

## Chapter 2

# The Triune God and the Household Covenant

"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"  
-Ecclesiastes 4:12b

### Into the Triune Name

To designate infant baptism into the name of the Triune God as an "ancient landmark" (Prov. 23:10) on the testimony of church history proves nothing unless it can be shown that the practice was divinely authorized. Antiquity, in itself, is no sufficient argument for the truth of a matter, for Satan himself is designated "that ancient serpent" by the beloved apostle John (Rev. 12:9); and that city John described as "drunk with the blood of the saints" (Rev. 17:6) is a very ancient city whose origins can be traced to Nimrod in Genesis 10:9-10. If infant baptism is to be substantiated, therefore, it must be on far surer grounds than the argument concerning its antiquity. It must be shown to hold some vital connection with the Being whom the Scriptures declare to be "the Ancient of Days" (Dan. 7:13). Of him and of him alone can it be said,

Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the earth and  
the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting  
you are God (Ps. 90:2).

As Pierre Marcel put it,

...it would be catastrophic if theological and dogmatic reflection were to be brought to an end because it is considered that historical proof is sufficient (1953, 21).

John Frederick Jansen of Austin Presbyterian Seminary stated that "the question of infant baptism is a problem of theology. . . . It will be settled by the meaning of baptism, for it is ultimately a doctrinal issue (Aland 1963, 14 [Preface from America]). Infant baptism, like every other practice, must be subject to a biblical/theological review.

In attempting to speak of this God, "the fountain of all being", the seventeenth-century Puritan authors of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, stated that "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth" (WCF 1946, II, ii; WSC n. d., Q. 4.). Christians have historically affirmed what the Scriptures universally attest, viz., that God's Being consists of a blessed tri-unity (Num. 6:24-26; Deut. 6:4; 2 Cor. 13:14), or as Tertullian first put it, a "Trinity" (Cairns 1954, 112). The framers of the *Westminster Confession*, following the *Nicene Creed*, affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity:

In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son (1946, II,iii).

William Ames, whose *Marrow of Theology* was standard reading for the students of Harvard and Yale in the early days, differentiated the respective persons of Deity.

15. The difference between being begotten, which applies to the Son, and that proceeding which applies to the Holy Spirit cannot be explained in words, except that the Son proceeds from the Father alone, and the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son (in this instance taken together).

16. Nevertheless, the relationship may be sketched in

part by a figure, The Father is, as it were *Deus intelligens*, God understanding; the Son who is the express image of the Father is *Deus intellectus*, God understood; and the Holy Spirit, flowing and breathed from the Father through the Son, is *Deus dilectus*, God loved (Ames [1629] 1983, 89).

While the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments attest the mystery and incomprehensibility of God (Rom. 11:33-36), the triune economy (Greek *oikonomia* [Eph. 1:10; 3:9]) is not one of chaos or disorder (1 Cor. 14:33). That God did not create the world a "chaos" (Isa. 45:18 RSV) is a reflection of the orderly perfection of his own Being. And though the persons of Deity have been fittingly described as "equal in power and glory" (WSC n. d., Q.6.), the divine economy cannot be considered "egalitarian" (Phil. 2:6). The persons of the Godhead dwell in eternal synchronicity, and are not only unthreatened by, but *delight in* the trinitarian lines of subordination and interdependence.

I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does (John 5:19-20a).

I desire to do your will, O my God;  
your law is within my heart (Ps. 40:8).

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are eternally covenanted together within the Godhead toward a mutual glorification of one another (Edwards 1879, 1:536). Among the persons of the Deity there are no power plays against one another--no declarations of independence, and no demands that the triune roles be laid aside in the interests of individual "rights."

When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do

nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him (John 8:28-29).

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me (John 15:26).

