

INFANT BAPTISM  
IN  
THE LIGHT OF  
SCRIPTURE



By Rev. FREDERICK S. LEAHY

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## INTRODUCTION :

This subject is always topical. How often we hear earnest Christians ask questions concerning the baptism of infants. What does baptism mean? How is it to be administered? What authority is there in the New Testament for the practice of Infant Baptism? How often, too, we hear dogmatic assertions. "Infant Baptism came from Rome. It has no Biblical warrant." The purpose of this booklet is to consider these, and many other comments, in the light of Scripture, and seek to present on a Scriptural basis the Reformed doctrine of Infant Baptism. First of all we shall consider the child in the Old Testament Church. Then we shall study the *meaning* of baptism, the *subjects* of baptism and the *mode* of baptism. Finally we shall examine common objections which are urged against this doctrine. We shall endeavour to avoid technical language. In dealing with a controversial issue we need simplicity, candour and love, and, above all, a willingness to be governed by the Word of God. In this issue, all Christians claim that their position is Scriptural. That is where the private judgement of the reader will be used. Our concern now, is to present the case for Infant Baptism as clearly and cogently as possible.

## THE CHILD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH :

We must agree that there was a Church in Old Testament times, and that we belong to the same Church of God, or our discussion can proceed no further. This is a crucial point. The New Testament refers to the Church in the days of Moses. Stephen in his defence calls it "the church in the wilderness." (Acts 7 : 38). In Deut. 18 : 16 we find the word "assembly" used of Israel. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, commonly quoted by our Lord and His Apostles, uses the word for 'church'—ekklesia. The same word is used for 'church'

in the New Testament. Stephen said: "This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear." Professor F. F. Bruce comments on this verse: "There in the wilderness Moses was guide to the people; there they were constituted the ekklesia of God; there they had the 'Angel of the Presence' in their midst; there they received through Moses the living oracles of God. What more could the people of God want? And it was all theirs in the wilderness, far from the promised land and the holy city."

The New Testament repeatedly declares that the saints of Old Testament times looked *forward* in faith to Calvary, just as we look in faith to that same event. The Psalms proclaim justification by faith alone just as strongly as does the epistle to the Romans. Christ said that Abraham rejoiced to see His day: "And he saw it, and was glad." (John 8:56). Paul writes, "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:29). The whole epistle to the Hebrews shows the essential connection between the people of God and their faith in Old Testament times, and the people of God and their faith in New Testament times. It shows that although, in a certain sense, the believers of Old Testament days walked in the shadows, those shadows were like an X-ray plate of Calvary. The whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament portrayed the Cross, and had no efficacy of its own. To say that there was no Church in the days before Christ appeared on earth, is to close one's eyes to the overwhelming evidence of the Scriptures. What happened at Pentecost was not the birth of the Church, but the reorganisation of the Church in its New Testament form. The Church of God goes back to Adam and Eve.

The people of Israel stood in a covenant relation to God. A covenant is simply an agreement or engagement. We read of God's covenant with Abraham and his seed in Genesis 17. In earthly covenants the agreement is mutual and the parties are often equal. It is not so in the covenant of grace. Dr. Griffith Thomas remarks, "God's covenant of grace is divinely one-sided. God is the Giver; man the receiver, not the equal." A careful reading of this important chapter in Genesis will show that God entered into a gracious

covenant, not only with Abraham, but with little children. The sign and seal of that covenant of grace was circumcision. It must be stressed that this sign was not merely a mark of the Mosaic period. This chapter in Genesis is long before Moses, and is dealing with a covenant of grace, and is, therefore, quite independent of Jewish national life. Our Lord Himself says so in John 7 : 22. This covenant into which God entered with Abraham is described as 'everlasting,' lasting for ever, verses 7 and 13. It definitely includes infants. Where is it now ?

