

# COMMENDATIONS

This book is an exegetical tour de force that is seasoned with pastoral wisdom and costly experience. No one should consider himself sufficiently studied on the subject of baptism until he has read the arguments of this paedobaptist-turned-credobaptist theologian.

**Dr. Tom Ascol**

Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, FL

President, Founders Ministries

Author of *From The Protestant Reformation to Southern Baptist Convention* and Editor of *Dear Timothy: Letters On Pastoral Ministry*

Fred Malone has examined the issue of credobaptism and paedobaptism from inside and out on both accounts. His defense of credobaptism is written with kindness and understanding along with a firm persuasion of the truth of the baptism of believers only. Exegetically, doctrinally, and ecclesiologically this book gives clarity to a debate that is now some centuries old. The conscientious holders of either doctrinal position will benefit from an honest evaluation of Fred Malone's carefully developed defense of Believer's baptism.

**Tom J. Nettles**

Senior Professor, The Southern Baptist Theologica Seminary

Founding Faculty, Insitute of Public Theology

Author of *By His Grace and For His Glory* and *Praise Is His Gracious Choice*

This is the most important book-length argument for the baptism of disciples alone in print today. I know of no other book like it. Its case is built on the sound hermeneutics of the Reformed tradition and the Bible's covenant theology. Malone writes from a place of deep conviction born out of much wrestling with the Scriptures and its implications for baptism. Though he served comfortably as a Presbyterian pastor for years, Malone changed his position

and became a Baptist because his conscience was held captive by the Word of God.

**Dr. Tom Hicks**

Pastor, First Baptist Church BC Clinton, LA  
Visiting Professor of Historical Theology, Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary

Believer's baptism is a beautiful ordinance given by Christ to His local churches that has sadly also been the focus of much division and controversy among faithful believers over the centuries. In his book, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone*, Fred Malone provides an accessible, gracious, knowledgeable, and convictional defense of the biblical practice of only admitting those able to give a credible profession of faith to the waters of baptism. He stands firmly upon this truth: 'Christian baptism is...credobaptism.' Churches today desiring to continue to reform according to the principles of Scripture, must seek to take Malone's arguments seriously and apply them faithfully. May this excellent treatment of such an important doctrine be read far and wide by pastors, laypersons, and all those who would seek to have a correct understanding of this wonderful sign and symbol of the Christian faith!

**Allen S. Nelson IV**

Pastor, Providence Baptist Church, Perryville, AR  
Author of *From Death to Life: How Salvation Works*  
and *A Change of Heart: Understanding Regeneration and Why it Matters*

Fred Malone's *The Baptist of Disciples Alone* is a classic treatment of baptism by one of the leaders of the Reformed Baptist resurgence of the last 50 years. His experience as a Presbyterian who became a Baptist gives an unusual insight to his treatment. May God give this new edition by Founders Ministries a wide reading. May God use it greatly!

**Dr. Sam Waldron**

Pastor, Grace Reformed Baptist Church, Owensboro, KY  
President, Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary

Every Baptist will welcome Dr. Malone's volume as being a new champion of the cause of truth. It should have immense usefulness for pastors and churches as a tool for teaching covenant theology and as an aid in controversy about the subjects of baptism.

**Walter J. Chantry (1938-2022)**

Editor, *The Banner of Truth Magazine*

Fred Malone has written one of the most important books on baptism to appear in at least the last two hundred years—and every thoughtful Christian will find *The Baptism of Disciples Alone* to be an essential guide to thinking through the debate between what Dr. Malone rightly identifies as the “paedobaptists” and the “credobaptists.” The Lord Jesus Christ set baptism at the center of Christian worship and as the defining mark of Christian identity. Dr. Malone is a scholar and pastor who argues with biblical passion and instructs by personal testimony. He presents his case with the skill of an attorney, the conviction of a theologian, and the care of a faithful pastor—and he is right! We are all in his debt.

**Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., President**

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Fred Malone presents the best case I have seen for believers' baptism from a covenantal perspective. This outstanding book deserves to be widely read and studied by everyone involved in the baptism discussion.

**Dr. Timothy George**

Founding Dean & Distinguished Professor  
Beeson Divinity School, Samford University



# The Baptism Of Disciples Alone

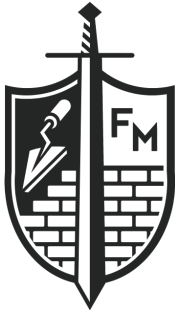
A Covenantal Argument  
For Credobaptism Versus Paedobaptism

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Fred A. Malone

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# Dedication

To my precious wife, Deborah, who followed me from Baptist to Presbyterian to Baptist ranks again with a sweet and trusting, though not blind, spirit. It always bothered her that it took a theologian (me) to explain to her the complicated arguments as to how infant baptism is biblical. As she put it, it was like having a priest tell her what she could not see in the Scriptures herself.

To pastors Steve Martin of Heritage Community Church, Fayetteville (Atlanta), Georgia; Walter Chantry of Grace Baptist Church, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and fellow board members of the Southern Baptist Founders Ministries who urged me off square one to revise my journal article on this topic for book publication.

To Dr. Tom Ascol, my dear friend, who deserves “a star in his crown” for his encouragement, advice and editing on this project. And thanks to Matthew Allen and Ken Puls for their help editing.

Special thanks to Ernest C. Reisinger, for taking a former Presbyterian to be his Associate Pastor in 1977, for taking me under his wing and making me answer right questions in many areas of theology, for being greatly used in the lives of many young men to better equip them for the gospel ministry, and for graciously writing the foreword to this work.

To the dear members of First Presbyterian Church (PCA), Eutaw, Alabama, who were so warm and encouraging when their pastor changed to a Baptist. They never made me feel like a traitor to them or to the Reformed faith, though often I felt like a traitor to them.

To the people of Heritage Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas, and First Baptist Church, Clinton, Louisiana, for their encouragements toward my writing ministry. The latter dear people of God graciously granted me a one-month sabbatical to finish the major portion of this work.

To my parents, Elton P. and Mary Davis Smith Malone, for taking me to church and helping me through many years of seminary training. My mother's difficult death in 1997 and my father's death in 1999 while finishing a draft of this book make its completion a testimony to the sustaining grace of God to a poor sinner. My dear sister, Mrs. Don (Sandra) Cain, faithfully cared for my parents during this time, enabling me to substantially finish this work while living so far away from them.

Finally, to God be the Glory.

