

# Infant Baptism

by Moisés Pinedo

Rooted in the idea that infants bear Adam's sin ("original sin") is the perceived need to baptize babies to free them from this "sinful nature" and "from the power of darkness" (*Catechism...*, 1994, 1250). It has also been declared that

[t]he sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant Baptism. The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth (1250).

Some well-meaning people who disagree with infant baptism have opposed it strictly because they see it as an imposition of one's will on someone who is incapable of making his or her own decisions. While making one's own choices is critical in regard to salvation, the argument against imposing the wishes of others on someone else should not be the determining factor in whether or not infant baptism is practiced. The only determinant should be whether God **authorizes** or **requires** it. After all, if God has commanded us to baptize babies, we should obey His command, even if the world calls it an imposition. But, if there is no biblical reason to follow this practice, we should not impose something purposeless on our children. With this understanding, the following parallel has been drawn:

**If my newborn son is born with an illness, should I deny him medicine** arguing that he is not consciously receiving it? Would I say that it would be better to wait until he has sufficient ability to reason? (Domínguez, 2006, emp. added).

Of course, infant baptism might be a necessity **if** original sin were passed down through the generations. However, children do not inherit the sins of their parents, so, ultimately, no one can inherit the sin of Adam (cf. Exodus 32:32-33; Deuteronomy 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chronicles 25:4; Jeremiah 31:30; Ezekiel 18:20; Pinedo, 2009). Therefore, babies and little children do not have "sickly souls," nor do they need baptism for spiritual healing. No one would give penicillin to a baby who is not sick and does not need it. No one would take his newborn son to the hospital so that he could undergo surgery to remove a nonexistent tumor. Similarly, no one should subject a baby to a baptism that is designed to forgive sins which he or she **cannot** commit (cf. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

The Bible never gives a command, provides an example, or implies that infant baptism should be administered. There is not a single Bible verse that mentions it. Therefore, some Catholics have tried to find biblical support for infant baptism by arguing from the silence of Scripture. Using Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15, where Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach and baptize, it has been suggested that the disciples would "consequently go forward in the practice of infant baptism, unless restrained and prohibited by a special interdict" (Hibbard, 1843, p. 95). This argument is fallacious because it suggests that where the Bible does not record a prohibition, everything is acceptable. The Bible does not prohibit "pet baptism." So, should we proceed to "baptize" them?

Others have suggested that the word "creature" in Mark 16:15 may include babies. However, this word is limited by the context in which it appears. The Greek word for "creation" (*ktisis*) is used to designate the act of creation or the creative actions in progress. It also refers to the product of creation (see Vine, 1966, 1:254,255). In its general usage, this word includes not only babies, but also the totality of what was created, i.e., animals and plants, as well as everything inanimate. Fortunately, the context helps us to understand that baptism should be performed on "every creature" who is able to be taught the Gospel and believe it (Mark 16:15-16). This automatically excludes animals, plants, and inanimate things—as well as babies and little children who cannot yet understand or believe the Gospel.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus told the apostles to "[g]o therefore and make **disciples** of all nations" (emp. added). A disciple is a person who learns at the feet of another. This certainly cannot include infants. In verse 20, Jesus told His apostles to teach the new disciples to "observe all things" that He commanded. The disciples were not only to learn, but also to observe or practice what they had learned. The truth is obvious: the Gospel was preached to, heard, and believed by people who were able to understand, believe, and obey.

But, what about the biblical accounts of entire families being baptized? Is it possible that babies were members of those families, and that they were also baptized? The Catholic *Catechism* explores this "possibility" and states:

There is explicit testimony to this practice from the second century on, and **it is quite possible** that, from the beginning of the apostolic preaching, when whole "households" received baptism, infants may also have been baptized (1994, 1252, emp. added).

Some Catholic leaders have gone even further. In his book, *The Faith of our Fathers*, Archbishop James C. Gibbons declared:

The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St. Paul, although containing only a fragmentary account of the ministry of the Apostles, **plainly insinuate that the Apostles baptized children** as well as grown persons. We are told, for instance, that Lydia “was baptized, and her household,” by St. Paul; and that the jailer “was baptized, and all his family.” The same Apostle baptized also “the household of Stephanas” (1891, p. 308, emp. added).

Although at first glance this argument may seem valid, it is actually an assumption lacking biblical support. First, it is hasty to conclude that when the Bible writers referred to the “household” of someone, they always included every member of the family. Second, there is no biblical evidence that those households included babies or young children. Since there is no way to prove that there were babies in the households in question, nor that the word “household” necessarily included babies, these passages do not endorse infant baptism.

