



Joint Document on Baptism Between Reformed Baptists and Reformed Presbyterians

Introduction

We, *Reformed Baptists* and *Reformed Presbyterians*, share a deep commitment to the authority of *Scripture* as the infallible and final rule of faith and practice, and to the *historic Reformed confessions* that have shaped our understanding of the gospel and the nature of the Church. Central to our shared faith is the belief in the *sovereign grace of God*, who in His infinite mercy and wisdom, chose to redeem a people for Himself, not on the basis of their works but according to His eternal purpose and plan.

A vital aspect of our faith and practice is the ordinance of *Baptism*, which was instituted by our *Lord Jesus Christ* as a means of publicly identifying with Him and His work of salvation. Baptism serves as a powerful sign and seal of God's covenant promises, symbolizing the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). Furthermore, Baptism also symbolizes the *outpouring of the Holy Spirit*, as promised in both the Old and New Testaments. In the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit is given to believers, enabling them to experience the regeneration, sanctification, and empowerment that comes with being in Christ. This spiritual reality is vividly depicted in Baptism, where the water symbolizes not only cleansing from sin but also the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as foretold by Jesus (John 7:37-39) and affirmed in the Pentecost event (Acts 2:38-39). For both Reformed Baptists and Reformed Presbyterians, Baptism is not merely a ceremonial act but a sign that marks a deeper reality—*God's Spirit working in and through His people* to bring about transformation and new life.

While our traditions differ in our specific practices surrounding Baptism—particularly regarding its administration to infants and its modes—we hold in common the theological foundation that *Baptism is a sacred and meaningful ordinance, intended to point to the realities of God's covenant faithfulness, His promises of salvation, and the believer's identification with Christ. Both traditions affirm that Baptism is not merely a ceremonial act but a sign that marks a deeper reality, a reality grounded in God's covenantal dealings with His people throughout redemptive history.*

Despite our differences in the mode and recipients of Baptism, we acknowledge that the *sovereign grace of God* underpins our understanding of the sacrament. We recognize that Baptism, as a sign and seal of the Covenant, is not the means of salvation itself but rather an outward expression of God's redemptive work that is received *by faith alone*. Thus, while there may be differences in how we apply this ordinance within the life of the Church, we stand united in our belief that Baptism is a gracious gift from God, a means of grace that calls us to respond in faith and obedience.

In this shared understanding, we continue to value the broader historical context of the Reformation, where Covenant Theology and the reform of sacraments were foundational concerns. As Reformed Christians, we remain committed to preserving the purity of the gospel, celebrating the sacraments as God has ordained, and striving to live in accordance with the truths revealed in *Scripture*.



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Of The Visible & Invisible Church

The *Visible & Invisible Church* is a crucial theological concept that both Reformed Baptists and Reformed Presbyterians affirm. While the *visible Church* refers to the local congregation or the gathered people of God, the *invisible Church* refers to the true body of believers—those who are genuinely saved by grace through faith in Christ, regardless of external appearances or membership in a particular local congregation.

We recognize the importance of the visible Church in our lives as believers and the community in which we are called to worship, grow, and serve, we also affirm the existence of the invisible Church, which represents the true body of Christ, made up of all those who have been redeemed by God through faith in Jesus Christ. The invisible Church is not confined to any one denomination, tradition, or local congregation but consists of all believers throughout history, who are *united by the Holy Spirit to Christ, the Head of the Church*.

1. The Invisible Church: A Spiritual Reality

Both Reformed Baptists and Reformed Presbyterians affirm that the invisible Church is the true, universal body of Christ. It is made up of all those who are genuinely united to Christ by faith, regardless of their external affiliation or denomination. *While church membership in the visible sense involves joining a local congregation, the invisible Church is composed of those whose hearts have been transformed by the gospel and who have been brought into a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ.*

We recognize that only God knows the true members of the invisible Church, as it is He who sees the heart and has predestined and called His people to salvation (Romans 8:29-30). The visible Church, in contrast, consists of those who profess faith in Christ and are visible participants in the ordinances and life of the local church community, including infants born into covenant-keeping families. Yet, we acknowledge that not all members of the visible Church are necessarily part of the invisible Church—only those who truly believe in Christ and have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

