

Pulpit & People

**Essays in honour of William Still
on his 75th birthday**

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THE CHILDREN FOR CHRIST

His Covenant Seed and their Covenant Sign

J. DOUGLAS MACMILLAN

A powerful and attractive aspect of the ministry which this book celebrates has been its focus on the welfare and status of the church's children. It has been bold enough, and Biblical enough, to see them not merely as the church of tomorrow but as the church of today.

As the years went by it seemed to many of Mr Still's friends that his appreciation of federal or covenantal theology enlarged itself and that it was his grasp of the place of children within that theology, and the practical questions which flow from it, that imparted a vital dimension to his ministry and the congregational life which it produced. Children were restored to the place which they had once held in Scottish churches; federal theology was not only believed, it was practised.

The healthy emphasis on 'family' religion which has characterised Gilcomston, generations of the congregation's children retained in the Christian faith, and published work on infant baptism are indicators of the prominence given in his ministry by Mr Still to the Biblical teaching on how the church should care for the children born within her fold. As one who shares his convictions and admires his action in this area, I would like to explore, by way of tribute, some aspects of the Bible's teaching on the children of believers, as covenant theology interprets these, and in particular, their covenantal right to the sacrament of baptism.

Getting the Question in Focus

It is a fact that no single passage or text in the New Testament can be pointed to as affording undisputed evidence that the New Testament practice was the baptism of children.

The fact that we are without express command to baptise children and that we are unable to cite any explicit case of infant baptism from the New Testament does not, however, mean that we must immediately abandon it. That would be no answer to the problem at all. It would merely be a simplistic solution to a difficulty which, viewed from a wider perspective, proves to be more apparent than real.

The first step in assessing the reality of the difficulty is to set it in context. Is it in fact the case that whenever there is no express or explicit injunction requiring a duty to be performed then that duty is either unlawful or may safely be neglected?

That question brings us face to face with two principles that must govern and regulate our approach to the Biblical teaching on any

specific question of Christian doctrine or Christian duty. These principles are given clear and cogent expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith where it is declared 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*' (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:6 italics ours). In his comment on this article of the Confession, Robert Shaw sets out its implications in a way that really dissolves the difficulty we have posited. He says, 'We do not insist that every article of religion is contained in Scripture in so many words; but we hold that conclusions fairly deduced from the declarations of the Word of God are as truly parts of divine revelation as if they were expressly taught in the Sacred Volume'.¹ Two principles, then, one of 'Express command', the other of 'Necessary inference', are to be applied in establishing the Biblical basis of any Christian doctrine or duty. And where one fails in any specific instance, as the first one does in the case of infant baptism, then the second one must become the determinative factor in deciding the issues at stake in that particular instance. Into this category, then, of 'good and necessary consequence', the New Testament itself forces us to go with our study of the Biblical basis of infant baptism. This fact must also be accounted for, and our evaluation of what is called the 'New Testament silence' on the issue, must take account of its historical and theological context. The sacraments were not instituted in a vacuum but against the background provided by Old Testament teaching and practice. Further, the Bible itself makes it clear that the sacraments are to be understood within a covenantal framework.

Having clarified the principles that must guide our approach to the Biblical teaching on our topic and having identified the context from within which that teaching may be traced we can proceed to set out the data which provide the Biblical mandate for child-baptism.

Preliminary Considerations

Before we do this, however, I wish to pave the way into that study by stating some considerations that bear upon an evaluation of these data and the conclusions to which they point. These are merely the brief statement of certain concepts of covenantal theology which can be established on Scriptural teaching but which, here, in the interests of brevity, are elucidated only in their immediate bearing upon our theme:

(i) *The Unity of the Old and New Testament Scriptures*

Each of these sheds light upon the teaching of the other and both are so linked, as to make one, indivisible, rule of faith and life for the Christian church.

1. Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith. An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, repr. Edinburgh, 1974, p. 16.

