

# IN RESPONSE - BAPTISM & THE “UNBREAKABLE” NEW COVENANT

by Dennis Prutow  
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In our last lesson I pursued the subject of regenerate church membership. I continue to speak in favor of the baptism of covenant infants by looking at a related argument opposing infant baptism. Baptists insist the new covenant prophesied in the Old Testament is unbreakable. Since this is true, they say, infant baptism is untenable. Baptism *must* await the evidence of new birth. The argument seems plausible at first glance.

One text to which Baptists point is Jeremiah 31:31-34,

‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the Lord, ‘I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’

Israel broke the old covenant. As the argument goes, this old covenant was external. The new covenant is internal. The law is written in the heart. Whereas the old covenant was broken, the new covenant is unbreakable.

Two things must be noted immediately. First, because of the nature of the old covenant as typological and anticipatory, many of its requirements were external having to do with the ceremonial aspects of worship. Second, the old covenant was not external in its essence. Moses reminded the people of this when he came down from Mount Sinai.

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all

His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? . . . Circumcise then your heart, and stiffen your neck no more (Deuteronomy 10:12-16).

The commandments of God were to be kept from the heart. For this to take place, the heart needed to be circumcised. From this perspective, the old covenant was indeed internal, of the heart. The apostle Paul confirms this.

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit (Romans 2:28-29, italics added).*

Here is the divine interpretation of the old covenant. It is not outward only. It contains a vital inward element, the presence of the Holy Spirit. We therefore see continuity with the new covenant as well as discontinuity.

This is important to grasp because, as mentioned above, the church under the new covenant is a mixed multitude as was the church under the old covenant. Jesus Christ affirms this in the parable of the wheat and the tares, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. It is true Jesus says “the field is the world” (Matthew 13:38) and not “the field is the church.”

However, when we look at the situation into which Jesus is speaking, we find the help we need. The kingdom of the new covenant has not yet been inaugurated. The kingdom exists only in its old covenant form and only within Israel. Through the apostles Jesus intends to sow the word of God throughout the world (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8). As this sowing takes place, the enemy of God sows tares among the wheat. Hence the *mixed* character of the kingdom as it progresses in growth in the world. The church is therefore a body of *professing* Christians in which there are both regenerate and unregenerate people.

Those who maintain the new covenant is inviolable and therefore deny

baptism to the children of believers have a defective view of the church. As shown in the previous lesson, they wrongly maintain a pure church theory they suppose is achieved through regenerate church membership.

In addition, proponents of the “unbreakable” new covenant fail to draw a distinction between the will of God’s decree and the will of God’s precept. Deuteronomy 29:29 declares,

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe the words of this law.

God’s secret will is the will of His sovereign plans and decree. As Reformed people we believe God has chosen a people out of the world for Himself. These elect people are eternally saved. They are born again in time and align themselves with the visible body of Christ, the church. Before their conversion, we have no idea who these people are. From this perspective there is absolutely no doubt the new covenant is unbreakable.

On the other hand, “the things revealed” are the precepts of God, His laws for living. As Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). These commandments are covenant obligations, duties, and responsibilities. Without fear of contradiction, no person is without sin. No person is a covenant keeper, 100%. To one extent or another we are all covenant breakers. Unrepentant covenant breakers are disciplined. In extreme cases, unrepentant covenant breakers are excommunicated, denied access to the communion table with God’s people. From this *outward* perspective the new covenant is often broken. Denying infant baptism will not preclude the presence of this covenant breaking in the visible church. Denial such covenant breaking exists is no sure ground infant baptism is unfounded.

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# IN RESPONSE - WHY DOES PAUL PROHIBIT CIRCUMCISION?

by Dennis Prutow

The apostle Paul takes a strong stand against circumcision. "Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you" (Galatians 5:2). Why is this the case? Paul argues against circumcision because circumcision is fulfilled in the new birth, it is said. Since the pouring out of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, circumcision has no significance. It is fulfilled in the giving of new hearts by the Holy Spirit. Present day circumcision is therefore a denial of the reality, new birth, in favor of the sign.

