



Chapter 29: Of Baptism

What is baptism? What does it symbolize? Can I be saved without being baptized? Are professing believers alone to be baptized? What about infant baptism? What is the baptismal formula? How is baptism to be performed? Is it by sprinkling, pouring or immersion?

Let me start with a personal testimony. I was born in Iraq to an Armenian (not Arminian) family. The church of the Armenian people is the Armenian Apostolic Church, which is an Orthodox church and it is very much similar to Roman Catholicism. Infants would be baptized around 40 days old or something around that time. That was not different in my case. Throughout my youth, I saw my infant baptism as the basis that I was a Christian. What made it also difficult was the fact that in Iraq, everyone would have their religion on their ID card. I even served as an altar boy in the church when I was little. But to be honest, I did not know the Gospel, yet I was not ashamed to proclaim that I am Christian, but don't ask me what the Gospel is! Thus, throughout my youth, I saw my baptism as the ground that I am a Christian, even though I did not pray often or did not know why Christ died. The Armenian Church, by the way, believes in baptismal regeneration and baptism by dipping the infant thrice in a bowl of holy water. My family came to the Netherlands in 2008 and I finally knew what freedom was, but not the freedom of the Gospel (yet). Two years or so after that, I met with an old friend and stayed with him a few days. He saw that I did not pray before bed, so he questioned me. He told me about prayer and how proper is it to pray to God and thank Him for everything. I told him that I don't want to be religious. He directed me to videos and episodes of [Zakaria Botros](#) (Arabic), who shares the Gospel with Muslims via TV and exposes Islam. Through his videos and episodes, I came to know the true Gospel and was saved by God's grace. After that, there grew in me a desire to study His Word, so I bought Bibles and study Bibles and started reading the Scriptures daily. Around that time, I started attending a Baptist church. I did not know that it was a Baptist church. We went there with some friends of mine and by God's grace, kept attending church on the Lord's Day.

I started reading the Bible and I could not find anything about the baptism of infants or that baptism as the basis of my faith and all the things which I had simply assumed in my youth. So I set out to study this matter and came to the conclusion that infant baptism was unscriptural and what happened to me as an infant, was not biblical baptism. On a Saturday night, I fell on my knees and asked the Lord if He wanted me to be baptized that He would give me some sign. The next day, the Lord's Day, the preacher talked about discipleship and following Christ no matter what and he said something like, "It doesn't matter what your family will think of you if you want to be baptized", which I saw as a sign from heaven. My family would not have been happy about my baptism because they think that my baptism as an infant was valid. Moreover, the Armenian Church is a national church. It does not get new converts, for example. Most infants are baptized and declared Christian, even if they know not the Gospel. Therefore, the only baptism that is practiced and that I have heard of is infant baptism.

I still feel guilty for asking the Lord for a sign when I had already concluded that believers' baptism is the biblical position and that infant baptism was unscriptural. His Word was clear on this subject. So, after that service, I directly went to one of the elders and told him that I want to be baptized. After giving my testimony and based on that I was [baptized on 16-06-2013](#).

It is not my purpose in this chapter to overthrow the paedobaptist position by directly arguing against it, but by presenting a positive case for credobaptism—baptism upon the profession of faith. No doubt, we would have to touch upon some arguments or texts which our paedobaptist brethren like to use. But

mainly, this is meant to be a positive case of what we (Reformed) Baptists believe.

§1 What Baptism Is And Is Not

1. 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**; **1** of **remission of sins**; **2** and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to **live and walk in newness of life**. **3**
 1. Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27^[1]
 2. Mark 1:4; Acts 22:16
 3. Rom. 6:4

Things Which Baptism Signifies

Christian Baptism is the immersion of a believer in water, in token of his previous entrance into the communion of Christ's death and resurrection,—or, in other words, in token of his regeneration through union with Christ.^[2]

Baptism signifies the new life and the blessings thereof, which the believer has received through faith and repentance. The Confession describes it as “a sign of fellowship with” Christ. Baptism shows our union with Christ, just as He Himself was baptized, so we share in a baptism similar to His and follow His example. Stanford E. Murrell defines baptism as:

an ordinance wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, signifies and seals the engrafting of a soul into Christ, and the partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace and our pledge to be the Lord's.^[3]

We will look at the different aspects of baptism as presented in the New Testament below.

Union With Christ In Death, Resurrection, Newness Of Life

Galatians 3:27

Gal. 3:25-27 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ have put on Christ**.

We are children of God, why? Because we have been baptized into Christ. What does this mean? It means that we identify with Christ and we declare that we belong to Him. What is the meaning of “have put on Christ”? This means that we “have put on his sentiments, opinions, characteristic traits”^[4] (Rom. 13:14). We are identifying with Him and saying to those watching that we belong to Him. To Paul's argument, this then would mean that all who are baptized into Christ are children of God because they have put on His characteristics. They identify with Him. Jamieson, Fausset, Brown give the input of Paul's argument well when they write: “By baptism ye have put on Christ; therefore, He being the Son of God, ye become sons by adoption, by virtue of His Sonship by generation. God regards us in Him, as bearing Christ's

name and character, rather than our own.”^[5] These are realities which baptism *signifies*, but are not *caused* by water baptism. The baptism *into Christ* is not the same as water baptism *in the name of Christ*. But we will see why that is the case below.

Romans 6:3-5

Rom. 6:3-5 Do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ** Jesus were **baptized into his death**? 4 We were **buried therefore with him by baptism into death**, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might **walk in newness of life**. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

This is the most familiar and known aspect of baptism amongst Baptists. Baptism symbolizes our death to the old life and our resurrection to the new life in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is even more strengthened when we understand the mode of baptism to be immersion. The whole body goes into the water, symbolizing the death of our old self and identification with Christ's death, and then we come out of the water, symbolizing the resurrection of the new man in Christ and with Christ. It is a given fact, the Apostle assumes, that baptism into Christ, which means to be engrafted in Him and united with Him, of which water baptism is a *sign* or *representation*, is a baptism into Christ's death. This means that in our baptism we are identifying with Christ's death. Baptism symbolizes the laying down of the old life with Christ and being united with Him in His death. Paul says elsewhere, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). This is symbolized by water baptism when the person being baptized is immersed and is under water. This signifies the person's death to his old self, even that the waters of baptism are seen as a grave for the old man. Dr. Wayne Grudem observes:

In fact, the waters of baptism have an even richer symbolism than simply the symbolism of the grave. The waters also remind us of the waters of God's judgment that came upon unbelievers at the time of the flood (Gen. 7:6-24), or the drowning of the Egyptians in the Exodus (Ex. 14:26-29). Similarly, when Jonah was thrown into the deep (Jonah 1:7-16), he was thrown down to the place of death because of God's judgment on his disobedience—even though he was miraculously rescued and thus became a sign of the resurrection. Therefore those who go down into the waters of baptism really are going down into the waters of judgment and death, death that they deserve from God for their sins. When they come back up out of the waters of baptism it shows that they have come safely through God's judgment only because of the merits of Jesus Christ, with whom they are united in his death and resurrection. This is why Peter can say in 1 Peter 3:21 that baptism "corresponds to" the saving of Noah and his family from the waters of judgment in the flood.^[6]

Paul identifies the waters of baptism with the burial of Christ. The burial of Christ showed that his body was truly dead, so also, us being identified with the burial of Christ shows that our old self is truly dead and thus we should live free from the dominion of sin (Rom. 6:6, etc). But our going under the waters of baptism and of God's judgment is not in order that we may die and be condemned. Rather, the reason, as the Apostle gives it, is that we may come out of the water in newness of life, just like the Lord Christ did. The Lord Christ did not die and was buried to remain dead and buried, but that He may obtain eternal redemption for His people by His death and resurrection and enter into His rest. So, in like manner, the believer goes into the water-grave but comes out of the waters of baptism in newness of life. His old self remains in the waters of God's judgment, and a new person emerges. The going into the waters of baptism identifies us with Christ's death. As John Gill observed on Romans 6:4, "for believers, whilst under water, are as persons buried, and so dead; which signifies not only their being dead with Christ, and their communion with him in his death, but also their being dead to sin by the grace of Christ, and therefore ought not to live in it: for the apostle is still pursuing his argument, and is showing, from the

nature, use, and end of baptism, that believers are dead to sin, and therefore cannot, and ought not, to live in it; as more fully appears from the end of baptism next mentioned;^[7].

Paul here is not teaching that baptism is the vehicle which brings regeneration and the new life, for that is contradicted by everything he laid down in the previous chapters about how justification is by faith and grace alone. Rather, baptism is that which *signifies* and *symbolizes* the truths of justification and regeneration. Moreover, we should remember the fact that in the early church, the believers did not wait a long time or wait at all for their baptism after faith. Therefore, baptism came to be identified with the beginning of the new life. People did not wait months and years to be baptized, as most of us do, but as with the three thousand on Pentecost and the Ethiopian eunuch, they were baptized immediately after believing in Christ. They did not receive regeneration, faith, or justification by water baptism, but they showed that they possessed these things by water baptism. All these truths are clearly represented and symbolized in water baptism by immersion. But, is the Apostle actually speaking of water baptism here? Dr. John MacArthur calls the baptism in Romans 6 a "dry baptism" in [a sermon](#) of his. This baptism which Paul is writing about is a spiritual baptism *into* Christ. Baptism symbolizes our union with Christ but it is not the means which brings our union with Him. To claim so would make salvation to be dependent upon baptism and reject what the Apostle had laid before this chapter about justification by faith alone. The baptism of Romans 6 is a metaphorical baptism into Christ at the moment of faith, when the believer is united to their Savior and experiences the blessings of this union. But does this overthrow everything that I've said above? Not for a bit! The truths of union with Christ in His death and resurrection are still *represented* and *shown* by baptism in water, but they are not the effects of water baptism. If baptism was the means of union with Christ, i.e., salvation, then that would mean that salvation is by faith and works, which is contrary to the foundation which the Apostle had laid in chapters 3-5. Although I deny that this passage is directly speaking of water baptism, yet, I believe that Paul *had* water baptism in mind because it was a sign given by the Lord to symbolize our union in His death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore, its use for the meaning and *mode* of baptism is proper. Although the baptism here is spiritual baptism, yet it cannot be denied that water baptism signifies spiritual baptism, i.e., regeneration.

A.H. Strong makes the following observation on the significance of Christian baptism:

Baptism, like the Fourth of July, the Passover, the Lord's Supper, is a historical monument. It witnesses to the world that Jesus died and rose again. In celebrating it, we show forth the Lord's death as truly as in the celebration of the Supper. But it is more than a historical monument. It is also a pictorial expression of doctrine. Into it are woven all the essential truths of the Christian scheme. It tells of the nature and penalty of sin, of human nature delivered from sin in the person of a crucified and risen Savior, of salvation secured for each human soul that is united to Christ, of obedience to Christ as the way to life and glory. Thus baptism stands from age to age as a witness for God—a witness both to the facts and to the doctrine of Christianity. To change the form of administering the ordinance is therefore to strike a blow at Christianity and at Christ, and to defraud the world of a part of God's means of salvation.^[8]

Colossians 2:11-12

Another passage which is quite similar to Romans 6:3-5 is Colossians 2:11-12:

In him also you were circumcised with a **circumcision made without hands**, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been **buried with him in baptism**, in which you were also **raised with him through faith** in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

The elect were united with Christ in His death and they were buried with their Covenantal Head, but also raised together with Him. In contrast to Jewish circumcision of the flesh, Christians still have a circumcision, namely, that of the heart (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:3). Circumcision continues in the New Covenant, yet it is not of the flesh but of the heart, which is regeneration. This passage is often claimed by our Paedobaptist brethren to teach that the sign or seal of the New Covenant is baptism because they see a connection here between circumcision of the foreskin and Christian baptism. But I believe that Paul has another counterpart to the Old Covenant circumcision. The language of circumcision stays the same, but the object of circumcision and its spiritual significance are changed in the New Covenant. The sign of the Old Covenant was circumcision of the males, but in the New Covenant, there is a “circumcision made without hands” by Christ for every member of the New Covenant, male and female. The Apostle is not equating circumcision and baptism here, but circumcision in the flesh and circumcision in the *heart*. In the Old Covenant, anyone who did not have the sign thereof did not belong to the covenant. In the New Covenant, anyone who is not circumcised in heart (which is *not* a sign of the New Covenant, because a sign has to be visible, see below on [Signs And Seal](#)), does not belong to the New Covenant. Circumcision functions as the prerequisite for membership in both covenants. Thus, the type and anti-type relationship here is not between Old Covenant circumcision of the foreskin and Christian baptism. Rather, it is between circumcision of the foreskin and circumcision of the heart, which is the regeneration promised to be an essential aspect of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27). The fulfillment and replacement of circumcision of the foreskin in the Old Testament is the circumcision of the heart in the New Testament.

What does the phrase “by the circumcision of Christ” mean? It can possibly mean a few things: 1) the circumcision which was performed *on* Christ (Luke 2:21); 2) the circumcision which *belongs to* Christ; or 3) the circumcision which is performed *by* Christ. The translation, as given in the ESV, I think, is purposefully vague, because the expression in itself is vague and not altogether clear from first reading. I believe we can quickly discard option one as being invalid. Nowhere is any significance attached to the circumcision performed on Christ in the New Testament in connection with our salvation. The second and third options I take together since they are not mutually exclusive. The circumcision of which Paul is writing is the Christian, New Covenant circumcision and it is the circumcision which Christ performs on believers by His Spirit. This circumcision is what is also known as regeneration in which the Spirit gives us a new heart and a new spirit. The Lord Christ, by the Spirit makes us a new creation and gives us His Spirit to dwell in us (Ezk 36:25-27). Dr. Richard Barcellos, after citing Titus 3:5-6 writes, “Regeneration is by the Holy Spirit and through Jesus Christ and all is connected to the divine trinitarian act in saving us. The Holy Spirit is the effective agent of regeneration; however, he is, nonetheless, the Spirit of Christ and God (i.e., the Father).”^[9] By regeneration we have put “off the body of the flesh”, which means the death of the old man and are raised to new life in Christ. What we must notice is that both circumcision and the “putting off the body of the flesh” are clearly spiritual things. Our human bodies were not renewed or destroyed, nor were we circumcised in our human bodies, rather, we were circumcised and born again in spirit and inwardly. The “flesh” is the fallen nature. This “circumcision made without hands” resulted in the “putting off the body of the flesh”. Paul continues and identifies this with burial with Christ in baptism. Similar to Romans 6, the going into the water symbolizes our death with Christ and the “putting off the body of the flesh”.

Now we come to verse 12. Verse 12 begins with an aorist tense, passive voice, participle mood verb, $\sigma\upsilon\upsilon\tau\alpha\phi\acute{\epsilon}\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ (*syntaphentes*, having been buried with). What does this all mean? The “**aorist** tense describes an undefined action that normally occurs in the past. [emphasis added]”^[10] The **passive** “represents the action of the verb being done *unto* the subject but not *by* the subject. [emphasis original]”^[11] As for **participles**, these “are those” forms of a verb which function as adjectives: *the running horse, a fallen tree*. [emphasis original]”^[12] Dr. Barcellos writes:

The participle, $\sigma\upsilon\upsilon\tau\alpha\phi\acute{\epsilon}\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ (“having been buried”), finds its antecedent verb $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\epsilon\tau\mu\acute{\eta}\theta\eta\tau\epsilon$ (“you were circumcised”) of verse 11. It indicates a further and subordinate explanation of the “circumcision made without hands.”^[13]

Now we will have to answer about the “when” of this baptism. This “baptism” is connected with the “circumcision made without hands”, which is regeneration. We've got three options here. This baptism occurs 1) prior to regeneration, 2) simultaneous with regeneration, or 3) after regeneration.

Option 3 would understand the text as saying, “you were circumcised *after* being buried with him in baptism.” This option would argue for baptism being necessary for salvation, and that baptism is the cause of regeneration, contrary to where it is taught that faith alone saves (Titus 3:4-7; Eph 2:8-9; etc...). We will look at a few texts which advocates of this position argue for baptism being necessary for salvation **below**. **Option 2** would read the text as “you were circumcised *while* you were buried with him in baptism.” This is the baptismal regeneration position, but this view should be rejected as unbiblical and a denial of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Options 2 and 3 are similar in their insistence that water baptism has something to do with one's salvation and regeneration. What we have left is **option 1**, the *subsequent* option. This position would read the text as follows: “you were circumcised *before* being buried with him in baptism”, that is, regeneration came *before* this baptism. Dr. Barcellos gives a few reasons to adopt this position [not all reasons mentioned]:

1. Aorist participles [συνταφέντες (“having been buried”)] subordinate to aorist verbs [περιετήθητε (“you were circumcised”)] can express subsequent action.
2. The burial in baptism here happens after the putting off the body of flesh which was affected by regeneration (circumcision made without hands). The “putting off the body of flesh” implies the death of the old man and then comes the burial.
3. This view maintains the death, burial, resurrection motif of other Pauline texts (e.g., Col. 2:12, 20; 3:13, 3; Rom. 6:3-8).
4. This view does not get into the difficulties of the others. This option maintains that there is a causal or logical relationship between regeneration and burial with Christ in baptism.

