

YOU
& YOUR
HOUSEHOLD

THE BIBLICAL CASE
FOR INFANT BAPTISM

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Does the Bible teach infant baptism? Or, is baptism only to be given to “believers”? If you are struggling to understand these questions, this short study will help. I will make the case that the Bible teaches we should baptize the children of Christians in infancy.¹

The view of baptism I am defending is “Reformed.” It is expressed in the great Reformation confessions (Genevan, Helvetic, Belgic, Westminster, etc.) and catechisms (Heidelberg, Westminster Larger & Shorter). Many of the greatest minds of the Christian Church defended this view, men such as John Calvin, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, Benjamin B. Warfield, and many others. While other traditions hold to infant baptism, the Reformed “covenantal” view stands in opposition to Roman Catholicism’s and Eastern Orthodoxy’s understanding of infant baptism.²

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

This is the most important paragraph in this booklet. Consider it carefully. This issue is about how we view *the children* of Christians. We all agree about *adult* converts—they must confess their faith prior to baptism. Baptists and paedobaptists disagree about how to deal with the infant (and young) children of Christians. There is no *explicit* example of “infant baptism” in the Bible. Baptists also should admit: *neither is there an explicit case* of a Christian’s child who grows up and is baptized on profession. The Bible does not explicitly address the *baptism of children* either way. This is a fact. This lack of an explicit basis should be acknowledged on both sides. Baptists sometimes appeal to the examples of adults who believe and are then baptized, like the eunuch (Acts 8:37). Attached to this, there is appeal to the commands to believe and be baptized (this will be addressed more fully below). The assumption is that this rules out little children. But the issue is not whether self-conscious converts believe, then confess their faith prior to baptism. Everyone agrees they should. The issue is *what do we do with the new convert’s children*. We cannot settle the case by appealing to an explicit passage in the Bible which tells us this child was baptized or this child was not baptized. The cases of adult baptisms do not automatically settle the question.

This question turns on one point. We must decide whether the children of believers are to be treated the same way as they were in the Old Testament. So, we must determine whether the New Testament teaches a change on the status of believers’ children. Is there continuity or discontinuity on the inclusion of believers’ children into the new covenant, and thus new covenant signs and rites?

The (Reformed) covenantal infant baptism view says baptism is for all under the household of a believing head. So, when children are born into a believing household, they should be baptized. This was the original pattern of the Abrahamic covenant. Circumcision (the sign of this covenant) was for the household, then for those born into the household (Gen. 17:27). Are children of Christians to be baptized? Or, is the Baptist view correct? Are only individuals who are mature enough to consciously confess their faith to be baptized? The contrast is this: Is the mature-individual (Baptist) view right, or is the covenant-family (covenantal infant baptism) view right?

IS BAPTISM A SIGN, LIKE OTHER SIGNS?

Biblical signs were given corporately to families in the Old Testament. Has that changed? This is a question of continuity. Baptism is similar to other faith rites in the Old Testament. Rituals which involve a symbolic act, such as baptism, are connected to Biblical covenants. Biblical covenants include signs to visibly represent the realities behind the covenant promises.

Reviewing the Biblical teaching, we find the covenant with Adam involved all the children of Adam. "As in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22, Rom. 5:12). The covenant with Noah included the "salvation of his household" (Heb. 11:7). The sacrifices of the patriarchs (including Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) were for the whole family. Job offered "burnt offerings according to the number of them all" (Job 1:5). Similarly, "Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal" (Gen. 31:54). Circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign of God's covenant for "you and your descendants after you throughout their generations" (Gen. 17:9). Under Moses the blood of the Passover lamb preserved the firstborn in the household. Israel was to observe Passover "as an ordinance for you and your children forever" (Ex.12:24). In the promise to David, the Lord said, "I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to David My servant, I will establish your seed forever, and build up your throne to all generations" (Ps. 89:3-4).

COVENANT (ADMINISTRATION)	VISIBLE SIGN	DESCENDANTS INCLUDED
Creation/Adamic	Tree of Life	yes
Noahic	Rainbow	yes
Abrahamic (Other Patriarchs)	Circumcision Sacrifices/Meals	yes yes
Mosaic	Passover (blood, then meal)	yes
Davidic	Throne*	yes
New Covenant	Baptism (entrance) Lord's Supper (continuance)	this is the issue

Previous covenant administrations always include a principle of family inclusion and succession. Covenant promises are given to *households* in the previous redemptive eras. Is this true of the new covenant? Is the visible sign of entrance into the new covenant (baptism) to be administered to the household of a believer? If so, then just as in circumcision and other signs of covenant, those who come into that household by birth or adoption would also have a *right to the rite*.

ARE CHILDREN STILL INCLUDED?

In obedience to Jesus' command to baptize (Matt. 28:19-20), who did the apostles baptize? By their actions, how did they apply the command of Jesus? In looking at all the actual recorded cases of apostolic baptism, is the individual (Baptist) thesis affirmed, or is the covenant (Paedobaptist) thesis affirmed?

We will consider all the biblical examples of Christian baptism, beginning in Acts. (I will deal with John the Baptist and pre-pentecost baptism below.) Do these examples indicate *only* individual, professing believers are to be baptized or do they indicate both adult believers *and* their family members are to be baptized? The basic outline of Acts is indicated in the first chapter. The gospel of Christ goes forth: "You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).³ The pattern of baptisms follow this expansion: Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the world.

ADULT CONVERSION BAPTISMS	HOUSEHOLD BAPTISMS
3000 (men) Pentecost (no household present)	Cornelius and household
Samaritans: (both men and women) Simon the Sorcerer	Lydia and household
Ethiopian Eunuch (no household)	Philippian Jailer and household
Paul (no household)	Corinthians: Crispus and household [inferred]
Disciples of John (12 men) (no household present)	Stephanas and household [Gaius below]
Gaius (and household?)	

In summary of the actual baptisms, we find the following: (1) The new covenant promise came “to you and your children” (Acts 2:39) at Pentecost. Only men (3000) are said to have been baptized (Acts 2:5, 14, 41). (2) In Samaria “men and women alike” (Acts 8:12) were baptized, including Simon (the apostate Sorcerer). (3) The Ethiopian eunuch (who had no familial household) was baptized (Acts 8:38). (4) Paul (who had no familial household) was baptized (Acts 9:18; cf 1 Cor. 7:7-8). (5) Cornelius’ household was baptized (Acts 10:48, 11:14). (6) Lydia’s household was baptized (Acts 16:15). (7) The Philippian Jailer’s household was baptized (Acts 16:33). (8) Many Corinthians were baptized, including Crispus, Stephanas’ household, and Gaius (Acts 18:8, 1 Cor. 1:14, 16). (9) The disciples of John (adult men) were baptized (Acts 19:5).

These are the facts about who was baptized. From this we learn: of *nine people* singled-out in the baptism narratives—*five had their households baptized* (Cornelius, the Jailer, Lydia, Crispus [inferred], Stephanas), two had no households for obvious reasons (eunuch & Paul). That leaves Simon, who actually turned out to be an unbeliever, and Gaius listed with Crispus, whom Paul baptized (1 Cor. 1:14).