(ii) *The Essential Unity of the Covenant of Grace*

The covenant administered under the Gospel is the same covenant in its essential terms as that revealed in various outward forms to the church of God under the Old Testament dispensation. It is the final unfolding of what was embraced in the first promise to post-fall Adam, and, its progressive revelation under various forms to Noah, Abraham, Moses and the prophets, can be regarded as the republication and the amplification of God's initial free promise of grace through the one covenant Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. This unity is given express statement by Paul when he says that, 'The Gospel was preached before unto Abraham' (Galatians 3:8), and when he elaborates that by going on to say, 'The covenant confirmed of God in Christ was given to Abraham four hundred and thirty years before the giving of the Law' (Galatians 3:17). 'Language', as Bannerman remarks, 'fitted to mark both the identity of the covenant of Abraham with the Gospel covenant, and its independence of the Mosaic ceremonial institutions'.²

(iii) *The Unity of the Church of God in Old and New Testament Times*

God has had a people on earth since the Fall. These people were graciously dealt with by God on the basis of the covenant which can be regarded as the charter of the church in every age. Those who have made up the church in every age have, by the same God, been called from the same lost state to the same Saviour and Mediator, Jesus Christ. Since the beginning he has been the Prophet, Priest and King of the church. The church in the days of Noah — in the days of Abraham — the church in the days of Moses — and the church under the Gospel — while it was formed in various outward patterns according to the particular dictates of the developing covenant revelation was, in all its essential elements, one and the same Church. Galatians 3:7 reads, 'Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham'. This establishes the essential spiritual relationship which exists between New Testament believers and Abraham. Verse 9 goes on to say, 'So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith,' and this establishes that the New Testament church inherits and enjoys the very same blessings that were Abraham's in the covenant. And the essential unity between the two is brought to the fore yet again when Paul states, 'If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise' (Galatians 3:29). That it was essentially the same Church even under the period of the Mosaic ceremonial is evident from the speech of Stephen in Acts 7:38 where, having quoted the prophecy of Moses concerning the coming prophet, he says, 'This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness' (A. V.).

(iv) *The Importance of the Family Unit in God's Dealings with Men*

Man was created in the 'Image and Likeness of God'. That involved

2. James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, repr. Edinburgh, 1974, ii, p. 70.

not merely man's individual personality but his circle of relationship with his kin. God himself ever exists in the fellowship of trinity and he it was who 'set the solitary in families' (Psalm 68:6). The trinity is the prototype of the family and, in this sense, the fact that the family fellowship was the sphere in which man was to bring forth children in his own likeness, thus imaging forth the creative power of God, makes it eminently fitting that the family should be the basic unit in God's covenant purposes for man; a unit of which the father is the representative and head.

(v) *The Covenant of Grace under the Old Testament made Provision for the Children of Believing Parents*

From its first free promise of grace to Adam, every fresh revelation of the covenant has highlighted this fact. An early instance in Scripture of the child's covenant status being in direct relation to its parent's faith, is that of Noah. His salvation was one of the first great illustrations of God's redemptive grace at work in a sinful world. In that act he demonstrated what was to be one of the great principles of his covenant activities towards man. The Genesis record makes clear the principle upon which God acted in saving, not only Noah, but his family from destruction. 'The Lord then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation"' (Genesis 7:1). The New Testament commentary on that act of God's grace confirms the principle of operation very simply but altogether sufficiently, 'By faith Noah prepared an ark, to the saving of his house' (Hebrews 11:7 A.V. Note also 1 Peter 3:20-21). It is beyond question that it was upon the basis of the father's faith that this whole family was saved. Noah is thus made a witness to future ages that the faith of a believing parent secures a blessing, not for himself alone, but for the children as well. It is no surprise to us then, that, when the covenant was established, in more fully elaborated terms, with Abraham, its provisions include not merely Abraham, but his children as well. 'I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you' (Genesis 17:7).

Some Necessary Consequences

Now, the positions which we have set out thus far, along with the bare indications of the line that the establishment of their full Scriptural validity would follow, dictate to us, certain 'good and necessary consequences' which can now be asserted and supported by various strands of Biblical teaching.

(i) *The first Assertion which we make is, that the Old Testament must be brought to bear upon the Issue of Infant Baptism*

It is rich in its teaching of the place and privilege of believer's children in the church of God during that dispensation. It was over

against that teaching and under its guiding influence that the New Testament church was established. The Old Testament provided the norms by which the New Testament church organised its life and expressed its faith. To confine the study of infant baptism to the New Testament Scriptures — as is so often urged upon us — merely because baptism is a New Testament ordinance is to beg a high and vital part of the question. It is to leave out of consideration a fund of evidence which is absolutely germane to the Biblical basis of baptism, and more particularly so when the baptism in question is that of the children of believers. Here we must insist, and insist in the strongest possible way, that, 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching... for correcting and training in righteousness' (2 Timothy 3:16). The unity of the covenant and the unity of the church of God established through the covenant, demands that the place of children in the Old Testament church regulate our whole approach to, and understanding of, the place of children in the New Testament church.

