

Systematic Theology 5.2.2

The Sacraments in General and Christian Baptism

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*Part Five: The Doctrine of the Church and of the Means of Grace — Section 5.2.2:
The Sacraments in General and Christian Baptism*

Editorial note

The text has been updated to UK English; gloss boxes have been added to explain technical terms; summaries have been included; and questions for further study have been added. We have also included a master outline with the part represented in this volume shown in bold.

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Berkhof's Systematic Theology: Master Outline

This six-part guide is designed for use at the beginning of each volume. The part represented in this volume is shown in bold.

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The Sacraments in General and Christian Baptism

III. The Sacraments in General

The sacraments are Christ's visible signs and seals of the covenant, joined to the Word and received by faith. They confirm grace already promised in Christ, strengthen believers, and point to the one saving work of God.

A. THE RELATION OF THE SACRAMENTS TO THE WORD.

GLOSS Sacraments: holy ordinances instituted by Christ, in which visible signs represent, seal, and apply the grace of God in Christ to believers.

In distinction from the Roman Catholic Church, the Churches of the Reformation emphasize the priority of the Word of God. While the former proceeds on the assumption that the sacraments contain all that is necessary for the salvation of sinners, need no interpretation, and therefore render the Word quite superfluous as a means of grace, the latter regard the Word as absolutely essential, and merely raise the question, why the sacraments should be added to it. Some of the Lutherans claim that a specific grace, differing from that which is wrought by the Word, is conveyed by the sacraments. This is all but universally denied by the Reformed, a few Scottish theologians and Dr. Kuyper forming exceptions to the rule. They point to the fact that God has so created man that he obtains knowledge particularly through the avenues of the senses of sight and hearing. The Word is adapted to the ear, and the sacraments to the eye. And since the eye is more sensuous than the ear, it may be said that God, by adding the sacraments to the Word, comes to the aid of sinful man. The truth addressed to the ear in the Word, is symbolically represented to the eye in the sacraments. It should be borne in mind, however, that, while the Word can exist and is also complete without the sacraments, the sacraments are never complete without the Word. There are points of similarity and points of difference between the Word and the sacraments. 1. POINTS OF SIMILARITY. They agree: (a) in author, since God instituted both as means of grace; (b) in contents, for Christ is the central content of the one as well as of the other; and (c) in the manner in which the contents are appropriated, namely, by faith. This is the only way in which the sinner can

become a participant of the grace that is offered in the Word and in the sacraments. 2. POINTS OF DIFFERENCE. They differ: (a) in their necessity, the Word being indispensable, while the sacraments are not; (b) in their purpose, since the Word is intended to engender and to strengthen faith, while the sacraments serve only to strengthen it; and (c) in their extension, since the Word goes out into all the world, while the sacraments are administered only to those who are in the Church. The word “sacrament” is not found in Scripture. It is derived from the Latin sacramentum, which originally denoted a sum of money deposited by two parties in litigation. After the decision of the court the winner’s money was returned, while that of the loser was forfeited. This seems to have been called a sacramentum, because it was intended to be a sort of propitiatory offering to the gods. The transition to the Christian use of the term is probably to be sought: (a) in the military use of the term, in which it denoted the oath by which a soldier solemnly pledged obedience to his commander, since in baptism the Christian pledges obedience to his Lord; and (b) in the specifically religious sense which it acquired when the Vulgate employed it as a rendering of the Greek musterion. It is possible that this Greek term was applied to the sacraments, because they have a faint resemblance to some of the mysteries of the Greek religions. In the early Church the word “sacrament” was first used to denote all kinds of doctrines and ordinances. For this very reason some objected to the name, and preferred to speak of “signs,” “seals,” or “mysteries.” Even during and immediately after the Reformation many disliked the name “sacrament.” Melancthon used “signi,” and both Luther and Calvin deemed it necessary to call attention to the fact that the word “sacrament” is not employed in its original sense in theology. But the fact that the word is not found in Scripture and is not used in its original sense when it is applied to the ordinances instituted by Jesus, need not deter us, for usage often determines the meaning of a word. The following definition may be given of a sacrament: A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which by sensible signs the grace of God in Christ, and the benefits of the covenant of grace, are represented, sealed, and applied to

believers, and these, in turn, give expression to their faith and allegiance to God. Three parts must be distinguished in the sacraments. 1. THE OUTWARD OR VISIBLE SIGN. Each one of the sacraments contains a material element that is palpable to the senses. In a rather loose sense this is sometimes called the sacrament. In the strict sense of the word, however, the term is more inclusive and denotes both the sign and that which is signified. To avoid misunderstanding, this different usage should be borne in mind. It explains how an unbeliever may be said to receive, and yet not to receive, the sacrament. He does not receive it in the full sense of the word. The external matter of the sacrament includes not only the elements that are used, namely, water, bread, and wine, but also the sacred rite, that which is done with these elements. From this external point of view the Bible calls the sacraments signs and seals, Gen. 9:12,13; 17:11; Rom. 4:11. 2. THE INWARD SPIRITUAL GRACE SIGNIFIED AND SEALED. Signs and seals presuppose something that is signified and sealed and which is usually called the *materia interna* of the sacrament. This is variously indicated in Scripture as the covenant of grace, Gen. 9:12,13; 17:11, the righteousness of faith, Rom. 4:11, the forgiveness of sins, Mark 1:4; Matt. 26:28, faith and conversion, Mark 1:4; 16:16, communion with Christ in His death and resurrection, Rom. 6:3, and so on. Briefly stated, it may be said to consist in Christ and all His spiritual riches. The Roman Catholics find in it the sanctifying grace which is added to human nature, enabling man to do good works and to rise to the height of the *visio Dei* (the vision of God). The sacraments signify, not merely a general truth, but a promise given unto us and accepted by us, and serve to strengthen our faith with respect to the realization of that promise, Gen. 17:1-14; Ex. 12:13; Rom. 4:11-13. They visibly represent, and deepen our consciousness of, the spiritual blessings of the covenant, of the washing away of our sins, and of our participation of the life that is in Christ, Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:4,5; I Cor. 10:2,3,16,17; Rom. 2:28,29; 6:3,4; Gal. 3:27. As signs and seals they are means of grace, that is, means of strengthening the inward grace that is wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit. 3. THE SACRAMENTAL UNION BETWEEN THE

SIGN AND THAT WHICH IS SIGNIFIED. This is usually called the forma sacramenti (forma here meaning essence), because it is exactly the relation between the sign and the thing signified that constitutes the essence of the sacrament. According to the Reformed view this is: (a) not physical, as the Roman Catholics claim, as if the thing signified were inherent in the sign, and the reception of the materia externa necessarily carried with it a participation in the materia interna; (b) nor local, as the Lutherans represent it, as if the sign and the thing signified were present in the same space, so that both believers and unbelievers receive the full sacrament when they receive the sign; (c) but spiritual, or as Turretin expresses it, relative and moral, so that, where the sacrament is received in faith, the grace of God accompanies it. According to this view the external sign becomes a means employed by the Holy Spirit in the communication of divine grace. The close connection between the sign and the thing signified explains the use of what is generally called “sacramental language,” in which the sign is put for the thing signified or vice versa, Gen. 17:10; Acts 22:16; I Cor. 5:7. Roman Catholics hold that baptism is absolutely necessary for all unto salvation, and that the sacrament of penance is equally necessary for those who have committed mortal sins after baptism; but that confirmation, the eucharist, and extreme unction are necessary only in the sense that they have been commanded and are eminently helpful. Protestants, on the other hand, teach that the sacraments are not absolutely necessary unto salvation, but are obligatory in view of the divine precept. Wilful neglect of their use results in spiritual impoverishment and has a destructive tendency, just as all wilful and persistent disobedience to God has. That they are not absolutely necessary unto salvation, follows: (1) from the free spiritual character of the gospel dispensation, in which God does not bind His grace to the use of certain external forms, John 4:21,23; Luke 18:14; (2) from the fact that Scripture mentions only faith as the instrumental condition of salvation, John 5:24; 6:29; 3:36; Acts 16:31; (3) from the fact that the sacraments do not originate faith but presuppose it, and are administered where faith is assumed, Acts 2:41; 16:14,15,30,33; I Cor. 11:23-32; and (4) from the fact that many were

