

Chapter 5

Abraham's Seed and the New Covenant Sign

In him you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. -Col. 2:11-12

The Mediator of a New Covenant

The promise to Abraham and his seed of a spiritually blessed offspring reached its fulfillment in Jesus Christ who was himself circumcised (Luke 2:21), who is the Mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 9:15), and who is the Seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). As the Mediator of the new covenant, Jesus carried forward God's covenant with Abraham into blessed fulfillment in the Christian Church. Whereas Jesus is the "Seed of Abraham" in the singular sense, the church is the Abraham's "seed" in the plural or collective sense. The following passages from Paul's letter to the Galatians punctuate this fulfillment:

So those who have faith are blessed with faithful Abraham (Gal. 3:9).

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14).

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ,

then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).

Several observations may be made from Galatians 3:26-29: *First*, to be a child of God through faith in Christ is to be an heir of the covenant promise--indeed, to be a son and daughter of Abraham. Accordingly, God's covenant with Abraham remains in effect, and is applied to the New Testament church.

One can only wonder how Alexander Carson could deny the obvious identification between the Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant gospel ([1853] 1981, 220) in the face of Galatians 3:8: "The Scriptures foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed by you.'" John Wesley, in his *Thoughts upon Infant Baptism*, affirmed that Abraham was the stock or root of the visible church and that the Jewish church represented the "natural branches." For Wesley, the Gentile church of the New Testament administration grew out of Abraham and thus participated in the Abrahamic covenant. He maintained that the Abrahamic covenant had two dispensations: (1) Mosaic, and (2) Gospel (Naglee 1987, 123).

The *second* observation to be made from Galatians 3:26-29 is that Jew/Gentile and male/female covenantal distinctions, long reinforced through the rite of circumcision, have been obliterated under the new covenant in Christ (See also Rom. 2:25-29; Gal. 6:14-16; Eph. 2:11-22; Phil.3:2-9; Col. 2:9-14; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). The Old Testament had anticipated this radical change: "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live" (Deut. 30:6).

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.

Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).

I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6b).

I will say to those called "Not my people," "You are my people"; and they will say, "You are my God" (Hos.2:23b).

The New Sign of Baptism

The *third* observation on Galatians 3:26-29 is that the old rite of circumcision has given way to a new outward covenantal sign, namely baptism. As for the New Testament demise of the rite of circumcision, Origen's comments on Exodus 4:25-26 are instructive. Reflecting upon the divine threat on Moses' life due to his procrastination in the matter of his infant son's circumcision, Origen wrote,

For this angel might have had power, I think, over those of the people who were not circumcised, and generally over all who worshiped only the Creator; and this power lasted so long as Jesus had not assumed a human body. But when He had done this, and had undergone the rite of circumcision in His own person, all the power of the angel over those who practice the same worship, but are not circumcised, was abolished; for Jesus reduced it to nought by (the power of) His unspeakable divinity. And therefore His disciples are forbidden to circumcise themselves, and are reminded (by the apostle): "If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing" (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 4:565).

There are at least two biblical reasons for the demise of circumcision as a covenantal sign. First, the Israelites had so profaned themselves that their physical circumcision was tantamount to spiritual mockery. They honored their God only

with their lips while their hearts remained distant from him (Isa. 29:13). Though they trusted in their circumcision and falsely prided themselves in being descended from Abraham (Luke 3:8; John 8:39), their circumcision amounted to "uncircumcision" from God's perspective.

"The days are coming," says the LORD, "when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh--Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart" (Jer. 9:25-26).

The apostle Paul designated the Judaizers as "dogs" (a term normally used by Jews in reference to Gentiles). Judaizers were those Jewish brethren who insisted that Gentile Christian believers be circumcised. From Paul's perspective, however, Christians were the ones indwelt by the Spirit and accordingly were the ones truly circumcised in heart.

Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:2-3).

The second biblical reason for the demise of circumcision is that, as an outward sign, it was too limited to represent the categories of new covenant fulfillment. The rite of circumcision was not directly applicable to females, now full partakers of the new covenant; nor did it fittingly represent the international nature of the new covenant community. The new covenant called for a sign commensurate with its international embrace.

I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6b).

. . . so will he sprinkle many nations (Isa. 52:15a).

Baptism became the new initiatory sign instituted by our Lord to identify his people.

...for all of you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ....If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:27,29).

Circumcision, once so closely identified with the Abrahamic covenant that the LORD referred to the sign as the covenant itself ("my covenant in your flesh" Gen. 17:13), yielded to baptism, the "pledge of a good conscience toward God" (1 Pet. 2:21). The theology that lies at the heart of this transition was clearly set forth by the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:11-12:

In him you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (Col. 2:11 -12).

Justin Martyr was echoing this passage when he correlated baptism with circumcision:

Wash therefore, and be now clean, and put away your iniquity from your souls, as God bids you be washed in this laver, and be circumcised with the true circumcision (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 1:203).

Just as circumcision was a "sign" and a "seal" (Rom. 4:11) of the righteousness that comes by faith, so the church reflecting upon Colossians 2:11-12, has historically affirmed baptism to be the same.

John Murray stated that "a sign points to the existence of that which it signifies, whereas a seal authenticates, confirms,

and guarantees the genuineness of that which is signified" (1959, 138). Because baptism is regarded as a *seal*, and not merely a bare *sign*, it is defined as a *sacrament*, and not merely an *ordinance* (Ames [1629] 1983, 196-97).

Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagements to be the Lord's (WSC n. d., Q. 95).

Beasley-Murray, though a Baptist, acknowledged that for Paul and his contemporaries baptism could no more be reduced to a bare sign than could the cross of Christ (1963, 209). Carson, however, considered this sacramental view of baptism to be an error.

