

Argument 4

Infant Baptisers Claim that Baptism Has Replaced Circumcision

A fourth claim which infant baptisers make is to say that there is direct New Testament warrant for the change from circumcision to baptism¹ – leaving aside the dispute about the covenant and the so-called continuity of the church.² One passage to which they refer is Colossians 2:11-14, which reads:

¹ In addition to what I say in the substance of this chapter, if baptism has replaced circumcision, why would Paul not say so at the meeting to discuss whether or not baptised Gentile converts should be circumcised (Acts 15)? Why would he circumcise the baptised Timothy (Acts 16:3)? And why would Peter refuse to eat with converted and baptised Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-12)? See R.E.O. White p211. Peter was wrong, of course, as Paul made clear (Gal. 2:11-21) – but my point is this: If Peter believed, as infant baptisers do, that baptism has replaced circumcision, why did he stop eating with baptised but uncircumcised believers? More important: Why didn't Paul use the argument when confronting Peter?

² But as with covenant theology, when the Fathers drifted towards infant baptism, for many years they did not argue for it on the basis of circumcision, and even when they did, it was only a question of analogy. The 4th century, of course, laid the foundations for the theology to develop (Stander and Louw pp37,69,80,183,185), and once that theology was developed, 'traditional defences of infant baptism have leaned heavily on... circumcision' (Wright: *What...?* p15). But it was not always so. Some words of Wright already noted: 'The invocation of circumcision with its covenantal context was generally not an original feature in [the] Reformers' baptismal teaching. It emerges in general terms when, having nailed their colours to the mast of *sola Scriptura*, they had to row back from an initial emphasis on the necessity of faith for beneficial reception of baptism. This re-positioning occurred when the opposition against whom this emphasis was directed, the old Roman Church, was supplanted by the new foe of Anabaptism. We should not underestimate the seriousness of the challenge posed by Anabaptist radicals. More than one of the magisterial Reformers had to overcome early doubts about infant baptism, independently of Anabaptist protests. It can be seriously argued that the baptism of babies was the single most significant constitutive element of

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In him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by [better, in] putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he has made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

We may take Hendriksen's comments on the passage as typical. He alleged that 'baptism has taken the place of circumcision. Hence, what is said with reference to circumcision... holds also for baptism'. He meant, of course, that water baptism in the New Testament has taken the place of physical circumcision in the Old. He quoted with approval the *Form for the Baptism of Infants*: 'Since, then, baptism has come in the place of circumcision, the children should be baptised as heirs of the kingdom of God and of his covenant'.³

This is wrong. It is based on a poor exposition of the passage. There are four reasons.

In the *first* place, the circumcision spoken of in these verses clearly is not a physical circumcision; it is 'the circumcision made without hands'. In other words, it is spiritual circumcision. Hence it is impossible to use the verses to teach that baptism has replaced the rite of circumcision, since physical circumcision is not even mentioned.

There is a *second* reason why Paul could not have been referring to physical circumcision. The apostle was writing to the Colossians. While this church (possibly) comprised some converted Jews, it (almost) certainly⁴ was made up (mostly) of converted Greeks. Yet Paul addressed them all as 'circumcised'. He could not possibly have meant physical circumcision – were the Greeks circumcised?

Thirdly, Colossians 2:11-14 does not say that believers are baptised instead of being circumcised, that baptism has taken the place of

church order that the Reformers preserved without explicit biblical warrant' (Wright: 'Children' p30).

³ Hendriksen: *Colossians* pp86,116.

⁴ Internal evidence in the book surely suggests it, to put it no stronger. 'The basic evil with which [this] young church was confronted was the danger of relapse into paganism with its gross immorality... A careful reading of Col. 3:5-11 proves that this peril was basic. The members of the Colossian church were, at least for the most part, rather recent converts from the darkness and coarse sensuality of heathendom' (Hendriksen: *Colossians* p16).

