

## **Means of Grace: Baptism**

Now let us turn our attention to apostolic teaching. But let us first summarize: baptism is not essential for salvation. I say that because of 1 Corinthians 1 and some of the things Paul says there. I could not imagine him saying these things concerning preaching of the Word, for example. “Is Christ divided?” verse 13, “Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name.” Then he remembers, yes, “I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that I do not remember if I baptized anyone else. For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel,” and so forth. Now granted, it is an extreme situation. And people are making these outlandish claims or he never would have said this. But it is interesting. I cannot imagine him saying, in verse 14 for example, “I am thankful I did not preach the Gospel to any of you.” I cannot conceive of Paul saying that. But he could say, “I am thankful I did not baptize any of you.”

Now again, the reason is that they were regarding baptism done by Paul as more important than somebody who was not an apostle and so forth. What a mess. It is a mixed up group. And then in verse 17, could you imagine him saying, “For Christ did not send me to preach the Gospel?” No, you could not imagine it. In fact, he says that He did send him to preach the Gospel. Because of those qualifications, I would insist that baptism, although important—and in fact more important than the average evangelical Christian allows and understands—is nevertheless not essential for salvation.

Regarding baptism by the Holy Spirit, we have looked at 1 Corinthians 12:13 earlier in the course, and here I will summarize. It speaks of the baptism of the Church by Christ with the Spirit. In Ephesians 4:5 we learn among the unities of the Church is this: “there is one baptism.” I understand water baptism to be one of the foundational unities of the Christian church, and I think we should so regard it. I do think it is a mistake to repeat baptisms, to have people being baptized multiple times. I classify, and I did before, these disagreements over the mode of baptism under “wrong opinions.” And I am perfectly prepared to admit that either you or I have a wrong opinion on some of these matters. That does influence the way I regard these disagreements. That is, I would admit it is not crystal clear. So I want to be charitable when I might be wrong. On other things where I am stronger, I hope I have even clearer biblical evidence. But I would place disagreements concerning the mode of Christian baptism under wrong opinions. I would hope that you would do the same.

In regards to baptism for the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29, I have to just be honest and say I do not understand what that means. I think we have lost the meaning of it. Paul understood, and so did his readers, the Corinthians. And we can even say how the thing works, in its context. He is arguing for the reality of the resurrection of the dead. But we simply have lost the historical reality to which this referred. We do not know exactly what baptism for the dead was. I have heard some meanings given to it. It speaks of people taking the place of those who have departed in the church. Maybe so, but we have no clear understanding of what that text means. We should not be discouraged. It certainly is not a significant thing. By the way, in passing I will mention the Mormon Church. Show me a puzzling text like this, and I will show you the occasion for a cult to be very sure of themselves and to pronounce on the meaning of it. According to Mormon theology of course, in their mother church in Salt Lake City, people are being baptized for us even. But they are being baptized by proxy, according to their understanding of this passage, which certainly is not what the passage means.

In terms of baptism, if you think we had controversy before, you have not seen anything yet. Again, hopefully Christian love and charity will prevail. I do agree that good people disagree. And when I teach on infant baptism in the Presbyterian Church, I preface it by saying that some things are more sure than

others, and this is not one of them. And I begin by expressing unity of the faith with my Baptist brothers. I think that is important. Nevertheless, let us examine the subject and see what we can do. When I get to infant baptism, my goals are to fortify those who believe in it and, for my dear Baptist friends, to help you understand. That is all—to help you understand.

On believer's baptism, Millard Erickson, a fine Baptist theologian, puts forth the following arguments. Quoting from his *Christian Theology*, "One of the most significant considerations is the lack of any positive New Testament indication that infants were baptized." I admit he has something to this argument, although I am going to return later on and say that the household baptism in Acts and 1 Corinthians could easily involve little ones. Is it a surefire argument from my side? No, it is not, and I admit it to you. It comes down to the philosophical matter of the burden of proof. Who assumes the burden of proof? But we will get to that later. Second, "The case for baptism of infants rests upon either the view that baptism is a means of saving grace or the view that baptism, like Old Testament circumcision, is a sign and seal of entrance into the covenant. Since both of these views were found to be inadequate, we must conclude that infant baptism is untenable." I agree with him that baptism is not a means of saving grace per se. I disagree with him because I do see it as a sign and seal of entrance into the covenant. And I will try to demonstrate that. Again, I ask you to respectfully lend me your ears and do the best you can at trying to understand.