Is there any Jewish tradition more void of scriptural authority, than that which designates baptism and the Lord's supper *seals of the new covenant*? There is not in the New Testament any single portion that can bear such a meaning. And what can the wisest man know about these things, but what God has told us? He has not said that baptism is a seal. Circumcision was a seal of the righteousness of the faith of Abraham. This was God's seal to the truth, till the letter was abolished. The Spirit of the truth is the seal, and the circumcision of the heart by him is the thing signified by circumcision in the flesh. The circumcised nation was typical of the church of Christ, for the apostle says, "we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit . . ." The circumcision of the Jews was the letter, of which the circumcision of the heart in Christians is the spirit. The Christian, then, has a more exalted seal than circumcision--he has the Spirit of God, "whereby he is sealed unto the day of redemption" Ephes. iv. 30 . . . The seal, then, that comes in the room of circumcision, is the seal of the

Spirit ([1853] 1981, 235).

At first glance, Carson's argument appears to have biblical support. The following passages from the letters of the apostle Paul certainly identify the "seal" with the Holy Spirit:

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Cor. 1:21-22).

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:13-14).

Paul King Jewett, who shared Carson's antipaedobaptism, conceded more than Carson at this point acknowledging water baptism itself to be a seal.

It is, indeed, plausible that in II Corinthians 1:22 Paul is referring to baptism under the figure of a "seal." In any case, baptism may be likened to a seal because it marks, affirms, attests, and authenticates--though it does not effect--our ingrafting into Christ (1978, 86-87).

Perhaps Jewett was conscious of the significant role played by water baptism in the book of Acts, and the close relationship between water baptism and the inner working of the Spirit which it signified so that the command to submit to the former was imperative for the authenticating of the latter (Acts 22:16)--though the reverse was true as well (Acts 10:46). At any rate, Jewett went so far as to acknowledge that "Paul's definition of circumcision in Romans 4:11 could very well be applied to baptism" (1978, 87). That was a concession that Carson refused

to make.

Since Jewett followed John Calvin on this point, it is curious fact that he stopped short of affirming what Calvin affirmed, namely the application of the sign and seal to the infant offspring of believers as per Romans 4:11. For while it is an important fact that Abraham had the righteousness which circumcision signified before he was circumcised, he was also instructed by God to apply that sign and seal to his infant son. Calvin denied that physical circumcision "*merely* prefigured that spiritual infancy which arises from regeneration of God's Word" (1960, 2:1337). Calvin's concern was with those who would de-institutionalize the Christian church on the basis of its New Testament spiritual fulfillment, and in the process negate the spiritual reality enjoyed by the Old Testament saints.

Carson, unlike Jewett, denied all continuity between circumcision and baptism as outward ordinances. This represented a diminishment of the Old Testament, and an over-spiritualization of the New. If water baptism represents the outward testimony which Christ has instituted for the church, and is itself a public expression of the Spirit's authenticating work (1 John 5:6-8), then it would follow that it is a seal, much as the mark of a notary public on a public document is a seal attesting the veracity of the signatures on the document. It was in the context of conversation about water baptism that Jesus stated that the one who received his testimony "has certified (lit. "set his seal") that God is truthful" (John 3:33).

There is nothing efficacious in the physical water of baptism *per se*; any efficacy associated with baptism is to be attributed to the atonement of Christ, the Word, and the Spirit. Yet to insist that baptism is but a bare sign, and not a seal, is to minimize the institution of Christ. Alexander Carson seemed to deny the role of water baptism in the following statement: "When the Holy Spirit himself, in the heart of the believer, is the seal of God's truth, there is no need of any other seal" (Carson [1853] 1981, 235). The application of physical water in baptism was instituted by Christ (Matt. 28:19), and therefore was an

imperative--however overshadowed by the work of the Spirit.

On the basis of Romans 4:11, Carson did concede that circumcision was a *seal*, but only in the case of Abraham. As a general ordinance, however, Old Testament circumcision, to his way of thinking, amounted to nothing but a bare outward sign without any associated spiritual significance, except as it pointed to New Testament fulfillment in Christ. He further denied (contrary to Colossians 2:11-12) any correlation between New Testament water baptism and Old Testament circumcision. For Carson to have carried out his principle consistently, he would have had to become a Quaker and deny water baptism even to adults!

While baptism with water is not necessary in an *absolute* sense, so that a person cannot be saved without it, it is certainly imperative, in the sense of a *seal*, or in a *sacramental* sense. Though the outward sign of baptism was not instituted by the Lord to be a hollow ritual, it does serve as a public attestation and confirmation of the internal transaction conducted by the Spirit of God. In the case of infants, of course, the parents attest on their behalf until such time as they themselves are able to confirm what their parents have declared on their behalf. This is God's way for the church to notarize the covenant and for men to publicly register their commitment and compliance with the Spirit's call--thus, outwardly assenting to the heavenly real estate transaction which Scripture designates an "earnest" or "down payment" on our inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14; Gen. 17:8).

David F. Wright, like Carson, missed the inter-sacramental connection between baptism and circumcision, however he may have grasped the spiritual fulfillment of the latter.

The correspondence is not between two rites, of circumcision and baptism, but between the Jewish rite and the divine work of spiritual circumcision accomplished by Christ. "The circumcision of Christ" is the atoning death of Christ (Wright 1987, 20).