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circumcision. It states that all believers have been both circumcised and baptised, the circumcision and the baptism being one and the same. The latter has not superseded the former. Paul declared that the Colossians ‘were... circumcised... buried with [Christ] in baptism’. He did not say they were baptised *instead of* being circumcised. He did not say baptism *is the equivalent of* circumcision. He did not say baptism *has replaced* circumcision. He said the Colossians were *both* circumcised *and* baptised. He went further. He did not even use the word *and* between ‘circumcision’ and ‘baptism’. Baptism has not taken the place of circumcision. They were ‘circumcised’, ‘baptised’. In the context, the two are *identical*, one and the same.

Fourthly, the Greek tense which Paul used was the aorist. He said that the Colossians were circumcised, were baptised, were buried, were raised, all at one and the same time in one finished completed act, one with abiding effect. This shows, again, that the circumcision, the baptism, the burial and the resurrection were one and the same thing. It all took place at one and the same time. They all constituted one event. It is clear that the circumcision in the passage is not physical; in the same way, nor is the baptism, nor is the burial, nor the resurrection. None of it is. It is all spiritual. It all speaks of spiritual union with Christ (Rom. 6:1-11).⁵ Therefore it is impossible to make the passage teach that water baptism has replaced physical circumcision. Neither of them is even mentioned.

The circumcision in question is not, as Warfield put it, ‘the circumcision which Christ ordained’.⁶ Paul did not say that Christ *ordained* it; nor did the apostle command believers to be circumcised in order to obey Christ.⁷ He declared that the circumcision is something which *Christ did*.⁸ Sartelle, too, was mistaken when he

⁵ Had the believers Paul was writing to been *physically* buried and *physically* raised? Of course not. Paul was not talking about *physical* burial and resurrection. Neither was he talking about *physical* circumcision or *physical* baptism. It was all *spiritual*.

⁶ Warfield p405.

⁷ The apostles did not command believers to be circumcised, but they did command them to be baptised.

⁸ ‘The words... are a Hebraism... “Christ-circumcision”, that is, circumcision effected for us in Christ, in virtue of our having passed through death into resurrection-life in him’ (Newton p11).

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alleged that it is ‘a symbolic circumcision’.⁹ Symbolic? Certainly not! There is nothing symbolic about it; it is an effective, real circumcision. It is, as Hendriksen said, ‘that circumcision [which] is yours by virtue of your union with Christ’.¹⁰ In other words, it is spiritual circumcision. Similarly, the baptism in view is not water baptism. It is spiritual baptism. Note also that Christ is the one who circumcises and baptises – not ministers. If Paul had been talking physically, then ministers would play their (vital) part. But he was talking spiritually; ministers do not come into it.¹¹ The passage has nothing directly to say

⁹ Sartelle p11. Those who think it is, apparently, want a *symbolic* circumcision, but an *effective* water baptism! Or do they, after all, believe that water baptism is symbolic?

¹⁰ Hendriksen: *Colossians* p117.

¹¹ But what about 2 Cor. 3:3? ‘You are a letter of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God... on tablets of flesh; that is... the heart’. Paul was saying that he needed no letter of recommendation to the Corinthians – the Corinthians themselves were all the letter he needed. Christ himself wrote it; that is, by his Spirit he had regenerated the Corinthians and brought them into a living union with himself through their repentance and faith. But, said Paul, Christ had used him as an amanuensis. Christ did the work by his Spirit, but Paul was the hand that he used. This was the proof that he was indeed a minister of Christ. Hence Col. 2:11-12, the argument might go, teaches that as ministers baptise, Christ regenerates.

But such a claim – were it to be made – would be a leap far too far. True, Christ uses his saints as ministers to regenerate his elect under their preaching (using the biblically-wide definition of preaching). There is no quarrel with this. He could, if he wished, regenerate sinners directly, but he generally uses his saints to witness or preach to bring others to himself. As I say, there is no quarrel with this. The issue is, however: What is this amanuensis-work? Is it baptism? Is *this* the hands-on work that ministers – sacramentalists are usually very shy of allowing ‘ordinary’ believers to get involved (this would hinder the drive to sacerdotalism!) – do in this regard? Is baptism the hands-on work that ministers perform so that Christ regenerates as they baptise? This, indeed, would be a literal hands-on ministry. Is it right?

