

**Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (14):
Walking and Watching (Col. 2:6-15) (part 3)**
[Or, Christians are full in Jesus Christ]

Today we will affirm the centrality, sufficiency, and fullness of the life that we Christians have in Jesus Christ. We will also focus on when and how we came to experience this fullness as Christians.

We are working through this rather complex paragraph in Colossians 2. The paragraph begins with verse 6 and continues through verse 15.¹ There are two major divisions in this paragraph, which coincide with the two Greek sentences, the first being verses 6 through 8 and the second longer Greek sentence of verses 8 through 15.² The first sentence commands Christians to be “walking with Him.” The second sentence commands Christians to be “watching in Him.” The thought of this second sentence is that these Christians were to be on guard against anyone or any teaching that would lead them away from the centrality of Jesus Christ in their faith and practice.

Let us continue what we began last Lord's Day, considering what it is to be...

II. Watching in Him (2:8-15)

The identity and sufficiency in Jesus Christ alone in the faith of these Christians was both the preventive and the corrective for the false teaching that was corrupting the church at Colossae. The errors that had troubled them were “not according to Christ.” In other words, these false teachings would direct them to things, to matters, that had essentially nothing to do with Jesus Christ. The apostle then explained in **verses 9 and 10** why they should see their sufficiency and fullness in Jesus Christ. *“For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”* And so, we might set forth these words in this outline:

A. In Him, Jesus Christ, God is incarnate. (v. 9)

B. Christians have been filled in Him. (v. 10a)

The commentator **F. F. Bruce** set forth the meaning of these verses within the context of Paul's epistle that addressed the error threatening the church at Colossae:

The teachers of error might talk as they would of the fullness of divine being which was filtered down to this world through a hierarchal succession of spirit powers; Christians had something better. They had Christ, the personal revelation of the Father, the one Mediator between God and man, the One in whom the plenitude of deity was embodied. Far from there being any inherent impossibility in the nature of things for God to communicate directly with this world, One who shared fully in the divine nature had become flesh and tabernacled among men. Not only so, but Christians by their union with Him shared His very life. If the fullness of deity resided in Him, His fullness was imparted to them. Without Him we must remain forever *dissecta membra*--uncompleted, unable to attain the true end of our existence. But united with Him, incorporated in Him, we find ourselves joined in a living bond with Him in which He and we complement each other as the body does the head and the head the body.³

¹ Although verses 6 through 15 are two paragraphs in the ESV, all of verses 6 through 15 is one paragraph in the Greek New Testament. See Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1966, 1968, 1975), 697f.

² Again, although verses 8 through 15 are 5 sentences in the ESV, they are but one sentence in the Greek text, which was the original language in which Paul wrote the epistle.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (William B. Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 232f.

Here, in these verse before us, the themes are set forth of God's fullness in Jesus Christ and of God's work through Jesus Christ in bringing His people salvation and glorification. Let us read the paragraph noting the phrases "in Him" and "with Him."

⁸See to it (i.e. beware) that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹For *in Him* the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled *in Him*, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹*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, ¹²having 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. ¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together *with Him*, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them *in Him*.

After the apostle set forth the truth that Christians have been filled in Him, he then related when it was and how it was that God had brought them into this state of blessedness. He sets forth their union with Jesus Christ that was affected in their regeneration and displayed in their baptism. Let us consider the phrases and clauses of this passage. First, we read...

1. "*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..."

Here, "the circumcision without hands" is a reference to our new birth, our regeneration. We were delivered from our former way of living for sin by our regeneration, here. We have been filled in Jesus Christ, because our God had delivered us from our sinful lives by causing us to be born again, or regenerated. Consider what **William Hendriksen** wrote regarding this:

Paul's thought at this point can perhaps be paraphrased somewhat as follows: Colossians, do not allow these teachers of error to deceive you as if, in order to triumph over the indulgence of the flesh (2:23) and to attain to the full measure of salvation (2:9, 10), you need to be literally circumcised (cf. Acts 15:1; Gal. 5:2, 3). *You were already circumcised!* Yes, you were circumcised with a circumcision that excels by far the rite that is being recommended do strongly by the teachers of error. You were circumcised **with a circumcision made without hands, by the putting off of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ.**⁴

In the Old Testament God had given *physical circumcision* to Abraham in order to bring His people into a physical, earthly covenant relationship with Himself. They entered into that covenant through physical birth and physical circumcision. They were promised earthly blessings, including numerous offspring, physical health and wealth, and a long blessed life in a land that God had promised to Abraham and his descendants. Their responsibility in keeping covenant with God was to have faith in Him as their God. And later, God had declared to His people that their faith was to be manifest in their obedience to His law that He gave to them through Moses.

But the physical circumcision that God had commanded them as a sign of their covenant, although it distinguished them as God's people from all others in the world, was not a life-changing experience. It served to foreshadow the need for the *spiritual circumcision* of the heart, which is regeneration, or what the New Testament refer to as the new birth (cf. John 3:3), or here in Colossians 2:11 as "*a circumcision made without hands.*"

⁴ William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Baker, Academic, 1964), p. 114.

The Old Testament spoke to this need. We read in Deuteronomy that even when Israel committed to God that they would keep His law, *they were without the heart to do so*. We read in Deuteronomy 5 of Moses rehearsing before the people of Israel the Ten Commandments (5:6-21). He did this with view to this new generation to enter the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership. Here we read Moses' words:

²³“So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders. ²⁴And you said: ‘Surely the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives. ²⁵Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore, then we shall die. ²⁶For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? ²⁷You go near and hear all that the LORD our God may say, and ***tell us all that the LORD our God says to you, and we will hear and do it.***’

²⁸“Then the LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me: ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken. ²⁹***Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!***’ (Deut. 5:23-29)

And so, even in Deuteronomy, God revealed that they were in need of their hearts needing transformed so that they would conform their lives to His law. In **Deuteronomy 30:1ff** we read that God intended that He would do this work of grace in His people.