Beasley-Murray, on the other hand, divorced the rite of circumcision, as practiced by the nation of Israel, from the spiritual reality to which it attested. He maintained that the "circumcision of the heart" had no relationship to the rite. According to Beasley-Murray the prophetic call to heart circumcision (Deut. 10:16) was an "application of the rite in symbol, not an exposition of the rite itself" (1963, 341). The weakness of such a hair-splitting argument is all too obvious. What is the *exposition* of a sacrament (a visible sign of an invisible grace) if it is not a statement of its *spiritual* application to the life of the participant? In any case, Beasley-Murray's position cannot withstand Paul's exposition of the rite as applied to Abraham in Romans 4:11.

English Reformed Baptist, David Kingdon, though preferring "the more usual interpretation" that Colossians 2:11 refers to spiritual regeneration (rather than the Atonement), acknowledged the correlation between circumcision and baptism:

In Colossians 2:11, whether we take the phrase "the circumcision of Christ" as having an objective meaning, i.e., the cross, or whether we take it subjectively to mean the spiritual and moral renewal of the believer in regeneration, the analogy between circumcision in its spiritual sense and baptism seems patently clear (1973, 28-29, 54-55).

Obviously, if there is a correlation between the spiritual significance of circumcision and baptism, it must follow that there is a correspondence with respect to circumcision and baptism as outward ordinances and signs. This was the opinion both of John Wesley (Naglee 1987, 124) and of John Calvin. Commenting on Colossians 2:11-12, the Geneva Reformer stated,

Clearly, if circumcision was a literal sign, we must estimate baptism to be the same. For the apostle

. . . makes neither more spiritual than the other. For he says that we were circumcised in Christ not by a circumcision made with hands, when we laid aside the body of sin which dwelt in our flesh. This he calls the "circumcision of Christ" [Col. 2:11]. Afterward, to explain this statement, he adds that in baptism we were "buried with Christ" [Col. 2:12]. What do these words mean, except that the fulfillment and truth of baptism are also the fulfillment and truth of circumcision, since they signify one and the same thing? (1960, 2:1333)

Commenting on Galatians 3:29, Paul King Jewett was compelled to acknowledge,

Now when one remembers that the mark of Abraham's progeny in the Old Testament, which identified them as his seed, was circumcision, one can hardly doubt that baptism has the same essential significance for Christians in the New Testament (1978, 88).

J. Vernon McGee, commenting on Leviticus 12:3, pointed out the significance of administering circumcision on the 8th day of infancy.

These passages make adequately clear that the spiritual meaning was uppermost in this rite. Performing the rite while the child was so young removed any danger from the operation, and it was God's way in the Old Testament of saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not." The covenant rite of circumcision was performed on the 8th day. This is a number of even greater significance than the number 40. The 8th day had a particular meaning. God created the heavens and the earth in 6 days and rested on the 7th day, which denotes the perfection and completion of the first creation. The 8th day begins another week and a new creation. This is in entire keeping with the

New Testament. The child of God today belongs to the new creation, which begins when Christ rose from the dead on the 8th day or the 1st day of the week, and he is entered into the circumcision of Christ (1964,1:99).

McGee further pointed out (1) that the "new creation" concept was linked with being "in Christ" according to 2 Corinthians 5:17; (2) that the "overtone and undertone of the 8th day in connection with cleansing and a picture of the new creation" was illustrated, as well, in such verses as Leviticus 15:14, 29; 14:10; 23:36; and Numbers 6:10; and (3) that Jesus himself was circumcised on the 8th day following his birth. McGee saw a parallel between Jesus' identification with his people through circumcision and his identification with a sinful race in his baptism (McGee 1964, 1:99-100).

Geoffrey Bromiley disavowed any clear typological connection between the 8th day of circumcision and Christ's resurrection on the 8th day (1979, 19; John 20:26). Bromiley's desire to avoid "fanciful" extrapolations from Scripture, however, did not keep him from acknowledging the close connection between baptism and Christ's resurrection. In support of such a connection, he cited numerous Scriptures, such as Romans 6:1-5; Colossians 2:11-12; and 1 Peter 3:21 (1979, 15, 18, 54-55).

The Colossian passage relates Old Testament circumcision to New Testament baptism, by depicting a kind of spiritual cleansing that underlies both—a cleansing identified with Christ's burial and resurrection and appropriated by faith:

In him you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (Col. 2:11 -12).

The theological connection between baptism and circumcision,

therefore, was not absent from Bromiley's argument despite his aversion to anything that hinted of numerology.

Justin Martyr noted the numerical significance of the 8th day, as he defended the Christian faith from Trypho's charge that Christians failed to observe the covenant of circumcision and the sabbath:

The command of circumcision, again, bidding [them] always circumcise the children on the eighth day, was a type of the true circumcision, by which we are circumcised from deceit and iniquity through Him who rose from the dead on the first day after the Sabbath, [namely through] our Lord Jesus Christ. For the first day after the Sabbath, remaining the first day of all the days, is called, however, the eighth, according to the number of all the days of the cycle, and [yet] remains the first (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 1:215)

Consistent with Justin (though not pressing the numerology), John Calvin noted,

Circumcision was for the Jews their first entry into the church, because it was a token to them by which they were assured of adoption as the people and household of God, and they in turn professed to enlist in God's service. In like manner, we also are consecrated to God through baptism, to be reckoned as his people and in turn we swear fealty to him. By this it appears incontrovertible that baptism has taken the place of circumcision to fulfill the same office among us (Calvin 1960, 2:1327).