This position is important to Baptist believers as an argument against infant baptism. It supposedly shows there is no relationship between circumcision and water baptism. This being the case, there is no ground for infant baptism as there was for infant circumcision.

The effort here is to draw physical circumcision, circumcision of the heart, and Spirit baptism together. Water baptism is excluded from the equation. Is this a legitimate approach? Is the new birth the fulfillment of circumcision? And is this why Paul forbid circumcision? My answer is No.

First of all, Paul spoke vehemently against requiring the circumcision of Christians not because it was fulfilled in the giving of the Spirit but because circumcision is a return to legalism, salvation by works. He makes this plain in Galatians 5:2-4.

Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

If you rely upon circumcision to bring you right standing before God, you are under obligation before God to keep every precept of the law. Circumcision alone will not do. If you are seeking right standing in this way, you have been severed from Christ. You have fallen from grace. That is, you are denying salvation by grace through faith by your dependence upon works. The problem is legalism. Paul does *not* aver circumci-

sion is to be shunned because new birth properly fulfills it.

Our Baptist friends retort with Colossians 2:11-12.

And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

The argument here might be there is no reference to water baptism in Colossians 2:11-12. The specific reference is to Spirit baptism and Spirit baptism is shown to be the fulfillment of circumcision. How was the circumcision of Christ, the circumcision made without hands, accomplished? It was accomplished through the baptism of the Spirit. As a result we have the triangle of physical circumcision, inner circumcision of heart, and Spirit baptism. Water baptism and circumcision are not connected. Water baptism simply symbolizes Spirit baptism which is in turn the fulfillment of circumcision. It does not replace circumcision.

Is this triangular relationship of heart circumcision, physical circumcision, and Spirit baptism proposed by our Baptist friends consistent with Scripture? No. The sign of the covenant in the Old Testament was circumcision. In Genesis 17:10-12, God told Abraham:

This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations....

Physical circumcision represented spiritual circumcision. Romans 2:28-29: For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit.

Fundamentally, circumcision is inward; it is that which is of the heart by the Spirit. We may put it this way: *real* circumcision is spiritual; *symbolic* circumcision is physical. Abraham "received the [outward] sign of circumcision, a [visible] seal of the faith he had while uncircumcised" (Romans 5:11). Physical circumcision was therefore fulfilled in spiritual circumcision. "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart" (Jeremiah 4:4).

The same parallel exists in the New Testament. The outward sign of membership in the covenant community, the church, is water baptism. Christ commanded the apostles to make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them (Matthew 28:19-20). We see this command carried out in Acts 2:41, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls." How were people added to the visible body of believers? They were added by way of baptism. What did this water baptism symbolize and represent? It represented Spirit baptism. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). We may put it this way: *real* baptism is Spirit baptism; *symbolic* baptism is water baptism.

These parallels must be understood in looking at Colossians 2:11-12. On one hand, in the Old Testament, physical circumcision represents inner circumcision of heart. On the other hand, in the New Testament, water baptism symbolizes the baptism of the Spirit. Because Paul equates the *inner realities* of OT heart circumcision and NT Spirit baptism in Colossians 2:11-12, the outward signs of OT circumcision and NT water baptism should also be equated.

We refuted the argument Paul denies circumcision because it is fulfilled in Spirit baptism. This argument is bolstered by a supposed triangular connection of physical circumcision, heart circumcision, and Spirit baptism which erroneously excludes water baptism.

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# IN RESPONSE - THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY, PART XII

## Giving Women Permission to Teach in Seminary

by Dennis Prutow

Last time I argued putting women under contract to teach Bible classes in a college violates neither 1 Corinthians 14:34 nor 1 Timothy 2:12. I said this is the case because the college is a covenantal authority structure *distinct* from the church. The historic marks of the church are three: the true preaching of the gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and church discipline. By this standard, the college is not a church. First, its faculty and staff do not represent the church to the world in the public proclamation of the gospel. The opposite is true. Pastors and teachers represent the church to the college when invited to speak to this community.

