

The Significance of Infant Baptism

Though circumcision and baptism are the signs and seals of covenant union and communion, it does not follow that every one who bears this sign and seal is an actual partaker of the grace signified and sealed and is therefore an heir of eternal life. It frequently happens that the sign is administered to those who, from the standpoint of good government and discipline, ought not to be baptised. The church too often fails to maintain the proper oversight and discrimination in this matter as in all others. But apart from the question of looseness and carelessness in administering this rite, it does not even follow that all those who, from the viewpoint of administration, properly bear the sign and seal are possessors of the actual grace signified. That is to say, even when the church exercises the proper oversight and discipline, even when all the safeguards of divine institution are applied, it does not follow that the administration of this rite insures for the recipient the possession of the grace signified. It must be admitted that this appears very anomalous, and it presents us with great difficulty. There have been many attempts made to resolve the difficulty.

It should be remembered that this anomaly does not concern infant baptism alone: it is a difficulty that inheres in the question of the baptism of adults as well. Antipaedobaptists must not think that they enjoy any immunity from this question, although they may sometimes naively consider that it is the exclusive problem of paedobaptists. It is a question that concerns the import of the sacraments as such. Here, however, we are concerned with this general question as it applies to infant baptism. And it is conceded that the question arises for many people most acutely in connection with the baptism of infants.

Several observations call for very distinct emphasis in connection with this question.

1. We must not seek the solution of the anomaly by saying that circumcision and baptism are signs and seals merely of *external* covenant privilege and blessing, that is to say, of external relationship as distinguished from the internal and spiritual blessing dispensed in and through the covenant of

grace. It cannot be too insistently stressed that circumcision was and baptism is the sign and seal of the covenant in the highest reaches and deepest significance of its soteric and spiritual meaning. In a word, they are signs and seals of the covenant of grace, not of certain external blessings accruing from or following upon the covenant of grace. And this is so even though many who bear the sign and seal do not possess and may never possess the blessings of the covenant itself.

It is not being contended that the distinction between an external covenant relationship and the internal covenant relationship is necessarily improper. This indeed may be a proper and even necessary distinction. Neither is it contended that it is improper to say that there have been and are many who have enjoyed the privileges of the external covenant relationship who are not partakers of the blessing of the covenant of grace. What is being contended for is that baptism may never properly be said to be the sign and seal of the external relationship rather than of the covenant itself in its richest and deepest blessing. There is not the slightest warrant from Scripture for the notion that baptism or, for that matter, circumcision is simply the sign and seal of external privilege.

2. The resolution of the anomaly, that there are some who, from the standpoint of administration, rightly receive the sign and seal of that which in reality they do not possess, is not to be sought along the line of the distinction between an external covenant relationship and the internal spiritual relationship but rather in the consideration that there is a discrepancy between the secret operations and purposes of God in his saving grace, on the one hand, and the divinely instituted method of administering the covenant in the world, on the other. In other words, the administration of the rite that is the sign and seal of the covenant has to be conducted not in accordance with God's secret operations and infallible purposes of grace but in accordance with certain requirements which fallible men may execute and apply. The divine method of administering the covenant in the world is that God commits to fallible men the ordinances of administration. These ordinances have to be dispensed in accordance with require-

ments which fallible men may apply. But the requirements that may be applied by men are not the measure of God's secret and efficacious operations of grace. To be very specific, baptism is not administered by revelation of God's secret will. It is properly administered when certain conditions of divine prescription, conditions with reference to which fallible men are in a position to judge, have been fulfilled. This is the divine institution. But God has not given us any assurance that the operations of His saving grace are invariably present where the divine institution is observed. Consequently, among adults there are some to whom the sign is administered, rightly and properly in accordance with the administration which God has committed to men, who do not possess, either in the forum of conscience or in the forum of the divine judgment, the inward grace of which baptism is the sign. Yet this discrepancy does not preclude the administering of the ordinance to them so long as they fulfil those conditions of intelligent and credible confession in reference to which men may judge. In like manner with respect to infants the sign is properly dispensed in many cases where the recipients do not possess and may never possess the inward grace signified. It may be said that such are only in external covenant relationship. But it may not be said that baptism is simply the sign and seal of such external relationship.

