The Subjects Of Baptism

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Shorter Catechism, Q. 95, "To whom is baptism to be administered?"

A. "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 of the visible Church are to be baptized."

Westminster Confession of Faith, XXV.2, "The visible Church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, and of their children."

Larger Catechism, Q. 62, "What is the visible Church?"

A. "The visible Church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children."

The subjects of baptism are the members of the Visible Church. The members of the Visible Church are those who profess the true religion, and their children. This has always been the answer of the majority of Christians to the question "Who should be baptized?", throughout the history of the Church
from the earliest post-apostolic times to the present day. So far as data exist on which to base a judgment, paedobaptism has always been the standard Christian practice recognized by the main body of Christians, while anti-paedobaptism has always been a sectarian and minority view.

Warfield in *Studies in Theology*, page 402, states that infant baptism is possibly hinted at in Justin Martyr, assumed apparently in Irenaeus, and openly proclaimed as apostolical by Origen and Cyprian while it was vainly opposed by Tertullian. He adds that it is certain from their writings that Origen and Cyprian were baptized in their infancy, which shows that infant baptism was practiced in the age of Irenaeus.

Tertullian opposed infant baptism, thereby affording evidence that it was an existing practice in his day. The approximate dates of the "church fathers" which have been mentioned are as follows:

- Justin Martyr, A.D. 100-167
- Irenaeus, A.D. 130-200
- Origen, A.D. 200-257
- Cyprian, A.D. 200-257
- Tertullian, A.D. 160-220

The scanty data we have on Polycarp, Ignatius and Papias, the very earliest of the fathers, gives no evidence either for or against infant baptism. The first evidence of anti-paedobaptism in the early Church is found in the writings of Tertullian, about A.D. 200. Tertullian opposed infant baptism,
though not for the same reasons that it is opposed today. He advocated postponement of baptism because of his belief that post-baptismal sins are harder to get forgiven than sins committed before one’s baptism. This of course is an unscriptural reason. But Tertullian’s very opposition to infant baptism proves the existence and the prevalence of the practice in his day.

Thus the earliest post-apostolic Christian writings that deal with the issue of pedobaptism at all show it as an existing practice in their day. From their day to our own pedobaptism has been standard Christian practice, while anti-pedobaptism has been a dissenting minority view. Whether the answer of the New Testament to the question “Who should be baptized?” is the same as that of the majority of Christians throughout the centuries of the Church’s history, is the question at issue.

The books written on this subject would almost fill a library. While much of the argument on both sides of the question has been very keen, perhaps not many have been convinced by the common proof-text method of procedure.

We may admit at once that there is not in the New Testament an explicit command to baptize infants, nor is there an explicit statement that an infant was baptized. If the warrant for pedobaptism is in the Bible, it is implicit, not explicit. On this there need be no dispute.

Anti-pedobaptists make a great point of this,
even holding that it settles the whole controversy. There is no explicit command to baptize infants, and no explicit record of the baptism of infants. Therefore infant baptism is an unscriptural practice and did not exist in the apostolic Church.

This is a most precarious argument, however. It rests upon the untenable assumption that only doctrines and practices explicitly stated in Scripture can be regarded as true or valid. This assumption cannot be granted, for if granted it would prove far too much.

There are several unquestionable doctrines and practices of the Christian Faith which are not found explicitly stated in the Bible, but which nevertheless are implicitly present in the Bible and are derived from the Bible by valid logical inference.

To take a very clear and elementary example, there is in the New Testament no explicit command that women are to partake of the Lord’s Supper, nor is there any explicit statement which proves that any woman ever did partake of the Lord’s Supper. As a matter of fact only men were present with the Lord when He instituted the Supper. It might be argued, therefore, that for women to partake of the Lord’s Supper is unscriptural. No one actually does hold this position, but we should realize that the participation of women in the Lord’s Supper is based on inference, not on explicit statements or commands of Scripture. In other words it is implicit but not explicit in the Bible.
Again, it is generally recognized that the doctrine of the Trinity is basic to Christianity — that the one God exists eternally in three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are the same in substance, equal in power and glory. Without this doctrine there can be no Christianity. To deny this puts one outside of Christianity among Jews, Mohammedans and Unitarians.

Yet the doctrine of the Trinity is nowhere explicitly stated in the Bible. There is no verse or passage of Scripture which actually teaches it. The elements of the doctrine are found scattered through the Bible, but the formulation of these elements into the doctrine of the Trinity rests upon inference, not upon explicit statements. The Bible teaches that there is one God — that is explicit. It speaks of the Father and calls Him God — that is explicit. It speaks of the Son and calls Him God — that is explicit. It speaks of the Holy Spirit and calls Him God — that too is explicit. But that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons, equal in power and glory, yet one in substance, is nowhere explicitly stated in the Bible. As Trinitarians, we hold that this is indeed implicit in the Bible, and that it is necessarily derived from the Bible by valid logical inference. But we should realize that the Bible does not explicitly teach it.

When the anti-pedobaptist demands explicit Scriptural warrant for infant baptism, he is making an improper demand. He is making a demand
which we cannot and should not grant. If explicit warrant must be produced for pedobaptism, then explicit warrant must be produced for every Christian doctrine and practice all along the line. We cannot have a special kind of logic for dealing with the issue of pedobaptism. We must have the same kind of logic for the whole field of doctrine and practice.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.6, rightly states that "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture..." The Reformed Presbyterian Testimony, in line with the Westminster Confession, speaks as follows:

"The exercise of Reason, with respect to Revelation, is lawful and necessary. God addresses man in the Scriptures as a rational creature: the faculty of reasoning is the gift of God; and men are bound to exercise it in searching the Scriptures, in ascertaining all the ideas which the Word of God conveys to man, and drawing inferences for the direction of faith and manners from Scripture doctrines, and these inferences, as well as the express words of Revelation, are the Divine authority. God hath spoken nothing the full force of which he did not comprehend" (IV.1).

To let the anti-pedobaptist's demand for explicit Scripture warrant pass unchallenged, and to pro-
ceed to debate with him about the meaning and relevance of particular alleged "proof-texts", is not the right pathway by which to arrive at a solid conviction of truth in this matter.

Many of the commonly cited proof-texts may seem to create a presumption one way or the other, but they do not afford certainty. For instance, the references to the baptism of households may very well suggest that infants were baptized, but they do not actually prove this. It is just possible that there were no infants in any of these various households.