“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, ²and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. ⁵Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. ⁶***And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*** (Deut. 30:1-6)

The people were unable, and over time they would show that they were unwilling, to order their lives according to God's law. On one occasion much later, when the Lord was denouncing rebellious Israel, He spoke these words to them:

***“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,
And take away the foreskins of your hearts,
You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,
Lest My fury come forth like fire,
And burn so that no one can quench it,
Because of the evil of your doings”*** (Jer. 4:4)

Later, still, after God had judged Israel for having transgressed His covenant, He declared through His prophets that the time would come when He would cause them to return from their exile to their land, and that He would then circumcise the hearts of His people so as to secure their compliance to His law. Consider these prophecies of the days of the new covenant, the days of the Messiah:

Jeremiah 24:4-7.

Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵“Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: ‘Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge those who are carried away captive from Judah, whom I have sent out of this place for their own good, into the land of the Chaldeans. ⁶For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. ⁷***Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.*** (Jer. 24:4-7)

Ezekiel 36:26

“And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD,” says the Lord GOD, “when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. ²⁴For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶***I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*** ²⁷***I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.*** ²⁸Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. ²⁹I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. ³⁰And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations. ³¹Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. ³²Not for your sake do I do this,” says the Lord GOD, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!” (Ezek. 36:23-32)

Ezekiel 11:29

Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ¹⁵“Son of man, your brethren, your relatives, your countrymen, and all the house of Israel in its entirety, are those about whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, ‘Get far away from the LORD; this land has been given to us as a possession.’ ¹⁶Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.”’ ¹⁷Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.”’ ¹⁸And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. ¹⁹***Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh,*** ²⁰***that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.*** (Ezek. 11:14-20)

This spiritual circumcision of the heart is a work of God in which He causes a sinner to be born again, thereby securing his love for God and his desire to live in compliance to God’s law. Paul declared to the Christians at Colossae that they had been the objects of this work of grace in God bringing them salvation. Again, Colossians 2:11 reads, “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.*”

It is the circumcision of the heart--spiritual circumcision, not physical circumcision--by which the true Israel of God may be distinguished. This is what Paul declared in Romans 2.

²⁵For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷And will not the

physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? ²⁸*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;* ²⁹*but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit*, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. (Rom. 2:25-29)

Israel in the Old Testament was comprised of physical descendants of Abraham, brought into covenant relationship with God in a physical covenant through physical circumcision. Israel in the New Testament is comprised of spiritual descendants of Abraham, whether Jewish or Gentile, brought into covenant relationship with God through spiritual circumcision. It is in this way that Abraham fulfilled God's promise to him that he would be "a father of many nations" (cf. Rom. 4:11f, 17-19). This is what Paul declared in Philippians 3:3, "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh..." Paul stated that those who have faith in Jesus Christ and are spiritual worshippers through the Holy Spirit are the true Israel, the true circumcision, those who have been spiritually circumcised; their hearts and lives were committed to Jesus Christ and they trusted in Him alone for salvation.

Now, what is meant by these words of 2:11, "*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*"? The first expression, "*by putting off the body of the flesh*", describes both the literal death of Jesus Christ on the cross and of the believers' spiritual death that we underwent with respect to our former life, when we were in union with Him when He died. Again, here is a good word from **F. F. Bruce**:

No longer is there any place for a circumcision performed by hands; the death of Christ has effected the inward cleansing which the prophets associated with the new covenant, and this our baptism is the visible sign.

In so far as "the putting off of the body of the flesh refers to the death of Christ, the expression is readily intelligible, especially in the light of the earlier mention of "the body of his flesh" in connection with His death in Ch. 1:22a. But the expression in our present passage includes also the Christian's baptismal experience. What is involved is much more than the removal of a small piece of flesh, as in the old circumcision; it is the removal of the whole "body of flesh"--what Paul elsewhere describes as "putting off the old man," reckoning one's former self with its desires and propensities to be dead, as a necessary prelude to "putting on the new man," putting on Christ Himself in His resurrection life. What they believe puts off is "the whole personality organized for, and geared into rebellion against God."⁵

What is the meaning in this verse of "the circumcision of Christ"? There have been several different proposals to its meaning. Some have said Paul was referring to the physical circumcision of Jesus of Nazareth when he was 8 days from birth. Others say *it's a reference to Christ's death on the cross*. This is the right understanding of these words. Again, here are Bruce's words:

What was their baptism?

It was, in the first place, a participation in "the circumcision of Christ." This "circumcision of Christ" is not primarily His circumcision as a Jewish infant of eight days old (Luke 2:21); it is rather His crucifixion, "the putting off of the body of the flesh," of which His literal circumcision was at best a token-anticipation.⁶

We see this to be true when we also consider the next clause of verse 11.

2. "...having been buried *with Him* in baptism,"

⁵ Bruce, *Colossians*, p. 235.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 234.

The apostle connects the experience of salvation, which involves the new birth, with baptism. In a number of places in the New Testament baptism is so joined with the initial experience of coming to salvation, that it is seen as one event. The new birth, which results in repentance and faith, is shown forth in one's confession in baptism. It was as one event: regeneration, repentance, faith, and baptism. This is why Ananias could say to Saul shortly after seeing the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). This is not to say that baptism affects the forgiveness of sins. God pardons our sins through faith alone in Jesus Christ. But when Paul was baptized, he was stepping forward to show forth his faith in, and identification with, Jesus Christ in whom forgiveness of sins was freely granted to him.

