

Baptism

the Kingdom and the Church

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1) Introductory

Baptism, the Kingdom and the Church – these are subjects about which one will find a host of opinions among Christian believers. My thoughts expressed here may appear to be simply just one more viewpoint added to the many already existing ones, but I hope that they also contain some helpful new insights.

I was raised among the "Plymouth Brethren" and grew up with their understanding of the above mentioned subjects. As a young man I "converted" to the Reformed position, most noticeably in the field of prophecy. I was also intensively occupied with the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox teaching on these subjects for some time. After looking at so many different viewpoints and opinions I came to the conclusion that not a single group or "tradition" had it quite right. Each had something right, but then again also something which just didn't seem to fit. A combination of the "right" insights from the various traditions appeared – to me – to be the most helpful thing to do. The following is an attempt to combine the best from various views and traditions along with several thoughts of my own.

As my target group is believers who acknowledge and accept the Bible as the Word of God (not just "containing" it) and have a fair knowledge of its contents I need not start with explaining basics, but I will start at the beginning. . .

God created "Man" (i.e. man and woman together as "Man") in His image with the purpose of representing Him here on earth. He also created Man to have fellowship and communion with Him. Given what we know about what is revealed later in the Bible – and particularly in the New Testament – we can say that God wanted to bring Man into the position of "Sons", i.e. mature persons who know and understand Him. Through Adam's sin and disobedience this goal seemed to be thwarted, but through the incar-

nation and atoning death of God the Son become Man God has achieved His goal – and gloriously so. But from Man's fall till the accomplished work of Christ on the cross much transpired, much which prepared Mankind to be able to understand and accept the offering of Christ.

2) Abraham and Circumcision

In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we see how God began to form and strengthen relationships with individuals and developed these until they later became a fellowship with a people, a nation, He could call "His". The most prominent figure in this development was Abraham. Abraham's faith in God is something that the Bible constantly refers back to. We, Christian believers, are sons of Abraham in that like Isaac we are "children of promise" (Galatians 4:28) and we share the "same principle of faith" (Galatians 3:9).

God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision as sealing the faith he had demonstrated in believing God. Circumcision, cutting off of the foreskin, may appear to be a most curious act with which to confirm faith and fellowship with God, but when we take a closer look at it we realize it is a most suitable one. Circumcision is a "beheading". Man can glory in his own strength and achievements – in his "flesh". Circumcision is a cutting off of this "flesh" (Colossians 2:11), bringing an end to this source of natural power. Circumcision says "man can achieve nothing", it is a sign of death.¹ This is particularly fitting in Abraham's case where he and Sara had attempted to fulfil God's promise on their own through Hagar and Ishmael. God would achieve His purpose – giving Abraham a son, an heir – contrary to human power and means.²

The identification of circumcision in the Old Testament, which began here with Abraham, with baptism in the New Testament is one so often made that I need not go into it here in detail. At this point I would simply like to draw attention to one thing. In making the comparison, Christian believers who emphasis (insist upon) so-called believer's baptism (where the one

¹ We find an indication of this inability in John 1:12-13: "but as many as received him (Christ), to them gave he the right to be children of God, to those that believe on his name; who have been born, not of blood, nor of flesh's will, nor of man's will, but of God." God had to act.

² From the biological side Abraham and Sarah were not able to have children: "And not being weak in faith, he (Abraham) considered not his own body already become dead, being about a hundred years old, and the deadening of Sarah's womb." Romans 4:19

Faith, something going beyond the natural, was necessary and at work here: "By faith also Sarah herself received strength for the conception of seed, and that beyond a seasonable age; since she counted him faithful who promised." Hebrews 11:11

baptised is conscious of what is taking place and why) see a confirmation for their view as over against such who plead for infant or household baptism, in that Scripture says:

"And he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had being in uncircumcision." Romans 4:11

The emphasis here is on Abraham's faith. Abraham had faith and was then circumcised as a confirmation (seal) of that faith. The conclusion drawn from this fact is that as a Christian you must have faith and then be baptised as a sign or confirmation of that faith. The argument seems to be legitimate as far as it goes up to this point, but something very important must be considered – namely what Abraham did afterwards. He circumcised his sons and not because he thought it was such a good idea, but because God had commanded it. Did they have faith? Of Ishmael we read: "And Ishmael his (Abraham's) son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin." (Genesis 17:25). Being 13 years old the argument could be brought forward that Ishmael was old enough to understand and consent – though his later history does not seem to bear out the assumption that he had true faith. Be that as it may, the argument for a consciousness of what is taking place being prerequisite breaks down when we consider Isaac – the child of promise: "And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac, being eight days old, as God had commanded him." (Genesis 21:4). A child of 8 days cannot be conscious of what is taking place and cannot assent or disagree to it.

This is an aspect of vital importance. Circumcision became a divine requirement. It was not carried out only on such who professed faith in the true God. It was carried out by such who had this faith on all those under their authority. Because of the importance of this principle I quote the section in Genesis at length:

"This is my (God's) covenant which you (Abraham) shall keep, between me and you and your seed after you - that every male among you be circumcised. And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and that shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. And at eight days old shall every male in your generations be circumcised among you - he who is born in the house, and he who is bought with money, any stranger who is not of your seed. He who is born in your house, and he who is bought with your money, must be circumcised; and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncir-

circumcised male who has not been circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his peoples: he has broken my covenant." Genesis 17:10-14

To belong to those professing faith in the true God circumcision was necessary. It was not an option. It was a divine demand. It did not matter how much faith one actually had in his heart or not, if he was not circumcised he did not "belong". The New Testament makes unquestionably clear, that circumcision without inwardly reality was of no real value.³ Nevertheless it was required. I will come back to the application to Christian baptism later.

