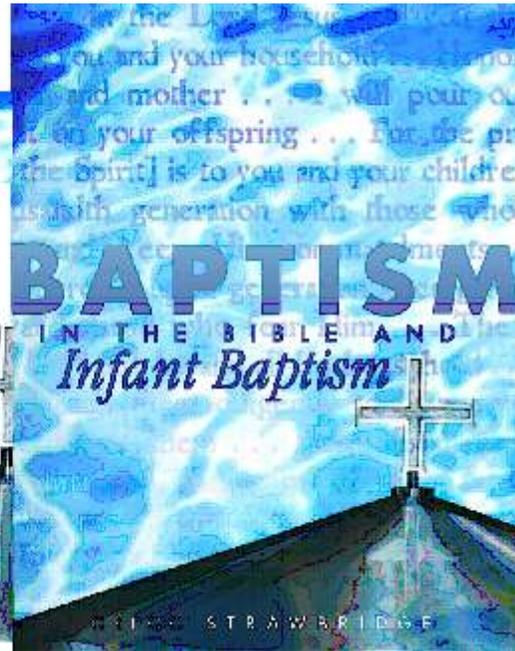


Gregg writes in a careful, frank style and covers every relevant passage dealing with the subject. As an introductory text, however, for that I lend out to those interested in learning more about the Reformed view of baptism. Once such have a strong basis for inquiry in Christian Baptism by the Methodist scholar, John Murray. With great joy, I have been a new work adding on my shelf ready to lend anyone who asks knowing that it will lend them to the truth. All who desire to better understand the position of baptism taught since the early Church and ecclesiastically recovered and preserved by the Reformers will find much help in this work. — ROBERT A. LUTZKE

Too often in our debates on baptism, we give Baptists the New Testament, while we keep the Old, and ancient theology. This work reminds us that we who believe in infant baptism do so because we believe all the Bible teaches it. Dr. Strawbridge has risen in service to the whole church, including our Baptist brothers, and their common foundation. — R. C. STRAUSS, J. E.

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## Baptism in the Bible and Infant Baptism

Gregg Strawbridge



Does the Bible teach that 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 that 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.<sup>1</sup>

Baptism is like the fine china cups and glasses at an elegant dinner – it sits upon a table, in a room, in a house, in a neighborhood. Since I can't take space to give a full theological context for baptism, let me identify the location of these china cups and glasses. The view of baptism I will be defending is that 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. Surely, it need not be said that these confessional statements and the great defenders of them stand in opposition to Roman Catholicism's understanding and practice of baptism.<sup>2</sup>

### What is the Issue?

A good starting point for this discussion is defining what is really at issue. Let me suggest that the infant baptism issue is whether we should baptize the children of Christians prior to their confession 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 agree that *neither is there an explicit case of a Christian's child who grows up and is baptized as a believer*. There is then nothing explicit about the baptism of

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<sup>1</sup>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”).

<sup>2</sup>Roman Catholicism places baptism in a system of sacramental merit. See the Council of Trent, 5<sup>th</sup> Session, decrees 4-5, from the year 1546.

children on either side. This must be acknowledged by both sides if our discussion is to be fair. Even more, many Baptist 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 that 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 that this child was baptized or that this child was not baptized. And no appeal to the cases of adult converts can settle the question — since, after all, we all agree about what to do with adult converts.

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 with regard to the inclusion of believers' children into the new covenant, and thus covenant signs and rites.

The covenantal infant baptism view maintains that 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). So then, 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? Let us contrast the case this way: Is the individual-believer Baptist thesis affirmed, or is the covenantal-family thesis affirmed?

### 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? Baptists (those who practice exclusive “believer baptism”) of all varieties answer yes, now it is individual, upon the grounds of one's experiential confession. 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.

Since *the Bible is one book* and not two, 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 that the covenant with Adam involved all of 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) is to be administered to the household of a believer, including young and infant children? 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 proceed by answering the question, Who was baptized in the Bible? Pretty simple, really. In obedience to Jesus' 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 of the examples of Christian baptism recorded throughout the apostolic history of the church, beginning in Acts. Do these examples indicate that *only* individual self-conscious, professing believers are to be baptized or do they indicate that both adult believers *and* their family is 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).<sup>3</sup> The patterns of baptism follow this expansion.

Adult Conversion Baptisms	Household Baptisms
3000 (men) at Pentecost <i>(no household present)</i>	Cornelius and household
Samaritans: (both men and women) Simon the Sorcerer	Lydia and household
Ethiopian Eunuch <i>(no household)</i>	Philippian Jailer and household
Paul <i>(no household)</i>	Corinthians: Crispus (and household) Stephanas and household
Disciples of John (12 men) <i>(no household present)</i>	
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 are said to have been baptized, some 3000 of

them. (2) In Samaria "men and women alike" (Acts 8:12) were baptized, including Simon (the apostate Sorcerer). (3) The godly Ethiopian eunuch (who had no familial household) was baptized (Acts 8:38). (4) Paul (who had no household) was baptized (Acts 9:18; cf 1 Cor. 7:7-8). (5) Cornelius' household was baptized (Acts 10:48, 11:14). (6) Lydia's household was baptized (Acts 16:15). (7) The Philippian Jailer's household was baptized (Acts 16:33). (8) Many Corinthians were baptized, including Crispus, Stephanas' household, and Gaius (Acts 18:8, 1 Cor. 1:14, 16). (9) The disciples of John (adult men) were baptized (Acts 19:5).

