God’s Covenant with man

Chapter 7 – “Hope for your house”

In this chapter of Covenants, we move a bit from the historical to the more broadly applicable. Now, as they say, we’re getting into the nitty-gritty. Last time, one of the discussion questions we had asked:

In Deuteronomy 10:16, and later in Jeremiah 4:4, the people of God are told to “circumcise” their hearts. Moses spoke in the plains of Moab to Israel, telling them that the Lord would circumcise their hearts, so that they might love Him. What does this mean? What was the true nature of circumcision?

In this chapter, Robertson makes the analogy between baptism and circumcision – the two signs which God instituted for the marking of his covenant people. The above question gets at the gist of the discussion. What is the true nature of the sign, whether it be covenant circumcision or covenant baptism? How does it relate to the believer? We’ll be talking about these things and others today.

Robertson takes pains in this chapter to relate the instances of baptisms recorded in the New Testament, with the goal of showing forth the meaning of baptism as a covenant sign, like circumcision was to Old Testament believers. This entails a discussion of the scriptural passages from which we infer the baptism of infants.
1. In our discussions of Noah and Abraham, we have found that God has made it clear that His covenant is an eternal one, (Gen 9:11-16, Gen 17:7-19) one with both the representative head and his descendants (Gen 9:9,12, Gen 17:7, 19). We will see further that Moses was told similar things. In the New Testament, Peter speaks in Acts 2:38-9 of a promise (THE promise, the promise to Abraham) which is “to you and your children”, whose sign is baptism.

   a. The focus of this chapter is hope, found in the signs of the covenant... how does this promise cause us to have hope for our houses?

   b. Make the connection, in your own words, between these promises and the warrant for the baptism of infants...

2. To choose one of Robertson’s examples, let’s look at the story of the baptism of Lydia’s household in Acts 16:14-15, wherein “she believed” and that “her household was baptized”.

   a. How does this parallel the case of Noah and his family?

   b. How does this parallel the application of circumcision to a house of a converted Jew? (or Abraham’s house, for that matter, upon the institution of the sign?)
c. Does this seem weird to you – that the whole household was to be baptized along with the head? What common presumptions about baptism may be at play here?

d. We spoke last time about inclusion of non-Jews into the covenant by means of circumcision as adults. Is the inclusion of adults into the covenant by baptism any different?

3. We often speak of blessing and curse in God’s covenants. The act of baptism, just as the act of circumcision, unites a person with the promises and demands of God’s covenant of grace.

   a. What did Paul say about those who rested on their circumcision as evidence of their salvation?

   b. Does Paul say something similar to those baptized?
c. For those who reject the covenant, what does their baptism (or circumcision, for OT people who rejected Yahweh) become?

4. What does Paul tell Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) in Romans 2:25-29?
   a. How does this reflect what we saw Moses saying in Deuteronomy 10:16?

   b. What does it mean to be circumcised with the circumcision made without hands? (Col. 2:11)

5. Now in Romans 3:1-2, Paul makes the following statement: ¹Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ²Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. Paul says that circumcision, notwithstanding that which we discussed in the previous question, presented those circumcised with a particular advantage. Presumably he wrote this to counter the possible conclusion that circumcision was for the Jew more of a liability. It can be argued that baptism, too, presents a similar advantage to those baptized. What are your thoughts on this?
For rumination and contemplation...

From John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (pp 4-5):

There does not appear to be in the New Testament any passage which expressly says that baptism represents purification from the defilement of sin, that is to say, regeneration. But since baptism is washing with water, since it involves a religious use of water, and since regeneration is expressed elsewhere in terms of washing (John 3:5, Titus 3:5; I Cor. 6:11), it is difficult, if not impossible, to escape the conclusion that this washing with water involved in baptism represents that indispensable purification which is presupposed in union with Christ and without which no one can enter into the kingdom of God. There is also consideration that baptism is the circumcision of the New Testament (I Cor. 2:11,12). Circumcision, without doubt, symbolized purification from defilement. We should infer that baptism does also.

From Paul Jewett, *Baptism and Confirmation* (pp. 168f.) in David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham: a Reformed Baptist View of Baptism, the Covenant, and Children* (quoted in Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, p. 166)

To experience the circumcision of Christ in the putting off of the body of the flesh, is the same as being buried with him and raised with him in baptism through faith. If this be so, the only conclusion we can reach is that the two signs as outward rites symbolize the same inner reality in Paul’s thinking. So circumcision may fairly be said to be the Old Testament counterpart of Christian baptism.
Indeed, it is most evident that the covenant which the Lord once made with Abraham (cf. Genesis 17:14) is no less in force today for Christians than it was of old for the Jewish people, and that this word relates no less to Christians than it then related to the Jews. Unless perhaps we think that Christ by his coming lessened or curtailed the grace of the Father—but this is nothing but execrable blasphemy! Accordingly, the children of the Jews also, because they had been made heirs of his covenant and distinguished from the children of the impious, were called a holy seed [Ezra 9:2; Isaiah 6:18]. For this same reason, the children of Christians are considered holy; and even though born with only one believing parent, by the apostle’s testimony they differ from the unclean seed of idolators [1 Corinthians 7:14]. Now seeing that the Lord, immediately after making the covenant with Abraham, commanded it to be sealed in infants by an outward sacrament [Genesis 17:12], what excuse will Christians give for not testifying and sealing it in their children today? ... There is a ready answer that for the time of the old Testament he instituted circumcision to confirm his covenant, but that after circumcision was abolished, the same reason for confirming his covenant (which we have in common with the Jews) still holds good. Consequently, we must always diligently consider what is common to both, and what they have apart from us. The covenant is common, and the reason for confirming it is common. Only the manner of confirmation is different — what was circumcision for them was replaced for us by baptism. Otherwise, if the testimony by which the Jews were assured of the salvation of their posterity is taken away from us, Christ’s coming would have the effect of making God’s grace more obscure and less attested for us than it had previously been for the Jews. Now, this cannot be said without grievously slandering Christ, through whom the Father’s infinite goodness was more clearly and liberally poured out upon the earth and declared to men than ever before.
tack-on’s for me: Murray, pp 48-49. Chiefly used for the opening of the discussion of infant baptism.