3. The infant seed of those who are believers by confession and profession should be baptised and thus bear the sign and seal of the covenant of grace. This is the divine institution: it is one of the ways by which it has pleased God to administer the covenant of grace in the world; it is one of the ordinances by means of which it pleases God to fulfil His covenant purposes from age to age and from generation to generation. It is this fact of divine institution that constitutes the sufficient ground for administering and receiving this ordinance. When we ask the question: why do we baptise infants or upon what *ground* do we dispense baptism to them? it is sufficient for us to know and to answer that it is the divine institution. God has ordained it as one of the provisions whereby He administers His grace in the world. When the church practises this institution and complies with the divine command, no further judgment respecting the secret purpose of God

nor respecting God's secret operations in the heart of those baptised is required as the proper *ground* upon which the ordinance is administered. To require any further information than the divine institution would go beyond the warrant of Scripture. It is true that in administering this ordinance we plead the promises which God has attached to faith and obedience, and we rest our faith and hope upon God's faithfulness. But our faith in God's promises would not appear to be placed in its proper relationship to infant baptism if it were conceived of as the *ground* for baptising infants. The ground is rather the institution which God has established and revealed, namely, that to the infant seed of believers the sign and seal of the covenant of grace is to be administered. Hence to aver that baptism is dispensed to infants on the ground of presumptive election or presumptive regeneration appears to be without warrant and also introduces perplexity into the question at issue.³⁰

³⁰ Underlying this divine institution is the covenant administration which God has established in the world in pursuance of His redemptive purpose. God has ordained that the infant seed of believers be included in the covenant relation, and it is because infants are included that they receive the sign and seal of the covenant. In other words, the covenant of grace and the divinely instituted method of administering it in the world are the rationale of infant baptism. But when we are thinking specifically of the *ground* or *basis* upon which we act in administering baptism to infants it would seem necessary to focus attention upon the fact that it is the divine institution for the sign of the covenant to be given to the infant seed of the godly.

The notion of presumptive election appears in the First Helvetic Confession when, with reference to the baptism of infants it says, "praesertim quum de eorum electione pie est praesumendum" (Art. XXII). Charles Hodge adopts this notion. He says: "Since the promise is not only to parents but to their seed, children are, by the command of God, to be regarded and treated as of the number of the elect, until they give undeniable evidence to the contrary, or refuse to be so considered . . . It is not their vital union with Christ, nor their actual regeneration by the Holy Ghost, that is presumed, but their election . . . This presumption of election is not founded on their baptism, but their baptism is founded on this presumption" ("The Church Membership of Infants" in *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, 1858, pp. 375 f. n; cf. also pp. 377 f.). He contends that this is the doctrine of all the Reformed Churches and also claims it is the doctrine of Calvin, quoting from *Inst.* IV, xvi, 5, 6 in support of his claim.

Calvin in *Inst.* IV, xvi, 5-11 certainly holds that infants are baptised

In the case of adults we baptise on the basis of an intelligent and credible confession, not on the basis of a judgment to the effect that the person is regenerate and not even on the basis of the judgment that the person is presumptively regenerate. This is the divine ordinance. It is the institution of God that all who make such a confession be baptised, and no further judgment may be posited as the *ground* of the administration. Likewise, in regard to infants, we baptise the infant seed of those who make this confession simply because God has instituted this ordinance. Short of that we must not stop. Beyond that we may not go.

