

Defense of Believer's Baptism – Romans 9

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Tonight, we will continue to follow the Heidelberg Catechism for the sermon topic and teach on baptism. On the sacrament of baptism, we have a lot that we agree with in terms of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Paedo-Baptist. Yet, we disagree with its affirmation of infant baptism. The Heidelberg Catechism states;

74. Are infants also to be baptized?

Yes: for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church; and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant.

I would like to suggest that we affirm and agree with the overwhelming majority of what the Heidelberg Catechism and the historic reformed confessions teach concerning baptism. I hope to show some of that. But obviously there is a point of significant departure.

Obviously, our contention with the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism on infant baptism is no small disagreement. In fact, many of the Paedo-Baptist denominations would recognize us as a sect, because in their view we do not rightly administer the sacrament of baptism. As a result, some would not allow us to be members of their church because of our baptistic position. Others will allow you to be members but not teachers or holders of office.

I think that it is important for us to think clearly on this because it is no small issue. Do we have the right to withhold the water of baptism from a child born to believing parents? Or, is it correct to administer the sacrament of baptism upon an unbelieving, unrepentant sinner who in this case happens to be an infant?

I know that when my children were younger, I wrestled with this very thing. Not just as a pastor, but as a father. Should we, on the one hand, give the waters of baptism to an

infant and all that it means, or do you withhold it? If a child should be baptized, what right do we have to withhold water from them? If, on the other hand, believer's baptism is correct, then what right do we have to put it upon those whom God has not asked us to?

We agree with the Belgic Confession that the marks of a true church are: the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments are rightly administered and church discipline is rightly practiced. And if this is true, then we must carefully weigh the issue of who should be baptized.

Tonight I would like to do two things. First, I would like to spend a little bit of time affirming the things where we are in agreement. Second, I will try to answer biblically why we would baptize only believers. And I don't think that I will be giving the final word on this. I would like to think that I would be, but since it has been debated for so long before I ever came on the scene, I doubt that what I am going to say tonight is going to be definitive one way or the other, but we will give it a go.

I'd like to start by reading a comment by B.B. Warfield. One of the assumptions that the Reformed have is that the Word of God is our final authority. It is the Holy Scriptures alone that are the final authority for our faith and practice. In dealing with the question of who should be baptized, it is what the Scriptures teach that is definitive. Therefore, specifically what does the New Testament have to say about who should be baptized?

The commitment to the reformed faith is that while the Old Testament contains the New, the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old. The Old is promise. It is a shadow. And the New Testament brings to fulfillment and brings to light those things that were hidden in the Old Testament.

Yet there is this odd statement by Dr. Benjamin Warfield on baptism which reverses this. He seems to suggest that the New Testament is to be interpreted by the Old Testament. Warfield writes,

It is true that there is no express command to baptize infants in the New Testament, no expressed record of baptism of infants and no passages so stringently implying it that we must infer from them that infants were baptized. If such were the warrant as it were necessary to justify the usage, we would have to leave it incompletely justified.

Let me read that again and break it down into sections.

“If such a warrant as this were necessary...” What warrant? That is to say, what is actually commanded or actually illustrated. Such a warrant for baptizing infants, Warfield says, is not to be found in the New Testament, and he affirms if it were necessary to have such a warrant, we should have to leave infant baptism incompletely justified.

However, Warfield continues,

But the lack of any express warrant for infant baptism in the New Testament is something short of forbidding the rite. And if the continuity of the Church throughout all ages can be made good, the warrant for infant baptism is not to be sought in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament when the Church was instituted. And nothing short of an actual forbidding of it in the New Testament would warrant our omitting it now.

So, Dr. Warfield is suggesting to us that the whole basis of infant baptism is founded upon the Old Testament, that there is no clear definitive New Testament record or command or warrant for it.

This is not just his opinion. William Cunningham, a famous Presbyterian theologian of Scotland, wrote these words, “And we ought to remember that we ought to form our primary and fundamental conceptions of baptism from the baptism of adults.”