God created the human species "male and female" (Gen. 1:27); yet, there has never been (nor will there ever be) an intra-Trinitarian challenge for the Father-Son relationship to yield to a "Mother-Daughter" relationship in the interests of human "political correctness" (Achte-meier 1993). Though God's compassion is sometimes described in motherly terms (Isa. 66:13; Luke 13:34), never would the Holy Spirit seek to eradicate the distinctions of the Father and the Son, or to substitute a "goddess" image for any of the divine persons (Jer. 44:15-30). To suggest such a notion is to challenge the immutability of the "Father of heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17).

God is who he is according to his own Sovereign Being--the "Ancient of Days" without respect for modern "political correctness." His name "I AM" (Exod. 3:14) conveys, among his many other attributes, his self-sufficiency. He did not create man out of a sense of need; nor is he dependent upon any created being for his own happiness or fulfillment (Acts 17:24-25). Such was the message of the eighteenth-century New England Congregationalist, Jonathan Edwards. In the *Nature of True Virtue* Edwards provided theological perspective on "being."

God is not only infinitely greater and more excellent than all other being, but he is the head of the universal system of existence; the foundation and fountain of all being and all beauty; from whom all is perfectly derived, and on whom all is most absolutely and perfectly dependent; *of whom*, and *through whom*, and *to whom* is all being and perfection; and

whose being and beauty are, as it were, the sum and comprehension of all existence and excellence: much more than the sun is the fountain and summary comprehension of all the light and brightness of the day (1879, 1:125).

In *The End for which God Created the World* Edwards put God's happiness in theological perspective.

Nor do these things argue any *dependence* in God on the creature for happiness. Though he has real pleasure in the creature's holiness and happiness, yet this is not properly any pleasure which he receives from the creature. For these things are what he *gives* the creature. They are wholly and entirely from him. His rejoicing therein is rather a rejoicing in his own acts, and his own glory expressed in those acts, than a joy derived from the creature. God's joy is dependent on nothing beside his own act, which he exerts with an absolute and independent power (1879, 1:102).

God's happiness, Edwards insisted, "consists in enjoying and rejoicing in himself; and so does the creature's happiness. It is a participation of what is in God; and God is the objective ground of it" (1879, 101).

And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began (John 17:5).

I am the LORD, and there is no other;  
apart from me there is no God (Isa. 45:5).

God's chief virtue, Edwards expounded, consisted "primarily in *love to himself*, or in the mutual love and friendship which subsists eternally and necessarily between the several persons of the Godhead, or that infinitely strong propensity there is in these divine persons one to another" (1879, 1:126; John 13:31-32; 16:13-14). Foremost among the attributes of this

triune God which overwhelmed the celestial seraphim in Isaiah's vision was the splendor of God's holiness:

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory (Isa. 6:3b).

Baptism into the name of this God was described by the apostle Paul as an "holy" baptism:

. . . Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Eph. 5:25b-27).

God's self-glorification is a fact of Holy Scripture: "I am the LORD; and that is my name! I will not give my glory to another" (Isaiah 42:8). His supreme motive of self-glorification was never *in opposition to* the creatures's need; in fact, it was supremely exhibited through the magnifying of his grace to the fallen creature. "In love he destined us to be his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--to the praise of his glorious grace . . ." (Eph. 1:4b-6a).

Here God acting for *himself*, or making himself his last end, and his acting for *their* sake, are not to be set in opposition; they are rather to be considered as coinciding one with the other. But yet God is to be considered as first and original in his regard; and the creature is the object of God's regard, consequently, and by implication, as being as it were comprehended in God (Edwards 1879, 1:101).

This coincidence of God's action *for himself* and *for the creature's sake* is seen in the Son's conversation with the Father on the eve of the crucifixion.

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father save me from this hour?' No, it was for

this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:27-28).

The salvation of the sinner and the divine glory go hand in hand in God's economy.

Call on me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver you, and you  
shall glorify me (Ps. 50:15 NRSV).

In the divine economy there is an eternal covenant whereby the divine persons cooperate, or confederate, for the creation and redemption of the human race.