But, if there is a causal connection between baptism and regeneration, how have we not fallen into the errors of options 2 and 3? The reason is that we have not argued that this baptism is, in fact, *water* baptism. I believe that just like Romans 6:3-4 and Galatians 3:27, what we have here in Colossians 2:12 is not water baptism, but union with Christ, which is *typified* and *shown* by water baptism. The baptism, strictly speaking, of which Paul writes here is metaphorical and not water baptism, but the reason the Apostle chooses to express himself by “baptism” language is because the realities which he describes are *typified* and *signified* by water baptism. We gave a few reasons above for seeing regeneration (“circumcision made without hands”) as “the presupposition of and causal prerequisite to burial with Christ...The baptism in view here, though typified by water baptism, is not to be equated with it.”^[14] What we have here is Paul teaching us that “all who are circumcised of heart are buried with Christ in spiritual baptism and raised with him spiritually, typified by their water baptism, effected through faith”^[14], and not that water baptism *preceded* (came before) regeneration (“circumcision made without hands”). All the elect of God were united with their Savior in His death and resurrection, and by faith they experience the blessings of this union after regeneration. Together with Christ the Lord, we were raised through faith to walk in newness of life. It would be very strange to see Paul believing that there is a certain kind of faith with which people could go into the waters of baptism to be regenerated, but that faith is one which does not justify them, or that they receive such a faith after they come out of the water. The fact is that this passage teaches that whoever is baptized is vitally united with Christ, but this couldn't be said of those who are merely water baptized. For there are many unbelievers who were either baptized as children or later by their decision, yet they are unregenerate and reprobate, like Simon Magus who was baptized as an unbeliever. The resurrection of the believers in v. 12, which is spiritual, happens through faith, not water baptism. This is typified by the person immersed coming out of the water. To equate the baptism spoken of here directly and only with water baptism, is to reject salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Water baptism is necessary for good and healthy Christian life, but not for salvation! Those Christians who have not yet submitted to the ordinance of Christ by being baptized in water by immersion, are in disobedience to the command of the Lord, but it does not mean that they're unregenerate and unjustified. In conclusion, as Dr. Barcellos said, “As the Colossians’ circumcision was without hands, so was their burial and rising with Christ”^[15] and he adds later on:

Christians are complete in Christ because they have received a circumcision made without hands - regeneration. Regeneration produces faith that vitally unites souls to Christ in the efficacy of his burial and resurrection. This vital union with Christ in burial and resurrection is a spiritual baptism. Vital union brings believing sinners into the orbit of redemptive privilege and power.^[16]

Therefore, what we have in this text is Paul teaching us that the circumcision of the Old Testament finds its counterpart in the circumcision of the heart in the New Testament. There is a spiritual baptism which is Union with Christ in His death and resurrection is spoken of in terms of spiritual baptism which comes after regeneration, which union and the blessings thereof are experienced through faith.

Even a cursory reading of these passages (Rom 6:3-5; Col 2:11-12) will display a connection between water baptism and union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. But a closer reading of these passages reveals that although water baptism is not that which they directly speak about, yet the realities described are *typified*, *symbolized*, and *signified* by water baptism.

Remission Of Sins

Acts 22:16 And now why do you wait? Rise and **be baptized** and **wash away your sins**, calling on his name.'

The use of water in baptism obviously does not literally wash away our sins, rather, it is the blood of Christ through faith which cleanses us from all sin (e.g. 1John 1:7-9; Rev 1:5), although it cannot be denied that baptism communicates such imagery of washing away sin, and therefore it is closely associated with believing and regeneration in the New Testament and it was immediately done after coming to faith in the Apostolic church. Albert Barnes says on this passage, 'Sinners are represented in the Scriptures as defiled or polluted by sin. "To wash away the sins" denotes "the purifying of the soul from this polluted influence," 1Co 6:11; Rev 1:5; Rev 7:14; Isa 1:16; Psa 51:2, Psa 51:7.'^[4] There should be no delay to be baptized after coming to faith. There is no reason. Paul was clearly regenerated, came to faith and was justified prior to his baptism, as it may be seen from Acts 9:17-18 about him being filled with the Holy Spirit. After that, the only proper response is to identify with the Lord Who appeared to him by baptism. Baptism was a public act which identified Paul with the Lord and His people, even if there were not many people, yet, his baptism still would have been seen as a sign about an inward reality. Even John Calvin, the Paedobaptist, agrees that baptism came after Paul's faith. He wrote on this passage:

It is not to be doubted but that Ananias did faithfully instruct Paul in the principles of godliness; for he would not have baptized him if he had been void of true faith. But Luke passeth over many things, and doth briefly gather the sum. Therefore, seeing Paul doth understand that the promised redemption is now given in Christ, Ananias saith, for good causes, that nothing ought to stay him from being baptized. But when he saith, Why tarriest thou? he doth not chide Paul, neither doth he accuse him of slackness, but he doth rather amplify the grace of God by adding baptism.^[17]

Then Calvin cites Acts 10:47 where we have clearly baptism happening after faith. Moreover, there is also a call, as in this passage (Acts 10:47), for the urgency of baptism and of identifying with Christ, just like in Acts 22:16. What is also to be noted is the connection between Acts 10:47 and Acts 9:17-18. Paul is filled with the Holy Spirit and gets baptized, in the same way the Gentile believers receive the Holy Spirit and then they are water baptized. Washing away of sin is symbolized by baptism, but the way sins are washed away is by "calling on His name", i.e., by faith in Christ, Who by His blood washed all our sins away. Not faith plus water baptism. There is no efficacy in the water of washing away sin, but the efficacy

is in the Savior Whom we trust washing us by His blood. As John Gill noted:

"And wash away thy sins"; or "be washed from thy sins"; not that it is in the power of man to cleanse himself from his sins; the Ethiopian may as soon change his skin, or the leopard his spots, as a creature do this; nor is there any such efficacy in baptism as to remove the filth of sin; persons may submit unto it, and yet be as Simon Magus was, in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity;^[7]

The stress for the forgiveness and washing away of sins, i.e., justification, as Paul elsewhere says (Rom. 10:9-10), is not in the water but in calling upon the name of the Lord Christ.

Conclusion On The Things Signified By Baptism

We have seen from the texts above that water baptism signifies/typifies/shows/demonstrates union with Christ in His life, death, and resurrection. The believer is vitally united to their Lord. They were united with Him on the cross as well as in His resurrection and they come to share in the blessings of this union when they come to faith ([see more here](#)). Water baptism likewise signifies the fact that we are walking in newness of life with Christ our Lord, because of His resurrection and the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit. What is also signified by water baptism is the cleansing of sins. It is not the water, but the blood of Christ which cleanses us from all sin. But we are to go into the water to publicly identify with our Lord and show the spiritual realities in the physical, divine ordinance of water baptism.

Signs And Seal Of The Covenant

It is said in the Westminster Confession 28:1 that baptism is "a sign and seal of the covenant of grace" and in 27:1 that the "Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace." The 1689 omits these two things in their respective chapters, but does this entail a *denial* and *rejection* of these things? It does entail a denial of some aspects, but not an entire denial. Baptists reject that baptism functions as a *seal* of the Covenant of Grace, rather, it is the Holy Spirit who is named to be the seal on believers in the New Testament. The same is true for the Lord's Supper; it is not a seal of the New Covenant, but the Holy Spirit is the seal. But we do believe that the holy ordinances do function as *signs* of the New Covenant.

In 1689 Federalist understanding, the Covenant of Grace *is* the New Covenant before it was formally established in in the blood of Christ. In contrast, in Westminster Federalism, the New Covenant is an administration of the Covenant of Grace. Westminster Federalism teaches that the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic covenants were administrations of the Covenant of Grace. But the Covenant of Grace reaches its final administration and revelation in the New Covenant. But we, 1689 Federalists, deny this. We believe rather that the New Covenant/Covenant of Grace was revealed in these covenants and the blessings thereof given to the elect, but not because of the covenant they found themselves in, but because they believed the promise. We believe that the Covenant of Grace, prior to the cross, existed in *promise* form, and not an established covenant. As John Owen famously said, "Believers were saved under it [the Mosaic Covenant], but not by virtue of it. Sinners perished eternally under it, but by the curse of the original law of works."^[18] See more on 1689 Federalism and the case for it in [chapter 7](#).

Signs

What do we actually mean by a *sign* and a *seal*? A sign is something *visible* which points to inward and spiritual realities. The rainbow was the visible sign of the Noahic Covenant, it functioned as a token ("Something serving as an indication, proof, or expression of something else"^[19]) that God will not destroy the earth by water again (Gen. 9:13-17). Circumcision functioned as a visible sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, which symbolized the need to be cleansed from sin through blood spilling. For Abraham, it was

a sign and a seal of the faith which he had prior to circumcision (Rom. 4:11). The Sabbath functioned as a visible sign of the Mosaic Covenant. It functioned as a sign that God had set His people apart (Ex. 31:12-17; Ezek. 20:12, 20). There is no sign mentioned in connection with the Davidic or the New Covenant *explicitly*. But the throne would probably fit as a visible sign for David that he will always have someone from his posterity to sit on it and rule over Israel. As for the New Covenant, we only have two “positive and sovereign institution[s]” (1689 28:1). I admit from the start that we have no text in the New Testament identifying baptism or the Lord's Supper either as a sign individually, or signs together of the New Covenant. But does this then imply that we have no *reason* to see them as signs at all? Obviously not. We see them as signs of the New Covenant when we understand what a sign or a token is.

We noted above on Colossians 2:11-12 that we do not see baptism replacing/fulfilling circumcision as *the* sign of the New Covenant, as it is often alleged by our Presbyterian brethren, but rather, circumcision of the foreskin has its counterpart in the circumcision of the heart. Circumcision of the foreskin was not fulfilled in water baptism, but rather in the circumcision of the heart. There is nothing said there about water baptism being fulfilled and has become the sign of the covenant, as it functioned for the Abrahamic Covenant. That was not the purpose or intention of the Apostle. But we may indeed see baptism as a sign of the covenant because baptism *signifies* something. Our Confession says that baptism is a sign of fellowship and union with Christ, as we tried to show above. Baptism shows us the blessings of the covenant. In water baptism, we picture the spiritual union which we have in Christ and thus we have it as a sign of the blessings of the New Covenant. In baptism, we picture the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Christ and our union with Him. Therefore, baptism is a sign of the New Covenant.

The Lord's Supper likewise functions as a sign of the New Covenant. A sign to be celebrated and not neglected, because, with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, we remember the Lord's death until He comes (1Cor. 11:26). When we remember the Lord's death in the Lord's Supper, we have the Gospel in visible form. We remember His great love for His own and the sacrifice of His life for our sake. We experience spiritual union with our Savior. We remember and express our thanksgiving for His great salvation and the forgiveness which he offered us on the cross and offers us daily. We celebrate His grace, in that he, God over all blessed forever (Rom. 9:5), became a man to take our sins upon Himself and give us His perfect righteousness.

We have two sovereign institutions given to us by the Mediator of the New Covenant, the Lord Christ, to function as visible manifestations of the truths of the Gospel. They serve as visible signs and tokens to show inward spiritual realities in us. Baptism and the Lord's Supper function as the two signs of the New Covenant.

Seal

What is the seal of the New Covenant? What is a seal? A seal is an “engraved or inscribed stamp, used for marking an impression in wax or other soft substance, to be attached to a document, or otherwise used by way of authentication or security.”^[20] Dr. William Mounce says that:

Ancient documents were often sealed using a waxy substance not only to close them up and thereby protect the contents but also to authenticate the document by imprinting the seal (called a bulla) of the writer in the soft wax (cf. Jer. 32:11)...A seal in the ancient world established and expressed ownership (Gen. 4:15; Exod. 13:9; Deut. 6:8; Ezek. 9:4; Rev. 9:4; 13:16-17).^[21]

A seal functions as a mark of *ownership* and *security*, therefore, the seal of the New Covenant must (unless the New Testament is the exception, of course) function this way too. So, who or what is described in this way in the New Testament? There can only be one answer, namely: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is explicitly identified as the seal upon believers (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). In 2 Corinthians 1:22 it is said that God “has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit”. Commenting on the first part, John Gill

says:

the seal by which they are sealed, is not any of the ordinances, as circumcision under the Old Testament, or baptism, or the Lord's supper under the New; for these are no seals, nor are they ever so called; but the Spirit of God himself, as the Holy Spirit of promise; for the same who, in the next clause, is called the earnest, is the seal;^[7]

Moreover, in the same passage, the Spirit is said to be given as “a guarantee,” a “pledge,” or an “earnest.” A *pledge* is a “solemn binding promise to do, give, or refrain from doing something”^[22]. Both this passage and Ephesians 1:14 identify the Spirit as the *guarantee* given to believers, not the ordinances or anything else, but the Spirit is the *seal* and *pledge* of the New Covenant and its members. For more on the Spirit as the seal and pledge see [here](#). The signatories of the Confession, in an appendix to the Confession, said the following on this topic (excuse their bad spelling!):

If our brethren do suppose baptism to be the seal of the Covenant which God makes with every beleiver (of which the Scriptures are altogether silent) it is not our concern to contend with them herein; yet we conceive the seal of that Covenant is the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ in the particular and individual persons in whom he resides, and nothing else, neither do they or we suppose that baptism is in any such manner substituted in the place of circumcision, as to have the same (and no other) latitude, extent, or terms, then circumcision had; for that was suited only for the Male children, baptism is an ordinance suited for every beleiver, whether male, or femal. That extended to all the males that were born in *Abrahams* house, or bought with his money, equally with the males that proceeded from his own loynes; but baptisme is not so far extended in any true Christian Church that we know of, as to be administred to all the poor infidel servants, that the members thereof purchase for their service, and introduce into their families; nor to the children born of them in their house.^[23]

Often, Romans 4:11 along with Colossians 2:11-12 is used to argue that just like circumcision functioned as a sign and seal of the Abrahamic Covenant, so in the same way, baptism in the New Covenant functions as a sign and seal. Therefore, because the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant was given to infants, in like manner, the sign of the New Covenant ought to be given to infants of believing parents. Colossians 2 is used to show that circumcision is replaced with baptism and Romans 4 is used to show that circumcision of the flesh functioned as a sign and seal of the Abrahamic Covenant and was administered to infants.

There are several things to respond to. **First**, we reject the fundamental pillar of Westminster Federalism, namely, that there is one Covenant of Grace administered differently throughout the biblical covenants. Westminster Federalism sees the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic as essentially the same as the New Covenant. We, 1689 Federalists, deny this. There is an *essential difference* between the covenants. Only the New Covenant is the Covenant of Grace. Prior to the establishment of the New Covenant in Christ's blood, the Covenant of Grace existed in promise form. It was promised in every covenant and was typified in every covenant, yet it was not a formal covenant until ratified in the blood of its Mediator. Therefore, arguments along the lines of “infants received the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, therefore, they ought to receive the sign(s) of the New Covenant” will not work. **Secondly**, we've tried to show that using Colossians 2:11-12 to argue for circumcision being fulfilled or replaced by baptism, is invalid. Circumcision of the flesh has its counterpart in the circumcision of the heart under the New Covenant, not baptism. **Thirdly**, the sign and seal of the New Covenant is not baptism. The two signs of the New Covenant are Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the seal is the Holy Spirit. Finally, we believe that there is a misinterpretation of Romans 4:11 on the part of those who use it in this way. The text says:

Rom. 4:11-12 He [Abraham] received the **sign of circumcision** as a **seal of the righteousness** that **he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised**. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, 12 and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

It is assumed by our Presbyterian brethren that circumcision as a sign and seal functioned in this way for everyone. But this is not what Paul is saying. He explicitly identifies that circumcision functioned in this way for Abraham. He is not making a blank statement about anyone and infants in the Old Covenant. Rather, because Abraham was a believer, circumcision functioned as a sign and seal for the promises of God to him and the righteousness which he had by faith alone. Faith was the *prerequisite* for circumcision to be a sign and a seal for Abraham in this passage. Circumcision functioned as a seal of the righteousness which Abraham had by faith (Gen. 15:6). It was a token which made certain in his mind the promises of God to him and his posterity. It did not function in this way for Ishmael or Esau, but only to Abraham who was justified *before* receiving the sign of circumcision. Therefore, the use of Colossians 2:11-12 and Romans 4:11 to argue for replacement of circumcision by baptism, and that baptism is now a sign and seal of the covenant and ought to be given to the natural offspring of Christians, we believe is inaccurate. Paul says that Abraham was credo-circumcised. See a little more on this passage [here](#).