In terms of infant baptism, I respect your right to disagree with me based on its biblical basis. I have three points. (1) The Abrahamic covenant is a spiritual covenant and is the basis of the new covenant. I will be back with the details in a moment. (2) In this Abrahamic/new covenant, God enters into a relationship with His people as individuals, and also as families. (3) It is God's will that the initiatory rite, the sign and seal of the Abrahamic covenant and that of the new covenant, be applied to believers and their seed and their children. Let us now go through this one point at a time. I regard the first two as simply biblical theology. The third one is not as clear, but I will argue for it on the basis of the first two and again on some biblical data.

Number one: the Abrahamic covenant is a spiritual covenant and is the basis of the new covenant. It was given to Israel as a nation, I do not deny it. It did involve a land promise. That is true, but also if you say it is only national or only having to deal with land, you certainly are mistaken. It is a spiritual covenant. Look at Genesis Chapter 17. Genesis 15:6 is where it says, "And Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." The NIV study Bible chapter heading for Genesis 17 says, "The Covenant of Circumcision." We read this in verse 7: "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." This is a spiritual promise. It is not merely land, nation, and national prosperity. It involves those things in the Old Testament period of infancy, of adolescence before the time of maturity comes. But there is a pledge on God's part to be God to Abraham and his children. I am not even worrying about the children now; I am just trying to show spiritual covenant.

Furthermore, according to the New Testament, the covenant God made with Abraham is the basis of the new covenant, which Christ ratified by His blood. As we turn to Galatians 3, I will remind you again of Jesus' words at that last supper: "This cup," He said, "is the new covenant in my blood." Jesus' death ratified the new covenant. In Galatians, Paul is opposing Judaizers who say one must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved. And they are claiming that Paul is a cultist who has brought a new religion and is violating the Old Testament. Not so, Paul says. I am not a cultist. I am a minister of the new covenant, which is a fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham. You Judaizers have wrested the Mosaic covenant out of its biblical context. It was given by God in the context of the

covenant God made with Abraham, which was a covenant based on grace through faith in the Redeemer to come. Why was the law given then? Paul says it was given as a sin detector. He uses two images to describe the law: as a jailer and a tutor to bring us to Christ. So you have taken the Mosaic covenant, which is in the framework of the Abrahamic, and instead you have made it the epitome of the Old Testament law keeping. You have missed the point, Paul says. The epitome is grace and faith and the coming Redeemer within that context Paul gives. God gave the Mosaic covenant to show people their sins and their need of grace and faith in the Redeemer.

Galatians 3:15 says, “Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.” The Scripture does not say, “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person who is Christ. What I mean is this. The law introduced 430 years later does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. Paul views the Mosaic covenant within the framework of the prior Abrahamic covenant. Thus, as Paul explains it, the new covenant he preaches is a fulfillment of the covenant that God made with Abraham.

It is the same in Hebrew 6. Apart from any notion of Christian baptism, this is simply biblical theology of the Old and New Testaments. I am not playing any tricks with you. As a matter of fact, when I gave this lecture many years ago, one of my Baptist students asked if I would come and give the first two points in his church. He said that we think as individuals so much—we are so individualistic—that we do not have a theology of the family undergirding our family life. I told him I would be happy to do that. And in that context I did not mention baptism, but I mentioned points one and two. And he thought it did the church a great deal of good for them to see themselves as Christian families and as special in God’s sight because of God’s covenantal promises made to the family. Because of this, because the Abrahamic covenant is a spiritual covenant—because it is the basis for the new covenant—there is a fundamental unity between the Old and New Testaments.