Some things were done before the world was created, yea from eternity. The persons of the Trinity were, as it were, confederated in a design, and a covenant of redemption. In this covenant the Father had appointed the Son, and the Son had undertaken the work; and all things to be accomplished in the world were stipulated and agreed. There were things done at the *creation* of the world, in order to that work; for the world itself seems to have been created in order to it (Edwards 1879, 1:534).

Each person is unique and exercises a distinctive role within the eternal covenant of redemption. The Father decrees and donates (Eph. 1:3-5; 11; Rom. 8:32), the Son mediates the covenant and executes the work of redemption (Heb. 9:15; John 17:4; Heb. 10:14), and the Holy Spirit applies and seals the covenant to the heirs (John 16:13-15; Eph. 1:13-14). The divine economy consists of a glorious order and operation of the persons of the triune God.

It is but one design that is formed, to which all the offices of Christ, directly tend, and in which

all the members of the Trinity conspire. All the various dispensations that belong to it are united; and the several wheels are one machine, to answer one end, and produce one effect (Edwards 1879, 1:534).

John Bunyan, England's beloved Baptist preacher and author of the classic *Pilgrim's Progress*, so esteemed the eternal covenant of redemption that he wrote one of the longest sermons ever written, and entitled it *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*. Bunyan viewed the intra-Trinitarian covenant from the perspective of John 6:37: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." In these words of Jesus, Bunyan saw two absolute promises on the part of the Father and the Son representing a mutual pact (Bunyan 1979, 274-77). Accordingly, the Father, by an eternal decree, gave the church as a bride to the Son, and the Son vowed to be eternally faithful to the bride and to guarantee her eternal well-being.

William Ames, similarly, spoke of (1) "the Father's decree and donation by which he has given Christ certain men to be redeemed and saved, John 6:39"; (2) "the intention of Christ whereby he has made satisfaction for the good of those who have been destined for him by the Father. John 17:9, 11, 12, 19"; and (3) "the acceptance of the Father, or his ratification of the satisfaction given for the reconciliation and salvation of those persons. 2 Cor. 5:19." The work of the Holy Spirit was not overlooked. Ames insisted,

The agreement between God and Christ was a kind of advance application of our redemption and deliverance of us to our surety and our surety to us (Ames [1629] 1983, 149).

Ames continued, "Both the Father and the Son are declared to send the Spirit to perform this application." In this covenant between the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit applies or makes "effectual, in certain men, of all those things which Christ has done and does as mediator" ([1629] 1983, 149).

To be baptized into the triune Name, therefore, is to be

marked for inclusion in the eternal covenant of the triune God--to be called by the Father, united to the Son (thereby becoming a recipient of all his redemptive benefits), and sealed with the Spirit of grace.

A failure to articulate the intra-Trinitarian covenant of redemption weakened Methodist Jacob Ditzler's defense of infant baptism in the Great Carrollton Debate of 1875. Graves mocked Ditzler's weak concept of the covenant of redemption, as though it had originated with Eve after the historic Fall, or worse yet, with Satan, as Graves caricatured Ditzler's exposition of Genesis 3:15. Ditzler eventually made the unbiblical concession that "the Covenants of the Old Testament" had "nothing to do with Infant Baptism," thereby destroying the theological continuity between the Old and New Testaments (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 671, 692, 694, 697). Marcel wrote, "With the rejection of the covenant of grace every possible foundation of infant baptism disappears" (1953, 199).

Baptism must be viewed from a fully Trinitarian perspective if it is to be viewed from a *biblical* perspective. The involvement of all three persons of Deity in the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16-17) and in the command to baptize in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) is quite explicit.

To consider *Christ* as a gift which comes from Himself, who finds in Himself and brings by Himself His explanation and justification, to establish the doctrine of the sacraments, and to give them their content, by a method which is simply and only *Christo-centric*, is to neglect the essential aspect of the problem . . . . As with every biblical doctrine, the sacraments must be and are established in a *theological*, that is to say, trinitarian, manner, and their true content can only be defined in a manner that is *theological and trinitarian* (Marcel 1953, 63).

