

For You and For Your Children: A Biblical Case for Infant Baptism

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Video Transcript:

For many in the church today, Infant Baptism seems like either a strange practice that simply comes as a hangover from Roman Catholicism, or worse, an unbiblical twisting of what baptism is. So, there's lots of confusion around why so many evangelical, protestant, Bible believing churches still baptise believers and their children.

Now, throughout history, the majority of the church has believed in infant baptism, but obviously that in itself does not make it a valid practice. In order for it to be valid, there needs to be nothing less than a Biblical case requiring it. If it's found to be anything less than biblical, then let it be dropped and forgotten. But, as much as we might like, this is not an issue that we can solve by just pulling out a verse that either affirms or denies it. Baptism is a tricky issue that needs some depth to unpack. So, let's wade in and explore Infant Baptism.

As counterintuitive as it may seem, the best way to find clarity when it comes to arguments about baptism is to not talk much about baptism. Instead, we need to go to the root of the issue, which is our covenant theology - this is where the disagreement really lies. And there's a few areas in covenant theology that need to be explored, and as we do the relevance to baptism becomes obvious. But first let's start at the beginning: What is a covenant?

In one of the most respected books on the topic, called *The Christ of the Covenants* by O. Palmer Robertson, he says this "Asking for a definition of Covenant is like asking for a definition of Mother. A mother may be defined as the person who brought you into the world, and this is formally correct, but who would be satisfied with such a definition?" And he's right, it's hard to define because there's so much to them. But, to give a very basic definition, a covenant is a life and death agreement made by God with people. And there are a number of different covenants throughout the Bible,

with each of them containing a different element and a different promise. And they come with one or many of their own covenant signs - physical symbols from God to give His people a visual representation of His covenant promises. So, Noah is given the Rainbow, Moses is given the Passover and the Ark of the Covenant, and so on. The last covenant is the New Covenant which Jesus established by His death, resurrection, and ascension, and this is what we Christians live under. So we see plenty of times in the New Testament where Paul contrasts the Old Covenant with the New Covenant.

But here's the thing, the New Covenant isn't so new that's it's a stand-alone thing. Actually, if you open up the New Covenant you find it's got all the elements of the previous covenants in it in a fulfilled form. In fact, in Jeremiah chapters 31-33 where God promises the New Covenant, he does so by referencing every other covenant previously made. This is because none of these covenants are stand-alone, they are all part of a one covenant of grace- one covenant which God has designed to be the means of saving His people. And so, as these covenants are added they don't cancel each other out but expand the one covenant of grace. And so, In the New Covenant we don't start from scratch, the Bible is one story. And even though the one covenant of grace was expressed differently before and after Jesus, we should still assume continuity between the Old and New Testament- except for where Jesus makes discontinuity necessary.

But how does this relate to baptism? Well there's two questions we need to ask: who are God's covenant people? and what is the covenant sign given to them?

Who Are God's Covenant People?

In Romans 9, Paul describes God's people like this "*Not all Israel are Israel.*" And what he means by this is that within God's covenant there is a mixed community of believers and unbelievers. There are people who really do have faith in their Covenant Lord and some who merely claim to. Nonetheless, they are still viewed as God's people. So when we look back at the Old Testament, we see that in the Noahic covenant it wasn't just Noah that was saved through the ark but his children too. And again, in God's covenant with Abraham his children are included in the promises, and then the whole people of Israel are members of the Mosaic covenant. So, through all covenant history God's people have been a mixed community of believers and unbelievers.

Yet, at the same time, it's true for all of these that the heart of the covenant is faith in Christ. You weren't fully participating as a covenant member unless you were a

believer, faith was the expectation. Regardless, people who did not believe were still visibly part of the people of God, even if they weren't saved. Because, here's the thing- Covenant member does not necessarily mean saved person. But because being in the covenant brings the expectation of faith, so unfaithful people were judged as covenant breakers.

So, does this change in the new covenant? Well there certainly is a change. God declares in Jeremiah 31 that faith and obedience really would be a defining feature, and that he would deal with the lack of faith that plagued the old covenant. But this doesn't mean that the Covenant of grace is now only made up of believers. In fact children of believers are specifically included in the new covenant promise (Jer 32:39). As well as this, the New Testament says that children of believing parents are not unclean but holy (1 Cor 7:14) – this is covenantal language. Obviously the Bible is not saying that Christians give birth to born-again babies, faith alone is what saves us. Covenant membership is not the same thing as having salvation. But it does bring with it an expectation of growing into faith and relationship with Christ. No Christian parent treats their child like a pagan, we rightly use phrases like 'we are a Christian family' because we don't treat our children as peripheral to the family unit.

On the other side of the same coin, the New Testament still talks about people who are part of the covenant and of God's people falling away. These people haven't lost their salvation, because they never had it, but they have broken the covenant. Now we either allow this to contradict the teaching of the rest of the New Testament (that you cannot lose your salvation), or we recognise that not everyone IN the covenant is OF the covenant. There are people in our churches who visibly profess faith yet really may fall away, who we nonetheless consider part of the church. And there are plenty of analogies in the New Testament to describe this reality: like a field with both wheat and weeds growing in it (Matt 13:24-30), like a net with both good and bad fish caught in it (Matt 13:47-50), and like an olive tree with unfruitful branches on it that will eventually be cut off (Rom 11:17-24). Even though they may not be joined to God in an eternal sense, for now they are part of God's people (Rom 11:22). And so, there is continuity between the Old and New Covenant in that believers and their children are included in the covenant community.

What Is Their Covenant Sign?

So having looked at God's covenant people, now let's look at the covenant sign. In the Old Covenant the main sign given was circumcision, given to every infant male in

the covenant community. But what did the sign actually mean? What did it communicate to God's people about his covenant promises? Let's look at a few key texts to understand it.

In Deuteronomy 10 we first see a phrase that will appear lots of times throughout the Old Testament: "*circumcise your heart and no longer be stubborn*" (Deut 10:16). Now these people had already been physically circumcised but that wasn't it. What's being communicated here is that your physical circumcision is a symbol that communicates the need for repentance- cutting off the sinful flesh and following after God. It was a visual way to communicate that living as God's people means living a life of repentance- of turning away from sin towards God. And so later on in Deuteronomy we read this, "*the Lord will circumcise your heart...so that you will love him*" (Deut 30:6). This is showing that physical circumcision represents and brings with it an expectation of repentance and faith in God.

Circumcision is therefore not just a physical sign. In Romans 2 Paul says circumcision is not outward and physical, it's a matter of the heart, by the Spirit. And then in Chapter 4 he calls circumcision a "*seal of the righteousness Abraham had by faith.*" And therefore, it gives everyone who is circumcised after Abraham an obligation to follow in the footsteps of faith, to live out their circumcision (Rom 4:12).

So how does this relate to baptism? Baptism equally symbolises repentance, the washing away of our sinful nature. In Romans 6 We read that baptism too gives an obligation to the ones who receive it to walk in newness of life- putting to death our sinful nature. Baptism is a sign of repentance just as circumcision was. This is because baptism is the sign of the New Covenant that has replaced circumcision. Baptism is the new visual demonstration of the covenant promises. One looked forward to the cross, the other looks back to the cross. And that's exactly how Paul understands it in Colossians 2. He says this, '*in him you were circumcised*' (that is, your old nature was cut off), '*by the circumcision of Christ*', (that is his crucifixion) '*when he was cut off from the land of the living.*' And when did this happen? '*When you were buried with him in baptism*' (Col 2:11-12).

So the Colossians didn't need to be circumcised, because they already were when they were baptised. Before the cross the sign communicated that bloodshed was needed, now the sign communicates that blood has already been shed. Baptism and circumcision are, if you like, two different coats that hang on the same hook (ie- repentance/union with Christ). They are the same in everything, except outward ceremony. And this is why we see that when Peter preaches in Acts 2 and tells his

hearers to *'repent and be baptized'* he alludes to when circumcision was given to Abraham and His sons. He charges them to Repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins, and then says *'the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off'* (Acts 2:38-39), everyone whom God calls to himself. When we look back at Genesis 17 we see the same thing said about circumcision. God says *'...this is my covenant between me and you, and your descendants after you. Every male throughout your generations shall be circumcised, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring'* (Gen 17:10-12). So Peter, by alluding to this passage, is linking circumcision with baptism.

Finally, the New Covenant brings with it a widening of God's blessings. It has better promises, its signs exhibit more grace, and now not just Jewish males, but also women and Gentiles receive the sign. So it seems odd that as the covenant widens, its sign is now denied to one of the old covenant's biggest recipients- infants. It is far more fitting to see that just as circumcision was given to even the infants in the Old Covenant community, so too should it's New Covenant equivalent – baptism. So, while the argument is normally framed *"Where does it say in the New Testament to baptise infants?"*, we would say *"Where are we told to stop giving our children the covenant sign?"*

Infant baptism is not a one-verse-and-solved issue, it requires a much more full orbbed understanding of God's covenant and his people, and this has by no means been an exhaustive look at the topic. There's also many good arguments from Baptist theologians against it which I haven't had time to explore here. But this is a topic really worth exploring further, and wherever you end up landing, it's important to see that for evangelical Infant Baptists this is not a matter of tradition, we really believe it to be the biblical view. So, let us be encouraged and motivated to raise godly disciples by the promise that God has made to us, *'I will be God to you and to your children'*.

