

o This series is based on “The Baptism of Disciples Alone,” by Fred Malone.

I. Why study this topic?

1. Baptist ignorance.

- Many Baptists are ignorant of both the Baptist and paedobaptist positions on baptism, making them easy targets to be won over by a well-trained paedobaptists, who often use “covenant theology,” which the Baptists are ignorant of.
- Many Baptists during the last century have imbibed classic dispensationalism, and forsaken the covenantalism of their forebears. Many leading dispensationalists in America and England have been paedobaptists. When confronted by paedobaptist covenantalists, the dispensational Baptists are confused.

2. Pastoral losses.

- Baptist pastors and seminary students who have recovered their Reformed roots are often tempted to follow respected Reformed men like John Murray, Charles Hodge, John Owen and RC Sproul in their infant baptism. “Can they be right on so many vital issues and so wrong on this?”
- It is so tempting to think that the difference on baptism is a minor issue compared to the many important issues we hold in common with our paedobaptist brethren. This is made more attractive by the opportunities in paedobaptist churches - including warm fellowship, apparent stability, opportunities of service, rich resources, etc. Actually, infant baptism leads to a string of other errors concerning the nature of the church, church membership, the evangelism of “covenant children,” assurance of salvation, the administration of the Lord’s supper, church discipline, and so forth.
- When one becomes a minister of a church, a vow is made to be faithful to the belief and practice of the church. In a paedobaptist church, this would include the “sacrament” of infant baptism. Can a Baptist have a clear conscience administering infant baptism? If he does not administer infant baptism, is he faithful to his vow?
- We are not so narrow minded as to think that Baptist churches alone are true churches. However, we cannot afford to lose faithful pastors because of their acceptance of infant baptism.

3. Membership losses.

- Many Baptist churches have lost members to Presbyterian churches when workers are so much needed in the work of reformation and missions in Baptist circles. We are not adverse to recommending our members to attend a good paedobaptist church if there is no good Baptist church in town. However, it would be better to channel our members to help struggling Reformed Baptist churches, and plant new ones where there is none.
- Infant baptism is not the minor error, much less an acceptable alternative view, that it is often portrayed to be. It will affect one’s spiritual life, and the spiritual life of one’s children and grandchildren. The cause of biblical truth is affected now and in future generations.

4. The real issue.

- The real issue is whether infant baptism is a practice based on Scripture alone that can be substantiated by correct principles of interpretation. If it is, then Baptists are guilty of refusing to submit to God’s revealed word in this matter, and of denying a children a sacrament. If it is not, then those who practise it are guilty of denying God’s people biblical baptism, and of binding many consciences to a man-made doctrine.
- We are urged to have a clear conscience in matters of indifference, for “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom 14:22-23). When applied to a sacrament (or special ordinance), namely baptism, which is no more an indifferent matter, how much more serious it is to ensure that we do things right, for “whatever is not of faith is sin.”
 - As we see it, there are two basic problems with infant baptism. First, there is the problem of the “Regulative Principle.” This Reformed principle requires that elements of worship must 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; also the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689). Our Lord established the regulative principle of worship in His earthly teachings (John 4:21-23; Matt 28:20). The Lutheran “normative principle” and the Roman Catholic “inventive principle” are different in that they permit in worship things not specifically

prohibited in NT Scripture. Since infant baptism is not instituted and prescribed in Scripture, it is a violation of the regulative principle of worship.

- Secondly, there is the problem of biblical interpretation. Baptists and Presbyterians agree with the basic Augustinian principle that “the New is in the Old concealed; and the Old is in the New revealed.” This places an emphasis upon the NT revelation as the final determiner of instituted and regulated Christian worship versus OT worship continued by inference alone (Eph 2:20; 3:5). This principle, consistently applied, also argues against any notion of infant baptism that is based upon an erroneous “good and necessary inference” from Scripture. Baptists and Presbyterians agree that there is no express command or clear example of infant baptism in the Bible. Yet, Presbyterians like John Murray and BB Warfield would hold to infant baptism based on “good and necessary inference” from Scripture. The Westminster Confession 1:6 says, “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.” The word “consequence” means an inescapable conclusion, like the doctrine of the Trinity, whereas the inference on infant baptism of Murray and Warfield is not.

II. Affirming covenant theology.

1. Early Southern Baptist theologians such as Basil Manly Sr., William Bullein Johnson, James P Boyce, PH Mell, RBC Howell, and John L Dagg, as well as the English Baptist, CH Spurgeon, believe held to the covenant theology spelled out in the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. All of them believed that:

- There is a *Covenant of Redemption*, in which the three Persons of the Godhead entered into an agreement to save a chosen people from the fallen race. Adam was the representative head of the fallen race.
 - There is the *Covenant of Grace*, which is the historical working out of the eternal Covenant of Redemption. Adam fell in the Covenant of Works. God revealed the Covenant of Grace after the fall through the historical “covenants of promise” made with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David (Eph 2:12), in which it is shown that Christ will redeem the elect.
 - The Sinai Covenant, a covenant of promise made with Moses, was wrongly interpreted by the Pharisees as a renewal of the Covenant of Works that was made with Adam. The Sinai Covenant was abrogated by the New Covenant of Jesus Christ (Gal 3:19), since the latter is the fulfillment of the historical covenants of promise. Jesus Christ is the effectual Mediator of the New Covenant (Rom 5:12ff), and the Head of those who trust in Him, who are the children of Abraham, the true circumcision, the true Jew, and “the Israel of God” (Gal 3:14; 6:15-16; Rom 2:28-29; 4:16).
 - The Great Commission requires us to make *disciples*, baptise *them*, and teach *them* to do all that Christ commanded (Matt 28:18-20). 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 then on (Rom 6:4-5; 1Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4-6).
 - Baptism and the Lord’s supper are “sacraments (ordinances) instituted by Christ” (Westminster Confession; 1689 Baptist Confession). 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 only form of baptism which fits this principle is baptism of disciples alone, not of infants by additional and supposed “good and necessary inference.”
- = Baptism is for disciples alone (John 4:1; Acts 2:38-41).