Not at all. Let us look at the context of 2 Cor. 3:3 – I mean from 2 Cor. 1:1 – 6:2, not forgetting, above all, 1 Cor. 1:10 – 4:21. What do we find? Baptism? The suggestion is ludicrous. I will return to 1 Cor. 1 (where Paul destroys the notion that it is baptism which he is talking about in 2 Cor. 3:3). So, what about the context of 2 Cor. 3:3? Baptism is not mentioned. But preaching is mentioned over and over again – 2 Cor. 1:18-20; 2:12,14-17; 4:2-5,13;

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on the subject of water baptism, and when infant baptisers use it to justify their practice, they are making a gross mistake.

What Colossians 2:11-14 does teach is that all believers have been united to Christ, having been regenerated by one sovereign act of God, when they were spiritually circumcised, spiritually baptised, spiritually buried and spiritually raised. The aorist is important! And there is nothing symbolic about any of it. I point out once again, reader, that Paul did not bring in the word ‘and’. The circumcision, the baptism in question, are one and the same – they are not separate events. What Paul speaks of has nothing to do with physical circumcision, nothing to do with water baptism. See also John 3:3-8; Romans 2:28-29; 6:1-11; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 12:13;¹² Galatians 3:26-29; Titus 3:5-6; and so on. In not one of these passages is water baptism or physical circumcision in view.¹³ If water baptism is forced into any of the passages, the most dire and unscriptural consequences follow.

5:11,18-21; 6:1-2 – and this as the means of bringing sinners to Christ. Ministers are not mentioned in Col. 2:11-12, and baptism is not mentioned in 2 Cor. 3:3. Therefore the objection – namely, that by linking Col. 2:11-12 with 2 Cor. 3:3 we may say that Paul was speaking of baptism by ministers in Col. 2 – if it were to be made, would be baseless. Indeed, the boot is on the other foot. The proper reading of the passages in their context is destructive of sacramentalism.

¹² See end note on p135 for excursus: ‘1 Cor. 6:11; 12:13’.

¹³ Contrary to Beasley-Murray, Wright and many (most?) others. Take Wright: ‘1 Cor. 6:11... [and] Tit. 3:5-6... show that the baptismal waters spoke prominently of spiritual cleansing’. But the verses do not refer to water baptism. If they did, then all who are baptised with water would be washed from sin and baptised into Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). No qualifiers could prevent it or get round it. It has to be faced; if the verses speak of water baptism, then water baptism saves! There is no talk of a sign in these verses. The baptism actually accomplishes what is being spoken of. And in every case: ‘For by one Spirit we were all [not ‘some’, or even ‘most’, or ‘those who prove to be regenerate’, but ‘all’ were] baptised into one body’. Either water baptism does what is claimed for it, or it does not; a close tie – or a 99.999% success rate – is not good enough. Now we know that Simon (the sorcerer) was baptised but not saved by it (Acts 8:13,21-23). This one ‘failure’, on its own, proves that saving grace does not come by baptism. Therefore the passages cannot speak of water baptism. Wright thought they do, even though he admitted ‘the baptismal interpretation of [Tit. 3:5-6] is not beyond questioning’. Quite! I certainly question it! I do not accept that “washing” is an unexpected

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Papists do that very thing and contend for baptismal regeneration on that basis. Likewise the Prayer Book of the Church of England. Reformed infant-baptisers hold that water baptism is in view but they try to fudge the issue. They say – as the Westminster Confession Chapter XXVIII put it – though water baptism is in view ‘yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it... that all that are

metaphor to use of rebirth if it [baptism] is rejected’ as the interpretation; in regeneration, a sinner is spiritually ‘washed’. See also Eph. 5:26 where ‘washing of water’ is connected with ‘the word’ with no suggestion whatsoever of baptism (see also Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23 where ‘regeneration’ is linked with ‘the word’ with no mention of baptism). On John 3:5, Wright did not ‘attempt to resolve conclusively the meaning of this heavily contested text’, but noted ‘it was probably second to none in popularity among the post-apostolic generations on baptism’.

I pause to illustrate this last point. Colin Buchanan and Michael Vasey cited an Anglican example of the defence of infant baptism: ‘In 1662, the Restoration leaders went for John 3 [instead of Cranmer’s use of Mark 10:13-16 – see below]... and that looked much better’ (Buchanan and Vasey p7). Or so they thought!