Fred A. Malone  
April 12, 2002  
Clinton, Louisiana



# Contents

Foreword . . . . .	v
Preface . . . . .	xi
Introduction . . . . .	xxi
Why Write This Book . . . . .	xxi
The Covenantal Baptist Position Briefly Stated . . . . .	xxix
<b>Part I: Preliminary Principles . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Hermeneutics, Authority and Baptism</b>	
1. No Straw Men . . . . .	3
John Murray's Case for Infant Baptism	
2. Biblical Principles of Interpretation and Infant Baptism . . . . .	23
<b>Part II: The String of Pearls . . . . .</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Covenant Theology, The New Covenant and Baptism</b>	
3. The Covenant Theology of the Bible (Part 1) . . . . .	49
Paedobaptist vs. Baptist Views	
4. The Covenant Theology of the Bible (Part 2) . . . . .	77
New Covenant Fulfillment and Infant Baptism	
5. The Relationship between Circumcision and Baptism . . . . .	105
6. Household Baptism, "the <i>Oikos</i> Formula" and Infant Baptism . . . . .	119
7. Answering the Infant Baptism Proof-Texts . . . . .	127
8. Jesus' Attitude Toward Children . . . . .	140
9. The Disjunction of John's and Jesus' Baptisms with Christian Baptism . . . . .	144
10. The Weight of Precept, the Argument of Silence And the Regulative Principle of Worship . . . . .	149
11. The Argument of Expanded Blessings to "Covenant Children" . . . . .	158

12.	The Testimony of Tradition and the Historical Argument of Silence . . . . .	171
13.	What Difference Does It Make? . . . . .	178
14.	Postlude: A Final Appeal to Build Baptist Churches . . .	183
	Appendix A: Spurgeon on Baptism . . . . .	187
	Appendix B: The Proper Mode of Biblical Baptism . . . .	202
	Appendix C: Book Review of <i>The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism</i> by Pierre Marcel . . . . .	222
	Appendix D: Appendix to the <i>1689 London Baptist Confession</i> . . . . .	228
	Appendix E: Book Review of <i>The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism</i> by Gregg Strawbridge . . . . .	239
	Appendix F: Extreme Covenantalism Rejected . . . . .	265
	Selected Bibliography . . . . .	293
	Index of Subjects . . . . .	301
	Index of Authors . . . . .	309
	Index of Scripture References . . . . .	311

# Foreword

## The Author: Dr. Fred A. Malone

Years ago I had to be in Washington, D. C., for a weekend. Since I did not know any churches in Washington, I called a friend who did. He mentioned two churches. Both had good ministers who were expository preachers. However, he recommended one above the other because one minister had blood and pain mixed with his convictions. Dr. Fred Malone is that kind of minister. He has blood and pain mixed with his convictions on the subject of baptism, and it comes through in this book.

It gives me real pleasure to write this foreword for three reasons. First, I know the author. Second, I witnessed some of his deep agony over this subject. Third, to a much lesser degree, I had some of the same struggles. A Philadelphia newspaper published the following announcement in January 1946:

### Presbytery Names a Lay Preacher

The Carlisle Presbytery at its January meeting in the Second Presbyterian Church commissioned Ernest Reisinger of Carlisle as a lay preacher. It was probably the first such action taken anywhere in the denomination since the commissioning of laymen was authorized last May by the General Assembly.

Under his commission, Mr. Reisinger, who is a member of the local construction firm of Reisinger Brothers, will be lay preacher at Biddle Presbyterian Chapel, East and North Streets, where he teaches a Sunday School class and conducts midweek prayer services. He was authorized to teach and preach, but cannot administer the sacraments or perform the marriage ceremony. Rev. Spencer B. Smith, Camp Hill moderator, presided.

Commissioning a lay preacher was a unique step for the Presbyterian Church at the time. When questioned about baptism, I answered honestly that I was not settled yet on my own position. The presbytery further asked me if I would ever be inclined to preach against infant baptism, to which I replied that I would never preach against any issue about which I was still unclear. So, on that basis, I was commissioned by the Carlisle Presbytery as a lay preacher. I later became clear on the issue and became a Baptist.

I first met Fred Malone in the early 1970s at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. He was a student, and I was there to give a series of lectures on God-centered evangelism. Fred was a young Calvinist and a long-time Southern Baptist, still practicing shallow methods of evangelism. He was not very receptive to me or to what I was teaching. In fact, he was obviously upset at what I taught, even challenging my position in a discussion class. Later, while in seminary, he moved in the right direction by fully embracing Reformed views, including my views on evangelism. However, he took a wrong turn as well, embracing paedobaptism at the same time.

Fred, like many other young men, thought that in order to be a consistent Reformed minister, he had to be a paedobaptist. He did not know much about his Baptist fathers or his Baptist theological roots. Fred was ordained by the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP) and called to pastor the First Presbyterian Church (PCA) of Eutaw, Alabama. Although he held to paedobaptism theologically, he told me later that his conscience screamed every time he sprinkled a baby. In 1977, he returned to his Baptist roots, becoming my associate pastor at North Pompano Baptist Church. He served as pastor from 1979 to 1980 before returning to seminary for doctoral work. During those years we spent together, I found him to be a man who loved God, God's Book and God's people. He was valiant for the truth. He is a faithful father, a loving husband and a loyal colleague in the ministry.

## The Subject: Baptism

This subject has left many casualties and divisions; therefore, it must be approached with charity and a conciliatory spirit. A wise caution is found in the words of the late Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

First, let us take the biblical doctrine of baptism. It is probably unnecessary for me even to mention the fact that this is a subject about which there has been great disputation. Whereas many people might, perhaps, have been comparatively ignorant about some of the other causes of dissension, I am sure that at some time or another, every professing

Christian has been engaged in discussion on the question of baptism. And equally saintly, equally spiritual, equally learned, people are to be found holding the various opinions. Therefore it behooves us once more to say that not only must we approach the subject with caution, but still more importantly, in a Christian manner and in the Spirit which we claim we have received and to whom we submit ourselves. Never has it been more important to avoid mere labels, glib generalizations, and dogmatic pronouncements than when considering a subject like this. Is it not perfectly obvious, before we go any further, that this subject cannot be finally decided, that it is not one of those subjects concerning which you can give an absolute and unmistakable proof? If it could there would never have been all this controversy and there would not have been denominational distinctions.

I would cite the example of Professor Karl Barth, the great Reformed theologian (though my citing him does not mean that I agree with his essential position). Barth was brought up in the typical Presbyterian manner, but he has undergone a great change in his view of baptism. Having been brought up to believe in infant baptism he has written a book to say that he no longer believes that, but believes in adult baptism. So it ill behooves us to be overdogmatic and to give the impression that there is only one possible point of view.

As we saw in the last lecture, baptism is not essential to our salvation. No sacrament is essential to salvation: if you say it is, you are aligning yourself with the Roman Catholics. Protestants have always said that while baptism and the Lord's Supper are commands of the Lord, and we should therefore practice them, they are not essential. They do not add grace, they simply point to it and bring it to us in a special way. So we must approach the subject with this caution and with a Christian spirit.<sup>1</sup>

## The Book

Some sermons are prepared by study and by research. A few sermons are born with tears and prayer (these are the best). This is also true of books—some are born. This book is born.

There is no end to books written on the subject of baptism. Most of them have been written by paedobaptists, and some are written about the differences they have among themselves. Ironically, it was the books and arguments of paedobaptists that convinced me to become a Baptist. Some paedobaptists believe in baptismal regeneration; others do not. The arguments and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church differ from those of the Lutherans and the Episcopalians, who differ among themselves. They

<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things*, vol. 3, *Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 35–36.

both differ from the Presbyterians and the Christian Reformed. Most Protestant paedobaptists do not agree with the Greek Orthodox Church, which practices immersion of infants. Dr. Malone has done his homework in examining these arguments, and I am sure they contribute to making him a thoroughly convinced Baptist. This book is the fruit of serious study and examination of the biblical doctrine of baptism. It is long overdue, and I believe it will go down in history as a classic on the subject from a Baptist point of view.

At this point, I think I hear some paedobaptist saying, “What about the covenant?” Some paedobaptists seem to think when they say “covenant” a Baptist must surrender or run; this book will prove otherwise. Dr. Malone addresses the knotty questions of covenant theology, circumcision and the sprinkling of infants.