Questions and Answers on Baptism

Taken from Jason Helopoulos' book *Covenantal Baptism* (pp. 105-140). P&R Publishing.

Circumcision was administered only to male children in Israel—so, if baptism is circumcision's New Testament counterpart, why are both male and female children baptized? Isn't this a strike against the argument for continuity? All branches of the Christian church recognize that there is both continuity and discontinuity between the old covenant and the new covenant. The very fact that we baptize instead of circumcise is an example of this discontinuity. However, the continuity of the covenant of grace, as we discussed in chapter 1, proves dominant. It is not surprising that girls are now included in the receiving of the covenant sign. The new covenant establishes a more inclusive, free, and gracious era, and we should expect to see its sacrament of initiation become more inclusive, not less. This, in fact, remains one of the greatest issues with the baptistic view. Its doctrine of church membership and baptism presents the new covenant era as actually being more restrictive than the old covenant era.

Wasn't circumcision an identification of an individual's citizenship rather than of his belonging to the "church"? The Jewish people held the unique position of being both the covenant people of God as well as a nation—they existed as both a church and a state. We often think of these two realms as being separated. However, Israel was a theocracy; for it, the separation between church and state did not exist. A child who was born into the covenant community was recognized as a member of both the state and the church. As we noted in chapter 1, God gave the gift of circumcision to be a sacrament of the covenant of grace. It surely identified those who belonged to the nation, but it was commanded because of the significance of its function as a spiritual mark of those who belonged to the covenant people of God (i.e., the church).

Are children of believers automatically saved? No. Neither birth nor baptism secures salvation for our children, any more than Ishmael's birth and circumcision secured salvation for him. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Covenant children must possess a personal faith in Christ Jesus—one that involves knowledge, assent, and trust—in order to be saved. Therefore, we should continually point them to Christ by teaching them the Scriptures, reminding them of their baptism, praying with and for them, modeling faith in Christ before them, and participating with them in the corporate worship of the church. They themselves must believe—and if, in fact, they continue in unbelief, they will reap the sanctions that are attached to covenant unfaithfulness. Isaac received the blessing, while Ishmael received the condemnation. God's normative way of working, though, is to bring covenant children to saving faith in Christ.

Wouldn't it be consistent to practice paedocommunion along with infant baptism? No. While God commanded that children receive the sign of circumcision, he gave no command to include children in the Passover meal. The Old Testament contains commands for them to be included in the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths, but no such command exists regarding the Passover. In fact, we might contend that a passage like Luke 2:42, in which we see Jesus going to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast at the age of twelve, implies that younger children were excluded from participating. Even more importantly, Paul warns us against taking the Lord's Table without self-examination. A participant must be able to "discern the body," lest he or she eat or drink judgment upon himself or herself (see 1 Cor. 11:27–32). Neither children nor adults should take communion until they have professed faith and been admitted to the Table by elders of the church. And small children cannot discern the difference between the Lord's Table and snack time. They cannot, and will not, understand that communion is a remembrance of Christ's death. They cannot understand that the bread represents Christ's body, nor will they comprehend their obligation to others in the church body. They will not be able to examine themselves. And those who come to the Table unworthily, irreverently, or ignorantly defame what it signifies. Paul talks about people who became sick and even fell asleep—in other words,

died—as a result of taking the Table in such a manner (see 1 Cor. 11:30). When we make this sacrament something it isn't by giving it to our children before they make a profession of faith, we lead them into the way of not grace but judgment.

Is the baptism that John administered the same as the one that we practice? The baptism that John the Baptist administered to individuals differs significantly from the baptism that Jesus commands his disciples to observe. Luke makes a sharp distinction between them in Acts 18:25, as does Paul in Acts 19:3–5. John's baptism prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah. Therefore, its meaning “was rooted and grounded in the Old Testament,” as the late Reformed teacher R.C. Sproul wrote. It served as a baptism of repentance and provided a transition from the old to the new in anticipation of the Messiah to come.

Why was Jesus baptized, then? Jesus, as the perfect man, had no need for a baptism of repentance. However, in order to identify with his people and “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15), he willingly underwent the waters of baptism. By speaking that phrase, Jesus was alluding to Isaiah 53—the famous text on the Suffering Servant, which says, “by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities” (v. 11). Jesus, our Lord, is the Suffering Servant who came to identify with his people and to bear our iniquities so that we might be counted righteous. Picture the long line of people who are being baptized by John. Jesus, the Christ, approaches them. He has every right to condemn them all. But instead he enters the line and says, “Let me be baptized as they are baptized and be counted among them.” The water baptism that Jesus received from John pointed forward to the baptism in blood that he would experience upon the cross for his people. “In his death and resurrection the core significance of both his circumcision and his baptism, and therefore of Abraham's circumcision and of our baptism, meet.” Circumcision and baptism both point to the atoning death he died upon the cross for sinners.

Does baptism cause regeneration? Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that Christ sent him to preach the gospel, not to baptize. If baptism were the primary converting means of grace, then Paul would have been sent to baptize—or at least to preach the gospel and baptize together. Yet he states that God sent him to preach the gospel only. The Word and the sacraments, while they work together, must also be differentiated. The sacraments, including baptism, primarily serve to strengthen faith, whereas God uses the Word for that purpose as well as for regeneration and implanting faith in the first place. Doesn't baptizing children imply that you think they are, or will be, regenerate? No. We neither presume nor infer regeneration by baptism.

Could an infant child be regenerated? Yes—the Spirit blows where he wills (see John 3:8), and in Luke 1:41 John the Baptist shows signs of regeneration while he is in his mother's womb! God wills and works as he pleases—but we are not making any assertion about God's regenerating work in a child whom we baptize. The baptism of a covenant child recognizes that child's entrance into the visible church, but it makes no statement regarding his or her entrance into the invisible church.

Does infant baptism declare that you know what is happening in the heart of a child who is baptized? None of us know a person's heart, and we do not presume to know the baptized child's heart. Yet baptism does involve some level of presumption. As B. B. Warfield, a great nineteenth-century Reformed scholar, stated, “All baptism is inevitably administered on the basis not of knowledge but of presumption. And if we must baptize on presumption, the whole principle is yielded; and it would seem that we must baptize all whom we may fairly presume to be members of Christ's body.” The baptistic view presumes upon the confession of an adult—that his or her confession is real and true. Covenantal baptism presumes not upon an individual's promise but on God's covenantal promises. As Warfield goes

on to say, “Assuredly a human profession is no more solid basis to build upon than a Divine promise. So soon, therefore, as it is fairly apprehended that we baptize on presumption and not on knowledge, it is inevitable that we shall baptize all those for whom we may, on any grounds, fairly cherish a good presumption that they belong to God’s people—and this surely includes the infant children of believers.”

Does baptizing our covenant children speak to our expectations or hope for them? Absolutely. The seventeenth-century Dutch theologian Johannes Cocceius’ commentary on question 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism stated that baptism “signifies not merely that there is an external sanctity arising from their not being conceived and born like heathen children . . . but also that there is good reason to hope that they may really be sanctified from their tender years so that when they reach the years of understanding, they will through God’s blessing upon the instructions of their parents discern and love the truth.” By hearing the Word and being prayed for, these covenant children are continually being put in the way of God’s grace, and so we expect and hope that they will believe. Our covenant children are truly privileged, among all the children in the world, and so we have great hope for them.

If baptism doesn’t save, is there any comfort for Christian parents in the baptism of an infant who later dies? Although baptism doesn’t save, its waters signify the promises of our covenant-keeping God—and his covenantal promises are for both us and our children. The kindness and graciousness that we see in our heavenly Father should give us confidence that our children who die in infancy are indeed with him. As Cocceius stated, “if they should die in infancy, then, as holy persons and members of Christ, they shall be saved. All this we believe on the ground of the promise given to Abraham, and through him to all believers, that Jehovah would be the God—that is, the sanctifier and the justifier—not of him only but also of his seed.” David’s story from 2 Samuel 12:15–23 reinforces the fact that we can have this confidence. The sin that David commits with Bathsheba incurs judgment from the Lord. Part of this judgment involves the sickness and eventual death of the infant child who is born to David from this illicit union. David spends seven days fasting and pleading with God for the life of his child. When his servants inform him, on the seventh day, that his child has died, he arises, washes, anoints himself, changes clothes, and goes to the house of the Lord to worship. His servants ask why he fasted and wept while the child was sick but then worshiped when he died. David’s response is “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, ‘Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” David believes that he “shall go to” his child. If he simply means that he will die and be buried the way that his son has died and been buried, then there is no reason for joy or comfort. Rather, he arises in peace with the knowledge that he will be reunited with his son in glory. The baptism of a child, though it doesn’t save, points to promises God has made that should comfort a parent’s soul by bringing confidence and hope.