We see in these words that in baptism the believer shows forth *the death* of his former life before conversion. We no longer live for sin, but for Christ. God caused us to be "buried with Him in baptism."⁷ It is a spiritual reality for the Christian.

But in addition to being buried with Christ in our baptism, we read also that we were raised with Him in our baptism.

3. "In which (baptism) you were also raised *with Him* through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Notice that it was not baptism that brought about being raised, but rather it was "through faith in the powerful working of God" that coincided with being baptized.

Not only did we die with Christ with respect to our former life, but we rose with Christ unto new life in Him. We share in the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, that life which is His when He was raised from the dead. Through faith, and here, at the time of our conversion coinciding with our baptism, we are no longer what we once were. We are new creatures in Jesus Christ.

Now each of these last two verbal ideas, "having been buried with Him" and "were also raised with Him" are in the passive voice. What the apostle Paul was declaring is that this burial and raising with Christ, this union with Him in His death and resurrection was an act of God working upon us. We were passive. God did this by His power. **Everett Ferguson** wrote:

Baptism is a confession of faith in the resurrection of Jesus by God. It is done in faith in the activity of God, who raised him from the dead. God is at work throughout the passage: the passive voices--were circumcised, were buried, and were raised--are the "divine passives" for what God did. Not only did he raise Christ, but he also made the one baptized alive and forgave his/her sins. The "with Christ" emphasis is obvious: "buried with him," "raised with him" (2:12), and "made alive with him" (2:13).⁸

But lest one misunderstands, Ferguson quoted another:

On the relation of faith and baptism in Paul, Kuss concludes with reference to Galatians 3:27-27 and Colossians 2:12 that faith can never be excluded, but Paul gives no indication of a Christian without baptism. Baptism had an initiatory character, for individual salvation introduces one to the body of Christ, but Paul warned against a magical view of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1-6).

Verses 13 and 14 make this very clear.

4. "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together *with Him*, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by cancelling the record of debt

⁷ This is the same idea as Paul set forth in Romans 6:1ff.

⁸ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church; History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (William B. Eerdmans, 2009), p. 160.

that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. (Col. 2:13-14)

Before we came to be in Christ, we each had a great “record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.” We were guilty and damned before God due to that debt to God’s justice for the innumerable transgressions against God’s law that each of us had committed in life. But because of our union with Jesus Christ in His death, that debt that was against us was cancelled. As far as God is concerned, our debt was paid in full by the death of His Son on our behalf.

5. “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him.”

Not only did God forgive us our debts when we were converted, but He delivered us from slavery as well. The forces of evil, even the devil and his minions had power over us when we were in our sins. We had sold ourselves into servitude to them. We were subject to them like indentured servants due to the debt we owed. But God has defeated those powers through the death of Jesus Christ, those powers to which we were formerly in servitude. He has delivered us into a state of liberty whereby we are free to live before Him, not in sin as formerly, but in righteousness. God has conquered those forces that held us in bondage. We are free in Christ. As **F. F. Bruce** wonderfully put it:

The very instrument of disgrace and death by which the hostile forces thought they had Him in their grasp and had conquered Him for ever was turned by Him into the instrument of their defeat and captivity. As He was suspended there, bound hand and foot to the wood in apparent weakness, they imagined they had Him at their mercy, and flung themselves upon Him with hostile intent. But, far from suffering their assault without resistance, He grappled with them and mastered them, stripping them of all the armour in which they trusted, and held them aloft in His mighty, outstretched hands, displaying to the universe their helplessness and His own unvanquished strength. Had they but realized the truth, those “archons of this age”--had they (as Paul puts it in another epistle) known the hidden wisdom of God which decreed the glory of Christ and His people--“they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8). But now they are disabled and dethroned, and the shameful tree has become the victor’s triumphal chariot, before which His captives are driven in humiliating procession, the involuntary and impotent confessors of their overcomer’s superiority.⁹

Now this passage leads us to address an important matter. These few verses, particularly Colossians 2:11 and 12, are cited frequently as a proof text for infant baptism, commonly called paedobaptism. This is the only place in the Scriptures in which circumcision and baptism are found within the same context. It is believed, because of these two verses, that New Testament baptism is the replacement of Old Testament circumcision. It is argued, therefore, that just as children of covenant parents in the Old Testament circumcised their male children as ones in covenant relationship with God, so children of believers in this New Testament age are to be regarded as covenant children. They are to be baptized and regarded as citizens of the kingdom of God.

I have given a great deal of thought, research, and consideration to this subject in my 42 years of ministry. And having thoroughly read and continue to read regarding these matters, I remain baptistic in my convictions, even more so than at any time in the past, and that for biblical, theological, and historical reasons. And I like other Baptists take issue with the interpretation of these verses and the conclusions drawn from it by our paedobaptist brethren. And brethren they are. Most of my “heroes” of the past, my best friends in the ministry today, as well as many who minister today whom I don’t know personally and for whom I have the greatest respect, hold to paedobaptism. But our convictions are not born of friendship, rather, we trust, of sound understanding of the Scriptures. And so, I might set forth several arguments, both biblical and theological, that I believe reveals the shortcoming of the paedobaptist position.

⁹ Bruce, pp. 340f.

