

5th. Reformed subculture in the United States (Page 7 for discussion 9-19-10)

4B. Do we have a reformed view of covenant theology and the sacraments?

This is probably where reformed thinkers will be most critical of us. Does our approach here still have a reformed core and trajectory?

1C. Baptism

If we base our answer on the tradition since Calvin in a strong confessional (repristinationist) way, then no, we do not have a reformed view of covenant theology because we do not define covenant standing or covenant children by birth to believing parentage, and therefore we do not practice infant baptism. The following conclusion that we draw from Scripture is fingernails on a chalk board to many reformed thinkers: we identify the children of the covenant not by birth to believing parentage, but by entry into the covenant community by repentance-baptism by the confession of sin and faith. This conclusion has a biblical theology orientation because of John's baptism in the history of redemption. Here, I am revisionist and it is per biblical-theological application to the topic of baptism and the question of covenant children. How accurately we do this is something for others to judge. Granted, the judgment of others will be controlled by their presuppositional sunglasses; it is difficult for all of us to see that with which we see. But if a person wearing bifocal glasses tilts his head as he looks out, he will notice the lenses and see what controls his seeing. We must engage, ask for dialogue with open-minded humility, rethink our own view regularly and fully, and then act on what we understand waiting on the Lord to reveal more to us of what we need.

As you know, the biblical-theological (history of salvation) notion we emphasize attempts to clarify the language of the covenant. We begin with the fact that the covenant people of Abraham are under judgment and thus are "not my people" and they are one with the nations as not the covenant children of God. However, *God keeps covenant with Abraham and his seed, even in their judgment. Therefore, they remain His covenant people but under judgment.* Now, marvelously, the gospel goes to all people: the covenant promises belong to all people, so, all people are covenant breakers. All are God's people under judgment and called to repentance to become the new Israel. Entry into the new Israel is by means of repentance-baptism to which Israelites, their children, and all nations are called. We have covered these sentiments in our NT survey, in sermons on Romans, in sermons on Matthew and Luke on John the Baptist, and in sermons on Matthew on the parables of the kingdom. For one detail, recall that at the end of the age law breakers (tares) will be gathered out of his kingdom (Mat 13.41). Wheat and tares include all people; all people are in God's kingdom; hence, they are in His covenant, the gospel belongs to them all in its free offer. Still, they are not the people of God and God calls out a new Israel from those that are not His Israelite (covenant) people to form the new Israel, the new covenant people. Thus, baptism is the entry way into new covenant membership in the visible church. [cf. **the woman, Israel, protected in the wilderness (church age) in the book of Revelation**]

Q: then, can we claim solidarity with reformed theology and does it matter?

Yes, we claim solidarity with reformed theology because a) our acceptance of the validity of infant baptisms reflects reformed thinking, especially on the objectivity of the sacraments as gospel signs. We think this is the most important point when we prioritize various matters of baptism (mode, meaning, subject, etc). b) We also dig deep into covenant theology rooting every historical covenant in the *pactum salutis*. We claim to hold to a strong view of covenant theology without the entailment of infant baptism, which many reformed folk see as some kind of oxymoron. However, the reformed folk of the CREC show more understanding to our view than most Presbyterians, even if they do not embrace our view. Both a) & b) matter.

c) We follow Calvin's root to its fruit on how Scripture counts sonship (Calvin, Rom 9.26, 372f).