

BAPTISM NOT FOR INFANTS BY T. E. WATSON: A RESPONSE

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General Comments

Mr. Watson's book is not impressive. Men like Kingdon and Carson have done a much better job of presenting and defending the Baptist position. For the most part Mr. Watson just sets one paedobaptist against another, something that can be done with almost any subject. Certainly it can be done with the baptist writers as well. Nor does it prove anything.

Instead, therefore, of answering the strongest and best arguments of the paedobaptist writers (the usual way of arguing one's case), Mr. Watson deals with them at their weakest points and even then seldom answers their arguments Biblically. To make them contradict themselves or others is not enough.

Indeed, we ourselves are not only critical of the baptist position but of many paedobaptist arguments, believing that paedobaptists have rarely argued their case clearly and consistently and that they have usually based their arguments on faulty views of the covenant or of the church.

To save time and space in answering Mr. Watson, we are not going to quote him, but will make reference to him by chapter, page, section and paragraph (the paragraph referred to is the first, or second, etc. full paragraph on the page) or by reference to the verses he is dealing with. It is assumed that since you have recommended his book, you either own it book or have access to it and can look up the references yourself.

Preface

Page 7, paragraphs 1, 2. We agree that the subject of baptism is of "primary importance" and needs to be addressed. We have no sympathy for those who refuse to address the issue, or insist that it is a non-issue and allow any practice (such as the Free Presbyterians of Ulster). Indeed, one of the great weaknesses of the evangelical movement today is its refusal to face controversial issues. As Watson shows, the matter of baptism involves the doctrines of the church and of the covenant, both matters of tremendous consequence, and is an ordinance of Christ. A proper understanding of it, then, is crucial.

Page 8, paragraph 1. That there are multitudes who believe paedobaptism simply as a matter of tradition is true. It is, however, no argument against paedobaptism. The same can be said for an equal number of baptists. It is rare, for example, to meet a baptist who does not simply take it for granted that passages like Matthew 3:16 and Acts 8:38-39 teach immersion and who has really looked at these passages (cf. Adams, **The Meaning and Mode of Baptism** - the arguments against immersion in these passages are incontrovertible).

Page 8, paragraph 2. It needs to be emphasised that we do NOT believe in baptismal regeneration or anything like what the C of E teaches, especially if they are deemed "the best boat to fish from." We consider them a completely apostate denomination. We say this because Watson often quotes from their men, and they have the weakest case of all.

Page 9, paragraph 1. Let me underline again the fact that we also reject many traditional arguments for infant baptism and find them utterly unconvincing. We believe that most of them are based on faulty views of the covenant. We believe, in fact, that the traditional view of the covenant is wrong both in that it makes a major concession to dispensationalism by teaching more than one covenant (works and grace), and to Arminianism by teaching either a conditional covenant or a covenant that includes more than the elect. Later in the book Watson calls our views "high calvinism" and simply rejects them as "obviously contrary to Scripture" (p. 93). Yet

these are the arguments Watson never faces, the only arguments, we believe, that can stand in the face of the baptist objections.

Page 10, paragraphs 3, 4ff. Watson is misleading here. Most of his quotations are not by way of "reinforcing his points" in the sense of showing that the arguments of the paedobaptists are unbiblical, but simply by way of making the paedobaptists contradict themselves. That is a non-argument, as we have pointed out.

Chapter 1

Page 17, paragraph 1ff. We do not believe that infant baptism should be or can be proved from Jewish proselyte baptism, though we believe the case for such is far better than Watson makes out. The argument, however, ought to be rejected especially because it is an historical rather than a Biblical argument and all extra-Biblical arguments are beside the point as far as we are concerned.

We would add, however, that the N.T. proves conclusively that the Jews did baptise, that these baptisms were *sprinklings*, and that they were applied to *children* (cf. Heb. 9:10, where the word "washings" is actually "baptisms", and Heb. 9:19, which speaks of one of these baptisms, a sprinkling of blood, and says that it was applied to *all* the people).

This is one of the passages we would use, therefore, as a N.T. warrant for infant baptism. It speaks:

- (1) of baptism (the NT word, nothing less, is used);
- (2) of baptism by sprinkling;
- (3) of the baptism of infants ("all the people");
- (4) of this baptism as a *pattern* for the NT (vs. 20).

The argument that this refers back to the O.T. is beside the point. The only questions that can legitimately be asked about this baptism are:

- (1) What did it signify? (and there can be no doubt, we think, that it signified the same thing as all other Biblical baptisms, the washing away of sin by the blood of Christ);
- (2) What covenant or testament did it represent and was that covenant in any essential features different from the new covenant? (a comparison of Heb. 8:10 and Ex. 20:5-6 & 20:2, and Ex. 2:5-6 with I Pet. 2:9, Rev. 1:6 shows that they are not different in essentials).

It should be added here (even though we are getting a little ahead of the argument), that if the old and new covenant are essentially the same covenant under different administrations or revelations, then Deuteronomy 29:10-13 makes it crystal clear that infants are included in that covenant.

Page 19, paragraph 3. We agree with Marcel that "it is impossible for us to found infant baptism (or any other teaching) on extra-canonical texts." To do otherwise would be a return to Romanism. The doctrine of infant baptism, therefore, "must be established and justified biblically."

Chapter 2

Page 21, paragraphs 1, 2. We do not dispute that John baptised adults upon repentance. We do the same. That, however, proves nothing for or against infant baptism.

Page 21, paragraphs 3, 4. It is by no means evident, however, that the phrase in Mark 1:4, "the baptism of repentance" means (1) that water baptism has its origin or reason in repentance, and (2) that repentance must *needs* precede baptism. Matthew 3:11 speaks of baptism *unto* (lit. "into") repentance, where both the Greek preposition and the accusative case have the basic idea of "motion towards."

Along with this there is in Acts 19:4 another description of John's baptism, which says literally, "John baptised the baptism of repentance, while saying (present participle, always expressing contemporaneous time) to the people, towards (with a view to) the One coming, that they should believe, that is, towards Jesus Christ." How in light of a text such as this the baptists can insist that faith also must always precede baptism is beyond comprehension. Perhaps a baptist would argue that John's baptism was prior to Christ's ministry and therefore, faith in Christ could not and did not precede baptism then, but only repentance. But this leaves a baptist with only several options:

(1) To admit that faith did not always precede John's baptism, that it was really the same as the O.T. baptisms and, therefore, of no significance with respect to the N.T. sacrament. In that case John's baptism cannot be used by a baptist to prove *anything* at all about the N.T. sacrament - not immersion, not the necessity of faith and/or repentance prior to baptism. This, however, would ignore the fact that *half* of the references to baptism in the N.T. are to John's baptism. The only other option, though, is:

(2) To continue to use John's baptism as an example of N.T. baptism and to concede that faith at least need not necessarily precede water baptism. This, however, would be conceding that the *foundation* for baptist teaching is in error, i.e., that baptism is not necessarily *believer's* baptism.

Page 22, paragraph 1. Even if it is true, however, that John "only baptized those who repented and confessed their sins," it still does not follow (1) that only they can be baptised, or (2) that repentance must always precede baptism, or (3) that baptism follows repentance as a sign of it (see below).

Chapter 3

Page 23, paragraph 1. We have no quarrel with the fact that *disciples* are first made and then baptised, but that proves nothing about the children or families of disciples. The baptist argument from passages such as this runs something like this:

Adults must be allowed to eat.

Children are not adults.

Therefore children should not be allowed to eat.

