

Baptizing Children and the Covenant of Grace

(A Response to Reformed Preachers on the Radio)

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Recently I responded to several reformed radio pastors who were dealing with questions that people wanted them to answer. One of the questions was this: “Should Children be baptized?” They were referring to babies and very young children. I was surprised when one of the pastors said that he wrote an entire booklet on the subject of “Why Children Should be Baptized.” The other pastor gave a summarized answer as to why children should be baptized, which I have written out below. What follows is my own rebuttal of the fallacy that children should be baptized by explaining what the Bible teaches regarding this matter and why baptism excludes children.

Reformed Preachers on Radio: “We see the Covenant of Grace extended to Israel continuing into the New Testament (the new Israel – the Church) since Jesus did not come to destroy the law but fulfill the law – advocating the practice of baptizing children. There is continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Under the Old Covenant the children were circumcised but under the New Covenant we replace the circumcision of children with the baptism of children so they can enter the Covenant of Grace. This practice of baptizing children is alluded to in the house of Cornelius (household salvation and baptism – Acts 16:33) which brings an entire family into the Covenant of Grace.”

My Response: Greetings in Christ. I’d like to make some brief comments on the subject matter of children being baptized which you spoke about on your radio program. You both firmly agreed that little children should be baptized. I’d like to critique your points without possessing a critical spirit, even though I’m stressing my points in a clear fashion. So, here I go. First, show me one verse where the Bible mentions by name the Covenant of Grace? Of course, we both know there are many covenants mentioned in the Bible by specific names (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian, Davidic, and New) but never once is the Covenant of Grace mentioned. Red flag! The whole premise of your argument has no foundation and merit since it is built upon an unbiblical and imaginary covenant not specifically addressed in the Bible.

Second, we know that Jesus coming to fulfill the law (Matt. 5:17) has to do with following ALL of the Mosaic Law (to the jot and tittle!) to prove He was the Messiah. It is not intended to convey that we are to carry all the intricacies and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law into our Christian lives. The Bible clearly teaches that circumcision is unnecessary for New Testament Christianity (Acts 15:19), or any *replacement* of circumcision, since we are living under grace (Rom. 6:14). Furthermore, if baptism replaces circumcision then only the male children should be baptized in accordance with Mosaic regulations!

You seem to suggest in your comment that Jesus came to fulfill the law but not abolish it. However, it is important to notice that Jesus did not say that the law would *never* pass away. He said it would not pass away *till all was fulfilled*. It was fulfilled in Christ and would pass out of existence (Gal. 3:19) and no longer be a rule of life that governs us today under the New Covenant (Gal. 5:18). Therefore, we are not obligated to follow it in relationship to outward conformity to strict codes but inward conformity to its morals (the righteous character of the law) by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:4; 2 Cor. 3:18). The change from the Old and New Covenants is stated in a clear fashion.

Third, to assume that infant children were baptized in the household of Cornelius (Acts 16:33) is incorrect since the Bible text gives no support whatsoever that there were infants or very young children in the household that were baptized. It's obvious that they were all old enough to believe in Jesus Christ and "come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4), since understanding truth is what God requires for salvation, and salvation is what Jesus was offering (Acts 16:31) – not the promise of entering a Covenant of Grace to assure elect children of their future belief and destiny.

Fourth, we do know that Jesus did NOT *baptize* children but *blessed* them (Mark 10:16). If baptizing children was so important you would think that Jesus, Paul, and other apostles would give instruction regarding this procedure in the epistles and that there would be very clear examples found that we could follow. Show me one *convincing* example in the New Testament where babies or young children were baptized?

Fifth, I understand that your Reformed Theology stresses a continuity between the Old and New Testament (the Church replaces Israel or baptism replaces circumcision) but we must remember that God is a God of variety and He often does things differently. This is why we are not bringing animals

to church today to be slain and offered on the altar. God's plan and purpose is not always the same throughout the ages. Nevertheless, whatever He does, He always gets the glory and the glory of God is the key unifying principle between the Old and New Testaments (Ps. 79:9; 108:5; Rom. 16:27; 2 Cor. 4:15).

Does the Church really replace Israel as you suggest? Is Replacement Theology a valid Biblical argument? Paul gives us the answer by asking: "Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew..." God is not finished with His national people Israel and has a future plan for them (Rom. 11:26-29 – "And so all Israel shall be saved" and "the gifts and calling are without repentance").

In conclusion, your arguments when weighed in the light of Scripture are found wanting. Every point that you made is invalid and is based upon preconceived assumptions built upon other assumptions, whether it has to do with a Covenant of Grace, that young children (even babies) should be baptized in fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, that infant children were baptized in the house of Cornelius, and that the Church replaces Israel (allowing baptism to replace circumcision) which is something the Bible never mentions nor teaches.

You reformed guys are sometimes hard to figure out. You preach "radical grace" (freedom from law) on your radio programs and yet want to *redo* or *rework* an Old Covenant practice for children in a New Covenant era, and in doing so, place children back under the law? I don't get it! Anyway, these are just my thoughts on this matter. I count you as brothers in Christ. Have a great day in the Lord.

Sincerely,

Pastor Kelly Sensenig