This is not, of course, to say everything regarding the relations of those who are baptised to one another nor regarding

because the covenant belongs to them as to the infants of the Jews under the Old Testament. Since they are partakers of the thing signified why should they not receive the sign? The covenant remains in force and includes infants. Baptism is now the mode of confirmation. "Let those, therefore, who embrace the promise of God that he will perpetuate his mercy to their offspring, consider it their duty to present them to the Church to be signed with the symbol of mercy, and thereby to animate their minds to stronger confidence, when they actually see the covenant of the Lord engraven on the bodies of their children" (*Inst.* IV, xvi, 9). It is without question, therefore, that Calvin regarded the inclusion of believers' children in the covenant as the reason for the baptism of such. To the present writer, however, this is not necessarily equivalent to the statement of Hodge that infants are baptised because they are *presumptively* elect or *presumptively* in the covenant. The reasons given by Calvin for infant baptism appear to be rather closely adhered to in the Second Helvetic Confession, Cap. XX, 6; The Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 74; The French Confession, Art. XXXV; The Belgic Confession, Art. XXXIV. The brevity of the statements in the British Confessions is rather striking. The Thirty-Nine Articles say infant baptism is to be retained "as most agreeable with the institution of Christ"; the Irish Articles that it is to be retained "as agreeable to the Word of God"; the Westminster Confession that "the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized"; the Larger Catechism that "infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized"; the Shorter Catechism that "the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized".

B. B. Warfield uses the notion of presumptive membership in Christ's body (*cf.* "The Polemics of Infant Baptism" in *Studies in Theology*, New York, 1932, p. 390).

For a historical survey and analysis see Lewis Bevens Schenck: *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* (New Haven, 1940).

the attitude of the church to those baptised. Those making the requisite confession and therefore baptised are to be received as believers, as those in union and communion with Christ, and they are to be treated accordingly. Baptised infants are to be received as the children of God and treated accordingly.³¹ But the proper ground of baptism, whether it be that of adults or infants, consists in the divine institution and command which regulate the church in these elements of worship as in all others.

If we bear in mind these principles as they apply to the divine method of administering the covenant of grace in the world, we shall find ourselves in a better position to understand some of the instances which occur in Scripture and which seem at first sight to confront us with great difficulty and anomaly. These instances are specifically the circumcision of Ishmael and of Esau. Ishmael was certainly circumcised (Gen. 17:23) and we have every good reason to believe that Esau was also. How could this be? The covenant was

³¹ One of the finest statements on this subject is found in the Directory for the Public Worship of God prepared by the Westminster Assembly. Under the caption, "Of the Administration of the Sacraments" it reads: "The seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it. and to the outward privileges of the church, under the gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament; the covenant of grace, for substance, being the same; and the grace of God, and the consolation of believers, more plentiful than before . . . That children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh: That they are Christians, and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized".

This evinces that the doctrine of the Westminster divines followed the lines of thought enunciated by Calvin and formulated in such Reformed creeds as the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, even though the statements in the other Westminster Standards are brief and do not show this so clearly.

If the word "presumptive" or its equivalent as used by the First Helvetic Confession, Charles Hodge, and B. B. Warfield, for example, simply means what the Directory, as quoted above, means, namely, that believers' children are to be received as "Christians, and federally holy", then no exception could be taken to its use. It is not certain, however, that this is all that is implied in the use of such a notion as "presumptive election".

established with neither. If we think along the lines delineated above we shall see that the circumcision of Ishmael and of Esau is perfectly consonant with the divine method of administering the covenant in the world and provides us with the most instructive example of the application of this principle. The divinely prescribed principle of procedure was that all males should be circumcised, those born in the house or bought with money of any stranger (Gen. 17:12). The provisions of Genesis 17:9–14 are explicit to this effect. When these provisions are duly appreciated it will be recognised that for Abraham not to circumcise Ishmael and for Isaac not to circumcise Esau would have been a direct violation of the divine command. They were both circumcised. And they were circumcised in accordance with the principles of the divine institution as it was operative in the world. Circumcision was not withheld from them, for to withhold it from them would have been to act in accordance with other data of revelation *that did not regulate and were not intended to regulate the actual administration of the ordinance of circumcision*. To refrain from circumcising Ishmael and Esau would mean the importation and application of other data that did not provide the rule and that could not be interpreted as modifying the rule by which the covenant sign was to be administered. That rule was that *all* males should be circumcised.