Let us again consider the teaching of our passage, Colossians 2:11 and 12. Paedobaptists' belief is errant in their teaching that the physical circumcision of male infants of the Old Testament is replaced by New Testament baptism of infant sons and daughters of believing parents. But this belief is foundational to their position. This is an errant belief and therefore their theology is divested of its foundation. And so, it is here that their theology self-destructs. ***The New Testament “replacement” or antitype of circumcision is not baptism, but the spiritual circumcision of the heart***, in other words, regeneration. They argue that the circumcision to baptism transition is set forth in Colossians 2:11 and 12, which again reads:

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. (Col. 2:11)

This is one of the main points of argument. But these verses do not link physical circumcision with baptism, but rather, Paul declared that the Old Testament physical circumcision performed externally--with hands—gives way to the spiritual circumcision of the heart (i.e. regeneration), performed internally – “without hands” (i.e. by God). The New Testament antitype of the Old Testament circumcision could not be baptism, for baptism is obviously performed “with hands.” It is the circumcision of the heart performed by Christ, that is, regeneration, which Old Testament physical circumcision prefigured. And so, where paedobaptists use these verses to argue for infant baptism, Paul actually reinforced baptism of regenerate people only. First the elect undergo spiritual circumcision (v. 11) that results in them “putting off the body of the sins of the flesh”, and then they are baptized (v. 12), showing their union with Christ in His death and resurrection. This cannot be said of infants and children. They must become believers before being baptized. This passage, therefore, is an argument for the baptism of disciples, converted people only; it is not a valid proof for infant baptism. The new birth is prerequisite to joining the covenant community. People do not enter the new covenant through physical birth and physical circumcision, but through spiritual birth and spiritual circumcision. One must be united to Christ in His death and resurrection through faith in the power of God; that is what Paul declared in verses 11 and 12.

Aside from what was said above, let me set forth some further arguments for the Baptist convictions regarding the baptism of disciples only. We will address this under three headings, biblical reasons, theological reasons, and historical reasons.

I. First, ***biblically speaking***, the command in the New Testament is to baptize disciples of Jesus Christ only. This can be seen clearly in our Lord's Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:18ff). Our Lord did not command them to make disciples and then baptize them *and their children*, but to baptize disciples. Our paedobaptist friends argue that there is no place in the New Testament where infant baptism is directly commanded or forbidden. That may be so, but how do you practice paedobaptism and in doing so not transgress what the Lord Jesus commanded in His Great Commission? To baptize infants of believing parents is to baptize non-disciples, but our Lord commanded to baptize disciples and, we say, them only. If a person is not a disciple of Jesus Christ, he does not meet the qualifications for New Testament baptism. It does not matter who your father or mother is, what the parents believed or did not believe.

The Ethiopian eunuch said to Philip: “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Phillip responded, “If you believe with all your heart, you may” (Acts 8:36, 37). But if we could imagine an infant of a believer asking the question (which he is unable to do), “What hinders me from being baptized?” The response of the paedobaptist would not be, “If you believe with all your heart, you may”, but rather, “If your dad or mom believes with all his or her heart, you may.” There is no warrant for this in the practice or teaching of the New Testament.

In the days of the Kingdom of God realized through Jesus Christ, individual responsibility and accountability is the rule of His kingdom. People enter the kingdom individually through conversion, not through physical birth. John the Baptist refused to baptize anyone who had not repented of sin and shown fruit of repentance, neither should we do so. John refused to baptize some, saying to them, “Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones” (Matt. 3:8ff). Who one has for a father does not qualify you for New Testament baptism. Individual responsibility is a basic principle. John said, “And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore *every* tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt. 3:10ff).

There is no place in the Bible in which there is the command, instruction, or example for children of believers to be baptized. To argue that children of believers should be baptized because of the reference to household baptisms in Acts, is an argument from silence, which itself is a logical fallacy. I like to cite the story of an old Baptist friend of mine who was from Arkansas, who was a member of my church in California. He was “debating” with a paedobaptist friend who argued that the baby of the Philippian jailer was baptized. Doug responded cleverly, “Yes, and his baby was a daughter, who grew up and married a one-eyed shoe cobbler from Damascus.” His friend was indignant, challenging Doug, “Where did you get that from the Bible?” Doug responded, “The same place you got that baby.” The point was made that you can argue anything from silence. There is no clear command or example in Scripture to baptize infants of Christians.

In fact there is evidence that in each of those cases of “household baptism” they all had become believers prior to baptism. In the case of Cornelius’ household (Acts 10 & 11), the apostles had challenged Peter for extending “Christian” fellowship to them for they were Gentiles. Peter recounted all that he had experienced. He then reasoned,

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God? ¹⁸When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’” (Acts 11:15-18)

What convinced Peter that these Gentiles were qualified to receive baptism was that they had received the Holy Spirit as all disciples had on Pentecost. Conversion was necessary for baptism. All had received the Spirit. Those who had received the Spirit were then baptized. This suggests that Cornelius’ household was comprised of persons of age and maturity to hear and believe the gospel. No hint of infants or small children is suggested by the text.

Regarding Lydia’s household in Acts 16, there is no evidence or suggestion that unbelieving children were baptized. The same can be said of the Philippian jailer’s household. In fact in this latter case there is a verse, granted the manner of translation is debated, in which it declares that everyone who was baptized of his household were believers. “Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, *having believed in God with all his household*” (Acts 16:34).

But we also need to remember that there were cultural forces at work in the biblical world that had bearing on why whole households were converted. It would have been customary, indeed, strange, not to have an entire household embrace the faith of the head of the household. They too, whether family members or servants, would have tended to embrace the faith upon the conversion of the head of the household. But again, there is no direct evidence that anyone except a disciple was intentionally baptized. If the head of a household embraced the gospel, there would have been a common response of all under his headship to also believe the gospel. They would then be baptized.

Paedobaptists argue from Acts 2:38f that the promise of God’s salvation extends to believers *and their children*.

³⁸Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹***For the promise is to you and to your children***, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. ⁴⁰And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” ⁴¹Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. (Acts 2:38-41)

But they do not quote the whole verse, which qualifies which children are included. They tend to stop by quoting the first part of the verse: “*For the promise is to you and to your children.*” But the following words qualify which children are to be baptized: “***as many as the Lord our God will call.***” God’s promise is not to all children of believers, but to all ***effectually called*** children of believers. They only are to be baptized upon giving evidence that God has called them to salvation through repentance and faith. This supports believers’ baptism, not the baptism of infants or small children who have not yet shown forth their faith in their repentance, submission, and confession of Jesus as Lord.