Remember, both Dr. Warfield and William Cunningham are writing this as a Paedo-Baptist.

Cunningham also writes, “Because, the general tenor of Scripture language upon the subject of baptism applies primarily and directly to the baptism of adults.”

In fact, there is no real evidence for the baptism of children. Professor John Murray writes in his book entitled Christian Baptism,

It is only too apparent that if we had an express command or even a proven case with apostolic sanction, then the controversy would not have risen; or at least it would be of a very different sort.

We are in agreement with Dr. Warfield, William Cunningham, and John Murray, that the New Testament does not command or explicitly require infant baptism.

So should we be baptizing infants or should we be baptizing professing believers? Well, I believe that the Bible is clear that we are to be baptizing believers, and to do that we will try to demonstrate this from the Scriptures. But what is clear from these quotations is that some holding to the Paedo-Baptistic position honestly acknowledges that there is no New Testament warrant for the practice of infant baptism.

They are quick to add, as Warfield states, that this isn't the end of the argument. We agree. Because the Bible has only one covenant of grace that is operative in both the Old and New Testaments, it is important to consider the whole of redemptive history and not merely the New Testament. Therefore, we need to consider evidence from the entire Bible.

But, to start with, I would like to make a couple of comments.

First of all, the mode of baptism. While the Paedo-Baptist tends to sprinkle, I think they agree with Baptists, actually, that they should be immersing. We certainly should use the New Testament language as a standard for how we understand baptism.

Calvin writes,

But whether a person being baptized should be wholly immersed or whether thrice or once, whether he should be only sprinkled or poured with water, these details are of no importance, but ought to be optional to churches according to the diversity of countries.

Then he makes a statement, “Yet, the word ‘baptize’ means immerse. And it is clear that the rite of immersion was observed in the ancient Church.”

This is a huge concession on his part because Calvin was not given to novelty, and we are thankful for his commitment not only to the Scriptures, but to bring the reformation of the Church from Scriptures and to how the early Church understood them. But here he tells us that the word “baptize” means to immerse and that this was the practice of the early Church.

Ursinus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, agrees with Calvin and writes, “The word ‘baptism’ comes from the Greek word **baptisma** which is derived from **Bapto** which means to plunge.” And then he says, “Or to dip, to wash, to sprinkle. In the eastern Church they were ordinarily immersed and they are to this day.” But he says, “Those, however, who lived in the colder regions of the north were commonly sprinkled with water.”

Well, Ursinus didn’t live to see the Baptist movement in England. He died maybe 100 years or so earlier. The Particular Baptists of the 1600s, our forefathers, came to the conviction of believer’s baptism while members of Paedo-Baptistic churches. They actually went down to the river, cut holes in the ice and baptized by immersion.

There are records of that happening even in some of the revivals of the early 1800s in Kentucky. There, Baptists were baptizing in frozen water, and, in part, because they believe that this is what Scripture requires. Ursinus and Calvin admit the language of the New Testament and the practice of the early Church was immersion, even though they personally didn’t practice it. I think they affirm that immersion is the most consistent way to take the language in which the New Testament was written.

What does baptism actually mean?

What is the meaning of baptism? And this is one of the places where I think we would be in agreement with the Paedo-Baptist, although sometimes the Paedo-Baptist tends to want to highlight a distinction here. But I think, again, if they are consistent, they will admit that they are on the same page with us. For example, Calvin, in the first of two chapters on baptism in his *Institutes* writes,

Baptism is a sign of the institution or rather of the initiation by which we are received into the society of the Church, in order that engrafted in Christ we may be reckoned among God's children. Now baptism was given to us by God for these ends which I have taught to be common of all sacraments. First, to serve our faith before him and, secondly, to serve our confession before men.

Now Calvin's first point we would definitely agree with, that the sacraments are always given for the encouraging of our faith. As it says in Romans 4:11, the reason why Abraham received the sign of circumcision was for his faith, as a seal of his faith. Likewise, baptism is meant to serve our faith, to strengthen our conviction that we have, in fact, been washed of our sins.