Geneva Reformer John Calvin highlighted the Trinitarian significance of baptism.

... all the gifts of God proffered in baptism are found in Christ alone. Yet this cannot take place unless he who baptizes in Christ invokes also the names of the Father and the Spirit. For we are cleansed by his blood because our merciful Father, wishing to receive us into grace in accordance with his incomparable kindness, has set this Mediator among us to gain favor for us in his sight. But we obtain regeneration by Christ's death and resurrection only if we are sanctified by the Spirit and imbued with a new and spiritual nature. For this reason we obtain and, so to speak, clearly discern in the Father the cause, in the Son the matter, and in the Spirit the effect, of our purification and our regeneration (1960, 2:1308).

### **The Divine Economy and the Human Family**

According to God's eternal wisdom and design, "his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name" from "the Father" to whom Christians pray (Eph. 3:14; Rom. 8:15). E. K. Simpson of Oxford's Trinity College commented,

... the appended clause *in heaven and on earth* warrants a secondary reference to the household of faith, conjointly perhaps with their angelic fellow-tribesmen, as Calvin terms them, who are specifically alluded to in the context. For the time being it is located in two worlds, yet constitutes in the aggregate a blessed entirety. Mundane families severed in time and space are incomplete; but here is a fraternity scattered through all ages and climes which is clasped indissolubly in one family register and cast in one identical mold. The saints are of one type, though not of one pattern, alike burgesses of Jerusalem which is above, the mother of them all" (1957, 79).

The Greek word translated "whole" in the New International Version could also be translated "every," and the Revised Standard Version so rendered it, emphasizing that *every* family

unit owes its existence and identity to the triune God. Noting strong support for the English word “every” in this passage, Simpson stated, “God Himself is the archetype of parentage, faintly adumbrated by human fatherhood” (Simpson 1957, 79).

The Bible makes it clear that the family owes its *order*, as well as its identity to God. To be sure, God's operations in the advancement of the Gospel and the upbuilding of his church are always in harmony with his established order, or infrastructure, for the family. Within the marriage partnership--and it is a partnership and not a dictatorship--wives can only win unbelieving husbands to Christ by submitting to their headship following God's covenant pattern established with Sarah. Conversely, husbands cannot expect their prayers to go unhindered if they fail to live considerately with their wives bestowing honor upon them "as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:1-7 ESV; 1 Cor. 11:3; Christenson 1970, 32-54, 126-139). Within the same family covenant, children are commanded to obey their parents “in the Lord” with the promise of a long productive life upon the earth (Eph. 6:1-3), while fathers are instructed, “Do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).”

Man does not stand in isolation from his family as he lives out his spiritual and moral accountability before God. In the Garden of Eden, where Adam stood in covenant accountability before God, he also stood in covenant solidarity with his family--his wife and progeny. While Adam and his wife were certainly created equal in human dignity and complementary as husband and wife, their marriage covenant was not strictly egalitarian in the governmental sense. Adam's headship, based on his being first in the order of creation, was reflected in the fact that God's simple command was delivered to him before God constructed the woman from one of Adam's ribs.

Male headship, however necessary to the proper ordering of the human family, would become an aggravation to womanhood when coupled with the effects of the Fall (Gen.

2:16-22; 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:11-15). Though his wife was the first to yield to temptation, Adam was first in the line of moral accountability (Gen. 3:6, 9, 17; 1 Tim. 2:13-14). God had set forth the terms of the Edenic covenant to Adam, and it was Adam of whom God would first require an accounting: "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9)

This covenant solidarity between Adam and his family formed the basis of the biblical doctrine of original sin. God's words, "For when you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17), were addressed to Adam as the covenant head of the human race. This became thematic for the apostle Paul in his discussion of the two Adams in Romans chapter 5:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all men sinned (vs.12).

. . . many died through one man's trespass (vs.15).

. . . one trespass led to condemnation for all men (vs.18).

. . . by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners (vs.19).

