

“Set Apart from all other Peoples and False Religions”

A Sermon on Article Thirty-Four of the Belgic Confession

Texts: Genesis 17:7-14; Luke 18:15-17

Article 34 - The Sacrament of Baptism

We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law (Rom 10:4), has by His shed blood put an end to every other shedding of blood that one could or would make as an expiation or satisfaction for sins. He has abolished circumcision, which involved blood, and has instituted in its place the sacrament of baptism.¹ By baptism we are received into the church of God and set apart from all other peoples and false religions, to be entirely committed to Him² whose mark and emblem we bear. This serves as a testimony to us that He will be our God and gracious Father for ever.

For that reason He has commanded all those who are His to be baptized with plain water, into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). By this He signifies to us that as water washes away the dirt of the body when poured on us, and as water is seen on the body of the baptized when sprinkled on him, so the blood of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, does the same thing internally to the soul.³ It washes and cleanses our soul from sin⁴ and regenerates us from children of wrath into children of God.⁵ This is not brought about by the water as such⁶ but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God,⁷ which is our Red Sea,⁸ through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, that is, the devil, and enter into the spiritual land of Canaan.

Thus the ministers on their part give us the sacrament and what is visible, but our Lord gives us what is signified by the sacrament, namely, the invisible gifts and grace. He washes, purges, and cleanses our souls of all filth and unrighteousness,⁹ renews our hearts and fills them with all comfort, gives us true assurance of His fatherly goodness, clothes us with the new nature, and takes away the old nature with all its works.¹⁰

We believe, therefore, that anyone who aspires to eternal life ought to be baptized only once.¹¹ Baptism should never be repeated, for we cannot be born twice. Moreover, baptism benefits us not only when the water is on us and when we receive it, but throughout our whole life. For that reason we reject the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with a single baptism received only once, and who also condemn the baptism of the little children of believers. We believe that these children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as infants were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises which are now made to our children.¹² Indeed, Christ shed His blood to wash the children of believers just as much as He shed it for adults.¹³ Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of what Christ has done for them, as the Lord commanded in the law that a lamb was to be offered shortly after children were born.¹⁴ This was a sacrament of the passion and death of Jesus Christ. Because baptism has the same meaning for our children as circumcision had for the people of Israel, Paul calls baptism the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11).

¹ Col 2:11 ² Ex 12:48; 1 Pt 2:9 ³ Mt 3:11; 1 Cor 12:13 ⁴ Acts 22:16; Heb 9:14; 1 Jn 1:7; Rev 1:5b ⁵ Tit 3:5 ⁶ 1 Pt 3:21 ⁷ Rom 6:3; 1 Pt 1:2, 2:24 ⁸ 1 Cor 10:1-4 ⁹ 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26 ¹⁰ Rom 6:4; Gal 3:27 ¹¹ Mt 28:19; Eph 4:5 ¹² Gen 17:10-12; Mt 19:14; Acts 2:39 ¹³ 1 Cor 7:14 ¹⁴ Lev 12:6

Before our Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, he left his disciples with the following command: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Based upon these words of the great commission, it is now the mission of Christ’s church to go into the world, preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations. And how do we make disciples? We baptize them in the name of the Triune God.

We are working our way through articles thirty-three through thirty-five of our confession which deal with the sacraments. Last time, we made the point that the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are visible signs and seals of invisible grace, given to us by a gracious God who is ever mindful of our hardness of heart and insensitivity to things of the Lord.

In article thirty-three, our confession makes the point that the sacraments draw their efficacy from God’s word through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is quite unlike the view of the medieval Roman church. Rome held (and still does) that the sacraments are efficacious because Jesus Christ vested this gracious power in the church through a sacrificing priesthood. Therefore, Rome’s errors regarding the sacraments are two-fold. The water of baptism supposedly regenerates, washing away the guilt of original sin. And the essence of the Lord’s Supper (the Mass) is an unbloody re-sacrifice of Christ’s broken body, which is offered daily by the priests to appease God’s wrath and anger.