Second, the college has no authority to administer the sacraments. It does not bring converts into the visible church by way of baptism nor does it baptize the infants of believers. The college sometimes *plays* church by celebrating the Lord's Supper. As the college does not baptize, it should not celebrate the Lord's Supper. The members of the college ought to go to church to enjoy the sacraments. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments of the church.

Third, as the college does not bring individuals into the church it does not exercise *church* discipline. The keys of the kingdom are not given to the college (Matthew 16:18-19). Its discipline ought to be *biblical* but this does not make it *church* discipline (Matthew 18:15-18). College faculty may not have contracts renewed and thus be barred from further teaching in the college. In church discipline, a person may be excommunicated, barred from fellowship with other believers around the Lord's Table. The college has no such authority. The same argument holds for the seminary.

Because colleges and seminaries are not churches and do not speak *for* the church, when colleges and seminaries place women under contract to teach, they are not violating either 1 Corinthians 14:34 or 1 Timothy 2:12.

A further word about seminaries is in order. Most seminaries exist as independent covenantal authority structures. As such, they are not part of the church

nor are they governed by the elders of the church. Granted, those who labor in seminary may be ordained teaching or ruling elders in particular churches. Primarily, they are professors. Secondly, they may or may not be elders. In such circumstances employing women to teach is not a violation of either 1 Corinthians 14:34 or 1 Timothy 2:12.

Is it prudential to employ women to teach in seminaries? Is it wise to have women teaching future pastors? Some would argue quite adamantly since the ordained eldership is reserved in Scripture for men, it is not proper for women to instruct future ministers. This line of reasoning seems sound.

Suppose a woman has technical expertise in biblical Hebrew. Suppose she has abundant experience in the area and could benefit future pastors with her teaching and could therefore help mold the education of future leaders of the church. Suppose however she is denied opportunity to teach in an independent *seminary* because she is not eligible to hold a teaching office in the *church*. Is such a position prudent? My answer is negative. In this circumstance, both the seminary and the church are the worse for their choice. I stand by my aforementioned argument.

Ideally, the seminary would be a purposeful extension of the disciple making process of a church. The Great Commission of our Lord is plain,

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age' (Matthew 28:18-20).

In this scenario, if the seminary is actually a part of the covenantal authority structure of the church, all the teaching of the seminary would be carried on by those authorized to teach in the church. Men ordained to the office of teaching elder would be the seminary faculty. In this case, the seminary would also be

governed by the elders of the church. The seminary would be a church school not an independent institution. In this latter case, our Hebrew scholar might be excluded from teaching.

Would the church and the seminary be the worse for this decision as you just mentioned? As far as technical expertise is concerned the answer *might* be affirmative. But there is a second, and overriding, factor. It is the matter of Christ's presence and blessing. If *we* do not take care to follow the words of Jesus in making disciples by "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you," we have no right to expect Christ to fulfill *His* promise, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The church is particularly vulnerable at this point. If she is disobedient to Christ she cannot expect the blessed presence of Christ upon her teaching and preaching. This is true because of the church's covenant obligations. Technical expertise does not yield blessing. Blessing is tied to covenant obedience (Psalm 25:10, 103:17-18).

As already argued, the independent seminary is a distinct covenantal structure with somewhat different covenant obligations. Our Hebrew scholar may legally and morally teach future pastors in such an institution. That such teaching is *legal* in our society is quite clear. The *moral* obligations are twofold. First, legal contractual obligations must be fulfilled. Second, our lady Hebrew scholar can teach future pastors in *seminary* and at the same time understand and teach her ineligibility to hold the teaching office in the *church*. In so doing, she is fulfilling the mandate of Christ by "teaching them to observe all that I commanded." Being morally correct in this matter, she may expect the blessing of Christ, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." This is true because covenant obedience in the independent seminary does not exclude our elect lady from teaching.