To let Wright continue; he called 1 Pet. 3:21 ‘a remarkably full-blooded assertion about baptism, and totally unambiguous’, but as he said, ‘the meaning of “saves” has to be determined rather than assumed’; so for ‘baptism’, of course. He was sure 1 Cor. 12:13 is water baptism, and seemed to assume the same for Rom. 6:2-11; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:11-12. In all this, even though, he admitted, ‘I have cut many an exegetical corner, but I am not assuming the mantle of a biblical commentator’, he nevertheless showed his hand: ‘My concern has been simply to convey a sense of the markedly direct terms in which the New Testament documents attribute the multifaceted reception of God’s salvation to the instrumentality of baptism’. As he said a little earlier: ‘Ask yourself whether [baptism] is an ordinance or sacrament which is merely[!] symbolic rather than truly effective as a means by which Christ or the Holy Spirit works our blessing’ (Wright: *What...?* pp88-92). This is not the real question to be asked of the verse (1 Cor. 12:13). But this is: *Which baptism is the verse (and all the other verses cited) talking about?* They do not speak of an ordinance at all, but the sovereign act of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Wright, of course, is far from alone: ‘The most widely held view of 1 Cor. 12:13 is that Paul is referring to water baptism which is the means by which the Spirit is given to the believer and by which they [*sic*] are incorporated into the body of Christ’ (Cross: ‘Spirit- and Water-’ p121). How do we know this is ‘the most widely held view’? And even if it is, the minority are not always wrong; sometimes, but not always.

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baptised are undoubtedly regenerated'.¹⁴ At least the Papists and the Anglicans have the merit of being consistent! They think that passages like Colossians 2:11-14 and Titus 3:5-6 are to do with water baptism, and they take the promises and statements as they think they stand. They accept the consequences of their assertions. They allege that the baptism in question is water baptism, and that it does regenerate. Reformed infant-baptisers like to claim that the baptism is water baptism, but try to shy away from the odious consequences of their assertions. All three, however – Papists, Anglicans and Reformed – are mistaken.

The passages teach that all who are washed are saved; that all who are baptised are joined to Christ, they are all regenerated and forgiven every trespass. But – and this must be emphasised – the baptism, the washing, is not water baptism; it is spiritual baptism. All who are circumcised spiritually, spiritually baptised, are regenerated, joined to Christ and saved. But beyond all question, water baptism does not accomplish this. It symbolises it, and is to be administered to those who demonstrate they have been regenerated; and only to them.¹⁵ But

¹⁴ Westminster p116. Note it well, reader: 'Not... all that are baptised are undoubtedly regenerated'. Not... all... are. This can only mean that some (many) are. Which means that the Westminster documents undoubtedly teach baptismal regeneration (at least for some, if not for many). But where, in these verses we are talking about, is there any suggestion that 'grace and salvation' are not 'inseparably annexed' to the baptism? The question, of course, as always, is: Which baptism do the verses speak of? All the elect, regenerated by the Spirit, are baptised into Christ, and invariably receive grace and salvation, grace and salvation being inseparably annexed to the baptism. Invariably! All who are thus baptised are saved, always. Always! But the baptism in question is spiritual, not water, baptism.

¹⁵ Thomas Goodwin: 'The eminent thing signified and represented in baptism, is not simply the blood of Christ, as it washes us from sin; but there is a further representation therein of Christ's death, burial and resurrection in [our] being first buried under water, and then rising out of it... a representation of a communion with Christ in... his death and resurrection. Therefore it is said: "We are BURIED with him in baptism"; and "wherein you also are RISEN with him". It is not simply said, *like as* he was buried and rose, but *with him*. So that our communion and one-ness with him in his resurrection is [effected by spiritual baptism – regeneration – and is] represented to us therein [that is, in water baptism], and not only our conformity or likeness unto him therein.

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that is beside the point at this stage, since passages like Colossians 2:11-14 do not refer to water baptism at all. Therefore they give no basis whatsoever for the baptism of infants.