Conclusion On Signs And Seal

The New Covenant has two signs, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The seal of the New Covenant is the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit. A *sign* is something *visible* which *signifies* the realities of the covenant, while a *seal* is a stamp of *ownership* and *protection*.

Not Necessary For Salvation

Almost always, when generally speaking of baptism, the question has to be answered concerning the connection between water baptism and salvation. Is water baptism necessary for salvation? Does an unbaptized person get to heaven? Are the sins of an unbaptized person forgiven? The "person" of whom we are speaking is a believer. He believes that Jesus Christ died on the cross for him to take away His sins and through faith in Christ, he is justified before God on the basis of Christ's work alone. There are groups, which I consider heretical because they teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. They are basically saying that faith alone is not enough to save, but something else must be coupled with that faith for the person to be saved, and that thing is water baptism. This turns salvation into a works system, even if the thing to be done is nothing great. There are several texts which, when read in isolation from the rest of the Bible, seem to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. We will look at a few of these texts below, but first, let's see why baptism is not necessary for salvation.

Let us **first** begin with the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace and through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). Justification is by faith alone (Rom. 3:21). Baptism is a deed of faith, but it is not faith. It is something which the regenerate heart would want to do in obedience to their Lord, but not a thing/deed which "activates" the fruits of faith (forgiveness, justification). See [chapter 11](#) for more on justification by faith alone. In every discussion of justification by the Apostle Paul, baptism is never seen as a condition of justification or a prerequisite for the forgiveness of sins, but faith is everywhere in such discussions. This is my fundamental presupposition.

The **second** reason is the obvious example of the thief on the cross. He expressed faith in Christ and he was assured by the words of Christ that he will be with Christ in Heaven (Luke 23:39-43). He expressed simple faith in Christ and asked Him to remember Him and Christ did not refuse this man. He did not require water baptism or anything else from him. His simple faith saved him. This is a clear example of a person going to heaven who was not baptized.

The **third** reason is that various people are said to have the Spirit before being water baptized. Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit prior to his baptism (Acts 9:17-18). The first Gentile converts to the Lord, first receive His Spirit and then water baptism (Acts 10:44-48). We recognize that there are instances where water baptism occurs first and then the giving of the Spirit, but these are special occasions peculiar to that time in the foundation of the Church by the Apostles. The Lord had meant His Church to be built through the Apostles, so that's why they're the ones in Acts who have received the authority to give the Spirit by the laying on of hands. The Apostles John and Peter came and prayed for Samaria to receive the Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). Through the preaching of Peter, the Spirit fell upon the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48), although that was prior to their water baptism as noted above. Paul lays his hands on a group of about twelve men for them to receive the Spirit and His spiritual gifts after their water baptism in Christ's name (Acts 19:1-7). Yet the normative New Testament teaching, aside from these peculiar instances, is that believers receive the Spirit at the time of faith (Eph. 1:13-14; Gal. 3:2). Water baptism comes after receiving the Spirit, yet for the foundational period of the Church, God had desired to show the authority of the Apostles in withholding the Spirit and giving Him when they prayed or laid their hands on people.

The **fourth** reason is 1 Corinthians 1:14-17. Paul says, "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel". "But if baptism is necessary for salvation, why have you preached the Gospel to a wide audience, yet baptized a few?" In this passage we see baptism and salvation to be two separate things, in which baptism is not necessary for salvation. Baptism is not part of the Gospel, but it is a most proper response to it. The task of the Apostle, as given by His Lord, was to preach the Gospel, let others do the baptisms. The Apostle does not disregard baptism, but he has not received the commission of baptizing everyone who turns to the Lord. It would seem very strange, if baptism was necessary for salvation, for Paul to say, "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius". The Apostle, according to the theology which sees baptism as necessary for salvation, would be thanking God that only two persons were saved by his preaching, although, the passage implies that a lot more people heard the gospel proclamation from Paul, received it and yet were not baptized by him. They were not unsaved or unjustified until they were baptized by someone else, but they were, in fact, justified because Paul was sent to turn people from darkness to light and turn them to the Son.

Misused Texts

There are texts which, when read in isolation from the things which we noted, seem to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. We will take a look at a few. We have already taken a brief look at [Acts 22:16 above](#), so we will not deal with it.

Mark 16:16

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Mark 16:9-20 is widely regarded as an addition to the Gospel of Mark and not part of the original God-breathed text of the Bible, therefore, in a sense, what it teaches does not have authority since it is not part of the original. Yet, I believe what is said in these verses is not in contradiction to the Bible. My response to this text by those who say that baptism is necessary for salvation is brief.

Notice that the writer (whoever it was) makes a careful distinction between salvation and condemnation. It is said that people will be saved if they believe and are baptized, but, then we would expect the passage to say "but whoever does not believe *and is not baptized* will be condemned." But this is not how the passage goes, this is because baptism is not a condition of salvation or damnation. Baptism is the proper response to the Gospel and goes hand in hand with faith. There were no unbaptized believers in

the Apostolic Church, people did not wait to get baptized, but did that right away, just like on Pentecost with 3000 people! John Gill noted on this passage, saying, "baptism, though it is said to save by the resurrection of Christ, as it is a means of leading faith to Christ's resurrection for justification, yet has no casual influence upon salvation; it is not essential to it; the thief on the cross, went to heaven without it, and Simon Magus to hell with it; but it is the duty of every one that believes, and he that truly believes, ought to be baptized, and prove the truth of his faith, by his obedience to Christ, and such shall be saved"^[7]. GotQuestions Ministries, in answering this question likewise note the absence of "non-baptism" as condition of damnation:

While this verse tells us something about believers who have been baptized (they are saved), it does not say anything about believers who have *not* been baptized. In order for this verse to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation, a third statement would be necessary, viz., "He who believes and is not baptized will be condemned" or "He who is not baptized will be condemned." But, of course, neither of these statements is found in the verse.^[24]

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown note that 'Baptism is here put for the external signature of the inner faith of the heart, just as "confessing with the mouth" is in Rom 10:10; and there also as here this outward manifestation, once mentioned as the proper fruit of faith, is not repeated in what follows (Rom 10:11).'^[5] Using this passage to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation, is to go beyond what the passage is saying.

John 3:5

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born of water** and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

This passage, when read for the first time, seems to give the idea that what the Lord Jesus is speaking about is water baptism, but that cannot be for several reasons. The most obvious is that Christian baptism was not yet instituted. There was no baptism in the Name of the Father, Son, and Spirit yet, therefore, it is very strange for the Lord Jesus to be talking to Nicodemus about something which has not yet been instituted. Nicodemus, "a ruler of the Jews" (John 3:1), comes to the Lord Jesus in the night to inquire about Him and His signs and he acknowledges that God is with the Lord Jesus (John 3:2). But, the Lord Jesus' response is strange. He said to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) Then Nicodemus asks about how one is born again (John 3:4) and the new get the answer in the passage under consideration. The way that one is born again or born from above, is by water and the Spirit. What is meant by this?

This is an allusion to an Old Testament prophecy about the New Covenant. In Ezekiel 36 we read:

Ezk 36:25-27 **I will sprinkle clean water on you**, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And **I will put my Spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

This was the background of the Lord's answer. He was not speaking of something which did not yet exist, but He was speaking about the promise of the Old Testament about regeneration and the new birth. This new birth will be accomplished by the work of God. They will be born of/out of spiritual water of cleansing. It is most obvious that water is a sign of cleansing. We will be cleansed from our sins and our idolatry when the Lord sprinkles spiritual water upon us (this is no text for the mode of baptism!). But we will also be born from and out of His Spirit. He will be the Agent who does this work of regeneration in us and He will be given by God to us so that we may walk in His paths. His work will consist in the elect of God being born again, and being born from above, born from the Spirit. Therefore, what the Lord Jesus is saying is that anyone who is not regenerated will neither enter nor see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus does not understand these things and the Lord Jesus points out that he, as a teacher of Israel, should have understood these things (John 3:9-11). In essence, what the Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus is, "How is it, you, as a teacher of Israel, don't know your Old Testament well enough?" He should have known of these things, but he did not, because these things are spiritual and Nicodemus was natural (Col 2:14). As the discussion moves forward, the Lord Jesus points out the way of salvation to Nicodemus in John 3:16. Faith is the requirement for eternal life, not faith *and* baptism. Faith and faith alone is the requirement for salvation, but saving faith is never alone.

To assume that the water being spoken of here is the water of baptism is to ignore the Old Testament background of this text, and to say that Jesus was speaking of an ordinance which was not yet instituted.

Acts 2:38

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is one of the most common passages used by Oneness Pentecostals and others to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. At the face of it, we must admit, that we could understand the passage to be teaching that baptism is necessary for salvation. But the question is, is that the proper and contextual interpretation? I believe the answer to that question to be no. Let us first note the context. On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter preached a sermon in which the response of the people was, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37) and the Apostle Peter gives them the answer to their problem. It is the claim of those who hold to baptism being necessary for salvation that Peter is saying that these two things, 1) repentance and 2) water baptism, are necessary for salvation, otherwise people will not be saved. This interpretation, which is in contradiction not only to the rest of Apostolic teaching but to what is said in the same chapter, is to be rejected.

First of all, in the same chapter, it is declared, on the basis of Joel's prophecy, that "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). There is no mention here of baptism or anything else, but simply faith in calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus. Moreover, in Acts 10:43, faith is said to be the means of forgiveness. I believe that biblical faith presupposes repentance and biblical repentance presupposes faith. They're always together. There is not one without the other. They are the two sides of the same coin. Therefore, when Peter calls upon the people to repent, he is at the same time commanding them to call upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21; Rom 10:9-13). That repentance is the essential part of receiving forgiveness of sins is seen from Acts 26:18 (turning from darkness to light), and also from Acts 10:43 where faith is explicitly named to be the means of receiving forgiveness. Not only this, but the passage itself links repentance and forgiveness of sins together. In the Greek, the word *repent* is in the plural and so is "everyone of you" and "forgiveness of your sins," while on the other hand, the command to be baptized is singular. This indicates that repentance is directly connected with the forgiveness of sins and it is presented as the condition for the forgiveness of sins. The passage would be read as: "All of

you repent, each of you get baptized, and all of you will receive forgiveness.” Repentance is what will bring forgiveness of sins. GotQuestions presents this as:

Therefore, when you take into account the change in person and plurality, essentially what you have is “You (plural) repent for the forgiveness of your (plural) sins, and let each one (singular) of you be baptized (singular).” Or, to put it in a more distinct way: “You all repent for the forgiveness of all of your sins, and let each one of you be baptized.”^[25]

This is similar to what is said of John's baptism, it was “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). It was a baptism whose purpose was to demonstrate that people were repentant. Peter does not connect repentance and baptism to the forgiveness of sins, but repentance only. True repentance will produce obedience to the Gospel and the ordinance of Christ to publicly identify with Him. To understand this singular passage, in isolation from the rest of the Bible, to teach that baptism is essential for salvation, is to misuse Scripture. In the next chapter, Peter preaching to Israelites again mentions nothing of baptism, but he does call them to repentance “that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). And so they did preach elsewhere, never making water baptism an essential part of or a requirement for salvation.

Galatians 3:27

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

This passage is similar to Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:11-12 in which baptism is used metaphorically to speak about union in Christ and not water baptism. Water baptism is, in fact, a sign and a picture of union with Christ, but it is not the cause thereof. The simple fact is that there are many who have been baptized but have not put on Christ. They will be damned, even though they had got themselves wet. To be baptized “into” Christ is to be closely identified with Him. In the same way, the Israelites closely were identified with Moses when they were baptized “into Moses” (1Cor. 10:2). To be baptized into someone is to be closely identified with that person. This is not to be confused with Matthew 28:19 where it is said that Christians should be baptized *into* or *in* “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. There, not only identification with God is implied, but also literal water baptism as the book of Acts shows. Charles J. Ellicott notes, “To be baptised “into Christ” is something more than merely “to be baptised in the name of Christ.” It implies the contracting of a very close and intimate relation, the nature of which is expressed in the phrase which follows.”^[26] To be baptized into Christ is to be closely identified with Him and, as the passage says, to put on Christ. To put on His character and His sentiments, being united with Him and to seek to be like Him. It is to have our identity in Him. Therefore, every true believer, even if not water baptized, is in fact baptized into Christ. They are in union with Christ, even if they have not yet taken the step to signify this union publicly. They should.

Titus 3:5

he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

Wayne Grudem writes that this passage is not speaking of water baptism, but “the washing of regeneration,” explicitly stating that it is a spiritual giving of new life. Water baptism is simply not

mentioned in the passage. [emphasis original]^[27] He is right. There is not an iota said here about water baptism. The Greek word for baptism is not used here, neither is the Greek word used here for “washing” ever used of baptism in the New Testament. The word is only used here and in Ephesians 5:26. There may be an allusion to baptism and what is signified by baptism, but this passage, along with Ephesians 5:26, are not about water baptism, but about spiritual cleansing, the thing *signified* by water baptism. The washing in Ephesians 5 happens by the Word of God and not by being baptized.

This “washing of regeneration” is the work of renewal and recreation by the Holy Spirit which was promised in the Old Testament (Ezek. 36:25-27). He is the Agent Who brings the new birth to the elect (John 3:3-8). Our works are explicitly excluded in the beginning of the passage, therefore, no act of baptism can bring the regenerating work of the Spirit to pass, but the Spirit works as He pleases and on whom He pleases. The way that God saved us was “by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” God saved us by regenerating us and giving us the Spirit in accordance with His promise in the Old Testament. This washing and regeneration are not effects produced because of water baptism, but because of the Spirit's work in God's elect. John Gill notes:

by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; by the former is meant, not the ordinance of water baptism; for that is never expressed by washing, nor is it the cause or means of regeneration; the cause being the Spirit of God, and the means the word of God: and besides, persons ought to be regenerated before they are baptized; and they may be baptized, and yet not regenerated, as Simon Magus; nor is it a saving ordinance, or a point of salvation; nor can it be opposed to works of righteousness, as this washing is; for that itself is a work of righteousness; see Mt 3:15 and if persons were saved by that, they would be saved by a work of righteousness, contrary to the text itself: but regenerating grace is meant, or a being born of water, and of the Spirit; that is, of the grace of the Spirit, comparable to water for its purity and cleansing virtue: hence such who are regenerated and sanctified, are said to be washed and cleansed, having their hearts purified by faith, and their consciences purged from sin by the blood of Christ^[27]

Philip Schaff notes that “**Renewing** is added to further define ‘regeneration.’ The word occurs in Rom 12:2. It describes the moral change which passes on a man when he becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. [emphasis original]”^[26] Regeneration and renewal is the work of God the Spirit in the elect of God to bring them to faith and vital union with their Savior. The HCSB translates this clause with “through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit” and notes:

Salvation comes **not by works** but through the washing of **regeneration** and **renewal** by the **Holy Spirit**. Some interpreters have understood this as saying that baptism (“the washing”) causes salvation, but in the context human deeds are clearly downplayed and the emphasis is on divine action and initiative. The **washing** described here is the spiritual cleansing that is symbolized outwardly by water baptism.^[27]

Yes, we believe that baptism symbolizes regeneration and union with Christ, but it is not an instrument nor cause of regeneration. Even if the “washing of regeneration” is taken to be a reference to the waters of baptism, which I deny, even then, “Baptismal regeneration can only be found here by substituting the sign for the thing signified.”^[28] The one baptized pictures their regeneration and union with their Lord by it but does not owe their regeneration to baptism, but to the work of the Holy Spirit in them.

1 Peter 3:21

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

To me, it is an utter sign of disrespect to the Word of God when passages are quoted partially or out of context, and the use of this passage by those who believe in baptismal regeneration is a perfect example. I've seen a couple of people online partially quoting "Baptism...now saves you" and act like this was the only thing that Peter said. The obvious thing that they want to communicate by this is that baptism is necessary for salvation, but reading the verse as a whole, this idea is refuted by the passage itself!