As for Simon, he was an *atypical case*. Certainly, his case would be a less than ideal basis for the Baptist view, since he turned out to be an unbeliever, condemned by the apostle Peter (Acts 8:20). As for Gaius, Romans 16:23 says, “Gaius [is] host to me and to the whole church.” This implies he was a man of some means (3 Jn. 1 references him as “elder”). As such, he may have had at least household servants, if not a familial household. Gaius is mentioned with household head, Crispus (synagogue leader). Crispus, “believed in the Lord with all his household” (Acts 18:8). Thus, his household was undoubtedly baptized with him. Yet, Paul said in no uncertain terms, “I baptized *none of you* except Crispus and Gaius” (1 Cor. 1:14). Given that culture, Paul probably spoke of Crispus as representing the household in the administration of baptism.⁴ Therefore, if Gaius had a household, it was baptized, just like Crispus’ household.

These important Biblical facts regarding household baptisms are often dismissed. One Baptist said, “Since the New Testament teaches only believer’s baptism the only logical conclusion is that the people in these households were all believers.” Everyone in these households must have believed since *we already know only* “believers” were baptized? This is begging the question (assuming what must be proven).

This view requires a serious assumption: Luke and Paul intentionally include *more irregular and anomalous cases* of baptism (households), than “regular” cases. Remember the outline of Acts—the gospel was to go to Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria, and then to the rest of the world. After the Judean and Samaritan baptisms, we have the baptism of Paul (the Apostle to the Gentiles), then the gospel crossed to Gentile territory. Beginning with Cornelius, *every baptism is a household baptism passage*—except where we are told those present were “twelve men,” who were apparently Jews (Acts 19:7). When Peter recalls the first case of Gentile conversion (Cornelius), it is framed with covenantal words: “And he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, *you and all your household*” (Acts 11:14). Then, the Gentile households of Cornelius, Lydia, the Jailer, Stephanas, and possibly Gaius (see the previous discussion) were all baptized.

OUTLINE OF ACTS THE GOSPEL GOES TO...	BAPTISMS FOLLOW THIS OUTLINE
Jerusalem and Judea	3000 Men at Pentecost
Samaria	Samaritans, Simon, Eunuch
Ends of the Earth Transition: Apostle Paul (Acts 9) First Gentile: Cornelius (Acts 10) God-fearer: Lydia (Acts 16) New Convert Gentiles: The Jailer (Acts 16), Corinthians (Acts 18) Ephesus (Acts 19)	Saul (apostle to Gentiles) Cornelius' Household Lydia's Household Jailer's Household Corinthians: Crispus' Household Stephanus' Household Gaius, 12 Men in Ephesus

Was it coincidence that when the gospel went to Gentiles, their households were baptized? Acts is a *selective history* of thousands of examples of baptisms over the first few decades of the church. Surely Luke did not record the only household baptisms in the entire apostolic period. Rather, this was the normative practice of the apostolic church as the gospel went to Gentile families. The gospel and its outward sign went *to families* because *families* were to be saved (Acts 16:31b). The salvation of ethnic families was the goal of the covenant: “The covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Acts 3:25).

Many Christians know the answer to the Biblical question, “What must I do to be saved?”—“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.” That’s not the answer in the Bible, rather, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, *you and your household*” (Act 16:31). I repeat, this is how Luke frames the first case of Gentile conversion (Cornelius): “And he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, *you and all your household*” (Acts 11:14).

The *pattern of Gentile household baptisms* should not be quickly dismissed by Baptists. It is not as though we have a hundred cases of baptism and there are these exceptional, anomalous few household cases. *We have nine individuals identified*; five clearly have their households baptized; two do not have households (eunuch, Saul); one is dubious (Simon); and Gaius is left (1 Cor. 1:14, see the above discussion). This is not a promising set of statistics for the Baptist thesis.

The reply, “But every member of the household believed,” will not be persuasive after considering the specific grammar of the two cases which include statements about the households and faith (the Jailer 16:31-34 & Crispus 18:8). Consider the nuances of these texts. Do they support the individualist (Baptist) thesis or the covenant family thesis (household members followed the leader according to their capacity)?

In the Philippian Jailer passage (Acts 16:31-34) and the Corinthian passage with Crispus (Acts 18:8), the Greek texts have singular, not plural verbs, to describe the actions of believing. These texts *do not say*, the Jailer (or Crispus) “and (*kai*)” household members “believed [plural].” Instead, these texts teach what any Old Testament believer might have expected: the Jailer, the household head, “rejoiced (singular verb) greatly, with all his house (*panoikei*, an adverb), having believed (*pepisteukos*, participle, *singular*) in God” (16:34, from the literal rendering of the 1901 American Standard Version). Crispus, the household head, “believed (*episteusen*, verb, *singular*) in the Lord “with” (*sūn*) all his household” (Acts 18:8). However, observe Luke’s careful language indicating baptism is administered to each member of the Jailer’s household: “he was baptized, he *and* all his household” (*kai hoi autou pantes*, literally, “those of his all”) (16:33).

In the case of the Jailer, the narrative is set up in a covenantal frame, “What must I [individual and singular] do to be saved?” The answer is covenantal. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you [individual] shall be saved, *you and your household*” (Act 16:31). These texts, when carefully considered, strongly support the covenantal thesis. They do not teach that every individual in these households had the capacity to self-consciously profess the faith and did so.

The Philippian Jailer’s household is very important to the purpose of Luke. So, Luke takes some time explaining this. Why? The Jailer was the first recorded baptism of an outright pagan. Previous Gentiles had been God-fearers, worshiping the true God of Israel. The eunuch worshiped in Jerusalem. Cornelius was “devout and feared God.” Lydia “worshiped God.” Philippi was a Roman colony. Many retired soldiers were rewarded with land there. It is likely this Jailer was a former Roman soldier. The Jailer was about to kill himself before Paul and Silas called out to him. This indicates his Roman value system which called for the “duty” of suicide in the face of grave failure, like the loss of one’s prisoners.

In fear and trembling with an earthquake, no less, he cried out, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The answer is pregnant with Biblical, covenantal concepts: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your

household" (Acts 16:31).

Further, the Exodus images and resonances of this passage should not be missed. This happened at midnight (16:25). Luke emphasizes the events of washing happened, "the same hour of the night" (16:33). This is an unmistakable Passover allusion (Ex. 11:4-5). "Midnight" in Hebrew [*tokh ha-laylah*] literally means, "the division of the night," or the point of release between darkness and light. Ironically, with the release of those in bondage (Paul & Silas), the Jailer's house would be delivered by the blood of the Lamb to pass through the Red Sea of baptism with rejoicing.