Herman Hoeksema described the transition of the outward covenant sign from circumcision to baptism as follows:

In the old dispensation circumcision is the sign which God's people bear. When Christ comes, Who is the head of His one people, both of the old

and the new dispensation, then He bears both the sign of circumcision and the sign of baptism. In Him the old and new dispensations are one; and through Him the old passes into the new, circumcision into baptism. When the Savior presently ascends into heaven and His Spirit is poured out upon all flesh, then in those circles where circumcision had always been the sign of the covenant, circumcision and baptism wrestle with one another for a time. Circumcision cannot immediately understand that it has served its time and that now it will be forced aside by baptism. But in that struggle baptism has a victory, and circumcision disappears. It is an historic fact that circumcision is replaced by baptism (1977, 95).

Jeremias suggested, on the basis of Acts 21:21, that prior to 55 A.D., the children of Christians in Jerusalem continued to be circumcised, and not baptized (Wright 1987, 40:16). In the case of the Jewish Christians, his first point was well taken--many apparently continued to circumcise their children, though obviously out of rigid adherence to their religious past rather than divine requirement under the new covenant. Paul's insistence upon the rule of Galatians 5:20 was designed to defend the liberty of those Christians without Jewish parentage. His circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:1-3) who became his partner in ministry seems to have been motivated by a desire to avoid giving needless offense to the Jews, and was consistent with Paul's own evangelistic strategy set forth in 1 Corinthians 9:20. It represented no compromise of Galatians 5:20 since Timothy's mother was a Jewess. Jeremias's suggestion, however, that baptism was not also administered to the children of Jewish Christian believers, cannot be inferred from Acts 21:21.

Jewett argued that Jews would not have been upset by a failure to baptize infants because they were permitted to continue to have their children circumcised after becoming Christians (1978, 230-231). But it hardly stands to reason that, having received the distinctive sign of the new covenant, they would have denied the same sign to their infant offspring simply

because they were allowed to continue with circumcision, anymore than they would have denied it for themselves.

Application of the New Sign

Christian believers are sons and daughters of Abraham, and thus incorporated into God's covenantal blessing of Abraham through faith in Christ. We who are "Gentiles by birth" were once "excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise."

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ....

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household (Eph. 2:11-13, 19).

Alexander Carson acknowledged that "all believers in every age are blessed by this covenant," but he insisted that "to them it was not promised, as it was to Abraham, that God would be the God of their seed." "The promise of the seed is to Abraham's seed only--not to the seed of all believers" (Carson [1853] 1981, 219). Carson observed that in the third chapter of Galatians "that blessing is not the blessing of a spiritual connexion between believers and their seed, but the blessing of having faith counted for righteousness" ([1853] 1981, 218).

Carson overlooked two things: (1) The promise of blessed offspring was not limited to Abraham but was given to his descendants as well. It is explicitly repeated throughout the Old Testament Scriptures and implied in many other places--not to mention its recurrence in the New Testament; and (2) Old Testament promises are confirmed to New Testament believers in Christ to the glory of God.

That the promise continues to extend to the offspring of believers is the clear implication of Romans chapter four. The apostle Paul argued in verse 13 that "it was not through the law that Abraham *and his offspring* received the promise . . . but

through the righteousness that comes by faith." Three verses later he continued,

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring--not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all (vs. 16).

Now it is plain that the promise to which Paul was referring had an intergenerational aspect to it: "I will establish my covenant . . . between me and you and your descendants after you . . . to be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (Gen. 17. 7). Are we to assume that aspect of the promise has been lost in its transmission to the New Testament church, and that the church has been short-changed in that regard? The New Testament makes it clear that such is not the case (Acts 2:39; 16:31; 1 Cor. 7:14).

Since Christian believers have been spiritually incorporated into God's covenant nation (Matt. 21:43; Gal. 6:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:8-10), the promises to Israel now pertain to them. They are, thereby, partakers of the promises given to Abraham and to the nation descended from him.

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "yes" in Christ, and so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God...He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Cor. 1:20, 21b-22).

Not the least among the promises God gave to his people was a spiritually blessed offspring.

The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live (Deut. 30:6).

All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace (Isa. 54:13).

They will not toil in vain
or bear children doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people blessed by the
LORD,
they and their descendants with them (Isa.
65:23).

Surely Paul must have had these promises in view when he wrote to the Roman Christians,

For I say that Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy (Rom. 15:8-9 ASV).

The promise of godly offspring with circumcised hearts is now administered by Christ and associated with the new covenant sign of baptism. Is it not fitting therefore, that baptism be applied to the infants (male and female) of believers under the new covenant much as circumcision was applied to the infant males under the Abrahamic covenant?

J. Oliver Buswell had this to say about the Colossians 2:11-12 passage:

We have clear implication in the Scripture that infant baptism was both taught and practiced from the very beginning of the Christian church. In Colossians 2:11,12, Paul writes explicitly, "You were circumcised...by being buried with Him in baptism." The syntax is unambiguous. The participle directly modifies the subject of the main verb. It makes no difference whether the baptism here referred to was intended figuratively or literally. The comparison of baptism with circumcision is absolutely inescapable (Buswell 1962, 2:259).

Joachim Jeremias argued in a similar vein, ". . . since Paul designates baptism as the ritual to replace circumcision," according to Colossians 2:11, "*it is very probable that these children were baptized*" (1962, 48). Jeremias, of course, drew his own inference from Acts 21:21 in the case of the Jewish Christians. In Colossians 2:11, however, he recognized the clear implication concerning the children of believers in the churches established through Paul's ministry.

It was not due to any slip of the tongue that Peter in his Pentecost sermon included the children as among the objects of God's promise and call.

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the LORD our God will call (Acts 2:38-39).

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, expressed the covenantal extension of faith to the children of the household in keeping with the Abrahamic covenant and the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures. How fitting it was, therefore, that baptism as recorded in the New Testament, frequently involved entire households!