Baptism does in fact save, but the question we must ask ourselves is, "how does baptism save?" The Apostle Peter was just writing about the Flood and he says that baptism corresponds to the flood waters. Albert Barnes, the Presbyterian, noted on this passage, saying, "The meaning here is, that baptism corresponded to, or had a resemblance to, the water by which Noah was saved; or that there was a use of water in the one case which corresponded in some respects to the water that was used in the other; to wit, in effecting salvation."^[4] The way that baptism saves is "not as a removal of dirt from the body." What might this mean? I believe the obvious answer is that Peter is speaking of sin as dirt of the body. Water Baptism does not cleanse or remove sin from the body. John Gill noted that the design of baptism is not "to take away either original or actual sin; this only the blood of Christ can do, and it is not a mere external cleansing of the body"^[7]. Sometime in the early church, some thought that baptism cleansed sin or original sin from infants, but this idea is refuted by the Apostle. Albert Barnes noted on this clause:

Not a mere external washing, however solemnly done. No outward ablution or purifying saves us, but that which pertains to the conscience. This important clause is thrown in to guard the statement from the abuse to which it would otherwise be liable, the supposition that baptism has of itself a purifying and saving power. To guard against this, the apostle expressly declares that he means much more than a mere outward application of water.^[4]

Water Baptism does *signify* and *typify* regeneration and salvation, but it is not the or a cause of salvation, but only Christ the Lord and faith in Him is the cause of salvation. Believers are not saved by baptism, but by what baptism signifies, the death and resurrection of the Savior. Rather than removing sin and cleansing us from unrighteousness, water baptism is "an appeal to God for a good conscience." What does this mean? The NASB Study Bible notes, "The act of baptism is a commitment on the part of the believer in all good conscience to make sure that what baptism symbolizes will become a reality in his life."^[29] In baptism, we make a commitment to walk in the new life which baptism symbolizes (Rom. 6:4) and to follow in the steps of our Savior, being united with Him in His life also and walking in the same way as He did (1John 2:6). In baptism, we make a public profession of faith and publicly identify with our Savior, therefore, we should seek to live holy so as not to dishonor our Lord and bring shame to His Name. John Gill wrote:

for, to baptism, profession of faith in Christ, and of the doctrine of Christ in a pure conscience, is requisite; and in baptism persons make a public confession of God, and openly put on Christ before men: the sense seems plainly this; that then is baptism rightly performed, and its end answered,

when a person, conscious to himself of its being an ordinance of Christ, and of his duty to submit to it, does so upon profession of his faith in Christ, in obedience to his command, and "with" a view to his glory; in doing which he discharges a good conscience towards God: and being thus performed, it saves^[7]

Wayne Grudem writes concerning 1 Peter 3:21, saying:

We could paraphrase Peter's statement by saying, "Baptism now saves you—not the outward physical ceremony of baptism but the inward spiritual reality which baptism represents." In this way, Peter guards against any view of baptism that would attribute automatic saving power to the physical ceremony itself.

Peter's phrase, "an appeal to God for a clear conscience," is another way of saying "a request for forgiveness of sins and a new heart." When God gives a sinner a "clear conscience," that person has the assurance that every sin has been forgiven and that he or she stands in a right relationship with God (Heb. 9:14 and 10:22 speak this way about the cleansing of one's conscience through Christ). To be baptized rightly is to make such an "appeal" to God: it is to say, in effect, "Please, God, as I enter this baptism which will cleanse my body outwardly I am asking you to cleanse my heart inwardly, forgive my sins, and make me right before you." Understood in this way, baptism is an appropriate symbol for the beginning of the Christian life.^[30]

What saves is not water baptism, but the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are saved thanks to and through the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 4:25). Peter says at the beginning of the Epistle that God has "caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1Pet. 1:3). Not through water baptism or any other work, but thanks to and through the resurrection of our victorious Savior.

Thus we see that these passages which some use to argue for the necessity of baptism for salvation are misinterpreted and isolated from the rest of Holy Writ.

§2 The Proper Subjects Of Baptism

2. Those who do actually **profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ**, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance. **1**
 1. Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:4-6; Luke 3:3-6; Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; John 4:1-2; 1 Cor. 1:13-17; Acts 2:37-41; 8:12-13, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 11:16; 15:9; 16:14-15, 31-34; 18:8; 19:3-5; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21; Jer. 31:31-34; Phil. 3:3; John 1:12-13; Matt. 21:43

Professing and Repentant Believers

All Baptists hold to the teaching that only those who *believe* should be baptized. Even Presbyterians agree, except for infants, those who are baptized should profess the Christian faith. They also acknowledge that there is neither command nor example of an infant baptized, therefore, the passages which I will present of believers being baptized, they will not object to. But they will try to make an exception for infants on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant and the inclusion of infants therein, but we

will come to that later.

The Great Commission

Matt. 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, 20 **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you**. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Here we see in the commission of Christ to His disciples that He calls them to go into all the world and make the world His disciples. His disciples are to be taught everything that He commanded the Apostles, but, at the beginning of this process of discipleship, there is an important commandment to be followed, namely, being baptized. As the Apostles preach the Gospel they should likewise call upon the people to be baptized in “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” and to make a public profession of their faith. Notice that the time of baptism is when they became disciples of Christ. They first become disciples and then they are baptized, but their discipleship does not stop at the moment of their baptism, but rather continues. Their baptism should be the first step of discipleship as they seek to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom and observe all that He commanded them.

Hercules Collins, one of the signers of this Confession, in 1691, wrote a short book entitled “Believers Baptism from Heaven, and of Divine Institution. Infants Baptism from Earth, and Human Invention”, in which he makes the following observations on the Great Commission texts from Mark 16:16 and Matthew 28:19:

Doct 1. It's the unalterable Will of Jesus Christ, who is King and Law-giver to his Gospel-Church, that all Persons believe before they are baptized.

Doct. 2. It's the indispensable Duty of all true Believers to be Baptized.

I call it an indispensable Duty, because I know no Place where our Lord hath left this to the Liberty of Believers to do it, or leave it undone, as best pleaseth them.^[31]

Baptism is not an optional thing in the Christian life, rather, it should take place at the beginning of the Christian life. Moreover, it is the duty of every true believer to be baptized. Negligence of this ordinance is a sin and is disobedience to our Lord and Master. For those calling the name of Christ, but have not been properly baptized yet, what is hindering you? Isn't your Lord's command and example enough motivation for you? What are you waiting for? To stop sinning before you get baptized? In that case, you won't ever be baptized! Obey your Master, and enter the waters of baptism and signify your union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection! As Collins observed, “Nothing sure can be more obliging Believers unto Obedience, than their Saviour's Precept and Precedent.”^[31]

The Book Of Acts

In the Book of Acts, we see that several times that repentance and/or faith is the prerequisite for baptism. Let us begin at the very start.

On the day of **Pentecost**, after Peter preached a sermon through which God brought 3000 souls to Christ, it is said that “those who **received his word were baptized**” (Acts 2:41). No infants were baptized, but only those who received the word preached and heeded the command to be baptized (Acts 2:38) were baptized by water. An explicit statement is made about the subjects of baptism and those are identified as those who received the preaching of the Gospel.

Philip went and proclaimed the Gospel to the Samaritans and it is said that “when **they believed Philip**

as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:13). They who believed Philip’s preaching and message, they were the same ones who were baptized. But, we have in this instance Simon Magus who was *not* a believer but went on with the crowd and later showed his depravity. Yet, it remains to be that only those who wanted to be baptized and who “believed” the word preached, were baptized. Only professing believers were baptized.

There is another episode with Philip and baptism. This is the one with the Ethiopian **eunuch**. Philip tells the eunuch “the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35) and explains the Gospel to him from Isaiah and elsewhere from the Scriptures. The conversation was not shallow and without substance, for it is the eunuch, upon seeing a body of water, says to Philip, “What prevents me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36) He was so schooled in the doctrine of Christ that he knew baptism to be a necessary step in obedience and the desire came from him. Oh, how I long that this would be the desire of every believer to go into the waters of baptism for their Lord.

Then we have **Paul** in chapter 9 who is filled with the Holy Spirit before being baptized (Acts 9:17-18). Paul was saved and then was called upon to symbolize washing his sins by baptism (Acts 22:16). But what cleansed his sins was the “calling on his name.”

The **Gentiles** in Acts 10 were first Spirit-baptized and then water baptized. When Peter saw that God had clearly given them repentance leading to life, Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (Acts 10:47). It seems that Peter thought to have the Holy Spirit was the prerequisite of being “a proper subject” for baptism. Since they have the Spirit, there is nothing to stand in their way and publicly identifying with the Lord in baptism and signifying what the Lord did to them by giving them the Spirit (regeneration).

It is said of **Lydia** that “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (Acts 16:14), and then “she was baptized, and her household as well” (Acts 16:15). Sometimes this passage or the example of Lydia’s household baptism is used in support of infant baptism. In all honesty, I find trying to search for support for infant baptism from household baptism texts to be a desperate attempt. The clear implication of the text is that only those were baptized who believed, consistent with what we have seen up to this point from Acts. Some exegetical or lexical argument must be made that a household *must* include an *infant*, but there is no such thing! There is no mention of her husband or any children, her household would include anyone living under her roof, servants included who also expressed faith, like Lydia, in the message preached by Paul.

The **Philippian jailer** is also an example which is sometimes used in support of infant baptism because it is said that “he was baptized at once, he and all his family” (Acts 16:33). But this is not correct. Again, an exegetical or lexical argument must be made that this household or any other included infants in it, but there is none. In fact, the passage about the Philippian jailer is clear. When the jailer asks the way of salvation, Paul and Silas answer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:32). The call to faith is both for him and for his household. Moreover, Luke explicitly mentions that Paul and Silas “spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house” (Acts 16:33). They receive the Gospel and then, after washing Paul’s and Silas’ wounds, the jailer and all his family get baptized at once. Faith preceded the baptism of his entire household and the Gospel was preached to all of them. There is not a hint of any infant here, nor that any of his family did not know the Lord.

Crispus believed in Christ along with “his entire household” as well as many other Corinthians and then “were [they] baptized” (Acts 18:8). Here we have yet another household baptism in which it is explicitly affirmed that his entire household believed in the Lord. Moreover, in the last part of the verse, when the Corinthians came to faith, it is after they believed that they were baptized. Not before or during. They believed and then they publicly professed the faith in baptism. Strangely enough, I’ve never seen this “household baptism” used by our Paedobaptist brethren with that of Lydia or the Philippian

jailer. I wonder why? Is it because the passage so clearly says, "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, **believed in the Lord, together with his entire household**"? As in the rest of Acts, we see here again that faith precedes baptism and is a prerequisite for it. The Apostles did not baptize households based on the faith of one person. Nor do we have any evidence that these households had infants in them. Furthermore, while it is not often mentioned, but there is an important difference between *infants* and *children*. We do not deny that children may be baptized, we deny that infants, who are unable to believe and profess the faith, should be baptized. A lot of believers have grown and been taught the Word of God from their youth and God has saved them from their youth. We don't deny that these people the waters of baptism. We deny the waters of baptism to those who cannot profess the faith.

In **Acts 19** we have the disciples who had the Gospel preached to them by someone who did not mention the Holy Spirit or Christian baptism, and so, when Paul explains to them the baptism of John in which they were baptized, then they get **baptized in Jesus' name** (Acts 19:5) and **received the Spirit by the laying on of hands of Paul** (Acts 19:6). Here we have one of the unique instances in which God did not directly give the Spirit to believers (Eph. 1:13-14), but waited so as to authenticate the Apostles. Paul explained to them that the point of John's baptism was to point people to Christ. Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus" (Acts 19:4). Therefore, the disciples, upon hearing this, get "**baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**" (Acts 19:4). They first understood the difference between the baptism of John and of Christ, believed in Christ and then got baptized.

Clearly, the narrative passages show that only those who received the word and were repentant were baptized. This does not mean that there were no false professors. The doctrine of believers' baptism alone does not teach that we can see who is a true believer or not. Rather, all who were and are baptized, are baptized on the basis of their testimony. They profess to have repented and believed on Christ, therefore, they are proper subjects of baptism. If their profession is false, although they were able to deceive us, they did not deceive the Lord. Their condemnation is just.

As a summary, we have this table:

Acts	Who were baptized
Acts 2:41	"those who received his word were baptized".
Acts 8:13	They who "believed...[the] good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ".
Acts 8:35-36	The Ethiopian eunuch who had "the good news about Jesus" preached to him.
Acts 9:17-18	Saul, after being "filled with the Holy Spirit...was baptized".
Acts 10:47	The Gentiles "who have received the Holy Spirit".
Acts 16:15-16	Lydia whose heart the Lord opened and her household.
Acts 16:31-34	They who had the word of the Lord spoken to them and believed in God.
Acts 18:8	Crispus, his entire household, and many Corinthians, "believed and were baptized."
Acts 19:4-6	The Ephesian disciples understood the meaning of John's baptism, which called upon the people to believe in Jesus, and then were baptized.
Acts 22:16	See Acts 9:17-18.

The Significance Of Baptism

We have argued above that baptism essentially signifies union with Christ, and is it not appropriate that only those who are actually united to Christ, be the subjects of the ordinance? Obviously, we cannot see into people's hearts, but we can listen to what they say and how they live, and on the basis of that baptize them. They may deceive us, but they will not deceive God, and their condemnation is just. But we should not willingly administer the ordinance of baptism to those we have no reason to believe that they're believers. We have no reason to believe that infants have faith or are united with Christ (Total Depravity

anyone?). They may, in fact, come to faith when they're older, but as they remain, we have no reason to believe that they are proper subjects of this solemn ordinance.

Could it be said of infants, when baptism is administered to them, that they are united with Christ in his death, are buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-5)? Obviously, we cannot, but that is the significance of baptism and that is what it signifies. We must find a distinct meaning for baptism, which is not true of all who have that ordinance administered to them if we want to maintain infant baptism. It is admitted by our Presbyterian brethren that baptism does not save, nor does any infant become a Christian by being baptized. Rather, they enter into the covenant of grace in an *external* manner and enjoy its *external* blessings. Yet we deny such membership in the Covenant of Grace. All who belong to the covenant are regenerated and Spirit-dwelt believers. Church membership does not equal membership in the New Covenant. There are many who are church members, but are sons of perdition and not members of the New Covenant in any way. They may enjoy the blessings of being with believers and under the teaching of the Word of God, but that doesn't make them members, in any sense, of the New Covenant, because I believe that the New Covenant doesn't have multiple ways of membership.

The significance of baptism argues for believers' only baptism. The ordinance should be administered only to those who profess to have experienced what the ordinance signifies, regeneration, remission of sins and union with Christ. A. H. Strong wrote:

As marriage should never be solemnized except between persons who are already joined in heart and with whom the outward ceremony is only the sign of an existing love, so baptism should never be administered except in the case of those who are already joined to Christ and who signify in the ordinance their union with him in his death and resurrection.^[32]

Dr. Wayne Grudem notes that "the outward symbol of *beginning* the Christian life should only be given to those who *show evidence* of having begun the Christian life."^[33] Essentially, each of the things which we argued that water baptism signifies, could not be applied to infants, therefore, baptism must mean something very different for infants and for those who profess faith. But about a distinct meaning of baptism for infants only, Holy Writ knows nothing.

The Covenantal Argument

Then there is the Reformed Baptist covenantal argument for the proper subjects of baptism. We have very briefly argued above for the understanding that baptism and the Lord's Supper are signs of the New Covenant, therefore, this argument is basically that only those who belong to the covenant should be subjects of its signs. Baptism and the Lord's Supper ought only to be given to those who are in the New Covenant. From a human point of view, we must judge with the knowledge which we have of the person and of the profession of that person whether they belong to the New Covenant or not. But we should not knowingly administer the ordinances and signs of the New Covenant to those we have no reason to believe that they're members of the New Covenant.

Reformed Baptist in general, both 1689 Federalists and others, hold that the New Covenant is a perfect salvific covenant which has only regenerate, justified, and Spirit-dwelt believers as its members. The New Covenant, unlike the Old Covenant(s), is not a mixed covenant of believers and unbelievers. There are no Isaac's and Ismael's, or Jacob's and Esau's in the New Covenant. The New Covenant consists of only born-again believers. We need to give our reasons for why we think that only believers are part of the New Covenant, unlike the previous Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants which included unbelievers in it. More about the New Covenant could be read in [chapter 7](#) about the covenants.

The fundamental text for this position is Hebrews 8:6-13 ([see here](#)).

Heb. 8:6-13 But as it is, **Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent** than the old as **the covenant he mediates is better**, since it is **enacted on better promises**. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. 8 For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when **I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah**, 9 **not like the covenant that I made with their fathers** on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they **did not continue in my covenant**, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: **I will put my laws into their minds**, and **write them on their hearts**, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 11 And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for **they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest**. 12 For **I will be merciful toward their iniquities**, and **I will remember their sins no more**." 13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

We've come to this passage a lot of times in our commentary on the Confession, but I will limit my comments here for the present purpose, namely: who are the members of the New Covenant.