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# IN RESPONSE - THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY, PART XIII

## Giving Women Permission to Teach in the Local Church

by Dennis Prutow

The apostle Paul says, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." My position with regard to 1 Timothy 2:12 has been that Paul does not permit women to hold the office of pastor-teacher within the church. Within the gathered body of God's people the pastor-teacher is to officially proclaim the Word of God, as God's representative, under God's authority. In this narrow sense Paul declines to give women permission to speak. In addition, under God, the elders of the church gather as sessions, presbyteries, and synods to sit as authoritative assemblies. They do so by and under the authority of their King and Head, Jesus Christ. Paul also declines to give women permission to take authority as members of these ruling bodies in the covenantal structure of the church. I am applying 1 Timothy 2:12 in this sense.

With regard to the local church and teaching additional questions must be answered. What is the relationship between teaching and authority? Is the relationship such that all teaching implies the taking of authority? If so, are women denied *all* teaching posts within the local church?

To begin, within the confines of the local church, Paul does not deny women *every* teaching opportunity.

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children... (Titus 2:3-4).

Here is a direct command given to older women to teach the younger women. This is *not* instruction in contradiction to 1 Timothy 2:12. The Word of God does not contradict itself. But does this mean teaching only within the women's group of the local church? As one lady put it to me, does this mean women of the church are confined to meetings where they play church or conduct mini-church?

Perhaps the answer comes in looking at the connection between teaching and authority. Mark 1:22 gives us a clue. "And they were amazed at his teaching;

for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22).

Here we see a comparison made between Jesus and the scribes. Jesus came with evident authority. There are two different definitions of authority worthy of mention. The first refers to Jesus. As the Son of God, Jesus came with a particular authority from God. He was vested with the *right* by God to speak for God. Because He had the right to speak as He did, a certain power adhered to His teaching. Both this right and power came from God.

This understanding of authority is seen in John 1:12, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God." This right is authority. It is legal right or authority. In John 1:12, the right is the right of entrance into God's family by way of adoption. As a result, we who come to Christ have a right to all the privileges of the children of God.

Compare the scribes. These scribes were Jewish ecclesiastical and civil lawyers. They knew the Scriptures. They were experts in the law. From this perspective, each scribe was looked upon as an authority. This authority is the authority of expertise. Does Jesus repudiate the expertise of the scribes in favor of power? No. Note His words in Matthew 23:23.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

The problem was not the expertise in and of itself. The scribes had expertise misguided by the flesh and untempered by love and mercy. That was the problem. Jesus goes so far as to tell us we must be more scrupulous than the scribes. "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). This is true because "every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment" (Matthew

12:36). The authority of expertise is therefore essential to kingdom life.

What we have seen also tells us plainly there can be teaching which utilizes the authority of expertise but does not touch upon the authority of special prerogative or power. It seems to me this distinction can be worked out in the life of the church while maintaining the integrity of 1 Timothy 2:12.

For example, an understanding in child development is quite helpful in teaching church school classes. Men in certain church school classes may run head long into difficulty because of their lack of expertise in this area. Is it better to place ladies in classroom who have this knowledge or to use these ladies as teachers in adult classes where the men may pick up vital pointers to improve their skills in the church school?

Vociferous protests might be raised if the latter tact were taken. Why? 1 Timothy 2:12 might be invoked. However, in the case outlined, no authority is taken outside the area of expertise. Technical information is imparted. In turn, men in the church, elders perhaps, are better equipped to teach in the classroom.

I will take it a step further. Suppose the Hebrew scholar mentioned in the last lesson is a part of my congregation. I would be free to avail myself of her technical expertise in the language to clarify my understanding of a text. Once receiving technical instruction from this local authority, my ability to teach with authority is enhanced. Notice I'm using the word authority in two different ways in the last sentence.

Do I compromise 1 Timothy 2:12 with such action? Not in the least. First, although this elect lady is teaching me, and although her teaching has an undeniable effect upon my work, she is not assuming the office of pastor-teacher and teaching as the appointed representative of Christ within the church.

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