actually saved without the use of the sacraments. Think of the believers before the time of Abraham and of the penitent thief on the cross 1. **THEIR ESSENTIAL UNITY.** Rome claims that there is an essential difference between the sacraments of the Old, and those of the New Testament. It holds that, like the entire ritual of the old covenant, its sacraments also were merely typical. The sanctification wrought by them was not internal, but merely legal, and prefigured the grace which was to be conferred on man in the future, in virtue of the passion of Christ. This does not mean that no internal grace accompanied their use at all, but merely that this was not effected by the sacraments as such, as it is in the new dispensation. They had no objective efficacy, did not sanctify the recipient *ex opere operato*, but only *ex opere operantis*, that is, because of the faith and charity with which he received them. Because the full realization of the grace typified by those sacraments depended on the coming of Christ. the Old Testament saints were shut up in the *Limbus Patrum* until Christ led them out. As a matter of fact, however, there is no essential difference between the sacraments of the Old, and those of the New Testament. This is proved by the following considerations: (a) in I Cor. 10:1-4 Paul ascribes to the Old Testament Church that which is essential in the New Testament sacraments; (b) in Rom. 4:11 he speaks of the circumcision of Abraham as a seal of the righteousness of faith; and (c) in view of the fact that they represent the same spiritual realities, the names of the sacraments of both dispensations are used interchangeably; circumcision and passover are ascribed to the New Testament Church. I Cor. 5:7: Col. 2:11, and baptism and the Lord's Supper to the Church of the Old Testament, I Cor. 10:1-4. 2. **THEIR FORMAL DIFFERENCES.** Notwithstanding the essential unity of the Sacraments of both dispensations, there are certain points of difference. (a) Among Israel the sacraments had a national aspect in addition to their spiritual significance as signs and seals of the covenant of grace. (b) Alongside of the sacraments Israel had many other symbolical rites, such as offerings and purifications, which in the main agreed with their sacraments, while the New Testament sacraments stand absolutely alone. (c) The Old Testament

sacraments pointed forward to Christ and were the seals of a grace that still had to be merited while those of the New Testament point back to Christ and His completed sacrifice of redemption. (d) In harmony with the whole Old Testament dispensation, a smaller measure of divine grace accompanied the use of the Old Testament sacraments than is now obtained through the faithful reception of those of the New Testament. 1. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

During the old dispensation there were two sacraments, namely, circumcision and passover. Some Reformed theologians were of the opinion that circumcision originated among Israel, and was derived from this ancient covenant people by other nations. But it is now quite clear that this is an untenable position. From the earliest times the Egyptian priests were circumcised. Moreover, circumcision is found among many peoples in Asia, Africa, and even Australia, and it is very unlikely that they all derived it from Israel. Only among Israel, however, did it become a sacrament of the covenant of grace. As belonging to the Old Testament dispensation, it was a bloody sacrifice, symbolizing the excision of the guilt and pollution of sin, and obliging the people to let the principle of the grace of God penetrate their entire life. The passover was also a bloody sacrament. The Israelites escaped the doom of the Egyptians by substituting a sacrifice, which was a type of Christ, John 1:29,36; I Cor. 5:7. The saved family ate the lamb that was slain, symbolizing the appropriating act of faith, very much as the eating of the bread in the Lord's Supper. 2. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. The Church of the New Testament also has two sacraments, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper. In harmony with the new dispensation as a whole, they are unbloody sacraments. However, they symbolize the same spiritual blessings that were symbolized by circumcision and passover in the old dispensation. The Church of Rome has enlarged the number of the sacraments to seven in a wholly unwarranted manner. To the two that were instituted by Christ it added confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction. It seeks the Scriptural ground for confirmation in Acts 8:17; 14:22; 19:6; Heb. 6:2; for penance in Jas. 5:16; for orders in I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6; for matrimony in

Eph. 5:32; and for extreme unction in Mark 6:13; Jas. 5:14. Each of these sacraments is supposed to convey, in addition to the general grace of sanctification, a special sacramental grace, which is different in each sacrament. This multiplication of the sacraments created a difficulty for the Church of Rome. It is generally admitted that sacraments, in order to be valid, must have been instituted by Christ; but Christ instituted only two. Consequently, the others are not sacraments, or the right to institute them must also be ascribed to the apostles. Before the Council of Trent many, indeed, asserted that the additional five were not instituted by Christ directly, but through the apostles. The Council, however, boldly declared that all the seven sacraments were instituted by Christ Himself, and thus imposed an impossible task on the theology of its Church. It is a point that must be accepted by Roman Catholics on the testimony of the Church, but that cannot be proved. **QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:** Has the term *mysterion* the same meaning in the New Testament as it has in the mystery religions? Are the New Testament teachings respecting the sacraments borrowed from the mystery religions, as a recent school of New Testament criticism claims? Is the assertion of this school correct, that Paul represents the sacraments as effective *ex opere operato*? Why do the Lutherans prefer to speak of the sacraments as rites and actions rather than as signs? What do they understand by the *materia coelestis* of the sacraments? What is meant by the Roman Catholic doctrine of intention in connection with the administration of the sacraments? What negative requirement does Rome consider necessary in the recipient of the sacrament? Is it correct to describe the relation between the sign and the thing signified as an *unio sacramentalis*? What constitutes the *gratia sacramentalis* in each of the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church?

IV. Christian Baptism

Christian baptism is Christ's covenant sign of cleansing, union with Him, and entrance into the visible Church. It is administered to believers and their children, not as a magical act, but as a means by which God confirms His covenant promise.

A. THE HISTORY AND INSTITUTION OF BAPTISM.

GLOSS Baptism: Christ's appointed sign and seal of the washing away of sin, union with Him, and admission to the covenant community.

1. IN THE GENTILE WORLD. Baptism was not something absolutely new in the days of Jesus. The Egyptians, the Persians, and the Hindus, all had their religious purifications. These were even more prominent in the Greek and Roman religions. Sometimes they took the form of a bath in the sea, and sometimes they were effected by sprinkling. Tertullian says that in some cases the idea of a new birth was connected with these lustrations. Many present day scholars hold that Christian baptism, especially as it was taught by Paul, owes its origin to similar rites in the mystery religions, but such a derivation does not even have appearance in its favor. While the initiatory rite in the mystery religions does involve a recognition of the deity in question, there is no trace of a baptism into the name of some god. Nor is there any evidence that the influence of the divine pneuma, rather prominent in the mystery religions, was ever connected with the rite of lustration. Moreover, the ideas of death and resurrection, which Paul associated with baptism, do not fit in with the mystery ritual at all. And, finally, the form of the taurobolium, which is supposed to be the most striking analogy that can be cited, is so foreign to the New Testament rite as to make the idea of the derivation of the latter from the former seem utterly ridiculous. These heathen purifications have very little in

common, even in their external form, with our Christian baptism. Moreover, it is a well established fact that the mystery religions did not make their appearance in the Roman Empire before the days of Paul. 2. AMONG THE JEWS. The Jews had many ceremonial purifications and washings, but these had no sacramental character, and therefore were no signs and seals of the covenant. The so-called baptism of proselytes bore a greater resemblance to Christian baptism. When Gentiles were incorporated in Israel, they were circumcized and, at least in later times, also baptized. It has long been a debatable question, whether this custom was in vogue before the destruction of Jerusalem, but Schuerer has shown conclusively by quotations from the Mishna that it was. According to the Jewish authorities quoted by Wall in his History of Infant Baptism, this baptism had to be administered in the presence of two or three witnesses. Children of parents who received this baptism, if born before the rite was administered, were also baptized, at the request of the father as long as they were not of age (the boys thirteen and the girls twelve), but if they were of age, only at their own request. Children who were born after the baptism of the parent or parents, were accounted as clean and therefore did not need baptism. It seems, however, that this baptism was also merely a sort of ceremonial washing, somewhat in line with the other purifications. It is sometimes said that the baptism of John was derived from this baptism of proselytes, but it is quite clear that this was not the case. Whatever historical relation there may have existed between the two, it is quite evident that the baptism of John was pregnant with new and more spiritual meanings. Lambert is quite correct when he, in speaking of the Jewish lustrations, says: "Their purpose was, by removing a ceremonial defilement, to restore a man to his normal position within the ranks of the Jewish community; John's baptism, on the other hand, aimed at transferring those who submitted to it into an altogether new sphere — the sphere of definite preparation for the approaching Kingdom of God. But above all, the difference lay in this, that John's baptism could never be regarded as a mere ceremony; it was always vibrant through and through with ethical meaning. A