However, Calvin goes on to say, "It is to serve our confession before men, that we actually confess Christ."

You can hear why even men like William Cunningham are saying, "Wait a minute," that baptism is, when we think about it, the New Testament teaching, primarily talking about and discussing adult baptism and that is exactly what we would expect to find.

Calvin goes on to say in that same section, "For Paul did not mean to signify our cleansing, our salvation are accomplished by water or water contained in itself had the power to cleanse or regenerate or renew, nor that here is a cause of salvation, but only that the sacraments are to be received the certain knowledge and the certainty of such gifts."

So we have this idea that baptism is given for the purpose of assuring us of our salvation. And for that we ought to be thankful.

Ursinus uses very similar language. When he talks about the ends of baptism, he writes, "The chief end of baptism is to confirm our faith." We agree with Ursinus that baptism is a solemn declaration by which Christ testifies to us that he has washed us in his blood in the Spirit and conferred upon us remission of sins.

Well, if that is to be the inherent meaning or the chief end of baptism, who does that best apply to but someone who has faith?

Secondly, Calvin states that baptism is to "serve our confession before men." And again he writes,

But baptism serves as our confession before men. Indeed, it is the mark by which we publicly profess that we wish to be reckoned God's people; by which we testify that we agree in worshipping the same God, in one religion with all Christians; by which finally we openly affirm our faith.

Calvin writes that the end of baptism is to declare our duty to God and the binding of ourselves and the Church to gratitude, to faith and repentance. Baptism pictures both our forgiveness, our washing and our regeneration, our renewal. And to take the sign upon ourselves, we are believing God to have washed us of our sins and to have regenerated us in Christ, and we desire to testify to man and God that we believe that Christ alone is the source of our salvation. We believe not only that we are washed, but that we have been so renewed that we walk in newness of life.

Baptism, therefore, is a sign of what we receive from God in Christ and what is our duty back toward God.

There is no real difference at this point between the traditional reformed position of the Paedo-Baptist and what we would hold as Reformed Baptist. The London Baptist Confession of 1689, chapter 29, paragraph 1 states,

Baptism is an Ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party Baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death, and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him; of remission of sins; and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ to live and walk in newness of Life.

But there is the issue of faith and baptism. What role does faith in baptism play?

Calvin makes an interesting comment, writing,

This we must believe, that we are baptized into the mortification of our flesh which begins with our baptism, which we pursue day by day and which will, moreover, be accomplished when we pass from this life to our Lord.

Baptism is a picture of the promise of the mortification of our flesh, and the ordinary Christian life is one of pursuing, day by day, the putting to death of the deeds of the flesh.

Calvin goes on to say that baptism serves as our confession before men. He writes, "Indeed, it is the mark by which we publicly profess that which is to be reckoned, that we wish to be reckoned as God's people."

But then he also makes this comment. "Yet, it is not my intention to weaken the force of baptism by not joining reality and truth to the sign insofar as God works through the outward means, but from this sacrament, as well as all others, we obtain only as much as we receive in faith."

In no way am I trying to be critical of Calvin or Ursinus or the historic reformed position. They were very conscious of the fact that part of the reforming of the Church was the need to get away from the Roman Catholic form of the sacraments, that apart from faith and just the doing of them something happens. And in reaction to that, the Reformers are coming back to the biblical position that the sacraments only contain effectiveness as

they are linked to an understanding of the gospel, a belief in the gospel and a public profession of that gospel.

Ursinus writes this comment about who ought to be baptized,

For the proper understanding of the question we shall consider first, who ought to receive and who ought to desire baptism, those who are not yet disciples of Christ, not being numbered among those who are called and not believing in the doctrine of the gospel nor obeying the ministry, are not to receive baptism, nor ought those who feel that they are not disciples of Christ to desire baptism. And the reason why they ought neither to receive nor desire baptism is because Christ says, first, ‘Teach and make all the nations my disciples and then baptize them.

We agree!