The Westminster fathers described God's relationship with Adam as a "covenant of works" (WCF 1946, VII, ii). J. Rodman Williams, John Piper, Daniel P. Fuller and others have shunned such a concept for it has suggested to them that Adam's obedience could theoretically have earned or merited eternal life (Williams 1988-, 1:277; Fuller 1992, 181; Piper 1997, 171; Rolston 1972, 15-20). Fuller's insistence that any theoretical obedience on Adam's part would have been an "obedience of faith" can be easily demonstrated on linguistic grounds. For the cognate of *foedus*, Latin for "federation" or "covenant," is *fides*, Latin for "faith." Even the English word "trust" can be used as a noun in the sense of "covenant" or as a verb in the sense of "believe" (Webster 1981). For a defense of the appropriateness of the "covenant of works" concept as it applies

to Genesis 2:16-17, however, the reader is referred to the author's booklet entitled *The Covenant of Works and the Second Adam*. To quickly settle the matter, we need only pose the following question, a bit rhetorically, of course: If the woman of Genesis 2:23 is to be mystically identified with the church as the bride of Christ according to Ephesians 5:32, is it too much to assume that the obedience required by the simple command of Genesis 2:16-17 is the bride's dress? The rhetorical nature of the question is demonstrated, and the point established, by Revelation 19:8 which identifies the fine linen of the bride's dress as "the righteous deeds of the saints." Not only is the expression "covenant of works" acceptable, therefore, it is indeed quite fitting as a designation for what is set forth in Genesis 2:16-17! While Reformed scholar Hoeksema rejected the "works" concept as being too "mechanical" to describe Genesis 2:16-17, his highlighting the *covenant* arrangement between God, Adam, and Adam's progeny was quite pertinent to the subject of infant baptism.

Over against this mechanical conception of God's covenant, we propose that the covenant consists essentially in a relationship of friendship, that God the Lord placed Adam in Paradise in that relation to Himself already through his very creation after the image of God, and that in that relation he possessed life and was blessed. Of course, Adam would be able to keep life in the way of obedience: for only in that way could he enjoy the favor of God. He was the servant of the Lord (1977, 74-75).

Hoeksema summarized the matter:

There is in our race not only an organic unity and affinity, but a judicial solidarity which finds its bond in the first man as he stands at the head of all before God. All this is evidently the truth as it is revealed to us in Scripture and as it is confessed by

the Reformed fathers, and is also the testimony of history and experience (1977, 77).

Though Hoeksema and others balked at the "covenant of works" idea, the framers of the *Westminster Confession* had applied the term not only to the pre-Fall probationary covenant, but to a particular function of the law of Moses according to God's design (1946, XIX, i-ii). The operation of the law as a *covenant of works* finds support in such Scriptures as Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 27:26, and Galatians 3:10-12. Functioning as a *covenant of works*, the law became a snare to "destroy the wisdom of the wise" (1 Cor. 1:19), i. e., those who were wise in their own eyes, and therefore foolish enough to presume that sinful men by their own efforts could fulfill the law (Exod. 19:8; Rom. 9:1-10:3). Any human effort to attain salvation by the keeping of the law was rendered futile by Adam's failure to uphold the covenant of works. In full view of Adam's trespass and its effects on the entire human race, Paul argued that by the "works of the Law no flesh shall be justified in His sight" (Rom. 3:20 NASB). The covenant of works was a subordinate feature of the covenant of grace in one sense, for Adam's violation of it thrust men upon God's grace revealed in Christ Jesus for their deliverance. In that sense, it was preparatory to it, for Christ's fulfillment of the covenant of works, by his obedience to the will of the Father as the Second Adam, laid the foundation for the justification and obedience of fallen men under the covenant of grace (Rom. 5:12-21).