Again, the instances of adult baptism upon personal profession of faith, in the New Testament, may seem to the anti-pedobaptist to mean that only adults who could profess their faith personally were baptized, but these instances do not actually prove this. When Christianity was new it was to be expected that most baptisms would be those of adults. The same is true in any pioneer mission field today. Individual adults are won for Christ, often against the opposition of their families and relatives. These adults are baptized. But in the second and subsequent generations of Christians in the field, infant baptisms will outnumber adult baptisms.

Anti-pedobaptists interpret the silence of the New Testament and of Polycarp, Ignatius and Papias on the question of infant baptism as evidence that the practice did not exist in their day. But the silence may equally well be interpreted as implying that infant baptism was prevalent and unchallenged
by opposition or controversy in their day. People do not write in defence of doctrines or practices which are generally accepted. Paul argued in favor of the resurrection in his First Epistle to the Corinthians because a party in the Church of Corinth denied the resurrection. His lack of argument about the resurrection in the Epistle to the Galatians does not indicate that Paul thought the resurrection unimportant, far less that he doubted or denied it, but only that there was no occasion to argue with the Galatians about it, for they fully accepted it.

Similarly, the lack of explicit reference to pedobaptism in the New Testament does not necessarily imply the absence of the doctrine or the practice. It may equally well imply the prevalence of the doctrine and the practice. The anti-pedobaptist, in other words, fails to take the occasional character of the New Testament writings into account.

While we are dealing with this matter of argument from silence, we may note in passing an interesting point brought out by Donald Balile in The Theology of the Sacraments (New York, 1957, p. 84) when he says:

"It seems very unlikely that in New Testament times adult baptism was ever administered to persons who had been born of Christian parents; either they were baptized in infancy or it was considered unnecessary for them to be baptized at all."

When our Baptist brethren challenge us to point
out a clear case of infant baptism in the New Testament, we might reply by challenging them to point out a single case of adult baptism being administered to a person born of Christian parents. On the Baptist assumptions there must have been many hundreds of such cases before the end of the New Testament. Yet there is no instance of it, nor a word of instruction about it in any part of the New Testament. Admittedly, silence proves nothing, but if we are to deal in arguments from silence, it would seem even more difficult to account for silence of the New Testament about adult baptisms of second generation Christians, than it is to account for its silence about infant baptisms of the children of believers. If it was the practice for the children of Christian parents to receive adult baptism on reaching maturity or adolescence, is it not passing strange that in the Pastoral Epistles there is not a word of instruction as to the proper age and qualifications for the administration of the ordinance?

May I suggest that pedobaptists have in the past often greatly weakened their case by allowing the anti-pedobaptist to make the rules for the debate, and the anti-pedobaptist has made rules which are improper because they are not applicable to the discussion of Christian truth as a whole. The anti-pedobaptist has made special rules of controversy which give him an improper advantage. The demand that everything be based solely upon explicit Scripture warrant, and the consequent limiting of the debate to an argument from alleged silence plus the
consideration of the relevance of ambiguous proof

texts, is an improper demand. The Christian Church
throughout its history, in studying the Scripture and
defining doctrine after doctrine, has not operated
under such rules as these. Nor does the anti-pedo-
baptist himself operate under these rules, except
in dealing with the subject of baptism.

So much for the improper method insisted upon
by anti-pedobaptists. Rejecting this wrong method,
what is the right method for determining the issue
— what are the real roots or bases of infant baptism
in the Bible?

Infant baptism, properly considered, is an im-
plementation of two doctrines of the Bible — the doc-
trine of the Visible Church, and the doctrine of the
Covenant of Grace.

It is not at all surprising that those sections of
the historically Reformed denominations in which
the Reformed doctrines of the Visible Church and
the Covenant of Grace are neglected or are not
emphasized, are precisely the ones in which infant
baptism is at present widely suspect as unscriptural.

Any church which is weak on the Biblical doc-
trine of the Visible Church and the doctrine of the
Covenant of Grace is bound to become weak and
unsure on the question of infant baptism. The same
is true of the individual Christian. Any Christian
who lacks intelligent conviction of the truth of the
Biblical doctrine of the Visible Church and the
doctrine of the Covenant of Grace is bound to become weak, hesitating and unsure on the question of infant baptism.

For infant baptism is a corollary of the two doctrines mentioned. It is implicit in them, and it is properly derived from them by inference. No church and no Christian can be any stronger or sounder on infant baptism than he is on the Biblical doctrines of the Visible Church and the Covenant of Grace.

This may suggest why there is so much weakness and questioning about infant baptism today in denominations which formerly held it firmly. It may well be that in these denominations there has been a gradual but nevertheless real shift from the historic Reformed and Biblical doctrines of the Church and the Covenant, and that this has involved, as its inevitable consequence, a weakening and in some cases almost a rejection of infant baptism.

It is no accident that in the Westminster Confession of Faith and other historic Reformed creeds infant baptism is coupled with a specifically Reformed doctrine of the Church and the Covenant. And it is no mere coincidence that when the Reformed doctrines of the Church and the Covenant are lost or obscured, infant baptism is lost or obscured with them. They are organically connected and they stand or fall together.

In many churches which traditionally and offi-
cially hold the Reformed theology, this theology has been virtually replaced by a more inclusive evangelicalism which involves different assumptions and has quite different affinities. In a good many cases the theology of the Westminster Confession has given way to the theology of the popular Bible institutes, evangelical press and mass evangelism of our day. While generalizations are perilous, it may be safe to say that this change involves a shift from emphasis on the Visible Church to emphasis on the Invisible Church, from the Reformed Theology to Arminianism, and from the organic covenant concept of the Bible to an unscriptural individualism.

In some of the larger nominally Reformed denominations, indeed, the shift has gone much farther — it has been a shift from Reformed views to liberal and neo-orthodox views in which religious authority is regarded as essentially subjective rather than objective. Where this has happened, debate about the propriety of infant baptism has become largely irrelevant.

We are concerned, however, with bodies in which the shift has been from a strictly Reformed view to a more general evangelicalism. As already stated, this has inevitably weakened the church's grip on the doctrine and practice of infant baptism. The fact that this shift has occurred only very slowly may explain why the change, though real, has been imperceptible.

The result of this shift has been that many
people have come to doubt and question the propriety of pedobaptism, some rejecting it altogether and others retaining it as a mere matter of form or custom while entertaining grave doubts as to its Scriptural character. It can hardly be questioned that infant baptism is often practiced today on a merely traditional basis, without conviction of its Scriptural character and without attempt to defend it on a Biblical basis.

The two largest sectors of American Protestantism are the Methodists and the Baptists. These have been extremely influential, and there is scarcely a denomination of historically Reformed character that has not been strongly influenced by them. It has been remarked that most American Presbyterians that are not liberals are either Methodists or Baptists. There is truth in this. In fact it could even be said that a good many people who are supposed to hold the historic Reformed position are both Methodists and Baptists — they have been strongly influenced by the experience-centered and decision-centered theology of the Methodists, and also by the individualistic, non-covenantal church-concept of the Baptists.