cleansing of the heart from sin was not only its preliminary condition, but its constant aim and purpose. And by the searching and incisive preaching with which he accompanied it, John kept it from sinking, as it would otherwise have tended to do, to the level of a mere *opus operatum*.”[The Sacraments in the New Testament, p. 57.] Another question that calls for consideration, is that of the relation of the baptism of John to that of Jesus. The Roman Catholic Church in the Canons of Trent[Sess. VII. De Baptismo.] curses those who say that the baptism of John equalled that of Jesus in efficacy, and regards it, along with the Old Testament sacraments, as purely typical. It claims that those who were baptized by John did not receive real baptismal grace in this baptism, and were at a later time re-baptized, or, more correctly expressed, baptized for the first time in the Christian manner. The older Lutheran theologians maintained that the two were identical as far as purpose and efficacy were concerned, while some of the later ones rejected what they considered to be a complete and essential identity of the two. Something similar may be said of Reformed theologians. The older theologians generally identified the two baptisms, while those of a more recent date direct attention to certain differences. John himself would seem to call attention to a point of difference in Matt. 3:11. Some also find a proof for the essential difference of the two in Acts 19:1-6, which, according to them, records a case in which some, who were baptized by John, were re-baptized. But this interpretation is subject to doubt. It would seem to be correct to say that the two are essentially identical, though differing in some points. The baptism of John, like the Christian baptism, (a) was instituted by God Himself, Matt. 21:25; John 1:33; (b) was connected with a radical change of life, Luke 1:1-17; John 1:20-30; (c) stood in sacramental relation to the forgiveness of sins, Matt. 3:7,8; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3 (comp. Acts 2:28) and (d) employed the same material element, namely, water. At the same time there were several points of difference: (a) the baptism of John still belonged to the old dispensation, and as such pointed forward to Christ; (b) in harmony with the dispensation of the law in general, it stressed the necessity of repentance, though not entirely to the exclusion of faith; (c) it was intended for the Jews

only, and therefore represented the Old Testament particularism rather than the New Testament universalism; and (d) since the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out in pentecostal fulness, it was not yet accompanied with as great a measure of spiritual gifts as the later Christian baptism. 1. IT WAS INSTITUTED WITH DIVINE AUTHORITY. Baptism was instituted by Christ after He had finished the work of reconciliation and this had received the approval of the Father in the resurrection. It is worthy of notice that He prefaced the great commission with the words, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." Clothed with the fulness of that mediatorial authority, He instituted Christian baptism and thus made it binding for all following generations. The great commission is couched in the following words: "Go ye therefore (that is, because all nations are made subject to Me), and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you." Matt. 28:19,20. The complementary form in Mark 16:15,16 reads as follows: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." Thus the following elements are clearly indicated in this authoritative command: (a) The disciples were to go out into the whole world and to preach the gospel to all nations, in order to bring people to repentance and to the acknowledgment of Jesus as the promised Saviour. (b) They who accepted Christ by faith were to be baptized in the name of the triune God, as a sign and seal of the fact that they had entered into a new relation to God and as such were obliged to live according to the laws of the Kingdom of God. (c) They were to be brought under the ministry of the Word, not merely as a proclamation of the good news, but as an exposition of the mysteries, the privileges, and the duties, of the new covenant. For the encouragement of the disciples Jesus adds the words, "And lo, I (who am clothed with the authority to give this commandment) am with you always, even unto the end of the world." 2. THE BAPTISMAL FORMULA. The apostles were specifically instructed to baptize eis to onoma tou patros kai tou huiou

kai tou hagiou pneumatou (into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit). The Vulgate rendered the first words “eis to onoma” by the Latin “in nomine” (in the name), a rendering followed by Luther’s “im namen.” The words are thus made to mean “on the authority of the triune God.” Robertson gives this as their meaning in his *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 649, but fails to give any proof for it. The fact is that this interpretation is exegetically untenable. The idea of “on the authority of” is expressed by the phrase *en toi onomati* or the shorter one *en onomati*, Matt. 21:9; Mark 16:17; Luke 10:17; John 14:26; Acts 3:6; 9:27, etc. The preposition *eis* (into) is indicative rather of an end, and may therefore be interpreted to mean “in relation to,” or “into the profession of faith in one and sincere obedience to one.” It is quite in harmony with this when Allen says in his commentary on Matthew: “The person baptized was symbolically introduced ‘into the name of Christ,’ that is, became His disciple, that is, entered into a state of allegiance to Him and fellowship with Him.” This is the meaning given by Thayer, Robinson, and, substantially, also by Cremer-Koegel and Baljon, in their *Lexicons*. It is also that adopted by the commentators, such as Meyer, Alford, Allen, Bruce, Grosheide, and Van Leeuwen. This meaning of the term is fully borne out by such parallel expressions as *eis ton Mousen*, I Cor. 10:2; *eis to onoma Paulou*, I Cor. 1:13; *eis hen soma*, I Cor. 12:13; and *eis Christon*, Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27. Dr. Kuyper’s argument touching this point is found in *Uit het Woord, Eerste Serie, Eerste Bundel*. [pp. 263 ff.] It would seem that we should translate the preposition *eis* by “into” or “to” (that is, “in relation to”) the name. The word *onoma* (name) is used in the sense of the Hebrew *shem* as indicative of all the qualities by which God makes Himself known, and which constitute the sum total of all that He is for His worshippers. Deissman in his *Bible Studies* [p. 146.] refers to interesting examples of this particular use of the word *onoma* in the papyri. Interpreted in this light, the baptismal formula indicates that by baptism (that is, by that which is signified in baptism) the recipient is placed in a special relationship to the divine self-revelation, or to God as He has revealed Himself and revealed

what He will be for His people, and at the same time becomes duty bound to live up to the light of that revelation. It is not necessary to assume that, when Jesus employed these words, He intended them as a formula to be used ever after. He merely used them as descriptive of the character of the baptism which He instituted, just as similar expressions serve to characterize other baptisms, Acts 19:3; I Cor. 1:13; 10:2; 12:13. It is sometimes said with an appeal to such passages as Acts 2:48; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5, and also Rom. 6:3, and Gal. 3:27, that the apostles evidently did not use the trinitarian formula; but this is not necessarily implied, though it is entirely possible since they did not understand the words of Jesus in the great commission as prescribing a definite formula. It is also possible, however, that the expressions used in the passages indicated served to stress certain particulars respecting the baptism of the apostles. It should be noted that the prepositions differ. Acts 2:38 speaks of a baptism *epi toi onomati Jesou Christou*, which probably refers to a baptism on the confession of Jesus as the Messiah. According to Acts 10:48 those who were present in the house of Cornelius were baptized *en onomati Jesou Christou*, to indicate that they were baptized on the authority of Jesus. All the remaining passages mention a baptism *eis to onoma Jesou Christou* (or *tou kuriou Jesou*), or simply a baptism *eis Christon*. These expressions may simply serve to stress the fact that the recipients were brought into special relationship to Jesus Christ, whom the apostles were preaching, and were thereby made subject to Him as their Lord. But whatever may have been the practice in the apostolic age, it is quite evident that when the Church later on felt the need of a formula, it could find no better than that contained in the words of the institution. This formula was already in use when the Didache (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) was written (c. 100 A.D.).[Cf. Chapter VII.]

1. BEFORE THE REFORMATION. The early Fathers regarded baptism as the rite of initiation into the Church, and usually considered it as closely connected with the forgiveness of sins and the communication of the new life. Some of their expressions would seem to indicate that they believed in baptismal regeneration. At the same time it should be noted that in the case of

adults they did not regard baptism as efficacious apart from the right disposition of the soul, and they did not consider baptism as absolutely essential to the initiation of the new life, but rather looked upon it as the completing element in the process of renewal. Infant baptism was already current in the days of Origen and Tertullian, though the latter discouraged it on the grounds of expediency. The general opinion was that baptism should never be repeated, but there was no unanimity as to the validity of baptism administered by heretics. In course of time, however, it became a fixed principle not to re-baptize those who were baptized into the name of the triune God. The mode of baptism was not in dispute. From the second century on the idea gradually gained ground that baptism works more or less magically. Even Augustine seems to have considered baptism as effective *ex opere operato* in the case of children. He regarded baptism as absolutely necessary and held that unbaptized children are lost. According to him baptism cancels original guilt, but does not wholly remove the corruption of nature. The Scholastics at first shared Augustine's view, that in the case of adults baptism presupposes faith, but gradually another idea gained the upper hand, namely, that baptism is always effective *ex opere operato*. The importance of subjective conditions was minimized. Thus the characteristic Roman Catholic conception of the sacrament, according to which baptism is the sacrament of regeneration and of initiation into the Church, gradually gained the upper hand. It contains the grace which it signifies and confers this on all those who put no obstacle in the way. This grace was regarded as very important, since (a) it sets an indelible mark on the recipient as a member of the Church; (b) delivers from the guilt of original sin and of all actual sins committed up to the time of baptism, removes the pollution of sin, though concupiscence remains, and sets man free from eternal punishment and from all positive temporal punishments; (c) works spiritual renewal by the infusion of sanctifying grace and of the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and love; and (d) incorporates the recipient into the communion of the saints and into the visible Church.