J. Rodman Williams may have unwittingly acceded to the *covenant of works* principle as a function of the Sinaitic covenant, for he used the expression "covenant of law" and spoke of its righteousness as a "righteousness of works." Since Williams regarded it neither as a subordinate part of the covenant of grace, nor as foundational to it (1988-, 1:292), he parted company with the *Westminster Confession* on this issue. This likely contributed to his rejection of infant baptism, for the organic principle which bound the fathers and the children together in God's program, and to which Williams makes no reference in his three volume work, may be clearly seen in the

law of Moses:

For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments (Exod. 20:5b-6).

The solidarity between Adam and his offspring observable in the probationary Edenic covenant and the subsequent Fall, therefore, was paralleled by the solidarity between the people of Israel and their offspring reflected in the Decalogue itself. The covenant of works, first set forth in Genesis 2:16-17, placed people in every generation under obligation of obedience to the law of God. The law of Moses clarified this fact for God's covenant people Israel, especially showing forth the intergenerational aspect of this covenant solidarity.

Indeed, the solidarity principle can be seen throughout the entire administration of the covenant of grace--the historical implementation of the eternal covenant of redemption. From its first mention in the proto-Gospel of Genesis 3:15, redemptive grace was God's initiative of warfare, and it set not only the woman, but also her *seed* at odds with the serpent (Rev. 12:1-17). The mortal blow to the serpent would be delivered by the Seed of the woman (Heb. 2:14; Rom. 16:20).

And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel (Gen. 3:15).

Louis Berkov commented on Genesis 3:15,

When God by his saving power generates enmity to Satan in the heart of man, this implies that He chooses the side of man, that He becomes *man's*

*confederate* in the struggles with Satan, thus virtually establishing an offensive and defensive covenant.

This relationship between God and men on the one side and Satan on the other side is not limited to the individuals but extends to their seed. The covenant is organic in its operation and includes the generations. This is an essential element in the covenant idea (Berkov 1932, 1:284).

In the propagation of the Gospel and the building of his church, God always honors this organic principle of the covenant which embraces the generations, which is rooted in the family order which he himself has established, and which is itself an expression of his own triune being. The church is depicted as the bride of Christ, both in this present age and in the age to come, and that relationship is the foundational pattern for the Christian marriage covenant (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 21:1-2). Similarly, the church is designated the "household" (Greek *oikos*) of God and is to be supervised by elders or bishops whose qualifications include being "the husband of one wife," good managers of their own households, and such effective fathers that their "children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient." ". . . if anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (1 Tim. 3:1-5, 15; Tit. 1:6). This special regard God has for his own *economy* (from *oikos*) is foundational to an understanding of infant baptism. The kingdom of God announced by John the Baptist, and demonstrated by Jesus, did not bypass the divinely established family infrastructure. Neither did it transgress the covenantal principle pertaining to the family inasmuch as the church itself was designated "God's household" [*oikos*] (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:19). The *Cambridge Platform* of 1648, the polity statement of New England Congregationalism, traced this concept of the church to the patriarchal period.

5 The state [of] the members of the Militant visible church [3] walking in order, was either before the law, Oeconomical, that is in families; or under the

law, National: or, since the coming of Christ, only congregational (Walker [1893] 1960, 205).

The *Platform* described the "state" of the church prior to the law as "Oeconomical" in that it consisted of families. In a striking way, this "oeconomical" phase of the church was embraced by the New Testament "congregational" phase, and was the basis for it. God's covenant with Abraham carried *ecclesiastical*, as well as *domestic*, overtones.

The *Covenant*, as it was that which made the Family of Abraham and children of Israel to be a church and people unto God, so it is that which now makes the severall societies of Gentil [sic] believers to be churches in these dayes (Walker [1893] 1960, 208).

The "oeconomical" aspect of God's covenant accordingly formed the basis for the Congregationalist (as it did for the Presbyterian) practice of baptizing infants.

J. Oliver Buswell stated,

The most important consideration connected with the discussion of infant baptism is that God establishes a covenant with a Christian family, as He has established a covenant with His church (1962, 2:265).