Are the sacraments necessary for salvation? No; they are not absolutely necessary for salvation—but God commands them, and so we are obliged to participate in them (even though they are more than an obligation; they are gifts God has given to us). If we neglect the sacraments, we experience spiritual deprivation—doing so has effects, just as persistently disobeying God in any respect will have effects on the spiritual life. We know, however, that the sacraments are not necessary for salvation. Berkhof, a Reformed systematic theologian, makes these points:

- From the free spiritual character of the gospel dispensation, in which God does not bind His grace to the use of certain external forms (Luke 18:14; John 4:21–23).
- From the fact that Scripture mentions only faith as the instrumental condition of salvation (John 3:36; 5:24; 6:29; Acts 16:31).
- From the fact that the sacraments do not originate faith but presuppose it, and are administered where faith is assumed (Acts 2:41; 16:14, 15, 30, 33; 1 Cor. 11:23–32)

- From the fact that many were actually saved without the use of the sacraments. Think of the believers before the time of Abraham and of the penitent thief on the cross.

If baptism itself does not save and isn't a requirement for salvation, why do Scripture passages such as Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; and 1 Peter 3:21 seem to say that it does and is? Verses such as these employ what theologians call sacramental language—language in which a sign can stand for the thing it is signifying. Genesis 17:10; Acts 22:16; and 1 Corinthians 5:7 all contain additional examples of this. In Genesis 17:10, God describes his covenant in terms of circumcision. In Acts 22:16, baptism is equated with the washing away of sins. And 1 Corinthians 5:7 calls Christ the Passover Lamb. Such a close relationship can exist between a sign and the thing it is signifying that, at times, the Scriptures will use them interchangeably.

My covenant children have not believed. Does this mean that I have failed? Or that the covenant promises of God have failed? Neither. Our adversary loves to sow the seeds of guilt and doubt—those are two of his greatest weapons. I have no doubt that you were not a perfect parent; no parents are. Nor did you model the faith perfectly; no parent has. But if you are a Christian parent, I'm confident that you pointed your children to Christ and taught them about him. So now you must rest upon his promises—and God provides great rest for Christian parents. He does not turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to his children—and you are his child. He is a covenant-keeping God, and we can pray for our children with confidence, because he works according to his covenant promises. So pray the promises of God for your children. They have heard the Word, their baptism calls out to them, “Believe, believe, believe,” and they have been pointed to the faith by the example you have set through the years. Salvation is all of God and wholly his work, and baptism is a good reminder of this—one that we often need. So pray with confidence that he will make your children his children.

The only believers whom we see receiving baptism in the New Testament are adults. Doesn't it seem odd that, if infant baptism is allowable, none of the believers we see in the Gospels and in Acts had received covenantal baptism? We should expect to see adult baptisms in the Gospels—in fact, it would have been impossible for a covenantal baptism to have taken place during that time. Why? Because no individuals could have been born into a Christian home during the time of the Gospels. And we should expect to see the same thing in the book of Acts. We are witnessing the first generation of Christians within the Gospels and Acts, so of course these first converts received baptism upon making a profession of faith. As Geoffrey Bromily points out, “The first baptisms in the New Testament are parallel to the first circumcisions in the Old Testament.” Furthermore, in the case of Lydia, her entire household is baptized when she comes to saving faith (see Acts 16:15). We cannot assert that children were definitely included in that instance of baptism; but Luke goes out of his way to make it clear that upon her profession of faith, her entire household was baptized. Fesko helpfully speaks to this issue when he says, “Baptists contend that a profession of faith is the administrative ground for baptism; only those who make a profession of faith receive the rite. They base this argument on what they see in the New Testament narratives that recount the baptisms of converts to the Christian faith. However, this argument rests on only half of the canon and fails once again to account for the doctrine of the covenant.” Should covenant children, who have always been considered as being among the people of God, continue to receive the sacrament of initiation into his covenant people—or did something change regarding the status of these children as a result of the move from the old covenant to the new covenant? That is the central question for us to ask as we consider the entire Scriptures.

In Acts 2:38, when Peter is preaching during Pentecost, he commands his listeners, “Repent and be baptized.” Infants cannot repent—so how can they be baptized? The word “and” in this verse functions as a coordinating conjunction, not a causal conjunction. That is to say, the “repent[ing]” does not cause the “be[ing]

baptized.” Neither does the word indicate a logical order for these commands—as if a person who has first repented should then be baptized. Rather, these are two equally important commands. Note, as well, that the conjunction “for” at the beginning of the following verse links it with this one—verse 38 cannot be understood apart from verse 39. The fact that “the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” provides the grounds for the commands to “repent” and “be baptized” that we see in verse 38. It is those who receive God’s promises who are to be baptized—and in verse 39 Peter includes covenant children within that number.

It has been stated that baptism is a sign and a seal of the saving work Christ has done to fulfill the covenant of grace. Since it is a seal, shouldn’t a person receive baptism after already having faith? The promises that baptism represents, signifies, and seals are not tied to the moment when baptism is administered. Upon receiving the sacrament in infancy or childhood, an individual may see these promises realized in his or her life at eight days old, eight years old, or eighty-eight years old. Furthermore, as chapter 1 discussed, baptism serves primarily as a seal not of a person’s subjective faith but of God’s faithfulness. What it principally seals is God’s promises, not our own.

If baptism means “to immerse,” isn’t that an argument against baptizing infants? The Eastern Orthodox Church has historically baptized infants by immersion. In fact, historical records testify that they were baptizing infants by a triple immersion as early as the eighth century. Therefore, we want to be careful about making the assertion that any particular mode of baptism (e.g., immersion) rules out any particular subjects of the baptism (e.g., infants).

Does the word for baptism in the New Testament always mean “to immerse”? The word that the New Testament uses for baptism—baptizo, in its various forms—can mean “to immerse,” but that isn’t necessarily how it should always be defined. If indeed baptism requires that immersion be performed, then we would expect the word that the Bible uses for baptism to always mean to immerse—and yet that is far from the case. It is used various ways in the New Testament, and in writings outside the New Testament as well. For example, the author of Hebrews mentions the various “washings” (baptismois) that were performed in the Old Testament (Heb. 9:10). These washings included “the sprinkling of defiled persons” (v. 13) and the account of when Moses “took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people” (v. 19). The chapter goes on to detail one more of these “washings”: the time when blood was “sprinkled [on] both the tent and all the vessels used in worship” (v. 21). The writer of Hebrews considers these to be examples of the same kind of “washings” that the word for baptism indicates—and they are all instances of something being sprinkled. In Mark 7, Jesus’s disciples are criticized for not washing their hands before they eat. We are informed in verse 3 that the Pharisees and the Jews did not eat unless they would “baptisontai.” In verse 4, Mark relays other rules that the Pharisees observed, including the “washings” (baptismous) of dining couches. And the Pharisees here are clearly not immersing themselves or their dining couches. In 1 Corinthians 10:2, Paul, after referencing the crossing of the Red Sea, says that “all were baptized [ebaptisanto] into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” The point of this passage is consecration. No one would contend that the Israelites were “immersed” in the sea—the Egyptians were! The Israelites were, at best, sprinkled by it. Luke 11:38 will suffice as our final example of how this word is used. Luke comments that a Pharisee “was astonished to see that [Jesus] did not first wash before dinner.” The word that is translated “wash” here is again a form of baptizo. Clearly what astonished this Pharisee was not that Christ didn’t immerse himself before eating. There are clearly times when the writers of the New Testament use this term to refer to a mode other than immersion. Therefore, it cannot be contended that baptizo indicates that baptism must be by immersion, because the word doesn’t always mean to immerse; it contains a range of meanings. So while the argument can be made that immersion is a valid form of baptism, it is not the required form.

Is immersion allowable? Yes. Immersion serves as a fine mode of baptism. The mode of baptizing itself is not essential—though most people in the history of Reformed theology have argued that pouring or sprinkling better signifies the meaning and purpose of baptism.

Why baptize by pouring or sprinkling? If any baptism that occurs in the New Testament proves important as a precedent for pouring or sprinkling, surely it is the baptism at Pentecost described in Acts 2. This is the baptism that Joel prophesied (see Joel 2:28–29), that John pointed to (see Matt. 3:11–12), and that Christ promised would come (see Acts 1:5; 11:16)—both John and Jesus outright calling it a baptism as they did so. And what occurs during that baptism? The Spirit is poured out. Since baptism signifies that pouring out of the Spirit, a pouring or sprinkling of the water does this most accurately. Presbyterians also sprinkle because baptism signifies the fact that we have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. On the great Day of Atonement each year, the high priest would sprinkle the blood from Israel’s sin offerings onto the mercy seat (see Lev. 16:14–15). This provided atonement for the people of God—and also pointed forward to the atoning work that Christ would perform as the Lamb of God. Baptism now points back to this atoning work, and sprinkling provides a strong visual of this.