Now, for the record, we need to be very clear; both Calvin and Ursinus baptized infants. They were not Baptist in the sense that we use this word. However, I want to stress that we are in agreement in what they understood adult baptism to be and mean. So the question really is: How did they get from these kinds of comments on baptism that we Baptist can affirm, to teaching that infants are to be baptized?

Ursinus writes,

The condition of faith is so joined to the promise for those who are baptized do not receive that which is promised and sealed by baptism unless they have faith, so that without faith the promise is not ratified and baptism is of no profit.

Well, what is interesting is that Ursinus, who comes down so hard and strong on the need for faith in baptism, actually tries to put faith into infants. He writes this. “Faith is, indeed, necessary to the use of baptism with this distinction, actual faith is required of adults and an inclination of faith to infants.”

Inclination of faith, kind of an odd statement, one that we do not find in the Bible. Ursinus goes on to write, “But infants born to believing parents have faith as to inclination.”

He goes on to write, “... that infants do believe after their manner or according to the condition of their age. They have an inclination of faith.”

In other words, infants can have an infant faith. Ursinus writes, “Faith is an infant’s potentiality and, by inclination, although not actually as adults. For as infants born to ungodly parents are without... who are without the Church have no actual wickedness, but only an inclination to wickedness.”

Well, what is Ursinus doing? Why is he writing this?

I think he understands he has kind of put himself into a box. He has come down so hard against a Roman Catholic position of the sacraments being just done mindlessly that he seeks to demonstrate the need to have faith. Having done so, he now understands somehow he has got to get faith into children to continue to justify infant baptism. And so he makes a distinction between children of believers and children of unbelievers, and the children of believers have an inclination (his word) towards faith, where the children of unbelievers have an inclination towards evil.

Is that what the Bible teaches us? What does the apostle Paul tell us in Ephesians 2:1-3? That we were dead in our trespasses and sins. He says to us in the book of Ephesians 2:3 that not only were we dead in our trespasses and sins, but that we were, by nature, children of wrath. We being dead in our trespasses and sins in which we formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

Paul doesn't make a distinction between children of believers and children of nonbelievers. He lumps us all together. But among them we, too, were by nature children of wrath. It is not that we had an inclination towards faith and these others had an inclination towards evil. We were all by nature spiritually dead and children of wrath. Whereas he says in the book of Titus 3:3 "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved..." not just inclined, "...enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us."

Well, why did he have to save us? Not because we weren't inclined to faith. My point is simply that the premise of infant baptism is predicated upon ultimately requires a changing of the New Testament understanding of the nature of this sacrament. If you are going to maintain, as Calvin and Ursinus do, that there is inherent in baptism a promise that must be heard, understood and believed, then you are going to say - if it is going to be applied to children, the children must have some type of incipient faith.

The other way of doing it is to say, "Well, the sign doesn't accomplish the thing promised in the infant until they come to faith." But I don't think that is true of the Old Testament circumcision. I think circumcision in the Old Testament absolutely meant something immediately upon its application, not when the child came to some point of believing.

Let us see if I can take some time and walk you through what I believe to be the New Testament fulfillment of the sign of baptism. I want to do it by walking through the whole Old Testament and bringing us to the New Testament. My understanding is that, number one, starting in the book of Genesis we have the institution of the covenant of grace in Genesis 3:15 and that it is very broad and universal and that through the movement of redemptive history, upon further revelation, there is a constant narrowing

and redefining of what that promise is till you get to the New Testament. So there is a narrowing and further defining of what it means to be part of the people of God. And, conversely, as there is this ever-narrowing and further defining of what it means to be of the people of God, there is consequently also an ever-expanding reality which goes from simply the children of a man and a woman to the children of a man, his descendants, Abraham, to all nations.