Those who oppose infant baptism are quick to point out that

. . . texts such as Acts 2:39 and Mark 10:14 should be read in the light of the portrayal of children in the apostolic Churches of the Epistles, where they are addressed as responsive and responsible Christians like their parents (Wright 1987, 40:23).

On the surface, such an interpretation sounds reasonable, especially in view of the command to "repent," which is difficult for modern minds to associate with infants. This interpretation,

however, cannot exhaust the meaning of Peter's words which apply the promise to children, as Reformed scholar Hanko so forcefully pointed out:

Again it must be remembered that this was spoken by the apostle Peter to an audience which was made up of Jews and proselytes. They were steeped in the Old Testament and took the same attitude towards children which the saints in the Old Testament had always taken. And when Peter spoke of the promise which had been made to Abraham and his seed....The question is: What did these words mean to the audience which listened breathlessly to Peter's words? There can only be one answer: They interpreted these words in the consciousness that the Old Testament had always spoken of them and their children (1981, 63).

Jewett balked at such an idea.

Paedobaptists, with their theology of the Old Testament externalism, according to which believers' children are "born in covenant," are prone to read this verse as securing the benefits of salvation (including baptism) to believers and their children *in distinction* to those who are afar off (1978, 121).

The critical question, however, is not how modern Paedobaptists would understand Peter's words, but how his hearers would have understood them--and, more particularly, what he intended by them. In this regard, the second chapter of Joel is instructive, for it was from this portion of the Old Testament that Peter drew prophetic words in order to explain the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that day of the Jewish Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21). The context for the original prophesy given to Joel was a time of national calamity under God's impending judgment. The following command was given to God's covenant nation of Judah:

Blow the trumpet in Zion,
declare a holy fast,
call a sacred assembly.
Gather the people,
consecrate the assembly;
bring together the elders,
gather the children,
those nursing at the breast (Joel 2:16).

It is significant that among those summoned as part of the "assembly" for consecration to the LORD were "those nursing at the breast." It follows that nursing infants are included as part of the group to whom the promise of the Spirit is given later in the chapter (vss. 28-32). This clearly weighs against the argument that the "sons and daughters" of Acts 2:17 or the "children" of Acts 2:39 were all older children who believed by the baptistic "adults only" standard!

Jewett protested the paedobaptistic handling of Acts 2:39 insisting that his opponents were so "attuned to the Old Testament echo in this text" that they were "deaf to its New Testament crescendo" (1978, 1:22). Such special pleading on Jewett's part in the face of Peter's words "and to your children" betrayed his Baptist presupposition. Jewett appears to have overlooked the promises of new covenant blessing pertaining both to believers and their offspring that were embedded in the Old Testament (Isa. 44:3; 59:20-21; Jer. 32:38-39).

Joachim Jeremias showed how infant baptism corresponded with the context of the Joel prophecy which Peter quoted and which warned of cataclysmic events preceding "the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord" (Acts 2:20). Baptism, Jeremias insisted, is an *eschatological sacrament* in keeping with Acts 2:38 and Colossians 1:13. It represents "an eschatological sealing in the last hour before catastrophe." A division of the household based on age, therefore, is highly unlikely (1962, 23). As for a presupposed age of discretion being required for the repentance commanded in Act 2:39,

this limitation is highly improbable because the

salvation from the final judgment mediated by baptism (2.40; cf. 2.21) excludes any limitation of age (Jeremias 1962, 41).

Beasley-Murray similarly noted the eschatological character of baptism, though not in the interest of baptizing infants. Appealing to the "seal" in Ezekiel's vision (9:4) and in Revelation 7:3, he described baptism as "the brand mark of Christ in view of the tribulation and Kingdom of the End" (1963, 175). God's eschatological judgments, however, are frequently described in the New Testament in such a way as to correspond to those in the Old Testament which involved entire families (Luke 19:44; 23:28-29; Jude 7, 11).

Jewett took Jeremias to task on the age of discretion issue maintaining that Peter's form of address presupposed "an audience capable of decision and action." He insisted that the anointing of the Holy Spirit with the attending gifts of visions and prophecies mentioned in Acts 2:17 was "beyond the ken of infants and little children" (1978, 120).

Jewett overlooked (or deemed irrelevant) the composition of the original audience that heard Joel's prophecy—the prophecy that would provide the framework for Peter's Pentecost sermon. Among those assembled by divine command for the original hearing of this prophecy were "those nursing at the breast" (Joel 2:16).

Jeremias's identification of the children of Acts 2:39 with the prophesying "sons and daughters" of the Joel prophecy quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17 (1962, 40) is substantiated, in principle, by Jesus' words spoken in the temple. In response to the scribes and chief priests, indignant concerning the shouts of little children crying "Hosanna to the Son of David!", Jesus replied,

Have you never read,
"From the lips of children and
infants
you have ordained praise?" (Matt. 21:16)

Calvin stated that the argument that infants should not be baptized because they cannot repent was "aimed more at God than at us. For it is clear from many testimonies of Scripture that circumcision was also a sign of repentance" [Jer. 4:4; 9:25; cf. Deut. 10:16; 30:6]. Yet,

... since God communicated circumcision to infants as a sacrament of repentance and faith, it does not seem absurd if they are now made participants in baptism--unless men choose to rage openly at God's institution (1960, 2:1342-3).

For the Jews, the covenant sign had always been applied to their infant offspring without exception by the *command of God*, though the covenant promise was only efficacious in the elect. There is no reason to suggest that the situation with respect to baptism should be any different, especially since it was associated with "better promises" (Heb. 8:6, 11-12). The pronounced obsolescence of the old covenant (Heb. 8:13) would certainly spell the end of circumcision as the covenant symbol, but it was not intended to exclude the infant offspring from the new covenant symbol and all that it represented. On the contrary, the "better promise" declared,

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. 8:11-12).