But what about the references we see in the New Testament to baptized individuals going “into” the water? Doesn’t that prove that baptism is done through immersion? The Greek preposition that we’re talking about here—eis—has a range of meanings. It surely can mean “into,” but it can also mean “to,” “toward,” “unto,” “for,” and “among.” For example, this one preposition occurs eleven times throughout Acts 8—and English Bibles translate those eleven occurrences in various ways. In the ESV we find the word translated as “to” seven times (vv. 3, 5, 20, 25, 26, 27, 40), “at” one time (v. 40), “in” twice (vv. 16, 23), and “into” (v. 38) only once. The way that both this word and baptizo are invoked indicate how, more often than not, the argument for baptism by immersion tends to employ circular reasoning. When the word for baptism is examined, we are often told that it means “to immerse” because the circumstances in which the Bible uses it make it clear that this is what is occurring. But when this circumstantial evidence is examined, and it is demonstrated that there is no proof that people are described as going “into” the water (as is argued from the use of this preposition as well), then it is maintained that this must have occurred because that is what baptizo means.

Doesn’t the case of the Ethiopian eunuch point to baptism by immersion? There is no evidence to support such a conclusion—in fact, the circumstantial evidence points in the opposite direction. The Ethiopian eunuch is said to be traveling in a “desert place” (Acts 8:26). The place the account is describing is the barren region of the Negev, south of Judea. Finding enough water there to immerse someone seems unlikely at best. When the eunuch and Philip come to water, the eunuch cries out to be baptized. It is safe to assume that Philip has explained baptism to him by this point—but from where has the eunuch drawn the conclusion that he should be baptized in the first place? The eunuch was reading from the book of Isaiah when Philip found him, and he had been reading for a period of time—long enough to wrestle with the text. In the vicinity of the passage that we know he was reading (see Acts 8:32–33), we find the line “So shall he sprinkle many nations” (Isa. 52:15). This is the only reference to water in the surrounding text from Isaiah. The fact that the text says they then went “into” and “out of” the water does not imply immersion. As John Murray says, It should be noted that Philip as well as the eunuch went down into the water and came up out of the water. If such expressions imply or prove immersion, then they mean that Philip immersed himself as well as the eunuch. . . . The expressions, “they both went down into the water” and “they came up out of the water” are satisfied by the thought that they both went down to the water, stood on the brink or stepped into the edge, and that Philip baptised the eunuch by scooping up the water and pouring it or sprinkling it on him. Could Philip have

immersed him? Yes; but the text neither demands nor proves that contention. We don't know the actual mode of baptism that Philip employed here, so this text does not support a baptistic argument.

What about the baptism Paul receives in Acts? The account of Paul's baptism also hints that immersion did not take place. He is in the house of Judas when God sends Ananias to him, and in Acts 9:17 we are told that Ananias "entered the house." After he informs Paul that God has sent him, we read, "And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened" (vv. 18–19). In both of the accounts we are given of this event—Acts 9 as well as Acts 22—the narrative moves quickly; it appears that Paul simply rises and receives baptism. The most straightforward reading of these texts implies that he does not leave the home; and it is doubtful, at the very least, that a house possessed the means for him to be immersed. Therefore, even the apostle Paul's own baptism account suggests that he was baptized via sprinkling or pouring rather than by immersion.

What about the Philippian jailer's baptism? The baptism that Paul and Silas performed on the Philippian jailer and his household occurred after the two apostles had been scourged and beaten by their captors. It would have been a difficult task for these two wearied evangelists, after surviving such a night, to have then baptized an entire family by immersion. Since the jail would not have contained sufficient water for baptism by immersion, baptizing this family between midnight and sunrise would have required the herculean task of departing the jail, winding their way down to a riverside in the dark, and there immersing an entire family. And all this after they had received a severe beating! The more likely sequence of events is that, after the Philippian jailer "brought them out" (Acts 16:30) from the "inner prison" (v. 24), he and his family received baptism in the larger portion of the jail—which also contained his house (see v. 34)—by way of sprinkling or pouring. Further evidence for this view presents itself when we consider how Paul refused to exit the jail, once the magistrates ordered him and Silas to leave, and required the magistrates to come and lead them out instead (see v. 37). Would they have left the jail in the middle of the night, without the consent of the magistrates, only for Paul to require them to come in and let him and Silas go after they did have the magistrates' consent? It would have undermined his entire position and argument if he had done so.

But wasn't the "baptism" of the Spirit a type of immersion, since Acts 2:2 says that "it filled the entire house"? This account from Acts doesn't say that the Spirit "filled the entire house." The Spirit is first mentioned after this has happened, in verses 3 and 4. The closest antecedent to the "it" that verse 2 says filled the house is the "sound" that this phrase is actually referring to: "And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting." It's only afterward that we read about the way in which the Spirit descended on the apostles: "Divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them" (Acts 2:3). No doubt this "sound" is tied to the Spirit, but it is the "sound" itself, not the Spirit, that fills the house.

In Romans 6, Paul says we were "buried" with Christ through baptism and then "raised" with him. Doesn't immersion best symbolize that process? Romans 6 is not about the mode of baptism; rather, it is addressing our identification with Christ. This passage is better understood as referring not to water baptism but rather to the fact that our identity changes as we are "immersed" in Christ. The term used for "baptism" in the New Testament world denoted some sort of change taking place. Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, used it of crowds that flooded (or baptized) Jerusalem and "wrecked the city." Jesus uses the term to indicate a transformation when he speaks of his death as a baptism in Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50. Paul employs it to denote the same thing. Two examples will suffice to demonstrate this. In 1 Corinthians 10:2, he recalls how the Israelites "were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea"—referring to the Red Sea crossing. Yet when the Israelites made that crossing, they were not immersed in water but rather joined to Moses and identified with him on the basis of not being able to return to Egypt. And Paul

uses the term again in Galatians 3:27, in which he makes the point that being baptized into Christ means being united with him. Furthermore, the perception that immersion symbolizes our dying and rising with Christ springs more from our Western practice of burial than from Christ's actual burial. He was not buried in the ground; he was buried in a cave in the side of a hill. His rising was not so much a case of "Up from the grave he arose" as "Out from the grave he arose."

Is covenantal baptism a holdover of Roman Catholicism? Covenantal baptism does not present the sacraments as possessing power in and of themselves, the way the Roman Catholic Church teaches. Roman Catholicism teaches that the sacraments, including baptism, are effective *ex opere operato* ("from the work performed")—in other words, that there is an efficacy in the doing that makes them necessary for regeneration. The Reformed tradition rejects such a view; it maintains, rather, that the sacraments have power and are efficacious (i.e., effective) only through the Holy Spirit and according to his working as they are embraced solely by faith. In a quote that was referenced earlier in the book, Calvin nicely illustrates why we need to have faith when we receive the sacraments: "They avail and profit nothing unless received in faith. As with wine or oil or some other liquid, no matter how much you pour out, it will flow away and disappear unless the mouth of the vessel to receive it is open; moreover, the vessel will be splashed over on the outside, but will still remain void and empty."

Does the act of baptism make children into members of the church? Covenant children receive baptism as a sign that they are already counted as members of the visible church. They enter into the covenant community upon conception, and thus they are entitled to receive the sign of entrance into that community as soon as they are able to. Baptism does not cause this membership but rather signifies it.

How old is too old for a covenant child to be baptized? At what age should a profession of faith be required before a person is baptized? Leaders in different churches may come to different conclusions regarding this question, and it is best answered by your local elders. However, a good principle to bring to bear is that as long as a child is not yet considered to be a young adult, he or she may rightly receive baptism as a covenantal child. If a child shows resistance to being baptized and is of a sufficient age to articulate a lack of belief, then he or she should not be baptized.

Is there an age of accountability? The idea of an age of accountability arose during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries among Protestants from an Arminian tradition who were trying to explain what happens to children who die in infancy. The Arminian view has no covenantal promises to offer to covenant children. Therefore, to alleviate the grief of covenant children being relegated to hell in their theological system, these Arminians developed the idea of the age of accountability. But no such notion can be found in the Scriptures—we see that we are all held accountable from the time of our conception. Clearly we each reach an age when we begin to comprehend the faith in a more mature way; but this will develop differently across different children, and thus establishing an arbitrary age makes little sense. Some children will understand the faith earlier than others, and all need to hear the free offer of the gospel regardless of their age. Therefore, we ought to appeal to our children, from their earliest days, to believe and embrace the covenant promises that have been made to them.