Remember, the inclusion of Israelite children were essential in the Exodus, since this event unfolded the Abrahamic promise (e.g., Gen. 18:19). Moses' request to be released was to "go with our young" to "hold a feast to the LORD." Pharaoh was willing to let the men go, but not "your little ones" (Ex. 10:7-11). Then came "one more plague," the death of the cherished first born child "at midnight" (Ex. 11:29). "Then [Pharaoh] called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, 'Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel'" (Ex. 11:30-31). The children were essential then and now.

This first pagan baptismal account is a household baptism account which alludes to the Exodus. By casting the Jailer's deliverance as a Passover/Exodus kind of event, Luke strengthens the image of the deliverance of children. It would hardly be a Passover without the salvation of the first-born. Children were also delivered through the Red Sea of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

ARE CHILDREN IN THE NEW COVENANT?

Despite the covenantal content of the Jailer narrative, someone might argue the new covenant is different from previous covenants in just this sense: the new covenant is only for spiritually regenerate people. Therefore, it excludes the children of believers until they show themselves to be regenerate. As pointed out previously, this could hardly be a happy fulfillment of the people of the Exodus. Nevertheless, let us ask whether the children of new covenant believers are excluded from the new covenant. One writer says, "Nowhere in the content of the new covenant is the principle 'thee and thy seed' mentioned."⁵ If this were true, such a change in covenant recipients and covenant promises could hardly be more drastic! Covenant membership has always and ever included "you and your children." Covenant content is most fundamentally, "God to you and your descendants" (Gen. 17:7, Deut. 7:9, 30:6, 1 Chr. 16:15, Ps. 103:17, 105:8).

Consider these new covenant prophecies. Are the children of believers included in the explicit and repeated new covenant promises? The very first word about the new covenant was in Deuteronomy 30:6:

- Moreover the LORD your *God* will *circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants*, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live . . .
- Jeremiah alludes to the above Deuteronomy passage throughout his prophecy. He emphasizes the inclusion of children in the new covenant promise:
- Jeremiah 31:1: “At that time,” declares the LORD, “I will be the God of all the *families* of Israel, and they shall be *My people*.”
- Jeremiah 31:17: [Though Rachel weeps for her children (destroyed in captivity), when they return] “there is hope for your future,” declares the LORD, “and *your children* shall return to their own territory.”
- Notice verse 36 of *the classic text of the new covenant*, the offspring of covenant participants are explicitly included:
- Jeremiah 31:33-37: “But this is the covenant which I will make with *the house of Israel* after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within *them*, and on *their* heart I will write it; and I will be *their* God, and they shall be *My people*.” . . . If this fixed order departs From before Me,” declares the LORD, “Then *the offspring of Israel* also shall cease From being a nation before Me forever. 37 Thus says the LORD, “If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all *the offspring of Israel* for all that they have done,” declares the LORD.”
- Jeremiah 32:37-40: “Behold, I will gather them out of all the lands to which I have driven them in My anger . . . And they shall be My people, and I will be their God; 39 and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good, and *for the good of their children after them*. 40 “And I will *make an everlasting covenant with them* that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in *their hearts* so that they will not turn away from Me.”

- Jeremiah 33:22-26: “As the host of heaven cannot be counted, and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the *descendants* of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me . . . 26 then I would reject the *descendants of Jacob* and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.”

Other Old Testament prophecies about the coming age of the new covenant are equally clear the children of believers are included:

- Ezekiel 37:24-26: David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd . . . and they shall dwell there, they, *their children, and their children's children, forever*; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. 26 “Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them . . .” (NKJV)
- Zech. 10:6-9: “And I shall bring them back, Because I have had compassion on them; and they will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God, and I will answer them. 7 “And Ephraim will be like a mighty man, and their heart will be glad as if from wine; Indeed, *their children will see it and be glad, Their heart will rejoice in the LORD* . . . They will remember Me in far countries, and *they with their children* will live and come back.
- Joel 2:1-29: Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! . . . So there is a great and mighty people; There has never been anything like it, Nor will there be again after it To the years of *many generations* . . . 15 Blow a trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, 16 Gather *the people, sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and the nursing infants*. . . *My people* will never be put to shame. 28 “And it will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your *sons and daughters* will prophesy . . .”
- Isaiah 44:3: For I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on *your offspring*, and My blessing on *your descendants*.

- Isaiah 54:10-13: Nor shall My *covenant of peace* be removed . . . 13 *All your children* shall be taught by the LORD, And great shall be the peace of *your children*.
- Isaiah 59:20-21: “And a Redeemer will come to Zion. . .” My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of *your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring’s offspring.*” says the LORD, “from now and forever.”
- Malachi 4:5-6 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6 “And he will restore the hearts of the *fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers,* lest I come and smite the land with a curse.”

In the New Testament, the apostles also repeatedly included the principle of “you and your seed.”

- Luke 1:17: “And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children,* and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”
- Luke 2:49-50: For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name. 50 and His mercy is upon *generation after generation toward those who fear him.*
- Acts 2:39: For the promise is *for you and your children,* and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.
- Acts 3:25: “It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, *‘and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’*”
- Acts 13:32-33: “And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled *this promise to our children* in that He raised up Jesus . . .”

- Romans 4:13-17: For the promise to Abraham or to *his descendants* that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith . . . 16 For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that *the promise may be certain to all the descendants*, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 (as it is written, “A father of many nations have I made you”) in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

These texts provide overwhelming and unambiguous Biblical support for the conviction the children of believers are included in the new covenant. How many more verses are required to make this point? Certainly no one can produce even one text which *explicitly excludes* them. Dozens of texts *explicitly include* them!

Even more, the whole message of the whole Bible requires that our children are a heritage. If baptism is the visible sign of inclusion in a covenant relationship with God, then who did the apostles baptize? The unmistakable conclusion of the exhaustive survey above is: baptism applies to the *households* of believers. We have no *biblical* reason to doubt infants born into such households are to be baptized by virtue of the covenant promises inclusive of them.

WHAT ABOUT BAPTIZING DISCIPLES?

Before our Lord ascended to reign at the right hand of the Father, where He reigns now, He commanded the discipling of the nations. He predicted the advance of His good news “in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8), just as we have seen (above). He said to His disciples, “Go ye therefore, and *teach [disciple, or make disciples of] all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19 KJV).

Some claim Jesus’ command excludes anyone from baptism who is not a self-conscious disciple, making a credible profession of faith. Such interpreters claim this Commission commands the discipling of “individuals from all nations, not the national entities” and the individual baptism of only “those who were made disciples.”⁶

The grammar of this command does not support the individualist reading. Rather, the direct command (*mathēteusate panta ta ethna baptizontes autous*) may simply be translated, *Disciple all nations, baptizing them (nations)*. The pronoun “them” (*autous*), grammatically refers to “nations” (*ethna*) a noun, not “disciples,” since “make disciples” (*mathateuo*) is a verb.⁷

If one thinks about the Commission both grammatically and culturally, a Jewish Rabbi of the First Century would not have been troubled if the text had said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, *circumcising* them [the nations] in the name of Israel’s God, teaching them [the nations] to obey all that I commanded you.” This was precisely what Pharisees were doing in “making proselytes [disciples]” (Matt. 23:15). They would not have thought this was a Commission to abandon infant circumcision for *exclusive adult circumcision*. Neither should we think the Great Commission to baptize nations excludes children. The new covenant promises call for nations to come to the Lord (Is. 2:4, 11:10, 42:1-16, esp. 52:15). Nations include children.

