

COVENANT (2)
Covenant Fellowship Church
Wednesday, 04 December 2024
Nelson D. Kloosterman

Last week:

- *covenant* is the “red iron” of the structure of Holy Scripture; *covenant* is the “backbone” of the body we call Sacred Scripture
- through Scripture there is *one covenant of grace* with various *administrations of the covenant* (e.g., Noahic covenant, Abrahamic covenant, Sinaitic covenant, Davidic covenant, new covenant)
- each administration of the one covenant of grace has . . .
 - . . . *a representative*: Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus Christ
 - . . . *a promise*: never destroy world via flood; be a God to A. and posterity; walk before me and live; your dynasty with rule forever; Your sacrifice will be sufficient
 - . . . *a requirement*: obey; believe
 - . . . *a sacrament* (or two): rainbow; circumcision; Sabbath; baptism and Lord’s Supper

* * * * *

The covenant of life/creation/works:

The parties: the Triune God and Adam (representing all his descendants)

The promise: eternal life in the path of obedience

The requirement: perfect and personal obedience

The penalty: death

The sacramental sign (opinions vary): the tree of life; the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

The covenant of grace:

The parties: the Triune God and Jesus Christ (representing all those who believe in Jesus Christ)
(Many identify this with the Covenant of Redemption, which the Father made with Christ)

The promises: Gen 17:7 (“I will be a God unto you and to your seed after you”); repeated as a renewal of the covenant in Jer 31:33; 32:38–40; Ezek 34:23–25; 30, 31; 36:25–28; 37:26–27; 2 Cor 6:16–18. This promise includes the promise of justification, of forgiveness of sins, of adoption, of eternal life, and of the Holy Spirit.

The requirement: faith in Jesus Christ

The New Testament sacramental signs: baptism and the Lord’s Supper

- Our two federal heads: First Adam and Second Adam
- Each “headship” involves imputation = crediting to one’s account: original sin and righteousness

From Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (299–300):

“The covenant of grace, as it is revealed in the New Testament, is essentially the same as that which governed the relation of Old Testament believers to God. It is entirely unwarranted to represent the two as forming an *essential* contrast, as is done by present day dispensationalism. This is abundantly evident from Rom. 4 and Gal. 3. If it is sometimes spoken of as a new covenant, this is sufficiently explained by the fact that its administration differs in several particulars from that of the Old Testament.”

What is “new” about the “new covenant” are these features: (1) the gospel moves outwardly, to the nations of the world; (2) the Holy Spirit is given to all believers alike, to bring the law of God into the believer’s heart; and (3)
(over, please)

the reality and possession of spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ are communicated more fully by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace.

* * * * *

The doctrine of *covenant* and *infant baptism* are connected through the theological understanding of God's covenant relationship with believers and their children.

In the Old Testament, God established a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, which included *circumcision* as a sign of the covenant for male children on the eighth day after birth. This practice symbolized being included in God's chosen community before the individual could make a personal profession of faith.

The majority of Christian churches view baptism in the New Testament as the *New Covenant equivalent to circumcision*. Just as Jewish children were circumcised as part of the covenant community, these churches argue that children of believing parents should be baptized as a sign of their inclusion in the Christian community.

The theological reasoning is that:

- God's covenant promises extend to believers' children
- Baptism represents entrance into the Christian community
- Children are considered part of the covenant community by virtue of their parents' faith: 1 Cor 7:14
- Baptism symbolizes God's grace, which precedes individual understanding

This theological interpretation contrasts with the tradition of believer's baptism, which require a personal profession of faith before baptism. The covenant theology approach sees baptism as more about God's promise and grace than about the individual's immediate comprehension.

It is important to distinguish between salvational infant baptism and covenantal infant baptism. The former is practiced by the Roman Catholic Church and Lutheran churches, which teach that baptism regenerates (thus: baptism saves). The covenantal infant baptism view emphasizes that baptism signifies and seals the promises of the covenant and proclaims the demands of the covenant. Moreover, in contrast to believer's baptism, which points to the activity of the individual involved, covenantal infant baptism points to the activity of God in relation to the person in covenant.

Here are specific biblical references supporting the covenant basis for infant baptism:

Old Testament Covenant References:

- Genesis 17:7 - God's covenant with Abraham includes "your descendants after you"
- Genesis 17:10-12 - Circumcision as a covenant sign given to children
- Deuteronomy 6:4-7 - Emphasizes passing covenant faith to children

New Testament Supporting Passages:

- Acts 2:38-39 - Peter's Pentecost sermon states the promise is "for you and your children"
- 1 Corinthians 7:14 - Suggests children of believing parents are "holy" or set apart
- 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 - *all Israel* was baptized into Moses and drank from the spiritual Rock, which was Christ
- Colossians 2:11-12 - Draws parallel between circumcision and baptism, implying similar covenant inclusion

Theological Interpretation Verses:

- Matthew 19:14 - Jesus welcomes children into God's kingdom
- Mark 10:16 - Jesus blesses children, suggesting their spiritual significance

These verses form the biblical foundation for the covenant theology understanding of infant baptism, highlighting God's inclusive promise to believers and their children.