

Chapter 13

Infant Baptism and the Church's Ambiguity

Simon himself believed and was baptized.
And he followed Philip everywhere,
astonished by the great signs and
miracles he saw.
-Acts 8:13-

The Visible Church

Some might point to the wide-scale abuse of infant baptism as an argument that the practice should not be permitted. But is the propensity to abuse baptism any greater among churches which practice infant baptism than among churches which do not? And does the abuse of a practice in any case invalidate the practice. If one is looking for the perfect church, he could argue that adult baptism is invalid, for at Samaria Simon did not immediately manifest the fruit associated with baptism (Acts 8:13, 18-23), and at Corinth Christians took a false pride in baptism (1 Cor. 1:11-17). Annanias and Sapphira could hardly be held up as exhibit "A" of the "Adults Only" approach to baptism (Acts 5:1-11).

False brethren worm their way into the church despite men's best efforts to maintain the church's purity (Gal. 2:4; 1 John 2:19; Jude 4). Our best efforts at watchful prayer, electing dutiful pastors and elders, revitalizing the congregation, care and discernment in the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, screening members transferring from other churches, and church discipline, do not always prevent hypocrites from surfacing among the flock. We must all confess that there is an enemy within each one of us which the Scriptures designate "our old man" (Rom. 6:6) who all too often betrays us into thinking

that the enemy is somewhere “out there.” For that reason, we are admonished to be diligent to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). This is simply to recognize the Reformation distinction between the *visible* church, in terms of its outward profession, and the *invisible* church, known only to God in this present age. So even if we had a totally regenerate church, how could we possibly know beyond the shadow of a doubt that we had one? What we see are professing believers.

The *Westminster Confession* states,

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 (WCF 1946, XXV, II).

The *Savoy Declaration* sounded a note of encouragement to those who would find it difficult to endure the imperfections in the church on this side of glory:

The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error, and some have so degenerated so to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan: nevertheless Christ always hath had, and ever shall have, a visible Kingdom in this world, to the end, thereof, of such as believe in him, and make profession of his name (Walker 1960, 396).

The apostle Paul reassured Timothy while sounding a warning to all who would presume upon their membership in the church,

Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness" (2 Tim. 2:19).

Christians theologians have historically distinguished between *general calling* and *special calling*. Special calling, or *efficacious* calling is illustrated in the Good Shepherd's words:

My sheep listen to my voice and they follow me. I give to them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one (John 10:27-30).

There is no better description of special calling than that. The special calling of the Lord imparts life everlasting.

John Bunyan illustrated special calling in his allegorical classic *Pilgrim's Progress* as Interpreter showed Christiana and Mercy a hen with her chicks:

He had [led] them then into another room, where was a Hen and chickens, and bid them observe a while. So one of the chickens went to the trough to drink, and every time she drank, she lifted up her head, and her eyes toward Heaven. See, said he, what this little chick doth, and learn of her to acknowledge whence your mercies come, by receiving them with looking up. Yet again, said he, observe and look; so they gave heed, and perceived that the Hen did walk in a four-fold method towards her chickens. 1. She had a *common call*, and that she hath all day long. 2. She had a *special call*, and that she had but sometimes. 3. She had a *brooding note*. And, 4. She had an *out-cry*.

Now, said he, compare this Hen to your King, and these chickens to his obedient ones. For answerable to her, himself has his methods, which he walketh in towards his People; by his common Call, he gives nothing; by his special Call, he always has something to give; he has also a brooding Voice, for them that are under his Wing; and he has an Out-cry, to give the alarm when he seeth the enemy come (n.d. 235-36).

Calvin wrote,

We must thus consider both God's election and his inner call. For he alone "knows who are his" [II Tim. 2:19], and, as Paul says, enclosing them under his seal [Eph. 1:13], except that they bear his insignia by which they may be distinguished from the reprobate. But because a small and contemptible number are hidden in a huge multitude and a few grains of wheat are covered by a pile of chaff, we must leave to God alone the knowledge of his church, whose foundation is his secret election (1960, 2:1013).

Commenting on the Parable of the Wedding Feast in which some who were invited managed to get into the banquet hall without wedding garments (Matt. 22:11-13), Calvin concluded,

Few, therefore, were chosen from the great number of those called [cf. Matt. 20:16]; however, we do not want to say that this is the call by which believers ought to reckon their election. For this call is common also to the wicked, but the other bears with it the Spirit of regeneration [cf. Titus 3:5], the guarantee and seal of the inheritance to come [Eph. 1:13-14], with which our hearts are sealed [II Cor. 1:22] unto the day of the Lord. . . . (1960, 1:974-75).