Second, in this Abrahamic/new covenant, God enters into a relationship with His people as individuals, and that is never done away with. God’s promises to Israel, as a nation and as families, never undercuts the notion of individual responsibility. And in fact, the Israelites often failed on that count. But God also enters into the covenant with His people as families. In Genesis 17:7 we read that God said, “I will make my covenant with you. An everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendents after you for the generations to come.” So it is a covenant God makes with Abraham as an individual and with Sarah as an individual, and they have to believe to be saved. Genesis 15:6 says, “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness.” He is used in Romans 4 and in Galatians 3 as an example of a believer. But my point is that God deals with His people as individuals. That is never nullified. But He also deals with them as families. God made a promise to Abraham “to be God to you and your descendents after you for the generations to come.” He is so emphatic that He is the God of your generations after you, and so forth. Here we have a promise given not only to individuals, but also to families.

It is such a family enterprise that Psalm 103 communicates. Psalm 103 makes promises to grandparents, to godly covenant keeping grandparents, in contrast to the transience of human life. We are here one day, and we are gone tomorrow. Psalm 103:17 says, “From everlasting to everlasting, the Lord’s love is with those who fear him and his righteousness.” It has to mean His saving righteousness in this context. It is parallel to His love. “His righteousness is with their children’s children,” their grandchildren. Automatically, no, but with those who keep His covenant and remember to obey His precepts. Covenant keeping parents can claim the promises of God, that He might work in their children, and not only so,

but that He might work in their children's children. If we turn our back on God's covenant, if we are covenant breakers, then we can interrupt that good line of God's grace. This is not a promise for covenant breakers, but it is for those who keep His covenant and remember to obey His precepts. We can thank the Lord that His love is with us and His righteousness with our children's children.

Now that was an Israelite promise; I just carried it over to the new covenant. Is that wrong? Has God now withdrawn His grace and promises to families? Does He deal with us as individuals? Of course He does. But He deals with us as families as well. Look at Acts 2 as we move to the new covenant. In fact, you might call this the first sermon of the new covenant, officially anyway, at Pentecost when Peter preaches the Gospel. "What shall we do?" the people cry out as the Holy Spirit brings conviction. Peter replied, in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." I am not positive whether the promise is forgiveness or the Holy Spirit. But whichever one it is, it implies the other, so it is not a big problem. The promise is for you and your children, that is one group, and for those who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call. For Peter, a Hebrew Christian, to talk like this shows that he understands God's covenant relation to be sustained in the new covenant. Right away, he says, the promise is for you and your children. Did the children not have to believe for the promise to be good? Of course they did. And the Jews in the old covenant had to believe too, in order for them to benefit from the covenant. They had to circumcise their hearts in order for them to be saved and not merely wear the outward badge of circumcision.

Let us look at 1 Corinthians 7. Here Paul envisions a situation that Jesus never addressed in His ministry. Two unsaved people marry, two Pagans marry, and one of them becomes saved. I could tell you what was happening at Corinth. Let us just say it is a Christian woman, now, with an unsaved husband. She looks around the church and she says, "Some of these godly guys are really sharp. And here is my old Pagan husband." Well, she thinks she has a little leading of the Spirit to leave the Pagan husband. No, Paul says. You cannot do that. That is not God's will. In verse 12 it says, "To the rest, I say this. I, not the Lord..." This does not mean Paul is making it up or that it is not God's Word. The meaning is I, not the Lord Jesus Christ in His public ministry. That is the comment up in verse 10. "Not I, but the Lord"—he means Jesus—"preceded me in this." Now Paul gives information that Jesus never addressed. It was never within His purview of His ministry to the lost sheep of Israel, to the house of Israel.