God's command to Abraham to apply the covenantal sign to the male infants of his household was to be "an everlasting covenant." To ignore the command was to break the covenant and to be "cut off" from the LORD's people (Gen. 17:13-14). Later Moses narrowly escaped with his life as a result of God's righteous displeasure at Moses' negligence in the matter of his son's circumcision (Exod. 4:24-26).

The burden of proof lies upon the Anabaptists to show that the apostles, in applying baptism, changed the patriarchal

principle of applying the covenant sign to the infant children of believers. Carson attempted to shoulder this burden by reinterpreting the patriarchal principle insisting that "the spiritual or emblematic meaning of circumcision," [i.e., "the change of heart by the Holy Spirit"] was "without personal reference to the circumcised infants." "The thing . . . that is shadowed by circumcision is not to be found in infants who were circumcised" (Carson [1853] 1981, 227-28). Carson maintained that "circumcision neither signed nor sealed the blessings of the covenant of Abraham to the individuals to whom it was by Divine appointment administered."

. . . the thing of which circumcision is a seal, is *the righteousness of the faith of Abraham*. It was not a sign to others that they possessed the faith of Abraham (Carson [1853] 1981, 222, 225).

Carson contradicted his own argument, however, when he allowed for an exception of Isaac and Jacob "to whom the covenant was given by name" ([1853] 1981, 222). A scripture such as Deuteronomy 10:16: "Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer," shows that the covenant emblem signified a deep spiritual obligation on Israel's part. With the sign of circumcision the LORD had marked them out as a distinct people.

The covenant confirmation in Deuteronomy 29:10-14 expressly included "children" among the participants and was immediately followed by the promise that "the LORD your God will circumcise your hearts *and the hearts of your descendants*, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul and live" (Deut. 30:6, italics mine). After crossing the Jordan that same generation of Israelites received the covenant sign of circumcision (Joshua 5:2-9).

Carson's contention that circumcision had no emblematic significance for anyone other than Abraham himself has no foundation in Scripture. Jacob Ditzler noted from Romans 2:28-29 that circumcision represented a mark of purity to all true

Jews, and not merely to Abraham himself (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 570).

Reformed Baptist Kingdon argued that since baptism, unlike circumcision, did not have a physical and national reference, it was not to be administered except on the grounds of actual faith and conversion. For Kingdon, the concept of the remnant signaled the transition from a nationalistic basis of natural birth to an ecclesiastical basis of spiritual rebirth (1973, 76).

J. R. Graves had argued along the same line.

There is no conceivable connection or relation between circumcision and baptism, the former belonged exclusively to the male children of one man, and secured to them the temporal distinctives and blessings only, while baptism is a profession of a personal saving faith in Christ, and of any one, and of any family under the whole heaven, and introduces into the visible church. The former rite every male *inherited* by reason of birth; the condition of the latter is personal faith in Christ (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 651).

The fact that in both the Old and New Testaments the "seed of Abraham" never included all the physical descendants, however, is clearly indicated in Romans 2:28-29; 4:11-16; and 9:6-8 (Hanko 1981, 31-33). Notwithstanding this fact, however, the covenant sign of circumcision was to be applied to all the physical descendants (Gen. 17:10-14). The application of baptism was similarly extended by the words associated with the new covenant promise, "and to your children," in Acts 2:39. We need not protest too loudly, therefore, the words of English Reformed Baptist, David Kingdon: "We must not select the Mosaic period of revelation as if the last word about church membership were said at that time" (1973, 76). We can only inquire as to their relevance.

Cyprian, the renowned bishop of Carthage, did recognize one change regarding the *timing of application* of infant baptism

compared to the circumcision of the Israelite sons. For him, and 66 other bishops who concurred, baptism of infants was to be administered as soon as possible--rather than waiting until the eighth day as had been the case with circumcision. Cyprian reasoned that circumcision was simply a type foreshadowing the spiritual washing and regeneration of baptism which had been fulfilled through Jesus' resurrection on the first day, or, as it were, the eighth day of the week. There was, therefore, no reason to delay baptism until the eighth day since the spiritual reality associated with that day had arrived.

That the eighth day was observed in the Jewish circumcision, was a type going before in a shadow and resemblance; but on Christ's coming was fulfilled in substance. For because the eighth day, that is, the next to the sabbath day, was to be the day on which the Lord was to rise from the dead, and quicken us, and give us the spiritual circumcision; this eighth day, that is the next day to the Sabbath, or Lord's day, was signified in the type before; which type ceased when the substance came, and the spiritual circumcision was given to us.

So we judge that no person is to be hindered from obtaining that grace, by the law that is now appointed: and that the spiritual circumcision ought not to be restrained by the circumcision that was according to the flesh: but that all are to be admitted to the grace of Christ; since Peter, speaking in the Acts of the Apostles, says, "The Lord has shown me that no person is to be called common or unclean" (Wall [1705] 1889, 64).

On the basis of the numerological/typological argument, some have jumped to the conclusion that the application of baptism be tilted the other direction--that is, that it be delayed until spiritual regeneration becomes apparent in the child's life by his confession of faith. Such was the position of Paul King Jewett:

. . . the temporal earthly, typical elements of the old dispensation were dropped from the great house of salvation as scaffolding from the finished edifice. It is our contention that the Paedobaptists, in framing their argument from circumcision, have failed to keep this significant historical development in clear focus (1978, 91).