### **The New Testament Household**

The Abrahamic pattern of the family was never obliterated by the emergence of the New Testament congregation, but continued in effect, existed alongside it, and was embraced by it. Those who oppose infant baptism frequently insist that there is no New Testament precedent for the

practice of baptizing infants. An examination of the New Testament, however, will show several instances in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles that illustrate the family covenant concept underlying infant baptism. They serve notice that salvation was received, the church built, and baptism administered along household lines. Their very mention illustrates that God relates to his people, not strictly as individuals, but as families—echoing the fact that He is "the Father from whom every family in heaven and earth is named" (Ephes. 3:14-15 RSV).

In response to Jesus' gracious house call, Zacchaeus resolved to contribute to the needs of the poor and to make amends for all possible financial wrongdoing in his past. Jesus clearly set forth the covenantal implications of Zacchaeus' change of heart when he announced: "Today *salvation has come to this house*, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:9-10, emphasis mine).

The conversion of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, similarly proved to be a domestic event as the coming of the Holy Spirit upon his entire household and the subsequent baptism of his family members attest (Acts 10:24-48). Later, when Peter reported this event to the church in Jerusalem, he quoted Cornelius' own account of the angel's words first spoken to him:

"Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you *and all your household* will be saved" (Acts 11: 13b-14, italics mine).

After Lydia believed as "the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message," Luke recorded. "When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home" (Acts 16:15-16). Responding to the Philippian jailer's desperate outcry, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?", Paul and Silas echoed this same domestic overtone of the gospel: " Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--

you and your household” (Acts 16:30-31). Noting the correlation between Paul's promise in Acts 16:31 and Peter's statement in Acts 2:39, that the new covenant promise extended “to your children,” French Reformed scholar Pierre Marcel pointed out that the converted pagans did not fall behind the converted Jews in respect to the covenant (1953, 194).

After Paul and Silas spoke the Word of the Lord to the jailer and those in his house, "he and all his family were baptized." Luke records that the jailer "was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family" (Acts 16:33-34). The New International Version's rendering of Acts 16:34, represents a kind of theological conciliation, if not a concession, rather than sound exegesis of the Greek. At the very least, it leaves open the question whether the Greek equivalent of a prepositional phrase "with all his house" should properly modify "he rejoiced" or the singular participle "having believed." By contrast, the English Standard Version renders the sentence, “And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.”

Marcel correctly noted that, to be consistent with the way the sentence is structured in the Greek, the prepositional phrase "with all his house" immediately follows "he rejoiced" (1953, 195). The sentence, therefore, should literally read: "He rejoiced with all his house [he himself] having believed", i.e., the jailer himself did the believing and his entire household did the rejoicing. R. J. Knowling's comments in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* support Marcel's exegesis (Nicoll 1956). This order also is more consistent with Paul's words previously spoken to the jailer in Acts 16:31 where the command to believe is specifically directed to the jailer himself whereas the offer of salvation is extended to the entire household. It specifically allows for the possibility that other members of the family may have been baptized (Acts 16:33) on the basis of the spiritual leadership role exercised by the father in the ancient world, and in keeping with the household covenant principle (Marcel 1953,

195 Note).

The Greek word for "house," *oikia*, in verse 32, commonly referred to a group of slaves or freedman making up an imperial office or court (Arndt 1957, 560); and it appears to have been this group of official employees of the jail to whom Paul and Silas spoke the Word. Later the jailer took Paul and Silas into his own family house [*oikos*] (vs. 34). On this basis, Gallagher suggested that the entire family, consisting of the jailer, his wife, and children, was baptized because of the jailer's new Christian faith (1878, 106-110). Such an idea seems outrageous to those absorbed with egalitarian ideals in the early twenty-first century; yet no less a scholar than Joachim Jeremias has reminded us,

If we wish to understand biblical texts rightly, we must radically free ourselves from modern individualistic thinking, and in particular keep before our eyes the fact that the family represented by the father of the household was in old times much more strongly experienced as a unity than today. People felt the solidarity, the mutual responsibility and the unity of the group. All important questions were decided by the father of the household and his decision was binding on all (1962, 22).