Why are children baptized into the visible church when they may prove to be unregenerate? Doesn't Jeremiah 31:31–34 make it clear that all God's people will know him? And thus, isn't the church no longer a mixed community of the regenerate and the unregenerate, as it was under the old covenant? The promises regarding the new covenant that are found in this passage have, as is true of much of the new covenant, been inaugurated but not yet consummated. They fall under the theological category that is commonly recognized as

“already but not yet.” All Christians recognize that this dynamic exists in the present, because all of us still evangelize. None of us believe that we currently exist in a state in which “no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Jer. 31:34). We still await the return of Christ so that this will be fully consummated. Some Christians, however, still argue that the new covenant differs from the old covenant in that the new covenant community is a regenerate community. In contrast, Reformed theology distinguishes between the visible and the invisible church. There are some members of the visible church (the community that professes belief in the Lord Jesus Christ) who will prove not to be members of the invisible church (the community of all true believers of all ages and in all places). Not all who are baptized into the visible church—whether as adults or as children—will necessarily be saved. The church isn’t a fully regenerate community. For some people, baptism will be—as was circumcision in the Old Testament—a sign of judgment. As Fesko points out, the contrast that we witness in Jeremiah 31:31–34 “is not between the new covenant and the Abrahamic covenant, but between the new and old covenant (the Mosaic covenant). Verse 32 clearly states that the new covenant would not be like the covenant that God made with the fathers when He brought them out of Egypt.” Furthermore, even in this text, God makes the promise with covenant children in view (see Jer. 32:38–41), which continues the idea of the Abrahamic Covenant. As Fesko asserts, “This means that the new covenant is organically connected to the Abrahamic covenant and that the Mosaic covenant expires.” The new covenant community remains, in this present age, a mixed community of regenerate and unregenerate individuals. One day the invisible church will be revealed, and in it there will be no mixture—but until that happens, at the return of Christ, the visible church will always be mixed.

Isn’t it sufficient to say that children can be baptized? Do we need to say they *should* be baptized? If God considers children to be members of the covenant community, then neglecting covenantal baptism means we are keeping one of the chief means of God’s grace from our covenant children’s lives. This would be a serious error.

Should people who were baptized in the Roman Catholic Church be baptized again?

To be fair, the answer to this question has not been uniform throughout Reformed church history. Yet most of the Reformed tradition has understood Roman Catholic baptism to be a legitimate type of baptism (though there was a significant portion of the American Presbyterian church, before the American Civil War, that argued otherwise). Most of the magisterial Reformers (e.g., Luther, Zwingli, Melancthon, and so on) were baptized within the Roman church, so this was not a small issue. And as they acknowledged, and as we must remember, there is only one baptism (see Eph. 4:5). And the efficacy of that baptism is not tied to the person who administers it. Rather, a baptism that is administered with water, in the name of the Trinity, and with the intent of signifying Christ and his benefits is a valid baptism. Charles Hodge, who argued strongly on the side of the validity of Roman baptism, stated, “The error of the Romanists concerning the absolute necessity and uniform efficacy (in the case of infants) of baptism, is very great, but it cannot invalidate the nature of the ordinance.”

What if I was “baptized” in a Mormon, Jesus-Only Pentecostal, or Jehovah’s Witness church? You should approach the elders and pastor of the church you attend and ask to be baptized. Baptisms that are performed in any of these contexts are done so outside the sphere of Christian baptism. These traditions deny the basic tenets of Christianity, as detailed by the historic creeds of the church, and thus lie outside the bounds of the Christian faith.

Is it wrong to be baptized again, as a believer, if someone was baptized as an infant? What if I simply want to make a public profession of my faith? Yes, it is wrong—because there is only one baptism (see Eph. 4:5). We call the purpose of baptism into question when we receive it more than once. Baptism is based not upon the individual but upon the working of the Spirit and the covenant promises God has made to us in Christ Jesus. Being “baptized again”

is an impossibility. A desire to make a public profession of faith is commendable. However, becoming a communing member of the church, attending corporate worship weekly, and living one's life as a "living sacrifice" unto God constitutes a public profession on its own (Rom. 12:1; see also v. 2).

Should we allow anyone to administer baptism? The sacraments, by their very nature, serve as a visible sign of what is proclaimed in the Word of God. The Word governs the sacraments, and therefore it would be improper to observe them in a context in which the Word is not preached. Paul asserts that ministers are "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1)—and thus, since the administration of the sacraments has, for most of Reformed church history, been understood as an extension of the preached Word, it has been reserved for teaching elders or pastors alone.

What if I was baptized by a non-pastor, such as a fellow teenager, my father, my mother, an aunt, a camp counselor, or a university campus ministry worker? Though the previous answer stands, the efficacy of baptism does not depend on the one who is administering it. As the Westminster Larger Catechism says, "The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered, but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ, by whom they are instituted." Even if it is not administered by an ordained pastor, a baptism that is administered with water in the triune name of God can be a true baptism. Let us, however, remind ourselves that baptism serves as a sign of an individual's entrance into the visible church. The sacraments are not simply individualistic acts of private piety; baptism was given to the visible church and is therefore tied to one's connection with a particular local body of believers. Therefore it would prove irregular to receive baptism separately from a local church body and an ordained minister of the gospel. Irregular, however, does not equal invalid—and in fact necessity may dictate irregularity (e.g., in a missions context somewhere that local churches may not be established, in a place where the church is persecuted, and so on). But irregularity should be avoided if possible.

What if the person who baptized me later denied the faith? Again, the efficacy of baptism is not tied to the person who administers it. It would be an awful thing if that were true—we would need to maintain a watchful eye, for the rest of our days, on the person who administered our baptism, and doubt would always remain about whether our baptism would prove, in the end, to be a true baptism. But this is not the case. The Spirit's working and Christ's blessing, according to the covenant promises of God the Father, make baptism effectual. It is dependent on him—not someone else.

Should I leave a church that practices baptism differently from the way I believe? Not necessarily. When congregants of the church that I serve are moving to a new area, I tell them, "Find a Bible-believing church that preaches the Word faithfully and where elders shepherd the flock and you can serve." If you belong to a church like this, thank God. It is a good and rare church—don't dismiss the great by instead seeking the ideal. You should seriously weigh the option of staying and serving, without being combative over this doctrine, if you are able. It may, however, be necessary or even beneficial for you (and for that church) to instead find a church that practices baptism in a way that is closer to your convictions about it. This decision should be made with the counsel of your current pastor and elders. If you have taken vows of membership at that church, your loyalty lies there until the Lord makes it clear that you should move on. And if you do so, I pray it is with tears and not a haughty spirit.

I am convinced about covenantal baptism, but I am a member of a baptistic church, and my children can't receive the sacrament here. Is this a reason to leave? Probably; but again, I would weigh this decision heavily. Your children are not somehow "lesser" covenant children if they are raised in a baptistic church. Though my baptistic friends don't realize that all the children in their churches are members of the covenant community, their personal

conviction doesn't nullify the fact that this is indeed true. Your children are still covenant children, even though they are missing some of the blessings of inclusion in that covenant. I would pray, talk with advisors, and consult with your current pastor(s) and elders. It may be that you will indeed have to move your membership—but you will want to do so with conviction (and a measure of sorrow).

If I have family members who don't believe in covenantal baptism, should I invite them to the service in which our child is baptized? Absolutely. Invite them, with the knowledge that they will view the service differently. I married into a wonderfully strong baptistic family. When I baptized my daughter, we invited all my in-laws to attend. The entire weekend was filled with comments like “I'm looking forward to the baby dedication”; “What a nice baby dedication”; “Congratulations on dedicating your baby.” It was fine, and we were blessed to have them there. I was happy for them to witness a covenantal baptism and to hear it explained—especially since I was the one performing and explaining it!

Should I marry someone with whom I disagree regarding baptism? I encourage couples to sort through this issue before marriage. It seldom becomes easier for them to do so later, and when they conceive their first child, the pressure surrounding this issue heightens—which raises the bar of stress in a young marriage. Can it work? Of course. Can it be sorted out later? Yes. But is it better to agree before vows are exchanged? Absolutely.

My spouse and I disagree on whether to baptize our children. What should we do? First, be patient and gracious with each other. Spend concerted times of prayer and study together. I would suggest reading some of the recommended resources at the end of this book. Choose one or two of them to read together. Then find a book that cogently presents a baptistic view and read it together. Search the Scriptures. Trust each other enough to actually engage in dialogue about this, ask each other questions, and share your concerns. I would take time to go through this process. But in the event that you spend a lot of time and energy doing so without reaching an agreement, I would encourage the husband to seek counsel from his pastor and elders. He will then need to make a decision about it—hopefully after hearing the counsel and receiving the support of his wife.

Must a person be baptized before being admitted to the Lord's Table? Yes—baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the covenant people of God. This is why it occurs once and why it occurs before communion can be taken. Meanwhile, the Lord's Table is observed regularly throughout the course of a Christian's life instead of simply once. It serves as the sacrament of spiritual nourishment and is to be taken primarily with the local body to which a Christian has committed himself or herself by taking its membership vows.

I attend a baptistic church, and they want me to be “rebaptized” before I can come to the Table. Should I do so? If you are convinced of the truth that the baptism you received as an infant or a child was a true baptism, then you should not participate in what they are requiring. It would go against your conscience to participate in it—and it is not good to go against one's conscience. This most likely means that you will need to begin searching for a new church. Not being a member of the church you attend or being able to come to the Table with your brothers and sisters in Christ can be endured for a season, but doing so is deleterious over a long period of time.