The following experience was related to me by a Baptist pastor’s wife. She was attending a ladies’ Bible study held in a local Presbyterian Church, and she was the only one in the study who was not a Presbyterian. The subject of children came up. The ladies were talking about “covenant children” when someone realized that there was a Baptist in the class. She began to apologize profusely for bringing up the subject of “covenant children” because, she asserted, she knew that Baptists did not believe in the covenant. This dear lady did not know that the prince of Baptist preachers, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, said: “the covenant is the marrow of Divinity.” Dr. Malone’s book will dispel such ignorance.

This book will provide an excellent tool for pastors and serious Christians. It is also an excellent apologetics resource to answer the well-trained paedobaptist who often overwhelms those who have never given serious study and examination to the subject. The motivated reader will learn the Reformed Baptist position on “covenant children” from this book; that is, they enter the covenant by circumcision of the heart, are sealed by the Holy Spirit and are revealed in a credible profession of faith, confessed publicly by baptism.

Dr. Malone states in his book that believer’s [disciple’s] baptism alone is the baptism instituted by our Lord and His apostles and the only baptism prescribed by the Holy Scriptures.

Neither this book, nor any other, will settle the long-standing difference among the best of God’s true servants. However, it will give a thorough answer for the Baptist position and show that it is a viable and honorable position. It will also show that Reformed Baptists do believe in the covenant. There will be no question that our brother Malone has studied the Scriptures and history on this subject, and now many of the Lord’s people will have the benefit of all the author’s years of serious study. May it please our Great Redeemer to shower His blessing upon our brother’s

long and tedious efforts.

I pray that the reading and studying of this book will produce a conciliatory spirit among Baptists and our dear and respected paedobaptist friends. I also pray our differences on baptism will not hinder our mutual efforts to obey our Lord's clearest command, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel."

Ernest C. Reisinger  
Christian Gospel Foundation  
Cape Coral, Florida  
2003





# Preface

## My Problem with Infant Baptism

As a former Presbyterian minister, I baptized two of my infants. I was sincere. It was meaningful. I believed that infant baptism (paedobaptism) was biblical. However, I was sincerely and biblically wrong.

Now, I am convinced that the baptism authorized by the Bible is the baptism of disciples. In fact, I believe the Bible authorizes the baptism of disciples *alone*. This position may also be called credobaptism, from the Latin verb *credo*, meaning *believe* or *trust*. Other designations are *believer's baptism*, *confessor's baptism* or *professor's baptism*, all synonyms describing the baptism of disciples alone. Hoping to be gracious toward my paedobaptist friends and mentors, the purpose of this book is to prove that the Bible authorizes only disciple's baptism. This book is also written, however, to help parents, pastors and laymen better understand the Baptist position for credobaptism versus paedobaptism so they can decide which local church to join and serve in.

The subject of baptism is of great practical importance. Should Christian parents have their babies baptized (paedobaptism)? Or should they evangelize their children, pray for them and wait for a disciple's profession of faith from them before baptism (credobaptism)? Is "repent and be baptized" a command that parents should obey for their children, or is it a command for their children to obey for themselves (Acts 2:38–41)?

Is paedobaptism so clear in Scripture that it would be sinful not to baptize one's babies? And if sinful, should not paedobaptist pastors exercise discipline against those church members who refuse to baptize their infants? Would Christian parents, who believe *sola Scriptura* (Scripture

alone), find infant baptism so clear in Scripture that they would become convinced in their own conscience that they *must* have their infant baptized or else disobey God's revealed Word? Or must they rely upon "expert" theologians to explain their biblical duty toward their children for what they cannot see in Scripture for themselves?

This issue of parents coming to their own conviction about the baptism of their children is of great importance. This is especially true since most of the specific Scripture texts and theological arguments for infant baptism are the subject of dispute among major paedobaptist theologians. If infant baptism is biblical, then parents should be able to see this for themselves in Scripture in order to obey God by having their infants baptized. However, if credobaptism alone is biblical, then parents must not rob their children of the opportunity to obey a command of God for themselves nor of having the joyful experience of confessing Christ in believer's baptism. And if lettered paedobaptist theologians differ so much among themselves about infant baptism, should unlettered parents be pressured into baptizing their infants? They are the ones who will give account to God for what they do with their own children.

I see two basic problems with infant baptism, both of which I will cover in more detail in subsequent chapters. The problems are (1) the regulative principle of worship and (2) biblical hermeneutics.

## The Problem of the Regulative Principle

Is infant baptism as clear in Scripture as other issues, like repentance before baptism (John 4:1–2; Acts 2:38, 41), or self-examination before the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:41–42; 1 Corinthians 11:27–29), or a woman's participation in the Lord's Supper (Exodus 12:1–4, 16; 1 Corinthians 11:18–22), or men only as elders (1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1–7), etc.? Obviously not. The latter issues at least are mentioned in Scripture and are settled by clear Scriptural commands following "the regulative principle of worship," an essential doctrine in both Baptist and Presbyterian churches.

The Reformed regulative principle of worship requires that elements of worship, including sacraments, be "*instituted by God Himself, ... limited by his own revealed will, and ... prescribed in holy Scripture*" (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 21:5; 21:1; 1:6).<sup>1</sup> The regulative principle teaches that the elements of New Testament worship and church order should be "regulated" by Scripture and clearly instituted for New Covenant worship. G.

<sup>1</sup>I will use the term "sacrament" in this book since it concerns a paedobaptist sacrament. The *1689 London Baptist Confession* prefers the term "ordinance."

I. Williamson, a paedobaptist, has well-stated the regulative principle of worship:

Thus, by the nature of the case, true worship could not exist except by divine provision. And this is the same as to say that such worship was *instituted* by God, *limited* by God, and *prescribed* by God. (1) By *instituted* worship the Confession means worship which has been authorized, commanded, or required by him...When men worship God in any way not appointed or commanded by God, they worship in vain (Mark 7:7)... That which is instituted (commanded) by God is true worship. That which is not instituted by God is *for that reason* itself false worship. (2) This principle (that true worship is instituted by God) necessarily involves the fact that it is *limited* by his revealed will. It is limited because God has commanded only certain things in his worship.<sup>2</sup>

Protestantism is experiencing a gradual return of pictures, ceremonies, and the like in that it has (often without realizing it) lost its hold upon the regulative principle of true worship. There is no safeguard to purity of worship except conscious and persistent adherence to this principle: *what is commanded is right, and what is not commanded is wrong* [emphasis mine].<sup>3</sup>

In Williamson's words, elements of Christian worship must be instituted by God and prescribed by God, either in the way of commands or clear examples.

The Lutheran "normative principle" and the Roman Catholic "inventive principle" are different in that they also permit in worship things not specifically prohibited in New Testament Scripture. This may even include non-instituted worship practices erroneously deduced from other Scripture such as the existence of priests, altars, pageantry, incense and priestly rituals for New Testament worship.

The Presbyterian *Westminster Confession* (1646) and *London Baptist Confession* (1689) both include baptism as an element of New Testament worship. Therefore, the meaning, mode and subjects of baptism, as a sacrament acknowledged to be "ordained by Jesus Christ" (*WCF* 28:1) and "instituted by Christ" (*WCF* 21:5), must conform to the regulative principle of instituted worship, not to the normative principle of things not specifically prohibited (the argument of silence). Because infant baptism is considered a biblical sacrament, one of the official elements of worship,

<sup>2</sup> G. I. Williamson. *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), 158-159.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

shouldn't it too be "instituted" by Christ according to the same principle as was the Lord's Supper? Yet, it is not so prescribed.