Article thirty-three also makes the point that the sacraments are means of grace and that God communicates his grace through material things, specifically the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. The materialistic language of our confession is drawn from New Testament, and our confession is a response to the Anabaptists of the 1560’s, who believed that God works directly upon the human heart, apart from means. This is why the Anabaptists did not understand baptism in the context of God’s gracious covenant and why they denied baptism to children of Christian believers. As they saw it, baptism has nothing to do with our ratification of God’s gracious promise to us and to our children. Children are not members of the covenant of grace—contrary to what is taught throughout both the New and Old Testaments. Rather, the Anabaptists understood baptism as an act of obedience on the part of someone able to make a decision to follow Jesus. Thus baptism is our promise to be faithful—not our ratification of God’s promise to be faithful to us and to our children. Baptism is the public confirmation of our personal decision to follow Jesus.

As signs and seals of invisible grace which are given their efficacy by the preaching of the gospel,¹ the sacraments are not incidental to the Christian life. They lie at the heart of a truly healthy Christian life. Since the sacraments communicate to us visibly (“take and eat”), what is promised to us audibly in God’s word (“I will be your God”), we must endeavor to understand the benefits of the sacraments in direct connection to the gospel. As baptism is the sacrament of entrance into the covenant, distinguishing us from unbelievers and members of false religions, so too the Lord’s Supper is the sacrament of

¹ Cf. Q 65 from the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Q. It is by faith alone that we share in Christ and all his blessings: where then does that faith come from? A. The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it through our use of the holy sacraments.

sustenance, given to us by God for the purpose of nourishing and sustaining that same faith which he creates through the preaching of the gospel. Thus word and sacrament are inextricably linked. When, in faith, we receive the signs and seals of the sacraments, we also truly receive the reality (those things signified by outward signs), namely, Jesus Christ and all his saving benefits.

Article thirty-three of our confession focused upon the sacraments in general. Article thirty-four deals with the sacrament of baptism, while article thirty-five (our subject next time) deals with the Lord's Supper. In order to set forth the Reformed view of baptism our confession develops four main points. First, baptism is the sign and seal of the new covenant, and replaces circumcision which was the sign and seal of the Old Covenant. But even as the covenant sign changes from circumcision to baptism, the thing signified does not change—God's covenant promise to be our God and we his people. Second, our confession deals with the nature and purpose of baptism. What is the meaning of baptism? Third, our confession addresses the problem with the Anabaptist view of baptism (more specifically the problem of "rebaptism"), before concluding by making the case that all children of believers are to be baptized, since they too are members of the covenant of grace, along with their parents.² If our children are indeed members of the covenant of grace, how can the sign and seal of the covenant be denied to them?

First, our confession deals with the relationship between baptism and circumcision.

Article thirty-three opens by setting forth the continuity between the Old and New Testaments regarding the thing signified (God's covenant promise under the terms of the covenant of grace), while at the same time contrasting the signs and seals of Old and New Testaments—the difference between a cutting ritual (circumcision) and a water ritual (baptism). Our confession states, "We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law (Rom 10:4), has by His shed blood put an end to every other shedding of blood that one could or would make as an expiation or satisfaction for sins. He has abolished circumcision, which involved blood, and has instituted in its place the sacrament of baptism."

Once Christ has come and shed his blood for the forgiveness of our sins, circumcision (a knife/cutting ritual, in which blood was shed, pointing ahead to the blood of Christ) is no longer appropriate as the sign of membership in the covenant. After the coming of Christ, what is appropriate, is a water ritual (symbolic of cleansing). Two of them are found in the Old Testament—Noah and the flood and the crossing of the Red Sea—which are mentioned in direct connection with baptism in the New (cf I Peter 3:18-22; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

The basis for the covenant sign of circumcision is God's covenant promise, made to Abraham in Genesis 17:7-14.

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

Notice, how Abraham is to ratify God's covenant promise made to him and to all his descendants. In verse 9, we read,

² Beets, [The Reformed Confession Explained](#), p. 249.

Then God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.'

Circumcision is the sign of the Old Testament administration of the covenant of grace, pointing forward both to the promised blessing (the messianic seed) and to the promised curse (being cut off from the people of God). With the coming of Christ, neither the blessing nor the curse pictured by circumcision are appropriate now that the promised seed has come. Paul makes this point in Colossians 2:11-12. *“In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”*

Notice what Paul says—in Christ, we have received true circumcision of the heart, having been buried with Christ in baptism. Since the Old Testament sign is fulfilled by Christ’s redemptive work on the cross, not only does baptism replace circumcision in the New Covenant, but that the efficacy of the sacrament is directly tied to our faith in the power of God to do those things he has promised to do. In this case, the “circumcision of Christ” (a much better translation of the phrase which the NIV renders *“the circumcision done by Christ”*)³ refers to our Lord’s suffering upon the cross so that our sins are forgiven and so that our own death to sin and resurrection to new life becomes a reality. Baptism is the sign and seal that we have died to sin and are to live in new obedience to the commandments of God.