2. SINCE THE REFORMATION. The Lutheran Reformation

did not entirely rid itself of the Roman Catholic conception of the sacraments. Luther did not regard the water in baptism as common water, but as a water which had become, through the Word with its inherent divine power, a gracious water of life, a washing of regeneration. Through this divine efficacy of the Word the sacrament effects regeneration. In the case of adults Luther made the effect of baptism dependent on faith in the recipient. Realizing that he could not consider it so in the case of children, who cannot exercise faith, he at one time held that God by His prevenient grace works faith in the unconscious child, but later on professed ignorance on this point. Later Lutheran theologians retained the idea of an infant-faith as a precondition for baptism, while others conceived of baptism as producing such a faith immediately. This in some cases led on to the idea that the sacrament works *ex opere operato*. Anabaptists cut the Gordian knot of Luther by denying the legitimacy of infant baptism. They insisted on baptizing all applicants for admission to their circle, who had received the sacrament in infancy, and did not regard this as a re-baptism, but as the first true baptism. With them children had no standing in the Church. Calvin and Reformed theology proceeded on the assumption that baptism is instituted for believers, and does not work but strengthens the new life. They were naturally confronted with the question as to how infants could be regarded as believers, and how they could be strengthened spiritually, seeing that they could not yet exercise faith. Some simply pointed out that infants born of believing parents are children of the covenant, and as such heirs of the promises of God, including also the promise of regeneration; and that the spiritual efficacy of baptism is not limited to the time of its administration, but continues through life. The Belgic Confession also expresses that idea in these words: "Neither does this baptism avail us only at the time when water is poured upon us, and received by us, but also through the whole course of our life." [Art. XXXIV.] Others went beyond this position and maintained that the children of the covenant were to be regarded as presumptively regenerated. This is not equivalent to saying that they are all regenerated, when they are presented for baptism, but that they

are assumed to be regenerated until the contrary appears from their lives. There were also a few who regarded baptism as nothing more than the sign of an external covenant. Under the influence of Socinians, Arminians, Anabaptists, and Rationalists, it has become quite customary in many circles to deny that baptism is a seal of divine grace, and to regard it as a mere act of profession on the part of man. In our day many professing Christians have completely lost the consciousness of the spiritual significance of baptism. It has become a mere formality. Baptists are at variance with the rest of the Christian world in their position that dipping or immersion, followed by emersion, is the only proper mode of baptism; and that this mode is absolutely essential to baptism, because this rite is intended to symbolize the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the consequent death and resurrection of the subject of baptism with Him. Two questions arise, therefore, and it is best to consider them in the following order: (1) What is the essential thing in the symbolism of baptism? and (2) Is immersion the only proper mode of baptism? This order is preferable, because the former question is the more important of the two, and because the answer to the second will depend in part on that given to the first.

1. WHAT IS THE ESSENTIAL THING IN THE SYMBOLISM OF BAPTISM? According to the Baptists immersion, followed by emersion, is the essential thing in the symbolism of baptism. A surrender of this would be equivalent to giving up baptism itself. The real baptismal idea, they say, is expressed in the going down into, and the coming up out of, the water. That such an immersion naturally involves a certain washing or purification, is something purely accidental. Baptism would be baptism even if one were immersed in something that has no cleansing properties. They base their opinion on Mark 10:38,39; Luke 12:50; Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:12. But the first two passages merely express the idea that Christ would be overwhelmed by His coming sufferings, and do not speak of the sacrament of baptism at all. The last two are the only ones that really have any bearing on the matter, and even these are not to the point, for they do not speak directly of any baptism with water at all, but of the spiritual baptism thereby represented. They represent

regeneration under the figure of a dying and a rising again. It is certainly perfectly obvious that they do not make mention of baptism as an emblem of Christ's death and resurrection. If baptism were represented here at all as an emblem, it would be as an emblem of the believer's dying and rising again. And since this is only a figurative way of representing his regeneration, it would make baptism a figure of a figure. Reformed theology has an entirely different conception of the essential thing in the symbolism of baptism. It finds this in the idea of purification. The Heidelberg Catechism asks in Question 69: "How is it signified and sealed unto you in holy baptism that you have a part in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross?" And it answers: "Thus, that Christ has appointed the outward washing with water and added the promise that I am washed with His blood and Spirit from the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as certainly as I am washed outwardly with water, by which the filthiness of the body is commonly washed away." This idea of purification was the pertinent thing in all the washings of the Old Testament, and also in the baptism of John, Ps. 51:7; Ezek. 36:25; John 3:25,26. And we may assume that in this respect the baptism of Jesus was entirely in line with previous baptisms. If He had intended the baptism which He instituted as a symbol of something entirely different, He would have indicated this very clearly, in order to obviate all possible misunderstanding. Moreover, Scripture makes it abundantly clear that baptism symbolizes spiritual cleansing or purification, Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:4 f.; I Cor. 6:11; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 10:22; I Pet. 3:21; Rev. 1:5. This is exactly the point on which the Bible places all emphasis, while it never represents the going down and coming up as something essential.

2. IS IMMERSION THE ONLY PROPER MODE OF BAPTISM? The generally prevailing opinion outside of Baptist circles is that, as long as the fundamental idea, namely, that of purification, finds expression in the rite, the mode of baptism is quite immaterial. It may be administered by immersion, by pouring or effusion, or by sprinkling. The Bible simply uses a generic word to denote an action designed to produce a certain effect, namely, cleansing or purification, but nowhere determines the specific mode in which the effect is

to be produced. Jesus did not prescribe a certain mode of baptism. He evidently did not attach as much importance to it as the Baptists do. Neither do the Biblical examples of baptism stress any particular mode. There is not a single case in which we are explicitly told just how baptism was administered. The Baptists assert, however, that the Lord did command baptism by immersion, and that all those who administer it in a different way are acting in open disobedience to His authority. To prove their assertion, they appeal to the words *bapto* and *baptizo*, which are used in Scripture for “to baptize.” The second word seems to be an intensive or frequentative form of the first, though in general usage the distinction does not always hold. *Bapto* is frequently used in the Old Testament, but occurs in the New Testament only four times, namely, in Luke 16:24; John 13:26; Rev. 19:13, and in these cases does not refer to Christian baptism. Baptists were very confident at one time that this verb means only “to dip”; but many of them have changed their mind since Carson, one of their greatest authorities, came to the conclusion that it also has a secondary meaning, namely, “to dye,” so that it came to mean “to dye by dipping,” and even, “to dye in any manner,” in which case it ceased to be expressive of mode.[Carson, *Baptism in its Mode and Subjects*, pp. 44 ff.] The question further arose, whether *baptizo*, which is used 76 times, and which is the word employed by the Lord in the words of the institution, was derived from *bapto* in its primary or in its secondary meaning. And Dr. Carson answers that it is derived from *bapto* in the sense of “to dip.” Says he: “*Bapto*, the root, I have shown to possess two meanings, and two only, ‘to dip’ and ‘to dye.’ *Baptizo*, I have asserted, has but one signification. It has been founded on the primary meaning of the root, and has never admitted the secondary.... My position is, that it always signifies to dip; never expressing anything but mode.”[Op. cit., p. 55.] The Baptists must maintain this, if they want to prove that the Lord commanded baptism by immersion. But the facts, as they appear in both classical and New Testament Greek, do not warrant this position. Even Dr. Gale, who was perhaps the most learned author who sought to maintain it, felt constrained by the facts to modify it. Wilson in his splendid work