2. Church Membership as a Reflection of the Invisible Church

Though we maintain differences in how membership is conferred in the visible Church—through infant or believer's baptism, respectively—both traditions affirm that membership in the visible Church is a reflection of membership in the invisible Church. Church membership in this life is a sign of the spiritual reality of being united to Christ by faith and living in fellowship with others who share that faith. *It is an external indication of an internal, spiritual reality that God has worked in the hearts of His people.*



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- **Reformed Presbyterians**, while practicing infant baptism and welcoming children into the visible Church by virtue of their covenantal membership, recognize that the ultimate membership of an individual in the invisible Church depends on God's electing grace and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring them to true faith and repentance.
- **Reformed Baptists**, practicing believer's baptism, acknowledge that the visible Church consists of those who have professed faith in Christ and been baptized, but they also affirm that only God knows the true membership of the invisible Church—those who are truly saved, regardless of whether they belong to a local congregation.

3. The Role of the Invisible Church in Shaping Our Understanding of Membership

The doctrine of the invisible Church reminds us that true church membership is not merely about sacraments, such as baptism, but about the inward reality of union with Christ. This union with Christ is the foundation of our spiritual identity and the source of our growth as members of His body. Therefore, while Baptism serves as the outward sign of initiation into the visible Church, the invisible Church consists of those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, those whom God has called and justified by His grace.

We both agree that the visible Church is meant to reflect the reality of the invisible Church—a community of believers who are striving to grow in grace, holiness, and truth. *Our local congregations, whether they practice infant or believer's baptism, are expressions of this greater, spiritual reality, and we must always remember that true membership is not about outward signs but about a heart transformed by the gospel.*

4. Unity in the Invisible Church

While our differences in the practice of baptism remain significant, we affirm that the ultimate unity of the Church is found in the invisible reality of being united to Christ by faith. *The invisible Church transcends denominational boundaries and embraces all believers who have been called by God to salvation. As such, we share a deep and abiding unity in Christ, the Head of the Church, and acknowledge that our membership in His body is a grace given to us through faith and the work of the Holy Spirit.*



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Of The Covenant And Its Participants

The doctrine of the covenant is central to the Reformed understanding of God's redemptive plan throughout history. In Reformed theology, the covenant is not merely a contractual agreement, but a sacred relationship established by God with His people, based on His promises and grace. *The Bible reveals that God has established covenants throughout history with individuals and nations, culminating in the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, through which God's promises are fully realized and extended to all who belong to Christ.*

1. The Covenant in Biblical Theology

In Reformed theology, the concept of the covenant is seen as a unifying theme in Scripture. It encompasses God's relationship with humanity, beginning with the Covenant of Works made with Adam, continuing with the Covenant of Grace, and ultimately fulfilled in the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus Christ.

- Covenant of Works: The first covenant, often called the Covenant of Works, was established with Adam in the Garden of Eden. In this covenant, God promised eternal life *for perfect obedience to His command* but warned of death as the consequence of disobedience (Genesis 2:16-17). Adam's failure to obey led to the fall, and from that point onward, all of humanity was affected by sin.
- Covenant of Grace: After the fall, God established the Covenant of Grace, a promise of salvation through a future redeemer. *This covenant is not based on human works but on God's grace and mercy.* It is progressively revealed through the Scriptures, from God's promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), to the Mosaic covenant (Exodus 19-24), and to the promises made through the prophets of the coming Messiah.

2. The New Covenant in Christ

The New Covenant is the fulfillment and culmination of the Covenant of Grace. It is a covenant that God makes with His people through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The New Covenant is described most clearly in Jeremiah 31:31-34, where God promises a new and better covenant than the one made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. This new covenant is further explained in the New Testament, especially in the book of Hebrews, which emphasizes its superiority over the Old Covenant.