It was prior to the circumcision of Ishmael that Abraham was told, "My covenant will I establish with Isaac". Rebecca knew by revelation, prior to the birth of her two sons, that Esau was to be rejected. But this information regarding the purpose of God could not properly be used either by Abraham or by Rebecca for depriving Ishmael or Esau respectively of the sign of circumcision. In accordance with the uniform principle enunciated in Genesis 17:9–14, circumcision was to be administered to all male children. In the case of Abraham we have in Genesis 17:21–23 the most eloquent witness to the fact that he did not fall into the error of confusing two things which must be kept distinct and therefore evidence of his sharp insight into the implications of the rule by which he was to be governed in the administering of the rite of circumcision. One of the outstanding features of Abraham's character was his unhesitating obedience to the revealed will

of God. This appears in the very circumcision of Ishmael. Abraham had been commanded to circumcise all males, and this command he scrupulously obeyed. He did not regard the revelation that not in Ishmael would his seed be called as providing him with any warrant for suspension of this explicitly prescribed rule of procedure. We may presume that it was likewise in the case of Rebecca. The additional revelation of the purpose of God in reference to Esau could not properly be pleaded by her as a reason for depriving Esau of the sign of circumcision. Such withholding would have been contrary to the divine institution whereby she and Isaac were to govern their conduct in this matter. The circumcision of both Ishmael and Esau, when viewed in this light, is thoroughly consonant with the principles of procedure which governed the dispensing of this sign. And the same principles govern the dispensing of baptism to infants as well as to adults. Divine institution governs its administration. That is the *ground*. And that is what constitutes for us the obligation to comply.

Corroboratory Evidence

As was indicated already the evidence in support of infant baptism is not merely the absence of any repeal of the principle in accordance with which infants received the sign and seal of the covenant under the Old Testament. There is also the positive evidence which indicates that the same principle which gave meaning and validity to the circumcision of infants under the old economy is embedded and is operative in the administration of the covenant of grace under the new. This evidence is not of the nature of an express statute authorising the baptism of infants. There is no such statute. As we have seen, it would have been unnecessary, and that because of the organic unity and continuity of the covenant and of the church in both dispensations. The positive evidence is of a different sort, and this evidence is all the more significant precisely because it is of a different sort. It is evidence of the continued existence and operation of the principle without which infant circumcision and infant baptism would be little short of monstrosities. It is the principle of representation, of soli-

clarity, of corporate relationship, coming to expression in the administration of God's redemptive and saving grace in the world. In other words, it is evidence that our Lord and his apostles taught and acted upon the recognition that the same principle which provided the basis of infant circumcision was to be applied in the administration of the kingdom of God and of the church.

1. *Matthew 18:1-6; 19:13, 14; Mark 9:36, 37; 10:14-16; Luke 18:15-17.*

It might readily be thought that when our Lord said, "Suffer the little children and forbid them not to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14; *cf.* Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16) he had in mind only such children as could come to Jesus of their own accord and were of sufficient age and understanding to answer to the description of Matthew 18:6, "these little ones who believe in me". Without determining the question as to the denotative scope of such an expression, it should be apparent that what Jesus says regarding the membership of little children in the kingdom of God cannot be restricted to children of sufficient age to be capable of intelligent understanding and faith. In Matthew 19:13 we are told that little children were brought to Jesus (*cf.* Mark 10:13) and the impression is distinctly created that the group included at least such as would not have come on their own initiative. All doubt, however, is removed by Luke 18:15, for there we are informed that the children were babes (*βρέφη*), that is to say, little infants. Hence our Lord's word to the effect that "of such is the kingdom of God" applies to little infants and not solely to children of more advanced years and intelligence.