This point is not theoretical. In the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, they speak of the “conversion of the Gentiles” (15:3). The Judaizers insisted, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (15:1). “It is necessary to *circumcise them*” (15:5). The “converted Gentiles” or the “believing Gentiles” were to be circumcised. What does this mean? Clearly, those to be circumcised were not just self-conscious professors or “believers.” This included their little children and infant children born to them. Thus, the Bible speaks of those “converted” as inclusive of the children.

When the apostles practiced the baptismal mandate, they baptized adults after confession with their households, whenever households were present. This is precisely because the Great Commission baptismal mandate is not separate from the original Abrahamic Great Commission. The Great Commission is a restatement of God’s purpose to renew the world with people after his own image, just like the original promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).

The purpose of God in converting the nations (in missions) is the mature statement of the Abrahamic promise after the True Seed has accomplished redemption. Father Abraham had many sons, as you know, “I am one of them and so are you . . .” Peter preached to the Jews, “It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘and *in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed*’” (Acts 3:25). The promise of the gospel is: “the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the

promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). Whereas Gentiles were “separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and *strangers to the covenants of promise*, having no hope and without God in the world”—“Now,” writes the apostle, “in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:12-13). Gentiles may now participate as receivers of the “covenants of promise.” We sing, “Father Abraham Had Many Sons . . .” It is true, we have become Abraham’s children too! Amazingly, Gentiles are “Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29), and of course, not just adult Gentiles, but their children (see Acts 15, discussed earlier).

The apostles repeat the Abrahamic promise to Gentile Christians. The promise to Abraham is “certain *to all the descendants*, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, ‘a father of many nations have I made you’)” (Rom. 4:16-17). In other words, the promise is to “all the descendants” of both believing Jews and Gentiles, because Abraham is the “father of many nations” (Acts 3:25, Gen. 12:3). Households of a Cornelius, or a Lydia, or a Philippian Jailer, or a Stephanas, could now be counted as Abraham’s children. This means children are included.

HOW NEW IS BAPTISM?

When reading the Bible from *left to right*, we see many reasons for the Great Commission to baptize nations. Many Baptists treat baptism as a completely new thing with John the Baptist. Then they read the accounts of John the Baptist as requiring the individualist-Baptist view. On the contrary, the water God provides for refreshment and cleansing is a theme throughout all of the Bible. From Eden flowed rivers. There are springs in the patriarch narratives. Israel (including children) passes through the Red Sea. A laver is at the entrance of the tabernacle for priestly cleansing. Joshua leads Israel across the Jordan into the Land. In the temple of Solomon an ocean and basins of water on chariots create a stylized river flowing out to cleanse the nations. Ezekiel and Zechariah see visions of rivers flowing out in the new covenant (Zec. 14:8). Washings in the tabernacle, as well as crossing the Red Sea, are explicitly called baptisms (Heb. 9:10, 1 Cor. 10). There are many references to baptism(s) in the Old Testament.

Most importantly, these foretell our new covenant era. Christ said of the Spirit’s reality: “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his

innermost being shall flow rivers of living water” (Jn. 7:38, cf. Is. 58:11, Zec. 13:11). This is the image of the new covenant’s spiritual reality pictured by Ezekiel’s temple (Ez. 47:1-3). This is a prophecy of the Commission to baptize the nations.

Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar (Ez. 47:1). [The text goes on to speak of fishermen who net many kinds of fish from this river, i.e., Gentiles cf John 21:11 “153 large fish.”]

Because of this rich and deep theme, a baptismal prayer developed, called “The Great Flood Prayer,” attributed to Martin Luther.

Almighty and eternal God, who through the flood, according to your righteous judgment, condemned the unfaithful world, and according to your great mercy, saved faithful Noah and his household, yet drowned hard-hearted Pharaoh with all his army in the Red Sea, and has led your people Israel dry through it, thereby prefiguring this bath of your holy baptism, and through the baptism of your dear children, our Lord Jesus Christ, has sanctified and set apart the Jordan and all water for a saving flood, and an ample washing away of sins: we pray that through your same infinite mercy you would graciously look down upon this your child, and bless this child with a right faith in the spirit, so that through this saving flood all that was born in this child from Adam and all which they have added thereto might be drowned and submerged; and that they may be separated from the unfaithful, and preserved in the holy ark of Christendom dry and safe, and may be ever fervent in spirit and joyful in hope to serve your name, and with all the faithful may be worthy to inherit your promise of eternal life, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Luther draws from the Apostle Peter’s flood imagery. It is an *antitype*, a fulfillment of the salvation of the household of Noah. It symbolizes the washing of the conscience. “There is also an antitype (*antitypos*) which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:21, NKJV).

DO WE FOLLOW JESUS IN BELIEVER'S BAPTISM?

John the Baptist was to go “in the spirit and power of Elijah” who divided the water of the Jordan (2Kgs. 2:8ff). John “prepared the way” for Jesus. He was “*preaching* a baptism of repentance” at the Jordan river (Mark 1:4). John was in the wilderness beyond the borders of the Land where they “went out to him” (Mark 1:5). We must call to mind what had happened to Israel in the past to make sense of this.

In the Exodus, Israel “passed (Heb. *avar*) through the midst of the sea into the wilderness” (Num. 33:8). Paul describes this as a “baptism.” They were “all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:2). Crossing the Red Sea is a “baptism.” Under Joshua, Israel was commanded to “cross (*avar*) this Jordan, to go in to possess the land” (Josh. 1:11). Due to Moses’ anger, he did not get to “cross” over (Deut. 4:22, 31:2). This “crossing” happens again when Elisha is given a “double portion” of the spirit of Elijah. “Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground” (2 Kgs. 2:8). Then in the exile, Judah was expelled out of the Land, beyond the borders of the Jordan River (1 Chr. 9:1; Josh. 3-4).

In the era just before Jesus came, the Jews wanted to know if the exile was over. On the one hand, they were back “in the Land” from Babylon (at least many were). They had walls, a city and a temple. On the other hand, they were still oppressed by foreign powers Herod(s) and Rome. Had God returned to Zion in fulfillment of the prophets (e.g., Is. 40:1-10)? Now enter John.