Not all who have made an outward profession of faith in Christ have genuinely responded inwardly from the heart.

Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fisherman pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 13:47-50).

The drawing of the net represents the gathering of the visible church from the world, on the basis of men's external response to the Gospel; the separation of the good fish from the bad represents the revelation of the invisible church at the final judgment.

Geoffrey Bromiley observed,

No matter how baptism is understood, water baptism can never be equated directly with the divine election of individuals which will be disclosed and known, not on the day of church admission, but on the day of judgment. Water baptism can be equated only with that external calling.... (Bromiley 1979, 48).

Baptism--An Act of Faith in Any Case

The administration of baptism even to adults involves an act of faith (Acts 10:47-48). How do we know whether the new believers will survive the "trouble or persecution" that "comes because of the word"--that they will not "quickly fall away" with the arrival of such adversity (Mark 4:17)? Do we withhold baptism until persecution has come and gone? What New Testament precedent would we have to delay baptism in such a manner? While we might, on that basis, delay the selection of a person to serve as an elder or a deacon of the church (1 Tim. 3:6, 10), we could hardly find biblical rationale to do the same regarding the administration of baptism.

And what about the "worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things" which come in and "choke the word making it unfruitful" (Mark 4:19)? Do we withhold baptism until we are sure that these things will never happen?

And how long should we wait? For we can never be absolutely certain in this life that a persecution, more severe than the previous, will not arise which will bring to surface in the baptized person an apostasy not apparent under lesser intensity. How can we be sure that a certain level of anxiety or materialism

will not result in spiritual atrophy within a professing believer who once appeared to have born fruit? Do we delay baptism among the unmarried until a habit of continence is established, as Tertullian suggested (Latourette 1953, 195)? Do we withhold baptism until the death bed, as Emperor Constantine did, for fear that he might commit some sin that would negate all that baptism represented (Latourette 1953, 93)?

It is said that every man has his breaking point, but surely the Lord who numbers the very hairs of our heads knows the breaking point of each of his elect children. The Psalmist who stated that his righteousness is "with their children's children" also stated that "he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14, 17).

Whether administered to infants or to adults, baptism represents an act of faith on the part of those who administer it. It is initiatory, introductory, and anticipatory as to what it symbolizes (1 Cor. 12:13). Baptism does not mark the believer's (or his offspring's) inner spiritual perfection so much as his inner spiritual beginning and his introduction to the covenant of grace (Walker [1893] 1960, 398). While it symbolizes regeneration, it anticipates the ever-persistent reality of sin within the believer in this present age, as well as the need of continual repentance and confession (1 John 1:8-10). It witnesses against sin but attests to the blessed Advocate in whom alone the Christian can trust for righteousness (Rom. 6:1-14; 1 John 2:1-2).

Try as they should to limit this initiatory rite of baptism to "true believers," men must acknowledge that there will never be a direct, one-to-one correspondence between the water-baptized church and the Holy Spirit-baptized church in this present age. Of this fact Jesus cautioned his disciples in the parable of the net (Matt. 13:47-50). Of this fact Paul warned those Corinthians who were calling his integrity into question (1 Cor. 4:3-5). Church history is tragically spotted by experimental human efforts to bring about a kind of communal perfectionism ridding the church of all hypocrites. The result has so often turned out to be something far more demonic than that which the religious zealots had originally sought to correct.

While we press for purity within the church, we must learn to expect a certain ambiguity lest we rip up the tares with the wheat at the expense of the church's peace (Matt. 13:24-30; John 6:70; 13:10-11). In the administration of baptism we must insist upon a credible profession but not expect immediate perfection. We must trust the Sanctifier to work even in the most promising of new converts, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6).

Ishmael--Kink in the Covenant?

The question is frequently posed: What shall be done with Ishmael and Esau? If the promise of blessing upon the offspring of the godly was valid and absolute, why was it not effective in Ishmael and in Esau? Paul King Jewett framed the question as follows:

What in baptism corresponds to *Ishmael's* circumcision? It is as easy to go from Christian baptism to *Isaac's* circumcision as it is difficult to go from Christian baptism back to *Ishmael's* circumcision (1978, 100).

