



Mount Merrion Free Presbyterian Church

No.2 The Proper subjects of Baptism.

Paedo-baptism and Credo-baptism

Sabbath Day Morning 24th April 2011

We come to our second message on the subject of Christian Baptism. Last week we looked at the significance or meaning of baptism, observing that it is a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace and a means of grace to reassure believers of their union to Christ. This week we will be considering from scripture the proper subjects of baptism, who should be baptized? It is with respect to the last two points of baptism, namely the subjects and the mode of baptism that great controversy rages, between Baptists and Presbyterians, both sides giving their differing arguments *“The Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, under Christ the Great King and Head of the Church, Realizing that bitter controversy raging around the mode and proper subjects of the ordinance of Christian baptism has divided the Body of Christ when that Body should have been united in Christian love and Holy Ghost power to stem the onslaughts and hell-inspired assaults of modernism, hereby affirms that each member of the Free Presbyterian Church shall have liberty to decide for himself which course to adopt on these controverted issues, each member giving due honor in love to the views held by differing brethren, but none espousing the error of baptismal regeneration.”*

Evangelical Protestants reject the Romish notion of baptismal regeneration, but they differ among themselves as to the proper mode and subjects of baptism. Historically, the Reformed churches along with the Lutheran, Episcopal, Congregational, and Methodist churches have accepted that pouring, sprinkling, and dipping are all valid modes of baptism. They have also believed that baptism is the sign and seal of God's covenant with His people and that it should be administered to all who are in that covenant. They argue that the infant children of believers are included in the covenant and that therefore baptism should be administered to them.

Over against this view, Baptists and Anabaptists have argued that baptism must follow a personal profession of faith. It cannot legitimately be administered to children who have made no such personal profession. The New Testament nowhere commands or mentions the baptism of infants. The only baptism it knows is believer's baptism. Many notable men have held differing views, C. H. Spurgeon strongly adhered to believer's baptism. The saintly Robert Murray McCheyne held strongly to baptism for the infant children of believers. So where does that leave us this morning? It leaves us with the bible, in this congregation we will look at the bible alongside our subordinate confession of faith.

1) Who should be baptised?

This is a very important question; is baptism something that is open to everyone and anyone? Sadly due to neglect and gross misunderstanding of baptism, many people are allowed to partake of the sacrament of baptism who should not.

a) The Baptist position. *Credo-baptism* [believers only].

Also referred to as *'believer's only baptism'* this is the position adopted by Baptists. Individuals are baptised only on profession of faith. The name *'believer's only baptism'* is misleading, in fact the term should never be used unless proper explanation is given. To say that only believers are the proper subjects of baptism is to revert back to the position that I outlined last week, viz, that those baptised are absolutely the Lord's; we cannot make such a claim, this is making the visible Church equate with the invisible Church who are known only unto the Lord. I know many Baptists who do not espouse that view, but on the basis of profession of faith baptise adults, perhaps it would be better to rename the practise as *'professing believer's baptism'*. May I say that the practise of baptising adults is not exclusively a Baptist position, it is wrong to state that Baptists alone will baptize men on profession of faith. Presbyterians baptise adults who have professed faith in Christ also. Paedobaptists ministers gladly baptise individuals on profession of their faith in Christ.

i) Not a sign of faith, but of grace. Baptists and Presbyterians part company on this aspect of baptism. Presbyterians affirm that baptism is a sign of the covenant of grace; Baptists affirm that baptism is a sign of faith, therefore only those who are baptised on profession of faith are illegible for baptism. Presbyterians view baptism as a sign of God's grace, not the evidence of faith. Randy Booth points out that it cannot be overstated enough that baptism is not a testimony to what man has done, i.e. repented and believed on Christ. Baptism is not a sign of anything we do, it is God's sign of his promise to save those that believe, his work! Grace and not faith!

ii) The Presbyterian position. Paedo-baptism [believers on profession of faith, plus infants of one or both believing parents].

Presbyterians as already outlined baptise individuals on profession of their faith, but also see the infants of one or more believing parents. *Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but the infants of such as are members are to be baptized.*” Shorter Catechism Q95 Westminster Confession Ch28 para 4-5, “*Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized.*” *The Westminster divines are careful to include a further paragraph [Para 5] which underlines the fact that the subjects of baptism whether they be adults or children of believers are not regenerated; that there is nothing attached to baptism that leads to the salvation of either, “Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it; or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.”*

To a large degree the paedobaptist position has been wrongly dismissed by evangelical Christians who unwisely charge paedobaptists with flaunting with Romanism, quips like ‘sure that is popery dressed up’ etc are sinfully wrong, sinful in the sense that no thought has gone into that argument; the scripture warns such that every idle and thoughtless word will be brought against the person who made that quip [Matt Ch12; 36], so care needs to be taken.