³ "For circumcision indeed profits if you keep the law; but if you be a law-transgressor, your circumcision is become uncircumcision. If therefore the uncircumcision keep the requirements of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision, and uncircumcision by nature, fulfilling the law, judge you, who, with letter and circumcision, are a law-transgressor? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither that circumcision which is outward in flesh; but he is a Jew who is so inwardly; and circumcision, of the heart, in spirit, not in letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Romans 2:25-29

"Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but keeping God's commandments." 1 Corinthians 7:19

3) The People of God

From Abraham on to be identified with the developing "people of God" – such who stood in a covenant relationship to Him - circumcision became a necessity. People who were circumcised were distinguished from all others. Birth within a special family was not the prerequisite for "belonging" – circumcision was.

God would not allow anyone who was uncircumcised to approach His sanctuary:

"So says the Lord God: No stranger, uncircumcised in heart and **uncircumcised in flesh**, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel." Ezekiel 44:9

Uncircumcised were strangers, but whoever was circumcised was considered to be a "native":

"And when a sojourner sojourns with you, and would hold the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and hold it; and he shall be **as one that is born in the land**; but no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof." Exodus 12:48

Through Abraham God was "gathering a people for His name" (Acts 15:14). The sons of Abraham's grandchild Jacob formed the basis of this people through the 12 tribes of Israel. The story of their captivity in Egypt and deliverance through Moses and how this all is a type of the Lord's work on the cross and our deliverance from sin and Satan and the world are well known and understood. After Israel – now a nation, God's holy (set apart) nation – was freed from Pharaoh's slavery they spent 40 years in the wilderness. (A time determined through their unbelief regarding God's purpose and ability to carrying out that purpose.) Right at the beginning God speaks of this delivered people as a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6). Here we should also note that God is NOT implying that each and every one of them was a "true believer" (especially when the "mixed multitude" is considered, Exodus 12:38 – compare Numbers 11:4), but they as a whole had come into this status. Nevertheless God set a certain family apart to be His priests in a special and exclusive way - the family of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi.

"And you (Moses) shall take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may serve me as priest - Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons." Exodus 28:1

"Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him." Numbers 3:6

God gave instructions for the construction of the tabernacle so that He could dwell in the midst of His people as He journeyed with them through the wilderness. It was the place where the priests served.

"And I will hallow the tent of meeting, and the altar; and I will hallow Aaron and his sons, that they may serve me as priests. And I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel, and will be their God." Exodus 29:44-45

The tabernacle in the midst of the camp of Israel with its Holy of Holies and Holy Place within the court is full of symbolism regarding God's people and their relationship to Him, their service and worship. The tabernacle was surrounded by the tents of the tribes of Israel in a distinctive arrangement (see Numbers 2). From this camp the Israelites could come into the court of the tabernacle to bring their offerings⁴, but they could not enter the Holy Place which was reserved for the priests and only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy – once a year on the Great Day of Atonement.⁵

1 Corinthians 10:11 states about Israel at that time:

"Now all these things happened to them as types, and have been written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come."⁶

⁴ E.g. Leviticus 4: 23-24 "If his sin, wherein he has sinned, come to his knowledge, he shall bring his offering, a buck of the goats, a male without blemish. And he shall lay his hand on the head of the goat, and slaughter it at the place where they slaughter the burnt-offering before the Lord: it is a sin-offering." This took place within the courtyard of the tabernacle.

⁵ See Leviticus 16:2-20 and Hebrews 9:6-7.

⁶ "For as many things as have been written before have been written for our instruction, that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." Romans 15:4

This set up and the events involved with it must be familiar to every believer who wants to understand the Christian position and how all this applies to us and demonstrates present realities.

To summarize: in the wilderness there was a group of circumcised people⁷ in general and a smaller distinctive group within the larger one with extra privileges and duties in particular – the priests and Levites. All were circumcised, but not all had a special position. The priests were circumcised, but they were also anointed.

"And you (Moses) shall clothe with them Aaron your brother, and his sons with him; and shall anoint them, and consecrate them, and hallow them, that they may serve me (God) as priests." Exodus 28:41

This was not true of the rest. In addition to this distinction we find another. Everyone who was not an Israelite could become one through circumcision as we have noticed in Exodus 12:48. He did not have to be born into a tribe of Israel. Access was possible. But – and this point is of great importance – being a priest was a "family affair". To be a priest that person had to be not only an Israelite, but from the family of Aaron as well. He was not only circumcised, but also anointed.

Every priest had to be circumcised, had to belong to the "people of God" as the rest, but in addition to that he had to be from a particular family.⁸ So he had something in common with all the rest, but also something which distinguished him from them.

The same was true later as regards the king. To be a king one had to be from the family of David. Though the later division into the southern and northern kingdoms led to the northern kingdom having changing dynasties the line of David remained the true line. One could only be a legiti-

⁷ Joshua 5:5 states that the Israelites born in the wilderness were not circumcised: "For all the people that came out (of Egypt) were circumcised; but all the people that were born in the wilderness on the way, after they came out of Egypt, them had they not circumcised." Several scholars see this as evidence that circumcision had to do with the Promised Land. Outside of it circumcision was not necessary as examples of non-Israelites who were believers seem to confirm, e.g. King Hiram. Nevertheless God started out with a group of circumcised people and from these the first priests were also chosen.

⁸ Not even Christ could be a levitical priest. See Hebrews 5:4; 7:11-15 and 8:4.

mate heir to the throne over all of Israel (Southern and Northern tribes) by belonging to this family (as our Lord did).

The king had to be anointed as well.

"And all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a covenant with them in Hebron before the Lord; and they anointed David king over Israel." (2 Samuel 5:3)

Now we can begin to apply these principles learned from the Old Testament to the Church and Christian believers.

4) New Testament Applications

I have already mentioned the connection between circumcision and Christian baptism. Both are rites of initiation. They lead into something. Both signify a change and both speak of death. Both are carried out so that something happens, not because something has already happened. Every passage in the New Testament dealing with baptism states that something happens **through** baptism and not that baptism should take place because something **has** happened.