John was “preaching a baptism of repentance” (Mark 1:4). This does not mean John was preaching, “You must be immersed.” Rather, given all the history to this point, John was preaching a “baptism” of the renewal of Israel. The baptism he preached showed this. Theologian Colin Brown wrote, “John was organizing a symbolic exodus from Jerusalem and Judea as a preliminary to recrossing the Jordan as a penitent, consecrated Israel in order to reclaim the land in a quasi-reenactment of the return from the Babylonian exile . . . the purity and quantity of the water were of less significance than the historic, symbolic significance of the Jordan itself as the boundary and point of entry.”⁸ Just as Deuteronomy looked to a time of renewal when they “cross the Jordan,” being led by Joshua (Deut. 4:21), so now on the verge of Messiah coming, John was leading them in a symbolic exodus to enter the Land in renewal.⁹ The rest of the New Testament draws upon various threads of this “crossing” image in baptism. We are “baptized” into Christ, through death and into resurrection

life. We “pass” or “cross” into Him (Rom. 6:3-4, Col. 2:11-12).

In addition to the “crossing,” John may have sprinkled water on people as they passed, as a ritual of cleansing. This is suggested by the words of Jesus about John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? *A reed shaken by the wind?*” (Matt. 11:7). This could be merely metaphorical, but throughout the Bible such branches are used to apply rites of cleansing (Lev. 14). “A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons who were there . . .” (Num. 19:18). “Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean” (Psalms 51:7). It is unlikely that John physically immersed all the people in Jerusalem, all of Judea, and the district around the Jordan (Matt. 3:5-6).

What about the baptism of Jesus? So, John’s baptism of Jesus involved this renewal of Israel, crossing the Jordan (as before with the Red Sea, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha) to “manifest” the Anointed One, “Christ” (Jn. 1:31, Ps. 2:2). Hebrews teaches Christ was appointed “by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:10). He “appoints a Son, made perfect forever” (Heb. 7:28). When did this happen? This happened at Jesus’ baptism (Luke 3:21, 4:18).

John was qualified to be a Levitical priest, as was his father (Luke 1:5). However, John did not do his ritual cleansings at the temple, under the corruption of the Sadducees. Levitical priests were appointed through a ritual washing, an anointing with oil, and vesting (clothing) (Ex. 28:41, Num. 3:3). Jesus was consecrated as a priest by John in the baptismal event (Matt. 3:13-17). I would consider John the “last Levitical priest” who anoints the Melchizedekian High Priest, Jesus. Jesus did not get symbolic oil at a corrupt temple; He received the actual Spirit coming down as a dove. Because of this, “having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has *poured forth*” the Spirit on us (Acts 2:33). This is the meaning of the word, “Christ” (anointed), and it goes back to the event of Jesus’ baptism when He was anointed.

So do we “follow the Lord” in baptism? Only with this rich background in mind, can we now see how Christ’s baptism is a model for us. In our baptisms we are cleansed; there is a washing away of sin in the symbolism. We “cross” or “pass” into Christ, and we are clothed. In baptism, we gain a new status as adopted sons and daughters of the Father. We are vested with the Spirit and called “sons/daughters” of God. Priestly ordination is a picture of the “royal priesthood” in Christ (1 Pet. 2:9). Our new identity is conferred in baptism,

even as it was for Israel in the crossing of the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1-4). This is all another way of saying what Paul states definitively. We are “all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27).

IS BAPTISM IN PLACE OF CIRCUMCISION?

It is just because baptism relates to the Spirit we see a connection between baptism and circumcision. Both are symbols of covenant promise and entrance signs. Baptism and circumcision symbolize the same reality, the work of the Spirit. Yet, baptism is greater than circumcision. Many have objected to this kind of argument. I do not think all the eggs of infant baptism are in the basket of circumcision. But there is a relationship between circumcision and baptism in Scripture. Seeing this clearly will help resolve the questions about what rites apply to children.

(1) *Circumcision represented the work of the Holy Spirit, the circumcision of the heart.* Stephen drew upon a very deep stream of the Biblical waters when he said to his persecutors, “You men who are stiff-necked and *uncircumcised in heart* and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did” (Acts 7:51). This meaning of circumcision is very evident in many Old Testament passages (Lev. 26:41, Jer. 9:26, Ez. 44:7, 44:9, Deut. 10:16, 30:6, Jer. 4:4). The very promise of the new covenant included this, “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants” (Deut. 30:6). Paul, who held the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen, learned this too (perhaps from Stephen). It permeates virtually all of his epistles (Rom. 2:29, 4:11, 1 Cor. 7:19, Gal. 5:6, 6:15, Eph. 2:11-12, Phil. 3:3, Col. 2:11-12, 3:11). The reality behind physical circumcision is circumcision “which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter” (Rom. 2:29). Circumcision signifies the renewal of the heart toward God.

(2) *Baptism represents the work of the Spirit, the baptism by the Spirit.* The very first words we read about baptism in the New Testament say this. John said, “I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8). Peter connects baptism with “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). He says of Cornelius’ household, “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” (Acts 10:47). Paul alludes to the image of baptism in Titus 3:5 when he says, “He saved us . . . by the *washing* of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” Baptism signifies the renewal of those who were spiritual dead and formerly unclean.

Therefore, (3) *a person who has been heart-circumcised has been Spirit-baptized, and a person who has been Spirit-baptized has been heart-circumcised.* What can this mean if not that *these two ritual acts signify the same reality?* The passage usually discussed at this point is Colossians 2:11-12: “and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” This text is disputed, especially in the meaning of “the circumcision of Christ.” Is this spiritual circumcision/regeneration or something else? It may be that this circumcision “of Christ” is the “cutting off of Christ” on the cross, i.e., His death. Even so, this would still correlate baptism and circumcision, but addressing the cutting off or “death” aspect: circumcision=death, baptism=death. My argument does not depend on a particular reading of this passage, but rather that there are parallels between circumcision and baptism in their meaning. On the face of it, Paul refers to both here because there is a similarity (whatever it is in this passage).

Circumcision and baptism are both signs of covenant union. This is plain in the case of circumcision (Gen. 17). It is also clear with baptism. Romans 6:3-4 teaches those “baptized into Christ Jesus” “have become united with Him in the likeness of His death” and “His resurrection.” Galatians 3:27 tells us those “baptized into Christ have clothed [themselves] with Christ.” Further the Spirit unites us in the Body: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). These passages affirm baptism is a sign of the work of God’s Spirit in our spiritual union with Christ.

In summary, baptism certainly signifies the work of the Spirit (Mark 1:8, Acts 10:47, Titus 3:5). It is commissioned to be a rite of cleansing which identifies one with the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19-20, Acts 10:48). Its meaning is unmistakably the Spirit’s work in cleansing us and uniting us with Christ in His body (Rom. 6:3, Gal. 3:27, Col. 2:11-12, 1 Cor. 12:13).

It is true, even if some baptized people are not living testimonies of it. The truth of baptism is objective, but what baptism represents is not *automatically* true of all the baptized. This is clear to us in the case of old covenant circumcision. Many in their disobedience lied about what circumcision said of them in the Old Testament. Going through the *ritual* does not automatically generate all of the *reality* signified. This is true for *adults* no less than little children.

This is also true in both the Old Testament and the new covenant era.

