

Baptism

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JOSEPH Frey's father was an assistant Rabbi, but Joseph came to faith in Christ as Messiah in 1798. After studying in the Berlin Seminary under Pastor Janicke, he came to London to train as a missionary to Africa but, increasingly concerned about the plight of the Jews, he helped to establish in 1815, The London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews. Moving to America, he established there, The American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews. In 1827, after studying the subject of Baptism, he changed his views and became a Baptist, convinced that believers are the proper subjects of baptism and that immersion is the proper mode. He served in pastorates of several Baptist Churches and spent his remaining years preaching the Gospel of God's Grace.

It is said that, under the Old Testament, "Jewish children were members of the covenant and of the Jewish church, and were, consequently, entitled to the blessings promised in the former, and the privileges enjoyed in the latter; and that, as baptism has come in the place of circumcision, and the Christian church being only a continuation of the Jewish church, therefore children of believers are entitled to the blessings of the covenant and the privileges of the church."

The reader will easily perceive that this answer, instead of explaining the nature and extent of the blessings and privileges, rather obscures the subject, and leaves it in still greater uncertainty and confusion. For as the scripture speaks of two covenants made with Abraham, we must inquire into the nature of each, to see how far children were interested; and whether the children of Christians and of Jews are entitled to the same privileges. We must also inquire whether there ever was such a

thing as a Jewish church, and if there were, how far the Christian church is connected with it.

I will therefore endeavour to give a scriptural statement of these subjects, and then show that the sentiments of our Paedobaptist brethren are inconsistent with such statement.

It appears from the sacred volume, that Abraham was peculiarly favoured with the knowledge of, and interest in, two covenants.

The Covenant of Grace

The former is generally styled the "Covenant of Grace," i.e. the way of salvation by grace, to distinguish it from the covenant made with Adam, commonly called "the Covenant of Works." This covenant of grace was revealed to our first parents immediately after the Fall, in the promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent; and its nature was explained by the immediate institution of sacrifices. Gen. 3:15, 21.

When Jehovah was pleased to call Abraham from Ur, of the Chaldees, from the worship of idols to serve the true God, he made an additional revelation concerning this covenant, viz. that the Mediator of the covenant, or the Messiah, should descend from him. And Abraham "believed in the Lord, and he counted it unto him for righteousness." Gen. 15:6. Hence he became the "father of all them that believe", whether Jews or Gentiles, Rom.4:4-12.

To make it impossible for any of my Paedobaptist brethren even to suspect misrepresentation of the nature of this covenant, I will describe it in the language of their own Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC), Questions 31 & 32: "The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and with him all the elect, as his seed", Gal. 3:16; Isa.

59:21; Zech. 6:13; Luke 22:29; 2 Sam 23:5; Rom. 5:15. &c. “The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by him, and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith with all other saving graces.” Gen.3:15; Isa 63:6; John 6:27; 1 Tim. 2:5; 1 John, 5:11, 12; John, 3:16; Prov. 1:23; 2 Cor. 4:13; Gal. 5:22, 23.

Here the reader will please to observe that the subjects of this covenant are the elect; that they become interested in this covenant by faith; that this faith is wrought in them by the Holy Ghost; and that the Holy Ghost is promised and given to them: hence the salvation of the elect is secured by the promise of God; and it is therefore impossible that one of them, interested in this covenant, shall ever perish.

Again, it is also secured by the intercession of Christ. For we are informed, “Christ maketh intercession by his appearing in our nature continually before the Father in heaven, in the merit of his obedience and sacrifice on earth; declaring his will to have it applied to all believers. Heb. 9:24; 1:3; John, 17:9, 20, 24.” WLC, Quest. 55. Now as the Father heareth him always, the merit of his obedience and sacrifice must be applied to them. The blessings procured by the merit of Christ, are “redemption and all other benefits of the covenant of grace”, Heb. 9: 12; 2 Cor. 1: 30.” WLC, Quest. 57.

Another benefit belonging to the subjects of this covenant is, that “they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably joined to Christ, as their head and husband.” Eph. 2:6, 7, 8; 1 Cor. 6:17; John 10:28; Eph. 5:23, 30. Once more: we are told that “the subjects of this covenant cannot fall away from the state of grace.” “True believers, by reason of the unchangeable love of God, and his decree and covenant to give them perseverance, their inseparable union with Christ, his continual

intercession for them, and the spirit and seed of God abiding in them, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.” WLC, Quest. 79. Thus it appears that all the subjects of this covenant will be saved with an everlasting salvation.

The Covenant of Circumcision

When Abraham was seventy-five years old he received the covenant of grace. Twenty -four years after the Lord was pleased to make a covenant with him, called “the covenant of circumcision” (Acts 7:8), the charter of which reads thus: “And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram; but thy name shall be Abraham: for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep, my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee, in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you, and thy seed after thee: every man-child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man-child in your generations; he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born

in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised manchild, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, THAT SOUL SHALL BE CUT OFF FROM HIS PEOPLE; HE HATH BROKEN MY COVENANT.” Gen. 17:1-14

From the tenor of this covenant it is obvious that its subjects were Abraham and his natural seed in all their generations. The blessings promised them were all of a temporal nature, viz. That God would increase and multiply them exceedingly; and be their God in a peculiar sense, affording special protection, provision, direction, &c. And giving them a certain described territory for an inheritance. To this covenant annexed the rite of circumcision as a sign of carnal descent, a mark of national distinction, and token of interest in those temporal blessings which were promised to Abraham. A neglect of this rite was punished with excommunication. And although the inheritance was restricted to the posterity of Abraham, yet all males that belonged to his domestic establishment must be circumcised, without any regard to personal character, conduct, or faith.