(ii) *The second Assertion we make is, that the Covenant of Grace has always included Infants in its Provisions, and still does under the Gospel*

Each time the covenant was revealed to man it included the child with the parent. This was the case, as we have seen, with Adam, Noah and Abraham. It was also the case with Israel through Moses. 'All of you are standing today in the presence of the Lord your God...together with your children...in order to enter into a covenant with the Lord your God...to confirm you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he promised you and as he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' (Deuteronomy 29:10-13). The very same keynote was struck in the opening sermon of the Gospel era. Men were exhorted to believe for the specific reason that, 'the promise is for you and your children' (Acts 2:39). At the beginning of the New Testament church we find that the title-deeds of its covenant life ensure, still, a covenant status for children of those who believe.

The nature and character of that status is confirmed for us in an interesting answer which Paul gives to a question which was posed to him by the church at Corinth. His reply to the problem given him is to be found in 1 Corinthians 7:14, where we read, 'For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy.' The word *holy* is the very same word that he uses earlier for Church *members* and which we translate, '*saints*'. The primary meaning of the word is 'to be set apart', and it is invariably used in Scripture of something set apart to God. It was used, for example, of Israel in the sense of their being a people set apart to God. They were a *holy* people, not because every individual amongst them was regenerated in heart, but simply because they were set apart by the covenant of grace to a holy purpose among the nations of the earth. This meant that they had special privileges through the covenant, one of which was, for instance, that 'they have

been entrusted with the very words of God' (Romans 3:2).

Now the context of 1 Corinthians 7:14 makes it clear that Paul was dealing with the specific problems of Christian converts married to unbelievers and the status that children of such a marriage should have in the church. Were they to be accepted with the believing parent or were they cast off with the unbelieving parent? Paul declares that the unbelieving partner and the children were 'set apart' to God in virtue of the faith of the believing partner and parent. He is not, of course, teaching that the children of such a marriage are 'saved'; but he does say that the faith and church membership of one parent sets them apart, and the term he uses implies some spiritual privilege. In this lies the whole force of his statement. For a people familiar with the covenantal teaching of the Old Testament this, of course, made perfect sense and Paul takes this familiarity for granted. His statement answered what was to them a very real problem. But outwith the framework of covenant principles it is difficult, not only to make complete sense of Paul's answer, but even to appreciate the problem to which his answer was the reassuring solution. Within that framework, this Scripture simply reaffirms the spiritual privileges of children who have even one believing parent. It demonstrates also that the children of believers are in a different category, respecting their relationship to God, than are children who have no Christian parentage. 'There is,' says John Murray in a comment on this passage, 'a status or condition which can be characterised as "holiness", which belongs to children in virtue of a parental relationship.' And, he goes on to say, 'It is a "holiness" that evinces the operation of the covenant and representative principle'.³

(iii) *The third Assertion is that: the Church of God, which is the same under both Dispensations, has always included Infants among its Members, and still does*

There is no doubt that the church in the Old Testament was the church of Christ just as really as the church of the New Testament is. In prophecy, type, symbol and promise, faith laid hold of Christ and the benefits which, in the fullness of time, would be actualised by his atoning sacrifice. The spiritual realities enjoyed were, in essence, those which the believer under the Gospel enjoys. It is equally sure that into the Abrahamic church infants, as well as their parents, were admitted as members. Circumcision was given as the seal of the covenant and as the badge of membership in the Church which began to take a formal, outward structure from the Abrahamic covenant. This import of circumcision is not to be traced to the Mosaic administration of the covenant, but to the Abrahamic. Jesus said to the Jews that this ordinance 'did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs' (John 7:22).

In the New Testament there is not the slightest indication of such a

3. John Murray, *Christian Baptism*, Philadelphia, 1962, p. 68.

change with regard to the place of children in the church — but rather the opposite. Let us glance at some of the evidence that supports that claim, noting two things in particular.