Do you have to believe in covenantal baptism in order to serve as an officer in a Reformed or Presbyterian church? Most Reformed or Presbyterian churches require their officers to hold to a covenantal view of baptism. This is because churches in this tradition usually require their officers to subscribe to confessional standards (e.g., the Westminster Standards, Three Forms of Unity, and so on). This requirement helps to safeguard the teaching, unity, and faithfulness of the church. A person's view on covenantal baptism affects many different areas of that person's

doctrine, and not subscribing to it would also mean not subscribing to most Reformed or Presbyterian confessions. This does not, however, mean that an individual with baptistic convictions cannot occupy other leadership positions in such a church. Some of the most servant-hearted leaders in different areas of the church that I serve hold baptistic convictions, and they are well respected; our church would suffer without them. They just can't be officers.

Is baptism made too much of in the church today? There seems to be a lot of disagreement and division over who receives it and how it is performed. Is it worth all this? It is certainly possible to make too much of baptism—but we also risk making too little of it. The discussions about it are worth having—but always in love. Truth matters, and so we honor the Lord when we attempt to ascertain and maintain what the Scriptures teach. There is a loving and gracious way of doing this, however. I for one am always happy—well, usually happy—when people want to discuss baptism. It affords me the opportunity to discuss the kindness of our covenant-keeping, sinner-saving, truth-defining, sovereign God. That is a good thing. And we can have these discussions well, and to the glory of the Father, by abiding in the grace of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit.

A (Mercifully) Short Explanation of Infant Baptism

- Imagine that I am a shepherd in a field and looking over my flock → I can tell which sheep belong to me because I have placed my mark on them.
- By placing my mark on them, I am promising to watch over them, care for them, and provide for them because they are part of my flock → This mark visibly separates my sheep from other flocks
- When others see my mark, they think of the shepherd's ownership, not the sheep's decision to be included in my flock...because sheep are notoriously fickle, dumb, and helpless
- When a new lamb is born into my flock, that lamb IMMEDIATELY becomes part of my flock and so I put my shepherd's mark on it → that visible sign that points to my promise getting passed on to a new generation of sheep in my flock (from the second they are born into the world)

We see similar signs like this throughout the Bible that point to promises God has made

- Most of these covenant signs (ex: rainbow, tablets of stone, throne of David, stars in the sky) are in the Old Testament... and are referenced AGAIN in the New Testament → CONNECTION!
 - Visible signs, given by God, that point to His promise to care for his visible flock
- When Jesus walked the earth, He constantly referred to the Old Testament → because that's the only Scripture that was written down at the time (Law, the prophets, and the writings)
- After His resurrection, He appeared on the road to Emaus (Luke 24:27) *"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things **concerning himself**."* → *"Somebody's coming (The Old Testament) → "Somebody's here right now!" (The Gospels)*
 - The rest of the New Testament → *"Somebody's coming again!"* (Ex: Rev 22)
 - Gen 3:15 (The 1st time the gospel is announced), the whole rest of the Bible is an outworking of that gospel promise → *"The promised Redeemer is coming!"*
- **Once you admit that the Bible is one connected story about Jesus (*"somebody's coming, somebody's here, somebody's coming again"*), you can't remove your view of baptism from this larger biblical framework**
 - **So...You CAN'T suddenly remove New Testament baptism from its Old Testament roots**
 - **Just like the Lord's Supper has its Old Testament roots in the passover meal**

So..if God makes what he calls an "everlasting promise/covenant" in the Old Testament, you have to admit that (unless God Himself reverses it), it is STILL ongoing/everlasting in the New Testament

- Genesis 17:7 *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an **everlasting covenant**, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.* → Promise God made to Abraham and his descendants
- **What was the mark/sign God used to point others to this promise He made?** → circumcision
 - **What did it mean?** → signified the removal of uncleanness from God's people and communicated that God's provision of blessing was being passed on from one generation to the next (hence, the physical location of the application of that sign on the male body)
 - It also pointed to God's promise (Gen 3:15) to bring redemption to His people through a redeemer who would be born of a woman and be blood-related to Abraham (Matthew 1)
- **Who was the sign applied to?** → Believers AND their children (8 day old infants)
 - God explicitly commanded Abraham to circumcise Isaac (Gen 21:4)
 - No one disputes that male children received this sign in the Old Testament

So...Where do we see this connection in the New Testament?

- Jesus Himself received the covenant sign of circumcision at 8 days old (Luke 2:21), so did Paul
- Circumcision was never just an ethnic marker, it always pointed forward to God's promise

- Example: Galatians 3:7, 26–29 *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham....for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.* → A new, better, more inclusive covenant would build upon the old covenant...Gentiles were included too!
- Abraham has spiritual descendants (Those who trust God by faith, regardless of sex/ethnicity) are still covered by God's promise to him in the Old Testament → those who, like Abraham, trust God BY FAITH alone
- In 1st Cor 7:14, the apostle Paul (who was an Old Testament expert) wrote that the children of at least one believing parent, even one married to an unbeliever, are considered "holy" (set apart) before God (ie- are in covenant relationship with God, part of the visible covenant community), instead of being seen as unclean (ie- outside of the camp/visible community) → Paul is intentionally using Old Testament covenant language here
 - Why? Because if one of the sheep belong to the shepherd, the lambs do too...immediately
- Just like EVERY OTHER covenant sign, it had nothing to do with the faith of the recipient, but it pointed to the faithfulness of the one who made the covenant and promised redemption → God Himself
 - This promise was given by God's grace alone → it could neither be bought nor earned
 - God's promise was to be believed....by faith alone, in Christ alone (the promised redeemer in Gen 3:15)
- What about the change in sign from circumcision to water baptism?
 - Romans 2:28-29 → circumcision of the heart is what matters...comes by grace through faith
 - Colossians 2:11–12 *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, [12] having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.* → Paul links Old Testament circumcision with New Testament water baptism
- So...in the New Testament...first generation converted adult believers in Christ received the new covenant sign of baptism by faith....along with their children (just like Abraham in the Old Testament)
 - Abraham was given the sign AFTER faith (as a first generation believer) but was given to his infant son Isaac BEFORE faith (because he was a child of one or more believing parents, like 1st Cor 7:14)
 - This was reaffirmed by Peter in Acts 2:38–39: *And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children [**believing Jews**] and for all who are far off [**this means the Gentiles too**], everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."*
- The sign itself is not what brings salvation, the sign visibly communicates the REALITY of the covenant promise of God and visibly points to the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ to be received by faith → just like Abraham and the rest of the Old Testament believers looked forward to

So...Where in the New Testament do we see God reversing His everlasting covenant? → Simply put- We don't

- There is not a single word in the New Testament about a change in the covenant inclusion of children
- Applying the new covenant sign is assumed (early church history backs this up). It seems odd that a large change would never be mentioned in Scripture. It's an argument from silence....but a very LOUD silence
- So...in summation (via R. Scott Clark): *The Abrahamic covenant is still in force. The administration of the Abrahamic covenant involved believers and their children (Gen 17). That's why Peter said, "For the promise to you and to your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). That's a New Testament re-statement of the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 17 and in the minor prophets (e.g., Joel 2). Only believers have ever actually inherited, by grace alone, through faith alone, the substance of the promise (Christ and salvation) but the signs and seals of the promise have always been administered to believers and their children. It's both/and not either/or.* → In other words, Baptism is NOT a sign from us to God showing Him that we believe, it is a sign from God TO us showing that we belong... to God's visible covenant community

BAPTISM IN THE BIBLE
AND
INFANT BAPTISM

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Does the Bible teach the infant children of Christians are to be baptized? Or, was baptism only to be given to “believers” who consciously profess allegiance to Christ? If this is a question you need to work through, I hope you will find this short study helpful. In it I will make the case that the Bible teaches that it is right to baptize the children of Christians.¹

The view of baptism I will be defending 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 have written and defended these confessions, men such as John Calvin, Francis Turretin, Samuel Rutherford, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, Benjamin B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen and many others to this very day. These confessional statements and the great defenders of them stand in opposition to Roman Catholicism’s understanding and practice of baptism.²

What is the Issue?

The infant baptism issue is whether we should baptize *the children* of Christians before their profession of faith. We all agree about *adult* converts—they must confess their faith prior to their baptism. Baptists and paedobaptists disagree about how to deal with the infant (and young) children of Christians. We acknowledge there is no *explicit* statement about the “infant baptism” of a Christian’s child. It is sometimes hard for Baptists to also see: *neither is there an explicit case* of a Christian’s child who grows up and is baptized on profession. There is then nothing explicit about the *baptism of children* on either side. This must be acknowledged by both sides if our discussion is to be fair. Even more, many Baptists appeal to the examples or commands of adults who believe and are then baptized, like the eunuch (Acts 8:37). But the issue is not whether adult converts 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 a text which tells us this child was baptized or this child was not baptized. No appeal to the cases of adult converts can 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. Thus we must determine whether the New Testament affirms continuity or discontinuity concerning the inclusion of believers' children into the new covenant, and thus covenant signs and rites.

