

Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism by Robert R. Booth.
Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1995. Review by Leonard W. Pine.

To the minds of many, the phrase “infant baptism” conjures up images of long-robed priests in the Roman church mumbling incantations that they think will infuse grace into an unwitting child who will then grow up thinking he or she is saved for eternity without ever taking any personal responsibility for his or her relationship to God. And, sadly, for many churches that practice infant baptism, or “paedobaptism” as it is more formally called, the ritual is really nothing more than that—a ritual that has no impact on the soul of anyone. Consequently, many evangelicals have abandoned the practice, substituting in its place a “dry” baptism called “dedication.” In so doing, they keep part of what God has commanded and abandon the rest because of the abuses of others. This is most unfortunate—and, frankly, sinful—since God has commanded the application of his covenant sign to all of his people.

In *Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism*, Robert Booth has provided the Church with one of the most useful tools this reviewer has yet seen for reclaiming the biblical practice of applying water baptism to the children of believers. After ten years of ministry in an independent Baptist church, Rev. Booth began a study of the subject of baptism that changed his entire ministry. As he began to see that he had misrepresented the doctrine in his preaching and pastoral ministry, he came to his church leadership with what he had discovered from the Scriptures. Through a painful (though peaceful) process, he and the church decided to part ways. Rev. Booth now pastors a Reformed and Presbyterian church.

This information is more than of just passing interest. Booth’s history affects his writing, and is, I believe, the key to why the book is one of the best resources on the subject available. He writes with compassion, with a pastor’s heart. Other books on the subject that I have read are characterized by sarcasm or harshness. There is not a hint of any acrimony from Booth; rather, he gently pleads with the reader to prayerfully consider what the Scriptures have to say on the subject. He has walked in the shoes of those that despised the doctrine, and knows the difficulty of admitting error in an area so fundamental to the external manifestation of faith for so many.

The other key to the usefulness of the book is Booth’s approach. Rather than doing what many have done before him in listing verses from the NT that typically are interpreted by Reformed believers to support the paedobaptist position (and that are typically either ignored by non-paedobaptists or interpreted in other ways), Booth begins at a more fundamental level. He begins with a thorough discussion of hermeneutics, the art of biblical interpretation. From there he discusses the matter of covenants in their progression through the OT to their fulfillment in Christ. He demonstrates simply and thoroughly that the Scriptures are a unified whole, that the promises and demands made upon Abraham, for example, did not end when Abraham died, or even at the conclusion of the OT era. In short, Booth lays the foundation of biblical unity to demonstrate that baptism is but the New Covenant version of circumcision, and he does so decidedly and persuasively. His arguments from Scripture are gently overwhelming to those who would resist the doctrine—I have seen its effects in my own ministry among adherents who liked a lot about the Reformed faith but just could not get past their prejudices against paedobaptism for various emotional or ill-informed reasons.

Only after seven chapters of rebuilding a biblical understanding of covenants, covenant signs, the unity of the Old and New Testaments, and the unity of God's covenant people, does Booth then lay out the rationale for the paedobaptist position. When he does so, the various NT "proof texts" that are often the starting point for other paedobaptist apologists suddenly leap into clear focus, without the inevitable air of dogma that exists if the whole hermeneutic mindset is not first corrected. The result is an even-handed, reasonable approach that opens, rather than closes, minds to further discussion on the issue, if not actually convincing the reader.

Additionally, Booth provides helpful appendices for further study, including Samuel Miller's argument for the position from church history (an excerpt from Miller's 1834 work *Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable*), and a helpful table of passages that clearly demonstrates the close similarities between circumcision and water baptism.

In short, this reviewer highly recommends Booth's work for anyone who wants to understand the doctrine of covenant baptism more thoroughly, without being brow-beaten in the process.