The argument assumes what needs to be proved; that because in some cases Scripture speaks of disciples being baptized that therefore *only* disciples can be baptized. Nevertheless, we understand that the chapters on John's baptism and Jesus's baptism are only part of Watson's argument. He is attempting to show that that the NT *never* mentions infant baptism, and that therefore infants cannot be baptised. That argument, however, is wrong (notwithstanding various paedobaptists who say the same). The NT does speak of infant baptism.

Page 23, paragraph 2. To use the behaviour of the twelve disciples at the time little children were brought to Jesus to "prove" that the disciples were not accustomed to seeing infants baptised is as weak as some of the arguments of the paedobaptists that Watson ridicules. None of the passages which record the incident tell us why the disciples rebuked those who brought these children or give any indication that this was due to a supposed belief on the part of the disciples that only adults could be baptised (or saved).

Page 24, paragraph 1, 2. Nor does any paedobaptist that we know of use these passages (Matt. 19:13-15, Mk. 10:13-16, and Lk. 18:15-17) to prove infant baptism by way of insisting that these parents brought their children to Jesus that He might *baptise* them. Matthew Poole and Tom Watson both miss the point entirely. The point is that these verses prove that Jesus granted salvation to these infant children, the salvation that baptism symbolises, and that therefore it is

not incredible to suggest that these same infants might be able to receive the sign of that salvation. This is an argument, by the way, that no baptist we know has addressed or answered - the argument from reality to sign based on the correspondence between reality and sign (see the enclosed pamphlet, **Infant Baptism and Sovereign Grace**).

Page 24, paragraph 3. If the use of Matthew 19:13-15 (and parallels) as evidence for infant baptism show "the absence of stronger proof," then, Watson's argument here shows equally the absence of stronger proof for his case. He argues fallaciously that because the Lord did not use this occasion to command His disciples to baptise infants, or (as the following paragraph states) because the disciples did not subsequently baptise these children, that therefore infants are not to be baptised. The fact of the matter is that Jesus did not *order* His disciples to baptise *anyone* until after His resurrection.

Page 25, paragraph 1. Indeed, the fact that these verses prove infant salvation is only part of the argument from these verses. Even more important is what Jesus says about "receiving" the kingdom "as a little child." The fact that we *receive* the kingdom and that we receive it as *little children*, both show that this is a matter of God's sovereign work apart from, prior to, and not depending on any response from us. Of that baptism is a sign. It is NOT, as we hope to show later on, a sign of faith and repentance, therefore, but of regeneration, something that precedes both faith and repentance. It is a sign, in other words, of how we "receive the kingdom" *not of what we do after we receive it* (repent, believe, live as disciples).

You see the consequence, do you not?. Baptism, then, even in the case of an adult believer or professor, is not marking some spiritual activity on his part but rather his receiving the kingdom through regeneration. That kingdom he receives as a little child, that is, without any preceding activity on his part. His faith and repentance, therefore, are not the reason for his receiving the kingdom, but the consequence of it and baptism marks the way he receives the kingdom, as the sign so clearly shows. The water does not symbolise faith or repentance, but the washing away of sins by the blood of Jesus (justification and the washing of regeneration). To put it differently, baptism does not mark the spiritual activity that is the result of God's work, but the sovereign work of God which begins our spiritual life, a work performed while we are still like little children, unable to do anything at all even to further that work. This is a crucial point, at least for Watson.

Chapter 4

Page 26, paragraph 1. The passages under discussion in this chapter record the great commission. And there is here one paedobaptist argument that is never addressed by the baptists - the fact that this commission concerns *nations* (which always include infants), not individuals. Indeed, nothing is said about individuals. Nor does Watson face this argument, but simply casts it aside on the basis of the usual baptist interpretation of the passage.

What is more, Matthew 28:19, is the obvious fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 52:15: "So shall he sprinkle many nations." You may argue that Isaiah refers to the reality of baptism, not the sign, and that is true, but even then the reality is a sprinkling and is a sprinkling of the nations. Not only that, but when these nations are saved, they are described in the book of Isaiah as bringing with them their sons and daughters and as being gathered in with their children, even nursing children (e.g., 49:22, 60:4).

The argument, that this passage speaks of nations would be of no weight, however, if the passages established a temporal order between teaching and baptism or faith and baptism. The reference to nations would not affect a command that required first teaching, then faith, then baptism. But there is NO TEMPORAL ORDER established in either passage.

Page 26, paragraph 2ff. Watson's argument (that of most, if not all, baptists), therefore, is that these passages do establish a temporal order, first teaching then baptising (according to Matthew who describes the duties of those doing the work), or first faith and then baptism (according to Mark who describes the response of those to whom the gospel is preached). The passages, however, establish *no temporal order at all*.

Consider:

(1) The word "then" is found in neither passage, though the baptists explicitly or implicitly read it in there.

(2) Not every list of things in Scripture lists things in their temporal order (II Peter 1:10 is a very good example - calling does not precede election either temporally or logically, but the order there is the order of experience). There many different ways one can list things as well and it is not uncommon to list them in order of importance, as I believe the Word of God does here (cf. Rev. 7:5 where Juda is listed first, for example).

(3) We have already seen that in the case of John's baptism faith in Christ did not precede baptism but followed it, so that unless the baptism of John is not a N.T. baptism, the passage cannot be establishing a *necessary* and inviolable temporal order.

(4) With respect to Matthew 28:19 it is very clear from the grammar that there is no temporal sequence in the verse. The two things, teaching and baptism, take place concurrently. "Teaching" is a present participle which always denotes contemporaneous time. In other words, Matthew 28:19 literally says: "teach all nations, *while baptising them*," or, "...when baptising them." the two events taking place side-by-side, not one after the other. If Jesus had wanted to indicate a temporal order here He would either have had to use the temporal adverb "then" or an aorist participle and a different order. This follows from the fact that passage is talking about nations, not individuals.

With respect to Mark 16:16, the order there is determined by the thought. The fact that baptism is not mentioned in the second clause ("he that believeth not shall be damned") shows that the Word is concerned especially to establish the primary importance of faith. Baptism is only of secondary importance and then only to them that are saved. Indeed, if Mark is establishing a temporal sequence, then the sequence is not faith, then baptism; but faith, then baptism, then *salvation*. And what baptist wants: "he that believeth and then is baptised shall then be saved?" That would make salvation dependent on water baptism.

Page 27, paragraph 1. The order, then, is not so plain as Mr. Watson and others make make out, be they paedobaptists or no.

Page 28, paragraph 1. There is NO evidence, Calvin to the contrary, that baptism is "an outward sign of faith." Try to find Scripture proof for such an idea! It is, as we have stated before, an outward sign of *regeneration* (Tit. 3:5, Col. 2:12), though not necessarily because the person who receives it is himself regenerated. But then, no baptist believes either that baptism is *always* a sign that the person receiving it is regenerated. It is, therefore, a sign or picture of what God does in the work of regeneration. Even though in the case of new converts from heathendom we baptise them upon their believing (we certainly cannot baptise them prior to their conversion), their baptism does not mark their faith but the work of God that produces their faith - the washing of Christ's blood).

Page 28, paragraph 2ff. Nor is baptism a sign of visible discipleship. Even when with new disciples we first make, then baptise them (how else can you do it?), the baptism does not mark the discipleship and disciplined life of the one baptised but the work of God that first made the person a disciple.

Page 29, paragraph 2. We emphatically disagree, therefore, with those whom Watson quotes, who say that the Great Commission has nothing to do with the baptism of infants and with Watson who insists that it teaches believer's baptism.