Baptism makes no statement about what has or has not taken place within the heart of the person baptised – just as circumcision didn't.⁹

To be able to stand in a relationship with God (covenant relationship) and be recognized as belonging to Him as His special people persons in the past had to be circumcised. It was not sufficient to say: "My parents are both Israelites. I believe what I read in the Law and I wish to follow the Lord." That was all right and good, but circumcision was necessary to outwardly identify this person as an Israelite. If he did not live according to the Law, if he did not love the Lord his God with all his heart and all his soul (Mark 12:30) his circumcision in the end was meaningless and would not save him. Being a believer in heart did not justify such a person to say: "I believe truly in my heart, while you as a circumcised person are a hypocrite and do not. I don't need circumcision. Faith alone is the important thing."

Circumcision brought the person circumcised into the sphere of those professing to follow the Lord and placed him under covenant obligations. It did not make a true believer out of such a person. It did not convey life. To the contrary, it spoke of the need of judgment, death, over the past.

Baptism does the same thing. It takes the person baptised out of the previous sphere in which he was – which Colossians 1:13 describes as "the

⁹ There are many sincere and devout Christians who were baptised as children or infants. At that time they did not have the "living faith" they do now. They were not conscious of what had taken place and had not consented to what had taken place at that time. For this reason they believe it is necessary to be baptised again. This time fully conscious of what is taking place and in full agreement with it - an expression of their true faith. But just as one could not be circumcised again so one cannot be baptised again. What took place in both cases took place. In the one the person became an Israelite, in the other a Christian. But all of this had and has nothing to do with the true "heart condition" of the person involved.

authority of darkness" – and "translates" that person into the kingdom of the Son of God's love.¹⁰ It brings that person into the kingdom of which Christ spoke so often in the Gospels. It is the place or sphere where Christ is acknowledged as King. His laws are the "norm" in this sphere.

As sinners we all deserved God's righteous judgment. We were all condemned to die. That is what baptism does. It brings us into death. In baptism, through baptism, we take the position which we deserve and bring to expression through it that God's judgment over us is just. Baptism "kills" in other words. It does not convey life.

There are Christian believers who maintain that baptism is only legitimate if done through immersion.¹¹ They emphasize the symbolism of going down into death (as if the person baptised were drowned) and coming up out of the water again in new resurrection life. The thought is understandable, but not justified. Romans 6, where we find a lengthier section on baptism, stops at the going down into death. See verse 4:

"We have been buried therefore with him (Christ) by baptism unto death, in order that, even as Christ has been raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life."

We have been buried in baptism "in order that" we should walk in newness of life, but baptism does not give us the power for that. Baptism only brings us into death. The same thought is expressed in Colossians 2:12:

. . ."buried with Him (Christ) in baptism, you have been also raised with Him through faith"

¹⁰ Notice it does not say into the Church or the body of Christ. This is very important as we shall later see.

¹¹ It is not my purpose here to go into the pros and cons of the various forms or modes of baptism. The modes of baptism are immersion, sprinkling, and standing in water while water is poured over the head of the person baptized. If they are done in the name of the Triune God they are all legitimate baptisms though one can discuss which mode is more fitting. I only point out that in the New Testament we read of Moses "sprinkling" and not immersing. Particularly as regards the Apostle Paul we read of him "standing" to be baptised: Acts 9:17-18; 22:12-16. In the case of the eunuch and Philip in Acts 8 the "went down" and "came up" (verses 38 and 39) is not down into the water, but down from the road to the water and then back to the road.

Baptism is judgment. God's judgment always comes from above.

Some translate: "buried with Him (Christ) in baptism, in which (baptism) you have been also raised with him through faith" as if it is baptism that brings us into new life. No, it is in Christ. In Him and through Him.

The Israelites who had been delivered from Egypt and had seen the Lord's wonders were not all true believers even if all – except for the mixed multitude – were circumcised.

"For I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them: (now the rock was the Christ;) yet God was not pleased with the most of them, for they were strewn in the desert." (1 Corinthians 10:1-5)

But they had all been brought into a new sphere, into a new relationship.

Baptism, like circumcision, is initiation, the beginning of something, not its conclusion. Baptism is necessary, but it stops short. Baptism does not raise us into newness of life, but it brings us into the position where this becomes possible. It is as the Apostle Peter expresses it in 1 Peter 3:21

. . ."which figure (the water of the flood) also now saves you, even baptism, not a putting away of the filth of flesh, but the demand as before God of a good conscience, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ". . .

The waters of the flood brought death and destruction, but it was through these waters that Noah and his family were saved and brought into a new world. Baptism saves in that it brings the baptised person into that sphere where judgment has already taken place – namely death.

"Are you ignorant that we, as many as have been baptised unto Christ Jesus, have been baptised unto his death?" Romans 6:3

But that is all it does. We shall see later that baptism does not convey life. Those baptised but who die without a living faith in Christ are like those who perished in the flood.

5) Kingdom Servants

In the Gospels our Lord often speaks of "servants" in the Kingdom of God (or of Heaven). There are good and evil servants. The evil servants definitely do not have eternal life, are not "saved" for eternity, do not enter the Father's House. Our Lord says of such for example:

"And cast out the useless bondman into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 25:30)

This "useless" bondman or servant is nevertheless a servant. How did he get to be that? Simply by claiming to be one?

In Matthew 7:22 we read

"Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied through your name, and through your name cast out demons, and through your name done many works of power?"

These people acknowledge Christ in some way, they call Him Lord. They definitely identify themselves as His servants by claiming to have done things in His name, i.e. in His authority.¹² But Christ replies:

"I never knew you. Depart from me, workers of lawlessness."

These people were servants in the kingdom because they had been baptised. They had been let into that sphere where Christ is acknowledged as Lord. They were not Hindus, Muslims or Buddhists. But that said nothing about their genuineness as believers. They are such of whom we read in Hebrews 6:4-5:

"For it is impossible to renew again to repentance those once enlightened, and who have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the works of power of the age to come."

¹² Peter writes of false prophets who "deny the master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1). These were people who stood in a master/servant relationship to the Lord, but were not true believers and worked to damage the true faith. How did they come into this status? Through baptism into the Kingdom. These "prophets" are not the same as the prophet gifts given to the Church which we find in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11.