Even though the sign changes from baptism to circumcision with the coming of Christ, in whom the promise to Abraham was fulfilled, the thing signified (God’s covenant promise to us and to our children) does not change. We see this in the very first Christian sermon in Acts 2:39, where this same promise is proclaimed by the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost—*“The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”* This clearly refers to the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 17, and like the promise made to Abraham, the promise made by God his people, extends to our children as well. The sign has changed, but the thing signified has not.

Second, our confession takes up the nature and character of baptism.

The purpose of baptism is set forth as follows. *“By baptism we are received into the church of God and set apart from all other peoples and false religions, to be entirely committed to Him whose mark and emblem we bear. This serves as a testimony to us that He will be our God and gracious Father for ever.”* In baptism, through which we embrace God’s covenant promise, we are clearly identified as followers of Jesus Christ. It is baptism which separates us from all other religions and from the secularism of modern America. Through baptism, we and our children, become members of the visible church, since through

³ Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 103-104

baptism we ratify God's covenant promise to be our God and to save us from our sins. It is possible that our confession has in mind Revelation 7:2-3 in this regard, "*then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 'Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.'*" Whether or not John is referring to baptism in Revelation 7 when he speaks of God's people being "sealed," the result is the same—God's people are marked off from all others, so as to be protected from his wrath.

Our confession goes on to flesh out the meaning of baptism by addressing a number of the important biblical passages. "For that reason He has commanded all those who are His to be baptized with plain water, into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). By this He signifies to us that as water washes away the dirt of the body when poured on us, and as water is seen on the body of the baptized when sprinkled on him, so the blood of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, does the same thing internally to the soul." Not only is baptism commanded as the means of making disciples, but this is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 12:13, when he writes, "*For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*" It is through the waters of baptism that the Holy Spirit makes us part of the body of Christ (the visible church).

Our confession also states that [baptism] "washes and cleanses our soul from sin" (based upon verses like Acts 22:16—when Paul addresses the crowd in Jerusalem, "*and now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name*"). But it is the next phrase in our confession which catches our attention, when it states that baptism "regenerates us from children of wrath into children of God."⁴ This phrase is taken from Titus 3:5, where Paul speaks of baptism as the bath of regeneration—"he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Paul says this not because the water itself regenerates, but because the water of baptism is the visible sign and seal of the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit.⁵ Where the sign is applied (the water), so too, we believe, the thing signified (regeneration) is present. Given the use of sacramental language, the sign can be spoken of as the thing signified. This is how Paul can call baptism the "bath of regeneration," and tell the crowd in Jerusalem that baptism washes away sin, when this is the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the blood of Christ.

Our confession goes on to make this very point by appealing to a number of important events in redemptive history. "This is not brought about by the water as such"—citing from 1 Peter 3:21 ("*Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*"—ESV), "but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God, which is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, that is, the devil, and enter into the spiritual land of Canaan." This sentence is a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. While the act of baptism does not in and of itself regenerate us, nevertheless, the sign (water) is so closely identified with the thing signified that where the one is present (water), so too, we believe, is the thing signified is present (forgiveness of sins), which is brought about by the blood of Christ, not the application of water.

To make certain that we understand this, our confession points out that "thus the ministers on their part

⁴ The French text reads, "*et nous re'ge'ne'rants d'enfants de col'ere en enfants de Dieu.*"

⁵ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, trans. T. A. Small (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 382-383

give us the sacrament and what is visible, but our Lord gives us what is signified by the sacrament, namely, the invisible gifts and grace. He washes, purges, and cleanses our souls of all filth and unrighteousness, renews our hearts and fills them with all comfort, gives us true assurance of His fatherly goodness, clothes us with the new nature, and takes away the old nature with all its works.” In baptism, God is the active party, since he alone gives the reality which is promised by the outward sign. Since ministers can only apply water, it is God who washes away our sins, gives the new birth, and assures us that we are his.

This illustrates the fundamental difference between the Reformed and Anabaptist views of baptism. For the Anabaptist, baptism means “I really mean it.” For the Reformed, baptism is the promise from God that “I really mean it!