The (Reformed) covenantal infant baptism view maintains baptism should be given corporately, to all under the household of a believing head of household. Infants, when they are born into a believing household, therefore, should be baptized. This was the original pattern of circumcision. It was for the household, then for those born into the household (Gen. 17:27). Is the covenant household (infant) baptism position correct? Are children of Christians to be baptized? Or, is the Baptist correct? Only individuals who are mature enough to confess their faith and do so are to be baptized. I do not think it is unfair to contrast the two views in this way: Is the individual-believer thesis affirmed, or is the covenantal-family thesis affirmed for New Testament baptism?

Is Baptism is a Sign, Like Other Signs?

In previous eras biblical signs were given corporately to the family, inclusive of future generations. Has that changed? Is new covenant baptism a radical departure from the way God "did it" in the Old Testament? This is a question of the continuity of an established pattern of sign-reception. Baptists (those who practice exclusive "believer baptism") of all varieties answer, "yes." Now it is individual, on the grounds of one's profession.

The Bible is one book and not two. Therefore, we must ask whether the symbol of baptism as an outward ritual is similar to other faith rites in the older portion of Scripture. Rituals which involve a symbolic act, such as baptism, are connected to Biblical covenants. In virtually every case Biblical covenants include signs which visibly represent the realities behind the covenant promises. Do these covenant signs include children?

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). Even 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	***	yes
New Covenant	Baptism (entrance) Lord's Supper (continuance)	?

Therefore, in every case in the Old Testament, the pattern of covenant administration includes a principle of family inclusion and successive generations in both covenant content and covenant recipients of the signs. 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?

Let us continue by answering the question, Who was baptized in the Bible? In obedience to Jesus’s command to baptize (Matt. 28:19-20), who did the apostles baptize? By their actions, how did they apply the call to enter into the new covenant? In looking at all the actual recorded cases of apostolic baptism, is the individualist-baptist thesis affirmed, or is the covenantal-family thesis affirmed?

Let’s consider all the examples of Christian baptism recorded throughout the apostolic history of the church, beginning in Acts. 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 patterns of baptism follow this expansion.

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
Disciples of John (12 men) (no household present)	Stephanas and household
Gaius (and household?)	

In summary of the actual baptisms, we find the following: (1) The new covenant promise came in it’s fulfillment “to you and your children” (Acts 2:39) at Pentecost. Only men (3000) are said to have been baptized. (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’s 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’s 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 those baptized. From this we learn that 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, whom Paul baptized (1 Cor. 1:14).

As for Simon, I think it is reasonable to conclude 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. As for Gaius, in Romans 16:23 we read, “Gaius [is] host to me and to the whole church.” This implies he was a man of some means. As such, he may have had at least

household servants, if not a familial household. Gaius is mentioned with Crispus who was a household head. Crispus, “believed in the Lord with all his household” (Acts 18:8). Thus, the household was undoubtedly baptized with him. Yet, Paul said in no uncertain terms, “I baptized *none of you* except Crispus and Gaius” (1Cor. 1:14). Paul could name Crispus as head of the baptized household, just as he could have with Gaius. Most likely in that culture, Paul simply spoke of Crispus as representing the household in the administration of baptism.⁴ Therefore, if Gaius had a household, it is quite reasonable to believe it was baptized, just like Crispus’s household.

About this time, one can see the hands raising of our Baptist brethren to object. These important Biblical facts regarding NT 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.” This is a quite predictable response—everyone in these households must have believed (i.e., since *we already know only* believers were baptized; this is begging the question).

Think for a moment what this response requires us to believe. In the individual baptism narratives, 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, all of Judea and Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8). After the Samaritan baptisms, we have the baptism of Saul (Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles), then when the gospel crossed to Gentile territory, beginning with Cornelius, *every baptism passage is a household baptism passage*—except where we are expressly told those present were “twelve men,” who were Jews after all (Acts 19:7). 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, Judea	3000 Men at Pentecost
Samaria	Eunuch, Samaritans, Simon
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)	Saul (apostle to Gentiles) Cornelius's Household Lydia's Household Jailer's Household Corinthians: Crispus's Household Stephanus's Household Gaius, 12 Men in Ephesus

Was it coincidence when the gospel went to Gentiles, their households were baptized? Acts is a *selective history* of thousands of examples of baptism 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 routine practice of the apostolic church as the gospel went to Gentile families. The gospel and its outward sign went *to families* because it was *families* who were to be saved. “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).

The *pattern of Gentile household baptisms* should not be so 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 to one who considers the specifics 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 (every member believed) 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 text has singular verbs, not

the plural verbs, to describe the action of believing. These texts *do not say*, the Jailer (or Crispus) “and (*kai*)” household members “believed [plural]” (with a plural verb). 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” (*sun*) 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.

The Philippian Jailer’s household is very important to the purpose of Luke. Luke takes some time explaining this. Why? The Jailer was the first recorded baptism of an outright pagan. Previous Gentiles had been God-fearers, worshipping the true God of Israel. The eunuch worshiped in Jerusalem. Cornelius was a God-fearer and devout. 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 some failures, 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 concepts: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). The text goes on to say after Paul preached the gospel, “He was baptized, he and all his household” (16:33). We are told Paul and Silas were brought into the house of the Jailer to eat, and the Jailer “rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household” (16:34).

The Exodus images and resonances of this passage would not have been lost on the original audience. 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), it was the Jailer’s house which would be delivered by the blood of the Lamb to pass through the Red Sea of baptism and rejoice on the other side.

The inclusion of Israelite children were essential in the Exodus, since this event unfolded the Abrahamic promise (e.g., Gen. 18:19). Moses’s 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.

By casting the Jailer’s deliverance as a Passover kind of event, Luke strengthens the image of the deliverance of children. It would hardly be a Passover if the first-born was not saved and if the whole household did not pass through the Red Sea of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

Are Children in the New Covenant?

Despite the Jailer narrative, which is a profound confirmation of the covenantal inclusion of the household, someone might argue the new covenant is different from previous covenants in just this sense: the promise of the new covenant is only for spiritually regenerate people and therefore 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, Are the children of new covenant believers explicitly included in the new covenant promises or are they excluded? 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” and covenant content is most fundamentally the Lord is “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. Let the reader decide on the testimony of many Scriptures whether the children of believers are 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 promised new covenant. How many more verses are required to convince one the new covenant includes the children of believers? Certainly no one can produce even one text which *explicitly excludes* them. Dozens of texts *explicitly include* them!

The whole message of the whole Bible requires that our children are a heritage. If baptism is the sign of inclusion in covenant with God, then

who did the apostles baptize? The unmistakable impression is baptism applies *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 in the study of baptism 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’s command excludes anyone from baptism who is not a self-conscious disciple, making 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

This a good theory to support the individualist view, except the grammar of this command does not support it. Rather, the direct command (*mathateusate 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 or before 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 observe all that I commanded you.” This was precisely what some sects were doing (Matt. 23:15). They would not have thought this was a Commission to abandon infant circumcision for *exclusive adult circumcision*.

This point is not theoretical. In the Jerusalem presbytery meeting 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” in that sense, but

also their little children and infant children born to them. Thus, the Bible speaks of those “converted” inclusively of the children.

Indeed, see how the apostles practiced the baptismal mandate: adults after confessing discipleship *and* their households were baptized whenever they 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 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 . . .” Recall 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 may become “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 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,” and in him all the “families of the earth shall be blessed” (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.

Is Baptism in the Old Testament?

When reading the Bible from *left to right*, we see the deep reason there is a consummate Commission to baptize. Many Baptists treat baptism as a completely new thing with John the Baptist and see it from the start as only applying to self-confession mature individuals. 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 (men, women, children and livestock) passes through the Red Sea. A laver is at the entrance of the tabernacle. Joshua led 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. The prophets Ezekiel and Zechariah see visions of rivers flowing out in the new covenant (Zec. 14:8). So yes, there is a flood of references to baptism(s) in the Old Testament. Washings in the tabernacle, as well as crossing of the Red Sea are explicitly called baptisms (Heb. 9:10, 1Cor. 10).

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 surely the image of the new covenant 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).

Because of this rich and deep them, a baptismal prayer developed in the Church historic, called "The Great Flood Prayer" which is 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 a biblical picture, 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" (1Pet. 3:21 NKJ).

Do We Follow Jesus in Believer Baptism?

Someone might ask, *Aren't we supposed to follow Jesus in baptism? Wasn't He baptized as a believer?* We are to imitate Christ's character. We are to follow the apostles as they followed Christ. We are to strive for Christlikeness, fully; but we cannot enter into the unique offices as Messiah. We are not born of virgins. We do not meet Satan in a 40-day fast in the wilderness. We do not cleanse the temple, etc. Upon reflection, there is a uniqueness to His baptism also. I have known those who went to the "Holy Land" to be baptized in the Jordan River, even though they had been baptized before. Better the wisdom of Luther who said the Lord has "sanctified and set apart the Jordan and *all water* for a saving flood" (from the "Great Flood Prayer").

