



Storming Fortresses

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh,
but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4

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Editor's Note:

This is the final article in a six part series by Rev. Steve Schlissel on the unity of Scripture, its themes and doctrines.

We pray that these articles may help you to better appreciate the "ONE" Bible that is our rule of life and faith.

Dividing the Bible and pitting Testament against Testament is an error that must be rejected and stopped. It is this error that has plunged our nation into degradation and the Church into an era of latent heresy.

Let us see if we can turn this around by promoting the unity and necessity of Scripture.

All I Really Need to Know I Learn in the Bible (Part 2)

By

Steve M. Schlissel

God's Witness to the Covenant in the Bible

God covenanting with Noah: "Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 'I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you'" (Genesis 9:8-9).

God covenanting with Abraham: "Then God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you must keep my covenant, *you and your descendants after you for the generations to come*. This is my covenant with *you and your descendants after*

you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. *For the generations to come* every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, *including those born in your household* or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting cov-

enant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant'" (Genesis 17:9-14).¹

¹. In case you are wondering, yes, I would affirm that if a man were to have slaves in his household today as then, they ought to be baptized. Yes, I believe in household baptism. Indeed, I believe in baptizing nations, if we could get at their heads. Compare Matthew 28:18-20.

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No Covenant Without Covenant Seed

The very purpose of covenanting is to fulfill in our children the promises received by us.

God covenanting with Abraham, again: "Then the LORD said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. *For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him*'" (Genesis 18:17-19).

Now quickly read the New Testament, addressed to adherents of Universal Judaism. We are Abraham's heirs; unbelievers are cut off. The promise belongs to *us* and to our children.

"For Moses said, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything He tells you. Anyone who does not listen to Him will be completely cut off from among his people.' Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. *And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers.* He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed'" (Acts 3:24-25).

"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29)

And again: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' *So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith*" (Galatians 3:8-9).

God's covenant with the fathers included the children: "Because *He loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them,* He brought you out of Egypt by His Presence and His great strength" (Deuteronomy 4:37).

"But it was because the LORD *loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers* that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 7:8).

"Yet the LORD set His affection on your forefathers and loved them, and He chose you, *their descendants,*

above all the nations, as it is today" (Deuteronomy 10:15).

Being elected into covenant did not relieve covenant members of the obligation to offer God a new heart, or, as some since the Puritans have put it, improve their baptism: "*Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer*" (Deuteronomy 10:16).

But look at the promise given to those who did "improve their baptism": "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).

God covenantees with Phinehas: "The LORD said to Moses, 'Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for My honor among them, so that in My zeal I did not put an end to them. Therefore tell him I am making My covenant of peace with him. *He and his descendants* will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites'" (Numbers 25:10-13). Because Phinehas was zealous, his sons received a promise. The true God works no other way.

God covenanting with David: "You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, *"I will establish your line* forever and make your throne firm through all generations'" (Psalm 89:3-4).

Though the covenant continues in the line of generations, that does not mean it has no conditions: "When

your days are over and you rest with your fathers, *I will raise up your offspring* to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for My Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be My son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But My love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before Me; your throne will be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

God covenants with his servants: “The children of Your servants will live in Your presence; *their descendants* will be established before You” (Psalm 102:28).

God covenants with those who fear him: “Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. He will spend his days in prosperity, and *his descendants* will inherit the land” (Psalm 25:12-13).

God covenants with the Recabites: “Then Jeremiah said to the family of the Recabites, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “You have obeyed the command of your forefather Jonadab and have followed all his instructions and have done everything he ordered.” Therefore, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “*Jonadab son of Recab will never fail to have a man to serve me*”’” (Jeremiah 35:18-19).

The God of the Bible does not make covenants which do not include children: “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and

streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit *on your offspring*, and my blessing *on your descendants*” (Isaiah 44:3).

The thought is absolutely contrary to his revealed character: “‘As for Me, this is my covenant with them,’ says the LORD. ‘My Spirit, who is on you, and My words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, *or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants* from this time on and forever,’ says the LORD” (Isaiah 59:21).

And again: “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before Me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name *and descendants* endure” (Isaiah 66:22).

We should go further still and say that God’s servants did not enter into covenants with others which did not include the others’ households. Two examples:

One, the spies’ covenant with Rahab of Jericho: “Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will *spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them*, and that you will save us from death.” “Our lives for your lives!” the men assured her. “If you don’t tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land.”

To treat her kindly could not possibly exclude treating her family kindly. But this example also illustrates the *obligation* of the beneficiaries of the covenant to

remain where God has graciously caused them to be connected:

The men said to her:

This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him (Joshua 2).

Two, David’s covenant with Jonathan:

When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, “Mephibosheth!” “Your servant,” he replied. “Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness *for the sake of your father Jonathan*. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table” (2 Samuel 9:6-7).

And later:

The king spared Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the oath before the LORD between David and Jonathan son of Saul (2 Samuel 21:7).

This is the way covenants work. There is no other way. That view of the New Testament church which sees it somehow suddenly shorn of children is every bit as destructive of the true religion as the covenant presumptuousness it was invented to combat. Berkhof properly cautions us to remember that early in church

history “increasing worldliness and corruption of the Church gradually led to reaction and gave rise to the tendency of various sects, such as Montanism in the middle of the second, Novationism in the middle of the third, and Donatism at the beginning of the fourth century, to make the holiness of its members the mark of the true Church.” Surely, this is cause for pause.

Covenant and Baptism

This controversy over baptism among Christians is just as stubbornly rooted in presuppositions as the issue of blood atonement is for the Jews (see my previous column). If you grant them their premise upon which they insist—that Jesus is not the Messiah, period—then their system will be seen to have some sort of cohesion. But is that presupposition one which best accounts for all the data of Scripture, not to mention history? It is not.