Page 30, paragraph 1. To this we would only add (we believe Watson also recognizes this), that the absence of an "explicit command" does not necessarily mean that infant baptism is not warranted or required in the N.T. As Watson himself later admits, there is no explicit command either that women should partake of the Lord's table, nor any explicit *command* for keeping the Lord's Day. More on this later.

Chapter 5

Page 31, paragraphs 1, 2. We have shown it untrue that the commission of Christ does authorise "the baptism of disciples or believers and none else." That premise of Mr. Watson's being faulty, the conclusions he draws from it are also faulty. Indeed, it is based on the false premise that only a direct command from Christ can establish the practice of infant baptism. Mr. Watson, however, does review the cases of baptism mentioned in the New Testament subsequent to the ministry of Christ.

Pages 31-33, Acts 2:38, 39. Though there is no mention of infants being baptised on Pentecost, nor any proof that there were such, the case for infant baptism does not rest on proving the unprovable. It rests, rather, as Mr. Watson himself suggests, on verse 39. This verse, however, gives the reason for what is stated in the previous verse, as the word "for" indicates. In the two verses Peter is saying to the adults there; "Repent and be baptised *because the promise is unto you.*" Notice that Peter does not say "Repent, and be baptised because you have repented." Those present were not baptised on account of their repentance, even though the baptism in this case must have followed the repentance, but on the basis of the promise of God. That promise, Peter says, is not only to them, but also to their children. It is on that basis that we baptise infants - the promise is to them.

That promise can be the basis of infant baptism because it is a promise of God, sure and immutable (cf. Heb. 6:13-20). This, of course, gets us into the whole question of whether or not the promises of God are conditional to all or particular and unconditional to the elect only. Let us simply state that on the basis of Hebrews 6:13-20 and other passages, we believe firmly in an unconditional and particular promise and find in that the only possible ground of infant baptism. To teach a conditional and general promise is to overthrow the sure ground of infant baptism in Scripture.

That promise is the basis of infant baptism also because it *promises* salvation to believers and their children and promises it unconditionally (God's promises never depend on us). That salvation promised is the salvation symbolised in baptism.

Nor will the argument of the baptists overthrow this - that some infants of those adults to whom the promise comes do not have the promise either as it comes promising or as it is surely fulfilled. Scripture makes it very clear: (1) that the unbelief of some does not void the promise or make it *of none effect* (Rom. 9:6, cf. also 4:16); (2) that neither natural descent nor coming under the preaching of the promise guarantee a share in the promise (Rom. 9:7, 8, cf. also 10:16ff); (3) that the promise is its own guarantee in that it is the sovereign, efficacious, and immutable Word of God and as such brings about the spiritual rebirth of those to whom it belongs, so that they very really can be called "children of the promise" (Rom. 9:8).

To put it in terms of Acts 2, the fact that the immutable and unconditional promise of God is to believers and their children, but not to *all* their children, neither voids the promise itself nor its sureness.

No baptist we have ever met takes that promise to heart. Though it is the *promise* of God who cannot lie and who does not change, the baptist always puts a big "maybe" in front of it, an act of unbelief and stumbling at the Word of God. We confess our faith in that promise by having our children baptised, even while we understand that the promise never has and never will guarantee the salvation of *all* of our natural descendants. If even a remnant is saved according to that promise, the promise has not failed (Rom. 11:5).

We insist, therefore, that the promise must be received as a promise that God will have His elect among our natural descendants when we believe. It is in this confidence that we baptise our children, believing that God will use even that to separate the wheat from the chaff.

We should add that Mr. Watson's rejection of all this on the basis of the last part of verse 39, "even as many as the Lord our God shall call," will not do. His insistence that this means that those who have the promise and are baptised must also be able to understand and respond to the call ignores the grammar of the sentence. He wants to read the sentence: "The promise *is* (now) unto you, and (will be) to your children and to all who are afar off, even as many (of them) as the Lord our God shall call." But that reading does not make sense either in Greek or English. Try to read the verse that way without the words in parentheses!

The verb "shall call" with its future tense can only refer syntactically to "those who are afar off. The first part of the verse must, therefore, be read as a whole: "The promise *is* to you and your children." A little careful exegesis would stand Mr. Watson in good stead, we believe. For clarity's sake we include the following chart:

| | Present | Future |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Baptist reading | You | your children and all . . . |
| Paedobaptist reading | You and your children | all who are afar off |

But to go on, neither is Albert Barnes correct when he suggests that Acts 2:39 does not refer to children as children but to descendants and posterity. The Greek has another word for descendents, the word usually translated "seed" (σπέρμα). One expects something better from such a well-known and respected commentator.

Page 33, Acts 7:12. Here Watson's argument is from silence (no infants mentioned), a very dangerous argument in any case, but especially here, we believe, in light of a clear warrant for infant baptism in the N.T.

Page 33, Acts 22:16. In answer to Watson's question whether baptism is a sign of the absolution or washing away of sins in the case of an infant, we would very emphatically say it is, though not necessarily the absolution of the infant being baptised (more on this later). If Watson is suggesting that only a professing adult can have his sins washed away, then he is denying the possibility of infants being saved if they die while still infants.

He is suggesting, too, that the washing away of sins somehow depends on our repenting, believing and professing faith. There is at this point, we believe, an implicit denial of sovereign grace in the baptist position (for a further discussion of this, see the enclosed pamphlet, **Infant Baptism and Sovereign Grace**).

Page 34, Acts 10:44. Another argument from silence.

Page 34, Acts 16:15. This, one of the principle grounds for household baptism, something the baptists do not and cannot practice, Mr. Watson dismisses it with two quotes from paedobaptists who do not see the point of the passage. No answer, just a couple of quotes that

prove nothing. There is far too much of this in Mr. Watson's book, especially since he is one that makes such an issue of it throughout that the question must be decided by Scripture.

The whole question of whether or not Lydia was married and had children is beside the point. This example and the example of the Philippian jailor are clear warrant for household baptism, and some households inevitably will include children.

We are willing and even eager to baptise households on the basis of God's sure family promises. No baptist can do it, because baptism, in his opinion, must follow upon the faith and repentance of the *individual*.

Our willingness to baptise households or families, therefore, follows in part from what is sometimes referred to as "covenant" or "federal" theology, that is, the belief that God does not deal with men individually, but always in their relationships to others, as members of the family, of the church, of a nation, even of the human race (cf. the whole doctrine of original sin), of the *body* of Christ, or of an elect and redeemed *world* (Jn. 3:16). Covenant theology is always federal (a word Watson sneers at in the book) and communal.

Pages 34, 35, Acts 16:33. Our arguments with respect to the Philippian jailor are similar to those with respect to Lydia and we will not, then, repeat what we have just said. It needs to be added here, however, that this is another passage that shows that God's *sure and immutable promise* is the real basis, first for assurance of the salvation of the children of believers (though not all of them), and then also for infant baptism as a seal of that salvation.

Note please that Acts 16:31 neither says nor implies (unless God's promises are conditional): "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house, if they believe." Not only that, but any baptist who insists that the order in such verses as these is always temporal, ought to be troubled by the fact that here the baptism of the jailor's household *precedes* any mention of their faith (indeed, vs. 34 begins with an aorist particle, denoting prior time, so that in this case there actually is some warrant for supposing a temporal sequence, but opposite the baptist order).

Mr. Watson's rejection of M'Crie's statement, too, is a bit foolhardy, in light of the two examples given in Romans 9. These examples illustrate the unfailing character of God's promises to save His people and their children, and *are* examples where only one child in the family was saved. Both in the family of Abraham and Sarah and in the family of Isaac and Rebekah there was only one, and these are the examples Paul uses to prove that the promise and word of God are not without effect!