The bottom line is this, baptism is to be extended to Christians only, ones who have repented of sin and put their faith in Jesus as Lord. We read in Acts 2:47, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” The Lord added only saved people to the church. But paedobaptists go beyond this, essentially declaring, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved, *and their children.*” But the Scriptures teach that only saved persons are to be baptized, they alone are regarded by our Lord to be ones qualified to be added to the church.

II. Second, ***theologically speaking***, several arguments can be put forward that refute infant baptism and reinforce credobaptism. It is credobaptism (believers’ baptism), not paedobaptism, that is consistent with both biblical theology and sound (in my opinion) systematic theology. Joel Beeke, for whom I have the greatest admiration and respect, said several times at the Bolton Conference (2015) that “our Baptist friends have no theological place or role for their children”, implying that paedobaptists have a legitimate theological position. Although I felt it was inappropriate for me to respond directly at that time, I would have argued just the opposite, and done so for several reasons--it is the paedobaptist that has errant theology defending their practice of infant baptism. Consider these matters:

(1) Paedobaptists argue that children of believing parents are within the covenant community or family, and therefore should be baptized, receiving baptism as the sign and seal of that relationship. They refer to their children as “covenant children.” But this is errant, for clearly the Scriptures teach that ***every person in the new covenant is regenerated.*** And with the institution of the new covenant by Jesus Christ, there is no covenant relationship with God possible to those apart from Christ. Children of believing parents cannot be regarded by the church as in covenant relationship with God until and unless they are in Christ through regeneration demonstrated in their repentance and faith. This is clearly seen in the promise of the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31ff is shown to be a present reality in Hebrews 8.

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- ³²not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: ***I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts;*** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴“No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they ***all*** shall know Me, ***from the least of them to the greatest of them,*** says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jer. 31:31-34, also Heb. 8:8-12)

Take note, God has written His law on the heart and is in the mind of ***every*** person who is relationship with God in the new covenant; i.e., ***they are all regenerate.*** This cannot be said of children of believing parents who are yet unregenerate. Also, everyone in the new covenant “***knows the Lord.***” Each and every

one in the new covenant knows the Lord personally, relationally, covenantally. And each and every one in the new covenant has his/her *sins forgiven*. None of these things can be said of unregenerate children of believing parents. Our paedobaptist friends argue their children are “covenant children.” We challenge them, “Of what covenant are they members?” There is only one covenant between God and mankind that brings salvation, the new covenant enacted by Jesus Christ, and everyone in that new covenant is regenerate; they love and know the Lord, and desire and purpose to live in obedience to God’s law. Only people who have experienced the new birth are in covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Now granted, children of believers, as well as an unregenerate spouse of a believer, have certain benefits and privileges (1 Cor. 7), but it is wrong to assume, to teach and declare, or to reinforce to them that they are in a place of safety or security when they are outside of Jesus Christ until they are converted. This is not to say that God does not regenerate children, even very young children, but we have no knowledge of who they are until they show forth the fruit of repentance, the evidence of saving grace in their lives, including an aversion to sin, love for the Word of God, love for righteousness, a heart for God and Christ, and a love for God’s people. Parents do a disservice to their children by telling them they are in “covenant relationship” with God through Christ unless and until they are converted. Our Lord declared, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). There is the need to “receive the kingdom”, which means understand it, embrace it, and live accordingly, before one can be in a saving, covenant relationship with God. And only those who do so are to be recognized and welcomed into the covenant community of God’s people.

(2) Prior to the coming of Jesus Christ, the covenant community was comprised of those of physical descent, who were born physically within the covenant community. Physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were “blessed”, for the covenant was entered through natural birth. Physical circumcision was the sign of this external, physical, and national covenantal relationship with God. But with the coming of Jesus Christ this changed. With the coming of Jesus Christ, who is the true promised seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16), one did not enter into covenant relationship with God through natural birth and physical connection to Abraham, but through believing and submitting to Jesus Christ, the promised Prophet to come. This only comes about through spiritual birth, which then results in the renewed person embracing and submitting to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Anyone and everyone who did not know and submit to Jesus Christ were “cut off” from the people of God. Peter proclaimed this in Acts 3:

²²“For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. ²³***And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.***’ ²⁴Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold *these days*. ²⁵You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ ²⁶To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, ***sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.***” (Acts 3:22ff).

The Scriptures declare that “every soul” that does not “hear” Jesus Christ (in other words, believe, submit, and obey), is outside the covenant that God has with His people. Paedobaptist theology argues that this is not true for children of believing parents, for they are in the covenant. Again we ask them, “To what covenant are you referring?” for there is only one new covenant, and that is only experienced through knowing and submitting to Jesus Christ. To give a child of a believer a sign and seal of a covenant declaring that child has a part, is giving a false declaration regarding the child and is giving a faulty assurance to the parent of that child. The children of believers need to be told that if they do not personally believe on Jesus Christ, they can have no assurance that they are in Jesus Christ. They are objects of wrath, in need of conversion, and need to be instructed and exhorted to embrace the gospel.

(3) Paedobaptists have a wrong understanding of the local church and their practice of infant baptism prevents them from having their churches conform to the New Testament model and character for a local

church. Baptists have historically believed and have historically taught that a local church should be comprised of regenerate people only. Only they have new life in Christ, who have common aspirations, affections, and commitments. Only they have new hearts that govern their thoughts and actions. They only have the Spirit of God indwelling them that can enable them to live for and before the Lord. Only they are capable of having true fellowship, true communion with God and His people. Paul reasoned to the church at Corinth:

¹⁴“***Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?*** ¹⁵And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’ ¹⁷***Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate,*** says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. ¹⁸I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,’ says the LORD Almighty.” (2 Cor. 6:14-18)

Paul declared that there is no common ground, no ability to have true “fellowship” with unbelievers. A local church cannot expect to have true fellowship among its members unless they are regenerate. Baptists understand the church should not admit into members those who give no evidence of regeneration.