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- Jeremiah 31:31-34: God promises to write His law on the hearts of His people, to forgive their iniquities, and to remember their sins no more. This marks the shift from external observances and rituals to a deep, internal transformation by the Holy Spirit.
- Luke 22:20: Jesus, during the Last Supper, declares, "This cup that is poured out for you is the *new covenant* in my blood." His death on the cross inaugurates this new covenant, ensuring the forgiveness of sins for all who trust in Him.
- Hebrews 8:6-13: The author of Hebrews draws a contrast between the Old and New Covenants, highlighting that the New Covenant is superior because it is established on better promises, secured by the work of Christ as the great high priest.

3. The Nature of the New Covenant

The New Covenant is both unilateral and gracious. God initiates and secures the covenant, not based on human works but on His grace through Jesus Christ. It is a covenant of forgiveness and transformation:

- Forgiveness: Through the death of Jesus Christ, the New Covenant offers the forgiveness of sins, once and for all (Hebrews 10:12-18). Unlike the Old Covenant, which required repeated sacrifices, Christ's sacrifice is final and sufficient for the redemption of His people.
- Transformation: The New Covenant also promises the internal transformation of God's people. The Holy Spirit, who was given to believers at Pentecost (Acts 2), works in the hearts of the covenant members to enable them to obey God's law, not out of mere external compulsion but from the heart (Jeremiah 31:33).
- Eternal Security: The New Covenant is an unbreakable covenant. Because it is secured by the finished work of Christ, those who are part of the covenant are eternally secure in God's promises (John 10:28-29).



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4. Who Is Part of the New Covenant?

The Reformed view of the New Covenant maintains that the covenant community consists of all those who are united to Christ by faith, and that God's covenant promises are extended to believers and their children.

4.1 The Role of Faith in the New Covenant

- The primary condition of the New Covenant is faith in Jesus Christ. Those who believe in Jesus Christ, trusting in His death and resurrection for salvation, are the true participants in the New Covenant (Romans 3:22-24; Galatians 3:26-29).
- Faith in Christ is not merely intellectual assent but is a trust that leads to a transformation of the heart and life. Those who are in Christ are those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are marked by a new life of obedience and love for God.

4.2 The Continuity of the Covenant Community: Believers and Their Children

- Reformed theology teaches that the children of believers are included in the covenant community. This reflects the continuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, *where God's promises to His people are extended to future generations (Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39)*.
- In the Old Covenant, circumcision was the sign of the covenant for male children, marking them as part of God's people. In the New Covenant, baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant, applying to both male and female children of believers. *The Reformed tradition believes that baptism signifies God's covenant promises to the children of believing parents, who are included in the covenant community by virtue of their family connection to the faith (Acts 2:38-39; Colossians 2:11-12)*.

4.3 The Role of the Church in the New Covenant

- The Church is the visible manifestation of the covenant community. It is within the Church that the means of grace—such as the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and corporate worship—are central to the life of those who are in the New Covenant.
- The Church serves as the context where believers and their children are nurtured in the faith, where the gospel is proclaimed, and where believers are disciplined to live according to God's law in the power of the Holy Spirit.



5. The Nature of Covenant Blessings and Responsibilities

The blessings of the New Covenant are both spiritual and future-oriented:

- **Spiritual Blessings**: These include forgiveness of sins, adoption into God's family, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who empowers believers to live in accordance with God's will.
- **Future Blessings**: The New Covenant also has an eschatological aspect. Believers look forward to the final realization of God's promises when Christ returns and His kingdom is fully established. In the meantime, the Church lives as a witness to the world of the reality of the New Covenant, calling all to repentance and faith in Christ.

At the same time, being part of the New Covenant entails certain responsibilities. Believers are called to live holy lives, to obey God's commandments, and to share the gospel with others. *The covenant is not a passive relationship but one that demands a living, active response to God's grace.*

6. The Fulfillment of God's Promise to His People

The New Covenant in Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem His people and establish an everlasting relationship with them. It is a covenant marked by grace, forgiveness, and transformation, where the central mediator is Jesus Christ, who, through His life, death, and resurrection, has secured all the blessings of the covenant for those who believe.