The regulative principle was a major issue to our Baptist forefathers as necessary to give biblical authority to infant baptism. This is made clear in "An Appendix" to the *1689 London Baptist Confession*, first published with the confession in 1677:

Therefore we cannot for our own parts be persuaded in our own minds, to build such a practice as this, upon an unwritten tradition: But do rather choose in all points of Faith and Worship, to have recourse to the Holy Scriptures, for the information of our judgment, and regulation of our practice.... *All instituted worship receives its sanction from the precept*, and is to be thereby governed in all the necessary circumstances thereof [emphasis mine].<sup>4</sup>

It is my belief that the regulative principle of worship, stated so clearly in the Presbyterian *Westminster Confession of Faith* and *1689 London Baptist Confession*, requires instituted revelation to authorize infant baptism, not by silence or inference. Because no such revelation exists, infant baptism is a violation of the regulative principle of worship.

Our Lord Jesus Christ established the regulative principle of Christian worship in His earthly teachings. He declared His authority over instituted Old Testament worship (Jerusalem) and non-instituted worship (Samaria) with these words to the Samaritan woman at the well:

Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know; for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers (John 4:21–23).

This declaration of our Lord is a historical-redemptive statement of the highest meaning, which establishes Him and His teachings as the New Covenant authority for worship over Old Testament and non-instituted forms. Before He left earth, He affirmed this principle in His apostles' charge in the Great Commission: "teaching them to do all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). We must assume from these statements

<sup>4</sup>"An Appendix," in *The 1689 London Baptist Confession* (1677; facsimile edition, Auburn, MA: B&R Press, 2000), 109–142. This appendix is reproduced in Appendix D of this book.

that the earthly teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ and their later applications by His apostles form the content of instituted and commanded Christian worship under the New Covenant administration. To resort to Old Testament forms by possibly erroneous inference or to practice non-instituted forms is a violation of His Lordship over Christian worship. The only instituted baptism in the New Testament by Christ and His apostles is credobaptism: the baptism of disciples alone.

## The Problem of Biblical Hermeneutics

Baptists and Presbyterians agree with a basic Augustinian principle of biblical interpretation that “the New is in the Old concealed; and the Old is in the New revealed.” This places an emphasis upon the New Testament revelation as the final determiner of instituted and regulated Christian worship versus Old Testament worship and forms continued by unqualified inference alone (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5). This principle, consistently applied, also argues against any notion of infant baptism grounded upon a supposed and possibly erroneous good and necessary inference, which may be neither “good” nor “necessary.”

Baptists and Presbyterians agree that there is no express command for or clear example of infant baptism in the Bible. Professor John Murray, for example, admits that no command or example of infant baptism exists in the New Testament. Hence, his main principle of interpretation used to establish infant baptism is “good and necessary inference”:

One of the most persuasive objections and one which closes the argument for a great many people is that there is *no express command* to baptise infants and *no record* in the New Testament of a clear case of infant baptism... The evidence for infant baptism falls into the category of *good and necessary inference*, and it is therefore quite indefensible to demand that the evidence required must be in the category of express command or explicit instance [emphasis mine].<sup>5</sup>

Apparently, Murray holds to B. B. Warfield’s position: “The warrant for infant baptism is not to be sought in the New Testament but in the Old Testament” by good and necessary inference.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), 72.

<sup>6</sup> B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1932; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 399.

Murray's reference to good and necessary inference is based upon the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 1:6, which states:

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is *either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture*: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed [emphasis mine].

However, is good and necessary *inference* a safe hermeneutical principle to apply to a New Testament sacrament *instituted* by Christ? Is it really indefensible, as Murray claims, to base the practice of a New Testament instituted sacrament and element of Christian worship upon an express command or explicit instance in the New Testament, rather than upon possibly erroneous inferences from the Old Testament? This position is not generally held, according to the regulative principle, concerning other elements of New Testament worship, all of which are expressly set down in Scripture. Why is it held for infant baptism?

All agree that reason, logic and deduction are involved in the interpretation of the Scriptures. However, one might argue that the word *consequence* in the *WCF* means an inescapable conclusion whereas Murray's substitution of "inference" leans simply toward a plausible case. The doctrine of the Trinity, for example, is certainly a good and necessary consequence deduced from Scriptures which speak of God as One yet in three Persons equally divine (Matthew 28:19; John 1:1). But some possibly plausible inferences from Scripture, when used to form a doctrine (a favorite tool of the cults), may be neither "good" nor "necessary," especially in light of the regulative principle of instituted sacraments. It is this use of possibly plausible or possibly erroneous good and necessary inference which must be rejected as the basis for building a case for an instituted sacrament. The elements of Christian worship must be clearly "*instituted* by God Himself, ...*limited* by his own revealed will, and ...*prescribed* in holy Scripture" (*WCF* 21:5; 21:1; 1:6). Neither plausible inferences nor deducted consequences attain to this level of certainty.

It would be easy to pass over the subject of infant baptism as a minor issue, but it is not. This is a controversial subject that necessarily separates

Christian brethren and churches one from the other confessionally, sacramentally and ecclesiastically.<sup>7</sup> Charity must govern each discussion. However, each pastor must settle this issue in order to determine which sphere of Christ's church he may serve with a clear conscience. Further, members must determine whether they have obeyed Christ's command for biblical baptism as well as which church they can join and serve as elders, deacons and teachers with a clear conscience. It is my hope that this book will help those so struggling and will assist those pastors and laymen who need a resource to teach or defend *the baptism of disciples alone*.

I have chosen the designation "the baptism of disciples alone" to describe the only instituted and regulated baptism "expressly set down in Scripture." It is no more an unbiblical description of baptism in the Bible than are other principles of reformation theology: Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone and God's glory alone. That which is "expressly set down in Scripture" concerning an instituted, regulated sacrament is sufficient to earn the designation "alone."

## A Personal Testimony

In 1977, as a Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) minister, I was forced by conscience to move from a paedobaptist (infant baptism) to a Baptist (disciple's baptism only) position. It was, and still is, one of the most traumatic experiences I have been through as a pastor and Christian. It is true that I had been raised a Baptist, but I adopted infant baptism in 1972 out of theological conviction while a student at Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) in Jackson, Mississippi.

As I look back to those blessed days at RTS (1970 to 1974), when I was a sincere and searching student, I believe that I accepted infant baptism with a clear conscience before God. Yet I sometimes wonder if I searched out the truth concerning infant baptism as sincerely as I thought I did. In the warm fellowship of my paedobaptist brethren, coupled with the suspiciousness of Baptists about my choice of seminary, it is more than

<sup>7</sup> I am thankful for the charitable spirit that exists between paedobaptist and Baptist brethren at such places as the Banner of Truth Conference. In such fellowships, baptism does not often become the object of first discussion. I personally try never to bring up infant baptism first. Recently, in other circles, I have noticed a more aggressive attitude against the Baptist position. Confrontive comments place one on the defensive with such thoughts as these: Do I pursue the issue of baptism, which he has presented, possibly ending our fellowship in discord? Do I keep quiet as if I have no answer? Why can we not fellowship around what we have in common as did good John Bunyan and dear John Owen?



possible that I allowed subjective feelings and wonderful opportunities for paedobaptist ministry to influence my study of infant baptism.