Those who have been influenced in the ways just described are unable to resist or answer the confident polemic of anti-pedobaptists. Lacking a clear knowledge and strong conviction of the Reformed theology, they are unable to defend infant baptism in a sound manner by showing its organic
connection with the Reformed and Biblical view of the Church and the Covenant. Too often the result is that they feel that the anti-pedobaptist position is unanswerable; or else they make an ineffectual attempt to answer it by the faulty method of appeal to proof-texts alone. The anti-pedobaptist seems able to provide plausible answers to all arguments based on such proof-texts, with the result that the embattled pedo-baptist is left with the frustrated feeling that infant baptism is something that he is supposed to adhere to, but cannot really defend as Scriptural.

Now let us consider the Reformed doctrines of the Church and the Covenant. Of these two, the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace is the more inclusive and basic. In a sense the doctrine of the Visible Church is an implication of the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace. So we will take up the doctrine of the Covenant first, but note as we proceed how the doctrine of the Visible Church is tied in with it.

In the Reformed theology the Covenant of Grace is God’s appointed way of implementing the eternal Covenant of Redemption made between God the Father and God the Son. The Covenant of Grace was first announced to men, in a somewhat veiled and mysterious manner, by the prediction of Genesis 3:15 that the Seed of the woman would eventually destroy the serpent. This is perhaps the most important single verse in the Old Testament, and it contains all the rest of the Bible in germ form. The
rest of the Bible is God’s process of making explicit what was implicit in Genesis 3:15.

During the period from Adam to Abraham no great advances were made in the implementation of the Covenant. There was, however, a definite body of people on earth who were embraced within the gracious provisions of the Covenant, and this covenant relationship was continued in a specific family line, from father to son, through Seth, through the antediluvian patriarchs, through Noah and Shem, to Abraham. The corporate, public worship of God began at the time of the birth of Seth’s son Enoch. During this long period the descendants of Adam and Eve through Seth down to Abraham formed the continuous embodiment of the Covenant of Grace among men.

With Abraham a big forward step was taken. He was separated by God from his natural and cultural background, and singled out as the progenitor of the nation of Israel—the covenant nation that was to form the stock from which the human nature of the Christ would come, and the human environment in which the Christ would perform His redemptive work. The Covenant was formally established with Abraham, as recorded in Genesis chapter 17. It should be noted that the Covenant was made with Abraham and with his seed; that it concerned a visible body of people—the clan or tribe of Abraham (Gen. 17:23); and that the covenant standing of this body of people was marked by the rite or
sacrament of circumcision. At this stage the clan of Abraham was the visible Church of God on earth, and every male claiming membership in it was required to have the outward token of the Covenant, namely circumcision (Gen. 17:12-14).

Throughout the patriarchal period the covenant people constituted a tribe or clan. Then in the time of Moses the Covenant was confirmed to Israel on a national basis (Ex. 24:3-8). From the time of Moses to the time of Christ, the Covenant was embodied in the nation of Israel. We should realize the fact of the continuity of the Covenant all through Old Testament history. There is a bond of organic continuity between Israel at Mount Sinai and that small company that began to call upon the name of the Lord when Seth’s first son was born. When the majority became apostate, as in the time of Jeremiah, the continuity was not broken; rather, the reality and life of the Covenant was continued in the faithful minority called “the remnant.”

On the Day of Pentecost a few weeks after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, there was another major advance. The body of Christian disciples together with the Jews who became Christians constituted the Christian Church, and this was the true continuation of the Covenant people of God which had existed on earth since the time of Adam and Eve. The Christian Church was new and yet it was not new. In one sense it was new, in another sense it was as old as the human race. The New
Testament Church was new in form, but old in essence.

The New Testament clearly teaches that the Christian Church is not something different from the Old Testament Israel; on the other hand, it is essentially the same as the real Israel of the Old Testament, and it is the real continuation of the true Israel of Old Testament times. This is shown, for example, by Paul's figure of the olive tree and the branches (Romans 11:16-24). We should note that the apostle speaks of a single olive tree. This tree had Jewish branches, many of which were broken off, while Gentile branches were grafted in; yet it remained the same olive tree throughout — the body of God's covenant people on earth.

The same truth is taught by Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians (2:11-13), where he explains that the Gentile Christians, who once were "strangers from the covenants of promise", have now been incorporated into "the commonwealth of Israel." Thus when a Gentile becomes a Christian he becomes an Israelite in the true sense of the term.

Thus Scripture teaches the unity and continuity of the New Testament Church with the Old Testament Israel. The form has changed, but the essence remains the same. The olive tree lives on; the commonwealth of Israel continues. This essential unity and continuity of the Christian Church with the Old Testament Israel is basic to the Reformed theology, but it is denied by many Baptists. (A con-
tributing factor has no doubt been the increasing influence of Darby-Scofield Dispensationalism, which posits a radical discontinuity between Israel and the Church).

The truth of the unity and continuity of the Christian Church with the Old Testament Israel, the Old Testament Covenant people of God, has important implications concerning the question of the propriety of infant baptism. We may mention these implications as follows:

(1) The Covenant is not a purely spiritual concept, but involves a visible body of people with an external organization and membership, including an external sign or token of membership in the body. As Israel constituted a visible body, so the Christian Church constitutes a visible body with organization and membership. The Visible Church is not a mere human convenience, nor a mere means to an end, but is of divine appointment and is an end in itself. Just as Israel of old was a true embodiment of the Covenant of Grace, so the Visible Church today is a true embodiment of the Covenant of Grace. Therefore the common present-day tendency to minimize the importance of the Visible Church is not Biblical.

(2) The Covenant is confirmed to believers and their children after them. Now, as then, God's ordinary way of maintaining and increasing the body of His covenant people on earth is through the birth of children into covenant homes or families. The
child born to an Israelite home had a covenant standing from birth. This could be despised and forfeited in later life, to be sure, but he had it from birth. If there is organic unity and continuity between Israel and the Church, then it is true that children born to Christian parents have a covenant standing from birth.

According to the sociology of the Bible, both Old Testament and New, the family, not the individual, is the basic social unit. Children are born into a social environment which involves a covenant standing and covenant obligations. Parents exercise faith and take vows for their children in a representative capacity.