They had tasted, but they had not fed. They had been partakers, but not possessors of the Holy Spirit. They are not true believers, but carry more responsibility than the heathen who do not know better, (compare Luke 12:47-48), similar to the mixed multitude in the wilderness.

6) The Kingdom and the "newness" of the Church

Circumcision was a characteristic of Israel. Baptism is a characteristic of the Kingdom. Circumcision was "national" and of a "local" character. Baptism is "universal", like the waters which cover the seas. Many Christian believers view baptism as the means by which one is let into the Church. They make no real distinction between the Kingdom and the Church. But there is a difference. An important difference and not making the distinction leads to much confusion.

Water baptism brings a person into the Kingdom and makes him a servant of the King – this can involve true believers (good servants) and mere professors (evil servants). It is a sphere of blessing because Christ is the King, but just as a kingdom in the "real world" has citizens who enjoy the benefits, but work against the ruler so here.

Water baptism is like circumcision in the Old Testament. But in the New Testament we also find a baptism in or with the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the Holy Spirit brings a person into the Church and makes him a member of the body of Christ, a son/child of God. Here the relationship is "authentic" in every way.¹³ We find many symbols of the Kingdom in the Old Testament, but we do not find a Head (Christ in glory) connected to a body (the Church) on earth. The "connection" between the Head in heaven and the body on earth takes place through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is like the anointing in the Old Testament and has to do with family.

A part of the difficulty in being able to distinguish between the Kingdom and the Church is placing a too strong emphasis on the continuity between Old and New Testaments. There is the danger as in some Christian circles of making too great a distinction and thus ending up wrongly speaking of two different "people of God" with different destinies. But mistakes can be made in the other direction as well.

What was the purpose of our Lord always speaking of something "new" in the Gospels – or the now revealed "mystery" we find in the Epistles – if in

¹³ Servants can be cast out of the Kingdom, but "body members" are not cut off. That would be mutilation. (Discipline in the Church, as we shall later see, is something else.)

reality there was nothing really new? Paul often writes of the "mystery" now revealed.

"Now to him that is able to establish you, according to my glad tidings and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, as to which silence has been kept in the times of the ages, but which has now been made manifest, and by prophetic scriptures, according to commandment of the eternal God, made known for obedience of faith to all the nations." Romans 16:25-26

"But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, that hidden wisdom which God had predetermined before the ages for our glory: which none of the princes of this age knew, (for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory)." 1 Corinthians 2:7-8

"For this reason I Paul, prisoner of the Christ Jesus for you nations, (if indeed ye have heard of the administration of the grace of God which has been given to me towards you, that by revelation the mystery has been made known to me, (according as I have written before briefly, by which, in reading it, ye can understand my intelligence in the mystery of the Christ,) . . . To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given, to announce among the nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ, and to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God, who has created all things, in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the assembly the all-various wisdom of God." Ephesians 3:1-4, 8-10

. . . "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been made manifest to his saints". . . Colossians 1:26

Here we have the clearest statements, repeated statements, that through Christ's accomplished work something has come about that had not existed before – and something which could not have been deduced from past revelations! Without the New Testament and what the Apostle Paul wrote about the "mystery" nobody with just the Old Testament would have – could have – come up with the "idea" of the Church.¹⁴ Salvation and the Kingdom are spoken of in the Old Testament and the Old Testa-

¹⁴ In a sense, the Dispensationalist viewpoint regarding the future Kingdom on earth with a national Israel and a central Jerusalem is what you arrive at if you take only the Old Testament without the New Testament revelation.

ment writers knew that there was "something more to it" (compare 1 Peter 1:10-11),¹⁵ but they didn't know what – and could not know!

There was no "Church" in the Old Testament. The text of Acts 7:38: "This is he who was in the assembly (church) in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received living oracles to give to us." simply because it uses the word "assembly" or "Church" cannot be used to support the thought that the Church as defined by the New Testament existed in the Old. Stephen's use of the term is not identical with Paul's.

From the Old Testament it was apparent that there would be a continued "people of God", a Kingdom, the inclusion of non-Israelites, faithful and unfaithful persons, professors and confessors, but nothing about a group of believers united into one body through the Holy Spirit with a glorified Head in heaven. Something radically new DID happen at Pentecost!!

In the Old Testament there were believers – definitely! - but they were not gathered into one. The purpose of our Lord's coming was to "gather together into one the children of God who were scattered abroad." (John 11:52). This gathering took place at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down. Obviously that had not been the case before.

Our Lord speaks of the Spirit who was abiding WITH the Apostles (John 14:17) as being IN them after His completed work. The Apostles definitely worked in the power of the Spirit during the Lord's ministry here – just as believers in the Old Testament did – but the major difference was that the dwelling IN them (tabernacling/templing in them) was only possible after the cross – after the cleansing we find typified in the Tabernacle and Temple (see Exodus 40:33-34 and Hebrews 9:21-22). Whatever continuities there are/were with the Old Testament scheme of things, the very new thing is the actual indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit – which was not possible in the past. The Spirit did not dwell in Israel or the Israelites as He does in the Church.

¹⁵ "Concerning which salvation prophets, who have prophesied of the grace towards you, sought out and searched out; searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them pointed out, testifying before of the sufferings which belonged to Christ, and the glories after these."

Though there is no talk of a "body" of joined together members united with a head in heaven before Christ's accomplished work and the descent of the Spirit in the Old Testament "hints" can be found - especially when looking at the tabernacle and its construction. The tabernacle speaks of Christ and His work – and of those associated with Him through that work. The wooden boards of the tabernacle were covered with gold and had feet or bases of silver – see Exodus 26. This speaks of man glorified and standing on the basis of redemption, surrounding God.¹⁶ The boards were connected with five bars (Exodus 26:26-29). Commentators differ here, but following the explanation of Hebrew scholars it is clear that four of the bars were arranged on the outside and one went through the middle from end to end. Four could be seen on the outside, but the inner one could not. This corresponds wonderfully to the gifts God has given His Church. The four outward bars reflect these visible gifts. They are the "joints of supply":

"Holding the truth in love, we may grow up to him in all things, who is the head, the Christ: from whom the whole body, fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply, according to the working in its measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building up in love." Ephesians 4:15-16

But the hidden inner bar is the Holy Spirit connecting all believers in an unbroken line. In Ephesians the Apostle Paul does not use the type of the tabernacle (as he does in Hebrews), but rather that of the temple:

"So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone, in whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22

¹⁶ Trees – or wood – are often used to represent man in Scripture. See e.g. Psalm 1:1-3, Jeremiah 17:8, Mark 8:24. Gold is very obviously glory or glorification. Silver speaks of redemption in connection with the "ransom" or "atone-ment" money of the firstborn, see Exodus 30:11-16 and compare with Exodus 36:23-30; 38:25-28.