It should be noted that throughout Scripture the covenant with Abraham is always referred to in the singular ; there are not several covenants in Genesis 17 as some affirm. In the New Testament this great, everlasting covenant is consistently interpreted as a *spiritual* covenant. The Old and New Testaments alike stressed the spiritual significance of circumcision, Dt. 10 : 16 ; Jer. 4 : 4 ; 9 : 25, 26 ; Acts 15 : 1 ; Rom. 2 : 26—29 ; Phil. 3 : 2, 3, etc. In Gal. 3 : 8 the promise of the covenant is called "the gospel." It was to this promise that Peter referred on the day of Pentecost, "The promise is to you, and to your children."

We have now established on unassailable Biblical grounds that the Church of God existed in Old Testament times, ever since the Gospel was first proclaimed (Gen. 3 : 15), and that children had a definite place in the visible Church of God. They were the children of God's children, children of promise, children of the Covenant, children on whom God had set His mark. This did not mean that God would never reach in mercy beyond the bounds of that covenant to others and bring them within its sphere of blessing. We know that He has done so again and again.

When we read the Old Testament we see that the children were regarded as an integral part of Israel and were treated accordingly. They were present when the Covenant was renewed (Deut. 29 : 10—12). Moses said, "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God ; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, *your little ones*, your wives and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water : that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord



thy God maketh with thee this day . . . ." In Joshua 8 : 35 we read, " There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, *and the little ones*, and the strangers that were conversant among them." When Jehoshaphat proclaimed a solemn fast, we read, "And all Judah stood before the Lord, *with their little ones*, their wives and their children." (II. Chron. 20 : 13). " Blow the trumpet in Zion," urged Joel, "sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, *gather the children and sucklings.*" (Joel 2 : 15, 16). The children had a standing in the congregation of Israel. They were never overlooked.

For several thousand years before Christ, children were members of the Church, and the people were profoundly aware of the fact. Against this background we must read the New Testament.

#### THE MEANING OF BAPTISM :

Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament commanded by Jesus Christ. Its element is water, and that indicates the fundamental significance of baptism, which is *cleansing*. The outward washing with water symbolises the "washing" of the soul in the blood of Christ. Baptism is not that washing, but it is a sign of the "washing of regeneration." (Titus 3 : 5). Just as the body is washed with water, so the soul is cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ. In Old Testament times *cleansing* was the fundamental idea in the various ceremonial washings. So the people, would clearly understand God's Word when He declared " Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean : from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes . . . ." (Ezek. 36 : 25—27). The people of God were being taught that mere outward ceremonial washings in themselves availed nothing. They only symbolised the inner washing wrought by the Spirit of God. The same idea emerges in Psl. 51 : 6, 7, where we have a moving reference to the ceremonial sprinkling of blood. The

Psalmist fully understood the spiritual meaning of that ordinance when he prayed, with an overwhelming awareness of the sinfulness of sin, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts : and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Hyssop, a small bushy plant, was used to sprinkle blood in Old Testament ceremonies (Ex. 12 : 22).

The baptism of John had the same message. It proclaimed the sinner's need of cleansing. When Christ was baptised by John, He was identifying Himself with sinners, for He was the sin-bearer, and His blood would cleanse from all sin.

It is abundantly clear that the many washings of Old Testament days symbolised cleansing ; few people dispute the point ; but have we any authority for saying that Baptism has that meaning ? The New Testament leaves us in no doubt. How else can we interpret Acts 2 : 38, "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." There the outward rite of baptism confirmed the inner cleansing and remission of sins. Even clearer is Acts 22 : 16, "And now why tarriest thou ? Arise, and be baptised, *and wash away thy sins*, calling on the name of the Lord." Baptism was to be the outward sign of an inward cleansing, cleansing from sin by the grace of God. Believers are said to be "washed" (I. Cor. 6 : 11 ; Tit. 3 : 5 ; Heb. 10 : 22 ; I. Pet. 3 : 21 ; Rev. 1 : 5). Cleansing from sin is fundamental in our experience of the grace of God, and baptism proclaims and confirms this to believers.