But paedobaptist churches, by definition, do not believe local church membership should be restricted to the regenerate only. They disobey the Lord’s command not to be “in fellowship” with unbelievers, for they extend church membership to non-converted people, if they were but born into a Christian family, profess to believe certain doctrines, and they desire to join the church. Apart from in America (and similar nations), in which there is freedom of religion and separation of church and state, in those nations in which there is or has been a state church in which paedobaptism has always been the practice, baptism and church membership is extended to everyone in the nation. Go to Germany today, or any number of Western and Eastern European nations, such as England, Ireland, and Scotland, as well as Roman Catholic nations, most everyone is baptized as an infant and is regarded as connected to “the church,” even though there is as little as 2% attendance in the churches. This is the fruit of paedobaptist theology. Nominal Christianity is the norm. No true fellowship exists to any degree in these churches for so few are truly regenerate.

And although our American culture and system of government prevents this scenario from being fully played out in our society, the theology of paedobaptism is still in place that leads to and undergirds this understanding of “the church.” Here is a typical definition of a local church according to the paedobaptists:

The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world ***that profess the true religion; and of their children:*** and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. (Westminster Confession of Faith, Art. 25, par. 2)

Notice, a mere acknowledgement or agreement of a set of doctrines will qualify one to become a member of the visible church. And then their children are also admitted into church membership. Evidence of new life in Christ is not regarded as essential, but rather agreement and conformity to a set of doctrines, or due to physical decent of one who espouses the right doctrine. In contrast, here is a typical historic Baptist statement of the local church:

All persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ according unto it, not destroying their own profession by any errors perverting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, are and may be called visible saints; and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted. (Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, art. 26, par. 2)

Take note that evidence of regeneration is required of any and all who may be regarded as members. Biblically and theologically, only they are able to have true fellowship with God and one another because of

they have experienced new life in Christ. The children of believing parents in Baptist churches are not accepted into formal membership until and unless they give evidence of regeneration.

This has very practical implications. I hear “horror stories” from my paedobaptist pastor friends of the kinds of issues and problems they deal with in their churches. Several years ago one paedobaptist pastor asked another across the table who had been lamenting his members’ serious errors of doctrine and behavior, “Well, are they regenerate?” I thought, “*that* is precisely the issue.” But this is not required of people prior to and as a prerequisite for joining a paedobaptist church.

Now, do not think that I am condemning all paedobaptist churches and legitimizing all Baptist churches, for there is a levelling of churches in our culture. Because church attendance is voluntary in our day and society, only regenerate people will normally attend a church that teaches faithfully the Scriptures as the Word of God. And so, many paedobaptist churches have many regenerate members. (Again, this is not true in nations where there has been a state church and all are baptized as infants). Moreover, most Baptist churches have so “dumbed down” what constitutes true faith and evidence of regeneration that masses of unregenerate people are assured of their salvation and have joined these churches. But that does not change the biblical and theological issues at hand. A true, local, New Testament church should extend communion and membership only to those who have common life in Christ.

(4) Only regenerate people can be citizens of the Kingdom of God. This may seem to be an obvious point, but our paedobaptist friends are inconsistent in this doctrine. They would be the first to argue the teaching of our Lord of John 3 that no one can “see” or “enter” the kingdom of God unless he is born again. But at the same time they claim that the visible church is the kingdom of God and children of believing parents are members of the church and members of the kingdom, therefore the sign of baptism should be applied to them. Here, again, is a typical paedobaptist statement, which we quoted above:

The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; *and of their children*: and *is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God*, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. (Westminster Confession of Faith)

They claim that children of believing parents are citizens of the kingdom of God and members of the family of God. But the Scriptures clearly teach that they are not until they are born again. Regeneration enables one to enter the kingdom of God. People become children of God and members of the family of God through regeneration, faith, and adoption. They are not in the family of God unless they are as Isaac, children of promise (the elect). We become children of God through the new birth. John 1:12, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” Paul wrote, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). Paedobaptists are basically arguing that you may also be one of the children of God by being a child of a child of God. There is no warrant for that in Scripture. Our Lord acknowledged the Jewish Pharisees as being the physical children of Abraham, but they were not the covenant children of Abraham, for spiritually speaking, the devil was their father (cf. John 8:44). Until a child is regenerate, and until we witness the same kind of faith that Abraham demonstrated, they are not to be told that they have the blessing of Abraham upon them.

(5) Similarly, paedobaptists see children of believers in a place of promise and blessing just as physical children of Abraham were included in the covenant community. But here they fail to distinguish between God’s covenantal promises to Abraham’s physical seed and those promises to his spiritual seed. They argue from Galatians 3:16 and 17 that the covenant Abraham had with God is the same one that Christians enjoy in this New Testament age.

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. (Gal. 3:16f)

Paedobaptists, therefore, equate the family relationship of Abraham to his physical children with New Testament believers and their physical children. But this faulty. Paul argues in Galatians and Romans that it was not the physical seed that distinguished these people as Abraham's children who would inherit God's promises, but those who had the same faith as Abraham—these are his children who inherit the promises of the covenant that God has made with Abraham in Jesus Christ.

