

I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

A. Baptism is the first of the two sacraments

- 1. We must distinguish between spiritual baptism (reality) and water baptism (sign)**
 - a. Failure to do this will lead to confusion: not all who receive the sign (water) receive the reality.
 - b. Yet, the Bible speaks of the sign *in terms of the reality*. We call that the "sacramental union."
- 2. Baptism is a sign of the work of God in delivering us from sin by the work of Christ.**
 - a. [Water] Baptism itself does not deliver us from sin. That is the error of baptismal regeneration.
 - b. But neither is [water] baptism empty, so that it becomes a mere profession of faith [Baptist]
 - c. Because it is a sign and seal of what God does it is a real means of grace.

B. In this lesson we want to ask the question, who may be baptised, and how does baptism occur?

- 1. [Water] baptism is administered in the church to adult converts and their children**
 - a. Since baptism is a sign of entering the church and kingdom of God adult converts are baptised. Adult baptism is much more common on the mission field than in the established church.
 - b. Reformed churches baptise the children of adult believers because they belong to the church and kingdom of God. *Reformed churches do not baptise all children, such as unbelievers' children.*
- 2. The mode of [water] baptism is less important [sprinkling, pouring, full immersion].**
 - a. Baptists make an issue out of mode by insisting that total immersion is the only valid mode.
 - b. Reformed churches have always taught that the mode is less important: they have preferred sprinkling for various reasons (several texts where baptise cannot mean immerse [Mark 7:4; Heb. 9:10]; the reality is by sprinkling so it fits better [Ezek. 36:25; Heb. 10:22, 12:24; I Peter 1:2]; the impossibility of immersing in various NT accounts; Christ was not "buried" in the modern sense; and in the OT types the godly were sprinkled and the wicked immersed, etc.).
 - c. The three requirements for a valid baptism: it be done by ordained man, with water, in the name of the Triune God. The amount of water, I repeat, is not so significant.

II. INFANT BAPTISM

A. To prove infant baptism we need to prove that the children of believers are in the covenant of God, the kingdom of Christ and the church of Christ.

- 1. The argument is really very simple. Children have the reality, therefore they have the sign.**
 - a. This is why the argument of the Baptists is so wrongheaded: they demand a proof text for infant baptism. "Find one place in the NT where children were baptised," they say.
 - b. Their other argument is just as irrelevant: "Repent and be baptised." No-one denies that believers should be baptised, and therefore the command to them is "Repent and be baptised." But the same command cannot be addressed to children in the same manner.
 - c. The controversy with Baptists is not over water, it is over who are the members of the church, kingdom and covenant of God; God's promises and the status of our children.
- 2. Remember the covenant of God is His relationship of friendship with His people in Christ.**
 - a. In the covenant God declares, "I will be your God and you will be my people." The Bible teaches that God makes *that* promise to believers and their children, not just adults. This does not mean that God will their God when they become adults, but will be their God *already as children*.
 - b. This is the case with every manifestation of the covenant: Noah (Gen. 9:9); Abraham (Gen. 17:7); David (Ps. 89:28-29) and the New Covenant (Jer. 31:33, 32:38-40).
 - c. Thus the Bible is filled with promises that God will work spiritual salvation in the hearts of the children of believers (Deut. 30:6; Isa. 59:21).
 - d. And here is the key: *God did not reverse that promise in the NT*: Acts 2:39.
- 3. Children are citizens of the kingdom of God as children.**
 - a. The kingdom of Christ is the spiritual rule of Christ by His Word and Holy Spirit.
 - b. Christ gives for the reason of His reception and blessing of the children of believers that they are already citizens of the Kingdom of which He is King (Mark 10:13-14; Luke 18:16).

- c. We do not baptise children *to make them citizens*. We baptise them *because they are citizens*. They are citizens *already as children*. We do not wait for them to grow before they are citizens.

4. Children are members of the church of Jesus Christ as children

- a. The church is the spiritual body and bride of Christ, consisting of the elect who are gathered throughout history from all nations and are united to Jesus Christ the Head.
- b. The issue with Baptists is this: Are Christians' children as children members of the church or do we wait for them to grow up before we can call them members and treat them as such?
- c. Paul addresses the children of the congregation as living members of Christ: Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20. You cannot *nurture* spiritually dead children; and the children are "in the Lord." Moreover, the children of believers are holy (I Cor. 7:14).

B. We have proved that the children of believers have the reality, therefore they must have the sign.

1. In the Old Testament the sign of the covenant was circumcision and it was applied to children.

- a. Baptists contend that circumcision was a sign of physical descent from Abraham or to membership in the nation of Israel. They see it as essentially Jewish. But this is false: circumcision was a sign of an invisible, spiritual reality. That is what a sign is!
- b. [Physical] circumcision [of the flesh] was a sign of spiritual circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30:6). Not all who were circumcised in the flesh [sign] had circumcision of the heart [reality] (Jer. 9:26; Acts 7:51; Rom. 2:28-29).
- c. Genesis 17 tells us that circumcision was a token (sign) of God's covenant (v. 11) and Romans 4:11 explains that it was sign of the righteousness of faith; and Col. 2:11 that is a sign of the cutting away of the sins of the flesh. *Therefore it is essentially a sign of cleansing.*

2. In the New Testament circumcision is no longer the sign of the covenant for three reasons.

- a. Circumcision was a bloody sign. But the NT has no more shedding of blood. There is further need of a sign and seal but a bloodless one.
- b. Circumcision was only applied to males, but in Christ there is "neither male nor female." A sign which can also be applied to females is demanded in the NT.
- c. Circumcision separated the Jews from other nations. Christ, by gathering a catholic church, unites Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:16). Thus circumcision makes way for a new sign.

3. The new sign, of course, is baptism.

- a. Baptism is bloodless, is applied to males and females, and carries no Jewish baggage with it.
- b. Baptism has essentially the same meaning as circumcision: that is why the NT describes baptised members of the church as spiritually circumcised (Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11-13).
- c. Thus circumcision gradually passes away, being replaced (better: "fulfilled" or "completed") by baptism. *If believers' children were circumcised in the OT, they must be baptised in the NT.*

C. Objections by Baptists

1. But not all baptised children grow up to be the children of God in truth!

- a. This is true, because God's promises are only made to the elect children, but this was no barrier to circumcision in the OT, so it should not be a barrier to infant baptism.
- b. God did not tell the OT parents to delay circumcision until their children made a "credible profession of faith." He commanded circumcision on the 8th day. We do not delay baptism.

2. There is no command to baptise children in the NT!

- a. That is not the point. There is no command to *exclude* the children from the covenant, kingdom and church of God. That would have been a major change (and impoverishment) of the NT.
- b. Besides, there is the practice of household baptisms: Acts 16:15, 31-33; I Cor. 1:16.
- c. And, children were baptised in the OT type of baptism in I Cor. 10:2.
- d. Conclusion: *God promise to our children [our seed] the reality; we gladly apply to them the sign. Heidelberg Catechism LD 27, Q&A 74; Belgic Confession, 34; Canons I, 17.*