When the apostles baptised believers, it was more than a solemn admission into the visible Church of God ; such baptism was a *sign* and a *seal* of the Covenant of Grace, a sign and a seal that believers were grafted into Christ, that they had experienced "the washing of regeneration," that they were associated with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, for He died as their substitute and representative. This last point is emphasised in Rom 6 : 3, 4 and Col. 2 : 12. All these blessings of the covenant of grace, which are ours in Christ the mediator of that covenant, are not effected by baptism ; it is simply their sign and seal. Just as bread and wine in the Lord's Supper proclaim the

message of the Cross, so water in baptism proclaims another aspect of the Cross, telling us that we need to be cleansed and that only the blood of Christ can effect that cleansing. When the New Testament speaks of "the blood of Christ," it refers to His redemptive work on the Cross. Bread, wine and water are only the outward symbols of the great spiritual realities which are ours in Christ. The ordinances which Christ has ordained can never be a substitute for Christ Himself.

When Christians were baptised, it also meant that they had made their covenant with the Lord, and from that day forward would be devoted to His service. Their baptism was a badge of allegiance and a symbol of their union with all other Christians. (I. Cor. 12 : 13 ; Acts 2 : 40, 41). The situation is the same to-day when men hear the gospel for the first time. When they obey the gospel and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, they are baptised, and their baptism conveys first and foremost God's message to them ; it is His sign and seal ; and it becomes their pledge of loyalty to Him. Henceforth they are disciples of Jesus Christ. Baptism is the mark of Christ's disciple. It marks him as belonging to Christ and not to Satan and the world. When Luther felt the force of temptation and doubt he would write two words on his table with a piece of chalk : *Baptizatus sum* (I have been baptized). It was not the sign and seal that mattered to him, but *what* was signified and sealed He belonged Christ. Christ is the *content* of baptism, just as He is the content of the Lord's Supper. All that these ordinances represent is found in Him alone. They are gospel ordinances, a dramatic presentation of the gospel of God's grace.

At this point a number of vital questions arise.

We have seen that the Church of God is one in all ages, and that there is no salvation apart from Christ and His Cross. Believers in New Testament times are saved on precisely the same grounds as believers in Old Testament days—faith in the Lamb of God. Christians are simply "*added* unto the Church," and are "*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*" and grafted into the Church of God (Rom. 11). The trunk and roots of the tree remain. New sheep are brought into the fold, but the Shepherd and the sheepfold preserve their identity. The Church of God

in every age stands within the same covenant of grace, so clearly revealed in Genesis 17, and described there as "everlasting." Children were expressly included in that everlasting covenant, and given its outward mark or sign. All this being so, we are compelled to ask if the standing of children in the Church has been altered, or does it remain the same? The sign of the covenant, circumcision, was given to the infant of a Hebrew home. Is there a similar sign to be given to the infant of a Christian home? Circumcision was the badge of membership of the Church in Old Testament times and was not limited to adults. It was administered in faith by believing parents to their children as a sign and seal of God's covenant of grace. Those children were brought up in a godly home and taught the truth of God. They were instructed in the covenant of God. When they reached years of responsibility they became covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers. For many the sign became a seal confirming their personal faith in God. For others it did not. "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." (Rom. 9 : 6).

Has that position been radically altered? Or, do circumcision and baptism have the same meaning? They are signs of the same covenant. To-day, Christian parents live within that covenant of grace; all the blessings of salvation are founded upon it. The covenant is differently administered now; the many types and shadows of olden times are no more, for Christ the substance has come. Yet we are saved within the same covenant; we have the same Messiah and the same grounds of salvation. As Christians we are "Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3 : 29). But what of our children? Has God withdrawn the sign of the Covenant from the children of believers? And if so, when? and why? To these questions we must address ourselves; for it is now obvious that the subject of infant baptism is much deeper than at first appears, it involves the standing of the children of believers to-day.

#### THE SUBJECTS OF BAPTISM :

In the case of adults, baptism must be preceded by a profession of faith (Mark 16 : 16 ; Acts 2 : 41 ; 8 : 37). The last of these verses is omitted in some manuscripts, but it does represent apostolic practice (Acts 16 : 31-33).

