

**COMMENTARY ON
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 19)**

We continue with Dr. Clark's eighth "Ecclesiastical" (or Ecclesiological) category of theses.

8:9. The proclamation of the Gospel is the divinely ordained means by which the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of members of the covenant of grace.

This slanted thesis is the result of equating the conditions of the New Covenant with the make-up of a visible local church, as if God makes the New Covenant with all in a local Presbyterian church. The thesis can be amended to read that "the Gospel is the ordained means of the Spirit's begetting faith in the hearts of the Elect," since the New Covenant is only made with the regenerate who "know the Lord" according to Jeremiah's definition of it, and by which he carefully distinguishes it from the Mosaic system. (31:31-35). Clark's phrase "members of the covenant of grace" just means "members of a local Presbyterian church." Jeremiah expressly states that *there is no need to evangelize the members* of the New Covenant, as the Prophets needed to under the Old. There are *no verses* in the Bible to suggest that there are any non-believers in the New Covenant, although any local church might contain mere professors and hypocrites of various kinds. Anyone still "under the Law" is under its *curse*, and is therefore *lost* until joining with the New Covenant by faith in Christ.

10. There are two signs and seals (sacraments) of the covenant of grace, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Change "covenant of grace" to "New Covenant" and the thesis is correct. It should be pointed out however, that strictly speaking, the "seal" of the New Covenant seems to be regeneration as the effect of the "seal of the Spirit" in Paul's thought (2 Cor 1:22, Eph 1:13, 4:30). One verse (Rom 4:4) calls circumcision a "sign and seal" of the Abrahamic Covenant, but no such language is used in the NT about baptism, although it could perhaps be argued that the Lord's Supper was designed as a "sign" of that Covenant at its original announcement (Luke 22:17-20). Specifically, it is never said that "baptism replaces circumcision" (not even in Col 2, often quoted for it), because Paul shows that circumcision is a *type* of regeneration replaced *not by yet another type*, but by the fulfillment or antitype, which is the regeneration of all in the New Covenant; shadow first, substance after. Then, Baptism *points back* as circumcision *pointed forward*, to the reality of which both are types only. The Lord's Supper *points back* to the Cross, and *points forward* to the Second Coming (1 Cor 11:23-26). The traditional covenantalist language of "signs and seals" is the result of the attempt to make the two "administrations" of the "covenant of grace" look more symmetrical than they are in the Bible. This symmetry is an illusion. The New *replaces* the Old. It is not a fresh version of it. There is no question however, that under the New Covenant, Baptism and the Supper are "means of grace" because they are acts of obedience with blessings of grace flowing from that obedience. The fact that the notion of a "means" (medium or mechanism) of grace has an unfortunate history, and is beset by connotations in Romanism related to sacramentalism, does not alter this. But they are not the only means by which grace comes to us; preaching, prayer, and Bible reading could be mentioned as "means" of grace in the believer's life. Thousands of believers would testify to the power of reading Christian biography or apologetics, also. We must not treat the "sacraments" as exclusive pipes to conduct grace to us as if it were a fluid.

In the covenantalist tradition, there has always been a level of uncertainty about the status of their physical descendants as "covenant children." Both infant communion and a "half-way covenant" have been proposed to solve this problem in various circumstances.

11. *The sacraments signify and seal the identity with and union of the believer with the death and burial of Christ.*

If this statement is correct (and it sure looks correct to me), how can it be true of an infant-in-arms? This proposition reveals the fundamental problem of *equating physical descendants with "covenant children."* This error is the reason Abraham Kuyper insisted that in the Dutch Reformed churches, members should assume their children are regenerate and raise them accordingly (the "presumptive regeneration" theory). This of course, precludes addressing them as the unbelieving kids they are, and thus evangelizing them. Baptists know their own kids better than that. We tell them that unless they believe in Christ they will be lost. You can't go to heaven on your parents' ticket.

The Lutherans (or at least Luther himself) taught that when a baby is "baptized," God regenerates the baby and gives it saving faith in the cradle (Yes, he actually did teach that). When I lived in Norway I attended an IVF conference at which a Lutheran Bishop "preached the Gospel" to the attendees (mostly Lutheran college kids). He told them that they had to remember their *BARNE-TRØ*, or "child-faith" that they had had in the cradle, to fulfill the Scripture, "Except you become *as a little child* you cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven." [No, I'm not kidding.]

Let me make again the key point about all those in the New Covenant according to Jeremiah: they don't need to be told to "Know the Lord" because *they all know Me* from the least to the greatest (31:34). The NC is "not like" the Mosaic, "which they broke," many being *unbelievers*.

So Baptists should agree with thesis 11, but Presbyterians shouldn't. Perhaps they should agree with Luther that the baby has saving faith in the cradle, being a "believer." Read that thesis again. It definitely says "believer." Covenantalism is definitely not the evangelical Gospel.

12. *As signs and seals of the covenant of grace, they are Gospel not Law.*

Change "the covenant of grace" to "the New Covenant," and NC thinkers can agree.

13. *The sacraments are signs to all and seals to the elect.*

Several things must follow from this clever distinction worthy of a true scholastic; I understand how baptism might be a "sign" to an unbeliever, but it cannot be also a "seal" to a baby who later apostatizes. What would it be sealing? Thesis 11 said they are seals of "the union of *the believer* with the death of Christ." Would the Covenantalist like to add that the non-believing baby is sealed in union with the resurrection of Christ also? That the baby has "died with Christ" as in Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12? Recall also that Col 2:11-15 is one of the main passages used by Catholics to prove the baptismal regeneration of infants....

"Seals to the elect"? Yes indeed. They are both uniformly presented in Scripture as acts of believing obedience. They are acts of "*faith* working through love" (Gal 5:6).

We should not be surprised then, that B. B. Warfield admitted that there is no evidence of infant baptism in the New Covenant, so we must go to the Old Covenant for evidence of it. Naturally, he was referring to circumcision. "Brutus was an honorable man," and Warfield was an honest theologian.

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