Jewett argued that the paedobaptist's analogy between circumcision and baptism was overdrawn.

. . . while circumcision belonged both to Isaac, in whom the seed was called (Rom. 9:7), and to Ishmael, in whom the seed was not called (Gal. 4:30), baptism belongs to "everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:38-39), and to those only. One who has not known the call of God has no claim to the rite which seals the promise given in the call (1978, 235).

Jewett's statement has typified much of modern evangelical thinking--so baptistic in outlook--which has confused general and special calling. It has bespoken an individualism bereft of the family covenant. While referencing his comments with Acts 2:38-39, his statement discounted the phrase "and to you children" by which Peter defined one category of the subjects of the promise. For Jewett, infants were not included among the "children" embraced by the words "everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." Accordingly, he denied the biblical reality that God's grace is extended, not only to believing adults through the Great Commission, but also to their infant offspring, and follows them during their minority years and beyond through the influence of godly parents.

Jewett misrepresented Romans 9:7 which has nothing to do with whether the covenant sign should be applied to the infant offspring of believers--but rather highlights the sovereignty of God's grace versus human effort in the matter of salvation. Before Isaac was born *or Ishmael was circumcised*, God told Abraham, "My covenant I will establish with Isaac" (Gen. 17:21). Though Ishmael received the covenant sign of circumcision as a thirteen-year-old (Gen. 17:25), Sarah's desperate appeal to her husband coincided with God's righteous decree: "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son (Gal. 4:30; Gen. 21:10).

Concerning Esau, Jacob's older twin, the LORD declared to Rebecca while the twins were still in the womb, "The older will serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23c). This corresponded with God's righteous judgment concerning the two: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Mal. 1:2,3; Rom. 9:11-13). Esau, a godless man, would sell "his inheritance rights as the oldest son."

Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears (Heb. 12:16-17).

Prior to circumcising Ishmael, Abraham was told of Isaac's election (Gen. 17:21), but this knowledge did not nullify God's command for Abraham to circumcise Ishmael as a male son (Gen. 17:23). Similarly, though Rebecca knew of Esau's rejection beforehand, there is no indication that knowledge of God's predetermined purpose deprived Esau of the sign of the covenant (Murray 1980, 57).

The application of the covenant sign and the efficacious call of God do not have an absolute one-to-one correspondence. God's grace in election is sovereignly bestowed. Man cannot bring into effect the divine blessing by human effort--a kind of religious arm-twisting--as the Jews mistakenly supposed.

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." As it is written:

"See, I lay in Zion a stone that
causes men to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall,
and the one who trusts in him will
never be put to shame." (Rom. 9:30-33).

...Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness (Rom. 10:3).

In keeping with the biblical distinction between the external and the internal calling, and between the church visible and invisible, the external sign (by divine command) is to be applied to the infant "Ishmaels" among the church's sons and daughters (Gen. 17:10, 23), for their reprobation is not immediately manifest. "And thus the Spirit urges believers to patience so as not to be vexed at the mingling of the Ishmaelites with the church, since the latter will eventually be unmasked and cast out

in disgrace" (Calvin 1960, 1:974-75). God will work his own sovereign purpose in spite of such disparity within the visible church during this present age.

The frequent disparity between those who bear the covenant sign and those who manifest the corresponding spiritual reality and fruit could paralyze, and ultimately destroy the church, were it not for the offsetting factor of church discipline. Christ has vested his church with the authority to discipline itself (Matt. 18:15-20). Heresy, or scandalous moral behavior, when it becomes evident within the fellowship of the church, is not to be ignored, but confronted in a very loving but forthright way, if necessary, to the point of excommunication from the church--even as it was in the case of Ishmael.

...But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned (Gen. 17:9-12).

Matthew Henry stated,

None are rejected and cast out from God but those who first deserved it. Ishmael is continued in Abraham's family till he becomes a disturbance, grief, and scandal to it (1706, Gen. 21:9-13).

Noting the distinction between the visible church and the invisible church, Hoeksema wisely commented,

But let it be emphasized once more that it is according to the Holy Scripture to call the whole of the organism of the congregation according to the

name of the elect kernel, the remnant according to the election of grace. And since it is also a certainty for the church on earth that some branches will never bear fruit, therefore the pruning-knife of discipline must be used in order to cut out such branches (1977, 111).