Let's go in our Bibles to Genesis chapter three. We certainly agree with all of the reformed faith that Genesis 3:15 is the beginning of the covenant of grace where God, seeking to remedy man's rebellion, makes a promise, a covenantal promise that "I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." Here we have the promise of God that he would, in fact, deliver the seed of the woman from the serpent. Not a lot of detail is given. You can hear kind of almost a universal idea here. Does the seed of the woman without definition mean all her seed? Or is it just some of the seed of the woman? The original promise does not give us any detail at this point. So we have, at the very beginning in type and in shadow the promise in a broadly open statement. But it doesn't take long before there is a narrowing of the promise. We are told in Genesis chapter four about Cain and his killing Abel. Eventually, Adam and Eve are given another son, Seth. In chapter four verse 25: "And Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, 'God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel; for Cain killed him.'"

At the beginning of the line of Cain and Seth, you have the beginning of the seed of the woman being broken into two different lines, the seed of Cain who verse 16 of chapter four, "went out from the presence of the LORD."

But in verse 26, "And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD."

Cain's line moves away from God. Seth's line begins to call upon God. The phrase, "calling upon the Lord" becomes a key descriptive term of those who are saved. This will be developed by the apostle Paul in Romans 10. However, for now see the narrowing and further defining of God promising to deliver the seed of the woman. Not all of her descendants will be, just those under the line of Seth.

In chapter 12 we are introduced to Abraham and the great promise, that he says that, "I will bless you and make you a great nation and through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed."

But, still, that is relatively undefined. How much of the nations? Well, when you get over to chapter 15 we are... he is declared righteous by faith. And then chapter 17, he says in verse seven, "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you."

We will come back to this verse later. We are going to see how the New Testament uses it.

But for now, notice that God has the promise to make a unilateral, royal grant covenant of promise. God says,

I will establish my covenant between Me and you and your [seed] after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your [seed] after you. And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession.

In verse 11, “And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.”

So God makes a covenant with Abraham. So now the seed of the woman has been narrowed to be the seed of Seth. Now you narrow it more to Abraham. A sign has been applied to it, the sign of circumcision. However, notice what Abraham says in verse 18,

And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.”

God responds...“And as for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. **But My covenant** I will establish with Isaac.” Carefully notice, not even all of Abraham’s children are part of the covenant of grace. God says He will bless Ishmael but He is going to establish His covenant with Isaac.

Now it is interesting that Ishmael gets circumcised in this context. But what is the circumcision for Ishmael? It certainly is a sign that he is a descendant of Abraham and will receive wonderful temporal blessing but not a sign of the promise of the covenant of grace. In fact, what we have in shadow or type is the fact that God is establishing in Abraham actually two different covenants, a temporal, physical covenant that will eventually be the basis of the formation of Israel as a nation and the covenant of grace in which the individual, spiritual, eternal blessings of salvation in Christ are established.

The apostle Paul makes this clear first in Galatians 4:21-31

Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?
For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking: for these *women* are two covenants, one *proceeding* from Mount

Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written,

“REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR;
BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR;
FOR MORE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE
THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND.”

And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

But what does the Scripture say?

“CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON,
FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR
WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN.”

So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

And he says he makes a contrast. So in Galatians 4:21-31 a contrast between Ishmael, who is circumcised, and Isaac who is circumcised. This means at least this much, whatever circumcision means, it does not mean the same for Isaac and for Ishmael, because God specifically says, “I will establish my promise not with Ishmael, but with Isaac.”

Turn to Deuteronomy 5:1-5, as we move forward. We need to understand that the Bible is not a mono-covenantal book. By mono-covenantal we are to understand that not only are there a variety of covenants, but a variety of kinds of covenants. And we are going to see an interesting language both here and in Jeremiah.

Notice Deuteronomy 5:1-4,

Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully. The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today. The LORD spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire.

Moses is making a distinction between the covenant of grace that is established in Abraham and in Isaac and this Mount Sinai covenant which contains in it a works element. If they will do and keep the Deuteronomy covenant or the, rather I should say, the Mount Sinai covenant, he will bless them. But if they don't, he will cast them out of the land.