Pages 35, 36, Acts 18:8. With reference to the households of Crispus and Stephanus we would only add in addition to what we have already said, that in speaking of households it is not uncommon in everyday speech or in the Scriptures that the household (or larger group) is described as doing something when in fact not every single member is doing it or capable of doing it. Nevertheless, the main point of the reference to Crispus is that it proves both household salvation and household baptism and underlines what we have already said along those lines.

Page 36, Acts 19:1-7. We have already dealt with these verses (Acts 19:1-7), showing how they contradict the baptist teaching that faith must precede baptism (cf. especially vs. 4). We insist again the baptism of new converts from heathendom after repentance does not prove that baptism *must always follow* repentance.

We might add that verse 5 neither proves the possibility of rebaptism, nor a difference between John's baptism and Jesus. Verse 5 is still part of Paul's words and refers to the people, not to the five men from Ephesus. The people who heard John were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, not the five men from Ephesus, who had already been baptized.

Page 36, paragraph 3ff. Once again, then, we deny Mr. Watson's conclusion, in spite of the fact that there are some paedobaptists who apparently agree with him. There *is* support for infant baptism in the NT. Indeed, one of the primary passages in support of infant baptism is never answered in the book, I Corinthians 10:1-4. This passage, as we have pointed out in other connections:

(1) Uses the NT word "baptism."

(2) Describes the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea as a "baptism."

(3) Teaches the "baptism" of infants, in that undoubtedly there were infants among the Israelites, who were also baptised.

Here is a NT passage, therefore, that speaks of infants being baptised. And the objection of the baptists holds no water - that this refers back to the OT. It is baptism, baptism with water, baptism that symbolises our regeneration and the beginning of our new life in Christ.

Chapter 6

Page 38, paragraph 1. We do not believe the two passages under discussion in this chapter constitute "indirect evidence" for infant baptism, but especially in the case of Colossians 2:11, 12, very direct evidence.

Pages 38-41, I Cor. 7:14. Mr. Watson fails miserably with this passage. He shows his ignorance of the what the passage means by stating that the "holiness of the children is not inferred from the faith of the believing parent, but from the sanctification of the unbelieving party, by or to the believer." Where he gets this interpretation we do not know. No commentator we know of even suggests it.

The verse says exactly the opposite, that the holiness of the children is inferred from the faith of the believing parent. The verse is saying something like this: "the unbeliever is sanctified by the believer, as is evident from the holiness of the children produced by this union," i.e, the fact that the children are holy (and this is taken for granted) is proof that the unbelieving partner is also sanctified. The word translated "else" in the AV has the meaning "since" or "because." It does not and cannot mean "thus" or "so" as Mr. Watson would like.

The difficulty, however, is with the meaning of the word holy, whether it means spiritual holy as cleansed by the Spirit, or holy in some other sense, and then, too, whether it means exactly the same thing with respect to the unbelieving marriage partner and the children of the marriage.

We believe that in reference to the children the word refers to the holiness that is part of salvation, the holiness that belongs to those who are reborn, cleansed from sin, and consecrated to God. Why? Because the word is set in contrast to the word "unclean" a word that means "spiritually unclean" or "sinful" in every almost every N.T. reference (there are only two passages where it refers to O.T. ceremonial uncleanness and in those cases the context makes it very clear that ceremonial uncleanness is meant). But even if the uncleanness is the ceremonial uncleanness referred to in a few passages, that ceremonial uncleanness meant, that a person had *no access to the O.T. church and its worship and to the fellowship of God's people* and cleanness meant the opposite. Cleanness even in that sense, then, has implications for the children of believing parents.

We do not, however, think that it means the same thing in the case of the unbelieving partner and would agree with Watson's question: "Now what holiness or sanctification has an unbeliever? Certainly not the sanctification of the Spirit, because this is accompanied by belief of the truth (II Thess. 2:13)." It seems to us, therefore, that it can only mean that the unbeliever is "sanctified" with regard to his or her position in the marriage relationship so that the believer

will not be corrupted and polluted by constant contact with him or her (cf. II Cor. 6:17). But this is not the point of our discussion here.

Nevertheless, even if one disagrees with this interpretation of the word "holy," the verse still makes it very clear that the faith of a believer "sets apart" his or her children, even if the other partner is wicked and unbelieving. There is, therefore, a difference between the children of believers and the children of unbelievers, and that difference follows from the faith of the believing parent(s). This, of course, is something no baptist can admit, for it strikes at the very foundations of what he believes about baptism. It implies the unity of the old and new covenants especially as far as the family promise of the covenant is concerned, and even implies, that as a result of that covenant and its promise, there is ground for distinguishing the children of believers from others by the sign of that covenant and promise.

Pages 41-43, Col. 2:11, 12. This we believe to be one of the pillars on which the unity of the covenant and of its sign rests. In spite of what Mr. Watson says, the verses *do* identify circumcision and baptism. They are not just saying that "circumcision and baptism are two different symbols of the same truth."

Mr. Watson's argument rests on the premise that the difference between outward signs of baptism and circumcision is an essential difference, but that is what needs to be proved. His argument is really:

The outward signs of baptism and circumcision are different in their administration.
A difference of administration is an essential difference.
Therefore the outward signs of baptism and circumcision are essentially different.

But that assumes what needs to be proved.

Our argument is:

The spiritual reality of baptism and circumcision are the same.
The outward signs correspond to the spiritual reality.
Therefore the outward signs are also essentially the same.
and

The apparent difference between circumcision and baptism is only a difference of administration.

A difference of administration is not an essential difference.
Therefore outward circumcision and baptism are essentially the same.

And this can be proved.

Mr. Watson does not deny that the same spiritual reality is symbolised by both circumcision and baptism: they are "different symbols of the same truth." Nevertheless, to show just how closely Colossians 2:11, 12 identifies them, we have included a diagram at the end of this paper that is taken from J. O. Buswell's **A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion** (see Note 2).

That leaves us, then, with the necessity of showing several things: (1) that the outward, visible signs do correspond not only to the same spiritual reality but to each other; and (2) that the apparent difference between them is only a difference of administration.

We want to show first of all, therefore, that because the outward signs of circumcision and baptism correspond to the same spiritual reality they also correspond to each other. Both are pictures of the work of God in the heart through regeneration. Both picture the removal of the guilt and pollution of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Baptism is a picture of the washing of regeneration by which God cleanses the heart of sin, and cleanses it so thoroughly that it is a "new heart." Because that work is performed upon the heart, we ourselves, by virtue of that cleansing, can be said to be born again, and to be new creatures in Christ. Water is used because of its cleansing power. It is, then, a picture of the blood of Christ and its cleansing power.

Circumcision, on the other hand, is a picture of the cutting away of sin from the heart. According to Colossians 2:11 it is the "putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ," that is, by the death of Christ on the cross (described as a circumcision both because it involved the shedding of blood and the removal of sin from Him as the Sin-bearer). In so far as it was performed upon the male generative organ it also pictures the cutting of the link with Adam by which we are guilty and defiled in him.