Baptism is a (visible) sign and seal of the covenant community. So, baptism functionally replaces the rite of circumcision, and is its *sacramental equivalent* (in the age of fulfillment).

	CIRCUMCISION	BAPTISM
Ritual	cut off flesh	cleanse the flesh
Reality	circumcision of Christ circumcise the heart united to Israel	baptism by the Spirit cleanse the heart united to True Israel/Christ
Recipients	primarily Jewish nation/ All in such households (males)	expanded to every nation/ All in the household (males and females)

The temptation for Baptists is to assume: since the reality signified in baptism is only true in regenerate “believers,” it is only proper to give this sign to such people. Reasoning this way, one entirely overlooks what has just been Biblically proven. Circumcision fundamentally signifies the same reality as baptism. Circumcision testified of a spiritual life. Yet, it was properly given to children. As Calvin says, “For what will they bring forward to impugn infant baptism that may not be turned back against circumcision?”¹⁰ In other words, any argument of the improper application of baptism to children because of baptism’s spiritual meaning, could also be an objection to circumcision. Circumcision also signified a spiritual reality. Abraham’s circumcision was the sign and seal of his *justification* by faith. He “received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised” (Rom. 4:11). But Isaac, who possessed the same Spirit-wrought reality, was circumcised as an infant.

So then, the sign of an internal, spiritual reality can be received when one is (painfully) conscious of the reality, like Abraham. Or, it can be received before one is conscious of the reality, like Isaac, and every other believing Jew. Baptism can be received with understanding (in the case of an adult) or it can be “recalled” with understanding (as in the case of an infant).

Baptists sometimes argue: *an internal spiritual work is more certainly true* of the “believer” (professing faith) than the infant (even when raised in the discipline and admonition of the Lord). This is a very unconvincing point to me,

having grown up in Baptist churches which regularly practice repeat-baptism two or three times on their own members. According to official statistics, one prominent Baptist denomination reported over 40% of its baptisms one year were for “rededication.”¹¹ No practitioners of baptism, regardless of their theology, baptize only regenerate people, for not even the Apostles managed to do that (e.g., Simon the Sorcerer, Acts 8).

WERE *THEIR* CHILDREN INCLUDED?

Let us read our New Testaments with an understanding of the original audience. If we stand in the sandals of the First Century Jewish (and proselyte) followers of Jesus, how would they have reacted to the Baptist claim that believers’ little children are excluded from the people of God? Imagine the shock of Crispus, the synagogue leader (Acts 18:8), who believes on Friday, let’s say, his children are in covenant with God and fully part of the people of God. Then after Paul preaches, he finds out that—in the fulfillment of all the promises, in the fullness of time, in the Messianic kingdom and glory of Israel ... now his little children have *no part* in the people of God!

Or, imagine the new proselyte family who has recently undergone the painful passage to covenant membership (circumcision), only to discover now their children have less of a place than in the shadows of Judaism! This view of the new covenant would be more than disappointing to the original audience: it would be *Biblically inconceivable*. The clearly stated objections of the Judaizers (e.g., circumcision is required as a covenant sign) are plain (Acts 15:1). If the Apostles actually had taught the infant children of Jews (and Gentiles) are now excluded, this would have been an outrage. It is very remarkable no hint of this discussion arises in the pages of the New Testament. But the reason this is not in the New Testament is best explained by the view that the Baptist practice and belief was not the Apostles’ teaching.

This brings us to an important objection which I will call the “Replacement Objection.” It has been stated in this way: If baptism replaced circumcision why didn’t the Apostles refute the Judaizers’ demand that Gentiles be circumcised by saying, “They don’t need circumcision; you all know that baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant.”

The Judaizers were saying Gentiles cannot be “saved” without circumcision (Acts 15:1) and circumcision is “necessary” (Acts 15:5). The Apostolic response (Paul and Peter) was: we are sure Gentiles are being saved without circumcision; we have seen it, therefore, circumcision is not necessary (Acts

15:7-12). Peter said, "If God therefore gave to them *the same gift as He gave to us also* and God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them [Gentiles], giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He *also did to us*; and He made no distinction between us and them, *cleansing their hearts by faith*" (15:8-9). Their Gentile uncleanness was "cleansed" by the *Spirit's presence and work*, which circumcision represented. The Spirit demonstrated that the ritual of circumcision was unnecessary to receive salvation and the observable manifestations of the Holy Spirit. "And as I began to speak [to Cornelius and household], the Holy Spirit fell upon them, *just as He did upon us* at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be *baptized with the Holy Spirit*'" (Acts 11:15-16). This was not a truth Peter (or any other Apostle) understood prior to Acts 10 and it was being contested in Acts 15.

Peter virtually says they do not need circumcision (ritual) because they were baptized by the Spirit (Acts 15:8-9). Therefore, Peter concludes, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these [Cornelius' household] to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" (Acts 10:47). Who would be tempted to refuse them baptism? The Judaizers, on the ground that they were not yet circumcised and thereby, "cleansed." But they had been cleansed. *This is the replacement of circumcision as a rite with the reality and rite of baptism.* But it's deeper than the ritual. The Gentiles received the Spirit, the reality behind both circumcision and baptism.

The reason Peter did not simply say, "Baptism has replaced circumcision," is due to several contextual factors. a) The Judaizers' true objection was that circumcision could never be replaced, even for Gentiles (Acts 15:1, 5). They did not appreciate the "newness" of the new covenant. Just "saying" it was not enough. The whole issue was being contested as "forsaking the Law." Those who truly appreciate the "newness" see that baptism "out cleanses" circumcision! b) The Apostles did not deny that Jews could still properly practice circumcision, though it was unnecessary for Gentile converts. To simply assert (in that context), "baptism has replaced circumcision," was not a full statement of the truth about the matter. Baptism did replace circumcision as a Gentile sign of entrance into the Church, as a matter of fact. Moreover, it is a necessary act for believing Jews in addition to circumcision (Acts 21:21, 1 Cor. 7:18). But, it doesn't exactly replace circumcision *for Jews*, especially in that transitional era.

Thankfully, like debating the Deity of Christ and the Trinity, the era of disputing about circumcision for Gentiles is long gone in the Church. Apart from evangelizing Jews, the issue in the world-wide Church is a non-issue. Baptism is the functional replacement of circumcision as the sign of entrance into the Church.

The baptism question is most essentially about the relationship of our children to our God. Old Testament saints considered their children in covenant with God, so also in the New Covenant. There is no difference in the OT or NT language about the children of believers.