And in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 and 29 you have the covenantal blessings and the curses based upon national obedience or disobedience. So here God says through Moses, “I am

making a covenant with you, but it is not the covenant I made with your fathers.” Who are the fathers? It cannot be their immediate physical fathers because he says, “The Lord spoke to you face to face at the mountain.” Their physical fathers who died in the wilderness would have been at that mountain. It is with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And so there are two different covenants in play here, the covenant of grace that God makes with their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the covenant at Sinai, the Mosaic covenant, which is a re-instituting of the covenant of works, like in the garden where God is going to predicate his blessings upon their obedience and bring forth cursing upon their disobedience.

In the book of Jeremiah in chapter 31, where we have the giving of what is the so-called new covenant, there is a change that is taking place. We are told in verse 27: Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast. And it will come about that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy, and to bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant," declares the LORD.

So here you have this reference to the Mosaic covenant, the covenant at Mount Sinai. He “watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy” as they disobeyed. But he is also going to watch over them and build them and plant them based upon the promise given to Abraham. Verse 29. “In those days they will not say again, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children’s teeth are set on edge.””

Hear the generational covenant implication of Mount Sinai. Remember God says in Deuteronomy 5:8,

You shall not make for yourself an idol, *or* any likeness *of* what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth *generations* of those who hate Me.

God says if you disobey, the curse is intergenerational and will be passed on to the second and third generations to those who hate me. However, we are told in Jeremiah that a day is coming where God is no longer going to say that.

“But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge. Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day.”

Here in Jeremiah 31, the fathers do refer back to Mount Sinai and not to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. “...not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My

law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

God is revealing that the covenant is even more narrow and specific than has been previously stated. The covenant of grace is not just open to every seed of the woman. It comes through the line of Seth and not Cain. It comes not through all the seed of Seth but through the seed of Abraham. But who is the seed of Abraham back in chapter 17:7-8? It is not all the physical descendants of Abraham. It is not really clear. Ishmael gets a lot of temporal blessings. But Ishmael is not the one to whom, the physical descendant of Abraham is not the one through whom the blessings will come. The apostle Paul will inform us in Galatians 3:16 that the seed is Christ.

We are told in Deuteronomy that there is another kind of covenant, a covenant of works that God enters into with the nation of Israel. It is established back to Abraham. About 13 times Moses tells us that the covenant at Sinai is because of Abraham. But there is also this covenant of grace which was also established with Abraham back in chapter 15 and 17 of Genesis, which Jeremiah tells us is different from the Sinai covenant and not all the descendants of Abraham are part of it.

Let's move forward to the New Testament and go to Luke chapter three. We have learned that God's covenant of grace is not with all the descendants of the woman in the garden, nor all the descendants of Seth or Abraham. As the New Testament opens, all of this is still kind of murky to us because it is part of the shadow. But with the coming of the New Testament, more light comes. And now we understand that those who are going to be part of this covenant of grace are not simply physical descendants. They don't get in the covenant of grace because they are part of a public community of Israel, but because of actual regeneration and renewal. In Luke chapter three, John the Baptist is baptizing people for the... with the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, it says in verse three. And then crowds of the people were coming out and he says in verse seven-

John the Baptist began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him saying,

You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. And also the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Two questions. First: Do you see that now again this covenant is narrowing how it is being defined? It is not the physical descendants of Abraham nor all who are legitimately part of the nation of Israel, but those who actually bring forth a transformed life. Just because you publicly identify with Abraham, he says, don't even begin to say that...

Second, if God—and we understand that John is speaking probably metaphorically here—but if God actually had raised up stones to be children of Abraham, would those stones have been children of Abraham? Yes. The presumption of these Israelites is that they were in because they had the sign as physical descendants of Abraham. I have got the right genetic code. John the Baptist is challenging that. It is much more narrow than that.

In fact, let us look at Romans 2:28-29 where Paul begins to explain the meaning of these very things. It is not the physical descendants of Abraham. It is those who are actually bringing forth the fruits of repentance. Well, who does that?

