COMMENTARY ON
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 20)

We are now ¾ of the way through Clark's 140 Theses on Covenantalism. The end is in sight.

8:14 The covenant signs and seals are a blessing to the elect but come also with jeopardy to the reprobate.

According to Paul, the Lord's Supper "comes" with more than "jeopardy." It comes with "damnation" to the unbeliever (1 Cor 11:26-29, *krima*, judgement). The reprobate (the non-elect) are not in "jeopardy." They are "condemned already" according to Christ (Jn 3:18). Of course, nobody can *know* that another person is not elect, because the human heart is always accessible to the Holy Spirit until that person dies. The visible (local) church is *a gathering of believers* throughout the NT text. The unbeliever who happens to get involved is an anomaly, not a natural necessary condition. In a state church, he is an inevitable and legitimate member. That's why the "half-way covenant" was invented. If "the promise is to you [believers] and your children" [whether believers or no], why stop with the children who happen to become believers? The "promise" (*i.e.*, the covenantal status) must include grandchildren also, even if they are not confessing Christ. The half-way covenant was not a stupid idea; it was a logical extension of the Church as a "covenantal community." This is the reason Baptists ask Presbyterians why in a "household baptism" (as in Acts), if non-believing children are baptized, why not unbelieving uncles and slaves in that household ?? The Bible doesn't teach "covenant objectivity": it teaches *believers'* baptism and nothing else. Only believers' baptism is covenantally objective.

15. Because of the visible/invisible distinction (internal/external) it is possible to participate in the covenant signs and seals to one's harm (I Cor 10, Heb 6,10).

This is correct even on a New Covenant Theology basis, since Christians are saved under the biblical New Covenant, not under an imaginary "one and eternal covenant."

16. The covenant signs and seals are means of grace for all believers, whereby their faith is genuinely strengthened and their sanctification advanced.

Change "covenant signs" to "New Covenant signs" and this is correct.

17. Because they deny the internal/external distinction, advocates of "covenant objectivity" teach a view of the sacraments which is virtually indistinguishable from the Roman ex opere operato *view.*

This is a criticism of the Federal Vision theory (of some recent Presbyterians), but it's hard to see what rational objection Clark could have to it, since he already believes the essential idea that all in the church are also in "the covenant." FV advocates make a scholastic distinction between those who are "covenantally elect" and those finally saved as the "decreed elect." This is just a blending of the visible and the invisible Church on the same principle as was National Israel, a nation elect for certain purposes, containing an elect Remnant who were invariably saved. But there can be no "remnant" in the Church of Ephesians 1:3-23, which according to Paul and Jeremiah, contains only regenerate persons under the New Covenant. The logical result of blending the visible with the invisible Church is indeed Romanist Catholicism. Federal Vision invites state-churchism, as do other forms of theonomism. It also depends on the "new perspective on Paul" notion that justification is not about *entering* the covenant, but about *staying in* it. This makes no sense at all to an orthodox calvinistic Baptist.

18. In distinction from the Lord's Supper, Baptism is the sign and seal of initiation into the covenant of grace.

Change "covenant of grace" to "New Covenant," and this thesis is correct.

19. In the history of redemption, baptism succeeded circumcision as the sign and seal of initiation.

There is no Scripture for this theory. Traditional covenantalism claims that in the new "administration of the covenant of grace," baptism "replaces" circumcision. This is clearly false. Circumcision was *a type fulfilled* in New Covenant regeneration. Baptism also depicts regeneration, but it is assumed on the basis of a "credible profession of faith," to have already happened, Even if the usual covenantalist theory were correct, the obvious differences between the OC and the New would preclude baptizing babies, as Paul Jewett (a covenantalist Baptist), argues. The supposed symmetry of circumcision with baptism breaks down at many points, including the fact that the Apostles baptized believing women as well as males. Circumcision was *abolished* when the substantial reality succeeded the shadow, just as the Passover was, and for the same reason. It was not "replaced" within a larger general covenant. It was the mediaeval Catholics who argued that the Passover was "replaced" by the real sacrifice of the Mass, just as the Jewish priesthood was "replaced" by the sacrificing Christian priesthood. They even quote "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" to prove it (1 Cor 5:7). They also argued that baptism replaced circumcision, but had no covenantalist theory to support the claim.

In Colossians 2, Paul states that the circumcision of believers is "without hands" (verse 11) and therefore it cannot be baptism. Presbyterian J. Oliver Buswell claimed in his *Systematic Theology* that the term "circumcision of Christ" means "Christian circumcision," and that this was baptism. But this makes verse 12 teach baptismal regeneration, and Catholics quote it for precisely that. But in verse 11, "circumcision of Christ" is the "circumcision without hands" of the same verse, or regeneration.

20. All baptized persons can be said to be in the covenant of grace in the broad sense. Not everyone who is baptized receives the substance or benefits of the covenant of grace.

The first proposition is the obverse of the assumption that the children of believers are to be baptized as members of the covenant. The "broad sense" is just the arbitrary extension of baptism to non-believers in a "covenant community," or state-church (in, say, Zürich in the 1520s). There is no "broad sense" of inclusion in the New Covenant; one is either regenerate and in it, or unregenerate and not in it. Nobody is born a Christian.

The second proposition is formally correct, since baptism does not regenerate anyone, and hypocrites abound in every age and local church. Again, this thesis should be amended to read "New Covenant" instead of "covenant of grace." The main value of the term "covenant of grace" is its propaganda effect. Who wants to deny that the New Covenant is a covenant "of grace"?

21. Baptism does not itself regenerate or necessarily unite the baptized to Christ.

But if this is true (which it is), what is it "sealing" in the case of a baby? If *Theses 10, 11, 12,* and *13* are correct, baptizing a baby is unintelligible. It is the arbitrary application of a biblical symbol to one to whom it cannot possibly apply. In the Bible, baptism is not a "promise." It assumes a promise has been fulfilled in a reality received. No passage of Scripture suggests or allows otherwise.