Upon this point there is no controversy. The Christian Church insists on a profession of faith before baptising adults. "The Shorter Catechism" is careful to state : " Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to Him . . . ." The Church can ask no more than that ; the responsibility rests upon the person professing faith. Unless there are obvious reasons for rejecting a person's profession, it must be accepted without hesitation. Professor Louis Berkhof points out that it does not belong to the Church's "province to pry into the secrets of the heart and thus to pass judgment on the genuineness of such a profession." There will always be, in this world, the outward Church of profession and the inward Church of true faith which is known to God alone. Wheat and tares grow together to the harvest. Simon Magus will make his confession of faith and be baptised.

In the book of Acts we have a missionary situation described. The Gospel was faithfully preached, and as men obeyed that Gospel and believed in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, they were baptised. We have already noted the meaning of that baptism. The position remains unaltered ; on this all Christians are agreed. When missionaries preach the Gospel to-day the same procedure is followed.

Believing Abraham received the ordinance of circumcision as a sign and seal of God's gracious and everlasting covenant. Circumcision did not confer faith, either to Abraham or to his son Isaac. Baptism, in New Testament times, did not confer faith, but it did have the same meaning for believers as circumcision had in Old Testament days. In other words, we are saying that circumcision had the same fundamental meaning as Baptism was later to have. The Scriptures make this abundantly plain.

Genesis 17 shows circumcision as firstly of spiritual, and only secondarily of national significance. At times it is impossible to separate Church and State in the Old Testament, but it is true to say that circumcision belonged primarily to the Church. Its fundamental meaning was spiritual. This is emphasised throughout the Old Testament. To circumcise the heart, meant obedience to God's will (Deut. 10 : 16) ; the circumcised heart was obviously regenerate (Deut. 30 : 6). While Israel walked in the wilderness under God's displeasure, circumcision lapsed ; but it



was re-instituted under Joshua (Josh. 5 : 2ff). The mere rite of circumcision was useless without the reality it symbolised. Concerning circumcision, God said to Abraham, "It shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you." That token proclaimed *cleanliness* of heart and life, separation from the defilements of sin. We saw that baptism had the same fundamental meaning—*Cleansing*. The Israelites were well aware of this spiritual meaning of circumcision. When Jeremiah cried, "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord," they knew what he meant (Jer. 4 : 4). Paul, a converted Jew, remembered the meaning of circumcision, when he wrote, "We are the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit" (Phil. 3 : 3). Commenting on this statement, Rev. Ralph P. Martin (Tyndale N.T. Commentaries) says that "circumcision" here "must be a title for the Church as the covenant people of God inheriting all the promises made to ancient Israel."

The New Testament confirms this spiritual conception of circumcision. Apart from the passage just noted, we recall Rom. 4 : 11 where Paul sees Abraham's own circumcision as "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised." If circumcision were merely a sign of membership of the Israelite nation, as some affirm, then Paul's language is meaningless. No ; circumcision was intensely spiritual in its meaning, and by it the Hebrew *family* was caught up in God's saving purpose. This rite of purification was given to Isaac as an infant, and to the children of believing parents. The child was a covenant child and had covenant prospects. We have already studied the position of the child in the Old Testament Church. We have seen the oneness of the Church and of God's covenant of grace. The difference between the Old and New Testaments is that between *promise* and *fulfilment*. Professor Geoffrey W. Bromiley makes an important point when he states that "the unity of the covenant carries with it a unity of the covenant people." ("Christianity To-day," Oct. 9, 1964).

God has not withdrawn the sign of the Covenant from the children of believers. The sign, however, is different. In place of circumcision, with its obvious limitations, we have baptism. The meaning of both signs is the same, and so are the subjects—believers and their children. The covenant is everlasting (Gen. 17) ; can we say this too often ?

The apostle Paul in Col. 2 : 11, 12, in one sentence, links circumcision and baptism, showing that both signs have the same inward reality. A study of Scripture confirms this ; both signs proclaimed cleansing and consecration. These were wrought, not by the external ordinance, but by the inward working of the Holy Spirit. (Those who would like to study this matter further, should read and compare the articles entitled " Baptism" and " Circumcision" in " The New Bible Dictionary," I.V.F., London).