1. Christ is said to obtain a **ministry much more excellent and better** than the ministry of the old Mosaic Covenant. The reason for this is twofold: 1) the covenant He mediates is better, and 2) the covenant is enacted on better promises. With the establishment of the New Covenant in Christ's blood, the Mosaic Covenant is being called "old" and is "ready to vanish away" (v. 13). This ministry which He has received takes place in heaven, in the true Temple of God, not in the type on the earth, but in the anti-type in heaven (Heb. 8:1-2). The ministry of the priests in the Temple in Jerusalem points to the ministry of the true and faithful High Priest in Heaven. The reason that this ministry is better is based on the fact that the covenant, on which this ministry is based, is better. The Mosaic and the New are not the same, but the one is better than the other. Moreover, the Lord Jesus is explicitly named to be Mediator only of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). Some Presbyterians suppose that the Lord Jesus was a mediator for the previous covenants also since all the previous covenants were essentially the same as the New Covenant, only different in outward form. But this is wrong. Clearly, in the words "the covenants he mediates is better" is implied that He did not mediate for the old covenant. We will come back later on the mediation of Christ in the New Covenant.

2. The **Old Covenant was broken**. "if that first covenant had been faultless", "they did not continue in my covenant". The people were unfaithful to God and broke His covenant. If Jeremiah was referring to any specific instance, the incident with the golden calf would have been a proper episode in Israel's apostasy. Then the meaning would be that the people had been breaking the covenant since the beginning of its establishment. This breaking of the covenant and the disobedience toward God we see in the pages of the Old Testament. They always were a disobedient people and whored after false gods. This covenant included in it both true believers like Moses, and reprobates like Korah; Samuel and Eli's sons; Josiah and Jeroboam, and so on. They were in the covenant because they had been circumcised and lived in Israel, not because they were true believers. Faith was not a prerequisite for membership in the Old Covenant, rather, ethnicity and the sign of circumcision was. But the New Covenant is said to be "not like the covenant that I made with their fathers". This means then that the New Covenant will be an unbreakable covenant, since it is mentioned that the Old Covenant was not faultless, it was broken and the people were faithless. The New Covenant is unlike the Old, at least in these aspects directly mentioned in this passage. This is why the New Covenant is a *better* covenant because it is an unbreakable and an infallible covenant. This means that apostasy from the New Covenant is impossible. There are no New Covenant members who will end up in Hell. There will be a lot of church members in Hell, but not New Covenant members. For a covenant member to be lost means that Christ was not a perfect Mediator and the New Covenant was, in fact, like the Old Covenant in which a lot of people apostatized from the true God. In summary, the New Covenant is unbreakable, faultless, and

its members will, in fact, continue in God's covenant. There is clearly a contrast in this passage between both covenants and not merely in the outward things, but in their essence.

3. The reason why the New Covenant is better is because of **Christ Who is its Mediator**. Therefore, we need to know a few things about what Christ, as a Mediator, does in this covenant. Christ is the High Priest of God's people who offered Himself as the sacrifice that atones for their sins. After His work of sacrifice, He entered into Heaven to intercede for His people. As Reformed people, we know that there is a perfect connection between those for whom Christ died (the elect) and those for whom He mediates (the elect). They are the same group. The work of mediation and intercession is the continuation of His sacrifice and is for the same people for whom His sacrifice was offered. He is the Mediator and thus, all who are called of God receive the promised eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15). He stands between God and man (1Tim. 2:5) and mediates for His people. The Lord Jesus cannot fail in His mediation and the Father never rejects Him (e.g. John 11:42). Therefore, since He is a Mediator, He must be a Mediator of a particular covenant. Mediators are always mediators based on an agreement or a covenant. The covenant which He mediates is the One established in His blood, the New Covenant. The people on whose behalf He gave His life were His covenant people, those given to Him from all eternity by the Father. He is said to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:17). All His covenant people, for whom He mediates, have their sins propitiated—a satisfaction has been made on their behalf for their sins. The book of Hebrews is thoroughly covenantal. The Lord Jesus is “a forerunner on our behalf” (Heb. 6:19), His people, appearing before God for us. A new hope and a new way has been opened for the people to draw near to God, by the abolishment of the Old Covenant system and replacing it with the New Covenant ministry (Heb. 7:18-19). It is a better hope, because “Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises” (Heb. 8:6). The Lord Jesus is said to be the surety of a better covenant (Heb 7:22 KJV). He is the guarantor and guarantee that the New Covenant is better than the Old. Jesus is the guarantee that the New Covenant is better. The New Covenant is better because of Jesus being its Mediator and High Priest. Because He is everlasting and has an indestructible life, His priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek is permanent and He makes intercession for His people (Heb. 7:23-25). Since He is the surety of the New Covenant, the High Priest who lives permanently, consequently, He is able to save completely those who draw near to God through Him. The reason? Since He “ever liveth to make intercession for them.” The people for whom He made His sacrifice and for Whom He intercedes and mediates are one and the same, and they are all saved because of His sacrifice and intercession which follows His sacrifice. The basis of His mediation and intercession is His sacrifice. We, as Reformed people (I'm speaking both to Presbyterians and Baptists), believe that Christ only died and intended to save the elect, therefore, they only will be saved. But what I'm trying to show from Hebrews is that 1) Christ made a sacrifice for His covenant people, 2) Christ intercedes and mediates on the basis of His sacrifice for His covenant people, and finally 3) Christ is able to save completely those for whom He mediates. Therefore, since we know that it is only for the elect that Christ made His sacrifice, mediates and makes intercession, that means that only the elect are part of the New Covenant. Christ intercedes and mediates on behalf of everyone in the New Covenant established in His blood because His sheep are those whom He died for—His people whom He came to save (Matt. 1:21). There are no members of the Covenant for whom Christ does not mediate or fails in His mediation. All His covenant people are brought to salvation completely. In Hebrews 9:11-14, Christ is said to enter by His blood into the heavenly Temple and secure an eternal redemption and “purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” This serves as the “therefore” that Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant who gives the called of God the “promised eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15). Christ is said to have offered a sacrifice that sanctified the people and perfects all who are being sanctified (Heb. 10:10-14; 13:12). We could go on, but this is enough to establish that the people for whom Christ is the Mediator are His covenant people, and His mediation is perfect which brings people to eternal salvation. In summary, Christ died for His covenant people, Christ intercedes and mediates for His covenant people, and Christ brings all His covenant people to salvation, without losing any.

4. The **blessings of the New Covenant**. Now we go back to Hebrews 8:10-11. The Lord now gives us a description of the New Covenant. There is a fundamental difference and a new aspect to this covenant

which is absent in the others. **(1)** The moral law of God will no longer be on tablets of stone, but it will be on tablets of heart (2Cor. 3:3). The Law of God will become a part of our nature, it will be written on our hearts and our minds and the Lord will give us the ability and willingness to obey (Ezek. 36:27). This is not said about the other covenants. This is a unique promise of the New Covenant. This is the circumcision of the heart. To be sure, circumcision of the heart is sometimes commanded by God (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4), but it is not granted as part of the Old Covenant. Certainly, believers under the Old Covenant, were circumcised of heart and had the Law of God written on their hearts, but not in virtue of the Abrahamic or Mosaic Covenant, but by virtue of the *retroactive* New Covenant or the Covenant of Grace, which was in promise form before its formal establishment in Christ's blood. The members of this covenant will have the Law upon their hearts and minds, it will be part of their nature, unlike Old Covenant Israel which had the Law merely in stone, and some of them, who were elect and true believers, had the law in their hearts (e.g. Ps. 40:8). **(2)** God being our God and we being His people is not a unique promise for the New Covenant, but part of the Abrahamic as well as the Mosaic Covenants. But obviously, this promise is relative to the covenant in which it is given. Our relationship with God, under the New Covenant, is much greater than the saints of old experienced. We have the completed Scriptures, we have Christ not in the shadows, but in the realities. We have a greater knowledge of God and His Father heart and so on. Though this is not a unique aspect of the New Covenant, yet the intimacy between the redeemed and God is greater in the New Covenant. **(3)** Another unique part of the New Covenant is the fact that there will be no need to teach people, who are part of the covenant, about salvation (knowing the Lord). This obviously does not mean we do not need to study the Bible and learn about God, but rather, the point of Hebrews 8:11 is more specific, namely, the Israel with whom God will make this New Covenant will all know Him salvifically. They will not merely hear about God and know Him among many other gods, but they will know Him intimately and be among His children and elect. That this fact concerns everyone in the covenant is seen in the way that it is described, it is said to be "all shall know me from the least of them to the greatest." Even if there are children in the Covenant, they will know the Lord. The old ones in the Covenant will likewise know the Lord and everyone in between. Everyone who is part of this Covenant knows the Lord salvifically. **(4)** The reasons that all the people in the Covenant will intimately and salvifically know the true God is because He will forgive their sins. As we saw above, the Lord Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice on behalf of His covenant people, for whom also, on the basis of His sacrifice, He mediates and intercedes. All who find themselves in this New Covenant, will have their sins forgiven. The blessings of the New Covenant include regeneration, the writing of the Law on the heart and the mind, the salvific and intimate knowledge of God, and the forgiveness of sins.

5. Therefore, on the basis of these considerations we believe that the membership of the New Covenant, which is the Covenant of Grace established in Christ's blood, is **restricted to the elect alone**. They enter the Covenant by faith when they are regenerated and come to experience its blessings. Since Baptism and the Lord's Supper are signs of the New Covenant, they should be restricted to members of the New Covenant *alone*. All members of the New Covenant are regenerate, Spirit-dwelt believers. We do not have special glasses to see who is truly regenerate and who is not, yet, if we see people professing the Name of Christ and living in His ways, we should not withhold the ordinances from them. They may be able to deceive us, but they will receive their condemnation from God, because they cannot deceive Him. We were deceived, but we did not *willingly* and *knowingly* administer the signs of the Covenant to unbelievers. This is in contrast to infant baptism, where we have no reason to suppose the infant is a believer and in contradiction to Scripture where we learn that faith and repentance are a prerequisite for baptism. But we also should keep in mind the covenantal argument, namely, only those who belong to the New Covenant should have the ordinances thereof administered to them, and those who belong to the New Covenant are born-again believers and these *alone*. Not many Baptists have become Baptists because of the "covenantal argument," yet we have our doctrine strengthened and confirmed by it.

Paedobaptist Argumentation

What I'm referring to here are primarily Presbyterian ways of arguing for infant baptism built on the idea

of the “single covenant of grace, multiple administrations” view. We’ve already argued for the invalidity of infant baptism by positively arguing for credobaptism, that is, baptism upon profession of faith. I’ve also tried to provide a covenantal argument why only regenerate believers should receive the ordinances of the New Covenant, and also that the New Covenant is unlike the breakable Mosaic Covenant.

Our Paedobaptist brethren still argue the fundamental unity of the covenants in their essence, while we, 1689 Federalists, reject this. I’ve tried to point out above why the New Covenant is different, and for those interested, take a look at [chapter 7](#) for more. So the usual “give me a text which excludes infants from the covenant” will not work for two reasons. (1) There is an *essential* difference between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant. (2) The New Covenant consists only of born-again believers who have the Law of God upon their hearts, unlike the Old Covenant. Therefore, unless it could be shown that infants of believing parent(s) have the blessings of the New Covenant and display its fruits, baptism should be withheld from them until they profess the faith and show fruits in keeping with their repentance.

There are a few texts which are often used in support of infant baptism, I will make a brief comment on them and move on to the next paragraph.

Acts 2:39

Acts 2:38-39 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is **for you and for your children** and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Acts 2:39 is probably the most misused Scripture in the New Testament by Westminster Paedobaptists. It is really unbelievable how this passage has been misused and is still being misused in favor of infant baptism. Usually, the first part is only quoted, “For the promise is for you and for your children.” “Look! This is Old Covenant language, Peter is saying that the New Covenant still holds true for infants!” Well...no. This is not what Peter is saying. The promise is the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4; 2:33), which is given to everyone who believes. Concerning this, James Hubner writes:

The meaning of “the promise” and the phrase “for you and for your children” **refers not primarily to the Abrahamic covenant or the covenant of grace**, but to the **specific promise of the Holy Spirit and the “sons and daughters” cited earlier from Joel** (Acts 2:17-21). This fact alone has numerous implications that question the legitimacy of paedobaptist interpretations of the verse. Acts 2:39 is undoubtedly **related to the covenant of grace revealed to Abraham** – just as countless other blessings are part and parcel of this broad gospel “preached beforehand to Abraham” (Gal. 3:8). But when priority is given to the original context and primary meaning of the verse, it becomes clear that **Acts 2:39 cannot and should not be equated with the covenant of grace**, nor can the specific features of the Abrahamic covenant (e.g. infants receive the sign of the covenant) be forced into the verse and its surrounding context – precisely because **Acts 2:39 is describing a New Covenant reality** (“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,” Acts 2:17).^[34]

Through the use of “children,” the Paedobaptists suppose that infants of believers are here meant and this is in continuation of the Old Covenant pattern established in the Abrahamic Covenant. But is “infants” what is meant here by “children”? I don’t believe so. Even the *Presbyterian* Albert Barnes notes that **“To your children** - In Joel, to their sons and daughters, who would, nevertheless, be old enough to prophesy.”^[41] This is an important point which Barnes mentions and which Hübner has a thing or two to

say about:

It should be obvious that the “**your sons and your daughters**” and “**your old men**” and “**young men**” in Joel 2 **are the “you and your children” in Acts 2:39**. Joel 2 predicts a time in the future, and that time has come in Acts 2. He wants to make that point clear, which is why he mentions children again in verse 39. **It is not as if the promise of the Spirit prophesied in Joel only refers to a certain age** or generation of Jewish believers, as if the Spirit would come for a while, and then leave (e.g. the Spirit that came and left Saul and Sampson [sic]). Not at all! The **Spirit continues to be poured out from that point of Pentecost forward**, from generation to generation. And it is not as if the promise of the Spirit is only for leaders since it expands to children and even “male and female servants.”^[35]

The promise of the Holy Spirit stands fast for the old and for the young, but this promise, we must not forget, is to be received by repentance and faith (Acts 2:38), which infants are incapable of. There is a condition of receiving this promise and the condition is repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, if infants are capable of repentance toward God for their sins and faith in Jesus Christ as the means of salvation, baptize them! John Gill notes on this phrase:

and to your children: this is the rather mentioned, because these awakened, and converted souls, were not only in great concern about themselves, for their sin of crucifying Christ, but were in great distress about their children, on whom they had imprecated the guilt of Christ's blood, as upon themselves; the thought of which cut them to the heart, and made their hearts bleed, within them: wherefore to relieve them, and administer comfort to them in this their distress, the apostle informs them, that the promise of Christ, and of his grace, was not only to them, who were now called, but it was also to their children^[7]

Concerning Acts 2:41 in this connection, Hübner writes:

Verse 41 is highly significant for the question as to who should be baptized. Peter has brought up several categories and groups of people in 2:17-21 and 2:39, including “children.” But the **final precondition** that was met before any in Peter’s audience were baptized **is the receiving of the word**, not social status, Old Covenant status, or the faith of any parent. **“Those who received his word and their children were baptized” is not in the text**, nor would it fit any concept asserted in Acts 2. **Baptism** in Acts 2, in Acts in general, and in *all* the New Testament **is consistently associated with repentance and faith**. Furthermore, as Conner argues, **when Peter specifically says “for you and your children” he “does not have specifically Christian parents in mind, but all Jews in general... This rules out any notion of making this promise apply just to Christian parents.”**^[36]

The ones who were baptized on the day of Pentecost are explicitly said to be the ones who “received his word” (Acts 2:41). Nothing is said of infants. Rather, the point is that this promise is always available to you and to your posterity on the condition of repentance and faith in the crucified and risen Messiah.

The next group is the “far off”, which are the Gentiles. This is seen from Ephesians 2:13 where they are so designated. The Gospel came to the Gentiles through Peter in chapter 10 and they were baptized after they received the Spirit (Acts 10:44-48). This promise is available not only to Jews but also to Gentiles.

Then there is the controlling clause which, as Dr. James White often says, we as Calvinists should directly recognize and see the sovereignty of God in it. “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:39). This is the controlling phrase in the passage. It is also the limiting phrase for the identification of

"you and...your children and...all who are far off". It is God who calls His people. They do not call themselves, but it is God who effectually calls them to salvation by His Spirit. The "you", the "your children" and the "far off" who will, in fact, receive the promise of the Holy Spirit are the ones whom "the Lord our God calls to himself." This is the controlling phrase in the passage by which we may know what is meant by children. We do not deny that, often, children raised in Christian homes come to faith early on. Some get baptized before adulthood, I do not see a problem in that. But the fact is, they get baptized because they show signs of faith and signs of repentance, not because their parents are Christian and not because of a theology of "covenant children." They get and they should get baptized because they profess faith. The parents and the elders should see if it's proper to baptize young people, but this is very different from baptizing an infant who knows nothing of the Gospel on the basis of their parents' faith.