Again, it might be supposed that when Jesus says, "Of such is the kingdom of God" all he means is that the kingdom of God is made up of those who are like little children and have a childlike spirit of simplicity and humility.³² It is

³² John Gill says: "The reason given for suffering little children to come to Christ; for of such is the kingdom of heaven, is to be understood in a figurative and metaphorical sense; of such who are comparable to children for modesty, meekness, and humility, and from freedom from rancour, malice, ambition and pride" (*op. cit.*, p. 295). Gill cites Calvin

true that in immediate connection with the statement concerned Jesus does say that "whosoever will not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall by no means enter therein" (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17; *cf.* Matt. 18:3). But we are not to think that this is the import of the statement in question, namely, "of such is the kingdom of God". What Jesus is asserting here is rather that the kingdom of God belongs to little children and that they are members of it, not at all that the kingdom of God belongs to such as resemble little children. This can be shown by the following considerations.

(a) The situation that evoked this disclosure on our Lord's part was one in which little children as such are the centre of interest. This is the case in all three passages where the statement occurs (Matt. 19:13, 14; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). Little children were brought to the Lord that he might touch them, lay his hands on them, and pray. The disciples were forbidding this intrusion. Apparently they thought that this was an unworthy interruption. Jesus was moved with indignation. Why? Precisely because the disciples were forbidding the *little children* from being brought and coming to him. It was then, and in specific reference to that incident, that Jesus said, "Suffer the little children and forbid them not to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of God". To suppose that our Lord was not speaking directly of the little children and affirming their membership in the kingdom of God would do plain violence to the actual facts of the situation. It was with little children the disciples were concerned, it was with little children Jesus was concerned, the disciples to forbid them and Jesus to receive them. Little children were in the focus of attention and interest, and it is therefore of the little children themselves that Jesus proceeds to speak.

as supporting this view of the clause in question. This is inaccurate. What Calvin says in his comment on Matthew 19:14 is that "under this term he (Jesus) includes both little children and those who resemble them; for the Anabaptists foolishly exclude children, with whom the subject must have commenced". Calvin clearly recognises that the clause in question refers to the membership of infants in the kingdom of God and not simply to the membership of those who resemble little children in modesty and simplicity of spirit.

(b) When Jesus says, "Suffer the little children and forbid them not to come unto me", he is speaking of little children and not of those who are like little children in spirit and attitude. To say the least, it would be unnatural and harsh to suppose that the reason he appends to the exhortation would not have little children as its subject but another class of entirely different denotation. It should be seen that such an interpretation would not supply the proper reason for the exhortation, "Suffer the little children . . . to come unto me".³³

(c) The demonstrative pronoun which is used points to the same conclusion. The pronoun (*τοιούτος*) means, "of this kind, sort, or class".³⁴ It is necessary to note the class of which Jesus had been speaking; it is distinctly and only of the infant class. This class alone provides us with the antecedent of the *τοιούτων* and not at all the class of those who are of childlike and humble spirit. Of the latter Jesus had not spoken. Neither were they in the focus of attention. The disciples were not forbidding such nor did Jesus here say of such, "Suffer them to come unto me".

The usage of the New Testament will show also that the force of *τοιούτος* is not to institute a comparison but rather to specify a class, and the class specified is defined by the context. In Matthew 18:5, for example, the expression, "one such little child" (*ἐν παιδίῳ τοιούτῳ*) is not "one illustrating the humble spirit" but "one such little child". Jesus is not saying, "Whoever will receive one like this little child in humility" but rather "one little child like this" (see also Mark 9:37). In John 4:23 the words, "The Father seeketh such to worship him" refer to those who worship in spirit and in truth and, obviously, not to those who are like such; the denotation is determined by the immediately preceding part of the verse. The following examples will verify this meaning and usage: John 9:36; Acts 19:25; 22:22; Romans 1:32; 16:18; I Corinthians 5:5; 7:15, 28; II Corinthians 2:7; 3:4; Galatians 5:21, 27; 6:1; Hebrews 7:26.

(d) The account of this incident given in Matthew 19:13, 14 has no reference to the childlike spirit requisite for entrance

³³ Cf. Calvin: *Inst.* IV, xvi, 7; Thomas Witherow: *Scriptural Baptism — its Mode and Subjects*, p. 56.