The New Covenant community, consisting of believers and their children, is called to live in light of this covenant, faithfully participating in the life of the Church, partaking of the sacraments, and growing in grace as they await the full and final fulfillment of God's promises in the return of Christ.



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Of Baptism

We both affirm that Baptism is a sign of the covenant of grace and a visible testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It symbolizes the washing away of sins, the union of the believer with Christ, and the believer's entrance into the covenant community of the Church. Baptism, whether administered to infants or adults, is a means by which God marks His people and demonstrates His promises of salvation through the work of Jesus Christ.

2. Baptism and Covenant Theology

- **Reformed Presbyterians:** We affirm that Baptism is administered to believers and their children as a sign of God's covenant promises. Our practice is grounded in the biblical understanding that God's covenant includes the children of believers (Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39). As such, we practice infant baptism, recognizing that the children of believing parents are part of the covenant community and are recipients of God's grace.
- **Reformed Baptists:** We hold that Baptism is for those who have personally professed faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that the New Covenant, while including the promises to believers and their children, specifically requires personal repentance and faith as a prerequisite for Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16). As a result, we practice believer's baptism, administering it to those who have made a credible profession of faith, regardless of their age.

3. The Mode of Baptism

Both Reformed Baptists and Reformed Presbyterians hold that the mode of Baptism is by immersion or pouring, as the term "baptizo" in the New Testament signifies "to immerse" or "to wash." While we differ in the practice, with Reformed Baptists generally practicing full immersion and Reformed Presbyterians often practicing pouring, we agree that Baptism is a symbolic act that signifies the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). Furthermore, Baptism signifies the Holy Spirit being poured out upon the believer, as seen in the Scriptures where the Spirit is often associated with the washing and renewing work of God (Titus 3:5). *The act of Baptism, regardless of its mode, is a powerful representation of the believer's spiritual renewal by the Holy Spirit and their initiation into the life of the covenant community.*



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4. The Efficacy of Baptism

We affirm together that Baptism, in and of itself, does not save. It is not the physical water but the work of the Holy Spirit that grants the spiritual benefits of Baptism.

Baptism is a sign and seal of God's covenant promises, and its efficacy is only realized when accompanied by faith (Colossians 2:12). As the Westminster Confession of Faith states, "not the water, but the Spirit of God, by whom the heart is purified" (WCF, 28.6).

5. Unity in Christ

While we differ in our understanding and practice of Baptism, we share a common faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the importance of the Word of God, and the sacraments as signs of the covenant. Our disagreements on the specifics of Baptism should not hinder our unity in the broader mission of the Church. *We agree that Baptism is not the dividing line of our fellowship but rather an issue on which charity and mutual respect should be shown, with both traditions recognizing the validity of each other's practices as being within the broader scope of orthodox Christianity.*

"one Lord, one faith, one baptism" - Eph 4:5

Of Church Membership

While we hold differing practices regarding Baptism, we are united in our conviction that the Church is the visible body of Christ, made up of those who have been called into fellowship with Him. Both Reformed Baptists and Reformed Presbyterians affirm that membership in the Church is ultimately based on God's sovereign work in calling individuals into union with Christ, through the gospel, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. *We believe that the Church is a covenant community in which the Word of God is preached, the sacraments are administered, and believers are called to live out their faith in love and service to one another.*

1. Church Membership as a Covenant Community

We both affirm that the Church, as the covenant community, is where believers are gathered to worship, learn, and grow in their faith. Membership in the Church signifies an individual's participation in the life of that community. Whether through the baptism of infants or believers, we agree that church membership is a mark of being included in the visible Church and a commitment to living under the Lordship of Christ.



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- **Reformed Presbyterians** see membership in the Church as extending to the children of believers through the sign of baptism, believing that they are part of the covenant community and are raised within the church to grow in faith and, when appropriate, make a profession of that faith.
- **Reformed Baptists**, while practicing believer's baptism, affirm that membership is granted to those who have made a credible profession of faith in Christ, as evidenced by baptism. Church membership, in this view, is a voluntary commitment to follow Christ and live in covenant with other believers.