If God has altered the standing of children in His Church, the onus rests upon the opponents of Infant Baptism to prove this from the Scriptures. If there has been no change in the standing of covenant children, we need not expect the New Testament to set out to establish something already so well established for many centuries. We should note, however, that the New Testament does refer to the special standing of the child of even *one* believing parent. Paul calls such a child HOLY (separate) in I. Cor. 7 : 14. Here Paul says literally what he says figuratively in Rom. 11 : 16, " If the root be holy, so are the branches." In the passage in First Corinthians, Paul is saying that the children of these mixed marriages are holy ; they belong to the visible church. That principle still holds. When a child has even one believing parent, we can say that *this is the child of God's child*. This is a covenant child. We cannot say so of all children indiscriminately. The covenant child has special privileges, and, later, special responsibilities. We must not close our eyes to the privileges of the child of the Christian home. His privileges are at least as great as those of the Hebrew child. He has the prayers of the congregation, the benefits of Christian teaching, the atmosphere and example of a Christian family and a Christian congregation, the mighty influence of the Holy Bible—not to mention the faith of the parents. The child born within the covenant has solid advantages. That child is "holy." " The Shorter Catechism," therefore, is on Scriptural ground when it concludes the answer we have already quoted in part, "but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized."

The child of a Jewish parent had a *right* to circumcision. He was circumcised not to make him an Israelite, but because he was an Israelite. That child was "holy," and the New Testament says that the child of a Christian is "holy."

We baptise the child not to make him something, but because of what he already is, the child of God's child, a covenant child, with covenant prospects and, in due course, covenant responsibilities. When we apply water to that child in baptism, it proclaims that he inherits a fallen nature and needs to be cleansed, and that this can only be done through the blood of Christ. For that fulfilment Church and parents pray, and the answer comes in God's time. It may come early, or it may come late ; "the washing of regeneration" is in the hands of God alone. Yet we do note that Jeremiah and John the Baptist were regenerate *before birth* (Jer. 1 : 5 ; Luke 1 : 15). The Holy Spirit is sovereign in all His operations.

When Christian parents present their children for baptism, they do so in faith. We believe that God will honour that faith. It is often urged against infant baptism that infants cannot exercise faith, an objection which we shall consider in due course, but seldom do we hear any discussion of the faith of Christian parents. The late Mrs. Booth said to a friend, " I have had nine children. As each one was born we gave them entirely up to the Lord. They were also each baptised. We believe the Lord took charge of them from the moment they were handed over to Him." She further remarked : " They all testified to their conversion to God in tender years and confessed Christ publicly. There was not one of them that cost me an hour's anxiety. The Lord not only accepted them but gave them grace and all Christian virtues. I acknowledged them as being His, because they had been handed over to Him, and I only had to train them for Him. He accepted them for Himself and His service and led them forth to do His will and nobly to fight His battles." Not all Christian parents could say that their children had never cost them an hour's anxiety, but thousands could give a similar testimony to that of Mrs. Booth. The fact is that God does honour the faith of parents who have their children baptised. This is not to say that all covenant children grow up to be covenant-keepers, that is Christians ; as with ancient Israel, there are, alas, covenant-breakers. On the other hand, we have no authority to deny that God will eventually save the children of parents who have, in faith, given those children to Him and claimed His promise. Suffice it to say that the experience of Mrs. Booth is common to the great majority of

similar parents, and that even those who did not live to see their prayers answered, may yet find them answered in Heaven.

In I. Sam. 1 : 27, 28, we have the moving words of the saintly Hannah : " For this child I prayed ; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him : therefore also I have lent him to the Lord ; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." This passage establishes an important principle, the principle already illustrated by the case of Mrs. Booth. Although the child was very young, Hannah had no doubt in her mind when she handed over her child to God for "*as long as he liveth.*" Later events proved that God honoured her faith and accepted her child.