When sin goes either undetected or unchecked by the church, God allows the tares and the wheat (indistinguishable until maturation) to grow side by side until the day of judgment (Matt. 13:24-30). Reformed Baptist David Kingdon cited the omission of Matthew 13:24-29 in the *Particular Baptist Confession of 1689*, as distinct from the *Westminster Confession* where it is included as a proof text for the *visible church* concept. Baptists have historically regarded the parable of the wheat and the tares as a statement about the world rather than the visible church (1973, 59). Hanks insisted that Matthew 13:24-39 is simply recognizing a fact--but not restricting discipline once the problem becomes totally recognizable (1981, 82-84). He pointed out that God's decrees of "election and reprobation cut through the lines of the covenant" as attested by Isaiah 1:7-9, and by the figure of the olive tree in Romans 11. For Hanks the breaking off of "branches" represented the removal of *generations* of reprobates (1981, 85, 86).

While infant baptism, improperly administered, can compromise the authenticity of the church's spiritual life, the same can be observed concerning adult baptism. Disciples of Christ founder, Alexander Campbell observed that the church's authenticity was compromised more by the latter than the former: "It is more likely that the children of Presbyterians . . . will be pious, and will be saved, than the same will be true of the children of Baptists' (See the Rice-Campbell Debate, p. 375)" (Mackay n. d., 81).

Sometimes God's purpose is to highlight the authentic by way of contrast with the counterfeit even in this present age (1 Cor. 11:18-19). Frequently, however, it is to test his people's responsible obedience in the application of church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13).

Ishmael's apostasy serves an important function for the New Testament church "on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11b). In the economy of God, Ishmael is a kind of negative reminder to the church concerning the wonder of God's sovereign electing grace (Rom. 9:6-7). He illustrates for the church the futility of carnal human effort in seeking to bring about God's purposes (Gal. 4:21-31; Gen. 16:1-12; 17:15-22). He also serves to remind the covenant children of the danger of cynicism--the illusion that somehow the covenant child can "outgrow" his need for the Gospel (Gen. 21:9).

Esau serves as a warning to covenant children not to write off their spiritual inheritance, as though it were a cheap thing. The true heartbeat of the covenant child was expressed in the David's words: "Surely I have a delightful inheritance" (Ps. 16:6). Esau reminds all Christians to beware lest they come to regard the Gospel as a dispensable commodity and allow bitterness to obtain a foothold in their hearts (Heb. 12:15-17).

It should be noted, in Ishmael's case, that even though he was cast out from the external church, God was with him in his rejection; though he was disinherited, he was not disowned (Gen. 21:20). Samuel Hopkins went so far as to suggest that Ishmael was saved, for with respect to his death, it was recorded that "he was gathered to his people (Gen. 25:17)." "This is said of the good; but of no wicked man." Hopkins reasoned that while the intergenerational pattern of Exodus 20:6 was interrupted in Ishmael's case, he himself was saved for the sake of his father Abraham (1811, 2:303-4 note). Furthermore, he did receive a blessing of a sort, though the covenant promise was not established through him (Gen. 17:20-21). Frequently, God accomplishes great things in the world through those trained in Christian homes, though they themselves may not even be spiritual partakers of Christ.

Great plenty of outward good things is often given to those children of godly parents who are born after the flesh, for their parents' sake (Henry 1706, Gen. 17:15-22).

We can be certain that the promise of the regenerating Spirit of God has been made more readily available to us, and is offered in greater measure and with fuller assurance to the Seed of Abraham than had ever been the case with the Old Testament patriarchs. We can, thus, expect greater blessings upon the home as we look to the Mediator of the New Covenant.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb. 4:14-16).

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19).

William Ames stated,

. . . the covenant as now administered to believers brings greater and fuller consolation than it once could, before the coming of Christ. But if it pertained only to them and not to their infants, the grace of God and their consolation would be narrower and more contracted after Christ's appearing than before ([1629] 1983, 211).

John Calvin had made the same point a century earlier:

Otherwise, if the testimony by which the Jews were assured of the salvation of their posterity is taken away from us, Christ's coming would have the effect of making God's grace more obscure and less attested for us than it had previously been for the Jews. Now, this cannot be said without grievously slandering Christ. . . (1960, 2:1329).

Pierre Marcel made the salient point that New Testament ministers are described by the apostle Paul as "ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit" (1953, 230). This ministry of the Spirit is described as "even more glorious" than that of Moses, and as "the ministry that brings righteousness" (2 Cor. 3:8-9). If the "righteousness" that it brings does not extend to "children's children" (Psa. 103:17), it can hardly be considered "more glorious" than the covenant "made known . . . to Moses" (Psa. 103:7).