The two outward signs, though they appear to be very different - one involving cutting and the other washing - point to the same spiritual reality (Watson himself recognises this), and in pointing to this same reality the two signs do correspond. If $b = a$ and $c = a$, then $b = c$. That is simple logic. A diagram will, perhaps, illustrate this correspondence more clearly than words. The two realities (and the signs with them), then, correspond at the following points:

| | Spiritual Circumcision | Spiritual Baptism |
|----------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Work: | removal of sin | removal of sin |
| Place: | from the heart | from the heart |
| Means: | by means of the shedding of blood | by means of the shedding of blood |
| Basis: | by the death of Christ | by the death of Christ |
| Author: | through the Holy Spirit | through the Holy Spirit |
| Manner: | in regeneration | in regeneration |
| Result: | unto holiness | unto holiness |
| Objects: | for the elect | for the elect |

But what about the difference between them - cutting in one case, washing in the other? Since they make the same picture it should be clear that the *only* difference between them is a difference of the way in which the signs were administered. The cutting and washing, therefore, are in the nature of the case matters of administration, and reflect the fact that the OT always required the shedding of blood, while in the NT the shedding of blood is done away by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Watson does nothing to show that this is not true. He claims that they are "different signs" but does nothing to show (1) that this difference is any more than a difference of administration, and (2) if it is, in what respects it is more than a matter of administration, or (3) that a difference of administration is an essential difference. Later on in the book Watson says that under the old covenant the sign of circumcision promised certain material blessings, but even, this (as we will show in the proper place) was not an essential difference in that those material things were promised only as types of spiritual things.

That the difference between circumcision and baptism is only administrative follows from the fact that the old and new covenants to which these signs belonged *differed only in administration*. This is a crucial point in the debate between paedo- and antipaedobaptists. Interestingly, it is Hebrews 9:6-13, the passage that speaks most clearly of the old and new covenants that shows the difference between them to be only a matter of administration.

Notice the following:

(1) If Hebrews 9:6-13 speaks of two covenants different in some essential way, then the passage cannot be reconciled with Genesis 17:7 and other like passages which speak of *one everlasting covenant*.

(2) Verse 10 uses the ordinary covenant formula (thy God, my people) to show that the new covenant is not essentially different from the old. At that point, with respect to their very nature and character, they are the same.

(3) The reference to the law confirms this. In the new covenant the law is not removed, but rewritten on different tables - the fleshly tables of the heart (II Cor. 3:3). Law and covenant still go together.

(4) In fact, the giving of the law (though differently written) is the "giving" of the covenant, both in Deuteronomy 4:13 and here.

(5) The two covenants are different, therefore, with respect to a change of mediator and with respect to the way the law was written, and it is in these two respects only that Scripture finds fault with the old covenant. But these are *only* differences of administration as the following charts will show. The essentials are still all the same.

SIMILARITIES

| Old Covenant | New Covenant |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| founded upon promises | founded upon promises |
| (the promise = thy God, my people) | (the promise = thy God, my people) |
| (the promise = salvation - vs. 12) | (the promise = salvation - vs. 12) |
| given through a mediator | given through a mediator |
| accompanied by the giving of the law | accompanied by the giving of the law |
| (the law written by God) | (the law written by God) |
| established with Israel | established with Israel (vs. 10) |

DIFFERENCES

| Old Covenant | New Covenant |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| mediator = Moses (a type of Christ) | mediator = Christ |
| law written on table of stone | law written in hearts and minds |
| incomplete revelation (vs. 11) | complete revelation (vs. 11) |

It is quite obvious it seems to us, that the difference between type and reality, lesser or greater revelation, and manner of revelation are all relatively insignificant matters of

administration and not essentials matters. The revelation given in the OT is not different in content, only in fulness, nor do the sacrifices, mediators, and types of the OT have a different object, only a different way of directing us to and teaching us that object.

(6) Indeed, if the second covenant is essentially different and better, then so are the promises not only better, but essentially different, according to vs. 6. But then how does one escape dispensationalism?

Chapter 7

Page 44, paragraphs 1, 2. With regard to the lack of an express command we refer back to our comments regarding Chapter 4, page 30, paragraph 1. Not everything in Scripture is proved or commanded by an *express command*.

Page 45, paragraphs 1-4. Watson's quotes from various paedobaptist writers here is a smoke-screen. None of them ask for an *express command*, but only a warrant by way of precedent, practice, commission, direction, promise, or rule (these are the words used by the writers themselves whom Watson quotes). We, too, do not look for an *express command* regarding every NT practice. Many of them are warranted by example, promise, precedent, etc. Mr. Watson himself recognises this on page 46 (see below).

Page 46, paragraph 1. Here Watson simply assumes that the New Testament is silent concerning infant baptism. We have already showed in detail that it is not.

Pages 46, paragraph 2 through page 47, paragraph 3. Here Watson himself argues, not from an *express command* regarding the place of women at the Lord's table, but by bringing different Scriptures together and drawing conclusions from them. We only seek to do the same.

Page 48, paragraph 1. Here Watson's conclusion is based on something he has not at all proved, that "the only general rule to be followed is Christ's commission to His apostles, which stipulates . . . that baptism be administered to professing believers." What rule was John the Baptist following, if his baptism is an example of NT baptism? (cf. also our comments on chapter 4).

Page 48, paragraph 2. We agree that infant baptism alters the whole meaning and significance of baptism (from a baptist perspective), but that does not necessarily argue against infant baptism. We believe the different meaning that baptists give to the sign alters it wrongly, making it, for example, a sign of faith and repentance, rather than of regeneration.

Page 48, paragraph 3. Watson simply assumes something here that needs to be proved, i.e., that baptism and the Lord's Supper are to be administered in the same way and have essentially the same meaning. This also we would dispute, but since it is not to the point of this paper, we pass it by.

Chapter 8

Page 49, paragraph 1. Here again let it be emphasised that baptism has for us a very different meaning than it does for Watson, a meaning that we believe is in harmony with Scripture's teaching, as Watson's is not. This we hope to show in our comments on the verses he brings up and later on in our comments on the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

Page 49, Romans 6:2-4. In our defense of infant baptism we follow not Bannerman and Hodge, but Dale and Adams (cf. chapter 5 of Adams' **The Meaning and Mode of Baptism**). Whether out of ignorance or deliberately, Watson is very selective in his quotations. Dale and Adams teach something very different from what Hodge teaches.

We believe that baptism is not a sign of our activity or an "embodiment" of our activity in repenting and believing, even when it follows these, but a sign God's work in regeneration, and

particularly of union with Christ (regeneration is spoken of as the implanting of the new life of Christ, or the gift of Christ Himself to the believer in such passages as Gal. 2:20).

Even the word "baptism" as Adams also points out, describes not an act but a condition, and a condition that can be posited also of an infant. Indeed, that condition, union with Christ, is the only way of salvation for an infant, though that union may not be conscious (cf. Jn. 17:23).

Our interpretation of the word "baptism" is the only way to make sense out of Romans 6 (we trust it is clear that Romans 6 is speaking not of the outward rite, but of the inward spiritual reality). If Romans 6 speaks of a baptism which is the equivalent of repenting and believing, then that baptism cannot possibly produce the results cited in Romans 6. The activity of repentance and faith is not the power that brings us into living contact with Christ's death and resurrection so that we are dead, buried and raised with Him, but the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration *is* that power.

We might notice, too that the spiritual circumcision which corresponds to this baptism in Colossians 2 is made "without hands." It is God's work not ours. Watson, not we, has changed the meaning of baptism unbiblically in making baptism refer to our responsibilities rather than God's sovereign work.

Page 51, I Corinthians 1:13. Here again we follow not Hodge but Adams and Dale. We do not believe that "to be baptised in the name of Paul . . . or unto Moses . . . is on the part of the baptised, to be made the believing and obedient disciples of Paul or Moses." Rather we believe that it refers to union with the person in whose name we are baptised.

The very language used bears this out. The phrase is literally "into the name of" (in Greek, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα) in I Corinthians 1:13, in the great commission, and in I Corinthians 10:2, though translated differently there in the AV (literally, the Israelites were baptised "into Moses").