#### BAPTISM OR DEDICATION ?

Those who look askance at infant baptism are often keen to **dedicate** children to God. This raises a vital question. *If the child is unfit for baptism, how can he be fit for dedication ?* On what Biblical grounds are we to base dedication ? Is it not highly inconsistent, first of all, to teach that the infant of a Christian home has no special standing before God, and is in no way different from all other children, and then to dedicate that child to God ! This becomes stranger still in view of the teaching that God has provided no means of receiving any who are not old enough to understand. If the children of believers are in no way different in the sight of God from the children of the heathen, on what authority can they be dedicated to Him ? Many of the arguments against infant baptism can be urged with equal force against dedication. When Christian parents dedicate infants they unwittingly admit that their children do stand in a different relationship to God than the children of the heathen, that those children are, as God Himself says, "holy," and that they have special privileges in being born and reared in a gospel environment.

While the doctrine of infant baptism cannot be founded on Luke 18 : 15, it does prove that Christ blessed infants, for while Mark uses the word for children, Luke uses the word for infants. The passage is best translated, "And they brought unto Him their babes." Mark expressly states that our Lord "blessed" the children brought to Him, and

the "touch" mentioned by Luke would, in Jewish circles, mean a benedictory laying-on of the hands. The disciples wished to send away the parents who brought their children to Christ; they rebuked them. At this Christ was much displeased. Dr. J. A. Alexander is right when he comments: "The application of this passage to infant-baptism, although scornfully rejected as absurd by its opponents, is entirely legitimate, not as an argument, but as an illustration of the spirit of the Christian system with respect to children." No one would pretend that there is the slightest reference in the above passages to infant baptism, yet this action of our Lord is an indirect encouragement to bring children to be baptised. We should certainly seek to avoid the spirit of the disciples who would have turned away the mothers who brought their nurslings to be blessed. How different were the words of Christ—Forbid them not! Bishop J. C. Ryle speaks in the spirit of the New Testament when he says, "It is allowed on all sides that infants may be elect and chosen of God unto salvation, may be washed in Christ's blood, born again of the Spirit, have grace, be justified, sanctified, and enter heaven. If these things be so, it is hard to see why they may not receive the outward sign of baptism."

It needs to be stressed that baptism does not save the soul. It is a gospel ordinance, not a saving ordinance. The penitent thief received no sacraments. Children are not regenerate because of their baptism and the doctrine of baptismal regeneration taught by Rome and echoed in "high church" circles is a grave error. Baptism does nothing to a child; it is a recognition of what that child already is. Because infant baptism has been abused, it does not follow that it should not be used; because there is a false doctrine of infant baptism, it does not follow that there is not a Biblical doctrine. The same applies to the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. There are unscriptural doctrines of the Supper, and unscriptural practice too; but that is no argument against the true doctrine of the Supper and its proper observance.

#### THE MODE OF BAPTISM:

The debate over baptism has been concerned with two issues—*candidate* and *mode*; *who* should be baptised and *how*. It is a pity that there has been so much controversy



about the mode of baptism, but as many insist that only immersion is valid baptism, we must consider this question. It is urged that the New Testament words "bapto" and "baptizo" can only mean "to dip." Christ's command to baptise is taken to be a command to immerse. This immersion is followed by emersion, and so, it is said, the death and resurrection of Christ, and the death and resurrection of the believer, are symbolised, and the candidate professes faith in Christ. We have already seen that the basic meaning of baptism is cleansing, and the New Testament repeatedly affirms that confession of faith in Christ is made with the mouth after believing—Rom. 14 : 11 ; Phil. 2 : 11 ; John 12 : 42 ; Rom. 10 : 10.

The word "baptizo" which occurs 76 times in the New Testament, and which was used by our Lord in the institution of baptism *does not* necessarily mean to immerse. Any good Greek lexicon will give "to dip," "to wash," "to bathe," and even "to cleanse," or "to purify" as meanings of this verb. The Biblical usage of the word supports this. We have references to washing before meals, and washing cups, cooking utensils and tables, in Mark 7 : 3, 4, and Luke 11 : 38. In both places "baptizo" is used. Mark says, "Except they baptize they eat not" ; and Luke writes, "The Pharisee marvelled that He had not first baptised before dinner." Did the Jews immerse tables (or "beds" as in A, V. margin) ? Did they immerse themselves before every meal ? In all of the following passages it is impossible to think of "baptizo" meaning immersion—Matt. 3 : 11 ; Luke 11 : 37, 38 ; 12 : 50 ; Rom 6 : 3 (a grave in the East was often, as with the burial of Christ, not a hole in the ground into which the corpse was lowered, but a place hewn in the rock into which the corpse was lifted) ; I. Cor. 12 : 13 ; Heb. 9 : 10 (washings, lit. baptisings) compare verses 13, 14, 19, 21 ; I. Cor. 10 : 1, 2.