(3) As infants of believers were to receive the external sign of membership in the body of the Covenant people of Israel, so infants of believers ought to receive the external sign of membership in the Christian Church, which is the continuation of the Old Testament Israel. The sign itself is different, but the meaning is basically the same. If we admit that the infants of believers received the external sign in the one case, we should also admit that they ought to receive it in the other case, the two cases being truly parallel. The sign of membership should accompany the fact of membership, in the one case as in the other. Baptism is the privilege of members of the Visible Church. If the infants of believers are members of the Visible Church, then baptism is their rightful privilege.
To these implications of the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace, we may add one or two implications of the Reformed doctrine of the Visible Church which are relevant to the question of infant baptism.

(1) The Visible Church, according to the Reformed view, is the body of those who profess the true religion, together with their children. It is not necessarily composed exclusively of regenerate persons. Membership in it is based on presumption, not on proof of regeneration. Thus the Anti-pedobaptist contention that infant baptism is wrong because there can be no certainty that the infants are regenerate, is quite without weight. If we are going to look for certainty of regeneration, there can be no certainty of that even in the case of adults. Simon the Sorcerer was baptized in adult life upon his personal profession of faith, yet he turned out to be unregenerate, for Peter said to him “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God . . . . I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:18-24). It has often been claimed, but never proved, that the anti-pedobaptist churches are purer or contain less hypocrites, than those that practice infant baptism.

(2) The Visible Church, according to the Reformed view, includes the children or infants of believers. The infant children of believers are members of the Church whether they are baptized or not, according to Reformed thought. This is a gener-
ally recognized and accepted view in the eminent Reformed theologians. It implies that infants are baptized, not to make them church members, but because they are already church members.

We have gotten almost entirely away from this viewpoint today, and even where infant baptism is practiced and regarded as important, the baptized children are regarded as non-members for several years, until in their early teens they make a public profession of faith and are said to "join the Church." This manner of speaking is all but universal. It is used by elders, deacons, Sabbath school teachers, ministers — almost everyone. The few who decline to use it are considered rather peculiar.

The use of this phase, "joining the Church," when speaking of those baptized in infancy, betrays an erroneous or defective view of the significance of and reason for infant baptism. If we could remember that infants are baptized because they are already members of the Visible Church, we would see the impropriety of speaking of their "joining the church" several years later. Our common use of this terminology betrays the fact that we do not regard the church membership of children as real or important.

I have endeavored to vindicate the propriety of infant baptism as a Scriptural practice rooted in the Reformed doctrines of the Covenant of Grace and the Visible Church. I must now add some remarks concerning abuses of infant baptism that should by all means be avoided. These abuses are
extremely common in denominations which adhere
to infant baptism by tradition rather than by intelli-
gent conviction. And occasionally one of these
abuses comes to our own parsonage or church doors
in the form of a temptation to compromise with
error. I shall mention three abuses of infant baptism
which have given a good deal of ammunition to
anti-pedobaptists, and which we should guard
against with great care.

(1) Promiscuous infant baptism is an unwar-
ranted practice and cannot be justified as Scriptur-
Al. It divorces infant baptism from the Covenant of
Grace. The practice of baptizing the infants of any
and all parents who request the rite, regardless of
their reasons and regardless of whether the parents
themselves are professing Christians and members
of the Church is becoming increasingly common in
some circles. This is "open baptism" and is analogous
to "open communion." Pastors are occasionally re-
quested to baptize an infant of non-church parents
because it is believed that the infant is near death.
It is hard to refuse such a request, yet it must be
refused if we are to be true to our vows and to the
Word of God. Of course such anguished parents
should be dealt with as sympathetically as possible
and should be invited and encouraged to become
Christians themselves.

(2) Baptism of infants where the parents,
though church members, are not living orderly is
improper. How can parents take solemn vows for
their child when they are living, and intending to continue to live, in flagrant and open violation of the same vows themselves? Parents who practically never attend church except for the Sabbath morning service at the communion season, have no right to baptism for their children. Those who are flagrantly and deliberately violating the Sabbath, or otherwise openly living in sin, have no right to baptism for their children. The session should take the initiative in dealing with such covenant-breaking members, so that the entire odium of refusing baptism for the child will not crash upon the head of the pastor.

The session should maintain and insist upon Scriptural standards and should back the pastor up in administering these standards. Where this is neglected, infant baptism becomes too cheap. It is a scandal that cries to heaven when parents can stand up in the congregation for the baptism of their children, vow solemnly to God that they will attend the ordinances of divine worship faithfully, go home at the end of the service, fail to come back for the evening service, and not enter the church building again for six solid months, or perhaps a whole year. I am not speaking of those living hundreds of miles out of bounds, but of those living easy driving distance of the place of worship.

(3) Infant baptism is meaningless apart from a serious program of Christian instruction on the part of both the parents and the church. If we expect God to be a covenant-keeping God, then we
must be covenant-keeping people. The parents promise to instruct their children in the things of God. The church also, of course, has a solemn obligation to instruct its own children in Christian truth and duty. Where these responsibilities are not taken seriously, infant baptism tends to become a mere matter of form or ritual. We are not to expect that infant baptism will function automatically, or ex opere operato, as the Church of Rome wrongly teaches. It will not be without its proper fruit if it is accompanied by the true faith and obedience to the obligations incurred in our vows to the Lord.

The Modes Of Baptism

Historically there have existed three modes of baptism in the Church, namely immersion, sprinkling and pouring. Several questions arise concerning these. Is a particular mode of baptism essential to the validity of the sacrament? Is the mode of baptism a matter of divine appointment in Scripture? Is the mode of baptism significant or symbolic of the meaning of baptism? What is the official position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church on the mode of baptism?
It is well known, of course, that sprinkling has been practically universal as the mode of administering baptism in the Covenanter Church. An outsider might very easily jump to the conclusion that our Church holds that sprinkling is necessarily the divinely appointed mode, and that we regard other modes as irregular if not actually invalid. Yet this would certainly be an unwarranted conclusion. The fact is, rather, that the universal practice of sprinkling in the Covenanter Church and other Presbyterian denominations rests upon convenience and tradition rather than upon theological principle. Sprinkling is the only mode of baptism practiced among us, yet as a church we do not hold that this is the only legitimate mode of baptism.