"If any brother [Christian man] has a wife who is not a believer, and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her." If there are two Pagans, one of them becoming saved does not automatically give that person the right to divorce the unbeliever. They were thinking that way in Corinth. "And if a woman has a husband,"—implied Christian woman—"who is not a believer, and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him, for the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife." Does this mean automatically saved? No, there are three categories here, curiously. "And the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy." I am not saying this means automatically saved. What is this holiness? What is the sanctification? The next verse says, "if the unbeliever leaves." So we have three categories. We have the unbeliever. We have the unclean person. That means an unsaved person with no Christian family and not a spouse of a Christian or child of a Christian. That person would be considered unclean, unsaved, unsanctified. We have the brother or sister, the believer, he calls them. This means Christians. You have Christians, you have unsaved people, then you have a third category. The unsaved spouse of a Christian man or woman and the children with only one Christian parent are called here "sanctified" or "holy." I am not, please do not misunderstand me, saying they are automatically saved. I am saying this is very obvious: that the Old Testament notion of God relating to families, and not merely individuals, here

carries over into the new covenant. It seems undeniable to me. How else do you account for this sanctified unsaved spouse or these holy children? Again, I am not saying they are saved. I am saying they stand in a different relation to God than if there were not Christians in that home whatsoever. What am I saying? God is a God who is a covenant God, who relates to individuals and to their families.

What benefit does Isaac have in the Old Testament? He has got (I am using New Testament language now) Christian parents. How is he different than a Canaanite kid whose parents are Pagans? Is he any more saved? No, he is born unsaved too. The difference is that God's grace is in his home. He has got the Word of God. He has the Holy Spirit in his home. He has godly examples and presumably other people praying for him. It is the same in this New Testament context. The unsaved spouse is not automatically saved, but he or she is in a special relationship to God and has a greater opportunity to be saved. You could say it that way, because the Holy Spirit is in that home in a special way. The grace of God—the promise of God—is there. Those children have greater opportunity to be saved as well. This is covenantal truth. It shows that in the new covenant as well, God has not withdrawn His grace from families. His grace is greater, and what makes a Christian family distinctive and very special to God is not what wonderful Christian husbands we are, although at times we do a good job. It is not what wonderful Christian wives there are in the Christian home, although at times they do very well. It is not even what wonderful Christian parents we are, or what wonderful Christian children we have. What makes a Christian family special is the Lord God who has promised us His grace, who has covenanted Himself with us. That is what makes it special. Under Him, yes, we do want to be covenant keeping parents and spouses, and we regard our marriage covenant as holy. We cannot easily discard it. And our children are special in God's sight. Is it because they are better behaved in the world? No, sometimes they are not. But our children are special in God's sight because He has promised to be God to us and to them. The Abrahamic covenant continues into the new covenant.

I have not mentioned infant baptism yet; I am going to shortly. But what I have said so far, you should accept, I would argue, as simply the teaching of the Bible. I am concerned, apart from the baptism question, that pastors preach on the family passages in Ephesians 5 and 6 and Colossians 3 and it comes across like this: law, law, law. Husbands love your wives. Wives submit to your husbands. Parents raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It is all true, but it is taken out of context. And I sometimes have winced in the past, thinking of a Christian man or woman exactly in the 1 Corinthians 7 situation. Here is a Christian woman. She is living with her unsaved husband. They both were unsaved, presumably, and now she comes to know the Lord. Maybe she married out of God's will, disobeying God and marrying an unsaved man. And here comes a message for her. The message says, "Jesus is your Lord, submit to your husband." Well, she does need to hear that, but that could be a hard message for her. You say, "What would you preach?" The same truth, but in the context of Colossians 3, which is Colossians 1 and 2. And you preach in the context of Ephesians 5, which is Ephesians 1, 2, and 3 especially, and 4 as well. What is the context in those earlier chapters of those epistles? We have a rehearsal of the mighty deeds of God on behalf of His people. In a word, we have grace. And it is altogether two different things to say: "Christian woman, submit to your unsaved husband because God told you to." It is true, but how much higher, how much greater incentive is there to tell her, "Christian woman, Ephesians 1 tells us that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have loved you with an eternal love and will keep you saved forever." Ephesians 2 says you were spiritually dead, but God made you alive in Christ. Also according to Ephesians 2, you were a Gentile, a dog of a Gentile, separated from God and the covenants and promises of God. Now He has brought you close in Christ Jesus. And now, as a response to His grace, yes, show your love for God by submitting even to your unsaved husband. This is the same message, but in an entirely different context. What I am trying to say is that we have inadvertently, I think, given legalistic teaching on the Christian family by forgetting the grace of God and forgetting the covenant of God, which is what those earlier chapters of this letter are all about. Yes,