on Infant Baptism, which is partly a reply to the work of Dr. Carson, quotes Gale as saying: “The word baptizo perhaps does not so necessarily express the action of putting under water, as in general a thing’s being in that condition, no matter how it comes to be so, whether it is put into the water, or the water comes over it; though, indeed, to put into the water is the most natural way and the most common, and is, therefore, usually and pretty constantly, but it may be not necessarily, implied.”[p. 97.] Wilson shows conclusively that, according to Greek usage, baptism is effected in various ways. Says he: “Let the baptizing element encompass its object, and in the case of liquids, whether this relative state has been produced by immersion, effusion, overwhelming, or in any other mode, Greek usage recognizes it as a valid baptism.” He further goes on to show in detail that it is impossible to maintain the position that the word baptizo always signifies immersion in the New Testament.[For the various possible meanings of baptizo consult, besides the treatise of Wilson, already referred to, such works as those of Armstrong, *The Doctrine of Baptisms*; Seiss, *The Baptist System Examined*; Ayres, *Christian Baptism*; Hibbard, *Christian Baptism*.] It is quite evident that both words, *batpto* and *baptizo*, had other meanings, such as “to wash,” “to bathe,” and to “purify by washing.” The idea of washing or purification gradually became the prominent idea, while that of the manner in which this took place retired more and more into the background. That this purification was sometimes effected by sprinkling, is evident from Num. 8:7; 19:13,18,19,20; Ps. 51:7; Ezek. 36:25; Heb. 9:10. In Judith 12:7 and Mark 7:3,4 we cannot possibly think of dipping. Neither is this possible in connection with the following passages of the New Testament: Matt. 3:11; Luke 11:37,38; 12:50; Rom. 6:3; I Cor. 12:13; Heb. 9:10 (cf. verses 13,14,19, 21); I Cor. 10:1,2. Since the word *baptizo* does not necessarily mean “to immerse,” and because the New Testament does not in any case explicitly assert that baptism took place by immersion, the burden of proof would seem to rest on the Baptists. Was John the Baptist capable of the enormous task of immersing the multitudes that flocked unto him at the river Jordan, or did he simply pour water on them as

some of the early inscriptions would seem to indicate? Did the apostles find enough water in Jerusalem, and did they have the necessary facilities, to baptize three thousand in a single day by immersion? Where is the evidence to prove that they followed any other method than the Old Testament mode of baptisms? Does Acts 9:18 indicate in any way that Paul left the place where Ananias found him, to be immersed in some pool or river? Does not the account of the baptism of Cornelius create the impression that water was to be brought and that those present were baptized right in the house? Acts 10:47,48. Is there any evidence that the jailor at Philippi was not baptized in or near the prison, but led his prisoners out to the river, in order that he might be immersed? Would he have dared to take them outside of the city, when he was commanded to keep them safely? Acts 16:22-33. Even the account of the baptism of the eunuch, Acts 8:36,38, which is often regarded as the strongest Scriptural proof for baptism by immersion, cannot be regarded as conclusive evidence. A careful study of Luke's use of the preposition *eis* shows that he used it not only in the sense of into, but also in the sense of to, so that it is entirely possible to read the relevant statement in verse 38 as follows: "and they both went down to the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him." And even if the words were intended to convey the idea that they went down into the water, this does not yet prove the point, for according to pictorial representations of the early centuries they who were baptized by effusion often stood in the water. It is entirely possible, of course, that in the apostolic age some were baptized by immersion, but the fact that the New Testament nowhere insists on this proves that it was not essential. Immersion is a proper mode of baptism, but so is baptism by effusion or by sprinkling, since they all symbolize purification. The passages referred to in the preceding prove that many Old Testament washings (baptizings) took place by sprinkling. In a prophecy respecting the spiritual renewal of the New Testament day the Lord says: "And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean," Ezek. 36:25. The matter signified in baptism, namely, the purifying Spirit, was poured out upon the Church, Joel 2:28,29; Acts 2:4,33.

And the writer of Hebrews speaks of his readers as having their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, Heb. 10:22. Roman Catholics consider baptism absolutely essential to salvation; and because they regard it as cruel to make the salvation of anyone dependent on the accidental presence or absence of a priest, they also in cases of emergency permit baptism by others, particularly by midwives. In spite of the contrary view of Cyprian, they recognize the baptism of heretics, unless their heresy involves a denial of the Trinity. The Reformed Churches always acted on the principle that the administration of the Word and of the sacraments belong together, and that therefore the teaching elder or the minister is the only lawful administrator of baptism. The Word and the sacrament are joined together in the words of the institution. And because baptism is not a private matter, but an ordinance of the Church, they also hold that it should be administered in the public assembly of believers. They have generally recognized the baptism of other Churches, not excluding the Roman Catholics, and also of the various sects, except in the case of Churches and sects which denied the Trinity. Thus they refused to honour the baptism of the Socinians and of the Unitarians. In general, they considered a baptism as valid which was administered by a duly accredited minister and in the name of the triune God. Baptism is intended only for properly qualified rational beings, namely, for believers and their children. Rome loses sight of this in so far as it applies the sacrament also to clocks, buildings, and so on. There are two classes to which it should be applied, namely, adults and infants. 1. ADULT BAPTISM. In the case of adults baptism must be preceded by a profession of faith, Mark 16:16; Acts 2:41; 8:37 (not found in some MSS.); 16:31-33. Therefore the Church insists on such a profession before baptizing adults. And when such a profession is made, this is accepted by the Church at its face value, unless she has good objective reasons for doubting its veracity. It does not belong to her province to pry into the secrets of the heart and thus to pass on the genuineness of such a profession. The responsibility rests on the person who makes it. The method of prying into the inner condition of the heart, in order to determine the genuineness of

one's profession, is Labadistic and not in harmony with the practice of the Reformed Churches. Since baptism is not merely a sign and seal, but also a means of grace, the question arises as to the nature of the grace wrought by it. This question is raised here only with respect to adult baptism. In view of the fact that according to our Reformed conception, this baptism presupposes regeneration, faith, conversion, and justification, these surely are not to be conceived as wrought by it. In this respect we differ from the Church of Rome. Even the Lutherans, who ascribe greater power to baptism as a means of grace than the Reformed do, agree with the latter on this point. Neither does baptism work a special sacramental grace, consisting in this that the recipient is implanted into the body of Jesus Christ. The believer's incorporation into mystical union with Christ is also presupposed. Word and sacrament work exactly the same kind of grace, except that the Word, in distinction from the sacrament, is also instrumental in the origination of faith. The sacrament of baptism strengthens faith, and because faith plays an important part in all the other operations of divine grace, these are also greatly benefited by it. Baptism represents primarily an act of the grace of God, but because the professing Christian must voluntarily submit to it, it can also be considered from the side of man. There is in it an offer and gift of God, but also an acceptance on the part of man. Consequently, baptism also signifies that man accepts the covenant and assumes its obligations. It is a seal, not merely of an offered, but of an offered and accepted, that is, of a concluded covenant.

2. INFANT BAPTISM. It is on the point of infant baptism that the most important difference is found between us and the Baptists. The latter hold, as Dr. Hovey, a Baptist author, expresses it, "that only believers in Christ are entitled to baptism, and that only those who give credible evidence of faith in Him should be baptized." This means that children are excluded from the sacrament. In all other denominations, however, they receive it. Several points call for consideration in connection with this subject.