What might be called the radical anti-immersionist viewpoint has existed among members of the Covenanter Church, but it has never been the official position of the church as set forth in its standards. In the latter part of the 19th century Covenanters in Nova Scotia repeatedly petitioned Synod to declare that immersion does not constitute valid baptism and that therefore those who have been baptized by immersion must, on joining the Reformed Presbyterian Church, be baptized by sprinkling. Synod declared its approval of sprinkling but declined emphatically to rule that immersion is not valid baptism. So the radical anti-immersionist view has remained a privately held minority view, while the Church as a body admits the legitimacy of immersion.
Diametrically opposed to the view just mentioned is the radical immersionist view. This is well known as the view of most Baptists and of various other bodies. It holds that immersion is the only valid mode of baptism, and that therefore sprinkling and pouring do not constitute valid baptism. Baptists who are true to their historic position not only prefer immersion, but they insist that it is the only lawful and proper mode of administration of baptism. Of necessity they must regard those who have not been immersed as unbaptized and therefore as living in sinful disobedience to the command of the Lord. Not all Baptists hold this radical position as their personal view of the matter, but it is the historic view of the Baptist faith, and by logical necessity, if consistently held, it involves regarding unimmersed Christians as unbaptized and therefore disobedient to the Lord.

Between the radical immersionist view and the radical anti-immersionist view there exists what might be called the common Christian view concerning the question of the mode of baptism. This common view has historically been by far the most widely held, and I shall seek to show that it is the correct view. According to this view the mode of administration of baptism is indifferent, and therefore any one of the three historical modes constitutes valid baptism. This view holds that the use of water is essential but the quantity of water and the manner of contact between the water and the person
baptized are not significant. This view is not anti-immersionist nor is it anti-sprinkling, but it is anti-Baptist in the sense that it opposes the claim of the exclusive propriety of immersion which is advanced by strict Baptists; and of course it is also opposed to the claim of radical anti-immersionists that sprinkling is the only proper mode of baptism.

There are several possible approaches to the problem of the mode of baptism. One method of approach is through the history of the Church. This is of considerable interest in itself, and may be very enlightening both to immersionists and to anti-immersionists who imagine that a single mode of baptism was universally used in the earliest centuries of the history of the Church. Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield wrote an informative article on The Archaeology of the Mode of Baptism (Bibliotheca Sacra, lxxii, 1906, pp. 601-644, reprinted in Studies in Theology. New York, Oxford University Press, 1932, pp. 343-386). This very learned and well-documented article shows, among other things, that in the early Christian centuries immersion was the common mode of baptism, while it was never regarded as the only valid mode of baptism, and it was never the exclusively practiced mode of baptism. Warfield states that insistence upon immersion as the only valid mode of baptism is a quite modern development. It cannot be traced any further back than the English Baptists of the seventeenth century, that is, about three hundred years ago. The early Baptists both on the Continent and in England
practiced affusion or pouring rather than immersion.

With regard to the early prevalence of immersion, Warfield states that "should we move back within the first millennium of the Church's life, we should find the whole Christian world united in the ordinary use of true immersion" (Studies in Theology, p. 351). He adds, however, that it would be necessary to inquire further whether this prevalence of immersion was in harmony with the practice of the apostles, or represented a deviation from apostolic practice. Obviously the study of Church history can never tell us whether anything is Scriptural. We can learn from church history what practices and beliefs were held at a particular time, but whether these beliefs and practices were Scriptural, and therefore correct in the absolute sense, we cannot learn from history, but only from a study of the Scriptures themselves.

Warfield suggests an interesting point when he states that baptism by immersion in the very early period of the Church, like Jewish proselyte baptism, was apparently administered to completely nude recipients. He says that the Jewish rabbis in administering proselyte baptism would not allow even a finger ring to break the contact of the water with the person, and that the available evidence indicates that early Christian immersion was administered with the candidate completely nude. He adds that presumably no one would desire to copy this feature at the present day.
Warfield traces Christian practice to the middle of the second century after Christ. He shows by literary and monumental evidence that at that time triple immersion was the common mode of baptism, but that pouring was freely allowed as an alternative mode when required because of scarcity of water or illness of the person baptized. He adds that it is a fair presumption that this represents the original Christian practice, but that this cannot be regarded as absolutely proved. For a solid and satisfying solution of the problem of the mode of baptism we must turn from archaeology and church history to the Bible itself. (*The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Vol. I, p. 477).

Another approach to the problem is by way of John the Baptist and the rite of baptism as administered by him. Related to this is the whole subject of Jewish proselyte baptism. It is often claimed as self-evident that John baptized by immersion. The present-day Baptist who says "I want to be baptized the way Jesus was" is taking for granted that John baptized exclusively by immersion. The scene of Jesus' baptism is often depicted in stained glass church windows, and almost invariably it is depicted as immersion. To state that we should be immersed because Jesus was immersed is really a question-begging method of argument. It is by no means proven that Jesus was immersed. The matter is debatable, to say the least. We shall note some of the evidence later in this study.
But even if it could be conceded as proven that John baptized exclusively by immersion, and that Jesus was immersed, still this would not necessarily settle the question concerning the mode of Christian baptism. For John's baptism was not Christian baptism. Baptists commonly assume that the two were essentially identical, but this assumption is unwarranted. As a matter of fact it can be proved that John's baptism was essentially different from Christian baptism. This is shown by Acts 19:1-5, where Paul at Ephesus finds a dozen "disciples" who state that they have received John's baptism. Paul declares this insufficient, whereupon these men are "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." If John's baptism and Christian baptism were essentially identical, it is inconceivable that those who had already received the one would be required to receive the other in addition.

There are other approaches which may place us on solid ground. One of these is to approach the problem by way of the meaning of the terminology of baptism used in the Bible. Another is by way of examination of the descriptions of the actual circumstances and procedures of baptism as found in the historical narratives of the New Testament. We shall first inquire into the meaning of the terminology of baptism in the Bible, after which we shall consider the data of the administration of baptism in the historical narratives of the New Testament; and finally we shall consider the further question of whether the mode of baptism is symbolically
significant of the essential meaning of baptism.


Professor Murray states that "The Baptist argument rests mainly upon two conceptions: (1) that baptizo means to immerse and (2) that passages like Romans 6:3-6 and Colossians 2:11, 12 plainly imply that the death and resurrection of Christ provide us with the pattern for immersion in, and emergence from, the water" (Christian Baptism, p. 9).