there is law. Grace does not nullify law. Grace establishes law. But I have to tell you the incentive for obeying the Lord is not just that He is our Lord and Master. It is that, and He is our Lord and Master, but the greatest incentive for living the Christian life, in all of its particulars including family responsibilities, is gratitude for God's sovereign grace.

It has been asked about 1 Corinthians 7 here; is it not more the covenant of marriage that is emphasized rather than Paul speaking for the sake of the children? I would not set them against each other. The main thing that is emphasized is the divine element, the covenant of God. It is not just because of marriage that the unsaved spouse is holy, for example. You could have two unsaved people being married and nobody is holy. What is assumed is the covenantal relation, that God has promised to be God, to the Christian and to the spouse and children. I might say by word of warning, in terms of our own teaching our children and the things of the Lord, covenants cut two ways. There are covenant blessings, but there are also covenant curses. In terms of the Lord's Supper situation, read 1 Corinthians 11 with this in mind. They were reaping the curses of God's covenant. God is not somebody to trifle with, and because of abuse at the Lord's Table, they were suffering physical maladies and even death. They were saved, but in fact God even taking their lives was a way, if I read that chapter right, that they would not be condemned along with the world. But it was a hard lesson indeed. So, a small part of our discipleship of our children, and let me emphasize that it is a small part, is that there are great privileges that are theirs because they have even just one Christian father or mother. But if both parents are Christians, how much more is the grace of God in your home. You children ought to be told that God expects them to walk in the ways of His commandments and so forth and to put their faith in Christ. They ought to go and live for God and not play games with Him and be hypocrites, because if they turn away from the things of God, woe unto them. It would be better for them never to have any Christian parents than for them to be children of the covenant, which they are whether you baptize your children or not. They are covenant children. For them to turn away, woe unto them. That plays a small part in our teaching of our sons. It is not the big focus. The big focus is on the grace of God, but they need to be taught about apostasy and the danger of it. They need to be told that they come into the world as sinners, but that God's claim is already on their lives, and they are not neutral in that way. No, they are sinful. But He has claimed them as His own. And if they walk away from Him, they are in serious trouble indeed. Worse than if they were merely Pagan children.

One might ask how this applies to divorced people when one of them becomes a Christian, as well as the children of divorced parents when one parent becomes a Christian after divorce. You have an unusual situation. Let us say it is the mother, and she comes to know the Lord, and she has the children with her; she has a Christian home. It is not as complete as we would like, but certainly those children are better off than with having no Christian parent whatsoever. I would say God's grace ordinarily—I do not say that to take His grace for granted—but ordinarily, His grace goes down the family tree. Jonathon Edwards' family is incredible for generation after generation after generation of godly people who are just strong pillars in American society—preachers and doctors and other people doing good. They gave tremendous testimony to God's grace.

Sometimes His grace shoots across the family tree in brothers and sisters and so forth, and even sometimes up to parents and grandparents. So we cannot control His grace, but the normal state of affairs, by His promise and covenant, is that He will keep going down the tree as we are faithful parents, grandparents, and, Lord willing, great grandparents and so forth. May it be true in the cases of our own individual families.