The author of Hebrews affirmed that

the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is the Mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises (Heb. 8:6).

Turning to the "new covenant" with its "better promises" as announced centuries before by the prophet Jeremiah, he heralded,

This is the covenant I will make
with the house of Israel
after that time, declares the Lord.
I will put my laws in their minds
and write them on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
or a man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord,"
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest
For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more
(Heb. 8:10-12; Jer. 31:33-34; cf. Gen. 17:7).

This notion--that the New Testament, with its pattern of fulfillment, ought to embrace the infants even in a greater way than the Old Testament--was characterized by Jewett as "a quantitative answer to a qualitative problem" (1978, 228). But if the above passage of Scripture means anything, it certainly

means that there is far less disparity between God's election and the outward expression of the covenant of grace under the dispensation of the new covenant than had ever been the case under the law. Indeed the new covenant envisions a Day when there will be no disparity whatsoever. And if the singling out of "the least of them," does not indicate the efficacy of the new covenant with respect to the infants, in keeping with Genesis 17:7, then we must despair of all use of language.

The new covenant as expressed in the above passage certainly addresses the "qualitative problem" associated with the legal administration of the covenant of grace (Jer. 31:32; Ps. 78:8). To suggest that such a passage rules out infant baptism is to insult the Spirit of grace and to ignore the implications of the Incarnation whereby Christ passed through the stage of human infancy.

Richard Baxter's vehemence at this point in his day should have come as no surprise to Professor Jewett, for such a suggestion demoted the children of the New Testament to a worse condition than the curse of the law had afforded the children of the Israelites (Deut. 28:4, 18, 32, & 41; Jewett 1978, 61; Baxter 1651, 70). When considered as a prophetic extension of Genesis 17:7, Hebrews 8:10-12 offers a surer foundation for infant baptism than the promise of Genesis 17:7 itself did for infant circumcision. For as John Bunyan expounded Christ's "Absolute Promise" concerning the elect,

. . . if faith and repentance be the way to come, as indeed they are, then faith and repentance *shall* be given to them for *shall-come* must be fulfilled on them (1979, 282; John 6:37 KJV).

The promise of Isaiah 59:20-21, also a prophetic expansion on Genesis 17:7, can hardly be described as being defective in quality with respect to its application. And its application is explicitly intergenerational. Professor E. Johnson commented on this text also citing the testimony of Albert Barnes, the author of the popular biblical commentary, Barnes's *Notes*:

He makes solemn promises to men conditional on their compliance with his terms. To the repentant his Spirit will be imparted, as a continuous gift. His words, or revelations, shall be in their mouth, therefore in their minds and hearts, for ever--flowing on, a holy stream of tradition, from generation to generation [cf. Deut. vii.9; iv. 37; v.29; Ps. lxxxix. 24-36; Jer. xxxii. 39, 40). The majority of religious people are descendants of those who were the friends of God. A large proportion of American piety has descended from the Pilgrim Fathers. Barnes says, "I am acquainted with the descendants of John Rogers, the first martyr in Queen Mary's reign, of the tenth and eleventh generations. With a single exception, the eldest son in the family, has been a clergyman--some of them eminently distinguished for learning and piety" (Spence 1950, 10:392).

For an American testimony to the qualitative transmission of the covenant blessings of the Christian faith from generation to generation one need only trace the descendants of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards, the eighteenth-century Congregationalist pastor and his wife. In her biographical study of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards, *Marriage to a Difficult Man*, Elisabeth Dodds described a pattern that continued up to 1900 and beyond in which the Edwards's descendants had

entered the ministry in platoons and sent one hundred missionaries overseas, as well as stocking many mission boards with lay trustees. One maverick married the daughter of a South Sea Island chieftain but even that branch reverted to type, and its son became a clergyman.

How is that for quality? This was not to mention the benevolent impact upon American society that accrued from 13 college presidents, 65 professors, 100 lawyers, 30 judges, 66 physicians, and 80 holders of public office (Dodds 1971, 38).