Third, given the prior understanding of the nature and character of baptism, our confession now addresses the errors of the Anabaptists in specifically in regards to rebaptism as adults, of those who had been baptized as infants.

Our confession states, “we believe, therefore, that anyone who aspires to eternal life ought to be baptized only once. Baptism should never be repeated, for we cannot be born twice. Moreover, baptism benefits us not only when the water is on us and when we receive it, but throughout our whole life. For that reason we reject the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with a single baptism received only once, and who also condemn the baptism of the little children of believers.” Paul condemns the practice of re-baptism in Ephesians 4:5– “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*” As a covenant sign and seal, the promise God makes to us in baptism abides with us until we die. In baptism with are both buried with Christ and rise to newness of life (Romans 6:1-7). In baptism, we are clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27), and receive the outward sign that our sins are forgiven (Acts 22:16). Whenever we witness a baptism and the promises are read to the one being baptized, or to those parents who are presenting their child for baptism, God’s renews his covenant promise with all those who have already been baptized. The blessings of baptism extend from the time of our baptism, until the time the Lord calls us home.

Finally, our confession takes up the subject of the baptism of infants.

Having refuted the Anabaptist practice of rebaptizing adults who were once baptized as children, our confession goes on to make the case for the baptism of the children of believers. “We believe that these children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as infants were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises which are now made to our children. Indeed, Christ shed His blood to wash the children of believers just as much as He shed it for adults. Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of what Christ has done for them, as the Lord commanded in the law that a lamb was to be offered shortly after children were born. This was a sacrament of the passion and death of Jesus Christ. Because baptism has the same meaning for our children as circumcision had for the people of Israel, Paul calls baptism the circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2:11).”

In order to make the case for infant baptism, we must do so within the overall context of our doctrine of baptism and in light of our covenant theology. But before we do that, we should not overlook the obvious. One of the best ways to defend the doctrine of infant baptism is to simply look at how Jesus viewed children of believers. In Luke 18:15-17, we read that

“people were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘Let the little children come to

me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’ I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

If babies are members of the kingdom of God (of which the covenant of grace is the historical manifestation), how can we deny to them the sign and seal of membership in that kingdom and covenant, which is baptism? Even as Jesus receive the children (and rebukes the disciples for preventing them from coming), so should we. Baptism is the divinely-appointed means for doing this very thing.

How then does our theology of baptism, require the baptism of infants? First, in Colossians 2:11-12, Paul states that baptism is the fulfillment of circumcision. To be baptized is to be united to Christ in his circumcision upon the cross (the circumcision “of Christ”), and according to Romans 6:3-4 to be united with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. To be baptized is to “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27) and to receive the “bath of regeneration” (Titus 3:5).

With the coming of Christ as the mediator of a new and better covenant fulfilling that promised to Abraham (Hebrews 8:7 ff; Galatians 3:15 ff), the sign of the covenant of grace changes from a cutting rite (circumcision) with its exclusively male curse of being severed from the covenant with the loss of all descendants, to a water rite (baptism). Nevertheless the thing signified by the sign—God’s covenantal oath to be God to his people and to consecrate them unto himself—does not change. Like circumcision, baptism is a gospel sign, focusing upon the promises God makes on behalf of sinners (including our children).

Second, as circumcision was an oath-curse sign, so also baptism is best understood primarily as a water-ordeal sign of blessing and curse (1 Corinthians 10:1 ff; 1 Peter 3:20-22; Romans 6:3 ff), and not as many Baptists see it as essentially total immersion in water. As Noah entered the Ark (Genesis 6 ff) as Moses crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 13:17 ff), and as Joshua led God’s people through the Jordan (Joshua 3), baptism is the sign and seal of ordeal-judgement as Jesus Christ takes us through the waters of judgment. In each of these cases, no one got wet! In the Old Testament water-ordeals (the Ark, the Red Sea, the River Jordan) women, infants and children (entire households) were delivered through means of the ordeal element itself (water). This explains why baptism is applied to both men and women, when circumcision was only applied to males.

Third, as circumcision was the ratification of God’s covenant promise (“I will be your God”) by passing through the curse-ordeal (the cutting of the foreskin), so too, baptism is a ratification of God’s oath by our passage through the ordeal element itself (water), which is why our confession and baptismal liturgy speaks of us as passing through the Red Sea with Christ. Just as circumcision included the element of consecration (“You will be my people”) so too does baptism (in Romans 6:5, Paul speaks of us being united with Christ in his death and resurrection). In both cases, the sacrament is the believer’s ratification of God’s sworn oath to keep his promise to be God to his people and to deliver us from the curse due us because we have broken the covenant of works and the commandments of God.