He takes up these two Baptist arguments in turn, first dealing with the meaning of the verb baptizo. He traces this verb first in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, stating that it is of infrequent occurrence in the LXX. One instance of its use is in II Kings 5:14, where Naaman the Syrian is said to have baptized himself seven times in the Jordan. This does not prove that Naaman immersed himself in the Jordan. All that can be regarded as certain is that he bathed seven times in the river. Whether this involved immersion is not clear from either the original Hebrew or the Greek translation. This instance of the use of baptizo therefore proves nothing.
The word *baptizo* occurs more frequently in the LXX of the Old Testament, and may sometimes refer to immersion. Murray points out very acutely that the real question is not whether *baptizo* and *baptizo* are used for acts which involved immersion, but whether these words necessarily mean immersion, that is, whether they can be equated with immersion. He states emphatically that neither *baptizo* nor *baptizo* means immersion, as is proved by the fact that in some cases these terms are used for acts which did not involve immersion. An example of this is found in the LXX of Leviticus 14:6, 51, where the ritual concerning leprosy involved the use of two birds. One bird was killed, and the other bird was dipped in the blood of the bird that had been killed. The word used in the LXX of this passage is *baptizo*. It is clear that no bird has enough blood for the immersion of another bird of the same kind. Murray states that the living bird could be dipped in the blood of the slain bird, but could not be immersed, because there would not be enough blood for immersion. Therefore *baptizo* does not mean immersion, for here it is used of an act where immersion was not involved. To the assertion that the living bird might be immersed in water in which the blood of the slain bird had been mixed, Murray replies that the passage, Levit. 14:51, 52 distinguishes between dipping in the blood and dipping in the water.

Murray cites other instances of usage of *baptizo* and *baptizo* in the LXX of the Old Testament. Among
the most striking are Daniel 4:33 and 5:21, where the Greek Bapto occurs as the translation of an Aramaic verb. The connection is Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity. The King James Version renders the clause in question by “his body was wet with the dew of heaven.” The Greek is kai apo tes drosou tou ouranous to soma autou ehephe (Murray, op. cit., p. 14). Nebuchadnezzar may indeed have been very wet with the dew of heaven, but it is surely clear that he could not have been immersed in the dew of heaven. Therefore here again the Greek bapto does not mean immersion.

Turning to the New Testament, Murray discusses several passages in which Baptizo or related words occur, and shows how these fail to substantiate the Baptist contention, and in some cases prove exactly the opposite.

The first New Testament passage which Murray discusses is Luke 11:38, with Matthew 15:2 and Mark 7:2-5. The connection of Luke 11:38 is Jesus dining in the home of a Pharisee, who “marveled that he had not first washed before dinner.” The Greek here is ou proton chaptisthe pro ton ariston. What the English version renders as “washed”, therefore, in the Greek is actually “was baptized” or “baptized himself”. This “baptized” is evidently equivalent to the word upsonai in Matt. 15:2 and Mark 7:3. It is not clear that even the hands were actually immersed in water; the act was apparently the pouring of water, or having it poured, over the hands. In
Luke 11:38 there is no mention of the hands; the
Pharisee simply is said to have marveled that Jesus
"was not baptized" before the dinner. Murray con-
cludes that here baptizo is used if an action which
did not involve the person being immersed, but only
the washing of the hands (op. cit., p. 17).

In Mark 7:4 there is a textual question, some
manuscripts having the word baptizo while others
have kathwize. The latter verb means "sprinkle." This
word cannot be used to denote an act of im-
ersion; baptizo can denote an act of immersion
but does not mean immersion. Hence, Murray says,
"to adduce cases in which 'baptise' or 'baptism' is
used to denote an act performed by immersion does
not prove that they mean immersion" (p. 20). He
adds that there is no proof that baptizo, even if this
reading is the genuine one in Mark 7:4a, is used in
the sense of "immerse."

It should be added that there is a textual question
as to the genuineness of the word kathwize in Mark
7:4 ("couches"). Several MSS and Nestle's critical
text omit this word. Therefore we should avoid using
it as the basis for a point of argument, as has often
been done. The argument has been that couches
could not very well be immersed. But it is quite
possible that couches could be taken apart and
immersed. The couches might be specially con-
structed with this very thing in view. Besides this it
is doubtful that the word "couches" is genuine at all.

Murray next takes up Hebrews 9:10-23, where
the expression *diaphoroi" baptismoi* ("diverse baptisms"); "diverse washings") is used to describe certain Old Testament rites. The phrase occurs in Heb. 9:10. In the context, verse 13, "sprinkling" is mentioned as one of the Old Testament rites under discussion. Hence it would seem that a rite consisting of sprinkling is listed as included under the category of "diverse baptisms". Clearly, then, *baptismoi* here cannot mean immersions. Moreover, we may inquire what immersions there were in the Old Testament system that would fit the baptismoi of Heb. 9:10. While there were many rites of sprinkling, it is difficult to see what immersions prescribed in the Old Testament would fit Hebrews 9:10.

Next Murray takes up the Baptism of the Spirit, in such passages as Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, with reference also to Acts 1:5 and 11:16. The question is whether the baptism of the Holy Spirit can be called immersion or not. Jesus said that His disciples would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Can this mean immersed in the Holy Spirit?

John the Baptist predicted that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. If baptism necessarily means immersion, then this statement must mean that Jesus would immerse in the Holy Spirit and fire. But such an idea is quite contrary to the actual phenomena of the fulfillment of the prediction. The terms used of the coming of the Holy Spirit are "pour forth", "shed forth" (Acts 2:33), "come
upon”, none of which suggests the idea of immersion in the Spirit as one might be immersed in water.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus said to the assembled disciples, “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you.” Here the verb is epercho. In Acts 2:17, 33, the Spirit is said to be “poured out” or “shed forth”, and the Greek verb is echeo. In Acts 10:44 and 11:15 the Holy Spirit is said to “fall” on the believers, and the Greek verb is epielpto. Mention may also be made of Titus 3:6 where the Holy Spirit is “shed” or “poured” on Christians, and the Greek verb is echeo. It is worthy of note that in all these cases in Acts and the Epistles the language used of the coming of the Holy Spirit to believers has affinities with sprinkling or pouring rather than with immersion. Again, at the Day of Pentecost, in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit became visibly present as tongues of flame which “sat” upon each of the Christians; the Greek is ephthaisen. Baptism with fire had been predicted. Here at Pentecost is baptism with fire, but certainly not immersion in fire.

Another New Testament passage discussed by Murray is I Cor. 10:2, “All were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” Murray states that if the Baptist argument is sound, this text must allude to the mode of baptism. It must therefore mean that the ancient Israelites were immersed in the cloud and in the Red Sea. But that is exactly what did not happen to them. It has been aptly
observed by another writer that the Israelites were
baptized without being immersed, while the Egyp-
tians were immersed without being baptized! The
Old Testament record explicitly states that the
Israelites got across without getting wet — on dry
ground (Ex. 14:22). Against this it has been argued
by Baptists that the Israelites were actually below
the level of the water, which was piled high to the
right and left of them, so they were virtually im-
mersed even though they remained perfectly dry.
Murray answers this by saying that is not what
Baptists ordinarily mean by immersion — an
immersion which leaves one perfectly dry has little
in common with the rite of baptism as performed
by Baptists.