I do not believe that I am the only Baptist who became a Presbyterian under those circumstances. In fact, I have come to believe that our good Presbyterian assemblies have a lot of Baptists sitting in their pews out of frustration with local Baptist churches. Further, it might be surprising to discover how many Presbyterian pastors once were Baptists. I receive regular reports of Baptist seminary students who have accepted the Reformed theology of our Baptist forefathers, often taught it by Baptist pastors, and then subsequently accept a job in a paedobaptist church as a paedobaptist. Often the reported accounts express “no opportunities and too much opposition to Reformed theology in Baptist churches” as a major reason for the switch.

Oh, that we had more Baptist “pioneers” willing to endure hardship to build new churches or to reform our established Baptist churches! Where will Reformed Baptists of conscience worship in coming generations if we do not take up the cross now?

As time passed happily while serving paedobaptist churches, I re-examined my position on infant baptism in 1977 and found many inconsistencies that, for whatever reasons, I did not find in seminary. At that time I composed a journal entitled *A String of Pearls Unstrung* to explain my change to a Baptist position for my Presbytery and for interested friends. Recently, that journal was updated and reprinted as a small booklet by Founders Press of Cape Coral, Florida.<sup>8</sup> At the urging of friends helped by the journal, I have expanded that booklet into this larger book. It is intended to be read easily by pastors, students and motivated laymen. Footnotes and a bibliography will point out additional resources for those so inclined.

I have endeavored to let most of my work be as original as possible. However, two books which helped me years ago to confirm my study are *Should Babies Be Baptized?* by T. E. Watson and *The Children of Abraham* by David Kingdon.<sup>9</sup> I highly recommend these works to paedobaptist and Baptist friends alike. Also, I have included Charles H. Spurgeon’s fine treatise

<sup>8</sup> Fred A. Malone, *A String of Pearls Unstrung* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Thomas E. Watson, *Should Babies Be Baptized?* (London: Grace Publications Trust, 1995); David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham*, (Sussex: Carey Publications, 1973). I also recommend Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978). Although Jewett’s work was available, I did not study it at the time. However, I have come to appreciate his work as a fair and effective rejection of infant baptism. His work on the early church and the Reformation in regard to baptism is invaluable.



tise on baptism in Appendix A and a critical review of Pierre Marcel's classic work defending infant baptism in Appendix C. Appendix D is the original appendix to the *1689 London Baptist Confession* defending the baptism of disciples alone. Appendix E is a book review of the recent publication of *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, edited by Greg Strawbridge.

The reader also will find that I have dealt mainly with the subjects of baptism in this work. This is because who is to be baptized is a more important question than how it is to be done. With respect to the mode of baptism, John Calvin himself believed that the Bible word *baptizo* means *to immerse* and taught that the early church practiced immersion:

But whether the person being baptized should be wholly immersed, and whether thrice or once, whether he should only be sprinkled with poured water—these details are of no importance, but ought to be optional to churches according to the diversity of countries. Yet *the word 'baptize' means to immerse, and it is clear that the rite of immersion was observed in the ancient church* [emphasis mine].<sup>10</sup>

I accept Calvin's analysis, even though he was inconsistent in allowing other modes of baptism. Appendix B is dedicated to a brief defense of immersion as the biblical mode of the baptisms of John, Jesus, the apostles and the early church, contrary to John Murray's sprinkling or pouring view.

As I cover each point of theology, I hope (as do we all, I am sure) to give glory to God by letting His infallible Word be the absolute and final authority of each conclusion. My continual prayer is for the Holy Spirit to illumine my mind and the mind of the reader as we gaze together into the mind of God on the written page.

## A Second Edition

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1967), 4:15:19 (1320); Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, 2 vols. (1822; reprint edition, Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1990), 1:422-428; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elentic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1997), 3:381. See also Herman Witsius' and Francis Turretin's discussions of mode of baptism in the early church. Both admit immersion was the practice, though they claim pouring and sprinkling also was practiced depending upon circumstances such as health or the availability of water.

It has been over three years since the first edition of this work was printed and distributed. To my surprise, the first edition's printing has sold out, necessitating this second edition. I am encouraged that the book has generated much discussion on the topic of baptism and has helped persuade many to stay the course in working for reformation in Baptist churches.

This second edition is not meant to respond to every comment or criticism formed by others. I have, however, attempted to clarify points that needed a clearer statement, added two appendices and dealt with several opposing views not included in the first edition.

As before, I pray that we reformed believers who differ on the point of baptism will be able to carry on our discussion *under grace* and in recognition of the faith that we hold so much in common. To God be the glory.

# Introduction

## Why Write This Book?

There are at least four good reasons for writing this book and all are related to the growing reformation and revival among Baptists in America, England and South Africa. The acceptance of infant baptism by Baptists is often related to their growing acceptance of the broader Reformed faith once held by our Baptist forefathers, as outlined in the *1689 London Baptist Confession* and its American iterations, the *Philadelphia Confession* and *Charleston Baptist Confession*. The following reasons justify this work.

### *Baptist Ignorance*

First, in my experience as a Baptist, I have found that many fellow Baptists are ignorant of both the Baptist and paedobaptist positions. Such ignorance often makes Baptist pastors, ministerial students and church members easy targets for a well-trained paedobaptist apologist. When discussing the doctrine of baptism with Baptist ministers, I have found many who are ignorant of covenant theology and unable to answer paedobaptist arguments from that position. This is an indictment against Baptist theological education which, by God's grace, has recently seen the beginnings of a much-needed reformation.

In addition, many Baptists during the last century have imbibed classic dispensationalists views. This new development in Baptist theology gradually replaced views that had been very covenantal up to that point.<sup>1</sup> I will

<sup>1</sup> R. B. C. Howell, *The Covenants* (Charleston, SC: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1855); Nehemiah Coxe, *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ*

explain in chapter two why classic dispensationalism has a difficult time arguing against infant baptism based upon Old Testament inference. One needs to remember that many leading dispensationalists in England and America have been paedobaptists. Dispensationalism by no means refutes infant baptism. Therefore, Baptists who have imbibed dispensationalists views are often confused by a studied paedobaptist covenantalist because they are unversed in the biblical covenants.

### *Pastoral Losses*

Second, Baptists have lost a number of pastors and seminary students to Presbyterianism (although they are not thereby lost to the kingdom of God!). There is a growing resurgence of Reformed theology among Baptist pastors and laymen in America, with many returning to the Reformed faith which our Baptist forefathers generally held.<sup>2</sup> However, in the process of rediscovering our Baptist and Reformed roots, some fine Baptist pastors have become Presbyterian by accepting infant baptism.<sup>3</sup> It is very tempting to follow wonderful Reformed teachers such as John Murray, Charles Hodge, John Owen and R. C. Sproul down the path of infant

(1681; reprint edition, Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2004). R. B. C. Howell served as President of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1851 to 1857. He was well-known as a defender of the baptism of disciples alone from a covenantal perspective. Other evidence of Baptist covenantalism is seen in the *1689 London Baptist Confession*, and in the works of J. L. Dagg, James P. Boyce, Charles H. Spurgeon and many others. Nehemiah Coxe's work is a classic exposition of reformed Baptist covenant theology. Coxe was the son of Benjamin Coxe who signed the *First London Baptist Confession* (1646). Nehemiah Coxe was the main editor of the *Second London Baptist Confession* (1677/1689). Attached to this republication is John Owen's exposition of Hebrews 8–10. Nehemiah Coxe's work is an historical illustration of the covenant theology which stands behind the *Second London Baptist Confession*, the mother confession of American Baptists. Historical Baptists were covenantal theologians.