Here we do not find interconnected boards, we find stones. Stones built upon each other.¹⁷ But the analogy of unity holds. You can't remove a stone without damaging the construction.

Of course there is unity between the Old and New Testament because it is the same Spirit at work, but we DO NOT find the Spirit coming down to dwell in the Old Testament. Characteristic of the Old Testament is more the thought of the Spirit not finding a place to rest because all is defiled – like the dove after the Flood.¹⁸ The slow leaving of the Spirit that we find in Ezekiel is also characteristic. The Spirit came and went, but He did not remain. In the Old Testament we do not have the sum of believers presented as a habitation of God through the Spirit.

¹⁷ Compare "To whom (Christ) coming, a living stone, cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God chosen, precious, yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 2: 4-5

¹⁸ The dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit as we see at our Lord's baptism in the Jordan – Luke 3:22. As the Pure One the dove found a place to rest. Firstly on the Lord, later in the Church.

7) The Holy Spirit and the Body of Christ

Possessing the Holy Spirit is essential to being a Christian in the sense of really belonging to Christ (Romans 8:9). He dwells in the believer (Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 2 Timothy 1:14) and does not come and go as in the past. In the past the expression was "came upon", but now it is "dwelling in". Activity of the Spirit (as Hebrews 6:4) is not to be confused with actual sealing (which is connected explicitly with believing - Ephesians 1:13 and John 7:39) and indwelling. The believer is now a temple of the Spirit. A true believer cannot lose the Spirit - as He is his source of life - though he can quench and grieve Him (1 Thessalonians 5:19, Ephesians 4:30). The Spirit is essential as it is He who unites all believers with one another into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13) and with their Head in heaven.

From the Old Testament it was clear that there would be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God's people:

"For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your offspring." Isaiah 44:3

"And they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west, and from the rising of the sun, his glory. When the adversary shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a banner against him. And the Redeemer will come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, says the Lord. And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord: My spirit that is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed, says the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." Isaiah 59: 19-21

"And I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols will I cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and keep mine ordinances, and you shall do them." Ezekiel 36: 24-27

"And I will put my Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land: and you shall know that I the Lord have spoken, and have done it, says the Lord." Ezekiel 37:14

"And I will not hide my face any more from them, for I shall have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God." Ezekiel 39:29

"And it shall come to pass afterwards that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. Yes, even upon the bondmen and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit." Joel 2:28-29

It was also clear that a change would take place:

"And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, says the Lord: for I will pardon their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more." Jeremiah 31:34

"And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." Jeremiah 24:7

"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Isaiah 11:9

"For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Habakkuk 2:14

But even in the light of these texts a special revelation was necessary. The Holy Spirit had come over people in the Old Testament, but He had never united them to a glorified Christ in heaven. Before the accomplished work of Christ there was no "Church".

The Kingdom was an expectation in the Old Testament so that even if God was "King" throughout (see e.g. 1 Samuel 8:7) it was not fully present. A kingdom presupposes a king sitting on a throne and this was only possible after Christ accomplished His work here. Here He and His disciples preached the Kingdom, a Kingdom which was at hand or near. But Christ had to go away to receive it (see Luke 19:12). A baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit through which a person becomes a disciple of the Kingdom was only possible after Christ had returned to heaven and seated Himself at God's right hand.

Was the Church expected in the same way as the Kingdom?

No.

But as Christ's return to heaven was necessary for the commencement of the Kingdom here, so also was His return necessary for the creation of the Church. He Himself said that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, would not come as long as He was still here (see John 16:7) and it was that Spirit that created the Church.

8) Differences in Time and Responsibility

When we read of the Kingdom and the people connected with it the emphasis is placed on the beginning of the earth:

. . ."so that that should be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden **from** the world's foundation." Matthew 13:35

"Then shall the King say to those on his right hand, Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you **from** the world's foundation." Matthew 25:34

. . ."and all that dwell on the earth shall do it homage, every one whose name had not been written **from** the founding of the world in the book of life of the slain Lamb." Revelation 13:8

When the family of God is dealt with, it is before the world's foundation:

"Father, as to those whom you have given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which you have given me, for you loved me **before** the foundation of the world." John 17:24

. . ."according as he (the Father) has chosen us in him (Christ) **before** the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love." Ephesians 1:4

. . ."foreknown indeed **before** the foundation of the world, but who has been manifested at the end of times for your sakes." 1 Peter 1:20 (See "if you invoke as Father" in verse 17.)

These "time references" are not interchangeable. They clearly point to a distinction.

We find the aspect of responsibility in the Kingdom and in the Church. But in the Kingdom responsibility is connected with being servants. In the Church, which is God's household (1 Timothy 3:15), it is connected with our being children. Servants and children both have responsibilities though the degree of intimacy in relationship is different.

Water baptism deals with responsibility and a judicial position¹⁹ whereas as baptism of the Spirit has to do with privilege and family bonds. The biblical examples used are important. In the one it is servant/master in the other husband/wife (= one flesh), son/Father, "body member"/Head. Being a citizen of a country does not make me a member of the ruling family, but does make me responsible. I have rules and regulations to follow. Being a member of the ruling family adds privileges to my obligations.

¹⁹ Water baptism has nothing to do with heaven and life after death. Baptism has to do with our life here on earth.

If water baptism were necessary for my eternal salvation then the thief crucified with our Lord was lost because he had not been baptized. But Christ says to him "Truly I say to you, Today you shall be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43). Without question this man was saved. Water baptism was not necessary in his case. Why not? Because this man no longer had a life on earth ahead of him.