Fourth, as with circumcision, the focus in baptism is upon God’s covenant oath and promise to save and forgive sins, not only for believers, but for their children as well (Acts 2:38-39; Acts 16:15; 33). Thus the context for baptism is the covenant of grace. There is no evidence in the New Testament that baptism is exclusively focused upon the testimony of a believer to the presence of regeneration—though there are a number of cases where baptism immediately follows conversion (as in Acts 8:36 ff.). Instead, baptism is seen primarily as the ratification of God’s oath. This becomes clear when we see that the New Testament has many references to “household salvation” (Acts 16:15; 33 ff.; 1 Corinthians 1:16; Acts

2:38 ff.; 10:2, 47 ff; 11:14; 18:8; 2 Timothy 1:16; 4:19; John 4:53). When the head of a household expresses faith in God's promise to deliver them on behalf of all those in the household under their covenantal authority from the covenant-curse (Acts 16:15; 31), all of the members of the household are baptized upon the basis of the principle of covenantal authority and the profession of faith by the covenantal head. Though the covenant sign changes from circumcision to baptism, there is nothing unique to baptism that excludes the children of believers.

In fact, the promise (which was certainly a reference to the promise that God had made to Abraham; cf. Galatians 3:29), says Peter, is for believers and their children (Acts 2:39). This is supported by Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 7:14, to the effect that through the faith of one party in a marriage between a believer and a non-believer, the marriage relationship is sanctified, so that any children born to that union are indeed holy and under the covenantal authority of the believing parent. Jesus certainly embraced infants as members of the kingdom (Luke 18:15-17), and viewed them as heirs of the promise. And in doing so implicitly supports the principle of covenantal authority, since the parents of these children brought them to Jesus, and he received them.

This is why the Scriptures speak of baptism as "the bath of regeneration" (Titus 3:5) and being for the "forgiveness of sin" (Acts 2:38 ff; 22:16), without also teaching that it is the waters of baptism that effect (or cause) regeneration *ex opere operato*. Regeneration is everywhere attributed to the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5; 1 Corinthians 2:14) and not to the mere presence of the sign itself, as if the sign somehow magically binds God to act. That being said, we must be very careful, however, not to reduce baptism to mere external sign and deny that anything at all is signified and sealed unto the one baptized. For by faith, we can say that the baptized adult or child of a believer, is indeed regenerate and has been washed in the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. If baptism is not only a sign of promise but also curse, then those who do not fulfill their baptism by coming to faith in Jesus Christ, will come under the covenant curses of which baptism is also a sign. This is clearly taught in Hebrews 6:4-6; Galatians 5:4 and John 15:1-16. This is why membership in the covenant cannot be equated with election. There will indeed be baptized members of Christ's visible church who will not inherit eternal life (cf. Simon the Sorcerer, Acts 8:13; 20-23; Those who will say "Lord, Lord," on the day of judgment, Matthew 7:21 ff; and the weeds who grow together with the wheat until the harvest; Matthew 13:30).

Fifth, according to Hebrews 8:7 ff, the new covenant is a superior covenant. This superiority is because the "new covenant" is different in kind from the old covenant made with Moses (in which the people of God swear the oath, rather than God), and that the new covenant is the fulfillment of that promised to Abraham, and, therefore, stands as the New Testament manifestation of the one previous covenant of grace.

With this in mind, since the Old Testament manifestation of the Covenant of Grace included the children of believers (Genesis 17:7 ff.), on what basis do we exclude them under a better covenant, which fulfills what was promised to Abraham in the first place? Do we now treat or children as unbelievers who are no different than the children of pagans? The New Testament clearly offers evidence that children of Christian parent(s) are members of the covenant community (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20; also see 1 Corinthians 7:14). If they are members of the covenant, how can they be kept from receiving the sign of the covenant - baptism? Add to this the fact that regeneration precedes faith, this line of argumentation becomes that much stronger.

Thus baptism is a wonderful gift from God to us and to our children. He swears on his oath that he is our God and that we are his people. And once baptized, we not only believe that we are regenerate and our

sins are forgiven, but it is through the waters of baptism that we are set apart from all other peoples and false religions. For through baptism, we become disciples of Christ and members of his church. Amen!