Infant baptisers are mistaken when they say that baptism has replaced circumcision. It has done nothing of the sort. Certainly Colossians 2:11-14 does not teach it. All believers have been spiritually circumcised and spiritually baptised (they are one and the same); they all have been regenerated. And that is how they came to faith. They have all been regenerated and united to Christ. And that is the meaning of Colossians 2:11-14.

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Surprisingly, Romans 4:11 is also used to try to justify the claim that baptism has replaced circumcision. Under the heading: 'What is said of circumcision also goes for baptism', George M.Ella quoted the verse, a remarkable choice for this purpose. Here it is:

And [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised.

I will have more to say on the verse in the next chapter, but what did Ella say about it? How did he use it to try to justify his claim that baptism has replaced circumcision? In this way:

Paul, in Romans 4:11, identifies what circumcision points to in relation to faith in the very same way as what baptism points to in relation to faith... Given this immediate connection in purpose of circumcision and baptism, it is in keeping with Scripture to hold that what was said of circumcision goes also for baptism. Abraham, as the believing covenant father, had his children circumcised at the command of God. This command is repeated throughout the New Testament with reference to baptism.¹⁶

And so [water] baptism represents this to us' (Newton p20, emphasis his). Spot on, Mr Goodwin, spot on! Represents – not accomplishes!

¹⁶ Ella p36. Ella mentioned the verse on three more occasions, but added nothing to the point above. But he did speak of what he called Paul's 'long essay on circumcision and baptism starting in Romans 2' (Ella p178). This is another remarkable claim, and a highly idiosyncratic reading of Rom. 2 and on. Baptism does not occur in the book until Rom. 6, and, as I have made clear, even there it is not water baptism but spiritual baptism. Indeed, water baptism is never mentioned in Romans.

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What a remarkable statement. We need not spend long on this, surely. May I point out the obvious? A distinction must always be drawn between assertion and proof. Anyone can make an assertion, but what about the proof? Let me illustrate. Anyone can assert the moon is made of green cheese; proving it, however, is altogether something else. In the extract just quoted, note Ella's three assertions: 'What is said of circumcision also goes for baptism... Given this immediate connection in purpose of circumcision and baptism... This command [given to Abraham] is repeated throughout the New Testament with reference to baptism'. Very well. Here we have the assertions. Where are the proofs? May we see them? Reader, note the absence of any corroborating scripture to prove that we can move from circumcision to baptism like this, the absence of any corroborating scripture to prove there is any connection whatever between the two, and the absence of any corroborating scripture to prove that the command to a believing father to baptise his children is repeated throughout the New Testament. In making these three assertions, Ella offered no scriptural proof whatsoever. None.

And taking his last, if there had been the repeated commands as Ella asserted, this debate would never have existed. Or, at least, I wouldn't have taken part in it. Indeed, I would have baptised my children in obedience to God's command. But since I have yet to come across such a command in Scripture to baptise my children – let alone a repeated command to do so – I did not baptise them. And I think it right to challenge Ella's assertion.

Finally, to cap it all, baptism is not even mentioned in Romans 4:11, or in the immediate context. That is why I said it is a remarkable verse to choose to try to establish the interchange between it and circumcision. How can a passage which does not even mention baptism, be used to prove that baptism has replaced circumcision?

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Ephesians 2:11-13 further supports the claim that the New Testament equivalent of circumcision is regeneration and not water baptism. It reads:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the

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commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ.

Paul said that the Ephesians were, at one time, without Christ, totally ignorant of the covenants, hopeless and cut off from God; that is, they were unregenerate. But now all that had changed. They had been brought into a state of grace; they were regenerate and joined to Christ.

It is the way Paul described their state before regeneration which is the point at issue. He reminded the Ephesians that they were ‘once Gentiles in the flesh’, by which he meant they were uncircumcised. And as he said, the sneering Jews taunted them with this, calling them the Uncircumcision, while bragging of their own physical sign. But of far greater importance – and this is the point – Paul said that while the Gentiles were uncircumcised in the flesh, they were also unregenerate – they were ‘without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world’. *That was their **real** uncircumcision.* Paul was not desperately concerned about their physical uncircumcision. Far from it. ‘Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing’ in this context (1 Cor. 7:19). Nothing! *It was their **spiritual uncircumcision**, or their **unregeneration**, which really mattered.* Thus, when Paul said that the Ephesians were formerly uncircumcised, he meant it in two ways.¹⁷ First, at that time they did not have the physical mark in the flesh; that, however, was now of little importance, except to the bragging Jews. But – and of far greater consequence – at that time, they were also uncircumcised spiritually; they were unregenerate. And that was what counted.