THE PLACE OF BELIEVERS' CHILDREN: THE SAME IN BOTH TESTAMENTS

	Old Testament	New Testament
Duties of Parents	"Command his children to keep the way of the LORD" (Gen. 18:19)	"Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4)
Duties of Children	"Honor your father and mother" (Ex. 20:12)	"Obey your parents" (Eph. 6:2)
Blessings	"Live long in the land" (Ex. 20:12)	"Live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:3)
Children Must Obey the Word	"Your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes" (Deut. 6:2)	"Continue in the things [Scripture] you have learned" from infancy (2 Tim. 3:14-15)
Household Leadership	"As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15)	The jailer "rejoiced greatly, with all his household" (Acts 16:34, ASV)
Promised Reality	"I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring" (Is. 44:3)	"For the promise [of the Spirit] is to you and your children" (Acts 2:39)
Duration of Inclusion	"To a thousandth generation" with those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Deut. 7:9)	"His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him" (Luke 1:50)

THE PLACE OF BELIEVERS' CHILDREN: THE SAME IN BOTH TESTAMENTS

Sign of
Inclusion

"All the men of [Abraham's]
household. . . were
circumcised" (Gen. 17:27)

The jailer "was baptized, he
and all his household" (16:33)
(Cornelius', Lydia's, Crispus',
Stephanus' households, too)

HOW DO WE LIVE OUT BAPTISM?

One of the most troubling objections to infant baptism is this: "If all you have said is true, then aren't you saying baptized children are saved? If baptism represents union with Christ, then shouldn't we consider baptized babies 'in Christ'?"

This is a challenging point since the Bible speaks of baptism as uniting a person to Christ. (Baptism is best understood as providing the official action of covenantal union.) Perhaps the best way to address this is to think of the analogy of marriage. The wedding event is critical to a marriage. All people that are married were somehow "wed." But no one treats the wedding, in and of itself, *as the totality of the marriage*. A faithful marriage is not the automatic result of a beautiful wedding. We all know of exceptions. Neither is a life of salvation automatic because of baptism, whenever it happens (in childhood or adulthood).

Do you need a wedding to be married? Well, something must start the "union." Unwed people may love one another *as if* they are married. There is something quite important about a wedding for a marriage. If one obeys good wedding vows, a strong marriage will result. Likewise, if baptism's meaning and obligations are lived-out, then a life of salvation will be evident. Baptism is to be the official beginning of faithfulness, and in baptism, the commitments of a happily married life in Christ are vowed. I am washed and have crossed into Him, and thus I shall live. Thinking of it this way: *baptism is just as applicable to little children as to adult converts*.

If you have brought your child to Christ, now you must obey what the Lord requires. Our father Abraham was told, "For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him" (Gen. 18:19). We must heed that ancient command, "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk

by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:7). Do you intend to command your children to keep the way of the Lord? Do you intend to teach them diligently to love the Lord their God (Deut. 6:4)? Without the reality of leading one’s home to Christ, in Christ, and for Christ, the water of baptism is worse than useless, it is a flood of judgment.

When the first new covenant (Gentile) households believed, they were commanded to bring their children “up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Just as in a previous era, Joshua nobly said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15). A baptized adult should be obedient to living a cleansed life in Christ. A baptized child should be a child being brought up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord, whose parents vow, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Practically, this means every person who grows up in a Christian home should be taught God’s Word from their earliest times. Just like Timothy, each Christian child should be exhorted to “continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood (*brephos*, infancy) you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

Therefore, the covenantal baptism of children is Biblical and leads to godly parenting. It imparts a hope of the sealed blessings of the gospel of grace. Baptized children should be viewed as those in the new covenant and should be called to mature into all this implies. This does not mean *automatic* faithfulness. Rather it demands responsibility and faith. It is a sobering challenge to remember those who break covenant will receive a greater condemnation, even than the unbaptized (Heb. 10:28-30).

THE CENTRAL LINE OF OBJECTION

There may still be objections. Given the brevity of this study, let me examine what I take to be the central objection.¹² The basic structure of the (new covenant) Baptist argument is this: we have (1) an explicit basis for “believers’ baptism” and (2) no explicit warrant (an example or command) for “infant baptism.” Undergirding this, (3) new covenant membership includes exclusively regenerate individuals and believers’ little children cannot be assumed to be regenerate; thus (4), such children are not to be baptized until they confess their faith and show their regeneration.

I will answer, point by point. (1) Even if the “explicit” baptisms are of only

“believers” (forgetting the households for a moment), a million cases of adult converts professing their faith before baptism prove nothing regarding the infants of believers (the question at hand). *Paedobaptists heartily concur with the practice of adult profession prior to baptism* as is evident in every Reformed creed!¹³ Most Baptist polemics just hammer away at the examples of adults, as though this settles the case. Ironically, the *childless eunuch* with his crystal-clear case of prior belief becomes the paradigm for settling the question of infant children. But the *eunuch* case cannot help us with how to deal with children, can it? As we have seen, the actual cases of baptism support the covenantal view. Virtually every person who could have conceivably had a household, had it baptized. The explicit cases of baptism, when fully considered, are not evidence of the Baptist view. Five household baptisms (of 9 individuals) is a strong evidence for the covenantal view.

(2) Explicit warrant for an “infant baptism” is lacking. But explicit cases on the baptism of believers’ children is lacking in both directions. There is no case of an “infant baptism,” and neither is there a case of the “believers’ baptism” of a Christian’s child. This question must be settled by the proper application of Biblical teaching related to the place of believers’ children, inclusion in the covenant, and the examples of baptism, such as the import of household baptisms. It cannot be settled with a direct appeal to an explicit text. The role of children in God’s covenantal plan was significant (Gen. 18:19) and it still is (Eph. 6:4).

(3) Is it true that new covenant membership includes exclusively regenerate individuals? No. There are many passages which teach the possibility of apostasy from the visible covenant community (Heb. 6:1-4, 10:28-30, John 15:2, 6, Rom. 11:21). There are many passages which teach the new covenant has stipulations for judgment (Matt. 16:19, 1 Cor. 11:29-30, 34, Heb. 10:30-31, 1 Pet. 4:17). There are many passages which teach the kingdom includes regenerate and unregenerate (Matt. 8:12, 13:24-31, 41, 47-50, 21:43, 25:1-13, Luke 13:28, Rev. 11:15). In this the new covenant is similar to the older covenant administrations. Even more, the paedobaptist, not the antipaedobaptist, possesses *explicit warrant* for the *inclusion* of children in the new covenant (Deut. 30:6, Jer. 31:36-37), church (Eph. 1:1/6:1-4, Col. 1:2/3:20, 1 Cor. 7:14), and kingdom (Matt. 19:14, Mark. 10:14, Luke 18:16).

