

## The Nature of the Church and the Subjects of Baptism

1. Why is it so important to understand the nature and composition of the church?
2. The new covenant defines the nature of the church.
  - a. The new covenant creates believers—people who are justified and regenerated.
  - b. According to the pervasive teaching and example of the NT, those who are united to Christ and reconciled to God are united to Christ's people and reconciled to them. This new life is lived out in visible connection to other believers in organized local churches. Eph. 2.
  - c. The church is composed of those who make a credible profession of these realities. The writers of Scripture address the church as those who possess the reality they profess:
    - i. Chosen of God – Col. 3:12
    - ii. Children of God by faith – Gal. 3:26
    - iii. Sanctified in Christ Jesus – 1 Cor. 1:2
    - iv. those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – “
    - v. who gave himself for our sins – Gal. 1:4
    - vi. Followers of the Lord – 1 Thes. 1:6
    - vii. Those who were being saved – Acts 2:47
  - d. Scripture acknowledges that the church as a visible organization and the church as the body of Christ will not line up perfectly. The fact that there is a discrepancy between church members and converted people does not authorize us to admit the unconverted or to exclude the converted.
3. Some churches and individuals do not practice membership in the local church, and this obscures and damages the display of the new covenant.

4. Some churches include infants of believers in their membership and baptize them. This confuses the nature of the church and the status of infants.
  - a. A covenant argument for infant baptism (*Children of Promise* by Robert Booth—my words in italics):
    - i. Covenant Theology. Throughout the Bible, God relates to his people by way of a covenant of grace. Covenant theology provides the basic framework for rightly interpreting Scripture.
    - ii. Continuity of the Covenant of Grace. The Bible teaches one and the same way of salvation in both the Old and the New Testaments, despite some different outward requirements.
    - iii. Continuity of the People of God. Since there is one covenant of grace between God and man, there is one continuous people of God (the church) in the Old and New Testaments.
    - iv. Continuity of Households. *God included Abraham and his offspring in the covenant. Therefore, whole households are included in God's redemptive covenant.*
    - v. Continuity of the Covenant Signs. Baptism is the sign of the covenant in the New Testament, just as circumcision was the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament. *Like circumcision, baptism is to be applied to the offspring of the household.*
  - b. This is based on a mistaken understanding of the relationship of the old and new covenants.
    - c. Baptism is not an exact replacement for circumcision.
    - d. Circumcision was not commanded for children of believers but for the offspring of Abraham.
    - e. The offspring of Abraham is Christ and those in union with him.
5. Baptism of believers is a blessing and privilege.