³⁴ Cf. Thomas Witherow: *op. cit.*, pp. 56 f.

into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew, therefore, indicates that the statement, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven" was valid and was to be understood quite independently of any mention of the additional observation reported by Mark and Luke, namely, that whosoever will not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter therein.

We must conclude, therefore, that when Jesus says, "Of such is the kingdom of God" he is not speaking of the class resembling little children but is referring to little children themselves and affirms unmistakably that little children are members of the kingdom of God. The thought expressed is not the quality which fits a person for entrance into the kingdom of God but rather the place which little children themselves are to have in the redemptive ministry of Jesus and their relation to the kingdom of God.

One further observation may be made regarding these passages. In Mark 9:41 the expression, "in my name" is explained by the qualifying clause, "because ye belong to Christ". To receive them in Christ's name is therefore equivalent to receiving them as belonging to Christ.³⁵ This, in turn, is but a variation of expression which has the same effect as saying that they belong to the kingdom of God.

To conclude: these two assertions — (1) that little children belong to the kingdom of God; (2) that they are to be received in Christ's name — do not offer stringent proof of infant baptism and they do not provide us with an express command to baptise infants. They do, however, supply us with certain principles which lie close to the argument for infant baptism and without which the ordinance of infant baptism would be meaningless. These principles are: (1) that little children, even infants, are among Christ's people and are members of his body; (2) that they are members of his kingdom and therefore have been regenerated; (3) that they belong to the church, in that they are to be received as belonging to Christ, that is to say, received into the fellowship of the saints. The force of all this is greatly enhanced when we remember the occasion of Jesus' assertion, "of such is the kingdom of God". The attitude of the disciples, to which these words of Jesus were the rebuke, was one that rested on the

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.* p. 53.

assumption that little children were not of sufficient importance to occupy the attentions of Jesus and were not really within the compass of his kingdom task. In contrast, our Lord's reply is to the effect that none are more intimately involved in his redemptive work and ministry than little infants and that therefore they are to be received into the bosom of the saints' fellowship and love. If little children belong to the kingdom of God, if they belong to Christ, if they are to be received into the fellowship of believers, if they are to be reckoned as possessing the qualities and rights that constitute them members of the kingdom of God and of the church, is there any reason why they should not receive the sign of that membership? In fact it would appear to be the proper and necessary recognition of that which the Lord himself explicitly asserted and of the injunction he so emphatically gave to his disciples. Surely the inference is one of good and necessary consequence that infants should be given the sign and seal of that which, by the authority of Christ, they are to be accounted. There is nothing signified and sealed by baptism that is in excess of that which our Lord asserts infants to be and of that which he commands they should be accounted.

Obviously this does not apply to all little children. And it does not of itself settle the mooted question of the fate of infants dying in infancy. Such applications were ostensibly outside the universe of discourse. The statements of our Lord with reference to the membership of infants in the kingdom of God can be applied only to such little children as come within the compass of a covenant situation analogous to that in which our Lord's words were spoken. Any universalising of the assertion would violate the most elementary canons of proper interpretation.

2. *Ephesians 6:1, 4; Colossians 3:20, 21.*

In these passages the apostle Paul includes the children among those who are addressed as saints. In the contexts of both passages exhortations are being given to the various classes of saints — wives, husbands, fathers, servants, masters. The exhortation in each case is appropriate to the specific duty and particular station of each class. It should also be noted that in each case the apostle frames and directs his

exhortation in terms of the Christian standing and character of the persons concerned. He is addressing wives, husbands, fathers, servants, masters as believers in Christ and as those therefore who recognise their allegiance to Christ as Lord. It is in such a context that children, as constituting one particular class among others, are exhorted to cultivate the specific virtue appropriate to them. It is necessary, therefore, to understand that the children are reckoned as saints in terms of the salutation in both epistles and that they are not regarded as belonging to any different category in respect of the Saviourhood and Lordship of Christ. Everything points to the conclusion that children, equally with parents and servants and masters, belong to the body of Christ and are fully embraced in the fellowship of the saints. If children were thus recognised and received in the apostolic churches, they were recognised as possessing the status of which baptism is the sign and seal. If this is so, there is no reason why such children should not have received the sign and seal of their status and privilege.