In Romans 2:28-29 Paul writes,

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Now remember, Ishmael was circumcised. But God never established the covenant with him, because he was not part of the covenant of grace. He was outwardly a son of Abraham. Genetically he was a son of Abraham. Sacramentally he was the son of Abraham. But he is not in the covenant of grace. Because it is not about being a Jew outwardly, nor is it about the circumcision. It is about regeneration. It is about being renewed in his heart by the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the defining mark of what it means to be part of the Israel of God in the covenant of grace. Paul will expound upon this later in Romans 9. We had this read to us because Paul tells us in Romans nine that... He says, “I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”

All of these Jews that Paul is referring to had been circumcised and were part of the public Old Testament Church under the national temporal covenant of Mount Sinai, yet he says, “I would gladly be accursed and separated from Christ if they could be united to Christ,” meaning they are not united to Christ. And yet he goes on to describe them, verse four:... “who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

They are part of the nation of Israel and as such are participants in many rich temporal and national blessings, but these same folk are not considered true descendants of Abraham. Paul describes them in Romans 9:6 not part of God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob stating, “...it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.”

Just because you are part of the genetic code of Abraham and are part of the public expression of Old Testament Israel, the shadow doesn't mean you are part of the New Testament Israel. As Paul states in chapter two, it is not the outward circumcision nor the outward participation in historic national Israel under the Mosaic economy that makes one a participant in the covenant of grace. It is renewal, it is transformation, it's the circumcision of the heart by the Holy Spirit that makes one a true Israelite. And he goes on to say that here, affirming in verse six that not all of the big circle Israel is the true inner circle Israel, the true redeemed. He says in verse eight, "that is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants." Now it is narrowed even further. It is not just that it is not a universal promise to all the seed of the woman, Eve. It comes through Seth. It comes through Abraham. It comes through a portion of Abraham's descendants, those who were of the covenant of promise. And the promise is extended to those who are regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart who are so based upon the promise of God.

Let's move to the book of Galatians and see how Paul argues there. Remember in the book of Galatians, the argument of the false teachers was that you had to first become a Jew before you could become a believer.

Certain Jews had crept into the Galatian church and taught that you first must keep Moses, starting with circumcision. And Paul is rebuking them for that because he says, "If you go that way you have fallen from Christ." In fact, he says in Galatians 5:2, "Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you." No small benefit or diminished benefit. No, Christ will be no benefit at all. If you seek to find salvation in the keeping of the law, then you will find Christ is of no benefit.

So he says to them in Galatians 3:2, "The one thing I want to find out from you. Did you receive the Spirit from the works of the law or by hearing with faith? The implied answer: by hearing. Then he says in verse five, "So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" Answer? Faith.

Now, in verse six and seven the apostle Paul very specifically defines for the Galatians who a son of Abraham is. He writes, "Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore [this is a key verse here], be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham."

Who are the sons of Abraham? Who are the sons of Abraham in which God has promised to bless in the covenant of grace? Not all the physical descendants of Abraham. We saw that all the way back at Genesis 17 with Ishmael. Not all of the physical descendants at Mount Sinai, we saw that in Jeremiah 31. Not all those who were part of the Old Testament Church who would come out from Jerusalem and Judea to see John the Baptist, but those who are of faith. Paul puts it this way in Galatians 3:9, "So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."

How do we participate in the blessings of Abraham the believer? Through faith. Again Paul writes it again in verse 26, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." And verse 29, "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."

Let's put Romans together with this. Who are the sons of Abraham? They are the ones who have had their hearts circumcised by the Holy Spirit. Who were the sons of Abraham? They are not the outward Israel, but they are the ones who are a promise covenant of grace. Who are the sons of Abraham? They are the ones who are of faith as Abraham. Who are the sons of Abraham? They are the ones who are the seed according to the promise.

Now remember back in Genesis 17:7, I asked you to hold in your mind. I asked who was the seed of Abraham. Paul gives us the definitive answer here in Galatians 3:15-16. Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

Who is the seed of Genesis chapter 17:7? Not the physical descendants of Abraham, but Christ. And who are those who are of Christ? Paul tells us in Galatians 3:26, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

How do we participate in the promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 17? By being Abraham's spiritual seed in Christ through faith, to be part of his descendants. And that seed is to have faith in Christ.