a. The Scriptural basis for infant baptism. It may be said at the outset that there is no explicit command in the Bible to baptize children, and that there is not a single instance in which we

are plainly told that children were baptized. But this does not necessarily make infant baptism un-Biblical. The Scriptural ground for it is found in the following data: (1) The covenant made with Abraham was primarily a spiritual covenant, though it also had a national aspect, and of this spiritual covenant circumcision was a sign and seal. It is an unwarranted procedure of the Baptists to split this covenant up into two of three different covenants. The Bible refers to the covenant with Abraham several times, but always in the singular, Ex. 2:24; Lev. 26:42; II Kings 13:23; I Chron. 16:16; Ps. 105:9. There is not a single exception to this rule. The spiritual nature of this covenant is proved by the manner in which its promises are interpreted in the New Testament, Rom. 4:16-18; II Cor. 6:16-18; Gal. 3:8,9,14,16; Heb. 8:10; 11:9,10,13. It also follows from the fact that circumcision was clearly a rite that had spiritual significance, Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25,26; Acts 15:1; Rom. 2:26-29; 4:11; Phil. 3:2; and from the fact that the promise of the covenant is even called “the gospel,” Gal. 3:8. (2) This covenant is still in force and is essentially identical with the “new covenant” of the present dispensation. The unity and continuity of the covenant in both dispensations follows from the fact that the Mediator is the same, Acts 4:12; 10:43; 15:10,11; Gal. 3:16; I Tim. 2:5,6; I Pet. 1:9-12; the condition is the same, namely, faith, Gen. 15:6; (Rom. 4:3); Ps. 32:10; Heb. 2:4; Acts 10:43; Heb. 11; and the blessings are the same, namely, justification, Ps. 32:1,2,5; Isa. 1:18; Rom. 4:9; Gal. 3:6, regeneration, Deut. 30:6; Ps. 51:10, spiritual gifts, Joel 2:28,32; Acts 2:17-21; Isa. 40:31, and eternal life, Ex. 3:6; Heb. 4:9; 11:10. Peter gave those who were under conviction on the day of Pentecost the assurance that the promise was unto them and to their children, Acts 2:39. Paul argues in Rom. 4:13-18; Gal. 3:13-18 that the giving of the law did not make the promise of none effect, so that it still holds in the new dispensation. And the writer of Hebrews points out that the promise to Abraham was confirmed with an oath, so that New Testament believers may derive comfort from its immutability, Heb. 6:13-18. (3) By the appointment of God infants shared in the benefits of the covenant, and therefore received circumcision as a sign and seal. According to the Bible the covenant is clearly

an organic concept, and its realization moves along organic and historical lines. There is a people or nation of God, an organic whole such as could only be constituted by families. This national idea is naturally very prominent in the Old Testament, but the striking thing is that it did not disappear when the nation of Israel had served its purpose. It was spiritualized and thus carried over into the New Testament, so that the New Testament people of God are also represented as a nation, Matt. 21:43; Rom. 9:25,26 (comp. Hosea 2:23); II Cor. 6:16; Tit. 2:14; I Pet. 2:9. Infants were considered during the old dispensation as an integral part of Israel as the people of God. They were present when the covenant was renewed, Deut. 29:10,13; Josh. 8:35; II Chron. 20:13, had a standing in the congregation of Israel, and were therefore present in their religious assemblies, II Chron. 20:13; Joel 2:16. In view of such rich promises as those in Isa. 54:13; Jer. 31:34; Joel 2:28 we would hardly expect the privileges of such children to be reduced in the new dispensation, and certainly would not look for their exclusion from any standing in the Church. Jesus and the apostles did not exclude them, Matt. 19:14; Acts 2:39; I Cor. 7:14. Such an exclusion would seem to require a very explicit statement to that effect. (4) In the new dispensation baptism is by divine authority substituted for circumcision as the initiatory sign and seal of the covenant of grace. Scripture strongly insists on it that circumcision can no more serve as such, Acts 15:1,2; 21:21; Gal. 2:3-5; 5:2-6; 6:12,13,15. If baptism did not take its place, then the New Testament has no initiatory rite. But Christ clearly substituted it as such, Matt. 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16. It corresponds with circumcision in spiritual meaning. As circumcision referred to the cutting away of sin and to a change of heart, Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25,26; Ezek. 44:7,9, so baptism refers to the washing away of sin, Acts 2:38; I Pet. 3:21; Tit. 3:5, and to spiritual renewal, Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:11,12. The last passage clearly links up circumcision with baptism, and teaches that the Christ-circumcision, that is, circumcision of the heart, signified by circumcision in the flesh, was accomplished by baptism, that is, by that which baptism signifies. Cf. also Gal. 3:27,29. But if children received the sign and seal of the covenant in the old dispensation, the

presumption is that they surely have a right to receive it in the new, to which the pious of the Old Testament were taught to look forward as a much fuller and richer dispensation. Their exclusion from it would require a clear and unequivocal statement to that effect, but quite the contrary is found, Matt. 19:14; Acts 2:39; I Cor. 7:14. (5) As was pointed out in the preceding, the New Testament contains no direct evidence for the practice of infant baptism in the days of the apostles. Lambert, after considering and weighing all the available evidence, expresses his conclusion in the following words: “The New Testament evidence, then, seems to point to the conclusion that infant baptism, to say the least, was not the general custom of the apostolic age.”[The Sacraments in the New Testament, p. 204.] But it need not surprise anyone that there is no direct mention of the baptism of infants, for in a missionary period like the apostolic age the emphasis would naturally fall on the baptism of adults. Moreover, conditions were not always favorable to infant baptism. Converts would not at once have a proper conception of their covenant duties and responsibilities. Sometimes only one of the parents was converted, and it is quite conceivable that the other would oppose the baptism of the children. Frequently there was no reasonable assurance that the parents would educate their children piously and religiously, and yet such assurance was necessary. At the same time the language of the New Testament is perfectly consistent with a continuation of the organic administration of the covenant, which required the circumcision of children, Matt. 19:14; Mark 10:13-16; Acts 2:39; I Cor. 7:14. Moreover, the New Testament repeatedly speaks of the baptism of households, and gives no indication that this is regarded as something out of the ordinary, but rather refers to it as a matter of course, Acts 16:15,33; I Cor. 1:16. It is entirely possible, of course, but not very probable, that none of these households contained children. And if there were infants, it is morally certain that they were baptized along with the parents. The New Testament certainly contains no evidence that persons born and reared in Christian families may not be baptized until they have come to years of discretion and have professed their faith in Christ. There is not the slightest allusion to any such practice. (6)

Wall in the introduction to his History of Infant Baptism points out that in the baptism of proselytes children of proselytes were often baptized along with their parents; but Edersheim says that there was a difference of opinion on this point.[Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah II, p. 746.] Naturally, even if this did happen, it would prove nothing so far as Christian baptism is concerned, but it would go to show that there was nothing strange in such a procedure. The earliest historical reference to infant baptism is found in writings of the last half of the second century. The Didache speaks of adult, but not of infant baptism; and while Justin makes mention of women who became disciples of Christ from childhood (ek paidon), this passage does not mention baptism, and ek paidon does not necessarily mean infancy. Irenæus, speaking of Christ, says: “He came to save through means of Himself all who through Him are born again unto God, infants, and little children, and boys, and youths, and old men.”[Adv. Haereses II, 22,4.] This passage, though it does not explicitly mention baptism, is generally regarded as the earliest reference to infant baptism, since the early Fathers so closely associated baptism with regeneration that they used the term “regeneration” for “baptism.” That infant baptism was quite generally practiced in the latter part of the second century, is evident from the writings of Tertullian, though he himself considered it safer and more profitable to delay baptism.[De Baptismo, c. XVIII.] Origen speaks of it as a tradition of the apostles. Says he: “For this also it was, that the Church had from the apostles a tradition (or, order) to give baptism even to infants.”[Comm. in Epist. ad Romanos, lib. V.] The Council of Carthage (A.D. 253) takes infant baptism for granted and discusses simply the question, whether they may be baptized before the eighth day. From the second century on, infant baptism is regularly recognized, though it was sometimes neglected in practice. Augustine inferred from the fact that it was generally practiced by the Church throughout the world in spite of the fact that it was not instituted in Councils, that it was in all probability settled by the authority of the apostles. Its legitimacy was not denied until the days of the Reformation, when the Anabaptists opposed it. b. Objections to infant baptism. A few of the more

important objections to infant baptism call for brief consideration. (1) Circumcision was merely a carnal and typical ordinance, and as such was destined to pass away. To put baptism in the place of circumcision, is simply to continue the carnal ordinance. Such carnal ordinances have no legitimate place in the New Testament Church. In our day this objection is raised by some dispensationalists, such as Bullinger and O'Hair, who claim that the baptism instituted by Jesus is connected with the Kingdom, and that only the baptism of the Spirit has a proper place in the Church. The book of Acts marks the transition from water-baptism to Spirit-baptism. Naturally, this argument would prove all baptism, adult as well as infant, illegitimate. In this representation of the matter the Jewish and Christian dispensations are placed over against each other as carnal and spiritual, and circumcision is said to belong to the former. But this argument is fallacious. There is no warrant for placing circumcision altogether on a level with the carnal ordinances of the Mosaic law. Says Bannerman: "Circumcision was independent either of the introduction or abolition of the law of Moses; and would have continued the standing ordinance for admission into the Church of God as the seal of the covenant of grace, had not baptism been expressly appointed as a substitute for it." [The Church of Christ II, p. 98.] It may be admitted that circumcision did acquire a certain typical significance in the Mosaic period, but it was primarily a sign and seal of the covenant already made with Abraham. In so far as it was a type it naturally ceased with the appearance of the antitype, and even as a seal of the covenant it made way for an unbloody sacrament expressly instituted by Christ for the Church, and recognized as such by the apostles, since Christ had put an end once for all to the shedding of blood in connection with the work of redemption. In the light of Scripture the position is entirely untenable, that baptism is connected with the Kingdom rather than with the Church, and is therefore Jewish rather than Christian. The words of the institution themselves condemn this view, and so does the fact that on the birthday of the New Testament Church Peter required of those who were added to it that they should be baptized. And if it be said that Peter, being a