Jewett went on to compare the paedobaptists' identification of the two rites of circumcision and baptism to "a jar lid that almost fits, but never tightly, no matter how many turns it is given" (1978, 97). Even though Jewett himself made a striking identification between circumcision and baptism (1978, 87) to which he here raised objection, his point nevertheless needs to be addressed. To baptize infants is not to insist on a complete *identity*, but rather a certain *analogy*, between circumcision and baptism. It simply requires a different sign for a new people consisting of Jew and Gentile--under a new covenant consisting of better promises and a living hope. The recognition that the "jar lid" does not quite fit, to be sure, accents an element of discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments that cannot be ignored. Jesus himself alluded to this radical discontinuity when he said,

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins (Mark 2:21-22).

Circumcision came to be associated with the legal administration or the law of Moses even though its original institution preceded that law (Exod. 19:7-8; Deut. 27:1-28:68; Gal. 3:10-12). Accordingly, the apostle Paul stated,

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no

value to you at all. Again *I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.* You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Gal. 5:2-6, emphasis mine).

The legalistic error that Paul addressed in Galatians 5:2-6 was related to the fact that *circumcision was a bloody sign.* Moses' wife had recognized this when with disgust she tossed her infant son's bloody foreskin at Moses' feet. "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me," she exclaimed (Exod. 4:25-26). Though the "putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ" (Col. 2:11 NRSV) is applied to every believer through the Spirit's regenerating work, the same "putting off" was accomplished, in an objective sense, once for all in Christ's atoning death. Isaiah stated that "he was cut off from the land of the living" (53:8). Daniel pinpointed the time when Messiah would be "cut off" (Dan. 9:6). Peter wrote that "Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body ["flesh" KJV], but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). For New Testament believers to insist on the administration of physical circumcision, a bloody ordinance, as a requirement for salvation, therefore, was to deny the finished work of Christ of which circumcision was but a shadowy type, and thereby to fall away from grace.

The discontinuity between law and grace came to focus in the issue of circumcision, and while it certainly indicated that circumcision and baptism could not be equated, it did not rule out the point of their identification as covenant signs. It certainly did not invalidate water baptism's succeeding circumcision as the sign of the covenant for God's people--unless the "various ceremonial washings" of Hebrews 9:10 be understood to include Christian baptism, a notion that would not square with Hebrews

10:22 or Acts 10:45-47. The apostle did not say that "if you let yourselves be baptized, Christ will be of no value to you"! Neither did he say that "if you let your babies be baptized, Christ will be of no value to them." Donald Bridge and David Pypers in *The Water that Divides*, nevertheless, challenged Paedobaptists with the question, "Did the Apostle, demolishing false reliance on a ceremony thought to have saving power to whole families, proceed to replace it with another ceremony thought to do exactly the same?" (1977, 63). To say that "the Christian equivalent of circumcision . . . is not baptism but regeneration," as Bridge and Pypers have suggested (1977, 65), however, is no more to deny infant baptism than it is to deny adult baptism.

Infant baptism is no more ceremonial than adult baptism, and infant baptism, properly administered, is no less spiritual than adult baptism. As Samuel Hopkins pointed out, "The baptism of children is a *covenant transaction*" (1811, 282).

If this were not a covenant transaction, which has respect to the children, and they were in no sense included in the covenant, the application of the seal of the covenant to them, by baptizing them, would be an unmeaning transaction indeed; or rather would be a signification of that which is not true, and does not really take place. Nor would it answer to what was intended and actually took place in the circumcision of children in the Abrahamic church (Hopkins 1811, 2:283).

To be sure infant baptism can be administered in a legalistic manner much as circumcision was in the Old Testament (Deut. 10:16). But Baptists engage in legalism when they insist that an adult believer, previously baptized as an infant, or by some mode other than immersion, be immersed as a prerequisite for church membership. This is hardly what the apostle had in mind when he said, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you" (Rom. 15:7). What is more, such a practice belies the Baptist dictum that "the Christian equivalent

of circumcision is not baptism but regeneration."

Infant baptism, properly administered, is primarily *spiritual* rather than *ceremonial*. *Strictly speaking*, infant baptism represents the spiritual engagement of the hearts of Christian parents, the believing congregation, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself on the child's behalf. It is an engagement and a conviction of the heart born of God's promise:

My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever (Isa. 59:21).

The fact that a perfect one-to-one correspondence does not exist between circumcision and baptism, therefore, does not overthrow the original terms of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:7).

Of course, where there is no spiritual engagement of the hearts of the parents and congregation with the Lord on the child's behalf, the "jar lid" will never fit. It will never fit if infant baptism remains a mere academic or theological category and not the covenant engagement of the heart, for in that case the responsible parties involved are themselves spiritual *misfits*. The Christian faith is far more than straightening out one's theological categories in an academic sense, and infant baptism will never make sense apart from the covenant engagement of the heart. The parental singleness of heart associated with the new covenant (Jer. 32:39) stands in sharp contrast with the parental heart defection associated with the bulk of those Israelites under the old covenant (Psalm 78:8). Accordingly, the application of the new covenant sign to the infant offspring of the covenant subjects has a greater foundation than did the same application under the old covenant.

The "jar lid," as Jewett described the circumcision\baptism analogy, does not fit perfectly in that baptism does not hold a perfect one-to-one correspondence to circumcision owing to a certain discontinuity between the covenants. It does not fit when the responsible parties do not

meet the spiritual qualifications associated with the new covenant. But this is no argument for annulling the covenant that was ratified by God before the law was in effect, and that was further expounded by the prophets foretelling the blessings of the new covenant (Isa. 44:3; 59:20-21; Gal. 3:17). Jewett failed to recognize this when he insinuated that the promised blessing upon the believer's offspring was part of the "scaffolding" to be dropped from "the great house of salvation" now that the edifice has been completed. Whatever imperfect fit is represented by the baptism\circumcision analogy simply highlights the change in the covenant sign to correspond to the change in the administration of the covenant. While circumcision clearly represents the outmoded scaffolding for a finished edifice, that in no way rules out another external token or rite in keeping with the New Testament administration of the covenant of grace.