2) Where do we stand on the position?

I mention again that the Fpc position is open for every believer to decide, however, it is my duty as your pastor to unfold what I believe the scriptures to teach concerning the subjects of baptism, therefore what I am giving to you is not a mixture of historical positions [Baptist and Presbyterian] but what the bible teaches. Let me leave with you a number of arguments for you to consider.

b) The inclusion of children in the covenant.

As you look at each of the several administrations of the covenant. Let us look at a few examples:

i) Noah. One of the clearest instances is seen in the home of Noah, Gen Ch6:8, this verse clearly states that it was “Noah who found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Yet when it comes to the children of Noah they are to be found in the Ark with their Father, the grace that Noah receives was extended to his three Sons and their families, turn over to Gen Ch9:8-9, “*And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him saying, And I, behold I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.*”

ii) Abraham. Gen Ch17:7 “*And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.*” Gen Ch17:7

a) Circumcision. Firstly let us consider the Old Testament practise of circumcision. This was the sign of the covenant of grace to Abraham and to his children. Circumcision pointed the one circumcised to the need for a circumcised heart, this was the great need of the individual, and circumcision was the sign that pointed forward to the need. The covenant was made with Abraham who was a believer; however, his children being children of a believer received the sign of the covenant. The main argument that paedobaptists put forth for baptising the children of believers is the continuity of the covenant of Grace in Old Testament and New Testament. That is why Peter said in Acts Ch2:39, “*For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*” There are differences between the Old administration of the covenant and the new administration of the covenant, Peter in his sermon does not deny that, Look at Acts Ch2:16-18, Peter is quoting from Joel Ch2:28-32, he points out that there will be changes in the new administration, instead of the covenant promise of the anointing of the holy ghost being restricted to Kings, Priests and Prophets, it will now be poured out on all flesh, the covenant privileges are extended to women now under the New administration, the gentiles are included also.. Acts Ch2 is a critical passage, the Old Administration and all its shadows are passing away, the new administration of the Covenant of Grace is coming into force, but one thing he emphasises that continues in the New Testament is the promise to the children of believers, many covenantal patterns have been destroyed [writes Rodgers], however, this pattern remains. As I said last week in the first message on baptism, the strength of the paedobaptists position is found in the unity of the covenants, not upon tradition or some novel idea invented a few hundred years ago, nor is it Romanism in disguise. That is one of the most serious slanders against paedobaptists, that it is Romanism, Rome has an erroneous teaching on baptism, this morning we are not comparing history or church teaching, we are looking at the bible.

iii) The Mosaic Covenant. “*Instead of God starting with a brand new covenant each time each successive covenant advanced God’s original purposes to a greater level of realisation*” Robert Booth The covenant revealed to Moses after Adam and Abraham, contained elements of the first administration. At this time Israel was under oppression in Egypt, had God forgotten what he told Abraham? No, he remembered his covenant with Abraham and Adam, In Egypt the cry of his people goes up before him! [Ex 2:23-24], “*And*

God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.” [See also Ex Ch6:4-8]. God brings Israel out of bondage and reminds them of the extent of the promises of the previous covenant with Abraham, look at Deut Ch29:9-15, those under the covenant of grace are individual men, children [little ones], wives, strangers, look especially at v14-15, *“Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath, but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day.”* What an interesting statement, he is referring to the next generation; the unborn children of Israel are included in the covenant.

3) The Special Place of Children in the Covenant.

Baptism reminds Christian parents of the special place that their child/children have in the heart of God, Psalm 127, “Lo children are a heritage of the Lord.” The Lord said ‘suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of God.” Mark Ch10:14; Luke Ch18:16; Matt Ch19:14. This does not mean that a believer’s child is regenerated, like the engaged couple, they have made a promise but have not yet entered into the experience of marriage [Rodgers]. The baptized infant will see himself as being engaged to the Lord, he will grow under his covenant privileges, being taught the word of God, the parents praying that their child will enter into the personal experience of Christ.