Now is it any wonder why B. B. Warfield would say, "We don't find any infants being baptized in the New Testament"? Is it any wonder why he would actually confess the fact that there is no commandment to baptize infants, no allusions of it, no illustrations of it? Because what the New Testament does is give us the light to shine on the Old Testament to understand all of these promises. And as the promises are further revealed and further defined, there is this ever-narrowing promise from this universal promise, this apparent universal promise in Genesis 3:15 down to a very specific promise, the promise is to Christ and those who are in Christ. And how do you get into Christ, but by faith and through baptism? So to apply that to anyone other than those who have expressed faith in Christ and believe is, in fact, to answer ... to apply the rite incorrectly.

I have tried to show that circumcision in the Old Testament is a shadow to demonstrate the blessings that are being passed on through covenantal union. I believe that is ultimately what circumcision is. It is defined as a sign of regeneration. It is a sign of all these different things. But the end, what circumcision is doing in the Old Testament is simply demonstrating that the blessings of God are passed on via covenantal union from the covenantal head to the generations that follow, because we need to think, we need to

learn to think covenantally and that the blessings of the gospel are passed on to us through a covenantal head.

The obedience of Jesus can be my obedience. The faith and faithfulness of Jesus can be my faith and can be imputed to me and counted to me for righteousness by faith alone. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness, and he received circumcision. On the basis of his faith his descendants will be blessed, as a covenantal head. So circumcision in the Old Testament serves in its role as a shadow of what was to come; it was to demonstrate in God's redemptive purposes that blessings can—both temporal and eternal—can be passed on through covenantal union and the sign of those covenants.

So in the New Testament baptism also shows us covenantal union. But our covenantal union is not simply to Abraham but to his seed who is Christ. The covenant of grace is no longer restricted to ethnic descendants, but it is international to every tribe, every tongue, every people, every generation who name the name of Christ. And in the regenerative work of the gospel, as the Spirit of God comes upon the hearers of the gospel and effectually calls them and renews them and they believe Christ, they are so engrafted into Christ being brought into union with Christ. In the covenant of grace we really participate in God's covenant blessing in Jesus, the true seed, the promised seed of Abraham. Baptism is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacramental shadow. The fuller light of the New Testament brings to us the understanding that what was promised in the Old Testament covenantal promises passed on to the physical descendants is, in fact, being passed on to us in union with Christ by faith in a greater and more profound way.

And so when we are baptized, we are baptized into Christ, and we agree with Calvin and Ursinus that it is by faith that all the promises of baptism come to us, that baptism becomes an effectual means by which the covenantal blessings are passed on to us in terms of signing to us and sealing our hope and blessings and that we can grow... and grow in our grace and understanding. And every time we witness a baptism, we ought to be remembering our own baptism, something an infant cannot do. And we come to believe that all that Christ has done for us as that blessed seed of Abraham, all that he has done, all that he is, all that he has accomplished in his life and his death and in resurrection, can, in fact, be mine by true participation in him covenantally. So while we agree with the Heidelberg Catechism in its definition of baptism and all that it purports in terms of the sacraments, we disagree at this one important point.

Are infants to be baptized? We would answer no. While we have the highest respect for Ursinus and his wonderful catechism and statements on the sacraments, in this one particular point we would disagree, because of the light of the New Testament. In the words of B.B. Warfield, the New Testament does not demonstrate, does not command, does not illustrate the baptism of infants, but only the baptism of believing people.

May God grant us the ears to hear and hearts to obey.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have given to us ordinances and sacraments to encourage us, to strengthen us, to strengthen our faith, to work in us your sanctifying graces and to mark us off, to set us apart as your people in Christ's work. Lord, we pray that you would help us more thoroughly understand all that you have given to us both in Word and in sacrament that we might rightly practice them in Christ we pray. Amen.