Jew, still followed the example of John the Baptist, it may be pointed out that Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, also required that his converts be baptized, Acts 16:15,33; 18:8; I Cor. 1:16. (2) There is no explicit command that children must be baptized. This is perfectly true, but does not disprove the validity of infant baptism. It should be observed that this objection is based on a canon of interpretation to which the Baptists themselves are not true when they hold that Christians are in duty bound to celebrate the first day of the week as their Sabbath, and that women must also partake of the Lord's Supper; for these are things not explicitly commanded. May not the silence of Scripture be construed for, rather than against, infant baptism? For twenty centuries children had been formally initiated into the Church, and the New Testament does not say that this must now cease, though it does teach that circumcision can no more serve for this purpose. The Lord Himself instituted another rite, and on the day of Pentecost Peter says to those who joined the Church that the promise is unto them and to their children, and further to as many as the Lord Himself shall call. This statement of Peter at least proves that he still had the organic conception of the covenant in mind. Moreover, the question may be raised how the Baptist himself can prove the correctness of his own position by an express command of Scripture. Does the Bible anywhere command the exclusion of children from baptism? Does it command that all those who are born and reared in Christian families must profess their faith before they are baptized? Clearly, there are no such commands. (3) A closely related objection is, that there is no example of infant baptism in the New Testament. It is perfectly true that the Bible does not explicitly say that children were baptized, though it does apprise us of the fact that the rite was administered to whole households. The absence of all definite references to infant baptism finds its explanation, at least to a large extent, in the fact that Scripture gives us a historical record of the missionary work of the apostles, but no such record of the work that was carried on in the organized churches. And here, too, the tables may be easily turned on the Baptist. Will he show us an example of the baptism of an adult who had been born and reared in a

Christian home? There is no danger that he ever will. (4) The most important objection to infant baptism raised by the Baptists, is that, according to Scripture, baptism is conditioned on an active faith revealing itself in a creditable profession. Now it is perfectly true that the Bible points to faith as a prerequisite for baptism, Mark 16:16; Acts 10:44-48; 16:14,15,31,34. If this means that the recipient of baptism must in all cases give manifestations of an active faith before baptism, then children are naturally excluded. But though the Bible clearly indicates that only those adults who believed were baptized, it nowhere lays down the rule that an active faith is absolutely essential for the reception of baptism. Baptists refer us to the great commission, as it is found in Mark 16:15,16. In view of the fact that this is a missionary command, we may proceed on the assumption that the Lord had in mind an active faith in those words. And though it is not explicitly stated, it is altogether likely that He regarded this faith as a prerequisite for the baptism of the persons intended. But who are they? Evidently, the adults of the nations that were to be evangelized, and therefore the Baptist is not warranted in construing it as an argument against infant baptism. If he insists on doing this nevertheless, it should be pointed out that on his construction these words prove too much even for him, and therefore prove nothing. The words of our Saviour imply that faith is a prerequisite for the baptism of those who through the missionary efforts of the Church would be brought to Christ, and do not imply that it is also a prerequisite for the baptism of children. The Baptist generalizes this statement of the Saviour by teaching that it makes all baptism contingent on the active faith of the recipient. He argues as follows: Active faith is the prerequisite of baptism. Infants cannot exercise faith. Therefore infants may not be baptized. But in that way these words might also be construed into an argument against infant salvation, since they not only imply but explicitly state that faith (active faith) is the condition for salvation. To be consistent the Baptist would thus find himself burdened with the following syllogism: Faith is the *conditio sine qua non* of salvation. Children cannot yet exercise faith. Therefore children cannot be saved. But this is a conclusion from which the

Baptist himself would shrink back. c. The ground for infant baptism. (1) The position of our confessional standards. The Belgic Confession declares in Art. XXXIV that infants of believing parents “ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as the children of Israel formerly were circumcized upon the same promises which are made to our children.” The Heidelberg Catechism answers the question, “Are infants also to be baptized?” as follows: “Yes, for since they, as well as adults, are included in the covenant and Church of God, and since both redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit, the Author of faith, are through the blood of Christ promised to them no less than to adults, they must also by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be ingrafted into the Christian Church, and distinguished from the children of unbelievers, as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism was instituted in the new covenant.”[Lord’s Day XXVII, Q. 74.] And the Canons of Dort contain the following statement in I, Art. 17: “Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with their parents are comprehended, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom it pleases God to call out of this life in their infancy (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39; I Cor. 7:14).” These statements of our confessional standards are entirely in line with the position of Calvin, that infants of believing parents, or those who have only one believing parent, are baptized on the basis of their covenant relationship. [Inst. IV. 16:6,15.] The same note is struck in our Form for the Baptism of Infants: “Since, then, baptism has come in the place of circumcision, the children should be baptized as heirs of the Kingdom of God and of His covenant.” It will be observed that all these statements are based on the commandment of God to circumcize the children of the covenant, for in the last analysis that commandment is the ground of infant baptism. On the basis of our confessional standards it may be said that infants of believing parents are baptized on the ground that they are children of the covenant, and are as such heirs of the all-comprehensive covenant-promises of God, which include

also the promise of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit unto regeneration and sanctification. In the covenant God makes over to them a certain grant or donation in a formal and objective way, requires of them that they will in due time accept this by faith, and promises to make it a living reality in their lives by the operation of the Holy Spirit. And in view of this fact the Church must regard them as prospective heirs of salvation, must regard them as under obligation to walk in the way of the covenant, has the right to expect that, under a faithful covenant administration, they, speaking generally, will live in the covenant, and is in duty bound to regard them as covenant breakers, if they do not meet its requirements. It is only in this way that it does full justice to the promises of God, which must in all their fulness be appropriated in faith by those who come to maturity. Thus the covenant, including the covenant promises, constitutes the objective and legal ground for the baptism of children. Baptism is a sign and seal of all that is comprehended in the promises. (2) Differences of opinion among Reformed theologians. Reformed theologians did not all agree in the past, and are not even now all unanimous, in their representation of the ground of infant baptism. Many theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries took the position described in the preceding, namely, that infants of believers are baptized, because they are in the covenant and are as such heirs of the rich promises of God including a title, not only to regeneration, but also to all the blessings of justification and of the renewing and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. Others, however, while recognizing the truth of this representation, were not wholly satisfied with it. They stressed the fact that baptism is something more than the seal of a promise, or even of all the covenant promises; and that it is not merely the seal of a future good, but also of present spiritual possessions. The view became rather prevalent that baptism is administered to infants on the ground of presumptive regeneration. But even those who accepted this view did not all agree. Some combined this view with the other while others substituted it for the other. Some would proceed on the assumption that all the children presented for baptism are regenerated, while others would assume

this only in connection with the elect children. The difference of opinion between those who believe that children of believers are baptized on the ground of their covenant relationship and of the covenant promise, and those who find this ground in presumptive regeneration persisted up to the present time and was the source of a lively controversy, especially in the Netherlands during the last period of the nineteenth, and the beginning of the twentieth, century. Dr. Kuyper at first spoke of presumptive regeneration as the ground of infant baptism, and many readily accepted this view. G. Kramer wrote his splendid thesis on *Het Verband van Doop en Wedergeboorte* especially in defense of this position. Later on Dr. Kuyper did not use this expression any more, and some of his followers felt the need of more careful discrimination and spoke of the covenant relationship as the legal, and presumptive regeneration as the spiritual, ground of infant baptism. But even this is not a satisfactory position. Dr. Honig, who is also a disciple and admirer of Kuyper, is on the right track when he says in his recent *Handboek van de Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*: [p. 655.] “We do not baptize the children of believers on the ground of an assumption, but on the ground of a command and an act of God. Children must be baptized in virtue of the covenant of God” (translation mine). Presumptive regeneration naturally cannot be regarded as the legal ground of infant baptism; this can be found only in the covenant promise of God. Moreover, it cannot be the ground in any sense of the word, since the ground of baptism must be something objective, as the advocates of the view in question themselves are constrained to admit. If they are asked, why they assume the regeneration of children presented for baptism, they can only answer, Because they are born of believing parents, that is, because they are born in the covenant. Naturally, to deny that presumptive regeneration is the ground of infant baptism, is not equivalent to saying that it is entirely unwarranted to assume that infant children of believers are regenerated. This is a question that must be considered on its own merits. It may be well to quote in this connection the first half of the fourth point of the Conclusions of Utrecht, which were adopted by our Church in 1908. We translate this as