In I Corinthians 1:13, therefore, Paul is making the point that by baptism the members in Corinth were not brought into union with him. Rather (this is assumed in I Cor. 1:13) through baptism we are brought into union with Christ.

That, of course, leaves the question what I Corinthians 10:2 means, though that is a bit beside the point of this article. We, however, agree here also with Adams, who says: "Make of it what you will, 'baptized *into Moses*' cannot be interpreted apart from 'as many as have been baptized *into Christ*' (Rom. 6:3), the same teaching found two chapters later in the words: 'for by one Spirit are we all baptized *into one body*' (I Cor. 12:13)." We would, then, interpret the passage along those lines, i.e., that through their "baptism" in the Red Sea the Israelites were identified thereafter with Moses, their mediator. The history of Moses as mediator bears this out and shows just how closely they were identified.

Page 51, Galatians 3:27. This passage goes even further in our explanation of the fundamental meaning of baptism "into" Christ by defining it as a "putting on of Christ." Nor does the verb necessarily imply any activity on the part of the person who has put on Christ (indeed, how can we who are dead in sins until we put on Christ, be active in putting Him on?). The middle voice of the verb "put on" *can* mean "to clothe oneself" but *can also* mean "to be clothed" or "to be invested" (Matt. 27:31, Lk. 24:49). Watson simply assumes that it means the former, but a little careful exegesis would stand him in good stead. Infants may not be able to "put on Christ's livery," but they certainly can have it put on them by God.

Page 52, Colossians 2:12. Without going again into the whole question of the identity of circumcision and baptism, we *do* believe that infant baptism can be a symbol of the present resurrection of an infant, though it is not necessarily such of the particular infant that is baptised. If not, how can they be saved, for this resurrection of which Paul speaks is the resurrection that gives us life from the dead?

Here, as throughout his book, Watson assumes that baptism is the symbol of the spiritual condition *of the person baptised*, a very subjective and impossible view of baptism. No baptist really dare insist it is so, either, or he ends up saying that every baptised person is saved. Baptism, as such, neither says nor guarantees anything about the person baptised, even if he is baptised subsequent to professed repentance and faith. It symbolises the objective promise of God given to believers and their children and the sovereign work of God by which God fulfils that promise to the elect.

We also believe that that infants are raised through the faith of the operation of God, as the verse says. However, the faith spoken of here must be what is called in theology, the *habitus* or power of faith which is given in regeneration, since it is described as the "faith of the operation of God." It is, in other words, essentially the same thing as the union with Christ we have been referring to (for more on the Biblical distinction between the power and activity of faith see Turretin's Institutes, Topic XV, questions 7, ii, and 14, i, John 15:1-5, Romans 6:5, and the many passages of Scripture which speak of faith "in" Christ, "into" Christ, and "upon" Christ). Perhaps, though, this is our "high calvinism" coming through, something Watson simply dismisses. Nevertheless, we cannot see how our resurrection from the dead can be "through the *activity* of faith" without denying the doctrines of sovereign, efficacious grace.

Page 53, *1 Peter 3:20, 21*. Here Mr. Watson ridicules the paedobaptist position and even says that the only two choices here are believer's baptism or baptismal regeneration. He comes to this conclusion because the verses speak of the fact that baptism saves: "Peter would never have stated that baptism saves, if he had been in the habit of baptizing any except professed believers" (page 53, paragraph 2).

Mr. Watson, however, is thoroughly confused. For one thing he is arguing along the following lines: "Peter only baptised saved persons, because Peter believed that baptism saved," i.e., "Peter believed that one had to be saved before being baptised, because he believed that baptism would save them!" What nonsense! For another thing Watson does not even seem to realise that the passage is not speaking of the sign of the baptism but of the reality, which does save! It is the only way to be saved. Thus he comes very close to advocating a kind of baptismal salvation.

But to turn to the passage itself, we ought to notice the support there for the paedobaptist position. The baptism Peter is talking about saves *by the resurrection of the Jesus Christ*. The clear implication is that the spiritual reality of baptism unites us with the resurrection of Christ which becomes our salvation. Baptism does not symbolise faith and repentance, but union with Christ in His suffering, death and resurrection.

The more difficult part of the passage is the part that is in parentheses in the AV. There God's Word seems to identify baptism with "the answer of a good conscience toward God." At first glance this might seem to support the baptist position. Watson himself comes to this conclusion and asks, "Does baptism give an infant a good conscience?" In light, however, of the fact that Scripture here is talking about the spiritual reality of baptism and says that it saves, the baptist, if he is a Calvinist, really faces the same difficulty as the paedobaptist.

If baptism is the same as the answer of a good conscience toward God, does that "answer" save? Obviously not. The resurrection of Christ is the power that saves. The words in parentheses can only be referring to the *result* of true spiritual baptism. That result is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God. This corresponds to Hebrews 10:22, which says that we have our hearts sprinkled *from* an evil conscience. But in that case, the good conscience follows baptism and does not precede it, at least as far as the spiritual reality is concerned. Indeed the good conscience cannot precede the

spiritual reality of baptism if the sinner is dead in trespasses in sins before being saved by baptism and by the resurrection of Christ with which baptism unites him.

Chapter 9

Regarding the antiquity of infant baptism, the question can be debated endlessly and without real profit, since the argument is once again from history and not from Scripture. To prove, therefore, that either paedobaptism or believer's baptism was the universal practice of the church back to the time of the apostles proves nothing.

Chapter 10

Page 65, paragraph 1. We have already shown that the case for infant baptism is *not* founded on the OT alone. Nevertheless, we will follow Watson's arguments.

Page 65, paragraph 2. Why should an appeal to the OT be thought strange, even if baptism is a NT ordinance? Jesus and the apostles appealed often to the OT, and in fact, until parts of the NT were written, had nothing else to appeal to. Is not the OT equally part of the Word of God with the New? And does not the OT apply also to NT believers? Our fears that believer's baptism is an incipient dispensationalism are only increased by the kind of language Watson uses. Only a dispensationalist would reject the testimony of the OT as being of no or lesser account than that of the New. Indeed, the case for the Sabbath as a NT ordinance rests largely on an appeal to the OT, though not entirely.

We do not by this, however, mean to indicate that we think the case for infant baptism in the New Testament is weak. We consider it to be very strong - so strong that we find difficulty understanding why the baptist does not see it.

Pages 66, paragraph 1 - page 69, paragraph 2. The arguments from the Old Testament are apparently so weak that Watson does not even bother to list them, much less consider them. If infant baptism is so important and so evil (chapter 14), why will he not deal with such arguments as that from the unity of the covenant and the unity of the people of God in both Testaments? Is the argument that the promise (Acts 2:39) sealed by baptism is the same promise in both Testaments and given to the same people (believers and their children) not even worth mentioning? We think it is.

Chapter 11

Page 70, paragraph 1. We, too, think the "church" argument of Charles Hodge to be very weak. In fact, if the case for infant baptism rests on this argument alone then we have no case. Nor do we agree with Hodge that baptism is symbolic of faith. We consider that to be a major misunderstanding of baptism both by Hodge and the Baptists.

With respect to the possibility of baptising of those who never profess faith, we believe we have already answered Watson and will not repeat what we have said (cf. our comments on chapter 2 especially).

Page 71, paragraph 1 - page 72, paragraph 3. As far as Hodge's and Bannerman's views of the church are concerned, we recognize only two senses in which Scripture uses the word "church," that is, in reference to the visible church as represented by the local congregation, and in reference to the whole body of the elect. What this has to do with the argument, though, is seen in the next paragraph, where Watson refuses to identify Israel as the visible church of the Old Testament. Our difference with Hodge on the uses of the word "church," therefore, is really quite insignificant. The argument really turns on whether Scripture speaks of visible church, whether Israel is the visible church of the OT, and whether infants belong to that church.