There is nothing I can do concerning my salvation, my belonging to the body of Christ. Nothing but accept Christ in faith. But there are things I need to do regarding the Kingdom. I **MUST** be baptized if I want to be a Christian, i.e. someone outwardly identified as a follower of Christ the King. This is not necessary for God – Who knows what is truly in my heart – but for the world, for other people.

Everyone baptised is a servant of Christ and belongs to the Kingdom.

(The correct expression in Matthew 28:19 is: "disciple the nations **BY** baptizing them".)

But not every baptized person is a member of the body of Christ.

Water baptism is a necessity (and in sense a testimony or confession) that no Christian can reject or deny. Mark 16:16 makes this quite clear:

"He that believes and is baptised shall be saved, and he that disbelieves shall be condemned."

Believing and being baptised = being "saved".

Believing = salvation as to heaven.

Baptised = salvation as to the earth.

If we are dealing with eternal salvation it is only **faith**. We read "he that disbelieves shall be condemned" and **not** "he that disbelieves and is not baptized shall be condemned."

Summed up: Baptism marks me as a follower of Christ on this earth. I am not a Hindu or a Muslim. I am a "Christian".

Water baptism does not touch the question of my eternal salvation. It is more like a passport through a dangerous region than an entrance ticket for heaven.

9) Adding To

Water baptism refers to the Kingdom:

"But when they believed Philip announcing the glad tidings concerning the KINGDOM of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women." Acts 8:12

The Kingdom expands through water baptism. The Church grows through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

"For also in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or free, and have all been given to drink of one Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:13

In the beginning of Acts it is difficult to distinguish between the Kingdom and the Church because it was the beginning of both and the persons involved were identical (though that changed very quickly). We find statements there as follows:

"Those then who had accepted his (Peter's) word were baptised; and there were added in that day about three thousand souls. . .and the Lord added daily those that were to be saved." Acts 2:41, 47

"And believers were more than ever added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" Acts 5:14

We have here an adding to the Kingdom and to the Church. My impression is that the adding to the Kingdom is seen in the action of men, i.e. their baptising others. The Lord adding daily is the increase of the Church, the body of Christ.

The sum of baptised persons (believers or not) is the Kingdom. The sum of true believers is the temple of the Spirit, the Church. We never read of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Kingdom and He "can't" because the Kingdom is a mixed affair. Because it includes believers and unbelievers it is in a sense "unclean".²⁰ The Spirit does not dwell in something unclean. We read of the Holy Spirit dwelling in individual believers:

²⁰ In the end Christ will terminate this mixed condition or state. See Matthew 13:41 and 49: "The Son of man shall send his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all offences, and those that practise lawlessness. . . Thus shall it be in the completion of the age: the angels shall go forth and sever the wicked from the midst of the just." Evil co-exists with the good until the end in the King-

"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then, taking the members of the Christ, make them members of a harlot? Far be the thought. . . Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God; and you are not your own?" 1 Corinthians 6:15, 19

And in the sum of believers, the Church:

"So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone, in whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22

Because many view the Kingdom and the Church as being identical they also view water baptism and baptism with the Holy Spirit as being simultaneous.²¹ Examples in Scripture where this is not the case²² are explained as belonging to the transitional development of things from old to new covenant in the early Church and are no longer applicable in the same way today. A section used to defend this view of a simultaneous water and Spirit baptism we is Ephesians 4:4-6:

dom. Things are different in the Church. Things that do not correspond with God's holiness must be dealt with immediately, e.g. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

²¹ When we find a simultaneous water baptism and anointing with the Spirit it is always in connection with such who believe. There is no Scriptural evidence of baptised infants receiving the Holy Spirit at their baptism.

In Acts 2:38 baptism is connected with the reception of the Holy Spirit because Peter is speaking to people who understand what he is saying and believe the Gospel (the Spirit comes through believing ("HAVING believed" Ephesians 1:13). This cannot be said of an infant. So drawing the conclusion, based on a text like Ephesians 4:4-6, that who is baptized (with water) as a rule receives the Spirit is erroneous – to say the least. Simon wanted the power to give the Holy Spirit the way the Apostles did (Acts 8:18), but it doesn't work that way. It is said of him that he "believed" (Acts 8:13), but judging from what Peter says to him in Acts 8:20-23 his "believing" was more in line with Hebrews 6:4-5 and not a faith that really changed his heart and life.

²² See for example the situation in Acts 10 where Cornelius and the others with him are baptised after receiving the Holy Spirit (v. 47). Or in Acts 8 where the believers in Samaria who had been baptised by Philip received the Holy Spirit only after Peter and John came to them.

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

But is it legitimate to take this and claim both are one and the same?

The one (water baptism) clearly speaks of death

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death". . Romans 6:4

and the other of life:

"For also in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body". . .
1 Corinthians 12:13

Actually in Ephesians we have something like concentric circles. The one body is the inner most circle – and stands clearly connected with the Holy Spirit – after which we have expanding spheres which can also contain mere professors. The "one Spirit" can include the thought of baptism in the Holy Spirit. The "one baptism" can easily only refer to water baptism – which stands in direct relation to "one Lord".

10) The Holy Spirit and Cleansing

The Holy Spirit is given as a seal of the faith one has – not in the hope of one day having that faith. In Abraham's case he was given the seal of circumcision as the sign of his already existent faith²³ which he applied to his household in the hope that they would make his faith their own as well. Water baptism involves this thought when believing parents baptise their children.²⁴ But baptism with the Holy Spirit is only given when real faith is present. The Holy Spirit can only dwell in a "place" that has been cleansed. Some understand the cleansing to take place in the giving of the

²³ "And he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision as seal of the righteousness of faith which he had being in uncircumcision". . . Romans 4: 11

²⁴ When the meaning of circumcision and its correspondence to water baptism is properly understood it becomes easier to understand the justification for infant or household baptism. Somebody already in the Kingdom (e.g. a father) brings those under his authority into the same sphere to raise and teach them the "laws of the Kingdom". This is a principle often found in the Old Testament, e.g. when a non-Israelite wanted to participate in the Passover. In such a situation not only was circumcision of the person wanting to participate required, but all those under his authority as well:

"And when a sojourner sojourneth with you, and would hold the passover to Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and hold it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land; but no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof." Exodus 12:48

The circumstances in Genesis 34 are similar: an individual wanted to marry into the covenant family. Not only did he have to be circumcised, but his whole tribe as well.