<sup>2</sup> The resurgence of Baptists to their Reformed roots is evident in the increased number of Baptist churches in America that have adopted the *1689 London Baptist Confession*; i.e., the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches in American (ARBCA) and many Southern Baptist Churches. Other indications include the return of many Southern Baptists to the Reformed theology of their founders (W. B. Johnson, Basil Manly, J. L. Dagg, James P. Boyce, John Broadus, Basil Manly, Jr., etc.), as exemplified in the Southern Baptist Founders Conference and Founders Ministries.

<sup>3</sup> As I was completing this introduction, I received notice of another Baptist friend who was called to pastor a PCA church. A number of former Southern

baptism.<sup>4</sup> Can they be right on so many vital issues and so wrong on this? It is hard to believe so.

It is also very tempting as a Baptist pastor to savor the warm fellowship and opportunities of Presbyterian denominations where the Reformed faith is more widely spread and more readily accepted than among modern-day Baptists. Many Baptist pastors have suffered persecution and rejection while trying to teach Baptists the Reformed faith, which most early Baptists originally believed. It is easy to convince oneself that infant baptism is a minor issue when compared to many major agreements with paedobaptists in other matters. This is especially true when one considers the joyful prospect of warm-hearted Reformed fellowship, service and opportunities in paedobaptist churches.

However, the issue of the sacraments (ordinances) is not minor by any stretch of the Reformed imagination. Along with infant baptism come issues regarding the nature of the church and church membership, the evangelism of “covenant children,” church discipline, and so forth. For example, the original PCA *Book of Church Order* presents an entirely different approach to evangelizing infant-baptized children than do those churches that establish membership of any age only upon a confession of faith as evidence of a regenerate heart:

By virtue of being born of believing parents, children are, because of God’s covenant ordinance, made members of the Church, but this is not sufficient to make them continue members of the Church. When they have reached the age of discretion, they become subject to obligations of the covenant [sic]: faith, repentance, and obedience. They then must make public confession of their faith in Christ, *or become covenant breakers, and subject to the discipline of the Church* [emphasis mine].<sup>5</sup>

Baptists who learned Calvinism from our Baptist forefathers now serve in Presbyterian churches. Also, I have received inquiries from several PCA laymen who are Baptists in background. They have been asked to be officers in their PCA churches, but they are struggling over infant baptism. Further, I have heard of at least one Presbyterian seminary which has had at least 40% Baptists in their entering student body, many of whom became pastors in the PCA and other Presbyterian denominations upon graduation.

<sup>4</sup> I am not accusing any of blindly following. However, even a sincere conscience in deciding for infant baptism may be strongly affected by the overwhelming testimony of such good men.

<sup>5</sup> *The Book of Church Order*, printed for the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (Montgomery, AL: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, 1975), chap. 57, par. 4.

While PCA ministers are cautioned to use “liberty” and “godly wisdom” when applying the extract just quoted, one wonders what is the age of discretion. Sixteen? Twelve? Ten? Pierre Marcel, whose views are very influential among modern Presbyterians, believes that it is twelve.<sup>6</sup> Further, what kind of pressure do children at that age feel under the threat of church discipline? Premature confessions of faith are necessarily encouraged by this system.

This is a very different approach to child evangelism than is practiced in Baptist churches that are Reformed in theology. It is an approach that could easily degenerate into a pressured decisional regeneration error like that practiced in many Arminian Baptist churches via the high-pressure invitation system at the so-called age of accountability. “Communion classes” for 11 to 12-year olds have degenerated in some paedobaptist denominations to an expected admission to the Lord’s Supper upon satisfactory completion of the course, thereby displacing admission based upon the elders’ confidence that evangelical repentance and faith are evident. In any case, I do not think that many PCA church members would look favorably upon the discipline of their infant-baptized children who refuse to be influenced by possible church censure to confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In fact, I doubt many church members even know that this is in their *Book of Church Order*.

The first generation of reformers who establish a purer paedobaptist denomination may not live to see the long-range effects of the error in their sacramental teaching. But what of the second, third and future generations? The proper administration of the sacraments was at the heart of the Reformation and is one of the marks of a true church. It is unworthy of one’s vows before a presbytery to minimize them for the sake of peace or opportunity. This issue is not the same as one’s practice of Christian liberty or view of eschatology. It is much more fundamental and necessary to church order and practice.

We Baptists are not so narrow that we do not realize that the kingdom of God grows across denominational lines. We love and respect our paedobaptist brethren. We are much indebted to our Presbyterian divines. However, our Baptist corner of Zion has lost valuable leadership because of the acceptance of infant baptism. It is my hope that this work will help to “plug the leak in the dike” and will, at least, give pause to those pastors who are ready to downplay differences between Baptists and paedobaptists on the ordinance of baptism. We Baptists cannot afford to lose one faithful pastor unnecessarily for the cause of reformation and revival.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Marcel, *The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, trans. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1959), 99.

*Membership Losses*

Third, Baptists have lost not just pastors but also valuable members to Presbyterianism when those members are vitally needed in the cause of reformation and revival in Baptist churches.<sup>7</sup> It is my hope that this work can be a resource book for pastors who have members tempted to forsake Baptist reformation for Presbyterian stability.

More than one Baptist church has lost faithful members to its Presbyterian counterpart. I personally have recommended that Baptist brethren (including my own children and church members) consider a good PCA, Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) or Associate Reformed Presbyterian (ARP) church when there is no Baptist church in town that teaches the historic Baptist and Reformed faith. However, there are a growing number of historic Baptist pastors and ministerial students who have no place to serve or who have been removed from Baptist churches because of their sound Baptist theology. What if we could conserve our Baptist church members and/or start new Reformed and Baptist works instead of losing them (in an ecclesiastical sense) to Presbyterianism? The cause of reformation, revival and conscience among Baptists is worth the personal sacrifice that necessarily accompanies such labors. This “pioneer spirit,” which characterized many of our Baptist forefathers, needs to be rekindled today.

Baptist churches have lost members not because there is no Reformed and Baptist church in town but because of the trials of bringing biblical reformation to a Baptist congregation. There are times when the efforts toward restoring a Baptist church to its historic, Reformed theological roots, church discipline and spiritual life can be very trying. Opposition from friends and family can prove very difficult, frustrating and painful. Why not go down the street to a fellowship that more readily accepts Reformed theology without all the trials of Baptist reformation—especially if that church does not require the acceptance of infant baptism to join?<sup>8</sup>

The answer to that question is very simple: for the cause of biblical truth now and in future generations. The error of infant baptism may seem

<sup>7</sup> I am convinced by my own experiences and by the testimonies of others that a significant number of members of PCA churches are from Baptist backgrounds and are still unsure of or still reject infant baptism. However, in the absence of a good Reformed and Baptist Church, they have been attracted to the sound Reformed doctrines, elder rule and no altar call of the PCA.

