, but the entire church to care for the well-being of this child. What a great blessing for a child to know that an entire church has recognized them and agreed to pray for them!
 6. Our children should not have this in common with the children of unbelievers, that they are unbaptized!

B. The Blessings for Christian Parents

- i. Parents who present their children for baptism are being obedient to God, and God always blesses obedience. (We reap what we sow). “Through the devotion that is demonstrated in baptism, parents begin to reap the blessings of obedience that come from building the foundations of a home on the promises of God.” (*Why Do We Baptize Infants?*, Chapell)
- ii. Parents who present their children for baptism are reminded to trust in the sovereignty of God, who cares for their children far more than they do.
- iii. Parents who present their children for baptism receive comfort
 1. Parents of children who die in infancy
 2. Parents of developmentally disabled children
- iv. Parents who present their children for baptism are reminded of their duty:
 1. “When we as parents remember the sign of salvation applied to our children, it is a call to raise them as God directed.” (Sartelle, p. 21).
 2. “We go to great pains to teach our children math, science, business, football, baseball, tennis, golf, and soccer, or perhaps ballet, music, art, and theater. But how much time or effort is spent in the training of our children in godliness?” (Sartelle, p. 20).
 3. “It may seem that all you need to do is have your child baptized, and all will be well, as if baptism were the ultimate fire insurance.” But, “if you and your wife don’t love each other as the Bible commands, if you don’t teach your children Scripture, if you don’t discipline them as God’s Word teaches, if you don’t pray with and for them daily, if Christ is not the center of your home, then you may baptize your children, but they will grow up just like children from non-Christian homes.” (Sartelle, p. 19).
 4. “As a public act of devotion, baptism also makes the parents accountable to the church before which they take vows to raise their child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (*Why Do We Baptize Infants?*, Chapell)

C. The Blessings for Pastors, Elders and Deacons

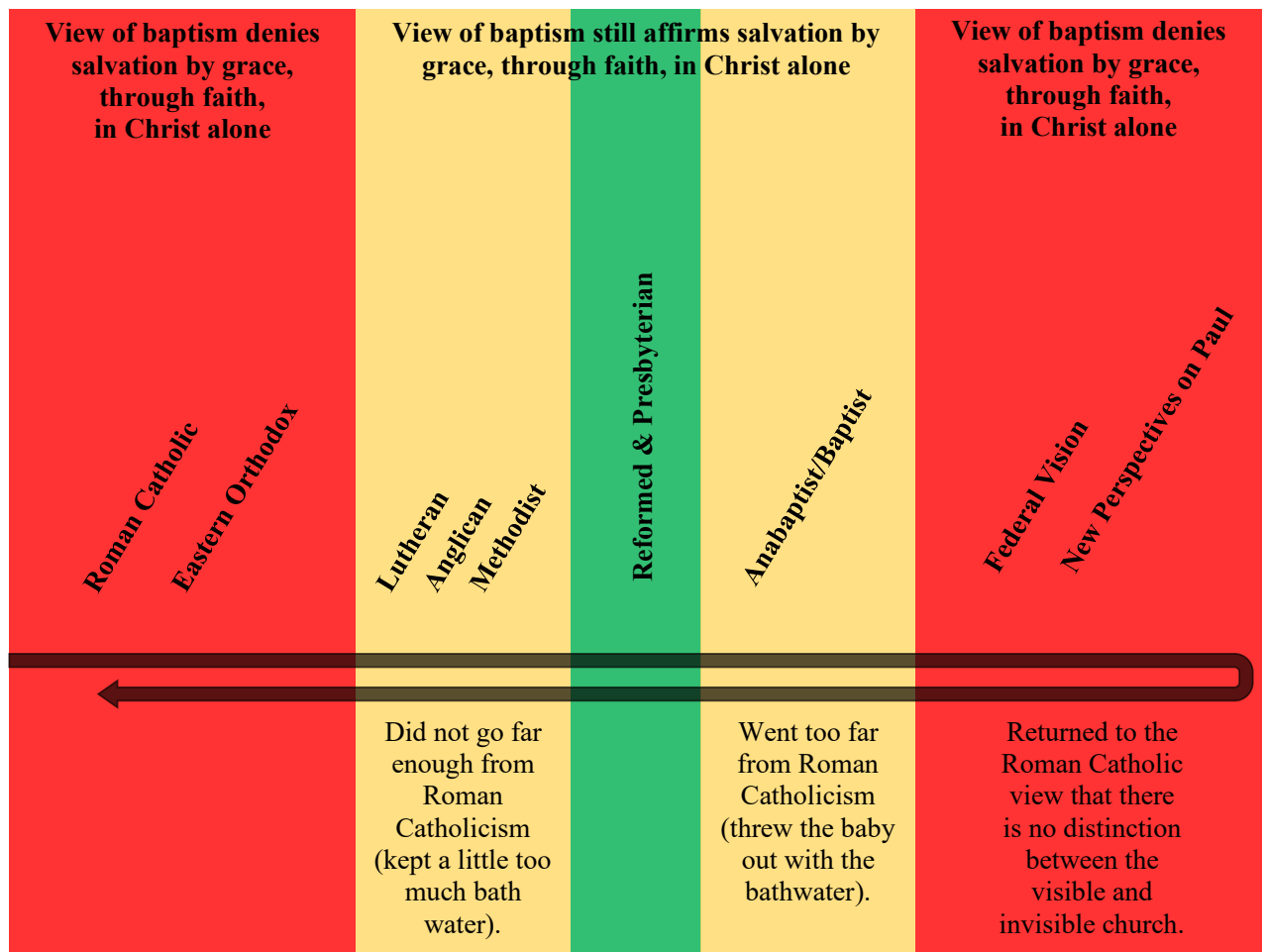
- i. Privilege of teaching covenant children to remember their baptism and walk by faith, not by sight.
- ii. The joy of seeing God’s faithfulness as he works through families.

D. The Blessings for the Church Body

- i. The privilege given to church members in being used by God to assist the parents in the raising of godly offspring.
- ii. The joy of seeing the next generation raised up as members of the church from infancy their particular callings as servants in Christ’s church.

“When a child is baptized, God enters the scene. He promises to strengthen and enable the testimony and training of parents who seek his aid: he pledges to walk with—and fulfill covenant promises to—the child who matures in faith; and God uses the devotion of the parents and the church to further the spiritual nurture of the child. These covenant promises are too good to delay!” (*Why We Baptize Infants?*, Chapell)

Baptism Spectrum Chart



Resources Referenced for this Class:

- *Heidelberg Catechism*, Questions 69-74
- *Belgic Confession*, Article 34
- *What Christian Parents Should Know About Infant Baptism*, John P. Sartelle
- *Why Do We Baptize Infants? (Basics of the Faith) (Basics of the Reformed Faith)*, Bryan Chapell
- *Infant Baptism: The Baptist Argument Against Infant Baptism*, Leonard J. Coppes
- *Baptism: Its Subjects and Modes*, J.G. Vos
- *The Meaning and Administration of Biblical Baptism*, Robert Grossmann
- *Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Why We Are Given Two Sacraments*, Robert Grossmann
- *Early Christian Doctrines*, J.N.D. Kelly
- *Creeds of the Churches Third Edition*, edited by John H. Leith

Resources Recommended for Further Study:

- *Jesus Loves the Little Children: Why We Baptize Children*, Daniel R. Hyde
- *Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism*, J.V. Fesko