3. *I Corinthians 7:14.*

Apparently believers in Corinth who found themselves in the anomalous situation of being united in wedlock with unbelieving partners were afraid that their Christian standing and character would be prejudiced by this mixed marital relationship. The apostle was writing to encourage them against this fear. The encouragement he provides is that the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother. In order to reinforce the argument drawn from this principle he appeals to what had been apparently recognised among the Corinthians, namely, that the children of even one believing parent were not unclean but rather holy.³⁶ That is the force of the statement "Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy". It is quite striking that the apostle does not feel called upon to vindicate or establish this truth; it was taken for granted

³⁶ Cf. B. B. Warfield: *op. cit.*, pp. 397 f.; Thomas Witherow: *op. cit.*, pp. 53 ff. John Gill regards the holiness spoken of in this passage as that merely of "legitimate marriage and offspring" (*op. cit.*, p. 304).

and therefore without argument pleaded as the premise already conceded by the Corinthians. This shows that the sanctification of the children of parents, only one of whom was a believer, was a recognised principle in the apostolic tradition. It is this principle, clearly enunciated in I Corinthians 7:14, that underlies the ordinance of infant baptism. It does not, of course, offer stringent proof of infant baptism. But it does show that the children of a believer are not in the same category, in respect of "sanctification", as the children who have no Christian parentage. There is a status or condition that can be characterised as "holiness", which belongs to children in virtue of a parental relationship.

In view of the context we cannot maintain that this "holiness" is that of regeneration. But it can be nothing less than the "holiness" of connection and privilege. It is a "holiness" that evinces the operation of the covenant and representative principle and proves that the Christian faith of even one parent involves the embrace of the offspring in a relationship that is by divine warrant described as "holy". This is wholly consonant with the basis upon which the ordinance of infant baptism rests, just as it is counter to the moving principle of the antipaedobaptist contention.

4. *Acts 16:15, 33, 34; I Cor. 1:16 (cf. Acts 10:47, 48; 11:14).*

These are the instances of household baptism. We cannot prove conclusively that there were infants in these households. But the significance of such explicit reference to the baptism of households appears when we take into account two considerations. There is, first of all, the fact that there are relatively few instances of actual baptism recorded in the New Testament.³⁷ It is remarkable that there should be so few.

³⁷ The reference here, of course, is to actual instances of Christian baptism. Cf. in this connection Thomas Witherow: *op. cit.*, pp. 57 f. When John Gill says, for example, "it is strange, exceeding strange, that among the many thousands baptized in Jerusalem, Samaria, Corinth, and other places, that there should be no one instance of any of them bringing their children with them to be baptized, and claiming the privilege of baptism for them upon their own faith; nor of their doing this in any short time after" (*op. cit.*, p. 306), he is not taking proper account of

We should expect that there would be a very large number. For actual baptism must have been very frequent in the days of the apostles. But only some twelve instances are actually recorded (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 13, 38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5, I Cor. 1:14, 16). It is quite illuminating that at least three of these instances refer to household baptism. Every consideration would point to the conclusion that household baptism was a frequent occurrence in the practice of the church in the apostolic days. If so, it would be practically impossible to believe that in none of these households were there any infants. It would be unreasonable to believe so. The infants in the households belonged to the households and would be baptised. Presumption is, therefore, of the strongest kind, even though we do not have an overt and proven instance of infant baptism. There is, in the second place, the representative principle which is embedded in the Scripture and is woven into the warp and woof of the administration of grace in the world. When we appreciate this we can understand how readily the apostles would apply this principle in the dispensing of the ordinances of grace. Household baptism would be a perfectly natural application.³⁸ And this would inevitably involve the baptism of the infants comprised in the household whenever and wherever there were such.

the fewness of references to actual baptism. He is building an argument upon the numbers baptised, when what is relevant to the question is not the numbers actually baptised but the number of times in the New Testament in which there is reference to the actual administration of the rite.