First, Jesus and the little ones. It is reported in all three of the synoptic Gospels that Jesus rebuked his disciples because they hindered little ones from coming to him. Luke makes it clear that 'People were bringing babies to Jesus' (Luke 18:15), and the word he uses to describe those so brought is *brephe-brephos* which does, indeed, mean infants or babies. Note that all three Gospels mention that Jesus 'laid hands upon them' or 'touched them' (Matthew 19:15; Mark 10:16; Luke 18:15); that Mark says, 'he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them' (Mark 10:16). And Matthew makes it clear that there was a very specific purpose in the minds of the parents who brought these infants to Jesus, when he gives the reason, thus, 'For him to place his hands on them and pray for them' (Matthew 19:13). This is all too often understood as a kindly sentimental 'recognition' of children by the Lord. It was far more than that. Laying on of his hands — prayer — taking up in his arms — blessing — these are the terms used, and they are each significant. The words, 'Do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these' (Matthew 19:14) seal the solemn nature of what Jesus did. While we do not rest infant baptism upon these passages we do claim that, at the very least, they are strongly indicative of continuing covenant favour for little ones, and mark their standing in the new administration of the covenant as no different from what it had been in the old. They make clear also, as G. W. Bromiley puts it, that Jesus 'does not seem to share the rationalistic view that the Holy Spirit cannot do his work of illumination and regeneration except in those who have at least the beginnings of an adult understanding. He does not endorse the idea that small children are not the proper subjects of his kingdom and therefore of the sacraments or signs of the kingdom'.⁴

Secondly, the place that Paul gives to children in his letters (e.g. Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20). Paul addresses children as though they not only have a place in the church but in the discipline and privileges which are exercised in and by the church. In Colossians, where he is exhorting certain types of behaviour upon church members and where the members are classified — wives — husbands — masters — servants, one group is, 'children' and they, like the others, are exhorted to do all, 'In the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him' (Colossians 3:17).

These citations are perfectly natural and easy to understand given the continuity of the New Testament church with the Old, and the inclusion of children of the believers amongst its membership. The children of Christian parents, in virtue of belonging to the believing community and sealed with the sign of the covenant, are to be taught

4. G. W. Bromiley, *Children of Promise*, Edinburgh, 1979, p. 5.

the covenant obligation and privilege of obedience to parents in the Lord.

(iv) *The fourth Assertion is that: the Ordinance of Outward Admission to the Church has not changed, in its Inward Character and Meaning, under the Gospel.* Here we identify as essentially one and the same in their use, meaning and character, the Old Testament rite of circumcision and the New Testament rite of baptism. This lies close to the crux of our entire discussion and if it can be shown that the two ordinances held the same place, meant the same thing, and performed the same function, in the one church of God, under both dispensations of the covenant of grace, then it is difficult to evade the conclusion that the one ought to be administered to the infant members of the one church under the last dispensation, as the other was under the previous one. Three points can be made.

First, both ordinances signal membership of the one church. That circumcision was the ordinance admitting to outward membership of the Old Testament church will not be questioned. There was no access to the privileges of that church except through the door of circumcision. By express command all infants born into the fellowship of that church must be circumcised. In virtue of its birth and the privileges that carried, the infant was sealed in circumcision as a member of the visible church. And it was as a member of the church that it was ceremonially, and spiritually, qualified to receive the outward privileges, and the inward blessings that were held out, or conveyed, through that church as a means of grace. There was no further qualifying ceremony of admission. This is indicative of the fact that, while circumcision was the outward badge of the visible church, it was also what it had been to Abraham himself in its first administration, the seal of admission to the true Gospel church.

Baptism as the seal of membership in the New Testament church requires no elaborate proof. The great commission along with the apostolic practice with converts to the faith amply demonstrates it to be so. As seals of membership in the church of God, circumcision and baptism perform the same function and mean the same thing. They hold in this respect one and the same place, at different periods in time, in one and the same church. The Biblical affinity between the two goes even further, though, as our second point shows.

Secondly, circumcision and baptism are signs and seals of the same covenant blessings. The great blessings held out in the covenant of grace are justification from the guilt of sin and renewal by the Holy Spirit. That circumcision was expressive of justification by faith and sealed it to the true believer is stated by Paul: 'And he (i.e. Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised' (Romans 4:11). That circumcision was expressive of heart renewal and heart-cleansing is also clear: 'The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your

heart and with all your soul and live' (Deuteronomy 30:6). The inward reality symbolised by circumcision was a work of saving grace in the heart. New Testament usage confirms this. 'A man,' says Paul, 'is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code' (Romans 2:29). It is hardly necessary to elaborate the fact that these same, inward, spiritual blessings are deeply embedded in the meaning of New Testament baptism.