Hence it is clear; to be uncircumcised, in the New Testament sense of the word, is to be unregenerate. Therefore the converse is also true. Spiritual circumcision, the only circumcision which counts, is regeneration. ‘For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that

¹⁷ Paul is engaging in one of his favourite linguistic devices – word play (see Rom. 3:27; 8:1-4; 9:6; 1 Cor. 9:19-23; Gal. 6:2,16; 2 Thess. 3:11 (NIV); Philem. 10-11). James Dunn noted Paul’s ‘nice word play in the Greek’, ‘δουλευετε αλληλοις... αλληλους δακνετε’ (Gal. 5:13,15), which U.Borse translated as ‘serve one another... savage one another’ (Dunn p284). God engages in word play (Mic. 1:8-16). Christ does it (Matt. 11:29-30 with Acts 15:10,28; Matt. 16:18).

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circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter' (Rom. 2:28-29). There it is; to be *regenerate* is to be *spiritually circumcised*. 'We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh' (Phil. 3:3). Even in the Old Testament, circumcision pointed to this spiritual aspect (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Ezek. 44:7).

Consequently, baptism is *not* the New Testament equivalent of circumcision, nor has it replaced it, since the equivalent of circumcision is not baptism but regeneration. So, when infant baptisers argue that baptism has taken the place of circumcision, they are wrong. And when they argue that since a Jew and his seed were circumcised, in the same way a Christian and his seed must be baptised, they are even more wrong. The question of water baptism simply does not arise.

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There is another point. We know the old covenant foreshadowed the new (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1); that is to say, various practices in the old represented the real and living fulfilment in Christ in the new covenant. The sacrifices, for instance. So also circumcision; it was a shadow; it represented a reality in the new covenant. Reformed infant-baptisers argue that circumcision represented or is fulfilled by baptism which now represents washing from sin in the blood of Christ.¹⁸ In other words, one shadow (circumcision) represented another shadow (baptism) which represents the reality of forgiveness; that is, a symbol led to another symbol which, in turn, leads to the reality.

This is wrong. May I make it clear by calling upon a parallel? The old covenant priesthood represented Christ – the true priest – under the new covenant; it did not represent another shadow (another priesthood, say) which in its turn represented Christ.

¹⁸ 'Baptism forced circumcision out of the way. When baptism came, circumcision must be discarded... Circumcision belongs to the time of the shadows, and, therefore, must make room for baptism as being the sign of fulfilment' (Hoeksema p17). No! The shadow gives way to the reality. Circumcision gives way to regeneration – not another sign! Of course, the logic of the infant baptiser's argument leads inexorably to the shadow – circumcision – being replaced by baptismal regeneration!

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But Reformed writers continue to make this mistake of claiming that one symbol or shadow leads to another. Pratt, for instance, criticised Nettles who had rightly argued that the old covenant shadow of circumcision is fulfilled by the new covenant reality of regeneration:

In his [Nettles'] view, circumcision in the Old Testament is seen as a foreshadowing of regeneration in the New Testament rather than a foreshadowing of New Testament baptism. This outlook is unfortunate... In the Old Testament, physical circumcision pointed to the need for inward spiritual circumcision; in the New Testament, physical washing [what now of sprinkling?] in baptism points to the need for inward spiritual washing. The parallels are between two outward acts and the inward realities they represent... Baptism correlates to circumcision, and [just as, he meant or at least implied] the Lord's supper corresponds to Passover.