In fact, the context of these passages in Acts speaks loudly against infant baptism. Concerning the Philippian jailer, Luke tells us exactly which members of “all his family” (Acts 16:33) were baptized. They were those who were taught the Word by Paul and Silas (16:32), and those who rejoiced with the jailer, having “believed in God” (16:34). Can babies be taught the Word and believe in God, understand the sacrifice of His Son, and immediately act upon faith? Can they rejoice as a result of their obedient faith? Concerning Lydia, Luke tells us that “the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14). Those who were baptized had hearts and minds that were open to the Word. Do babies have open hearts and discerning minds? The New Testament clearly teaches that baptism was performed on people who were taught the Word, who had open hearts, who carefully listened to and obeyed the Word, and who rejoiced because they made the conscious decision to follow Christ.

Using Colossians 2:11-12, another attempt to defend infant baptism has been based on the idea that baptism “replaces” circumcision. According to this argument, since “circumcision was done to infants,” then infant baptism is a biblical practice (“Infant Baptism,” n.d.). Although Paul used circumcision to illustrate the time when people “put off” sin and become Christians (in baptism—Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27), he never taught, promoted, or commanded infant baptism (cf. Lyons, 2003). Consider these points: (1) Paul made a comparison between circumcision and baptism, **not** infant baptism. The comparison was between the “cutting off” (of the flesh) in circumcision and the spiritual “cutting off” (of sin) which occurs at baptism. (2) Circumcision was commanded only for the descendants of Abraham, and proselytes (Genesis 17:12-13; Exodus 12:48), but baptism is for all nations (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). (3) Circumcision was performed only on **male** babies (Genesis 17:10), but baptism is for men and women (Galatians 3:28; Acts 8:12). (4) Circumcision was performed on the male infant’s **eighth day** (Genesis 17:12), but baptism is to be performed when one believes and repents (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). (5) Many people were circumcised before becoming Christians (Philippians 3:5), and others were circumcised afterward even though it was optional (Acts 16:3; cf. 15:1-29). If baptism **replaced** circumcision, how could they both be performed at the same time, among the same people, and under the same covenant (Brents, 1874, pp. 345-347)? (6) Paul declared that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision is worth anything, nor uncircumcision (Galatians 5:6). Colossians 2:11-12 does not justify nor advocate infant baptism.

If the Bible does not support infant baptism, when and how did this practice begin? Catholics acknowledge that “[i]n the course of the fourth century it became quite common for people to be born into Christian families, and by the next century, in the whole Mediterranean world, this was the common pattern. This means that the process of baptism changed considerably. Infant baptism became the general pattern” (Orlandis, 1993, p. 35; cf. Koch, 1997, p. 116). In A.D. 418, the Council of Carthage officially accepted this practice and enacted a condemnation for those who opposed it (see “Canons,” n.d., 2). This is one more piece of evidence that infant baptism is not commanded by God, but rather is a man-made tradition.

Finally, according to *Catholicism*, what happens to the babies who do not receive baptism soon after they are born? According to the Catholic Catechism, babies are born with sin, and should be baptized so they may be “freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God” (1994, 1250). In other words, little babies are condemned in spiritual darkness and separated from any spiritual blessing. The provincial Council of Cologne even declared that “[f]aith teaches us that infants...are excluded from the kingdom of heaven if they die [unbaptized]” (quoted in “The Existence of Limbo...,” 2006, bracketed item in orig.) Nevertheless, it is also declared that

[a]s regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus’ tenderness toward children which caused him to say: “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them,” allow us to hope that **there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism** (*Catechism...*, 1994, 1261, emp. added).

On one hand, Catholicism asserts that little children, without baptism, are in spiritual bondage, while, on the other hand, it wants us to believe that “there is a way of salvation for those children who died without baptism.” Does this mean that little children are contaminated with original sin at birth but are liberated from this sin at death? If

there is a "way of salvation for those children who died without baptism," why should Catholics baptize their babies at all?

Such incongruity can only be the result of a doctrine that lacks biblical authority. Infants are gifts from God, pure and unblemished by the world (Psalm 127:3). As they grow, precious little ones can learn what sin is, and what its consequences are. Hopefully, as accountable persons they will realize their need for forgiveness from God, and, ultimately, they will choose between believing and being baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16), and disobeying and living eternally separated from God (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

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