Thirdly, baptism replaces circumcision as the covenant sign of inward renewal, in the New Testament era. Read against its Old Testament background the New Testament makes it clear that sacraments which Christ instituted, baptism and the Lord's supper, correspond to the two covenantal signs of the Old Testament; the Lord's supper to the passover, baptism to circumcision. The point of discontinuity between the old signs and the new is self-evident and interprets the replacement for us. The old signs both involved blood-shedding, a feature which pointed forward, in type and promise, to the atoning work of Christ. By way of contrast, the new signs look backward to the 'one sacrifice for sin' (Hebrews 10:12) which has taken place and the fulfilment of which is emphasised by the bloodless nature of the signs. This outward discontinuity emphasises, not the disjunction between the facts symbolised but, in a very positive way, their spiritual continuity.

The continuity, in both cases, is spelled out in the New Testament in a clear way. The institution of the Lord's supper marks it quite strongly but, Paul actually spells it out for us, 'Christ our passover lamb has been sacrificed for us' (1 Corinthians 5:7). In the case of the other signs, which are our particular interest here, the link is established by Paul in Colossians 2:11-12. Expositors differ in their detailed interpretations of this passage but the focal fact it proclaims is quite clear. Over against those wishing believers to have the Old Testament sign of the covenant, circumcision, Paul urges, very cogently, that they have already been circumcised: 'In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ' (Colossians 2:11). If we ask, when was that inward work sealed to these believers the answer is emphatic — 'having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith' (Colossians 2:12). In terms of the Old Testament teaching it would hardly be possible to find a more positive rebuttal of the need for circumcision or to find a more accurate and fitting description of what had happened to those people than is couched in the phrase 'the circumcision of Christ'.

(v) *The fifth Assertion is that: the Principle of the Admission of Children as Church Members was, and still is, the Covenant Status of their Parents*

It was to the faith of the parent that the promise was made, and the

sign given in the cases of Noah and Abraham. Right through the history of the Old Testament church the family unit was the pivot around which God's dealings in covenant grace turned. The promise was unvaried in its terms — 'you and your seed'. The faith of the parent conditioned the Godward standing of the child. In the light of that fact it is instructive to note the precise vocabulary used by Peter when the covenant terms are republished to the New Testament church. The vocabulary of Acts 2:38-39 is that which any man would use in summarising the covenant terms proclaimed to Abraham in Genesis 17. There, the covenant promise of God embraced three things. Blessing to himself; blessing to his seed; blessing to many nations. How succinctly and cogently Peter puts these three elements forward, then, as he unfolds the covenant promise and holds out to his hearers the blessing which it assures to repentance and faith. 'The promise,' he says, 'is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off.' In Acts 2:39, then, it is clear that infants are not only placed in the same relation to their parent's faith as they are in Genesis 17, but that they are placed in precisely the same relation to baptism as they were to circumcision; and they are placed there by the identical terms of an identical covenant promise.

Concerns in New Testament Practice

Having looked at some of the basic factors which have to come into our consideration of child baptism and at the way in which these establish the correlation between the Old Testament covenant sign and that of the New Testament, it remains now to look a little more closely at what did take place in the New Testament church. Do the baptisms spoken of there strengthen or weaken the link we have been following? Do the New Testament facts encourage us to see baptism as a suitable replacement for and fulfilment of the sign of circumcision? Of twelve cases of baptism cited in the New Testament — and only twelve are mentioned out of the thousands that must have taken place — no less than four — perhaps five — are cases of what we generally refer to as 'house-hold baptism' but which, for reasons that will follow, I prefer to call '*family baptisms*'.

The fact that at least four out of twelve baptisms are recorded as taking place within a family situation is interesting on statistical grounds alone. But it is even more so on linguistic grounds.

The New Testament uses two Greek words for house and household — *oikos*, *oikia*. In every instance in the New Testament it is said that the *oikos* was baptised, never the *oikia*. This is significant because of the different connotation of the two words. The literal meaning of *oikos* is the inside of the house, or the rooms in it which are used by the family which lives there. The literal meaning of *oikia* is the ground around the house — or the immediate setting of the house. Both

words, however, seem to have a similarly differentiated figurative meaning. Figuratively, *oikos* is used of the immediate family, *oikia* of other persons who go to make up the wider household, or of people who are assembled there in a meeting. A house, in this sense of *oikos*, implies family lineage, but the figurative distinction between 'house' and 'household' is not so clear to us in English — if, indeed, it is there at all — and so the distinction tends to be obscured in our English translations. The Greek text of Acts 16:31-33 illustrates the distinction quite clearly. 'And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house' — and there 'house' is *oikos*; then, in verse 32 we read, 'And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to those that were in his house' — *en tae oikia*. And then when it comes to the actual baptism, and to those who were baptised, they are denominated, *autos kai hoi autou pantes* — 'he and all his'. Now, had the English translation taken note of this distinction and translated *oikos* as 'family' it would have followed the sense of the Greek text more closely and avoided the confusion that tends to arise in the mind of the reader about the precise connotation of 'house' and 'household'.