The third point is that it is God's will. So points one and two I regard as simply biblical teaching. Point three is a deduction, not entirely without basis. It is God's will that the initiatory right, the sign and seal

of the Abrahamic covenant and that of the new covenant, be applied to believers and their children. I am positive that it was true for the Abrahamic covenant. And here is a test case, oh Baptist friends, for this question that comes often. What in the world could baptism mean to a child? What in the world did circumcision mean to Isaac? It meant nothing to Isaac. So here is what I am saying. It is wrong to say God would never apply something, assign, a sacrament to a child that the child could not understand. Well, you could say the New Testament has changed things, arguing for discontinuity between the Testaments. But you cannot deny that that is how God did it in the Old Testament, because He did. The children were eight days old, the male children, when God told their parents to circumcise them. Plainly, it was the command of God in the Old Testament. So, the fact that Isaac did not understand did not keep God from doing it. What was supposed to happen? Obviously Isaac was to grow up and hear God's Word from his parents.

Now here is the stretch, the move, the deduction. Under the new covenant, the books of Acts and 1 Corinthians talk about the baptism of believers and their households. Lydia is an example. In Acts 16:14 it says, "The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited them into her home." If you want somebody to come into your home and not despise your fellowship, you cannot do better than her words. It is pretty hard to turn somebody down who says something like that. It is a household or family baptism. Can I prove that she had an infant? I cannot. If it said, "and she had her infant daughter in her arms," we would not be having this discussion. We would all agree. So it is not crystal clear, I admit it, but here is what I am saying. If you read the book of Acts from the perspective of the Old Testament, it takes on a different light. For thousands of years, for millennia, God had commanded the Jews to apply the sign and seal of the old covenant to their eight-day-old infant sons. And now in the New Testament we have household baptisms. It is the same thing for the Philippian jailer in verses 31-34: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. You and your household." Now, I can understand that verse. It does not mean automatically, but it does indeed involve this covenant relation between the head of the household, the father, and the rest of his family. God makes a promise to the rest of the family. They have to believe for the promise to be fulfilled. But God does make promises to families. Verse 33 says, "At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds, and immediately he and all his family were baptized." I am going to suggest immersion might not work in this particular context. I do not know where they could go so quickly in the middle of the night to be immersed. But maybe they were. It would not disprove my theology if they were. But notice, and here is my point, that he and his family were baptized, and we already read 1 Corinthians 1:16: Also remember, Paul says, I did baptize one more person and his household: Stephanas (or Stephen).

Here is my argument. How would the first Christians, who were consistently Jewish Christians, know not to apply the New Testament sign to their children? That is how they had thought ever since they were little kids, and their fathers thought that way and their grandfathers, all the way back for generation after generation. They thought that way. Here is a new covenant. Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost, said, "The promise is for you and your children," and so forth. And in that light, the household baptisms could well have included infants. Even if they did not, it indicates a mindset that the family is to be presented to the Lord as for baptism. What I am trying to say is the Jewish Christians would need to be told by God not to baptize their little ones since circumcision had been applied to the boys for every generation, at least when they obeyed God. Sometimes they disobeyed God and did not do it. But when they obeyed God, baby boys were circumcised ever since God made His promise to Abraham.

My argument is not foolproof; I admit it, and that is why I do not turn from fellowship those people who do not baptize their infants. I am saying, in the absence of a clear command for them not to do it, I

assume, because of the silence, that they would continue doing what they had been doing in the past. An argument from silence, by its very nature, is not foolproof. That is why there is some disagreement here. It comes down to a matter of the burden of proof, as John Frame shows in his book, *The Doctrine of The Knowledge of God*. Under burden of proof, under logic, if you emphasize the discontinuity between the Testaments, then you say they would have to be given a command to baptize their children. OK, that is the Baptist argument. If you emphasize the continuity between the Testaments, you say, “No, as Jewish Christians they would ordinarily apply the sign and seal to their little children.” By the way, it is greater now in the New Testament, because it applies to females as well as males. The Bible knows none of this female circumcision—mutilation that is practiced—in some places. It is a sad thing indeed. The Bible knows none of that. But the new covenant is greater than the old in that it extends to females as well as males in terms of the sign of the covenant. How would the Jewish Christians know not to apply the sign to their children? Do you understand better at least how somebody could do such an outrageous thing, oh Baptist friends?