John 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 quite literally. John was "preaching a baptism of repentance" at the Jordan river (Mark 1:4). Literally, John was in the wilderness beyond the borders of the Land where they "went out to him" (Mark 1:5). He called the people to follow his "path" outside of Israel and to "turn" (repent) and cross the Jordan to enter the Land in renewal. John's baptism for Israel was a sign of *passing through* or *crossing* into renewed Israel to prepare for Messiah.

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 In the background, Deuteronomy looks to a time when they “cross the Jordan” being led by Joshua (Deut. 4:21). The rest of the NT draws upon various threads of this crossing into Christ, through death and into resurrection life on the other side (Rom. 6:3-4, Col. 2:11-12).

John's baptism of Jesus involved this renewal of Israel through the Jordan (as before with Israel, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha) to “manifest” (Jn 1:31) the Anointed One, “Christ.” Anointing restores fallen man (Adam) back into the presence of the Lord (Ps. 2:2). Priests were appointed through a ritual washing, anointing and vesting (clothing) (Ex. 28:41, Num. 3:3, etc.). Hebrews teaches Christ was thus appointed “by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:10). Through this He “appoints a Son, made perfect forever” (Heb. 7:28). This happened at Jesus’s baptism (Luke 3:21, 4:18). Therefore, Jesus “having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth” the Spirit on us (Acts 2:33).

With this rich background in mind, through our baptisms we are cleansed, we “cross” or “pass” into Christ, and we are clothed. Thus, we have a new status as adopted sons and daughters of the Father. We are vested with the Spirit, able once again to enter into Garden of God to have communion with the Father. What was pictured in the high priest’s ordination is now true 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 first crossing of the river (1 Cor. 10:1-4). 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.

Let me try to convince the reader of this: (1) *Circumcision represented the work of the Holy Spirit which is 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 metaphor, “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 heart renewal of those who are spiritual dead and unclean.

(2) *Baptism represents the work of 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’s 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 teach if not that *these two ritual acts signify the same reality?* The passage usually discussed at this point is Colossians 2:1-12: “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 in the flesh. 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.

Baptism signifies a person is in covenantal union with God just as circumcision did. For example, 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.” First Corinthians 12:13 indicates the work of the Spirit in uniting 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.” These passages affirm baptism signifies the work of God’s Spirit in our spiritual union with Christ.

Baptism most 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 thereby uniting us with Christ and His body (Rom. 6:3, Gal. 3:27, Col. 2:11-12, 1 Cor. 12:13). This is what is plainly taught in Scripture.

Perhaps the hardest part of seeing this is realizing *this is true, even if some baptized people are not living testimonies of it*. It is true in the same way in which Jesus saves us from our sins, even though all who believe in Jesus are still sinners. The truth of baptism is objective, but it is not *automatically* true of all the baptized. We can also see this of circumcision. Many who had flesh-circumcision were lying about what it really meant. Going through the *ritual* does not automatically generate all of the *reality* signified. This is true for *adults* no less than little children.

Baptism is a (visible) sign and seal of inclusion into the covenant community, a community not of one nation (Israel), but made from *all nations*. Hence, baptism functionally replaces the Abrahamic rite of circumcision (befitting to the antecedent age), 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 New 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 people, it is only proper to give this sign to those who demonstrate this spirituality. Reasoning this way, one entirely overlooks what has just been Biblically proven. Circumcision

fundamentally signifies the same reality as baptism. As Calvin says, “For what will they bring forward to impugn infant baptism that may not be turned back against circumcision?”⁹ 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). In both cases it represents the inward work of the Spirit which we hope to be true in both.

Baptists sometimes argue it 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. In many cases the Baptist position is “I-feel-like-I-am-now-saved-baptism” vs. “believer” baptism. No practitioners of baptism, regardless of their theology, only baptize 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 believer’s little children are not to be considered in the covenant or part of 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, part of the people of God, and members of the synagogue of God. Then, on the Sabbath after Paul preaches, he finds out that—in the fulfillment of the promised seed of the women, through the covenant promises, in the fullness of time, in the era of great David’s greater Son, in the Messianic kingdom and glory of Israel . . . now his little children have no part in the people of God!

Imagine the new proselyte family who have recently undergone the painful passage to covenant membership (circumcision), only to discover in the new covenant his children are afforded less of a place than they

who were in the shadows of Judaism. From the original audience's mindset, this view of the new covenant would be more than disappointing: it would be *Biblically inconceivable*.

To add, imagine the overwhelming status of inferiority Gentiles would have felt if the Jews' children were considered members of the Christian synagogue (James 2:2) and part of the "household of God," while Gentile children had neither sign nor membership. With the clearly stated objections of the Judaizers (e.g., circumcision is required as a covenant sign), if the Apostles taught that the infant children of Jews (and Gentiles) are now excluded, it is very remarkable no hint of this discussion arises in the pages of the New Testament!

How Do We Live Out Baptism?

This brings us to where the rubber meets the road. This, I have found, is the most strenuous objection to infant baptism and what the Bible says about baptism. It goes like this, if all you have said is true, then are baptized children saved? If baptism represents union with Christ (Rom. 6:3-4, Gal. 3:27), then shouldn't we consider baptized babies "in Christ"?

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? It would not be impossible for a man and wife to love one another *as if* they are married. A person may trust Christ unto salvation without baptism; but, this is biblically irregular. 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 calls for faith ever after, but in my argument, a conscious faith is not the prerequisite. This is because God wants us to raise our children in the consciousness and culture of Christ (Eph. 6:4).

Instead of relegating baptism to being useless, we should simply see it in relation to a life of faithfulness. 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 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). Yes, this is the Old Testament—but it is directly applicable to us. 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 the flood water of judgment.

When the first new covenant (Gentile) households instructed, 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 (*brepheos*, 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, covenantal baptism has a rich Biblical basis 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 mature into all that implies (this is true of baptized adults as well). This does not mean *automatic* faithfulness. Rather it demands responsibility and faith, responding to the promises of God on the part of both the parents and the individual child. 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 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/Testament. 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" (Jos. 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)
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's, Stephanus's households, too)

The Central Line of Objection

There still may be objections. Given the brevity of this study, let me examine what I take to be the central objection.¹⁰ 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) The "explicit" baptisms are of "believers" only. But, a million cases of adult converts professing their faith before baptism prove nothing of themselves, 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!¹¹ 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 “infant” 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 express text—like the eunuch’s profession. Again, the adult eunuch example cannot teach us how to deal with believers’ children. But 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 (new covenant) 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” (taking this is in the normal sense). 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 fell 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.”¹²

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 infantile 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 infant because it is so clear in the case of circumcision. Is it meaningful that my little children are citizens of the United States? Though they do not comprehend it now, 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 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 is (wrongly, I believe) 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). According to official statistics, one prominent Baptist denomination reported over 40% of its baptisms one year were for “*rededication*.”¹³ 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?* No. Neither does adult baptism save the adult. Even so, we should not dismiss it as unimportant. (See the discussion above about wedding/marriage.) Baptism “saves” a person in a similar the sense that a wedding *marries* a person. It is the start of the union, it is the official declaration, but does not automatically provide a perfect married life.
- *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. Even though, the word in the Bible is the word “supper” (evening meal). In the same way, the *mode* of baptism, whether by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling, is surely less important than its meaning and recipients. Reformed Christians do not usually *require* a particular mode to be *necessary* for baptism. However, a strong case can be made that most Biblical baptisms or “washings” were like an “anointing” from above, e.g., in the Tabernacle sprinklings (*baptismois* in Heb. 9:11, see verses 9:13, 19, 22). Further, 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 the water part.
- *If you believe in infant baptism, do you have to believe in infant communion?* I have written on this elsewhere.¹⁴ The earliest historical sources on infant baptism, like Cyprian (200s) and later Augustine (400s), 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 meal 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.¹⁵ B. B. Warfield (no paedocommunist) 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.”¹⁶

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, 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 and then turn the proceedings over to someone else.

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 and so is the direct object of the verb. In this verse, the verb, “disciple” (*mathateuo*, in the imperative form), is a *transitive* verb, since it has an object. I am aware “them” is masculine in gender 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: www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bbr/baptist_brown.pdf

9 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4:16:9, Trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1331.

10 Other objections and critical reviews of anti-paedobaptist books may be found in the writer’s, *Covenantal Infant Baptism: An Outlined Defense* at <http://www.paedobaptism.com>.

11 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.”

12 “The Polemics of Infant Baptism” in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, Vol. IX* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991 [1927]), 390.

13 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 www.founders.org.

14 See my, *The Case for Covenant Communion* (ed.) (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2006). Available in PDF form at WordMp3.com.

15 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.

16 *The Polemics of Infant Baptism* in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. IX (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991 [1927]), 408.