Public "Covenanting" and the Lord's Table

Before children are admitted to the Lord's Table, the church must insist upon a credible profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus. In other words, there is a gap between *covenant* membership and *communicant* membership--they are not one and the same. Beasley-Murray regarded this gap as intolerable. "It leaves the unconfirmed in an ambiguous position with regard to the Church, and for the majority that ambiguity remains throughout life" (1963, 370). Ironically, Beasley-Murray as much as acknowledged the same ambiguity in Baptist circles with respect to their own children. Noting that the catechumen in the paedobaptist setting was permitted to attend worship but not the Supper, and that he was viewed as a pagan yet was under the church's discipleship care, Beasley-Murray made a remarkable concession:

Something similar may be said of our children in their tender years. Admittedly there is a difference between catechumens of maturer years, undergoing instruction for a definite period at their own request, and young children, whose preparation for the Church commences even before birth in the prayers of the parents, and whose nurture for the glory of God begins long before they can appreciate what they receive. Nevertheless, where Christian parenthood is regarded as a vocation from God, the blessing of God is not withheld, and often the prayers are wonderfully blessed (1963, 373).

In the face of such a concession on Beasley-Murray's part, one can only ask how such a glorious thing can be true if no covenant is in effect worthy of baptism's seal. Whatever ambiguity infant baptism poses for the church, antipaedobaptism poses as well. The difference is that the paedobaptist parent deliberately, publically, and sacramentally enters into a covenant with the triune God on behalf of his or her children.

To suggest, as Beasley-Murray did, that the separation of baptism and confirmation represents the divorcing of baptism and the Holy Spirit (1963, 370) is almost like suggesting that the church should not celebrate both Resurrection Day and Pentecost Sunday. Beasley-Murray himself stressed how totally inappropriate, if not impossible, it was to hold an iron-clad dogmatism about the Holy Spirit's actions in the book of Acts (1963, 301).

The church that presents her covenant sons and daughters to the Lord in Christian baptism openly acknowledges the ambiguity but does not allow it to go unattended. Provision must be made and appointed times established by the pastoral leadership of the church for the covenant sons and daughters to *own* the covenant. Children must own the covenant through repentance and faith in Christ offering convincing public testimony to the church's satisfaction that they have received the "seal" of the Holy Spirit. In this way the covenant sons and daughters validate the baptismal vows spoken on their behalf by their parents.

Paul King Jewett scorned confirmation as the time "when the child is old enough to say 'yes' to the proper questions, but too young to say 'no'" (1978, 117). A heart-felt public affirmation of the living God was required, however, of all those who were circumcised in the Old Testament in order properly to observe God's appointed feasts. Such a demonstration gave credible evidence that they were indeed the LORD's people (2 Chron. 29-30; 2 Kings 23:1-25; Ezra 6:19-21; Neh. 8). Public "covenanting" under the new covenant is to precede the communion ordinance celebration as well (Edwards 1879, 1:442-3). What in the Old Testament is commonly termed "swearing" (Isa. 45:22-25), is in the New Testament designated as "confessing" (Rom. 10:9-10; 14:11; Edwards 1879, 1:442-44).

There is no one thing that the covenant of grace is so often compared to in Scripture, as the marriage-covenant; and the visible transaction, or mutual profession, there is between Christ and the visible church, is abundantly compared to the mutual

profession there is in marriage. In marriage the bride professes to yield to the bridegroom's suit, and to take him for her husband, renouncing all others, and to give up herself to him to be entirely and forever possessed by him as his wife. But he that professes this toward Christ, professes saving faith (Edwards 1879, 1:443).

Jonathan Edwards explained the significance of such a public covenanting in regard to infant baptism.

When those persons who were baptized in infancy properly own their baptismal covenant, the meaning is, that they now, being capable to act for themselves, do professedly and explicitly make their parents' act, in giving them up to God, their own, by expressly giving themselves up to God....A child of Christian parents never does that for himself which his parents did for him in infancy, till he gives himself wholly to God (1879, 1:444).

Anything short of a open commitment of the heart-- whether promise of future obedience, or profession of historical faith-- was insufficient to qualify one for the Lord's Table.

Such persons, instead of being professedly united to Christ, in the union of the covenant of grace, are rather destitute of the love of Christ; and so, instead of being qualified for admission to the Lord's Supper, are rather exposed to that denunciation of the apostle, 1 Cor. xvi. 22. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema. Maranatha" (Edwards 1879, 1:244).