What paedobaptists seem to fail to recognize or acknowledge is that when God entered into covenant with Abraham, it was with both his physical descendants and his spiritual descendants. And these were not the same group, as Paul reasons in Romans 9. The sign of physical circumcision was to be extended to his physical offspring. God had promised his physical offspring that they would inherit that physical Promised Land after 400 years of bondage in Egypt. God later at Sinai told these physical descendants of Abraham that He would bring them into the land as He had promised the patriarchs but that their continuance in the land with God's blessing was contingent on their faithful keeping of His law. They failed, of course. The promises to Abraham's physical seed had been realized and then forfeited by rebellious Israel. They broke this covenant between the physical seed of Abraham and God. But God had purposed to fulfil promises to Abraham and his spiritual descendants, which He does so because His covenant was in Christ. All those who are in Christ, irrespective of whether they are Jewish or Gentile, are the heirs of God's promises to Abraham. These receive the promise/gift of the Spirit, the gift of eternal life, the promise of dwelling with the patriarchs in the kingdom, even the dwelling in a city whose Builder and Maker is God. Physical children of Abraham or physical children of Christians do not have these promises extended to them; rather, these are promises for "children of promise" like Isaac, who are children of Abraham because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Until a child comes to faith in Jesus Christ, he is no child of Abraham, no member of God's covenant of grace that He made with Abraham. Paedobaptists repeat the same error as the Jews, presuming their physical relationship with their parents brought them into a privileged position and condition before God.

(6) Paedobaptists are wrong to argue that infant baptism is "a sign and seal of the covenant of grace", which is the common terminology they ascribe to the ordinance. For example, the Westminster Confession declares:

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church; but also, *to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his engrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life.* (WC, Art. 28, par. 1)

There is no Scripture that calls baptism a "sign and seal" of these manifestations of grace. This statement is based and built upon a wrong understanding of the sign and seal of physical circumcision that God gave to Abraham and then wrongly extending that wrong understanding of circumcision to be also true of those who undergo infant baptism. Consider these points:

First, Paul declared that the rite of physical circumcision was a sign and seal to Abraham specifically and limited to his imputed righteousness, that is, his justification by grace through faith alone, and therefore God's forgiveness of his sins and his righteous standing before God. Romans 4:11 reads, "And he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised." But the Westminster statement declares that infant baptism is also a sign and seal of "the covenant of grace, of his engrafting into Christ, of regeneration." It is true that the New Testament speaks of baptism connected with these gifts of God's grace, but never are they associated with Old Testament circumcision or to infant baptism (which is nowhere taught in the New Testament).

Second, the Westminster Confession statement above then assumes what was true of Old Testament circumcision is the true of New Testament baptism, assuming what was true of all who were physically circumcised was also true of all who are baptized. The Scriptures never do so explicitly state this to be the case.

Third, paedobaptists fail to distinguish and declare the implications of the great and foundational distinction between the covenant that God made with Abraham's physical descendants and that He has made

with Abraham's spiritual descendants. In the Old Testament God's covenant with Abraham was with his physical descendants, who were identified and set apart by physical circumcision. But the New Testament identifies the God's covenant with Abraham's spiritual descendants, who are identified and set apart by believers' (disciples') baptism. And although the new covenant was implicit and proclaimed in God's dealings with Abraham, the emphasis of the Old Testament was God's covenant with the nation of Israel, Abraham's physical descendants, of which Gentiles had no part or place. The Old Testament covenant people were physically related; the New Testament covenant people are spiritually related by their common life in Christ. An unregenerate infant has no membership in this covenant community of only those who are in union with Jesus Christ.

Fourth, and this is important, we would argue that circumcision was a sign and seal *only* of Abraham's righteousness through faith, not of the righteousness of any and all who were thereafter physically circumcised. Romans 4:11 declares: "And he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised..." Was Ishmael's circumcision a sign and seal of Ishmael's faith? What of the circumcision of Esau? Was it a sign and seal of Esau's faith? No, rather, it was sign and seal of Abraham's faith to them, teaching them that they must have faith as their father Abraham had faith. The point that Paul was making in Romans 4:11 was that after Abraham had believed, the sign and seal was given to him and was to be administered by him, thereby proclaiming the truth that righteousness is imputed to believers, whether Jew or Gentile, thereby assuring them that Abraham would become the father of "many nations." Paul did not declare that physical circumcision was a "sign and seal" for any and all of "their" righteousness through faith alone, but rather it testified of the righteousness that God had conferred upon Abraham, when he believed.

Fifth, baptism is never declared to be "a sign and seal" of the new covenant. The *sign* of the new covenant is not baptism, rather, it is the blood of Christ. Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:25). The *seal* of the new covenant is the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote, "In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13; see also 2 Cor. 1:22 and Eph. 4:30).

Here is what the Baptist, **John Gill**, wrote about the relationship of circumcision and baptism, which are his comments on Romans 4:11. Many of my arguments above may be seen to have been his also. The words in *italic* are his quoting phrases and clauses of Romans 4:11:

Ver. 11. "*And he received the sign of circumcision*", or "the sign circumcision"... that is, Abraham received at the hands of God, the commandment of circumcision, which was a "sign" or token of the covenant; not of grace, but of that peculiar covenant God made with Abraham and his natural seed, concerning their enjoyment of the land of Canaan; and which was a distinctive sign or badge, which distinguished the posterity of Abraham from other people, and was also a typical one; not of baptism, for circumcision was peculiar to Abraham's natural seed, whereas baptism is not, but was administered to Gentiles as well as Jews; circumcision was confined to males only, not so baptism; circumcision bears no likeness to, nor any resemblance with baptism, whereas there is always some likeness and agreement between the type and the antitype; besides, if this had been the case, circumcision would have ceased when baptism took place, whereas it is certain it did not, but continued in full force with the rest of the ceremonies until the death of Christ; and it is as certain, that "baptism" was administered and continued to be administered three or four years before that time; which fully demonstrates the falsehood of that assertion, that baptism succeeds or comes in the room of circumcision; whereas baptism was in full force before circumcision was out of date: but circumcision was a typical sign of Christ, as all the ceremonies of the law were, and of the shedding of his blood, to cleanse from all sin, original and actual, and also of the circumcision of the heart.