2. Shared Commitment to the Local Church

Both traditions understand that church membership involves a commitment to the local body of believers. It entails mutual accountability, support in the faith, participation in the worship of God, and the practice of the ordinances—both Baptism and the Lord's Supper—as means of grace. *Church membership is not merely a formality but a covenantal commitment to live out the Christian faith together.*

3. The Role of Baptism in Membership

While Reformed Presbyterians baptize infants as part of the visible Church, recognizing them as members of the covenant community, we also recognize that the individual's faith and personal profession of that faith is integral to *true membership*. Similarly, Reformed Baptists practice believer's baptism, recognizing that individuals are initiated into the covenant community through their personal profession of faith. However, both traditions affirm that Baptism serves as the initiatory sign of membership in the visible Church and marks the beginning of a life of faith, repentance, and sanctification.

4. Mutual Respect and Unity in Christ

We acknowledge and respect our differences in how membership is conferred—through infant baptism in one tradition and believer's baptism in the other. However, we hold that these differences do not negate the shared reality of the gospel or our mutual membership in the universal Church. We affirm that church membership, regardless of its mode or the timing of Baptism, is about belonging to Christ, growing in His grace, and living faithfully as members of His body.

As we strive to maintain our unity in Christ, we commit to fostering an environment where individuals from both traditions can grow in their understanding of Scripture, serve together in love, and maintain fellowship in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.



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Conclusion

“John answered, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.” But Jesus said to him, “**Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you.**” - Luke 9:49-50

In this joint statement, we have sought to affirm both the visible and invisible aspects of the Church and their significance in relation to church membership. While our practices differ in the way membership is conferred, we agree that the Church, in its invisible and visible aspects, is the community of believers who are called by God, united to Christ, and growing in the grace of the gospel. Church membership in the visible Church, whether initiated by infant or believer’s baptism, is an important part of our life together in Christ, but we are reminded that true membership ultimately lies in being part of the invisible Church—those whom God has chosen and redeemed through Christ.

We have sought to outline our shared convictions on Baptism as Reformed Christians, while acknowledging our differences in practice. We agree that Baptism is a means of grace, a sign of God's covenant, and a powerful testimony to the gospel. While we may have different views on its recipients and mode, *we continue to walk together as faithful members of the body of Christ, striving to serve Him and proclaim His gospel to the world.*

This Joint Statement Document seeks to affirm mutual respect, while maintaining the distinct practices of each tradition. It emphasizes shared commitments to the local church, the gospel, and the role of Baptism in initiating people into the covenant community. Additionally, it provides a way forward for the two traditions to agree on what church membership entails, even if they have different practices concerning Baptism.



Embracing Two Forms of Baptism in a Reformed Church: A Unified Approach

Baptism, as an initiatory ordinance, is a clear and commanding act of Christ that serves as an essential step in the faith journey of believers. The Reformed tradition, grounded in Scripture and guided by a theological commitment to unity and theological richness, offers a unique opportunity for the local church to engage with baptism in a way that respects diverse practices and approaches. This document outlines how a Reformed Church can hold to and practice two forms of baptism—both in terms of modes (immersion and pouring) and subjects (covenantal and believer's baptism)—while promoting a spirit of unity and avoiding unnecessary controversy.

Theological Foundations

1. **Baptism as an Initiatory Ordinance** Baptism is a one-time ordinance, commanded by Christ, that marks the entrance into the covenant community. As per Matthew 28:19-20, Christ commissions His followers to baptize, signifying its importance as an act of obedience and identification with the faith. In the Reformed understanding, baptism is seen as a covenantal sign that God extends to His people, establishing a visible connection between the believer and the gospel message.
2. **Scriptural Support for Two Modes of Baptism** Scripture presents baptism as involving water, but does not prescribe a singular mode, allowing for flexibility in how it is practiced. The two primary modes of baptism that the Reformed Church recognizes are **immersion** and **pouring**:
 - **Immersion**: Often linked to the symbolism of burial and resurrection (Romans 6:4), immersion represents the full identification of the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
 - **Pouring**: Recognized particularly in references such as Acts 2:17 and Titus 3:5, pouring reflects the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and God's grace, often seen as equally valid and meaningful in the baptismal act.
3. While both modes are practiced, the key is understanding that the significance of baptism transcends the method. It is not the mode that is most important but the profound symbolism of cleansing, rebirth, and initiation into the body of Christ.