It is interesting that this controlling clause, which restricts those who are called from the "you", the "your children" and the "far off", is treated as non-existent by an eminent exegete as John Calvin, although he is so bold to declare that "This place, therefore, doth abundantly refute the manifest error of the Anabaptists, which will not have infants, which are the children of the faithful, to be baptized, as if they were not members of the Church."^[17] No, brother John, it does not refute the Baptists, but now you know better. All the attempts to get a support for infant baptism from this passage are vain. The signs of the covenant, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are to be administered only to those "whom the Lord our God calls to himself" and have repented of their wicked ways. Hübner writes:

The reason why **baptism** (and not circumcision) **is a sign of new life** (Col. 2:12), **forgiveness** and cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16, 1 Pet. 3:21), and being **identified with Christ** (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:10-14) **is precisely because those who are to be baptized have been regenerated** (Heb. 8:11), **forgiven** (Heb. 8:12), and **united to Christ**. That is, **those who are in the New Covenant** (believers) are to **receive the sign of the New Covenant (baptism)**. Such was never the case in the Old Covenant - whether with Abraham's descendants/servants (Gen. 17:23) or in the Mosaic economy - since the **sign was given regardless of spiritual status**.^[37]

There is a history, old and new, of the paedobaptist misuse of this passage and it should stop when we listen to what the passage in its context says without importing our theological presuppositions to it.^[38] We close with a famous quotation from Paul Jewett on Acts 2:39:

Whether we think of Peter's listeners or of their children or of those far removed from the immediate scene of this first Christian *kerygma*, the point is that the promise is to all whom God shall call. This fact puts the whole matter on a rather different theological axis from that which is traditionally assumed in the interest of infant baptism. It becomes no more a question of one's natural birth, as Paedobaptists have often implied; there is nothing in this Scripture passage of "visible church membership" and "external covenant privilege." Rather, the passage is concerned with the call of God, that inner work of the Spirit...The **Paedobaptist ear is so attuned to the Old Testament echo in this text that it is deaf to its New Testament crescendo**. It fails to perceive that **the promise is no longer circumscribed by birth but by the call of God**.^[39]

Household Baptisms

This is what I called above a desperate attempt at finding support for infant baptism. There are four household baptism texts, three we noted above in Acts and one in 1 Corinthians, which are used by our Paedobaptist brethren to argue for infant baptism.

1. Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:43-48);
2. Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15);

3. The Philippian jailer and all his family (Acts 16:31-34);
4. The household of Stephanas (1Cor. 1:16).

It is to be noted that in none of these texts is there any hint of any infants. That is simply read into the narrative. There is no lexical or theological argument that a household *must* include infants. In all respect, Paedobaptists who use this sort of argument for infant baptism, though Christ be my witness that I love them as brothers and sisters, I find to be desperate to find support in the Bible for an *unbiblical* doctrine.

- 1) Cornelius and his household are said to have the Spirit fall upon them before being baptized (Acts 10:46-47). Therefore, all who were baptized were true believers and there is no mention of infants.
- 2) Lydia's heart was opened by the Lord and she and her household were baptized. There is nothing said about a husband, or even children (let alone *infants*). Moreover, in Acts 16:40, those who belonged to Lydia's household are called "brothers", a term which Christians did not simply throw around. Paul distinguishes between those who are brothers and walk according to their profession and they who are "false brothers" (e.g. 1Cor. 15:11; 2Cor. 11:26; 2Thess. 3:6; Gal. 2:4).
- 3) Everyone in the house of the Philippian jailer hears the Gospel and then gets baptized (Acts 16:32-33). Moreover, he rejoices with his family that he had believed in God (Acts 16:34). Since when do unbelievers rejoice with believers for their faith in the true God?
- 4) There is nothing said in connection to infants being in the household of Stephanas. It is said of them in 1 Corinthians 16:15, "you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints". They were all believers who demonstrated the genuineness of their faith by their the service to the saints.

None of these texts give any support for infant baptism, for there is not an indication in any of them of any infants present. But all who were present believed and that was the basis for their baptism, consistent with the pattern in the rest of Acts. The Appendix attached to the Confession dealt thus with household baptisms:

The arguments and inferences that are usually brought for, or against Infant baptism from those few instances which the Scriptures afford us of whole families being baptised; are only conjectural; and therefore cannot of themselves, be conclusive on either hand: yet in regard most that treat on this subject for Infant baptism, do (as they conceive) improve these instances to the advantage of their argument: we think it meet (in like manner as in the cases before mentioned so in this) to shew the invalidity of such inferences.

Cornelius worshipped God with all his house, the Jaylor, and Crispus the chief ruler of the Synagogue, believed God with each of their houses. The household of Stephanus addicted themselves to the Ministry of the Saints: so that thus far Worshipping, and Believing runs parallel with Baptism. And if Lydia, had been a married person, when she believed, it is probable her husband would also have been named by the Apostle, as in like cases, inasmuch as he would have been not only a part, but the head of that baptised household.^[23]

The Confession mentions an interesting case, namely, that of Crispus and his household. I have never yet heard of Crispus's household baptism used as support for infant baptism. Why might that be? Maybe because of what the text actually says:

Acts 18:8 **Crispus**, the ruler of the synagogue, **believed in the Lord, together with his entire household**. And many of the Corinthians **hearing Paul believed and were baptized**.

Let us briefly note two things in this passage. Firstly, the stress laid by the Holy Spirit upon the fact that not only Crispus as an individual by "together with his entire household" believed in the Lord. The description is more comprehensive than in the other instances of household baptisms. May we now simply because of the of the word "entire household" assume that he must've had infants there? If everyone in this household is said to have "believed in the Lord", why not also in the other households? Secondly, the second part of the passage mentions the pattern of baptism in the New Testament: faith and then baptism. The Corinthians heard the preaching of Paul, believed and then were baptized. Therefore, here again, we see faith functioning as a prerequisite for baptism.

The only way we can find support for infant baptism in these texts (Acts 10:43-48; 16:14-15; 16:31-34; 1Cor. 1:16) is if we come to the texts with the presupposition of infant baptism.

1 Corinthians 7:14

For the **unbelieving husband is made holy** because of his wife, and the **unbelieving wife is made holy** because of her husband. Otherwise **your children** would be unclean, but as it is, they **are holy**.

This passage is often used to claim that children of even one believing parent are holy, and therefore, they may receive baptism. But there is nothing here said about baptism or covenant membership. Moreover, this is a notoriously difficult text with many differing interpretations. I do not claim to have a perfect grasp on it. I believe this *holiness* to be not *internal* holiness, but the *external* influence of a Christian and the holiness which is determined by the subject at hand: the marriage of a Christian and a non-Christian. God will bestow His blessing upon them for the sake of the Christian, much like God did for Joseph when he was in Egypt (Gen. 39:5). The children will have the influence of their Christian parent and be taught in the things of God, and in this way, they will be *separate* (which is the basic meaning of "holy"). Furthermore, they are legitimate or "holy" because they are the offspring of a lawful marriage. There is nothing said here about the New Covenant membership or that children receive its blessings. That is far away from the mind of the Apostle.

It is interesting to note the comments of the great Presbyterian commentator, Alber Barnes on this passage. First, he says what this "holiness" does not mean:

- (1) That the unbelieving husband would become holy, or be a Christian, "by the mere fact" of a connection "with" a Christian, for this would be to do violence to the words, and would be contrary to facts everywhere; nor,
- (2) That the unbelieving husband had been sanctified by the Christian wife (Whitby), for this would not be true in all cases; nor,
- (3) That the unbelieving husband would gradually become more favorably inclined to Christianity, by observing its effects on the wife (according to Semler); for, though this might be true, yet the apostle was speaking of something then, and which rendered their children at that time holy; nor,
- (4) That the unbelieving husband might more easily be sanctified, or become a Christian, by being connected with a Christian wife (according to Rosenmuller and Schleusner), because he is speaking of something in the connection which made the children holy; and because the word ἀγιάζω *hagiazō* is not used in this sense elsewhere. ^[4]

Right after this, he adds something which is beneficial to all Scriptural interpretation:

But it is a good rule of interpretation, that the words which are used in any place are to be limited in

their signification by the connection; and all that we are required to understand here is, that the unbelieving **husband was sanctified "in regard to the subject under discussion;"** that is, in regard to the question **whether it was proper for them to live together, or whether they should be separated or not.** And the sense may be, "They are by the marriage tie one flesh. They are indissolubly united by the ordinance of God. As **they are one by his appointment,** as they have **received his sanction to the marriage union,** and **as one of them is holy, so the other is to be regarded as sanctified,** or made so holy by the divine sanction to the union, that it is **proper for them to live together in the marriage relation.**" And in proof of this, Paul says if it were not so, if the connection was to be regarded as impure and abominable, then their children were to be esteemed as illegitimate and unclean.^[4]

If the union of the man and woman was unlawful, then their children would likewise be unlawful. In other words, if their marriage was no marriage in the eyes of God, then their children would be unlawful. But the Apostle argues that it was, in fact, lawful marriage in the eyes of God. Therefore, their children are likewise lawful and holy in *this sense*. If their union was unlawful, for example out of wedlock, then their children would likewise be unlawful. Barnes adds that the children are "Holy in the same sense as the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife; for different forms of the same word are usual. That is, they are legitimate. They are not to be branded and treated as bastards, as they would be by your separation. You regard them as having been born in lawful wedlock, and they are so; and they should be treated as such by their parents, and not be exposed to shame and disgrace by your separation."^[4]

The usual Paedobaptist use of this passage sees a federal holiness or covenantal holiness in the children here. It is interesting to note, as Stan Reeves does, "Although Murray, Calvin, Henry, Hodge, Marcel, Sydenham, and Poole all make the argument for covenant status of the child from the passage, none of them seem to recognize that this implies covenant status for the unbelieving spouse too."^[40] His observation about the identical holiness between the unbelieving spouse and the children are likewise important. He says, "Any attempt to distinguish the sanctification of the unbelieving spouse from the holiness of the children is necessarily an exercise in eisegesis rather than exegesis. Nothing in the passage suggests that these two concepts differ, and the language itself and the proximity of the terms is a strong argument that they are the same." For an alternative Baptist interpretation of this passage, see [Reeves](#).

It is interesting to note that Barnes himself does not subscribe to the usual interpretation of this passage, although he adds Doddridge's interpretation of it at the end of his comments on this verse. He says:

See, however, Doddridge and Bloomfield for a different view of this subject - **I believe infant baptism to be proper and right,** and an inestimable privilege to parents and to children. But a good cause should not be made to rest on **feeble supports, nor upon forced and unnatural interpretations of the Scriptures.** And such I regard the **usual interpretation placed on this passage.**^[4]

Although we disagree that infant baptism "to be proper and right," yet we agree with our brother that 1 Corinthians 7:14 is a feeble support, and a forced and an unnatural interpretation of the Scriptures.

No Command Is Needed

Our Paedobaptist brethren will often say that no command is needed for infants to be baptized since we have a command in the Old Testament for infants to be circumcised. Well, this would equate circumcision with baptism and the Old Covenant with the New Covenant, which we have sought to differentiate above. But another interesting objection is raised, which, until I read Hercules Collin's *Believers Baptism From Heaven*, didn't know that it was such an old objection. Basically, it says that we do not have a command

or example of women partaking of the Lord's Supper, but we administer to them the Lord's Supper, so why not to our infants as well?

These are two different things. First of all, we have clear examples and commands of baptizing those who have professed the faith. While on the other hand, no precept neither an example could be found from the New Testament about infant baptism. Second, the significance of baptism, as given in the New Testament, necessitates its subjects being professing believers, which infants are not. Third, in the case of the Lord's Supper, while we have the narrative of the Last Supper being composed of 13 men, yet we have no reason to exclude women from the Lord's Supper, as we do for infants. This is a silly objection and an attempt at seeking justification for paedobaptism. Here is how Collins dealt with this objection:

There is no express command for Womens receiving the Lord's Supper, yet there may be good Consequences to prove it lawful; so of Infant Baptism.

I Answer.

Who will say there's no Command for Women's communicating, so long as that stands upon Record, 1 Cor. 11. 8. But *let a Man examine himself, and so let him eat?* The Learned do know the original word signifieth *Man or Woman*. The Apostle saith, *There's one Mediator between God and Man;* the word signifieth *Man or Woman, Male or Female, all one in Christ;* it is the same word with the former in the Original.

Moreover, we read of Women who believed and were Baptized, Acts 8. 12. so are fitly qualified for the Lord's Table. We have also an Example of Women's communicating: in Act 1.13,14. we read, *Mary, and other Women, with the rest of the Disciples, were altogether.* And in Act. 2.44. it's said, *all that believed were together;* and in ver. 42. *these continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine, and in Fellowship, and in breaking of Bread, and in Prayer.* So that here is a Command and an Example for Womens communicating, tho none for Infants Baptism, therefore the Objection is false and weak. ^[41]

We should observe the basic teaching of the Regulative Principle of Worship, which Reformed churches are supposed to hold: Only that which is commanded and has precedence in the Word of God, ought to be done in worship. If it is absent, it is forbidden. If it is commanded, it ought to be done. There is no hint of infant baptism in the New Testament, therefore, it is forbidden. Even the so-called covenantal arguments for infant baptism do not stand up to Scriptural scrutiny, therefore, there isn't even a precedent for infant baptism.

Conclusion

We have seen that the fundamental foundation for Westminster infant baptism is the “one covenant, multiple administrations” model of Covenant Theology. We disagree and offered a brief positive case for “elect and regenerate only membership” of the New Covenant. We took a look at a few passages which our brethren use to support infant baptism and found them to be vain attempts producing no results. Therefore, since we have the supposed support for infant baptism out of the way, this gives all the more support for the biblical position to baptize professing believers alone.

§3 In The Name Of The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

3. The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, wherein the party is to be baptized, **1** in the **name of the Father**, and of **the Son**, and of **the Holy Spirit**. **2**
 1. Matt. 3:11; Acts 8:36, 38; 22:16
 2. Matt. 28:18-20

Water

Water is the element into which we are baptized. Water was used by John and in the same way that water was used by the Apostles in the book of Acts. This is how the word baptism is frequently used in the New Testament. Unless we have other reasons, we should always understand baptism to be speaking of water baptism.

The Baptismal Formula

We are to use the full formula of baptism as given by Jesus when He said: “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). Baptism in the Name of the God Triune shows that we belong to Him. John Frame observes, “To be baptized into the name of someone is to belong to that person. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:13, 15; 10:2.”^[42] We identify with this Triune God and we show, through our baptism, that we belong to Him. John Norcott wrote, “And surely it is one Reason, why Baptism is special is to be administered in the Name of the Father, Son, & Holy Ghost; because he who doth sincerely believe, and is baptized, the whole Trinity, the Father, Son and Spirit is his portion; and that glorious Union of the Trinity in Christ’s Baptism, is in every Believers Baptism commemorated.”^[43]

It is quite interesting that the full, trinitarian baptismal formula is not repeated in the book of Acts. Rather, what we have are people being baptized in:

- in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 10:48);
- in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:16; 19:5).

We should notice that in none of these passages do we have a declaration of “and they were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” So, what went wrong? Nothing went wrong. None of these passages present a baptismal formula. We read in none of these passages a citation of what the Apostles actually said at the time of baptism. We don’t read of Peter or Paul saying, “I baptize you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,” rather, what we have is a declaration that people were identified with the Lord Jesus, Whom their leaders rejected and crucified. The Lord Jesus was the stumbling block, thus, the Apostles calling the people to be baptized in His name is to call the people to receive the One they rejected and identify with Him. They baptized them based on the authority of the Lord Jesus and on behalf of the Lord Jesus, this is what these expressions mean. Keep this in mind: In none of these passages is a baptismal formula given. We only have one baptismal formula given and that is in Matthew 28:19. In none of these Acts passages do we have a quotation of what the Apostles actually said at the time of baptism, therefore, we have every reason to believe that as the Lord taught them, so did they. They baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, the only baptismal formula should be used which was given at the institution of that ordinance (Matt. 28:19). We have a command from the Lord Himself to baptize in the Triune Name.

§4 Baptism By Immersion

4. **Immersion**, or **dipping** of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance. **1**

1. 2 Kings 5:14; Ps. 69:2; Isa. 21:4; Mark 1:5, 8-9; John 3:23; Acts 8:38; Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12; Mark 7:3-4; 10:38-39; Luke 12:50; 1 Cor. 10:1-2; Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5, 8; 2:1-4, 17

Baptists are known to argue that baptism should be (1) administered to professing believers alone (paragraph 2) and (2) should be by immersion. Therefore, this surprisingly short chapter, which forms part of the framers’ identity on a subject which divided them from their Presbyterian and Congregationalist brethren, closes by insisting that immersion is the proper way that baptism is

administered.