³⁸ In connection with household baptism reference might also be made to the absence of any evidence of the baptism of adults who were born of Christian parents and who were brought up in a Christian household. Paedobaptists have appealed to this consideration as providing at least presumptive evidence in favour of the belief that in apostolic practice the children of believers were baptised in infancy. Most recently, Oscar Cullmann in his booklet *Die Tauflehre des Neuen Testaments* (Zurich, 1948) presses this consideration rather strongly. He says, for example: "Those who dispute the Biblical character of infant Baptism have therefore to reckon with the fact that *adult Baptism for sons and daughters born of Christian parents, which they recommend, is even worse attested by the New Testament than infant baptism* (for which certain possible traces are discoverable) *and indeed lacks any kind of proof*" (p. 21; Eng. Trans. by J. K. S. Reid, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Chicago, 1950), p. 26).

5. *Acts 2:38, 39.*

The relevance of this text concerns the clause in verse 39, "For the promise is to you and to your children". There is no room for question that the children are coordinated with the adults who are being addressed by Peter on this occasion. And the important consideration is that the promise, which is urged as an incentive to, or reason for, repentance and baptism, stands in the same relation to the children as to the adults being addressed. This is the force of the coordination.

It might be argued that the children being contemplated here are simply and solely those of age and intelligence sufficient for the intelligent repentance urged in the preceding verse. Or it might be said that the children come into the purview of the passage and therefore within the purview of the promise only as they attain to an age of understanding which will make them capable of such repentance and also of the call referred to in the latter part of the verse. On this interpretation the promise could not be conceived of as actually embracing infants or young children. But there is nothing in the text to indicate that there is such restriction in the denotation of the children referred to. And it would be entirely counter to everything in the revelation which formed the background of Peter's statement and which provided the basis of it. We may well ask: what was there in the revelation of the Old Testament or in the teaching of Jesus which would give the least support or even plausibility to the supposition that in the denotation of those designated "children" a line of distinction must be drawn between little infants and grown-ups? To institute such discrimination would be the resort of desperation, would be without any warrant in the context of Scripture and would be contrary to the analogy of Scripture usage. Hence we must believe that the children spoken of are the children of those being addressed, and as the children of such they are for that reason placed in the same category as their parents in reference to the promise. Simply stated this means that the promise is to the children as well as to the parents and that, in respect of this property, the children are included with their parents.

We are not in a position to appreciate the significance of this unless we bear in mind the covenant relation established by God and clearly revealed in the Old Testament. It is in the light of Genesis 17:7, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee" (*cf.* Deut. 29:10-13) that this word of Peter is to be understood. It is this principle, institution, or arrangement alone that gives meaning to Peter's appeal.

Now, what does this imply? It demonstrates that Peter, in the illumination and power of the Spirit of Pentecost, recognised that there was no suspension or abrogation of that divine administration whereby children are embraced with their parents in God's covenant promise. It is simply this and nothing less that Acts 2:39 evinces. Pentecost is to be coordinated with the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ as one of the epochal events in the economy of redemption. We may well regard Pentecost as that which brought to fruition the inauguration of the new dispensation. Nothing could advertise more conspicuously and conclusively that this principle of God's gracious government, by which children along with their parents are the possessors of God's covenant promise, is fully operative in the New Testament as well as in the Old than this simple fact that on the occasion of Pentecost Peter took up the refrain of the old covenant and said, "The promise is to you and to your children". It is the certification of the Holy Spirit to us that this method of the administration of the covenant of grace is not suspended.

It is precisely because there is such evidence of the perpetual operation of this gracious principle in the administration of God's covenant that we baptise infants. It is for that reason alone that we continue to baptise them. It is the divine institution, not, indeed, commended by human wisdom and not palatable to those who are influenced by the dictates of human wisdom, yet commended by the wisdom of God. It is the seal to us of His marvellous goodness that He is not only a God to His people but also to their seed after them.