An argument often used to oppose infant baptism is the claim that Romans 6 cannot be applied to an infant. But two mistakes are made in doing so. Firstly in not realizing that baptism has to do with death and not life (i.e. not realizing that baptizing infants is not conveying life) and secondly that the Bible does not differentiate between believers and unbelievers in baptism. If baptism really did convey life it must always do so – regardless if applied to an infant or a grown-up, a believer or an unbeliever.

On the other hand Mark 10:13-16 is often used to justify infant baptism, actually it cannot do that. If we follow the analogy of circumcision/baptism through here we must admit that the children brought to Jesus were already circumcised so that this act must have a different meaning when applied to the situation in the Church or the Kingdom. The teaching we can derive from this incident goes more in the direction of the need of leading children to Christ even though they have been baptised as infants.

Holy Spirit, but the thought in Scripture is: cleansing first and then the Spirit comes in – not the cleansing through the Spirit.

What cleanses us in this fundamental way is Christ's blood – which speaks of death:

"But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." 1 John 1:7

. . ."and almost all things are purified with blood according to the law, and without blood-shedding there is no remission." Hebrews 9:22

In the tabernacle there was a laver or washing basin in the courtyard. At times this has been applied by some to baptism, but incorrectly so. The priests and Levites who washed at the laver were already circumcised – and only they had access to it. The washing here is for the ministry and is the application of the cleansing Word of God - as we find for example in Ephesians 5:26 "in order that he (Christ) might sanctify it (the Church), purifying it by the washing of water by the word." This is what takes place with such who already "belong" and is a continuous and not once-for-all process. That the Word is the "prime agent" in cleansing (as applied by the Spirit) we find expressed in our Lord's words: "You are already clean by reason of the word which I have spoken to you." John 15:3

The Apostle Peter also speaks of purification: "Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth". . 1 Peter 1:22

Water baptism also cleanses and saves, but NOT with a view to eternity.

In Scripture we find water baptism applied in a comprehensive way whereas baptism in the Spirit is always explicitly associated with faith in the ones receiving it. As regards water baptism faith on the part of the one baptised was not required, but rather on the part of the one baptising.²⁵ As regards the Holy Spirit this is quite different. The Apostle Paul states in Ephesians 1:13:

²⁵ In the New Testament we have examples of people who heard and believed the Word of God and were baptised.

"But when they believed Philip announcing the glad tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women." Acts 8:12

. . ."in whom (Christ) you also have trusted, having heard the word of the truth, the glad tidings of your salvation; in whom also, **having** (or "**after** that you") **believed, you have been sealed** with the Holy Spirit of promise". . .

"And we are his witnesses of these things, and the Holy Spirit also, which God has given to those that **obey him**." Acts 5:32

Water baptism is associated with death – as we have seen above – and the Spirit associated with life.²⁶

"And Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptised, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. . . Those then who had accepted his word were baptised; and there were added in that day about three thousand souls." Acts 2:38-41

This is simply a report of a particular sequence in a given situation and not a set pattern of how things must always be. Of course the Gospel was first directed to adults who understand it and were convicted by the preaching of the Apostles. (Just as Abraham first believed and was then circumcised.) Someone who believes must be baptised if he is to be viewed as a Christian here. But this does not allow us to draw the conclusion that the sequence must always be the same. We read in Acts of people coming to faith in Christ and being baptised – not only themselves, but their whole house. (Just as Abraham had all circumcised in his house.) We are not in anyway justified to presuppose that all such "additional" persons must have been adults who had come to a living faith as well.

Actually faith is not connected with baptism as a prerequisite, i.e. that the baptised person must first have faith. What does require a connection with faith is hearing the Word of God:

"For indeed we have had glad tidings presented to us, even as they also; but the word of the report did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard." Hebrews 4:2

²⁶ "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death. . . For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit life and peace." . . . But you are not in flesh but in Spirit, if indeed God's Spirit dwell in you; but if any one has not the Spirit of Christ he is not of him: but if Christ be in you, the body is dead on account of sin, but the Spirit life on account of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that has raised up Jesus from among the dead dwell in you, he that has raised up Christ from among the dead shall quicken your mortal bodies also on account of his Spirit which dwells in you." Romans 8:2, 6,9-11

"The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God." Romans 8:16 "Children" implies being born – life.

. . ."who has also made us competent, as ministers of the new covenant; not of letter, but of spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit quickens." 2 Corinthians 3:6

"If we live by the Spirit, let us walk also by the Spirit." Galatians 5:25

Even a verse like Romans 8:13

. . ."for if you live according to flesh, you are about to die; but if, by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you shall live". . .

emphasizes the life giving aspect of the Spirit.

"Now he that establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God, who also has sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

This cannot be said of all baptised persons. Note here the connection of "anointing" with Spirit and establishing and sealing.

"For he that sows to his own flesh, shall reap corruption from the flesh; but he that sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life". . . Galatians 6:8

. . ."for Christ indeed has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in flesh, but made alive in the Spirit". . . 1 Peter 3:18

"For to this end were the glad tidings preached to the dead also, that they might be judged, as regards men, after the flesh, but live, as regards God, after the Spirit." 1 Peter 4:6

11) Conclusion

According to my understanding the application of Israel in the wilderness to our situation today is as follows: the camp of Israel represents professing Christendom, the Kingdom. It consists of a company of circumcised (baptised) people, true believers and mere professors. The tabernacle involves those who are true believers (family) only and have access to the Holy Place, i.e. it represents the Church, the body of Christ.