This is clearly a bad mistake. I should like to see the biblical justification for an old covenant shadow being replaced by another shadow in the new. Significantly, Pratt offered no verse. There is none. But we do have verses – see above – where we are explicitly told that the old covenant shadows led directly to, pointed to, their real and spiritual fulfilment in the new – with no second shadow in between. As Nettles noted: 'Part of the confusion seems to rest in Pratt's view that one symbol is fulfilled by another symbol'.¹⁹ Scripture, of course, teaches that the shadows and symbols in the old covenant are fulfilled by the reality in the new.

In particular, the Passover did not foreshadow the Lord's supper. Certainly not! It foreshadowed *Christ and his sacrifice*. We are expressly told so: Christ is our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7); Christ, not the supper. Similarly, circumcision did not foreshadow baptism.

Can we be shown New Testament proof that baptism is meant to point 'to the *need* for inward spiritual washing'? As far as I am aware, baptism always 'points to the inward spiritual washing' *which has already taken place*, and until that has happened, baptism is completely out of order. Baptism does not represent something which needs to happen; it represents something which has already happened.

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¹⁹ John H. Armstrong pp45-46,66,75.

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Earlier, when dealing with the covenant, I asked what infant baptisers make of the command found in Genesis 17:14 – the uncircumcised must be cut off from his people. On their reasoning, they must cut off the unbaptised. What, exactly, is this – I asked – in terms of the New Testament? Allowing, for the moment, the infant baptiser's application of the covenant to believers to stand, once we understand that the spiritual equivalent of circumcision is regeneration, we can see that if anyone is uncircumcised, in New Testament terms he is unregenerate; he is indeed cut off from God's people. He cannot be, he must not be, in the church, because he does not belong to Christ. Hence we may say that the church must be composed only of the regenerate. Just as any professing Israelite was cut off from Israel when it was discovered that he was not circumcised, and therefore could not take part in God's ordinances, so no unregenerate, spiritually uncircumcised person should be allowed to join the church; or, if already joined, he should be removed. In the light of this, how can infant baptisers contemplate a church with unregenerate members? But this is what they do, some of them with apparent contentment. It is most improper. Once again, this is getting close to the heart of the practical consequences of infant baptism, consequences which are shocking,²⁰ consequences which have moved me to write. I will come back to the point.

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This fourth argument of infant baptisers is erroneous. Baptism has not replaced circumcision. The New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament rite of circumcision is regeneration. To link water baptism with Jewish circumcision is to make a very serious mistake.²¹

²⁰ It was, of course, a major bone of contention between the Anabaptists and the Reformers.

²¹ Is there any risk that someone reared on the teaching which replaces circumcision by baptism, on hearing of the need to be 'spiritually circumcised' – 'you must be born again' (John 3:7) – might imagine he has been born again in his infant baptism?

End note to Argument 4: Circumcision Has Replaced Baptism

1 Cor. 6:11; 12:13

Gordon D.Fee: In 1 Cor. 6:11, 'it is possible, but not as certain as most interpreters [including sacramental Baptists; Fee cited Beasley-Murray] imply, that the verb "you were washed" is also an allusion to baptism... [But] Paul does not in fact say "you were baptised", which he was perfectly capable of doing if baptism were his concern. This verb [washed] is not used elsewhere in the New Testament to denote baptism (it is joined to baptism in Acts 22:16, but is not the actual verb for baptism itself)... Regeneration, sanctification and justification... for Paul... are the work of the Spirit in the believer's life, not the result of baptism' (Fee: *1 Corinthians* pp246-247).