The new sign of baptism is a more triumphant sign, a sign of fulfillment of the promises, of total identification with Christ, of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and of sins having been washed away. Baptism is a watery echo of the sprinkling of the blood, a signal that the former things have passed away and the new order has come. Zipporah called Moses a "bridegroom of blood" (Exod. 4:25-26). Circumcision had been a bloody sign. Now that Christ, the church's true "bridegroom of blood," has completed his sacrificial work once for all, a new sign has been instituted--a bloodless sign attesting to Christ's finished work. Water signifies the Spirit's application of Christ's finished work. The sacramental means for a father to apply Christ's redemption to his household is no longer the removal of the infant son's foreskin, nor the dipping of hyssop in the blood of the Passover lamb and dabbing it on the lintel and doorframe of his home (Heb. 11:28). Rather it is the application of water baptism upon the members of the household trusting in the finished work of Christ, "a minister of the circumcision" and "our Passover" Rom. 15:8; 1 Cor. 5:7). "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17). The sacrament of baptism announces not only "The Kingdom of God is at hand!" (Mark 1:15), but also, "Today salvation has

come to this house" (Luke 19:9; Acts 16:14-15).

Jesus did not come to *deinstitutionalize* the church. He came to *reinstitutionalize* the church, to establish it on better promises, to inaugurate the new covenant with his blood, and to seal it by sending the Holy Spirit. Water baptism is the formal sign of covenant initiation for the believer and his offspring. "There are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement" (1 John 5:7). Christ did not come to do away with all wineskins, but to introduce the new wine of regeneration! Baptism represents the new wineskin for the new wine. Circumcision, as it is bound to the old order, must go. The objection that water baptism itself represented a Jewish rite for proselytes, and therefore does not qualify as a "new wineskin," is tantamount to insisting that Jesus' messianic office holds no relevance for the Christian church. For Isaiah prophesied concerning the Jewish Messiah, "So will he sprinkle many nations" (Isa. 52:15). The Abrahamic covenant to which circumcision originally attested is spiritually validated in the church of Jesus Christ (Gen. 17:7; Rom. 2:28-3:4; 15:8) being fulfilled in Christian baptism (Acts 2:38-39; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:11-12).

The argument that since regeneration under the New Testament is "without hands" and "done by Christ," parents and pastor ought to keep their hands off until it is accomplished ignores the continuance of the Genesis 17:7 covenant pattern graphically expounded in the writings of the prophets. It also fails to take seriously the example of Jesus the Mediator. Ironically, Baptists themselves have insisted that they follow the example of Jesus' with their "hands on" service of dedication for their infants. As Bridge and Phypers have pointed out, Baptists cannot use Jesus' blessing of children to justify infant dedication, for these same Baptists commonly insist that these children must be *old enough* to come (1977, 178)!

It is the conclusion drawn by the Baptist that more accurately corresponds to the lid that does not fit the biblical jar. The Baptist conclusion, no matter how hard it is pressed, faces the unpleasant task of explaining away Jesus' words and actions

and the recurring scriptural theme replete in such phrases as "and your seed," "and to your children," "and your household," "to this house," and "as for me and my house."

Samuel Hopkins, heir of the literary legacy of Jonathan Edwards, stated,

. . . if nothing be recorded in the New Testament that was said or done by Christ or his apostles, contrary to including the children of believers, in the covenant with their parents, and baptizing them; then the constitution which God had already made in his church, with respect to this must stand unrepealed; and it may safely be concluded, that it is the will of Christ, that this should take place in his church, and that it actually did take place, and was practiced, though nothing be said directly concerning it.

Hopkins hastened to add how readily it could be observed that the children of believers in the New Testament "were considered in the same light and character, and treated as children were in the Abrahamic church" (1811, 2:273).

God of Abraham

In the act of welcoming and blessing the little children, Jesus was doing nothing less than fulfilling, as the second person of the Godhead, the promise spoken to Abraham--"to be your God and the God of your descendants after you"(Gen. 17:7). Indeed, he is the same God who entered into a covenant relationship with Abraham, as his own words attested: "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56).

Jesus' declaration, "Before Abraham was born, I am!", was certain cause for stoning by the unbelieving Jews (John 8:58-59), who regarded these words as blasphemous. They

recognized Jesus' unmistakable identification with the God who had spoken to Moses in the burning bush--indeed, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you."

God also said to Moses, "say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob--has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation"(Exod. 3:14-15).

In the light of Jesus' self-disclosure as the God of Abraham, his blessing of the infants takes on monumental significance.

God's promise to be, not only Abraham's God, but the God of his descendants as well, represented the promise of eternal life for Abraham's descendants, as well as for Abraham, because Jesus Christ affirmed "He is not the God of the dead but of the living" [Luke 20:38; Matt. 22:32] (Calvin 1960, 2:1326).

The *Heidelberg Catechism's* answer to the question, "Are infants also to be baptized?", is a fitting affirmation of an ancient Christian practice--a practice that has scriptural foundations so as to withstand the onslaught of modernity.

Yes, because they, as well as their parents, are included in the covenant and belong to the people of God. Since both redemption from sin through the blood of Christ and the gift of faith from the Holy Spirit are promised to these children no less than to their parents, infants are also by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, to be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Covenant by

circumcision. In the New Covenant baptism has been instituted to take its place (1983, Q. 74).