The Meaning Of *Baptizo*

It is generally agreed among scholars that the basic meaning of the Greek verb βαπτίζω (*baptizo*, G907) is “to immerse.” Therefore, those who baptize without immersion, seek to find several ways to underscore this point, either by pointing to passages where *baptizo* means something other than immersion ([we will look at those passages](#)), or trying to find a theological reason for immersion not being necessary. Wayne Grudem says that “to plunge, dip, immerse...is the commonly recognized and standard meaning of the term in ancient Greek literature both inside and outside of the Bible.”^[44] Let us look at how various lexicons define the verb.

Mounce’s *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* says that “The verb *baptizō* literally means “to put or go under water,” although it has several different sense.”^[45] And also “to dip, immerse; to cleanse or purify by washing”.^[46] *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* notes on this *baptizo*:

“to baptize,” primarily a frequentative form of *bapto*, “to dip,” was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another, etc. Plutarchus uses it of the drawing of wine by dipping the cup into the bowl (*Alexis*, 67) and Plato, metaphorically, of being overwhelmed with questions (*Euthydemus*, 277 D).^[47]

Strong’s Definitions says “to immerse, submerge; to make whelmed (i.e. fully wet); used only (in the New Testament) of ceremonial ablution, especially (technically) of the ordinance of Christian baptism”.^[48] *Joseph Thayer’s Greek Definitions* says (G907):

1. to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (of vessels sunk)
2. to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash one's self, bathe
3. to overwhelm^[49]

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* gives the basic meaning of *baptizo* and the root *bapto*:

The Meaning of ***baptō* and *baptizō***. *baptō*, “to dip in or under,” “to dye,” “to immerse,” “to sink,” “to drown,” “to bathe,” “wash.” The NT uses *baptō* only in the literal sense, e.g., “to dip” (Lk. 16:24), “to dye” (Rev. 19:13), and *baptizō* only in a cultic sense, mostly “to baptize.”^[50]

A. H. Strong provides a few citations from lexicons and people about the definition of *baptizo*:

Liddell and Scott, *Greek Lexicon*: “βαπτίζω, to dip in or under water; Lat. immergere.” Sophocles, *Lexicon of Greek Usage in the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, 140 B. C. to 1000 A. D.—“βαπτίζω, to dip, to immerse, to sink ... There is no evidence that Luke and Paul and the other writers of the N. T. put upon this verb meanings not recognized by the Greeks.” Thayer, N. T. *Lexicon*: “βαπτίζω, literally to dip, to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge, ... metaphorically, to overwhelm.... βάπτισμα, immersion, submersion ... a rite of sacred immersion commanded by Christ.” Prof. Goodwin of Harvard University, Feb. 13, 1895, says: “The classical meaning of βαπτίζω, which seldom occurs, and of the more common βάπτω, is dip (literally or metaphorically), and I never heard of its having any other meaning anywhere. Certainly I never saw a lexicon which gives either sprinkle or pour, as meanings of either. I must be allowed to ask why I am so often asked this

question, which seems to me to have but one perfectly plain answer.”

In the International Critical Commentary, see Plummer on Luke, p. 86—“It is only when baptism is administered by immersion that its full significance is seen”; Abbott on Colossians, p. 251—“The figure was naturally suggested by the immersion in baptism”; see also Gould on Mark, p. 127; Sanday on Romans, p. 154-157. No one of these four Commentaries was written by a Baptist.^[51]

It is to be noted that if what God wanted to communicate was baptism by pouring or sprinkling, there were words available for those things, but not once used for baptism! Wayne Grudem in a footnote writes:

If any New Testament author had wanted to indicate that people were sprinkled with water, a perfectly good Greek word meaning “to sprinkle” was available: *rhantizō* is used in this sense in Heb. 9:13, 19, 21; 10:22; see BAGD, p. 734.^[52]

There is also a word for pouring, *ἐκχέω* (*ekcheo*, G1632) which is used 28 times in the New Testament, but never of water baptism. It is used of the (out)pouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:17, 18, 33; 10:45), but not water baptism.

It is obvious that the basic meaning of the verb *baptizo* is neither sprinkling nor pouring, but immersing and dipping. An interesting side-fact is that the Greek Orthodox Church’s infant baptisms happen by dipping, the same goes for the Armenian Church. When I was an infant, I was dipped thrice into “holy water”. Isn’t it interesting that the Greek Church practices baptism by dipping? I guess they understand the import of the word. Baptism by pouring and sprinkling is by all admission the easiest and quickest to administer. It does not require a lot of water and you can do it wherever you are. You do not need a pool or to go into a river. My wild guess is that the reason that the Greek Orthodox Church practices baptism by dipping, is because they understand what the word *baptizo* means.

The basic meaning of the word *baptizo* or as transferred into English, baptize, is to dip, immerse, or plunge into water. Therefore only baptism by immersion is the acceptable way of administering this ordinance. Using the [Regulative Principle of Worship](#), this is the way that we are commanded to administer this ordinance of Christ, therefore, this is the way we should do it—by immersion.

Counter Examples

Sometimes, a few examples are raised in which the Paedobaptists try to lessen the force of the word’s definition and to argue that *baptizo* actually doesn’t mean immersion. Louis Berkhof writes:

In Judith 12:7 and Mark 7:3,4 we cannot possibly think of dipping. Neither is this possible in connection with the following passages of the New Testament: Matt.3:11; Luke 11:37,38; 12:50; Rom. 6:3; I Cor. 12:13; Heb. 9:10 (cf. verses 13,14,19, 21); I Cor.10:1,2. Since the word *baptizo* does not necessarily mean “to immerse,” and because the New Testament does not in any case explicitly assert that baptism took place by immersion, the burden of proof would seem to rest on the Baptists.^[53]

It is perfectly possible to think of dipping and immersion in these passages. Moreover, we should note that an exception does not overthrow the rule. We have seen that virtually all lexicons give *baptizo* the basic meaning of “to dip, to immerse, to wash” and the like, therefore, even if an instance could be produced in which *baptizo* cannot possibly mean dip or immerse, still, this does not overthrow all the other instances, or change the basic definition of the word. It seems to me so contrary to Reformed thought to seek another, non-prescribed way of administering the ordinance. It is clear and admitted by

all lexicons that the basic and fundamental meaning of *baptizo* is to immerse, to dip and to plunge into water, yet we see various ways from our Reformed brethren who practice infant baptism, to change the meaning of the word or to raise doubts upon its basic meaning and thus justify different modes of administering this ordinance. Only that which is commanded and has a warrant in the Word of God should be done, and it is obvious both from the meaning of *baptizo* and how baptism is described in the New Testament (as we will see below) that it should be administered by immersion. But let us look to these passages which supposedly could not be understood in terms of immersion or dipping.

Judith 12:7 – NRSV: “So Holofernes commanded his guards not to hinder her. She remained in the camp three days. She went out each night to the valley of Bethulia, and **bathed** at the spring in the camp.” She was in the water and washed her body was probably almost wholly in the water. Moreover, the word *bapto* is used here, and not *baptizo*. The word, while it is related, is not the same. The word *baptizo* is much stronger in force and it is the word used for water baptism, while *bapto* is not.

Mark 7:4 – Why is it impossible to think that the Pharisees would dip their "cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches" thus do exactly what *baptizo* or the noun (which is used in the last part of the verse) *baptismos* basically means? It is not difficult to imagine that the first three items in the phrase were immersed in water. The difficulty is in the fourth item: dining couches or tables (KJV). The Greek word κλίβη (kliné, G2825) means "a small bed, a couch" or "a couch to recline on at meals"^[49]. While most commentators use this point out that this item is missing in some manuscripts, point to this example as an exception to the meaning of *baptizo* and *baptismos* as immersion mainly because it is unimaginable. John Gill, a convinced Baptist and a man steeped into Jewish writings, argues otherwise. In long commentary on Mark 7:4, with many citations from Jewish authors, he says the following on this part:

but to washing tables by immersion, there is no objection; wherefore, to perplex this matter, and give further trouble, it is insisted on that the word should be rendered "beds"; and it must be owned that it is so rendered in the Syriac, Persic, and Ethiopic versions, (in the Arabic version the clause is omitted,) and in many modern translations: and we are contented it should be so rendered. And these beds design either the couches they lay, or leaned upon at meals; or the beds they slept in at nights: these were capable of being polluted, in a ceremonial sense; for of such pollution, and such washing, are we to understand these traditions: for those things regard not the bare washing of them when naturally unclean, when they ought to be washed; and it is the custom of all people to wash them when this is the case. A bed, and bedstead, are capable of such pollution as soon as they are shaved with a fish skin, or are completed without polishing {g}; that is, as soon as they are finished; and there are several ways by which they are defiled...Now these were to be washed when they had received any defilement, and that by immersion. Their canons run thus:

"hjm, "a bed", that is wholly defiled, if □□□□□□, "he dips" it, part by part, it is pure {l};" again {m},

"hjmh ta wb lybjh, "if he dips the bed in it", (the pool of water,) although its feet are plunged into the thick clay (at the bottom of the pool), it is clean."

If it should be insisted upon, that it ought to be shown and proved, that the very bolsters and pillows on which they lay and leaned, were washed in this way, we are able to do it:

"ytokhw rkh, "a pillow", or "a bolster" of skin, when a man lifts up the ends, or mouths of them, out of the water, the water which is within them will be drawn; what shall he do? □□□□□□, "he must dip them", and lift them up by their fringes {n}."

In short, it is a rule with the Jews, that

"wheresoever, in the law, washing of the flesh, or of clothes, is mentioned, it means nothing else than the dipping of the whole body in water--for if any man wash himself all over, except the top of his little finger, he is still in his uncleanness {o}."^[7]

Those who insist that the word cannot mean immersion here, do so because they cannot imagine a bed or a couch being immersed. But this cannot overthrow the basic meaning of the word. And even we say that, for the sake of argument, immersion is not meant here, still this doesn't overthrow the basic meaning of *baptizo* and *baptismos*. An exception does not overthrow a rule.

Matthew 3:11 – Why isn't it impossible to think of dipping or immersion in the case of John's baptism? This is what the word means, and as we will argue, this is how the Lord Jesus was baptized—by immersion. To argue in the manner of "how could John do this" is to dismiss the basic meaning of the word. John went to places where there was much water (John 3:23), why would he need this if all he could do was to pour some water or sprinkle it? As for baptism with the Holy Spirit, this would mean that we become overwhelmed with the Spirit and be affected by Him in our whole being. The word *baptizo* can surely be used in a figurative sense, don't forget Mark 10:38-39 and Luke 12:50. But this does not overthrow its meaning of *immersion* and *dipping*.

Luke 11:37-38 – The Presbyterian Albert Barnes notes on v. 38, "The origin of the custom of washing with so much formality "before" they partook of their meals was that they did not use, as we do, knives and forks, but used their hands only. Hence, as their hands would be often in a dish on the table, it was esteemed proper that they should be washed clean before eating."^[4] And he sends us to Mark 7:4 to compare with this passage. The Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges says of this practice:

ἐθαύμασεν ὅτι οὐ πρῶτον ἐβαπτίσθη. Literally, 'bathed.' No washing was necessary to eat a few dates or figs. At the chief meal of the day, where all dipped their hands into a common dish, it was a matter of cleanliness.^[54]

This practice is parallel, apparently, to Mark 7:4, which we noted was perfectly fine to understand as dipping or immersing one's hand into water. Likewise, Charles J. Ellicott notes, "Here the word "washed" (literally, though of course not in the technical sense, *baptized*) implies actual immersion, or, at least, a process that took in the whole body."^[55]

Luke 12:50 – This is a metaphorical way of speaking of baptism and of being plunged and immersed in the wrath of God in His whole being. John Gill notes, "the baptism of his sufferings is meant, which was compared to a baptism, because of the largeness and abundance of them; he was as it were immersed, or plunged into them; and which almost all interpreters observe on the text, and by which they confess the true import and primary signification of the word used; as in baptism, performed by immersion, the person is plunged into water, is covered with it, and continues awhile under it, and then is raised out of it, and which being once done, is done no more; so the sufferings of Christ were so many and large, that he was as it were covered with them, and he continued under them for a time, and under the power of death and the grave, when being raised from thence, he dies no more, death hath no more dominion over him."^[7] Hercules Collins notes, "*Our Lord's Sufferings are called a Baptism, because his Pains were not only upon one part of his Body, but his whole Soul and Body was baptized and plunged into Sorrows.*"^[50]

Romans 6:3 – We argued in paragraph 1 that this passage (and Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27) refers to vital union with Christ. This refers to the union of the whole person of the believer to Christ. Moreover, immersion and dipping is necessary to picture the imagery and union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Pouring and sprinkling simply will not do.

1 Corinthians 12:13 – This is likewise metaphorical, speaking of our baptism into the body of Christ. Our joining into the body of Christ. There is no water here.

Hebrews 9:10 (cf. verses 13, 14, 19, 21) – In Hebrews 9:10 the noun βαπτισμός (*baptismos*, G909) is used and not the verb *baptizo*, and in the four verses referenced, the word ῥαντίζω (*rhantizo*, G4472) is used which means "to sprinkle." The context of v. 10 and the other passages is not the same. These

various washings refer to ceremonial washings done at the Temple. Let us not forget that there was a huge Brazen Sea/Molten Sea/Sea Of Cast Metal in the Temple (2Chron. 4:2-6, see image below) of which it is said that the “sea was for the priests to wash in”. They did not wash *with* its water but *in* its water. Therefore, this would refer to the washing of the priests, as it is consistent with the basic meaning of the word, which does not mean pouring or sprinkling, rather dipping and immersing. Otherwise, the Author would have used a different word which did not mean dipping or submersion. The sprinklings, on the other hand, referred to the sprinkling of blood upon the people and on the mercy seat (among other things) that we often read of in Leviticus (e.g. Lev. 8:30; 16:14-15).



The “Sea” was a metal basin 7.5 feet (2.3 m) tall and 15 feet (4.6 m) in diameter. It held 12,000 gallons (44,000 liters) of water for the priests to wash in. It was supported by twelve bronze oxen in sets of three, facing in each direction (1 Kings 7:23–26; cf. 2 Chron. 4:2–5).

1 Corinthians 10:1-2 – They were covered from all sides by the roaring sea. The sea became like a wall for them. They were covered by water on both their sides.

Looking at these passages, we see that it is not at all impossible to understand them to be speaking of immersion, dipping, plunging, whether literally or metaphorically, as Berkhof supposed. This means that the basic meaning of *baptizo* remains standing, which is “to immerse, to dip, to plunge.”

Sometimes Ezekiel 36:25 is cited to support sprinkling instead of immersion for baptism, but I believe that this argument is to be mentioned simply to be dismissed. There is nothing here about baptism. The passage is wholly spiritual. It speaks of God’s spiritual cleansing of us from sin and our idolatry, it is not prescribing a mode of baptism. The mode of baptism is known via the use of the specific word *baptizo*, and not from passages which have nothing to do with water baptism.

The Baptism Of John And Christ

Can we discern any mode of baptism from the texts which we have of John’s baptism? I believe that it is crystal clear that our Lord’s baptism was by immersion. Here, I am trying to ignore the clear lexical support for *baptizo* meaning to immerse, and I’m trying to discern if we can learn from the text if submersion is described.

Mark 1:5 says that people were being baptized by John “in” the river Jordan. They were standing in the river. John wasn’t getting some water from the river, while he stood on the side, but they were in the river and being baptized *in* the river. John was mainly baptizing in the Jordan (Matt. 3:5-6; John 1:28; 10:40), although Aenon is also mentioned. That is a place which John chose “because water was plentiful there” (John 3:23). Gill notes on John 3:23, “many waters”; not little purling streams, and rivulets; but, as Nonnus renders it, abundance of water; or a multitude of it,...and what was sufficient to immerse the

whole body in, as Calvin, Aretius, Piscator, and Grotius, on the place, observe; and which was agreeable not only to: the practice of the Jews, who used dipping in their baptisms, and purifications, as Musculus and Lightfoot assert; but to John's method and practice elsewhere'.^[7]

But now we should take a look at how our Lord Himself was baptized. Of this, we read in Matthew 3:16 and Mark 1:10.