The idea of washing or purification gradually became prominent in the usage of "baptizo," and it is significant that for centuries such cleansing had been associated with sprinkling, not dipping, as the following passages make plain—Num. 8 : 7 ; 19 : 13, 18, 19, 20 ; Psl. 51 : 7 ; Ezek. 36 : 25 ; Heb. 9 : 13, 14, 19 ; I. Cor. 10 : 1, 2. Clearly the idea of sprinkling is not so unscriptural as is sometimes supposed.

It is a fact that "baptizo" does not necessarily mean to immerse, and nowhere does the New Testament explicitly state that immersion took place. We do not deny that there may have been cases of immersion, nor do we deny that immersion is a valid mode of baptism. That is not the point at issue. We do maintain that sprinkling or pouring are equally valid modes and that immersion is not necessary. It is improbable that John the Baptist immersed the multitudes that presented themselves for baptism ; it is much more likely that he poured water upon them as some early inscriptions indicate. It is improbable that the apostles had enough water and the facilities to immerse three thousand in a single day in Jerusalem. Would it not appear from Acts 9 : 17, 18, that Paul was baptised in the house where Ananias found him ? Does Acts 10 : 47, 48, not suggest that in the case of Cornelius and his friends, water was brought and that those present were baptised in the house ? Is there any evidence that the Philippian jailor was led away from the prison, in the dead of night, to be immersed in a pool or river ? Would he have dared to do this when he was commanded to keep his prisoners safely ? (Acts 16 : 22—33). The account of the baptism of the eunuch, Acts 8 : 36, 38, is often regarded as a Scriptural proof for immersion ; but it is far from conclusive. This baptism was in a desert. The eunuch said, " See, here is water," quite literally, " See, water." We have no idea how much water there was ; we are simply told that "they went down *both* into the water." The preposition "eis" (into) is sometimes used by Luke in the sense of "to," so that Acts 8 : 38 may be properly translated, "and they both went down to the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptised him." Besides, as shown in early drawings, it was common practice for candidates for baptism to stand in the water while water was poured upon them.

The case for total immersion as the only valid mode of baptism is not proven, and we have encouragement to regard sprinkling and pouring as being equally valid. It is noteworthy that in a prophecy of the blessings to be experienced in New Testament days, God says, "And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean." (Ezek. 36 : 25) ; and the purifying Spirit (Whose work is symbolised in baptism) was *poured out* upon the Church. (Acts 2 : 33).

## OBJECTIONS TO INFANT BAPTISM :

(1). Circumcision, it is urged, was merely a carnal ordinance, destined to pass away and having no connection with baptism. We have already seen that circumcision was a spiritual ordinance (Rom. 2 : 28, 29) and it is a mistake to place circumcision on the same level as the Mosaic ceremonial laws ; circumcision was quite independent of those laws and in its Biblical usage goes back to Abraham. We have shown in this study that the Scriptures do connect circumcision and baptism.

(2). There is neither command nor example for infant baptism in the New Testament. This is true, but in no way affects the validity of infant baptism. It should be noted that the whole Bible is our rule of faith and conduct, and that those who make this objection are not consistent with their own method of interpretation. They allow women to partake of the Lord's Supper. Where is the command or example in the New Testament for admitting women to the Lord's Table ? We believe that there are sound Biblical grounds for the admission of women to the Supper, but if we followed the type of reasoning illustrated by this particular objection, the argument from silence, then we should have to debar them. We have seen that for many centuries children were recognised as members of the visible Church, and the New Testament nowhere says that this must now cease. The argument from silence cuts both ways ! Where, for example, does the Bible command that all those who are born and reared in Christian homes must profess faith before they are baptised ? Where in the New Testament is there a single example of this ? Dr. A. A. Hodge in his commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith writes : " There are only eleven cases of baptism recorded in the Acts and the Epistles. In the case of two of these, Paul and the Ethiopian eunuch, there were no children to be baptised. Five of the cases were large crowds. After Stephanas was baptised with the crowd among "the many Corinthians," Paul baptised his household. Also were the households of Lydia, of the jailor, of Crispus, and probably of Cornelius, baptised. Thus in **every case** in which the household existed it was baptised. The faith of the head of the household is mentioned, but not that of the household itself, except in one case, and that as a general