Fee: In 1 Cor. 12:13, 'it is often assumed that Paul is referring to the sacrament of water baptism, and it is then often argued... [even by sacramental Baptists; Fee cited Beasley-Murray] that this text supports the close tie [see the following note] of the reception of the Spirit with baptism itself. But that assumes more than is actually said'. As Fee observed, water is not mentioned; the baptism is with/in/by *the Spirit*; and, above all, 'one is hard pressed [it is impossible!] to find an equation between baptism and the reception of the Spirit in Paul's letters' (Fee: *1 Corinthians* p604; see also *God's* pp178-182,853-864). Words matter. Little words often matter most. Donald G.Barnhouse: 'In studying the word of God, we must never underestimate the importance of little words' (Barnhouse p157). Paul did not say they received the Spirit *by* baptism; he said they were baptised *by* the Spirit *into* Christ. Fee: 'Paul's usage elsewhere strongly suggests that the prepositions *εν* and *εις* should be translated respectively as locative (the Spirit is the "element" into which they were submerged)... The point is that Paul is not referring to water baptism at all' (Fee: *God's* pp861-862). 'The use of *εν* with *βαπτίζω* throughout the New Testament is locative, expressing the element into which one is baptised (see on [1 Cor.] 12:13)' (Fee: *1 Corinthians* p445). On the element question, Beasley-Murray agreed, 'suggesting that when Paul uses *εν* with the verb to baptise, he has in view the element in which baptism takes place... The Spirit... is the element in which one is baptised so as to be in the body'. But, of course, Beasley-Murray was linking this with water baptism, dismissing H.T.Andrews (and E.Best) who 'dared' to query it in 1 Cor. 12:13: 'The question appears naïve from a responsible theologian. The inter-relating of gospel, faith, confession, grace, baptism appears never to have come within the horizon of this writer, nor the idea of baptism as a meeting of God and a penitent sinner on the basis of the Christ event'. 'God's gift to baptism and to faith is one: it is his salvation in Christ' (Beasley-Murray: *Baptism in the New Testament* pp167-168; *Baptism Today and Tomorrow* p37; see also *Baptism Today and Tomorrow* pp27-33). For an assessment of the views of Beasley-Murray, Dunn, Fee, Stott and Lloyd-Jones on 1 Cor. 12:13, see Cross: 'Spirit-

Argument 4: Baptism Has Replaced Circumcision

and Water-'; O'Donnell. See also Donald Macleod. Speaking for myself, I hope I am 'responsible', even though I may be 'naive' in the eyes of sacramentalists. Granted that, I do more than question that 'baptism and faith is one' 'gift' and that this 'gift' is 'salvation in Christ'; I deny it absolutely. And I respectfully ask to be shown the biblical proof of it by 'non-naive responsible theologians'.

This discussion needs broadening beyond 1 Cor. 12:13. 'Into', εἰς, denotes the element in which the baptism takes place, and the element determines the outcome of the baptism. Spiritual baptism is baptism in the Spirit which unites to Christ, and water baptism is baptism in water which makes one a professor of Christ. Beasley-Murray, citing Rom. 6:3, raised the sacramentalist view: 'What is meant by baptism to Christ Jesus? Frequently εἰς after the verb βαπτίζειν denotes the goal desired and realised through baptism', citing Matt. 3:11; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13. 'It would be possible to view "baptism to Christ Jesus" therefore as baptism in order to be *in* Christ, and so as "baptism *into* Christ". This interpretation is strengthened by the related passage, Gal. 3:26-27'. I pause. Note the muddling of water baptism and spiritual baptism, leading to sacramentalism. The two baptisms must be kept distinct. When talking of spiritual baptism, εἰς means baptism into Christ; that is, spiritual baptism which actually unites to Christ. But when talking of water baptism, εἰς does not carry that weight. Beasley-Murray went on to quote Best on Gal. 3:26-27: 'The implied suggestion is that those who are "in Christ" had come "into him" by [water] baptism, and that therefore εἰς must carry the social and local meaning of ἐν'. That is to say, according to Best, water baptism actually unites to Christ – a full-blown sacramental position, of course. But, as Beasley-Murray pointed out: 'A difficulty is encountered by this view in that Paul declares the Israelites to have been baptised "to [into] Moses" (εἰς τὸν Μωσέειν, 1 Cor. 10:2), which can scarcely be said to mean "into Moses"'. Best had countered this objection by taking Moses as representative of Christ – so that the baptism into Moses was truly an actual baptism into Christ! The paucity of the argument only serves to show the wrongness of the original claim. As Beasley-Murray said: 'The Israelites were baptised with respect to Moses... for his allegiance' (Beasley-Murray: *Baptism in the New Testament* pp128-129, emphasis his). In other words, in spiritual baptism, baptism εἰς or ἐν the Spirit actually unites to Christ; in water baptism, baptism εἰς or ἐν water is profession of Christ, allegiance to Christ, commitment to Christ.