Noting these distinctions Dr Alan Harman goes on to say, 'It is interesting that in the two references to the family of Stephanus, in the first in 1 Corinthians 1:16 *oikos* is used, but in 1 Corinthians 16:15 ("You know the household of Stephanus, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for the ministry of the saints") the wider word *oikia* appears'.⁵

Irrespective of the linguistic argument, however, the baptism of families or households provides evidence that the 'representative' or 'family' principle, so deeply embedded in Jewish practice, was in operation in the New Testament church just as it had been in the Old. That fact lends its support to our entire thesis.

Enough has probably been said to demonstrate that, 'by good and necessary consequence', a broad spectrum of Scripture teaches that infants of believers are to be admitted as members of the visible Gospel church and that the seal of their membership in that church is baptism. Let us summarise the situation, however, with a closer look at the actual instances of baptism in the New Testament and by examining the data they give us against the background of all that has been said already.

As we have seen, the New Testament gives us only twelve instances of actual baptism. Of these twelve, four are clear instances of household baptism — and, if the household of Crispus be included on the grounds of 1 Corinthians 1:14, allied with Acts 18:8, the number is five. Here the number of family baptisms is high enough to indicate such baptism as a frequent occurrence in the apostolic practice and one can only agree with John Murray when he says, 'It would be practically impossible to believe that in none of these households were there any

5. Alan Harman in *Hold Fast your Confession*, ed Donald Macleod, Edinburgh, 1978, p. 209.

infants'.⁶ But further, of the remaining seven cases cited, four were of 'group' or 'crowd' baptisms and the presumptive case for children being a part of any, or of all of them, is of the strongest kind. That leaves only three stated cases where we can be absolutely clear that no child was involved and where we have the baptism of individuals being baptised upon the profession of their own faith. These are, Simon of Samaria, the Ethiopian eunuch, and Saul of Tarsus. Let us note too that these were baptised within the context of a missionary situation. In a similar situation today, any paedobaptist minister or missionary would require the same profession before baptising any similar adult convert and, in such a situation, he would expect a good number of such baptisms. But, once the missionary situation was no longer the predominant one, such cases of baptism would not, in a paedobaptist church, be so frequent. And, although the New Testament writings extend for a period of more than thirty years from the inception of the Christian church, it is surely a very significant fact that not one single case of the baptisms instanced in the New Testament was that of an adult who had grown to the age of maturity within the Gospel church.

On the inference that children were baptised along with their parents the absence of 'second generation' baptism is not surprising; but apart from that thesis it is inexplicable in a record that covers the first thirty/sixty years of New Testament church-life so extensively. On the other hand, the existence of even one such instance would be a stronger counterpoint to the continuity of the covenant principle in the New Testament church than any other factor which can be brought against it. But the fact of the matter is that the baptism of people who have grown up within the church is a practice which cannot be demonstrated from the New Testament.

Finally, we must remind ourselves of the background against which the New Testament writings are to be set. They are to be set in the perspective of the total teaching of the Old Testament on the place of the child within the covenant, and within the church which the covenant terms established. Hence, it need not surprise us that none of these writings should carry an express command, or contain an explicit example, about administering the sign and seal of the covenant to the child. The Old Testament teaching was so clear, the warrant so deeply embedded in its warp and woof, that no new command was necessary. The New Testament silence at this point, far from being a weakness in the whole case, is one of its best pillars of support. The practice was perfectly clear and it was to remain what it had ever been in the covenant dealings of a gracious God with his people. The federal theology which we have inherited in Scotland provides a cogent framework within which to demonstrate that the practice of baptising the children of all Christian believers is firmly rooted in the teaching of Scripture, and that the duty of every Christian church and the privilege

6. John Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

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of every Christian parent as to the baptism of their children is made very clear by 'good and necessary consequence' from principles which lie richly widespread through the Old and New Testaments.

It is the unity of the covenant, taken along with the covenantal solidarity of the parent/child relationship, which establishes, we believe, the right of the believer's child to the sign and seal of the covenant just as surely in New as in Old Testament times.

The baptism of our children is a perpetual seal to us that God is not only a God to his people but also to their seed after them. When this is understood, who is the Christian parent or the Christian minister but will say, 'Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptised?' (Acts 10:47).