(4) By putting the entrance sign of the new covenant on the children of believers, we are not making any assumption that is not *explicit* in the Bible’s teaching. The Bible explicitly and repeatedly speaks of the children in the new

covenant. The Baptist practice assumes that by profession of faith, the baptismal candidate is regenerate. But this may be false. The paedobaptist acts simply on the basis that the child is under the terms of the covenant, which is explicitly taught in the Bible. In any case, no one baptizes out of “knowledge” that a person is “regenerate.” Here I think a practical theological argument militates against the coherence of Baptist practice. Surely the identification of the regenerate requires more than a mere “profession.” I have known many people who have made a profession, been baptized, and then have fallen away. Professing the faith is no sure evidence of regeneration. So then on the level of church practice we are left with the sage words of B.B. Warfield, “. . . no one, however rich his manifestation of Christian graces, is baptized on the basis of infallible knowledge of his relation to Christ. All baptism is inevitably administered on the basis, not of knowledge, but of presumption.”¹⁴

A FEW MORE QUESTIONS

- *Why baptize children if they do not understand the meaning of baptism?* Baptism is like circumcision. For adults it is *entered* with some understanding, for infants it is “*remembered*” with understanding. If a person is a new convert, their knowledge of baptism may be very immature anyway. In other words, all baptism is “infant” baptism (in the sense of really understanding its meaning). *In principle*, one cannot object to such a sign being given to an actual infant because it is so clear in the case of circumcision. Is it meaningful that little children are citizens of the United States? Though they do not comprehend it, they have all the rights and protections of a citizen, though under age. As they grow, they will learn their duties, along with all the rights and privileges their citizenship afforded them, while they were yet unaware of it. So it is with baptism.
- *What about baptized children who grow up and forsake the faith?* Apostasy (from the Church and covenant) may be committed by children baptized as infants, believer-baptized children, and adult-baptized converts. It is the Biblical function of *church discipline* (Matt. 18:15-20), not baptism, which purifies church membership of those who willfully and unrepentantly deny the faith. We should not try to keep people from entering in baptism, but keep them faithful by teaching, love, and discipline.

- *What if a baptized child has a dramatic conversion later? Are they to be baptized again?* A Christian (child or adult) should only be baptized once, since it signifies our entering into union with Christ. To redo it presents the picture of falling from grace. The reason many re-baptisms take place (wrongly, I believe) is because baptism is viewed as meaningful only if the one baptized has a certain *prior experience* (i.e., baptism is a testimony to my conversion experience). I have argued (above) this is a misunderstanding of baptism. So if a baptized child has a later dramatic conversion, the parents, the pastor, and the person should rejoice that the claim placed upon them at baptism has yielded fruit by the grace of God.
- *Do you believe infant baptism saves the child?* Baptism “saves” a person in a similar sense as a wedding *marries* a person. It is the start of the union, it is the official declaration, but does not automatically provide all the blessings of a married life. Baptism is the official start of Christian identity, but it is in living out one’s baptismal identity, that all the blessings of salvation are received.
- *Shouldn’t baptism be done by immersion?* If we compare baptism and communion, whether the Lord’s Supper is actually a “supper” (*deipnon*, an evening meal) is not essential to its purpose, meaning, or sacramental quality. In the same way, the *mode* of baptism, whether by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling, is less important than its meaning and recipients. I provided many references to kinds of baptisms in the study above and they vary in their “mode.” The Reformed view does not *require* a particular mode as *necessary* for a valid baptism. However, a strong case can be made that most Biblical baptisms were like an “anointing” from above, e.g., in the Tabernacle sprinklings (*baptismois* in Heb. 9:11, see verses 9:13, 19, 22). The baptism of the Spirit is spoken of as the Holy Spirit “*poured* out upon the Gentiles” (Acts 10:45-47). As discussed earlier, baptism is also a “crossing” into (e.g., Red Sea, Jordan river, John’s baptism). The baptismal washings in Scripture are many and varied, so don’t worry about how water is applied.
- *If you believe in infant baptism, do you have to believe in infant communion?* I have written on this elsewhere.¹⁵ The earliest historical sources on infant baptism, like Cyprian (c. 200-258) and

later Augustine (354-430), make clear infant baptism and infant communion were normative in their day. Still, this is a separate question and depends upon other principles such as: (a) whether infants or young children partook of Passover and other Old Testament sacrificial meals, (b) if there were any qualifications for participation, such as asking and understanding (Ex. 12:26), and (c) whether in the new covenant there are any additional qualifications.¹⁶ B. B. Warfield said, "The ordinances of the Church belong to the members of it; but each in its own appointed time. The initiatory ordinance belongs to the members on becoming members, other ordinances become their right as the appointed seasons for enjoying them roll around."¹⁷

Endnotes

- 1 I will contrast the "Baptist" position (believer's, professor's, or confessor's baptism) with the "paedobaptist" or infant baptism position (*paidion* in Greek means "child" or "infant").
- 2 Roman Catholicism places baptism in a system of sacramental merit. See the Council of Trent, 5th Session, decrees 4-5, from the year 1546.
- 3 All Scripture citations will be from the New American Standard Bible (1977), unless otherwise noted. All of the *italicized* print in Bible texts represents points I am seeking to emphasize.
- 4 It is logically possible Paul baptized only Crispus and Gaius, then someone else baptized the households. However, it seems unlikely Paul would baptize Crispus only to turn the proceedings over to someone else. *Even more, 1 Corinthians 1:16 implies that Paul ordinarily baptized households, i.e., the reference to the pronoun, "other" (*allos*) is "household." "Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other [*allos*, referring to household]."
- 5 David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham: A Reformed Baptist View of Baptism, the Covenant, and Children* (Sussex, UK: Carey, 1973), 34, 35.
- 6 Fred Malone, *A String of Pearls Unstrung: A Theological Journey Into Believers' Baptism* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 1998), 7.
- 7 "Nations" (*ethna*) is in the accusative case (direct object). In this verse, the imperative (mood) verb, "disciple" (*mathateuo*), is a *transitive* verb, since it has an object. "Them" is masculine and "nations" is neuter. This usage is called the *ad sensum* use (according to the general sense). See for example, Matt. 25:32, "all the nations (*ethna*, neut.) will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them (*autos*, masc.) from one another."
- 8 Colin Brown, "What Was John the Baptist Doing?," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 (1997): 37-50. Available here: .
- 9 There may be a hint to this crossing when John and his disciples, "looked at Jesus as *He walked*" (John 1:36). This is an odd statement in the context of being a baptism spectator. But, if the baptism setting was a symbolic exodus, then Jesus may have been walking with a crowd of those identifying with this new exodus.

- 10 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4:16:9, Trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1331.
- 11 The number of rededication baptisms was around 60,000, according to the representative sample, "The Troubling Waters of Baptism," Thomas Ascol, *Founders Journal*, available at .
- 12 Other objections and critical reviews of anti-paedobaptist books may be found in my, *Covenantal Infant Baptism: An Outlined Defense*, available at www.paedobaptism.com.
- 13 The *Larger Catechism 166*, for example says, "Unto whom is baptism to be administered? A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descended from parents, either both or but one of them professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are, in that respect, within the covenant, and to be baptized."
- 14 "The Polemics of Infant Baptism" in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. IX (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991 [1927]), 390.
- 15 See my, *The Case for Covenant Communion* (ed.) (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2006). Available in digital form at www.WordMp3.com.
- 16 For a good discussion on this from the non-paedocommunion point of view, see the response to this objection in John Murray's *Christian Baptism* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 73-76.
- 17 *The Polemics of Infant Baptism* in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. IX (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991 [1927]), 408.