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4. **Two Approaches to Baptismal Subjects** The Reformed Church embraces two major theological approaches regarding the subjects of baptism:
 - **Covenantal Baptism:** In the Reformed tradition, baptism is viewed as a sign of God's covenant with His people, extending to children as a mark of inclusion in the covenant community. This form, often referred to as **infant baptism**, underscores the belief that the promises of God extend to all members of a family within the covenant, as seen in Old Testament practices (Genesis 17:10-14) and continued in the New Testament (Acts 16:31-34).
 - **Believer's Baptism:** For those who practice believer's baptism, it is seen as a personal profession of faith. This approach emphasizes the necessity for the individual to consciously choose baptism as a public declaration of their faith in Christ and their commitment to the church.
5. The Reformed Church, therefore, acknowledges the legitimacy of both views, focusing on the fact that baptism, in all its forms, signifies God's grace and an individual's incorporation into the body of Christ.

Practical Guidelines for Exercising Two Forms of Baptism

1. **Inclusive Worship and Teaching** A Reformed Church committed to both modes and subjects of baptism must ensure that its worship and teaching reflect an inclusive approach. When explaining baptism, leaders should focus on its shared theological significance rather than on mode or subject. Sermons and Bible studies should emphasize the unifying themes of baptism: forgiveness, new life, and the grace of God.
2. **Respecting Diversity in Baptismal Practices**
 - For churches that practice **covenantal baptism**, it is important to recognize and celebrate the baptisms of infants alongside those of adults. This can be done by ensuring that parents understand their role in raising their children within the faith, while also recognizing the significance of the child's baptism as a covenantal act of God's promise.
 - For churches that practice **believer's baptism**, there should be clear teaching on the importance of a personal profession of faith before being baptized. Adult baptisms should be celebrated with a clear emphasis on the individual's personal relationship with Christ and the choice to follow Him.



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3. **Ceremony and Mode Flexibility** Both immersion and pouring can be offered as options, with the church offering either mode depending on the preference of the family or individual, as well as the theological conviction of the local church community. For example, an infant may be baptized by pouring, while an adult choosing a believer's baptism might be immersed.

The church should ensure that both modes are taught as equally valid, emphasizing that it is the faith in Christ and not the method of baptism that is paramount. This helps maintain unity while also honoring the diverse practices within the broader body of Christ.

4. **Covenant Community and Membership** Whether baptizing infants or believers, the Reformed Church understands baptism as a means of incorporating individuals into the covenant community—the body of Christ. Therefore, members who have been baptized (regardless of whether as infants or as adults) are equally considered part of the church family. *Emphasis should be placed on the lifelong discipleship and responsibility that comes with being part of the covenant, with members, whether baptized as children or adults, called to live out the promises of baptism throughout their lives.*
5. **Avoiding Controversy and Division** *A key aspect of practicing two forms of baptism is avoiding unnecessary controversy.* In a Reformed Church, it is essential that members respect each other's practices and convictions regarding baptism, understanding that differences *in practice do not represent fundamental theological disagreements about the nature of salvation.* Pastors and leaders should guide the congregation in unity, encouraging open dialogue while keeping the focus on the shared, central meaning of baptism.

Conclusion

A Reformed Church can effectively practice both modes of baptism (immersion and pouring) and both approaches to its subjects (covenantal and believer's baptism) while maintaining a spirit of unity and reverence for the ordinance. By focusing on the common theological truths that bind all believers—namely, the grace of God, the power of baptism to signify new life in Christ, and the inclusion of believers into His body—the church can avoid unnecessary controversy and confusion, while honoring the rich diversity within the Christian community. *Ultimately, baptism remains a sacred act that points to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in this, all can find common ground.*