<sup>8</sup> Many Baptists have told me that they did not have to accept infant baptism to join a Presbyterian church. Their disciple’s baptism by immersion was accepted. However, some Catholics have reported that they asked Presbyterian pastors to baptize them by immersion when they were converted and yet were denied—a real inconsistency. Amazingly, their Catholic infant baptism was acceptable!

minuscule right now compared to other theological and practical errors in many present-day Baptist churches, but if one of the sacraments is in error, it will inevitably affect one's spiritual life and the spiritual life of one's children and grandchildren. We must not forget that the proper administration of the sacraments is one of the marks of a true church and therefore no small issue.<sup>9</sup> Baptists need to conserve the results of reforming efforts and keep our members faithful to the churches that taught them the Reformed faith that they now love.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Real Issue*

Fourth, the real issue is whether infant baptism is a practice based upon the Scripture alone that can be substantiated by standard hermeneutical principles. If it is, then Baptists are guilty of refusing to submit to God's revealed Word in this matter and denying children a sacrament. However, if it is not based upon the authority of Scripture alone, then those who practice it are guilty of denying God's people a sacrament, adding to God's Word and binding many consciences to a man-made doctrine. Further, if it is not based upon the authority of Scripture alone, then the erroneous hermeneutical principles that establish it can only be damaging to the cause of *sola Scriptura*. R. B. C. Howell, a Southern Baptist Reformed scholar of the nineteenth century and president of the Southern Baptist Convention numerous times, listed nineteen dangers of infant baptism which ultimately will weaken evangelism and church life.<sup>11</sup>

Every sincere Bible-believing Christian and pastor should want to know the answer to these questions about infant baptism. If God has so instructed us about such a major issue as a Christian sacrament (or ordi-

<sup>9</sup> If we agree with historic Reformed teaching that the three essential marks of a true church are (1) the preaching of the Word of God, (2) *the proper administration of the sacraments* and (3) church discipline, then the issue of infant baptism can never be relegated to a minor issue. This is not to say that there cannot be a true church where a sincere error in baptism exists, but we all must agree that this is not a minor issue. Further, the spiritual condition of children is involved. Some who practice infant baptism are opposed to the evangelizing of their children as unbelievers.

<sup>10</sup> It is a common report among reforming pastors that members and visitors sometimes receive great help from their ministries but then join other churches because of the pressures of family, friends or the demands of faithful membership.

<sup>11</sup> R. B. C. Howell, *The Evils of Infant Baptism* (Charleston, SC: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1852; reprint, Watertown, WI: Baptist Heritage Press, 1988), 302–310.

<sup>12</sup> J. W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander* (Reprint, Harrisonburg,



nance), then the decision of whether to practice it or not is not a matter of Christian liberty.

Although I do not subscribe to the overstatement of his second consideration, the great Presbyterian and Princeton President, Archibald Alexander, recognized the importance of correctly practicing baptism while he wrestled with becoming a Baptist in 1797:

Two considerations kept me back from joining the Baptists. The first was that the universal prevalence of infant baptism, as early as the fourth and fifth centuries, was unaccountable on the supposition that no such practice existed in the times of the apostles. The other was, that *if the Baptists are right, they are the only Christian church on earth, and all other denominations are out of the visible church* [emphasis mine].<sup>12</sup>

I will deal with Alexander's untenable first reason later, but his second reason, though extreme, ought to shock those who relegate baptism to a secondary doctrine while determining which church to serve and to join.

Elders, like Archibald Alexander, take ordination vows that they sincerely believe and will teach the sacraments according to their respective confessions. As he finally was, so also must every man be convinced in his own conscience and not by the conscience of others. However, the following statement accurately summarizes comments expressed to me by both Presbyterian elders and laymen:

When I read the Baptist side of the argument, it sounds convincing. When I read the paedobaptist side, it also sounds convincing. I could go either way. Great minds have wrestled for centuries over this issue. Who am I to settle it? Can such great paedobaptist minds be so right on so much and so wrong on this? Because of such great men, I lean toward the paedobaptist side. And since I consider it a minor issue, compared to the major doctrinal problems in Baptist churches today, I will practice it until I am convinced otherwise.<sup>13</sup>

One problem with the above statement is that a sacrament is not a "minor issue." Another is that believers (especially church leaders) are to come to their beliefs with their own convictions, not the convictions of "great men." Pastors are called to be "experts" on the essentials of church life in their local congregations. This is why Paul said to a young pas-

VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1991), 205.

<sup>13</sup> I will not divulge confidences here, but suffice it to say that this summarized statement has come to my hearing ten or more times.

<sup>14</sup> Leonard T. Van Horn, "The Reformed Pastor and His Vows," *The Banner*

tor, “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman unashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Whether a Baptist or paedobaptist pastor, to be unable to hold or defend one’s practice of a sacrament from Scripture alone with sincere conviction is a violation of conscience, one’s own confession and ministerial ordination vows.

Leonard T. Van Horn, a PCA teaching elder and personal friend to whom I am much indebted, has lamented the waning lack of seriousness concerning ordination vows today. Though dealing with vows concerning the Doctrines of Grace and other issues such as women’s ordination and Madison Avenue tactics, Dr. Van Horn’s conclusion applies just as truly to those who take vows concerning infant baptism without personal biblical conviction:

The writer, who is now retired from the ministry, urges all pastors of Reformed churches to show integrity regarding their ordination vows. It is not biblically ethical to leave out certain doctrines in our preaching and teaching. If a preacher no longer believes them, he should inform the appropriate church court; they must deal with it. To be “Reformed” is not a matter of convenience. It is a matter of eternal importance once one has taken vows and subscribed to them.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Van Horn’s call to integrity concerning ordination vows is much needed for all churches today, both Baptist and paedobaptist. Ordination vows are not a matter of convenience. We all must hold to and teach our doctrines with personal and sincere biblical conviction, not the convictions of others.

Another problem with the previously summarized statement of Presbyterian elders and laymen quoted above is stated in Romans 14:22–23, a warning about disagreed upon practices:

The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and *whatever is not from faith is sin* [emphasis mine].

In this passage, Paul is talking about disagreed-upon practices in Christian liberty. How much more should we be careful with disagreed-upon practices concerning a sacrament. It is much safer for conscience and truth

*of Truth* 412 (January 1998): 19. I owe much to Dr. Van Horn’s charity, patience and wise leadership when I changed my view of baptism in Warrior Presbytery (PCA) in 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Such issues include whether to preach the gospel to covenant children or

to be conservative in practice rather than to add an uncertain practice. Whatever is not of faith is sin. We give account to God for what we do (James 3:1).

Most of us sincerely believe that we are basing our position upon the Scriptures. However, one side or the other is wrong about this matter—and it does make a difference. It has implications regarding the nature of the New Covenant, the doctrine of the church, the evangelism of children, assurance of salvation, the administration of the Lord's Supper, church discipline and other important matters.<sup>15</sup>

In summary, it would have been easy for me to have passed over this controversial topic and to continue in my previous sphere of service in the Presbyterian Church (Presbyterian Church USA, ARP, PCA). It still saddens my heart that my vows required me to withdraw myself voluntarily from that sphere with its wonderful fellowship and opportunities. However, our conscience and practice must be ruled by Christ alone through the guidance of His written Word alone and by no man, tradition, or dubious logical extension.