This statement of the covenant of circumcision might be confirmed by many testimonies from the writings of some of the most eminent Paedobaptist divines. I will appeal to a few only.

Witsius: “Circumcision was the sign of a covenant with God, undoubtedly made with Abraham and his family only, exclusive of other nations, and a seal of those benefits which he intended to be peculiar to Abraham’s posterity: and therefore, according to divine appointment, it was used to distinguish the seed of Abraham from the nations of the world. Whence the sons of Jacob thought it unworthy the dignity of their family that their sisters should be

given in marriage to one that was uncircumcised.” *Egyptiaca*, L 3. c. 6. 5.

Carpzovius: “The covenant of, circumcision is very closely connected with the promise of multiplying Abraham’s posterity; of bestowing on them a large country and very great honours; and it was a mark of difference by which they might be distinguished from other nations. Whence it followed that the Jewish republic being abolished, and the land of Canaan lost, this covenant expired at the same time. Nay, it by no means agreed to the times of the Messiah, in which, according to the predictions of the prophets, the distinction between the natural descendants of Abraham and other nations being removed, both became one people under the Messiah, and afterwards were to have all things common.” *Apparat. Hist. Crit. Antiq. Sac. Annotat.* p.605.

From this plain statement the candid reader will easily perceive that Abraham was interested in two covenants, viz. The covenant of grace and the covenant of circumcision; and that these covenants were entirely distinct in their nature, privileges, duration, and subjects (although the latter was typical of the former – MHW). The want of keeping in view the distinction of these covenants, has been the cause of much confusion.

It has been justly observed by Dr Cox: “that neither he nor they (i.e. Dr. Wardlaw and his Paedobaptist brethren) can ever find the passage in which the covenant of circumcision is called the covenant of grace - nor can they point out the text wherein the temporal blessings given to Abraham are mentioned in the covenant of grace - nor can they show, if the terms were identical, how Melchizedek, Lot, and others, should be included in the covenant of grace, which none will deny, yet were not in the covenant of circumcision; or how Ishmael and Esau should be in the covenant of circumcision, yet had no portion of the covenant of grace - nor is it possible for them to obviate the difficulty, that, if Abraham were the

federal head of his natural and spiritual seed, or of the covenant of grace, and Christ is confessedly the head of the same covenant, there must be two heads of that covenant, having in fact, as such, a conflicting title of superiority. It is the first and great mistake respecting the covenant itself, that perplexes the whole subject, pollutes all the subsequent reasonings, and confounds together things which, essentially differ." On Baptism, p.134.

Position of Children - in the Covenant of Circumcision

We therefore repeat the inquiry, viz, What do our brethren mean when they say that children were interested in the covenant made with Abraham, and that circumcision was the sign and seal thereof? They certainly cannot mean that all that were circumcised, were interested in the covenant of grace; for the Westminster Standards, as we have shown, inform us that all interested in that covenant will certainly be called, adopted, justified, sanctified, and glorified; but multitudes who were circumcised proved by their life and conduct that they had neither part nor lot in these matters, and therefore were not interested in the covenant of grace. They must then mean the covenant of circumcision - be it so. But this covenant was made with Abraham and his natural posterity exclusively; and whether it be abrogated or not, it certainly can afford no argument in favour of their opinion, that the infants of believers are entitled to baptism, and that baptism seals to them the blessings of the covenant of grace, because the Jewish children were interested in the covenant of circumcision.

If there were any propriety in such a mode of reasoning, surely the descendants of Abraham might have argued with greater propriety, that "as Jehovah was pleased to favour them with the blessings of a peculiar covenant, in which no others had any share, he would certainly not exclude them from the covenant of grace, which was for all nations." Such, indeed, dear reader, seems to have been the

foundation on which the carnal Jews rested their hopes of salvation, that they had Abraham to their father.

Circumcision: a Sign and Seal, but to whom?

Perhaps it will be said that the Jewish children must have been interested in spiritual blessings sealed to them by circumcision, because the apostle calls it "a sign and seal of righteousness." In this confused manner the passage is, indeed, frequently quoted; but the whole verse reads thus: "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all, them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also." (Rom. 4:11)

If the reader will have the goodness to refer to Bible, he will find that this first verse is a part of the conclusion of a chain of arguments, which commences at the beginning of the second chapter. The apostle having in the first chapter shown that the gentiles were without a justifying righteousness, proceeds to show that the Jews, though circumcised, had no advantage in this respect: viz, that they could no more be justified by the deeds of the law than the Gentiles, but that the only way of any sinner's justification at the bar of Jehovah, was faith in the Messiah ; and this he proves from the example of Abraham, who himself was justified by faith, before he had received the law of circumcision. Circumcision, therefore, instead of being the procuring cause of gospel justification, was only a sign and seal to Abraham that he had already been justified by faith; for his implicit obedience to that positive law, which had nothing but the authority of the law-giver for its recommendation, was a convincing evidence of the purity and strength of his faith. And the reader will please to notice that this is the only place in the Bible where circumcision is called a sign or seal of righteousness, and that it was so to Abraham and no other.