fact. The apostles also address children as members of the Church. Compare Eph. 1 : 1 with Eph. 6 : 1—3, and Col. 1 : 1, 2 with Col. 3 : 20."

(3). The most important objection to infant baptism is that Scripture requires faith and repentance from the candidate for baptism. Infants cannot believe or repent, therefore, it is argued, they should not be baptised. Scriptures quoted to support this include Mark 16 : 16—"He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved"; Acts 2 : 38—"Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"; and Acts 8 : 37, which gives Philip's reply to the Eunuch, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest."\* To many this argument is unanswerable. But of whom is faith and repentance required? Clearly of adults. On this we are all agreed. We believe these verses as strongly as anyone. Our contention is that these verses do *not* relate to infants. One might as well argue that the Scriptures clearly teach that without faith there is no salvation, infants cannot exercise faith, therefore they cannot be saved. Here again those who urge this objection are not consistent with their method of interpretation, as almost all Christians believe that those who die in infancy go to Heaven. Besides we have already noted express Biblical authority for believing that in some cases infants are regenerate. This objection, if it were true, could be used with equal force against the divine ordinance of circumcision. By God's command infants of eight days old were to be circumcised (Gen. 17 : 12). Yet much is said of circumcision that could not possibly apply to infants. The Apostle Paul declared that every man that was circumcised was a debtor to keep the whole law? (Gal. 5 : 5). In Rom. 2 : 25, he says, "Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision." An infant cannot keep the law or become a debtor. Yet infants were to be circumcised. In view of this we see that one of the main objections to infant baptism breaks down completely. In certain respects infants are quite plainly in a different category from adults.

\*This verse is omitted in the best manuscripts and does not appear in recent translations.

Other objections have already been dealt with in our study of this subject ; suffice it to state that these and similar objections *prove too much*. They prove that circumcision of infants was wrong, when in fact it was right ; that women should be debarred from the Lord's Supper when in fact they should be admitted ; that no infant can go to Heaven (" He that believeth not shall be damned.") when in fact the Scriptures warrant no such doctrine. An argument that proves too much destroys itself.

#### OUR LORD'S BAPTISM :

Although the baptism of our Lord is not directly related to the subject of infant baptism, it is often discussed within the context of baptism in general. Much confusion prevails concerning Christ's baptism at the hands of John the Baptist. We may observe :

- (1). Christ did not need to exercise saving faith ;
- (2). Christ did not need to repent ;
- (3). John's baptism was a "baptism of repentance"  
(Mark 1 : 4).
- (4). He Who was to bear the sin of many, to be numbered with the transgressors and to effect our cleansing from sin *identified* Himself with sinners when He was baptised by John ;
- (5). The baptism of Christ is unique ; there is no comparison between His baptism and ours.

#### CONCLUSION ;

We believe that the Reformed doctrine of Infant Baptism has sound Biblical foundations. We have yet to meet with another doctrine of Baptism which will stand the test of Scripture. The main objections to infant baptism we find to be weak both from the standpoint of Scripture and reason. It must be emphasised, however, that there is no Scriptural defence for careless, indiscriminate baptism ; and baptism does not save a child. Baptism, like the Lord's Supper, is not essential to salvation. The penitent thief received neither baptism nor the Supper ; but he received their content, CHRIST. It is to Christ that baptism and the Supper point us, and our trust should be in Him alone. Only then will these holy ordinances be meaningful to us ; only then will they strengthen us in our Christian experience.