Similarly, the Baptist filters every text through a grid which insists beforehand upon profession, or born-again-ness, as a requirement for covenant status. But is the Baptist presupposition the one that best accounts for all the data of Scripture? It most certainly is not. Rather, it begins with, and depends upon, a view of the Old and New Testaments as essentially antithetical, a view we can never embrace.

Which view can take the following passages in stride, with no discomfort or lust for asterisks?

On the day of Pentecost: “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the

gift of the Holy Spirit. *The promise is for you and your children* and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39). If children were, from Pentecost on, to be excluded, someone forgot to tell Peter.

Of the household of Cornelius: “He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you *and all your household* will be saved” (Acts 11:13-14).

Of the household of Lydia: “On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When *she and the members of her household were baptized*, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us” (Acts 16:13-15).

Of the household of the jailer: “Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, *and thy household*.’ And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, *he and all his*, straightway. And when

he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:29-33).

Of the household of Stephanas: “Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else” (1 Corinthians 1:16).

As I said, if we presuppose hostility between testaments, it becomes a matter of mere hermeneutical gymnastics to justify the exclusion of children. “You see, the jailer’s whole house *believed*,” etc. But this misses the point. It is not a matter of hermeneutics. It is a matter of which covenant presuppositions inform your hermeneutics.

Covenant and Election

There has always been, we maintain, one covenant, and that covenant has always and only been efficacious through faith in Christ, and that covenant has always included children (and does even now). God’s people were, together, an elect people, and spoken to by God as such. But never are we required to believe that everyone regarded as properly in covenant is therefore elect.

My Baptist brothers functionally deny covenant at its administrative core by withholding baptism from their offspring. This act of hostility toward covenant babies (yes, hostility can be powerfully expressed in passive ways; just ask your wife!),² is the fruit of a view of Scripture which imposes a fundamental hostility between the testaments.

Instead of rejecting just *unbelief* in both testamental administrations,

Baptists equate unbelief with the Old and faith or belief with the New. This is not only unbiblical; it is anti-historical. Does anyone dare to suggest that the period from Christ to the present has been characterized, not necessarily exhaustively but even substantially, as an administration of *faith* without much unbelief? I trust not!

No. The Baptist rejection of the Old Testament covenant motif is as destructive to the proper view of Scripture's unity as is the Jews' rejection of the New Testament.

The Baptist approach to Scripture effectively redefines the "peoplehood" of the people with whom God covenants, and therefore suggests, however subtly, however gross, that the Old Testament administration was *carnal* while the New Testament administration is *spiritual*. We have already shown that Scripture itself will not countenance any such dichotomy. Spiritual and carnal, if the words must be used, describe the difference between belief and unbelief, not between the Old and the New Testaments.

In Scripture we find a single message organized around a single motif: covenant. The Baptist denial of this is just as radical in its impact on our view of the unity of the Bible, though not as deadly, as the Jewish denial of the New Testament's authority.

This was evident to our Fathers who taught us, in the Belgic Confession, Article 34, to confess:

Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists,³ who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received, and moreover condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, who we believe ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as the children in Israel formerly were circumcised upon the same promises which are made unto our children. And indeed Christ shed His blood no less for the washing of the children of believers than for adult persons; and therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that which Christ has done for them; as the Lord commanded in the law that they should be made partakers of the sacrament of Christ's suffering and death shortly after they were born, by offering for them a lamb, which was a sacrament of Jesus Christ. Moreover, what circumcision was to the Jews, baptism is to our children. And for this reason St. Paul calls baptism the circumcision of Christ.

The Unity of God's Plan

All I really need to know I learn in the Bible. There is but one Bible. There is but one God. There is but one Christ. There is but one covenant. At the heart of that covenant is the atonement through the blood of Christ. From the moment of their conception, my children were heirs of that covenant. They were born under that blood, covered, and secure. God, my God, is more willing to forgive my children than they

are, by nature, to be forgiven. This is the heritage of grace. This is the way of God. Now they have an obligation: to keep covenant with God.

Their Savior has told them: "Abide in Me, and I in you." They are in Christ. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:4-10).

H. C. G. Moule said it so well: The doctrine of election "is a lamp, not a sun. It is presented to us everywhere as a truth not meant to explain everything, but to enforce this thing: that the man who truly loves God has to thank, not himself, but God. He must thank the true God that his eyes, guiltily shut, were effectually opened."

². The hostility I speak of here is real but objective; it would be obviously and utterly false to say that Baptist Christians deny baptism to their children because they *feel* hostility toward them. Nevertheless, withholding the sign and seal of God's grace from proper candidates is, *objectively* considered, no act of love.

³. Today's Baptists are not direct descendants of the Anabaptists here mentioned, but they most certainly do embrace the error here condemned.

Seeing things in this light frees us to read the Scripture with humble hearts, seeking to be edified in the ways of the Lord, not with proud hearts seeking to build our lives upon that which God has not seen

fit to reveal. For the sum of the matter is this: **“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we**

may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Amen, Lord Jesus.

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Scripture

All Scripture is the context in which any Scripture is to be considered and applied. *Anon.*

The Same Testator made both Testaments. *Thomas Taylor.*

Knowledge of the Bible never comes by intuition. *J.C. Ryle.*

We must never edit God. *A.W. Tozer.*

The Bible was the only book Jesus ever quoted, and then never as a basis for discussion but to decide the point at issue.

Leon Morris.

The doctrines of the Bible are not isolated but interlaced; and the view of one doctrine must necessarily affect the view taken of another. *A.A. Hodge.*