And was, moreover, "*a seal of the righteousness of faith*"; or which "sign" was "a seal"; and so it signifies the same as before;... as that circumcision was a seal, not for secrecy, but for certainty; it being a confirmation, not merely of the sincerity of Abraham's faith, but of his justifying righteousness, which was not his faith, but that which his faith looked to; and *which he had*, both faith and righteousness, *yet*

being uncircumcised: whence it follows, that he was not justified by his circumcision, but by a righteousness which he had before he was circumcised, or otherwise his circumcision could not have been a seal of it: though this clause, “which he had, yet being uncircumcised”, may be rendered, “which should be in the uncircumcision”, that is, in the uncircumcised Gentiles; and the sense be, that circumcision was a seal to Abraham, and gave assurance to him that he should be the father of many nations in a spiritual sense; and that the righteousness of faith which he had, should also come upon, and be imputed to the uncircumcised Gentiles; and accordingly it may be observed, that this seal was continued in full force on his natural seed, until this promise began to take place, and then it was abolished: this seal was broken off when the middle wall of partition was broken down, and the word of righteousness and faith, or the Gospel preaching justification by the righteousness of Christ, was ordered to be published to the Gentile world. It may be inquired whether circumcision being called a seal, will prove that baptism is a seal of the covenant? I answer, that circumcision was only a seal to Abraham of a peculiar covenant made with him, and of a particular promise made to him, and was it to be admitted a seal of the covenant of grace, it will not prove baptism to be such; since, as has been observed, baptism does not succeed it in place, in time, and use; and could this be allowed that it succeeds it, and is a seal of the righteousness of faith, as that was, it can only be a seal to them that have both faith and righteousness, and not to them that have neither; it would only at most be a seal to believers. But, alas! Not ordinances, but other things more valuable than they, are the seals of the covenant, and of believers; the blood of Christ is the seal, and the only seal of the covenant of grace, by which its promises and blessings are ratified and confirmed; and the Holy Spirit is the only earnest, pledge, seal, and sealer of the saints, until the day of redemption. The apostle uses the word “seal” concerning circumcision, it being a word his countrymen made use of when they spoke of it, thus paraphrasing on “everyone of them was sealed, “with the seal of circumcision” upon their flesh, as Abraham was sealed in his flesh:” “*that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised*”; that is, his circumcision was a seal unto him that he should be so, which explains and confirms the sense of the former clause; not a father of the uncircumcised Gentiles by natural generation, for so he was only the father of the Jews, but of them as they were believers; and not so called because he was the author of their faith, but because they have the same sort of faith he had: “*that righteousness might be imputed to them also*”; not Abraham’s faith and righteousness, nor their own, but the righteousness of Christ received by faith, which is unto all, and upon all them that believe, without any difference of Jew or Gentile. Now when the apostle styles Abraham the father of “all” believers, even of uncircumcised ones, he says no other than what the Jews frequently own... The apostle reasons on what they (Jews) themselves allow, to prove that the blessedness of justification comes not only upon the Jews, but upon the Gentiles also. (From John Gill’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible*)

III. Third, because of *historical matters*, I remain a committed Baptist.

(1) Early church history fails to give evidence that the earliest Christians practiced infant baptism. The matter was discussed by several church fathers in the second century, but infant baptism was not practiced commonly or universally at the end of the second century. Granted, after the second century infant baptism, and that by sprinkling, became the common practice, but this practice also accompanied the errant belief that baptism of infants removed the guilt of their original sin and caused them to become born again. These doctrines most modern reformed paedobaptists also repudiate, even while they argue for infant baptism.

(2) Yes, most of the Protestant Reformers were in agreement with infant baptism, although they differed in their theology of baptism. Lutherans, the Church of England, and later Methodists continue to teach what Rome had taught and practiced, that infant baptism affected the new birth--regeneration. Reformed (Geneva) and the later Puritans and Presbyterians developed the doctrine of paedobaptism that it was a sign and seal of the covenant community of which children were members by virtue of their believing parents.

But during those centuries there were also many Anabaptist and later Baptist churches that spontaneously emerged throughout Europe as people who studied their Bibles came to baptistic convictions

of baptism of disciples only and that by immersion. There were many of them, but they were alienated, persecuted, incarcerated, and even executed by both Rome and “Protestants.”

I believe that this is best explanation for the Protestant understanding and practice of infant baptism: When the Reformers broke with Rome, they sought to reform the doctrine and practice of the church according to the Scriptures. But there were many who practiced infant baptism who sought justification for their practice in the Scriptures. They formed their teaching of New Testament baptism to be the replacement of Old Testament circumcision.

(3) Another reason that I cannot easily abandon my baptistic belief and practice is due to the knowledge of so many who had suffered persecution and even execution for refusing to have their children baptized and for baptizing by immersion those who came to repentance and faith in Christ. Many of our Baptist forefathers suffered greatly and forfeited much freedom, property, and privilege, choosing rather to be true to their biblical convictions. Consider John Bunyan and others. How can I defect from the teaching and practice for which they suffered so much? Would I set aside so easily a biblical truth which cost them so greatly? I cannot and will not do so.

Conclusion:

Now it is important that we affirm that the manner and mode of baptism is not an essential matter. My love for and involvement with many paedobaptist pastors in the New England Reformed Fellowship demonstrates this. But though infant baptism is not an essential matter, it is a very important matter, and has significant implications for how we understand the local church and its membership.

The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace. (Numb. 6:24-26)