My Baptist friend may say, “I am following along this reasoning; it makes sense. I may not switch tomorrow from being a Baptist to being an infant baptizer, but I at least can understand how you people at Covenant Seminary, who are so biblical in other ways, can make a case for this. I could understand better.” You know that is good, and also I appreciate your charitable attitude that you are not denying me fellowship and acknowledging that matters are not crystal clear. “But this does not seem to square with what we saw about the significance of baptism. It signified union with Christ and forgiveness of sins. Does it have that significance for children?” The two models to use to answer almost any one of the questions are, what about Isaac and the parallel with the Word of God? According to Colossians 2, spiritual circumcision and Christian baptism overlap in meaning. They both mean the forgiveness of sins in the cutting away, the removal, of the spiritual foreskin of the flesh, as Paul says. There is an overlap in meaning there. It is undeniable.

So, if circumcision signified cleansing, and it did, then what did it signify to Isaac? God commanded it for Isaac to be circumcised at eight days old. The answer is, the meaning was the same, although he could not understand it. He wanted to grow up in that family, and his parents were to describe to him why his body was different than some Pagan bodies and what that meant. And he was responsible to believe in the Lord that it might be counted to him for righteousness, even as it was for his father. And that he would be circumcised inwardly, Romans 2, at the end. “The true Judaism is circumcision of the heart by the Spirit, and not merely outwardly.” By the way, parallel with the Word, you could be circumcised and not be saved. You can partake in the Lord’s Supper and not be saved. You could hear the Gospel and not be saved. Nevertheless, circumcision has great value, Paul says in Romans. Likewise so does Christian baptism.

So tell me what circumcision means; run it by Isaac and Abraham and you are going to have the same parallel. That is, it is not a legitimate reason to reject him from baptism to say an infant cannot understand, because Isaac could not understand anything, and God commanded it to be applied to him. The meaning is the same, but he has got to grow up and understand it. Obviously, it did not prohibit God from having it apply to him before he could understand himself. God had such a concern for the family that He wanted that initiation rite performed on eight-day-old infants, even before they came to years of understanding.

It is a very good question indeed. When you think these things through, first think of Isaac and the difference between him and the Canaanite kids, and number two, the parallel with the Word of God; if you do this most answers then will fall out.

One might have questions about infants who die. Let me just in general talk about infant baptism. I do not understand infant baptism as saving our children per se. No, I do not understand it as being automatically regenerative. I am in good company with John Calvin at Geneva in reaction to what he considered Roman Catholic abuse, which was to rush the dying infant to the baptismal font. No, Calvin said he deliberately did not have the children baptized, the ones who were dying. Why? He said it is not the water that saves them, rather it is the fact that God is their father by covenant oath, and it is blood that saves them. He knows of where he speaks. He and his wife lost a son, Jacque, at birth, or shortly thereafter. So he knew how to cry with people who wept over that thing. And he did not have Jacque rushed to the baptismal font. Instead, our confidence that Jacque is in heaven, he said, is that he has a Father who has made a promise to him, because He made a promise to us, his parents. Because Corinthians 7 says, “our children are holy.” Now it did not mean that baptism automatically saved him, and it does not deny the fact that covenant children can grown up and be covenant breakers and turn away from the Lord. But it does mean that God’s normal way of working is through the Christian parents to save the children and so forth. And also, it enables me, as administrator of the Gospel, to bring hope to people whose babies do die, if there is even one Christian parent.

In my book, *Hell on Trial*, I address this in the last chapter as one of three questions that I have been asked over and over again when people learned I was studying about hell. Concerning the children of the unsaved, it is a hard topic. In the book I do not dogmatize, but I say I do not have the same confidence. As a minister of the Gospel, I can do a funeral for an infant who died who had a Christian father or mother, and give real hope to that family.

I am not saying the infants of unbelievers are all lost, but I am just saying God does not give me confidence in His Word that they are saved, so I just cannot make a pronouncement. I might like to think that they are saved, but my opinion does not count for a whole lot when God shuts His holy mouth. The verses you will point to to give you confidence are always in a covenantal context. David going to his child, Jesus’ words about the little children, and so forth.