## The Covenantal Baptist Position Briefly Stated

I have come to believe that the only proper subjects of Christian baptism are defined biblically as disciples. The following summary of the covenantal Baptist position was believed and taught by early Southern Baptist theologians such as Basil Manly, Sr., William Bullein Johnson, James P. Boyce, P. H. Mell, R. B. C. Howell, John L. Dagg, as well as by the English Baptist, Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

The following points are consistent with the *1689 London Baptist Confession*. I believe:

1. That before the foundation of the world, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit entered into a Counsel of Peace, or Covenant of Re-

not, whether they should receive communion as infants by virtue of infant baptism, what it takes to be a covenant breaker in the unbreakable New Covenant (Hebrews 8:8–12), whether the church is to be made up of professing Christians only or not. Jonathan Edwards had to deal with the deadening generational effects of infant baptism in the Half-Way Covenant. He dealt with infant-baptized adults who had never expressed a conversion experience nor were admitted to the Lord's Supper. Yet their children were infant-baptized but not admitted to the Lord's Supper until a profession. This practice filled the churches with baptized, unconverted members for generations.

<sup>16</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and

demption, to save an elect people from their sins (Ephesians 1:1–14; Titus 1:9). That within the decrees of God, only two covenant heads were designated, Adam and Christ. That God the Father decreed to create the world, including Adam as the covenant head of humanity, that He decreed to permit the fall of Adam by his own free choice, and that He decreed to send His Son as the covenant Head to rescue an elect people from their sins and death. That all men who ever were to be born had Adam designated as their head in his Covenant of Works and that all of God's elect people had Christ designated as their Head in the Covenant of Redemption. That every person at any time in history is either in Adam or in Christ (Romans 5:12–19), but never in both or neither.

2. That the so-called Covenant of Grace with God's elect is His historical working out of that eternal Covenant of Redemption in Christ.
3. That Adam was created upright, had the moral Law written on his heart (Romans 2:14–15; 7:7), and placed in a relationship with God that would continue perpetually if he kept God's commands, variously called the Covenant of Works or Covenant of Life (Ecclesiastes 7:29; Hosea 6:7). This covenant of law-obedience could have confirmed Adam to eternal life, had he obeyed perfectly and eaten of the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22). God rewards obedience. As the covenant head of all humanity, his fall into sin brought sin, death and condemnation upon the entire race (Romans 5:12–19). Now, all his descendants are born "under law" in Adam (the Covenant of Works), are subject to its curse, and spiritually unable to keep its perfect requirements for eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:22; Genesis 6:5; 1 Corinthians 2:14).
4. That God did reveal historically the "promise of grace" in Genesis 3:15, commonly called the Covenant of Grace, successively revealing its future fulfillment in Jesus Christ's New Covenant through the historical "covenants of promise" (Ephesians 2:12). Thus, salvation by grace through faith in the coming "seed of the woman" as covenant Head was revealed and offered from the fall of man by types and shadows throughout the Old Testament administration of the "covenants of promise." The church invisible is "the church of the firstborn enrolled in heaven" of all ages (Hebrews 12:23).
5. That the New Covenant of Jesus Christ is the prophesied fulfillment of what has been called the historical Covenant of Grace, revealed in the "covenants of promise" since the fall, and is the fullest and final

historical manifestation of that eternal Covenant of Redemption to save God's elect (2 Timothy 1:8–10).

6. That the New Covenant administration is an effectual covenant of realized blessings, not like the Sinai Covenant which it abrogates (Galatians 3:19), with an effectual Mediator as its covenant Head, writing the law on every member's heart as individuals (Jeremiah 31:27–34; 32:40; Deuteronomy 30:6), giving them the true knowledge of God, and forgiving their sins (Hebrews 8:8–12; 10:15–17). It was established *already* by Jesus Christ but is *not yet* fulfilled until the New Heavens and New Earth to come (1 Corinthians 2:9; 1 John 3:1–4).
7. That Jesus Christ is the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), the final physical seed of Abraham to whom the promises were made (Galatians 3:16, 19), the effectual Mediator of the New Covenant (Romans 5:12ff.), and the covenant Head whose “of faith” seed become joint-heirs with Him, members of the New Covenant, children of Abraham, the true circumcision, the true Jew, “the Israel of God” and the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham (Galatians 3:14, 6:15–16; Romans 2:28–29, 4:16).<sup>16</sup>
8. That all who repent of sins and believe in Jesus Christ, Jew or Gentile, shall be saved and, as evidence of their New Covenant membership and heart-circumcision, should be baptized as disciples who have professedly entered the New Covenant by repentance and faith alone (Acts 2:38–41).
9. That John baptized disciples alone who repented of sin (Matthew 3:6). That Jesus and His disciples “made and baptized more *disciples* than John” (John 4:1). The disciples were first made, then baptized. That all who were baptized had to decide to be baptized for themselves, not by another's decision for them (as in circumcision).
10. That there is no stated abrogation of the only subjects of Jesus' baptism, disciples alone, in the New Testament, confirmed at Pentecost in the baptism of those who “received [Peter's] word” (Acts 2:41).

Reformed Publishing Company, 2000), 43–45. Robertson reserves the title “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:15–16) in the New Covenant only for Jews and Gentiles who are justified by faith and are members of the universal church. This is exactly the Baptist position when identifying the members of the New Covenant. Only the regenerate are members, not believers and their seed.

11. That the Great Commission commands us to “make disciples of all the nations [individuals from all nations, not the national entities], baptizing *them* [the “made” disciples] . . . teaching *them* [the baptized disciples] to do all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). Luke corroborates this understanding: “and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).
12. That this is exactly what happened at Pentecost. Only those who “received [Peter’s] words were baptized” (Acts 2:41), not the infant children of believers.
13. That, amidst the debates about whether infant-baptized children of believers are included in the New Testament church visible, it is often overlooked that the common designation for the church visible in Acts is “the disciples” (Acts 1:15; 6:1f.; 9:19, 26, 28; 11:29; 13:52; 14:20, 22, 28; 15:10; 18:23, 27; 19:9, 30; 20:1, 7, 30; 21:4, 16): “And it came about that for an entire year [Saul and Barnabas] met with *the church*, and taught considerable numbers; and *the disciples* were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). The church is called “the disciples” because it was made up of those who had repented of their sins, publicly confessed faith in Christ, and followed Him as committed “learners.” These disciples were first called Christians at Antioch; and only disciples were called Christians in Antioch. There is no room in these designations for the children of believers to be called church members or Christians simply by organic relation. The church visible is an assembly of disciples, whether adults or children.
14. That baptism is a sign of the subject’s cleansing from sin, his union with Christ by his faith, his union with the body of Christ and his commitment to a new life in Christ from thenceforth (Romans 6:4–5; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:4–6).
15. And, finally, as stated in the *Westminster Confession* and the *1689 London Baptist Confession*, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, including their subjects, are “sacraments instituted by Christ.” That they are included as elements of worship under the regulative principle of worship positively instituted by God and “limited by His own revealed will” (*WCF* 20:1, 5). The elements of Christian worship governed by the regulative principle are all “expressly set down in Scripture,” not deduced by good and necessary inference or consequence. The only form of baptism which fits the regulative principle is that which was “instituted” and “prescribed in the Holy Scripture;” that

is, the baptism of disciples alone, not of infants by additional and supposed good and necessary inference or consequence. Baptism is for disciples alone (John 4:1; Acts 2:38–41): *solis discipulis*.