Carson argued that participation in the Old Testament Passover had involved "no condition either of faith, or of character," but only outward circumcision according to Exodus 12:43 ([1853] 1981, 228). Carson overlooked the consistent Old Testament call upon the covenant people to comply with the

spiritual meaning of circumcision (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4), as well as the prophets' utter denunciation of religion that consisted only in outward observance (Isa. 1:10-18; Amos 5:21-24; & Micah 6:6-8).

English Reformed Baptist leader, David Kingdon, argued:

. . . those who make much of the circumcision/ baptism analogy should make a little more of the Passover/Lord's supper analogy. If following circumcision infants were present at, and partook of the passover, then why do our Reformed Paedobaptist friends deny the Lord's Supper to infants? If the analogy holds good in the one instance it should do so in the other (1973, 71).

Baxter argued that with baptism the subject was more passive than was the case with the Lord's Supper; hence, the latter was not as appropriate for infants. Infants could be washed but they could not eat bread or drink wine. He was willing, however, to yield to paedocommunion if the Baptists could prove that it was biblical (1651, 114-15).

Kingdon failed to catch the sense of Exodus 12:26-27:

And when your children ask you, "What does this ceremony mean to you?" then tell them, "It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians."

These instructions suggest that the children were on-lookers, rather than full partakers, at the Passover meal, at least until old enough to investigate its meaning (Calvin 1960, 2:1353).

Kingdon insisted that the Old Testament knew of "no ceremony subsequent to circumcision which like the 'bar mitzvah' of Judaism marked the person as a full member of the covenant community" (1973, 69). The renowned Jewish scholar, Alfred Edersheim, however, indicated that

in strict law, personal observance of the ordinances, and hence attendance on the feasts at Jerusalem, devolved on a youth only when he was of age, that is, at thirteen years (1959, 1:235).

The Lord's Table, according to 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, calls for a self-examination and a discernment of the body that are best reserved for those whose covenant compliance has passed the review of the elders and the assembled congregation (Calvin 1960, 2:1352-1353).

The Scripture consistently calls for public "covenanting" or "subscribing" on the part of the church's covenant sons and daughters, though it attributes such a public engagement to the enabling grace of the Spirit of God.

I will pour out my Spirit on
your offspring
and my blessing on your
descendants....
One will say, "I belong to the LORD";
another will call himself by the
name of Jacob;
still another will write on his hand,
"The LORD's,"
and will take the name Israel (Isa.44:3, 5).

...and no one can say "Jesus is Lord,
"except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3, 5).

Paedocommunion, the practice of some churches of admitting to the Lord's table those covenant children who have not yet publicly subscribed, may be said to break down the confirmation event into many events of childhood spiritual bite size. On the positive side, it may be viewed as eliminating the rigidity of the church's confirmation process and allowing for the sovereignty of the Spirit in the regeneration of the infant sons and daughters. It accommodates the variety of the responses of covenant children to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit and to the Gospel itself.

On the negative side, however, paedocommunion ignores the spiritual principle behind the *bar mitzvah* and minimizes the maturation process in the life of covenant children for attaining sufficient discretionary powers (Isa. 7:15-16; Deut. 1:39) so as to make an unforgettable, conscious, and lasting commitment to Christ. This is not to deny the possibility of infant faith, or to impugn the salvific aspect of it, but simply to recognize the need for a critical juncture of intelligent faith and public acknowledgment of God's grace which itself was revealed at a critical point in time--indeed, the fulness of time (Paedocommunion 1988).

Instead of withholding water baptism on the one hand, or introducing paedocommunion on the other, it is far better to baptize the covenant children as infants and to recognize the example of Jesus who at the age of twelve affirmed His unique relationship to His heavenly Father and to His Father's house in the face of his concerned parents (Luke 2:49), notwithstanding the fact that He was the eternal Son of God by virtue of His conception by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35)? Clearly the New Testament reveals the concept of a youth coming "of age" and being regarded by his parents and others as capable of speaking on his own regarding religious issues. Such was the man born blind whom Jesus healed. Whatever spiritual shortcomings attended his parents, their response to the inquiry concerning their son certainly implied that the Jews recognized a critical juncture in a person's life associated with an age of public accountability: "Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself" (John 9:21-23).

Just as the Jewish synagogue afforded an example of church government by elected ruling elders which itself was rooted in the Old Testament (Deut. 1:13), and this model was adopted by the early church (Acts 14:23), so the Jewish *bar mitzvah* may serve as a better model for recognizing among the covenant sons and daughters maturer judgment and confessional readiness for the responsibilities associated with the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 11:28-29).