An argument which can be brought against my application is that in the old order of things, a non-Levite would never have had access to the Holy Place and so all members of the camp must typify mere professors. But the Levites who served in the tabernacle lived in the camp round about the tabernacle,²⁷ so that those of who belonged to "family" were also part of the camp. There is also the limitedness of the Old Testament "shadow" to consider. It could not represent everything and reveal the fact that in the new order of things every believer has become "family" and belongs to the class of priests. In the past this would have been unthinkable, as Hebrews 5:4 states

"And no one takes the honour (to be a priest) to himself but as called by God, even as Aaron also."

But this Christ has accomplished:

. . ."Jesus Christ. . .who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father". . . Revelation 1:5-6

Some say, distinguishing between the Kingdom and the Church unnecessarily complicates matters. To the contrary, it makes everything so much clearer. What would have been more confusing? Distinguishing between the Israelites in general and the aaronic priests in particular or saying both groups are identical?

True believers (Levites/Priests) are part of the camp (Kingdom), but also have access to the Holy Place (Church).

²⁷ . . ."but the Levites shall encamp round about the tabernacle of testimony". . . Numbers 1:53

The tabernacle was in the camp as were the priests and Levites who served God, but the camp was not the tabernacle nor the tabernacle the camp. The Kingdom and the Church can involve the same persons (in this case true believers who are in both), but they are not identical.

Much of the arguments involved in talking about a visible or invisible Church are not really helpful. There is a sense in which the Church is visible: people who gather together in a certain building on a Sunday morning are certainly visible. But are all such who attend the service really part of the body of Christ? They might all be baptised, but do they all have the Spirit dwelling in them? Are they all really children of God? Often it is very difficult to distinguish and we can only go by what we see. If some one acts contrary to the Gospel he has to be dealt with and sometimes a true believer must be dealt with as if he were an unbeliever to bring about repentance.²⁸ Who knows who is "real" and belongs to the body? Only God does that.²⁹ And in this sense the true Church is invisible, because we never see the group of "only believers", it is always mixed.

²⁸ "But if he will not listen to them, tell it to the assembly; and if also he will not listen to the assembly, let him be to thee as one of the nations and a tax-gatherer." Matthew 18:17

. . . "to deliver him, I say, being such, to Satan for destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. . . For what have I to do with judging those outside also? you, do not you judge them that are within? But those without God judges. Remove the wicked person from amongst yourselves." 1 Corinthians 5: 5, 12-13

"We enjoin you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the instruction which he received from us." 2 Thessalonians 3:6 Now

The believer who does not repent must be dealt with as if he were an unbeliever because he has behaved as one, but the goal is always restoration:

"But if any one obey not our word by the letter, mark that man, and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed of himself; and do not esteem him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15

Compare 2 Corinthians 2:6-8

²⁹ "Yet the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those that are his; and, Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity." 2 Timothy 2:19

Appendix

Baptism and John 3

Our Lord's encounter with Nicodemus as related to us in John 3 and His talking of the need of being "born again" has often been brought into connection with water baptism.

This is a mistake.

Christian baptism did not yet exist at the time Christ was speaking with Nicodemus and we are in error if we read our present understanding of it into the past.

Christ expressed surprise that Nicodemus did not understand what He was taking about. If Christ had meant Christian baptism Nicodemus' lack of knowledge would not have been surprising. Christ is not referring to water baptism here when He speaks of water. He is speaking of the Word of God – something Nicodemus should have known from Ezekiel 36:21-33.³⁰

³⁰ "But I had pity for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, So says the Lord: I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. And I will hallow my great name, which was profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in the midst of them; and the nations shall know that I am Lord, says the Lord God, when I shall be hallowed in you before their eyes. And I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols will I cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and keep mine ordinances, and you shall do them. And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will save you from all your uncleannesses; and I will call for the corn and will multiply it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the trees and the increase of the field, so that you may receive no more the reproach of famine among the nations. And you shall remember your evil ways, and your doings which were not good, and shall loathe yourselves for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, says the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel. So says the Lord God: In the day that I shall cleanse you from all your iniquities I will also cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be builded."

There are many passages that bear out this thought of new life, being born again or from above, as connected with the Word and the Holy Spirit – but not with water baptism:

"For we were once ourselves also without intelligence, disobedient, wandering in error, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But when the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared, not on the principle of works which have been done in righteousness which we had done, but according to his own mercy he saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, having been justified by his grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:3-7

"According to his own will begat he us by the word of truth, that we should be a certain first-fruits of his creatures." James 1:18

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the living and abiding word of God." 1 Peter 1:23

I have argued in this paper that water baptism brings us into the Kingdom and not into the Church. This does not degrade the Kingdom in any sense. All who are in the Church and a part of Christ's mystical body are also in the Kingdom – and they are the ones who truly understand what the Kingdom is. Realizing this we can better understand the words of Christ to Nicodemus:

"Jesus answered and said to him, Verily, verily, I say to you, Except any one be born anew he cannot **see** (understand, know) the kingdom of God." John 3:3

"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say to you, Except any one be born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." John 3:5

Here Christ is not speaking of a ritual entrance into the Kingdom through baptism – He is not speaking about baptism at all! – but of the true reality involved.

. . . "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit". . . Romans 14:17

An unbeliever cannot make this claim. Christ is speaking here along the lines of Paul in Romans 2:28: "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither that circumcision which is outward in flesh."

Circumcision and baptism are alike in that they are rites of initiation through which one changes his position. Anointing and baptism in the Holy Spirit are alike in that they have to do with family. A major difference is that in the past a non-Levite could not become a priest. A non-Levite could not become "family". Today in the Church that is possible. Every true believer becomes "family" and belongs. Of late there have been theological discussions among scholars about the word "regeneration" or "born again" and its use or misuse within the Church throughout her history. It can have two meanings or applications. It can mean a change of state or condition – and this would apply to water baptism. It can also mean a "new birth" – and this would apply to the Holy Spirit. We have been "begotten again", not through water baptism, but

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his great mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead". . . 1 Peter 1:3

. . ."being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the living and abiding word of God." 1 Peter 1:23