As for the pillar of cloud, Paul says that the
Israelites were baptized in the cloud. But according
to the record in Exodus (Ex. 13:21), the cloud was
before them. It did not surround them nor did they
enter into it. It was to lead the way before them,
and on one occasion it served as an impenetrable
barrier between them and the Egyptians. Yet the
Israelites were baptized in the cloud. It is hard to
see how this can possibly mean immersion. In
what sense could it be said that the Israelites were
immersed in the cloud?

In dealing with the baptism of the Ethiopian
eunuch by Philip (Acts 8:36-39), Murray states that
this incident proves nothing about the mode of
baptism one way or the other. It has been used both
by immersionists to prove immersion and by anti-immersionists to prove non-immersion. The immersionists have stressed the words "went down into the water" as proving immersion, while anti-immersionists have argued that in such a desert region there could not have been deep enough water for immersion. Murray points out that it is a mere supposition that there could not have been enough water for immersion. Even in desert country there are ponds and reservoirs in places. On the other hand, the words "went down into the water," if they prove anything, prove too much, for it is explicitly stated that both Philip and the eunuch "went down into the water." Therefore if this means that the eunuch was immersed it means that Philip was immersed also. But even Baptists do not suppose that Philip as the administrator of the baptism was himself completely immersed under the water. It is entirely possible that Philip did immerse the eunuch, but the passage does not prove that he did. All that it proves is that they descended to the water level and stood at the edge or in the shallow water near the edge. Hence this passage proves nothing about the mode of baptism.

In dealing with the baptism administered by John the Baptist, Murray demonstrates that it need not have been immersion. The fact that John at one time baptized at Aenon near Salim "because there was much water there" (John 3:23) and on another occasion baptized "in the Jordan" (Matt. 3:6) have been appealed to as proving that the mode was
immersion. It may very likely have been immersion, but there is no real proof that it was. Even for baptism by pouring "much water" would be needed, because great multitudes flocked to the baptism of John. And apart from the water actually used in the rite of baptism, so many people, many of whom had travelled long distances, would need considerable quantities of water for drinking, washing and for their animals. The water supply of an ordinary Palestinian community would have been quite disrupted by such unusual demands upon its resources. The statement that John baptized "in the river Jordan" is no more than a designation of the location where he was working, and carries no implication as to the mode of administration of the rite itself.

Murray's general conclusion with regard to the terminology of Baptism in the Bible is as follows:

"On the basis of such considerations as these, derived from both Old and New Testaments, we are led to the conclusion that though the word baptizo and its cognates can be used to denote an action performed by immersion yet they may also be used to denote an action that can be performed by a variety of modes. Consequently the word baptizo itself cannot be pleaded as an argument for the necessity of immersion as the mode of baptism" (op. cit., p. 29).

Turning to the actual instances of the administration of baptism in the New Testament, it should
be noted first of all that these are extremely scanty. We have only a few recorded baptisms, and what is said about them is told in a very few words in each case. There are statements about groups of people being baptized, and even of three thousand on a single occasion (Acts 2:41). But in no case are we told just how the rite was performed. It is hardly even possible to say whether baptism was performed indoors or out of doors. The three thousand baptized at Pentecost presumably received the rite in the open air, but this cannot be proved. The Philippian jailer was baptized with his household at midnight (Acts 16:33), but the location is not stated. Nor do we know the place and circumstances of the baptism of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:47, 48). In Acts 8:12 we read of a group of people in Samaria being baptized, and in verse 13 Simon the Sorcerer was baptized. Again, in Acts 9:18 Saul of Tarsus was baptized at Damascus, and in Acts 16:15 we read of the baptism of Lydia of Philippi. In none of these cases is there any real evidence as to the mode of administration of baptism. As it was by a river side that Lydia heard Paul preach, we may suppose that she was baptized in that same river, but again there is no evidence that it was by immersion. These instances of baptism in the book of Acts prove nothing one way or the other about the mode of baptism. At most they may suggest possibilities or what may seem to some to be probabilities, but no certainties. It is a mistake to use these cases in argument against immersionists, for nothing is
proved, and the impression is given that our case must be very weak if we have to resort to such inconclusive data to prove our point. The case for immersion remains unproved. Neither the terminology of Baptism in the Bible nor the recorded instances of the administration in the New Testament prove the immersionists’ claim.

Another main line of immersionist argument is built upon the idea that the essential meaning of baptism is burial and resurrection with Christ, which, it is claimed, is dramatized or portrayed by immersion and emergence from the water, but which cannot be portrayed by either sprinkling or pouring. This argument is often presented with a great show of plausibility, and is perhaps regarded by many immersionists as their main proof for the necessity of immersion.

The starting point for this argument is the passage in Romans 6:3-5, together with a partial parallel in Colossians 2:12. The passage in Romans states that Christians are baptized into Christ’s death and that “we are buried with him by baptism into death” (Rom. 6:3, 4); that in Colossians speaks of Christians as buried with Christ in baptism. On the basis of these two passages it is claimed by immersionists that the primary or basic meaning of baptism is burial, and that only immersion can portray burial. Therefore, it is claimed, these two passages in Paul’s Epistles absolutely require that immersion be regarded as the only valid mode of baptism.
Several things may be said in answer to this
immersionist claim. In the first place, it is not
correct to say that the basic meaning of baptism is
burial and resurrection. It would be more nearly
correct to say that the basic meaning of baptism is
cleansing or washing. But even this would not be
exactly correct, either. The basic meaning of baptism
is union with the Triune God, hence participation in
the benefits of God’s plan of redemption through
the mediatorial work of Christ. It is not necessary
to take time in this lecture to give the proof of this
proposition in detail. It is given convincingly by
Murray in the book already cited, and has been
given by other authors. Something may be said about
it, however. The Great Commission of our Lord
includes the command to baptize “in the name of
the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”
Literally it is into the name — the Greek preposition
εἰς following by the accusative case (Matt. 28:19). If
it were only into the name of the Son, we might
think that cleansing or purification must be the
basic meaning of baptism — that as water cleanses
away dirt, so the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses
away sin. But baptism is into the name of the divine
Trinity, not simply into the name of Jesus Christ.
It signifies a relationship to God the Father and the
Holy Spirit as well as a relationship to Christ. Hence
cleansing by Christ’s atoning blood cannot be its
sole import. The Israelites were baptized “into Moses”
or “unto Moses” (1 Cor. 10:2), meaning that they
came to participate in a relationship to Moses, by
virtue of which they received special benefits. But
they were not cleansed from sin by the blood of Moses. The basic idea is therefore not simply cleansing. Nor is the basic idea burial and resurrection, which would not at all fit the idea of the Israelis being baptized "into Moses". The basic and inclusive meaning of baptism, therefore, is union with the Triune God.