follows: “And, finally, as far as the fourth point, that of presumptive regeneration, is concerned, Synod declares that, according to the confession of our Churches, the seed of the covenant must, in virtue of the promise of God, be presumed to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ, until, as they grow up, the contrary appears from their life or doctrine; that it is, however, less correct to say that baptism is administered to the children of believers on the ground of their presumptive regeneration, since the ground of baptism is the command and the promise of God; and that further the judgment of charity, with which the Church presumes the seed of the covenant to be regenerated, by no means intends to say that therefore each child is really regenerated, since the Word of God teaches that they are not all Israel that are of Israel, and it is said of Isaac: in him shall thy seed be called (Rom. 9:6,7), so that in preaching it is always necessary to insist on serious self-examination, since only those who shall have believed and have been baptized will be saved.”[Acts of Synod, 1908, pp. 82 f.] (3) Objection to the view that children are baptized on the ground of their covenant relationship. It has been said that, if children are baptized on the ground that they are born in the covenant and are therefore heirs of the promise, they are baptized on another ground than adults, since these are baptized on the ground of their faith or their profession of faith. But this is hardly correct, as Calvin already pointed out in his day. The great Reformer answered this objection effectively. The following is a translation of what Kramer says respecting Calvin’s position on this point: “Calvin finds occasion here in connection with infant baptism, now that he has taken the standpoint of the covenant, to draw the line farther. Up to this point he has not called attention to the fact that adults too are baptized according to the rule of the covenant. And therefore it might seem that there was a difference between the baptism of adults and that of children. The adults to be baptized on the ground of their faith, infants, on the ground of the covenant of God. No, the Reformer declares, the only rule according to which, and the legal ground on which, the Church may administer baptism, is the covenant. This is true in the case of adults as well as in the case of children.

That the former must first make a confession of faith and conversion, is due to the fact that they are outside of the covenant. In order to be admitted into the communion of the covenant, they must first learn the requirements of the covenant, and then faith and conversion open the way to the covenant.”[Het Verband van Doop en Wedergeboorte, pp. 122 f.] The very same opinion is expressed by Bavinck.[Geref. Dogm, IV. p. 581.] This means that, after adults find entrance into the covenant by faith and conversion, they receive the sacrament of baptism on the ground of this covenant relationship. Baptism is also for them a sign and seal of the covenant. d. Infant baptism as a means of grace. Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. It does not signify one thing and seal another, but sets the seal of God on that which it signifies. According to our confessional standards and our Form for the administration of baptism, it signifies the washing away of our sins, and this is but a brief expression for the removal of the guilt of sin in justification, and for the removal of the pollution of sin in sanctification, which is, however, imperfect in this life. And if this is what is signified, then it is also that which is sealed. And if it be said, as it is sometimes in our Reformed literature, that baptism seals the promise(s) of God, this does not merely mean that it vouches for the truth of the promise, but that it assures the recipients that they are the appointed heirs of the promised blessings. This does not necessarily mean that they are already in principle in possession of the promised good, though this is possible and may even be probable, but certainly means that they are appointed heirs and will receive the heritage, unless they show themselves unworthy of it and refuse it. Dabney calls attention to the fact that seals are often appended to promissory covenants, in which the bestowment of the promised good is conditional. But baptism is more than a sign and seal; it is as such also a means of grace. According to Reformed theology it is not, as the Roman Catholics claim, the means of initiating the work of grace in the heart, but it is a means for the strengthening of it or, as it is often expressed, for the increase of grace. This gives rise to a rather difficult question in connection with infant baptism. It can readily be seen how baptism can strengthen the

work of faith in the adult recipient, but it is not so apparent how it can operate as a means of grace in the case of children who are entirely unconscious of the significance of baptism and cannot yet exercise faith. The difficulty, with which we are confronted here, naturally does not exist for the small number of Reformed scholars who deny that baptism merely strengthens an antecedent condition of grace, and claim that it “is a means for the impartation of grace in a specific form, and for the specific end of our regeneration and ingrafting in Christ.” [This position is defended at length in a work entitled *The Divine Life in the Church*, pp. 9-196.] All the others must, of course, face the problem. Luther also wrestled with that problem. He made the efficacy of baptism dependent on the faith of the recipient; but when he reflected on the fact that infants cannot exercise faith, he was inclined to believe that God by His prevenient grace wrought an incipient faith in them through baptism; and, finally, he referred the problem to the doctors of the Church. Reformed theologians solve the problem by calling attention to three things, which may be regarded as alternatives, but may also be combined. (1) It is possible to proceed on the assumption (not the certain knowledge) that the children offered for baptism are regenerated and are therefore in possession of the *semen fidei* (the seed of faith); and to hold that God through baptism in some mystical way, which we do not understand, strengthens this seed of faith in the child. (2) Attention may also be called to the fact that the operation of baptism as a means of grace is not necessarily limited to the moment of its administration any more than that of the Lord’s Supper is limited to the time of its celebration. It may in that very moment serve in some mysterious way to increase the grace of God in the heart, if present, but may also be instrumental in augmenting faith later on, when the significance of baptism is clearly understood. This is clearly taught in both the Belgic and the Westminster Confession. (3) Again, it may be pointed out, as has been done by some theologians (e.g. Dabney and Vos) that infant baptism is also a means of grace for the parents who present their child for baptism. It serves to strengthen their faith in the promises of God, to work in them the assurance that the child

for whom they stand sponsors has a right of property in the covenant of grace, and to strengthen in them the sense of responsibility for the Christian education of their child. e. The extension of baptism to children of unbelievers. Naturally, only children of believers are the proper subjects of infant baptism. In several ways, however, the circle has been enlarged. (1) Roman Catholics and Ritualists of the Anglican Church proceed on the assumption that baptism is absolutely essential to salvation, since it conveys a grace that can be obtained in no other way. Hence they consider it their duty to baptize all children that come within their reach, without inquiring as to the spiritual condition of their parents. (2) Some call attention to the fact that the promise applies to parents and children and children's children, even to the thousandth generation, Ps. 105:7-10; Isa. 59:21; Acts 2:39. In view of these promises they maintain that children whose parents have left the Church have not thereby forfeited their privileges as children of the covenant. (3) There are those who externalize the covenant by making it co-extensive with the State in a State-Church. An English child, has, as such, just as much right to baptism as it has to State protection, irrespective of the question, whether the parents are believers or not. (4) Some have taken the position that the fact that parents are baptized, also assures their children of a title to baptism. They regard the personal relation of the parents to the covenant as quite immaterial. Churches have occasionally acted on that principle, and finally harbored a class of members who did not themselves assume the responsibility of the covenant, and yet sought the seal of the covenant for their children. In New England this was known as the half-way covenant. (5) Finally, the principle of adoption has been applied, in order to obtain baptism for children who were not entitled to it otherwise. If the parents were unfit or unwilling to vouch for the Christian education of their children, others could step in to guarantee this. The main ground for this was sought in Gen. 17:12. QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: What are the different meanings of the words baptō, baptizo, and louesthai? Did John the Baptist baptize by immersion? Was the eunuch (Acts 8:38, 39) baptized in that manner? Does the New Testament anywhere

emphasize the necessity of one particular mode of baptism? Is the doctrine of infant baptism Biblical? Was its right ever called in question before the Reformation? What accounts for the rise of the Anabaptist denial at the time of the Reformation? What is the Baptist conception of the covenant with Abraham? How do they explain Rom. 4:11? What do our confessional standards say as to the ground on which children are baptized? What is Calvin's position as to the ground on which both children and adults are baptized? What practical dangers are connected with the doctrine of presumptive regeneration? How about Dabney's position that baptism is a sacrament to the parent as well as to the child?