Matt. 3:16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately **he went up from the water**, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;

Mark 1:10 And when **he came up out of the water**, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

As all the people were coming to John the Baptist and being baptized "in the river Jordan" (Matt. 3:6), in the same way, the Lord Jesus went to John in the river Jordan. He was not standing near the river Jordan, but as with the rest, in the actual river itself. Therefore, when it is said that He "came up out of the water" (Mark 1:10), it presupposes that He actually went *into* the water. The expression ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος (*ek tou hudatos*, out of the water) here is parallel to Acts 8:39 where the mode clearly was dipping and immersion. It does not speak of Christ going from the river to land, but rather coming up from *under* the waters. John Gill notes on Matthew 3:16 saying:

One would be at a loss at first sight for a reason why the Evangelist should relate this circumstance; for after the ordinance was administered, why should he stay in the water? what should he do there? Everyone would naturally and reasonably conclude, without the mention of such a circumstance, that as soon as his baptism was over, he would immediately come up out of the water. However, we learn this from it, that since it is said, that he came up out of the water, he must first have gone down into it; must have been in it, and was baptized in it; a circumstance strongly in favour of baptism by immersion: for that Christ should go down into the river, more or less deep, to the ankles, or up to the knees, in order that John should sprinkle water on his face, or pour it on his head, as is ridiculously represented in the prints, can hardly obtain any credit with persons of thought and sense.^[7]

Wayne Grudem writes:

The fact that John and Jesus went into the river and came up out of it strongly suggests immersion, since sprinkling or pouring of water could much more readily have been done standing beside the river, particularly because multitudes of people were coming for baptism. John's gospel tells us, further, that John the Baptist "was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there" (John 3:23). Again, it would not take "much water" to baptize people by sprinkling, but it would take much water to baptize by immersion.^[56]

Hercules Collins likewise joins in, saying, "'Tis said of our most blessed Lord Jesus, *That he went up out of the Water*; which in common sense signifies, He first went down, not only to the Water, but *into* the Water, *and came up out of the Water*."^[57] Aside from the lexical meaning of the word *baptizo*, we have this description of Christ's baptism to have been by immersion, as we contend ours should likewise be. Although there is a difference in the signification and meaning of John's baptism and Christian baptism, yet the mode is the same.

The Baptism In Acts

Can we discern a mode of Christian baptism in Acts? I believe that there is a place where we clearly see immersion being practiced, but as to the other places, there is nothing special mentioned by which we can discern the mode, except obviously, the very meaning of the word.

Acts 8:36-39 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 37 --- 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both **went down into the water**, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 And **when they came up out of the water**, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

The eunuch sees some water and asks Philip to baptize him right away. Then we read that they both went *down into the water*. The eunuch didn't stand on the side until Philip got some water to baptize him with. If pouring or sprinkling was a proper way of administering this ordinance, the eunuch would have undoubtedly had some water with him. Notice that it is the eunuch who asks to be baptized, this shows that Philip schooled him very well in the doctrine of Christ. John Calvin, the Paedobaptist, admits that immersion of the whole body was the practice of the ancient Church when he comments on this passage, saying, "Here we see the rite used among the men of old time in baptism; for they put all the body into the water."^[17] But he then goes on to say the fact that we should not make a problem because "a small difference of a ceremony" that ministers "sprinkle the body or the head." Well, brother John, it is not a small difference, it is simply what the practice of the ancient Church, by your admission, was, and the basic meaning of the word.

The Expositor's Greek Testament says εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ [into the water]: even if the words are rendered "unto the water" (Plumptre), the context ἀνέβησαν ἐκ [came up out] indicates that the baptism was by immersion, and there can be no doubt that this was the custom in the early Church.^[58]

In v. 39, after going into the water, they come up from under the water and the Spirit carries Philip away, and the eunuch goes on his way home. Here we have an instance of baptism by immersion, where a mode of sprinkling or pouring would have been done easier and with less difficulty, but it was not done until they came to a proper place where the eunuch could be immersed.

The Symbolism Of Baptism

Another argument for immersion is one which we have already alluded to when dealing with the passages about union with Christ using baptismal imagery (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:11-12; Gal. 3:27). As baptism symbolizes, among other things, our union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, so, baptism by immersion pictures this union perfectly. As the believers goes into the water, they are picturing their union with Christ's death and burial in the "water-grave." They lay down their old self and their sinful lives behind in the waters of baptism. As they picture the death of the old man, so they come up out of the water to picture the resurrection of the new man created in Christ's image. The old is gone, behold the new is here. They died with Christ, and they were raised with and thanks to Christ. The coming out of the water would picture the receiving of the new life in Christ from God and emerging as a new creature, and thus symbolizing regeneration. This is a crucial aspect of what baptism signifies. Wayne Grudem notes the following on the basis of Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12—

When the candidate for baptism goes down into the water it is a picture of going down into the grave and being buried. Coming up out of the water is then a picture of being raised with Christ to walk in newness of life. Baptism thus very clearly pictures death to one's old way of life and rising to a new kind of life in Christ. But baptism by sprinkling or pouring simply misses this symbolism.^[59]

But this picturing of union with Christ's death and resurrection cannot happen if baptism is administered by sprinkling, pouring or effusion, but only by immersion/dipping/submersion. Not to mention the fact that very often, these improper *modes* of baptism are used on improper *subjects* of baptism, therefore, I believe that there is no biblical baptism actually taking place where such things are practiced. Hercules Collins, one of the signers of the Confession, wrote:

The end of the Ordinance sheweth *Baptism* to be *dipping*; which is to hold forth unto a Believer, *the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ*; as the Apostle saith, Rom. 6. 4. *We are buried with him in Baptism*. Although there be no manner of *similitude* and *likeness* between Chrif't's Death and Burial, with *sprinkling a little Water on the Face*, yet burying in the Water is as lively a *Similitude* and *Likeness* of Jesus Christ's Death, as the breaking Bread, and pouring out the Wine is at the Lord's Table: So that they lose one great End of this Ordinance, who Rantize [sprinkle] instead of Baptize; for no Man accounts him buried, who hath only Earth cast on his Face, but he who is in the Heart of the Earth, and covered with the same.^[60]

Other Modes Not Baptisms?

It is obvious that the framers of the Confession rejected infant baptism as unbiblical and often called it a doctrine of antichrist. Therefore, they rejected their baptism and that of others as infants. They did not see those as proper baptisms on two grounds: 1) its subjects and 2) its mode of administration. The New Testament teaches that believers alone are to be baptized, therefore, when an unbeliever gets "baptized", it is actually not baptism, but, he is simply getting wet. Infants are unbelievers and ignorant of the Gospel, therefore, they are unfit subjects of baptism, and so, their baptism is invalid. But, our forefathers also objected to the mode of baptism for infants. Infants are usually sprinkled with little water on their faces, which is not what biblical baptism is. There are several ways which the Baptists argued against sprinkling not being what God had appointed and an invalid mode of baptism. But, what do we do in the case of those adults who were baptized not by sprinkling? Would such a baptism count as valid? In my not-wide reading of some Baptists at that time (John Norcott, John Spilsbury, Hercules Collins), I do not remember them mentioning anything about sprinkled adults. Therefore, this raises a difficulty concerning the "baptisms" of adults by sprinkling. Is that a valid baptism? My thoughts are mixed and I believe that one should decide if they need to have baptism properly administered to them with their elders.

Sprinkling, pouring or any other mode than immersion or dipping is not baptism at all. Baptism, by definition and Apostolic example, is by immersion. Therefore, in a strict sense, there is no "baptism" when the water is applied by sprinkling, pouring or any other mode than immersion. Moreover, that which baptism signifies, union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, is lost in all other modes than immersion. But, an important aspect of baptism may be present in an invalid mode, namely, a testimony of faith on which this "baptism" is based. I would say that baptism not by immersion and not based on the testimony of the one baptized, is no baptism, but I find this question very difficult. It seems to me that a reading of this paragraph would indicate that the framers believed all other forms of baptism to be invalid and undue administrations of this ordinance, but some people disagree about what is communicated in this paragraph. Dr. Waldron writes:

The Confession does not assert that someone baptized by another mode is not baptized. Immersion is necessary only to the 'due' administration. This may mean its 'proper, fitting, or suitable' administration. The Confession does not take up all the possible irregularities. It does not manifest a rigid, externalistic, or superstitious fascination with how much water is used.^[61]

But I find it hard to imagine that the framers would accept as valid baptism that which is an "undue" administration of this ordinance. If there is a proper and prescribed way of administering this ordinance and which is by immersion, how can other modes then be considered as baptism? Another brother writes:

The language of the Confession at this point is interesting: “immersion...is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance.” The framers of the Confession were apparently unwilling to be absolutely inflexible on the mode of baptism. To put it another way, they were prepared to accept as valid a baptism which involved pouring or sprinkling. At the same time, they believed that the mode was not simply a matter of indifference. There IS a correct way, and that way is immersion.^[62]

I make the same reply as above to this citation. Now let me give a long citation from John Norcott on why sprinkling is an improper mode of baptism.

Quest. *But why may not Sprinkling with water serve, as well as Covering under water? Is there any more vertue in a great deal of water than there is in a little water?*

Answ. Sprinkling may not serve as well as Dipping under water.

1. Because God is a jealous God, & stands upon small things in matters of Worship; 'tis likely Nadab and Abihu thought, if they put fire in the Censer it might serve, though it were not fire from the Altar; but God calls it strange fire, and therefore he burns them with strange fire, *Lev. 10. 1,2.* And *Moses* adds, *Ver. 3. This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come, nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.* God 'bid *Moses* speak to the Rock, and *Moses* smote the Rock, and therefore must dye short of *Canaan*, *Num. 20.8, 11, 12.*
2. Sprinkling may not serve, because thereby the end of the Ordinance is lost, which is to shew the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ, *Rom. 6. 4. We are buried with him by Baptism, that like as Christ was raised, &c.*
3. Sprinkling will not serve, because it is not that God hath appointed. *Naaman* the Leper did think the waters of *Damascus* to be of the Tame vertue with (or better than) the waters *Israel*, *2 Kings 5. 12. May I not wash in them and be clean?* God had appointed him to dip in the *Jordan*, not that there was more vertue in that water; but God did appoint him to dip in *Jordan*, and he did, and was clean. Dipping is God's Appointment.
4. Sprinkling will not serve, because it is not according to the Pattern. Christ went down into the water. *Philip* & the *Eunuch*, went down into the water, *Act.8.38. Heb.8.5. See thou make all things according to the Pattern.*
5. Sprinkling will not serve, because it is high presumption to change God's Ordinances; Is not God wise enough to appoint his own Worship how it shall be performed? *Isa. 24. 5. The Earth is defiled, because they have changed the Ordinance.*
6. Sprinkling will not serve, because Sprinkling is not Baptism ; it is not the thing intended by God ; Baptism is *Dipping* or *Plunging*. Sprinkling is not Baptism, therefore Sprinkling will not serve, *Luk.7.29,30. Gods Council is Baptism or Dipping.*^[63]

It is obvious from this citation that the only proper mode of baptism, as seen by this Particular Baptist, is immersion. But, as I said at the beginning, this question has its difficulties and should be decided by the person themselves, their elders. and in prayer and in light of the Word of God.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

(Matthew 28:19)

Footnotes

1. [^](#) Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's [Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith](#) which was apparently supplied by the [Westminster Confession of Faith 1646](#).
2. [^](#) A. H. Strong. *Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed For The Use Of Theological Students*. (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1970. Originally, 1907). p. 931.
3. [^](#) Stanford E. Murrell. *A Foundation For Faith An Introductory Study of Systematic Theology: With References To The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*. p. 215.
4. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#), [d](#), [e](#), [f](#), [g](#), [h](#), [i](#), [j](#) [Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
5. [a](#), [b](#) Jamieson, Fausset, Brown. [Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible \(Full\)](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
6. [^](#) Wayne Grudem. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Zondervan (1994). p. 969, n. 7.
7. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#), [d](#), [e](#), [f](#), [g](#), [h](#), [i](#), [j](#), [k](#), [l](#) John Gill. [Exposition of the Entire Bible](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
8. [^](#) Strong, *Systematic Theology*. p. 945.
9. [^](#) [Recovering A Covenantal Heritage: Essays In Baptist Covenant Theology](#). Edited by Richard C. Barcellos. (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014). p. 459.
10. [^](#) William D. Mounce. *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. Third Edition, 2013). p. 195.
11. [^](#) [Understanding How Greek Verbs Work](#). Blue Letter Bible.
12. [^](#) [Glossary of grammatical terms](#)
13. [^](#) [Recovering A Covenantal Heritage](#). p. 460.
14. [a](#), [b](#) *Ibid*, p. 463.
15. [^](#) *Ibid*, p. 466.
16. [^](#) *Ibid*, p. 467.
17. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#) John Calvin. [Commentaries](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
18. [^](#) Nehemiah Coxe & John Owen. *Covenant Theology: From Adam To Christ*. Edited by Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, Francisco Orozco. (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005). p. 198.
19. [^](#) [The Free Dictionary](#). [Token](#).
20. [^](#) [Webster's 1913 Dictionary](#). [Seal](#).
21. [^](#) William D. Mounce. *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. (Zondervan, 2006). p. 620.
22. [^](#) [The Free Dictionary](#). [Pledge](#).
23. [a](#), [b](#) [An Appendix](#). *Second Baptist Confession Of Faith Of 1689*.
24. [^](#) [Does Mark 16:16 teach that baptism is necessary for salvation?](#) GotQuestions Ministries.

25. [^ Does Acts 2:38 teach that baptism is necessary for salvation?](#) GotQuestions Ministries.
26. [^ Philip Schaff. A Popular Commentary on the New Testament.](#) Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
27. [^ HCSB Study Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible.](#) (Nashville, Tenn. 2010). p. 2104.
28. [^ Preacher's Complete Homiletical Commentary.](#) Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
29. [^ Zondervan NASB Study Bible.](#) Edited by Kenneth L. Barker, Donald W. Burdick, & Kenneth Boa. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House. 1999). p. 1817.
30. [^ Grudem, Systematic Theology.](#) p. 974.
31. [a, b Hercules Collins. Believers Baptism from Heaven, and of Divine Institution. Infants Baptism from Earth, and Human Invention.](#) 1691. p. 5.
32. [^ Strong, Systematic Theology.](#) p. 946.
33. [^ Grudem, Systematic Theology.](#) p. 970.
34. [^ Jamin Hüber in Recovering A Covenantal Heritage: Essays In Baptist Covenant Theology.](#) Edited by Richard C. Barcellos. (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014). pp. 384-385.
35. [^ Ibid.,](#) p. 391.
36. [^ Ibid.](#) p. 399.
37. [^ Ibid.](#) p. 400-401.
38. [^ See chapter 14, "Acts 2:39 in its Context \(Part 2\): Case Studies in Paedobaptist Interpretations of Acts 2:39" by Jamin Hübner in Recovering A Covenantal Heritage: Essays In Baptist Covenant Theology.](#) Edited by Richard C. Barcellos. (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014). pp. 417-448.
39. [^ As quoted in](#) [ibid.](#) p. 400.
40. [^ Stan Reeves. A Reformed Baptist View of I Cor. 7:14.](#)
41. [^ Collins, Believers Baptism.](#) p. 15. Footnotes removed.
42. [^ John M. Frame. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief.](#) (P&R Publishing, 2014). p. 1063.
43. [^ John Norcott. Baptism discovered plainly and faithfully, according to the word of God wherein is set forth the glorious pattern of our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ.](#) 1694. pp. 6-7.
44. [^ Grudem, Systematic Theology.](#) p. 967.
45. [^ Mounce, Expository Dictionary.](#) p. 52.
46. [^ Ibid,](#) p. 1104.
47. [^ Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words. Baptism, Baptist, Baptize.](#)
48. [^ Strong's Definitions in The Blue Letter Bible. G907.](#)
49. [a, b Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions.](#) Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). See reference for the Strong's number.
50. [^ TDNT, from BibleWorks.](#) Number 123, p. 93.
51. [^ Strong, Systematic Theology.](#) p. 933.
52. [^ Grudem, Systematic Theology.](#) p. 967, n4.
53. [^ Louis Berkhof. Systematic Theology.](#) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Banner of Truth Trust. 1963). p. 630.
54. [^ The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges.](#) Edited by J. J. S. Perowne. Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
55. [^ Charles J. Ellicott. Commentary For English Readers.](#) Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
56. [^ Grudem, Systematic Theology.](#) p. 968.
57. [^ Collins, Believers Baptism.](#) p. 7.
58. [^ William Robertson Nicoll. The Expositor's Greek Testament.](#) Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
59. [^ Grudem, Systematic Theology.](#) pp. 968-969.
60. [^ Collins, Believers Baptism.](#) pp. 6-7.
61. [^ Waldron, Exposition of 1689.](#) p. 448.
62. [^ The London Baptist Confession of Faith | Exposition of Chapter 29.](#) Herald of Grace.
63. [^ Norcott, Baptism discovered plainly and faithfully.](#) pp. 19-21.