Page 72, proposition 1. No comment necessary.

Page 72, proposition 2. No comment necessary.

Page 73ff, proposition 3. The question whether Israel was the visible church is rather easily answered contrary to Watson. Scripture does identify Israel as the visible church and does so in the NT, Acts 7:38, where the NT word "ecclesia" is used. Certainly that "church" was not the invisible church, the body of the elect, and most certainly it did include children. That the NT church also includes children is clear from those epistles in which Paul addresses the church and in doing so addresses also the children (Eph. 6 and Col. 3) or speaks of them (I Cor. 7). Nor are those children all old enough to make a credible profession. Those who can understand "honor thy father and mother" are by no means old enough to make the kind of profession the baptist requires as a prerequisite to baptism. We, then, believe what the Westminster Larger Catechism says, that the visible church is made up of those who profess the true religion and their children (Q&A 62).

However, we reject Hodge's view of two covenants and consider it to be a major concession both the baptists and to the dispensationalists. Where in Scripture is there any evidence for what Hodge says?

Page 74, proposition 4. We believe that there is but one church, both visible and invisible under the Old and New Testaments. There are not two churches, but the visible church is the manifestation of the invisible at any time in history. God indeed "has ever had but one church in the world." On that point we agree wholeheartedly with Hodge.

Page 74ff, proposition 5. Here Watson speaks of something he calls "Jewish faith." What kind of faith is this and where is the proof for it in Scripture? What is the difference between this and classic dispensationalism? Either the believing Jews in the Old Testament were saved by the same faith that we are or they were not. Watson cannot have it both ways. He is trying, of course, to find some essential difference between the old and new covenants and between Israel and the church, and topples right over into dispensationalism.

Nor does Watson understand our argument. We are saying that the visible church is one both in the Old and New Testaments and that infants *are* members of the visible church by virtue of their birth. Again, Watson cannot have it both ways, especially when he really does not want the concept of visible church at all. He cannot have one church against dispensationalism and two against the paedobaptists.

And the baptists really do have a different church with a different membership. Baptist churches truly have no children in them, at least not any young children, certainly not children who are too young to make a credible profession but old enough to understand the Word of God in Ephesians 6:1-3. We believe the whole of Scripture testifies to the fact that the visible church is composed of households and includes the children of believers (Eph. 6, Col. 3, I Cor. 6, Acts 16, etc.).

Page 75ff, proposition 6. If the Israel was the visible church of the Old Testament, then indeed infants belonged to it. Watson, therefore, must answer Acts 7:38 as well as such passages as Acts 15:15-17 and Romans 9:25, 26 where OT prophecies concerning Israel are specifically applied to the gathering of the NT church.

Here Watson also speaks of a *Jewish church*, having already spoken of Jewish faith. So now we have not only a Jewish faith but also a Jewish church, and later on in the book a different covenant as well. Where has Watson's answer to dispensationalism gone? How is that Jewish church different from the Christian church except in non-essentials? Or if different only in non-essentials, why call it a Jewish church? Scripture simply calls it the church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38).

Page 76ff, proposition 7. Watson asks if baptism conveys some privilege or blessing to an infant. Our answer, whatever Hodge may say, is that the sacrament of baptism, as such, conveys nothing, not even to an adult believer. Infant baptism does, however, serve as a sign and seal to the whole church of how we enter the covenant and of the promise of God to be our God and the God of our children after us, and in that way functions as a visible promise and testimony of God and is used by God to build up the faith and hope of His elect.

Nor does baptism, as such, make a difference between children who have and have not been baptised, not even between children of believers who have or have not been baptised. There is, though, a difference between the children of believers and the children of unbelievers that is *marked* by baptism, i.e., that children of believers have the promise of God along with their believing parents. Thus, a parent who does not have his children baptised shows that he does not take God's promise seriously.

Here, too, we emphatically reject Hodge's view not only of the covenant but of election. If infants have their names written in the Lamb's book of life through baptism and can later erase them, then election is not unconditional, nor the covenant and its promise sure. Watson rightly finds Hodge's statements preposterous.

Page 77ff, proposition 8. We have already put forward the argument from reality to sign and will not repeat what we have said (this is the same argument put forth in the enclosed pamphlet, **Infant Baptism and Sovereign Grace**).

Chapter 12

Page 79, paragraph 1. Watson rightly criticises Vos' first argument, since it is at best incomplete.

Page 80, paragraph 2 (baptism as a sign). Finally Watson has hit one of the basic truths we have been promoting regarding infant baptism, but only to reject it. Baptism is indeed "the sign of an objective promise, and has no reference at all the character and condition of the person baptised." Where in Scripture is the support for the idea that baptism somehow shows the spiritual character of the person baptised, especially when one sees that Scripture does not (every baptist to the contrary) teach that baptism necessarily follows repentance and faith?

Indeed, no baptist can consistently maintain that baptism always marks the spiritual condition of the person baptised unless he is willing to say that every baptised person is saved. Even he knows better. He will say he baptises *fewer* unsaved persons, but that is to concede the whole point, even if what he says is true (in fact, it is unprovable).

Page 81, paragraph 2. The same applies here. Baptism is not only a sign but a seal of the objective promise of God and not of the spiritual condition of the persons baptised. These are the only two options, but not only for the paedobaptist. The baptist also must choose between them, and Watson opts for the idea that baptism is a sign of the spiritual condition of the person baptised.

He is aware of the difficulty, however, and tries to extricate himself. He does not want to say that all who are baptised are also saved and so he insists that baptism is not a seal in and of itself and is not, therefore, a seal at all to those who do not believe. But this is only to say that baptism, after all, is not a seal of the spiritual condition of the person baptised and to concede the point. We say essentially the same - that baptism seals something only to the elect, that is, the sure promise of God. We add, however, that it is also a seal to the *whole church* of that promise of God to the elect and their elect children, a kind of visible gospel promise.

Page 82, paragraph 1. Watson's rejection of Romans 4:11 as proof that baptism is a seal obviously follows from his rejection of the correspondence between circumcision and baptism.

The paedobaptist case for baptism as a seal rests on the identity between them. This matter, however, we have already addressed.

It is true, of course, that circumcision did not guarantee that the person circumcised was justified in the sight of God, but neither does baptism. The baptists insist that baptism marks the spiritual condition of the person baptised. When faced with the fact that not all who are baptised are saved, they defend themselves by saying (without proof) that there are fewer unsaved persons in their churches and then bury their heads in the sand, hoping that the difficulty will go away. But admitting that they baptise even one unsaved person, is the same as admitting that baptism does not mark, sign, seal, or embody the spiritual condition of the person baptised. It cannot. It can only mark, sign, seal, embody something objective -the sure and unchangeable promise of God.

Page 82, paragraph 2. Now Watson wants more than one covenant of grace! We have had Jewish faith, a Jewish church and now a separate covenant of grace! It is Watson who is promoting confusion here, not the paedobaptists. How can there be more than one covenant of grace without their being more than one grace or more than one way of salvation? What is the difference between the baptist position as present by Watson and classic Scofieldian dispensationalism?

Watson, of course, is trying to have it both ways. He does not want dispensationalism, but neither does he want one covenant, so he halts between two opinions. We insist again that there is but one covenant.

With regard to those supposed two covenants, Watson says that the covenant of grace was made with Christ and the covenant of circumcision (here he has changed his language and not longer speaks of two covenants of grace) with Abraham - that the one promises spiritual blessings, the other material blessings.