David Kingdon, the English Reformed Baptist, ridiculed this household concept. Noting that the sphere of the application of circumcision under the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 17:10-14 included domestic servants, Kingdon stated,

If the Paedobaptists reply that the principle that the head of the household may exercise faith for *all* the members of his household, including servants, is no longer in operation, we must ask him where in the New Testament it is abrogated and set aside. Can it be possible, we may ask, employing their own argument against them, that God is less generous to servants in the present dispensation than in the Old?

(1973, 44).

Whether Kingdon overlooked the reference to servants by the prophet Joel in the passage which Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost is not clear, but the fact that the promise did embrace household servants cannot be denied: "'Even upon my maidservants and menservants will I pour out my Spirit,' says the LORD." Those household servants loyal and obedient to their Christian masters (Eph. 6:5-8; John 14:21, 23-23) accordingly were prime candidates for the same gift of the Spirit bestowed upon their masters. To suggest that the adult servant would not be given the opportunity to openly confess Christ on the occasion of his baptism, something of which the infant would be incapable, is a *non sequitur* argument.

Even allowing for the innocuous rendering of Acts 16:34 by the New International Version, however, it is quite apparent that the New Testament apostles honored the Abrahamic pattern of the family. Consistent with that fact, the New Testament writers described the church's advance in terms of a household pattern. That is undeniable--and that is the essential point. In the face of such overwhelming testimony, the following statement by Kurt Aland falls flat: "The elevation of this 'oikos-formula' to a theological status seems to me to be utterly unsatisfactory" (1963, 91). To suggest, as Aland does here, that any theology associated with the "oikos formula" is artificially conceived, misrepresents the facts of the case. It is not a matter of elevating the "oikos-formula" to a theological status, but of acknowledging the biblical theology behind it.

Luke also recorded that "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8 RSV). The prepositional construction "with all his household" differs from the adverbial construction of Acts 16:34; significantly, in this case, it *follows* the verbal construction "believed" which it modifies. The entire household in this instance, therefore, clearly believed. Later Paul acknowledged that he himself had baptized Crispus and Gaius,

and also the "household" of Stephanas at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14).

It is highly unlikely that among all these references to "households," with the possible exception of Acts 18:8, there were no infants or small children. If it be said that this represents an argument from silence, so is the argument to the contrary.

There is no specific mention of an infant being baptized in the household of Acts, yet there is no specific statement that these households contained no infants, or if they did that the infants were excluded from baptism. Indeed, we have no explicit instance of the child of a believer coming to faith and then being baptized, as in a good deal of Baptist practice (Bromiley 1979, 11).

As for any apparent New Testament "silence" regarding infant baptism, Philip Schaff contended that infant baptism was "overshadowed by the baptism of adult proselytes" during the church's early missionary years (Buswell 1962, 2:265). Marcel noted the silence of the New Testament as to whether women are commanded or forbidden admission to the Lord's Table. Those churches who admit women to Communion (and who does not?) do so by *theological inference* from Scripture, *not by direct command*.

The church never confines herself merely to the letter, but, working from the data of Scripture and under the control of the Holy Spirit, she affirms normative principles and elaborates the consequences and applications which make her life and development possible and effective (Marcel 1953, 190).

Ditzler listed seven things which are commonly accepted, and yet of which the New Testament makes no mention: (1) that John baptized a woman, a boy, or a girl; (2) that the 12 apostles baptized a woman, a boy, a girl, or a man; (3) that an infant was ever circumcised in all the Apostolic period; (4) that the 12

apostles were ever baptized; (5) that the 70 were baptized; (6) that the 120 disciples were baptized; or (7) that John the Baptist himself was baptized. All these things we accept by *inference* (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 603). The question is not whether the New Testament mentions the baptism of infants, but whether there is a biblical basis to infer that the infants of Christian believers were baptized. The household salvation motif and the recording of household baptisms must be regarded as relevant data in the establishment of that basis.