Besides, facts show that multitudes, who were

circumcised in the flesh, have never been justified by faith. It is evident, therefore that circumcision, though “a token” of temporal blessing, yet was neither a sign nor a seal of spiritual benefit to Jewish children (This is not to deny, of course, that, in its own right, circumcision is a symbol of God’s work in regeneration, renewing the heart and removing the guilt, power and defilement of sin: Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:28, 29; Colossians 2:11 – MHW). The inference, therefore, that baptism is a sign and seal of spiritual blessings to the children of believing Gentiles, is without foundation, and must fall of itself.

Baptism: “Seal of the Covenant of Grace”

On the supposition that baptism is a seal of the covenant of grace, what is the consequence? Why, instead of being an argument in favour of infant baptism, it would absolutely exclude infants from the solemn ordinance. With entire confidence we submit the case to a jury selected from their own most eminent divines. But, instead of a foreman, let us hear several of the jurors express their sentiments.

The great Mr. Charnock: “God seals no more than he promises, nor in any other manner than as he promises. He promises only to faith, and therefore only seals to faith. Covenant graces, therefore, must be possessed and acted, before covenant blessings can be ratified to us.” Works, vol. 4, p. 433.

Mr. Bradbury, “We call these two institutions of the New Testament the seals of the covenant; but they never seal what you have not, nor can they seal anything you did not.” Duty and Doctrine of Baptism, 13.

Mr. Calvin: “Baptism is, as it were, the appendix of faith, and therefore posterior in order; and then, if it be administered without faith, of which it is a seal, it is both an injurious and a gross profanation.” Commentary on Acts 8:36.

Hence it appears that the jury is perfectly agreed

that infants are not proper subjects for baptism, and that it would be “an injurious and gross profanation” to administer it to them. And who can disapprove their principles and arguments? God seals only what he promises, he promises only by faith, and that personally, not by proxy, such as parents and other sponsors, (see Bradbury;) but infants cannot believe, therefore they have no right to the seal. But it is high time to proceed to the consideration the next part stated in the reply, viz. That baptism has come in the place of circumcision; and that as this rite was performed on all the male posterity of Abraham, so baptism is to be administered to all the children of believers. Notwithstanding the frequency of this assertion, and the great confidence placed in it, yet I cannot believe it for want of evidence. “If Dr. Wardlaw,” says Dr. Cox, “will point out any individual passage in the scriptures, in Genesis, or in Romans - in Moses, or in Paul - where baptism is represented as substituted for circumcision, ‘we will believe it.’” On Baptism, p.149.

I am aware that Col. 2:11, 12, is generally quoted as a proof. But let us read it: “In whom (Christ) also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God.” Does not the reader perceive that the persons here spoken of are adults, who believed, mortified the deeds of the flesh, &c.; and that this passage has, therefore, nothing to do with infant baptism?

Besides, does it follow, that because there seems to be in these words a comparison between baptism and circumcision, therefore the one is come in the place of the other? We know that there was some similarity between Noah’s Ark and the ordinance of baptism, 1 Pet. 3:21. Do any of our brethren therefore believe that the latter has come in the place of the former?

The eminently learned Venema, though a

Paedobaptist, acknowledges “that the Scriptures nowhere affirm that baptism holds the place of circumcision. Nor from that place of Paul, Col. 2:11, 12, can anything be inferred, that that the two sacraments answer one another; for it is not there asserted in express words. The apostle simply asserts in these words, that baptism answers to spiritual circumcision.” Diss. Sacrae, L. 2. C. 15: 6, 7.

Circumcision and Baptism Contrasted

Besides, wherein does the striking similarity or analogy consist? There are, no doubt, a few particulars in which baptism may be compared to circumcision; but there is a striking dissimilarity in very many of the important parts. As we have shown before, that the covenant of grace and the covenant of circumcision differed essentially in nature, subjects promises, and duration; so, likewise, do the ordinances of baptism and circumcision differ.

Circumcision was a bloody and painful ceremony; baptism is the immersion of a person in water, as a solemn religious ordinance, administered to such as

believe, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The subjects of the one are only male children eight days old; the subjects of baptism are not infants, but “both men and women,” capable of making a credible profession.

The design of circumcision was chiefly to keep the descendants of Abraham a distinct people from all other nations; baptism is to be administered to believers of every nation without exception.

The duration of circumcision was during the existence of the Jewish polity; the duration of baptism to the end of the world.

In the observance of any positive institution (one originating, not from essential rightness of the thing, but entirely from the sovereign will and express word of God), we are to be guided by the express law of the institution. Baptism is a positive institution; therefore its own law is to be the rule of our conduct, and not analogy.