It is impossible, however, to follow this reasoning consistently since it leads to a denial of what Scripture says about the children of Abraham (Rom. 2:28, 29, 9:7, 8, Gal. 3:29), i.e., that not all the circumcised *are* counted children of Abraham, and that all believers are!

His main point is that there is a real difference between the OT covenant in that it promised material blessing to Abraham's descendants. But those blessings promised cannot be anything else essentially than the true spiritual blessings of salvation and of the kingdom of heaven, though promised under the types and shadows. They were promised to Abraham and his seed forever. Many, including Abraham, did not in fact receive them, and therefore only the dispensationalist is consistent in insisting that if these blessings are truly material, then there must be a special earthly future for the Jews.

Scripture, too, makes it clear that these blessing were essentially all spiritual in Hebrews 11:8-16. Abraham himself never received anything of the land which was at the heart of all the promises, and Acts 7:5 tells us that the promises were also made *to him*. But he understood that these promises of material things were only the "wrapper" in which the spiritual realities they typified were enclosed. When he left Ur, therefore, to go the land God had promised him, he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God, as did Isaac and Jacob after him.

Those promises are the same promise that are made to us, therefore, though stripped of their typical form and "wrapper." But that part never mattered. One never did have to receive those things to receive the promises. Abraham himself did not receive them, yet was an heir of the promises.

Page 84, paragraph 1. We agree here with Watson's criticisms of Vos' covenant theology. We believe neither a breakable covenant nor that all children of believers are in the

covenant, and find Vos' arguments unconvincing, his theology a concession to the baptists, and his doctrines going over into a denial of the sovereign, efficacious grace.

Page 85, paragraphs 3, 4. There is no evidence in Scripture that any others than children of believers have the promise of God to be their God (and not even everyone of them). There is, therefore, a difference between the children of believers and unbelievers, but that does not give us the right to assume that all our children are elect. That would be little different from Abraham Kuyper's doctrine of presupposed regeneration, something we reject. We assume nothing, but simply do our duty, trusting that God *will* use our efforts to fulfil His promise in His way and in His time.

Page 86, paragraph 1. We do not even believe that all children of believers dying in infancy are saved. We find no support for this in Scripture and while we understand the desire many have to tell parents that their dead child is saved, we refuse to say it if the Word does not give us that right.

Chapter 13

Page 90, paragraph 2. We do not believe that the infant's right to baptism depends on his physical descent from his parents. Rather, it depends on the fact that God's covenant is always a family covenant and that the promise of the covenant concerns the infant as well as the adult in those families. Watson's argument, then, in this and the following paragraphs is beside the point as far as we are concerned.

Page 92, paragraph 2. It is here that Watson dismisses all our arguments with a wave of the hand by referring to them as "high calvinism" (p. 93), saying that "high calvinism" is "obviously contrary to Scripture." Perhaps he should reconsider not only his baptist views but his "Calvinism" as well.

All his objections to paedobaptism are really, therefore, only objections to what we consider to be Arminian views of the covenant and of grace.

Chapter 14

In this chapter Watson speaks of the evils of infant baptism. We in turn speak of the evils of believer's baptism.

(1) It is an incipient dispensationalism or concession to dispensationalism in that it is forced to make some kind of essential distinction between old and new covenant, the two Testaments, the status of God's people in both testaments, and the promises made to them under both Testaments. Thus Watson speaks of a "Jewish" faith and church and of two covenants of grace.

(2) It is an incipient denial of sovereign grace in that it teaches that one cannot receive even the *sign* of regeneration without first exercising repentance and faith - man first, God following.

(3) It changes the meaning of baptism unbiblically, making it a sign of our activity rather than of God's promise and activity.

(4) It excludes infants and small children from the visible church, in spite of the fact that they are included as both Old and New Testament show.

(5) It is individualistic rather than federal in its approach to sin and grace, something that is always characteristic of Arminianism rather than of Calvinism and Reformed theology.

(6) Worst of all, it fails to take God at His word and to believe His certain and unchangeable promise to be the God of His people and their children. Many paedobaptists fail to take this promise seriously also, changing it to a conditional promise (which is not sure), but

the baptist *cannot* take it seriously, since repentance and faith must precede and be a condition not only to the promise itself, but even to the sign of that promise.

Page 101, paragraph 1. It is interesting, to say the least, that Watson closes his case for believer's baptism by saying, "Not that any church of professing believers will be entirely free from occasions of stumbling, alas. But it will be *much purer* than the corresponding Paedobaptist church, and will thereby bring more glory to the name of the Saviour." Somehow, the baptist case always seems to come down to this utterly unprovable assumption. Yet even if it were proved, it only shows that the baptist does not believe his own objections to paedobaptism. He says that paedobaptism is wrong because individuals who do not have faith are baptised and then admits that he has the same problem while trying to cover himself by saying that he has less of a problem.

Conclusion

No comments.

Appendix A

We find it a bit amusing that after 100 pages of argument against infant baptism, Watson tries to make a case for infant blessing. We can see little difference between the infant blessing and dedication, though Watson tries to maintain a distinction. If there is a difference, though, we would think that a good baptist would have even more objection to infant *blessing* than to infant dedication. Does not *blessing* after all distinguish some infants from others? By what right can a baptist make such a distinction, if there is no difference between the children of believers and unbelievers? Watson tries to avoid the difficulties by saying that blessing only means to "pray for the Lord's blessing" upon the infant, but that is not what the word means in Matthew 19:13-15 and Mark 10:13-16, his support passages, nor is it what blessing means throughout Scripture. Watson himself in the suggested service of blessing says that the service could end with the Aaronitic blessing. Is not this saying exactly what the paedobaptists say about Matthew 19 and Mark 10, that Jesus blessed the little children and that they have a right to that blessing as children of believers? Or is the blessing of Jesus and of God just a form of empty words pronounced as some kind of incantation over the heads of infants?

Appendix B

No comment necessary.

Appendix C

Watson misinterprets the Westminster Confession of Faith (c. xxvii, s. 1). The fact that infants have an *interest* in Christ that is marked in baptism, does not mean that they are personally and actively desiring Christ (interested in that sense), but that they have a certain "proprietary right or share" in Christ by virtue of the promise of God.

Nor does c. xxviii of the Westminster Confession mean that infants at the time of baptism must be able to give "up unto God through Jesus Christ to walk in newness of life." Watson assumes once again that repentance, faith, and discipleship must precede baptism and forgets that Scripture speaks of a baptism *unto* repentance and faith., which is exactly the kind of baptism the Westminster Confession of Faith is talking about. Rather there is in baptism an implied admonition to all who are baptised that they must repent, believe and live a disciplined life (cf. I Cor. 6:11), an admonition that must be applied to every baptised person, infant or adult.

The confusion, absurdity and inconsistency are not only on the part of some paedobaptists, but on the part of Watson as well.

Note 1

| Basis for Infant Baptism | Main Proponents | Analysis |
|--|---|-----------------|
| baptismal regeneration of all baptised children | Some early fathers, Augustine, Romanism, Lutheranism, Anglicanism | false |
| presupposed regeneration of all baptised children | A. Kuyper, C. Hodge (?) | false |
| subsequent regeneration of all baptised children | ? | false |
| conditional promise of regeneration to all baptised children | A. Barnes, most paedobaptist evangelicals | false |
| greater hope of regeneration for baptised children | M. Henry | false |
| promised regeneration of (some) children of believers | ourselves | true |
| conditional covenant with all baptised children | C. Hodge, J. G. Vos, P. Marcel, most paedobaptist evangelicals | false |
| unconditional covenant with the elect and their elect children | ourselves | true |