However the benefits of this union come primarily through Christ, the atoning Mediator, and Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of redemption through the shed blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin. Therefore it is correct to say that subordinately to the basic meaning of union with the Triune God, baptism signifies cleansing from the guilt of sin. It is not correct to say that the basic meaning of baptism is burial and resurrection. In controversy with immersionists, it is necessary to insist upon this point. For if we allow the claim that baptism basically signifies burial, it will prove futile to argue further as to the precise import of the passages in Romans and Colossians.

In the second place, burial today in Europe and America is very different from burial in ancient Israel. We dig a grave or sink a shaft several feet deep into the ground, and the body is covered with many feet of earth. In ancient Israel burial was often in natural or artificial caves. The burial of Jesus Himself affords an example. He was buried in a cave — not a natural cave but an artificial one which Joseph of Arimathea had hewn out of a rocky
cliff (Mark 15:46). To this artificial cavern there was a narrow entrance which could be sealed off by placing a large boulder against the opening. This burial was not underground at all in the ordinary sense of the term. And it is rather difficult to see what it had in common with baptism as practiced by immersionists. The body of Jesus was not lowered below the surface of the ground, but carried horizontally into the cave and there laid to rest.

Paul was writing to the Roman Christians. We have all read descriptions of the catacombs of Rome where the mortal remains of thousands of the early Christian dead were laid to rest. These again were not “buried” as we would understand the term today. The body was placed in a niche hollowed out of the catacomb wall. If the Christians who first read Paul’s Epistle to the Romans thought of this kind of burial how could this call to their minds the idea of baptism by immersion beneath the surface of a body of water? Would they think in terms of such imagery as they read Romans chapter 6? We are buried with Christ by baptism into death, certainly, as the Scripture says. But this means that by baptism we are united or connected with Christ so as to receive the benefits of His death. It is not proven that any reference to the mode of baptism is intended.

Moreover, both in Romans 6 and in Colossians 2 the subject under discussion is not baptism and how to administer it, but sanctification. The apostle
is discussing how Christians ought to live, in view of the fact that they have been united with Christ so as to receive the benefits of His death. They are to live a new life of moral uprightness and holiness. If the subject being discussed in these two passages were baptism, there might be some color to the claim that the passages teach that baptism is intended to portray burial and resurrection. But as a matter of fact, baptism is mentioned only incidentally in both passages. It is introduced as one part of the apostle's argument as to how Christians ought to live. To press the reference to burial so as to regard it as implying that baptism is a dramatization of burial is not sound exegesis. We might as well argue that because the Church is called "the city of God", Christians ought not to live in the suburbs or in rural districts; or that because Christians are called Christ's sheep, they ought always to wear clothes made of wool. The true conclusion to be drawn from Romans 6:4 is not that we should be baptized by immersion, but that we should "walk in newness of life"; the true inference to be drawn from Col. 2:12 is "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

Again, burial is only one of the figures used to denote the believer's union with Christ. The New Testament abounds in others. For instance, Christians are branches of the true vine, namely, of Christ. Christ is the head, and Christians are His members, as arms and legs are members of a human body. Christ is the door, and through Him
we enter into the house of salvation. Christ is the tree, and Christians are grafted into vital union with Him. Christ is the passover Lamb, and we partake of His flesh and His blood. This kind of figurative language is common in Scripture, and many more examples could be cited. But even in the immediate context of Romans 6:4, the apostle uses other figures than that of burial and resurrection. In verse 5 he speaks of Christians being "planted" together with Christ, and in verse 6 of their being "crucified" with Christ. No one asserts that crucifixion is dramatized or portrayed by the mode of baptism. Yet sound exegesis would require that if baptism essentially portrays burial, it must also essentially portray crucifixion. But it obviously does not portray crucifixion. We are warranted in concluding, therefore, that Paul is not in this passage implying anything concerning the mode of baptism; he is only setting forth some of the redemptive facts and spiritual realities which benefit the believer through his union with Christ, of which baptism is the sign and seal.

The various counts of the immersionist position are thus shown to be not proven. The terminology of baptism may be used of acts which involve immersion but it may also be used of acts which do not involve immersion, therefore the terminology does not essentially mean immersion. The recorded instances of baptism of individuals or groups in the New Testament prove nothing one way or the other as to the mode of administration employed. The
passages appealed to in support of the idea that the essential meaning of baptism is burial and resurrection, when examined by sound exegetical methods, are found to contain no such teaching. Thus we are left with assumptions and alleged probabilities, but no proven certainties, as to the mode of administration of baptism in the apostolic age.

Warfield says: "It would hardly appear probable that the mode of applying the water in baptism can enter into the very essence of the sacrament, when it is so difficult to obtain certainty as to what the mode was in the hands of the apostles" (The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. 1, pp. 449, 450). He also says, "No mode of applying the water is prescribed in the New Testament. In the record the New Testament gives of acts of baptism, the mode in which the water was applied is never described. It is never even implied with a clearness which would render differences of interpretation impossible . . . ." Candor would seem to compel the admission that not only is there no stress laid in the New Testament on the mode of applying the water in baptism, but that all the allusions to baptism in the New Testament can find ready explanation on the assumption of any of the modes of administration which have been widely practised in the Churches" (ibid., pp. 447, 448).

We may conclude, therefore, by reaffirming the historic position of the Presbyterian family of
Churches that immersion in water is not necessary, but that baptism is rightly performed either by sprinkling or by pouring (Westminster Confession of Faith, XXVIII. 3. Reformed Presbyterian Testimony, XXV, Error 5, "That overwhelming with water is essential to Christian baptism.") Our Church in common with the vast majority of Christians of all ages holds that any one of the three historical modes constitutes a valid and Scriptural administration of baptism. The Directory for Worship of our denomination sets forth this position (III. 3, in Constitution of the R. P. Church, page 313), by its statement that "The water is applied by sprinkling or pouring, though the Church accepts baptism by immersion." Incidentally, the Directory does not specify sprinkling in preference to pouring, as in the actual instructions for baptism it merely states that the minister "shall place the water on the head" of the person to be baptized. How it is to be placed there — whether by sprinkling or by pouring — is not specified. (Constitution, page 315).

Our disagreement with our Baptist brethren, therefore, is not because of their practice of immersion, but rather because of their unjustifiable and unscriptural claim that immersion alone constitutes Christian baptism. The Scriptural data do not substantiate this claim, and our verdict must be that their case is not proven. We are fully warranted, therefore, in continuing our practice of baptism by sprinkling.

(The End)