

WEEK 1: 28th August – God’s plan
Genesis 17:1-2, 7, 9-14 & Titus 2:11-14

1. God’s plan: a people of His own
 - a. God promises to be your God to Abraham
 - b. Jesus came to have a people that are His very own
2. God’s plan: old and new covenants
 - a. ‘Testament’ comes from the Greek word for ‘will or covenant’
 - b. There are multiple covenants in the Old Testament
 - c. The Old Covenant refers specifically to the covenant with Moses which was unable to bring to fruition the Covenant with Abraham because it lacked power to change people from the inside out
 - d. A New Covenant was promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34, which echoes what was there in the Old Covenant with Moses, but it also contained the means to bring it about
 - e. The New Covenant built upon the covenants with Abraham and David but replaced the covenant with Moses
3. God’s plan: the place of children
 - a. The covenant with Abraham included the nations (Gen 15) and children (Gen 17)
 - b. Acts 2:38-39 – children are seen by Jews and thus by Peter as being a part of the covenant God made with Abraham, this is never questioned in the New Testament, even though many other parts of the Old Covenant are (food laws, priesthood, sacrifices, women receiving sign of covenant, circumcision)
 - c. God’s plan includes the children of believers: beginning in the Old Testament and carrying into the New Testament

WEEK 2: 4th September – Baptism and children
Genesis 15:1-6 and Romans 4:1-16

1. Theology of children: inside or outside the covenant?
 - a. Scripture doesn’t phrase questions the way we might ask them
 - b. This is maybe because it held to a Covenant Theology more than we first appreciate, and so it assumes this within its conclusions
 - c. Covenant Theology is woven across the Scriptures, particularly with children:
 - i. 2 Samuel 12:23b – David has confidence of being reunited with his deceased son
 - ii. Ephesians 6:1, 4 – children are addressed as being able to grow in the ways of the Kingdom, which is impossible without the Spirit’s enabling
 - iii. Matthew 19:14 – the kingdom of heaven belongs to children “such as these”, without mention of a childlike faith in Matthew’s gospel, because he was writing to a Jewish audience

2. Sacraments are signs and seals of God's promise
 - a. A sacrament is 'an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith' (John Calvin, Institutes)
 - b. There are references to baptism that are not to do with the actual act of baptism itself, but rather speak of baptism in a spiritual sense (Rom 6:3; 1 Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27)
 - c. Acts 22:16 – baptism is related to the washing of sin through the name of Jesus, of the promise of forgiveness in His name
 - d. Baptism is understood in the Reformed tradition as pointing to our spiritual need and God's promise to meet that need through Jesus
 - e. The same was true of circumcision (Rom 4:11-12) – it was a sign pointing to the promise that God would give righteousness (the cleansing of sin and the giving of forgiveness) on the basis of faith
 - f. Circumcision pointed to the same internal need and God's promise to meet it, but it was replaced with baptism as circumcision was tied to national identity. Note: neither baptism nor circumcision save
 - g. Neither circumcision nor baptism are understood (in the Reformed tradition) to point to our response, but to our need and God's promise, and so it is fitting for both adults and infants to be baptised – it is God speaking to us more than it is us speaking to God
3. Baptism and the response of faith
 - a. Faith is still central in the Reformed tradition:
 - i. Upon faith parents bring a child
 - ii. A response of faith is called forth from a child as they grow so that they then continue in what is already theirs
 - iii. Faith is required across the whole of life:
 - Warnings in Scripture about turning from Jesus – John 8:31, Hebrews (various passages), Rom 11:16-24

WEEK 3: 11th September – Communion and children
Exodus 12:1-3, 21-27; Luke 22:7-8, 13-20

1. Communion: proclaiming the New Covenant
 - a. Luke 22:7-8 – the context of the institution of Communion is the Passover, when God's people looked back and forward
 - b. Luke 22:19-20 – Jesus gave His life to save us, as the Passover Lamb was sacrificed in Egypt to ensure judgment "passed over" the people (Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 5:7)
 - c. 1 Corinthians 11:26 – when we celebrate Communion we proclaim the Lord's death until He returns; we proclaim the means by which the New Covenant was established
2. Communion: more than mere memorial
 - a. Luke 22:19 "this is my body"
 - i. Calvin: sacraments are signs and seals of God's promise
 - ii. Jesus promises to be with us when we celebrate Communion – in a spiritual way, not literally in/alongside the elements
 - b. Communion is more than mere memorial, given to sustain our faith

3. Communion: for our children
 - a. We have seen how children are included in the New Covenant, so Jesus' death was for them, His body was given for them too
 - b. Children shared in the Passover meal, which was replaced by Communion
 - c. Luke 22:19, 20 speaks of "remembrance" but Paul concludes this to be "proclaiming" (1 Cor. 11) and this can also be a communal activity; Passover was also a proclamation and children were involved before they could understand
 - i. If "remembrance" means everyone must understand and have cognition, then what do we do with those affected by dementia?
 - d. 1 Cor. 11 speaks of "discerning" and "examining" but here Paul is giving directions on how to curb deliberate sinfulness against one another, not giving directions to curb who can participate based on their level of understanding
 - e. If we do not allow children to share in Communion then we create a separate community and deny their place in the New Covenant, whilst also making their entrance based on understanding rather than grace, and possibly also stunting growth in faith by excluding them from one of the few moments of symbolism in our church life
 - f. I would argue that when a child reaches out to take the elements that they are allowed to do so (yet no force feeding)
 - g. This will be a personal and family decision; I am not saying everyone should do it, but that we allow space for variance whilst maintaining unity and peace for we are one in the Lord (Eph. 4:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:17)