These are the facts about those baptized. From this we learn that of the *nine peoples* singled-out in the baptism narratives—*five had their households baptized* (Cornelius, the Jailer, Lydia, Crispus [inferred], Stephanas), two had no household 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 that 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 that "Gaius [is] host to me and to the whole church." This implies that 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" (1Co 1:14). Paul could name Crispus as head of the baptized household, just as he could have with Gaius. As would be perfectly intelligible to any first century Jew, it seems that Paul simply spoke of Crispus as representing the household in the administration of baptism.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, if Gaius had a household, it is quite reasonable to believe that it was baptized, just like Crispus' household.

About this time, one can see the hands raising of our Baptist brethren to object. These important Biblical facts regarding the household baptisms are often dismissed by those denying infant/household baptism. 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—that everyone in these households must have believed (i.e., since *we already know* that *only* believers were baptized).

<sup>3</sup>All Scripture citations will be from the New American Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, and all of the *italicized* print in Bible texts represents points I am seeking to emphasize.

<sup>4</sup>It is logically possible that Paul baptized only Crispus and Silas or someone else baptized the household, but it would be hard to imagine what circumstances required Paul to baptize only Crispus and then turn the baptismal proceedings over to someone else.

Think for a moment what this response requires us to believe—that in the individual baptism narratives, their writers (Luke & 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. 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 that 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' Household Lydia's Household Jailer's Household Corinthians: Crispus' Household Stephanus' Household Gaius, 12 Men in Ephesus

Was it coincidence that when the gospel went to Gentiles, their households were baptized? Acts is a *selective history* of thousands of examples of 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* that 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.” But 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 Baptists!

The oft-repeated 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). We should ask whether the nuances of these texts 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*)” his household “believed [plural]” (with a plural verb). This would be one nuance Luke could have used to indicate the equal action of each member in believing. 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, see the American Standard Version). Crispus, the household head, “believed (*episteusen*, verb, *singular*) in the Lord with (*sūn*) all his household” (18:8). However, observe Luke’s careful language indicating that baptism is administered to each member of the Jailer’s household: “he was baptized, he and (*kai hoi autou pantes*) all his household” [literally, those of his all] (16:33). These texts when carefully considered, clearly support the covenantal thesis.

This is doubly true in the case of the Philippian Jailer’s household. Luke takes some time explaining this. Why? It appears that the Jailer was the first recorded baptism of an outright pagan. Previous Gentiles had been God-fearers, worshiping the true God of Israel (The eunuch worshiped in Jerusalem. Cornelius was a God-fearer and devout. Lydia “worshiped God”). But the Jailer was about to kill himself before Paul and Silas called out to him. This indicates his Roman value system which called for suicide as the noble act in some situation, like the loss of one’s prisoners.

In fear and trembling with an earthquake, no less, and perhaps even knowing of the supernatural exorcism earlier in the city, 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 that

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,” 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. That the children are of the essence in the Exodus is critical to the biblical pattern (e.g., Gen. 18:19). Moses' request to be released was to “go with our young” to “hold a feast to the LORD.” Pharaoh was willing to let the men go, but not “your little ones” (Ex. 10:7-11). Then came “one more plague” — 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).

By casting the Jailer's deliverance as Passover for pagans, 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 I take to be a profound confirmation of the inclusion of children, perhaps someone might say that the new covenant is different from previous covenants in just this sense: the promise of the new covenant excludes successive generations, *our children*. 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? One important writer, defending a Baptist perspective says, “Nowhere in the content of the new covenant is the principle 'thee and thy seed' mentioned.”<sup>5</sup> 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 that 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).

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<sup>5</sup>David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham: A Reformed Baptist View of Baptism, the Covenant, and Children* (Carey: Sussex, UK, 1973), pp. 34, 35.

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.

In 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 that 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 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, sustained and unambiguous Biblical support for the conviction that the children of believers are included in the promised new covenant. How many more verses are required to convince one that 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! Let us settle the question at this juncture. *The new covenant explicitly includes believers' children.*

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 that baptism goes to households of believers. We have no biblical reason to doubt, then, that infants born into such households are to be baptized by virtue of the covenant promises inclusive of them. But let us add more weight to the case.

## 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). From this text there are those who claim that Jesus' command excludes anyone from baptism who is not a self-conscious disciple, making credible profession of faith. Hence, such interpreters claim that 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.”<sup>6</sup>

This a good theory to support the individualist view. Unfortunately for Baptists, the grammar of this command does not support this theory. Rather, the direct command (*mathâteusate panta ta ethnā baptizontes autous*) may simply be translated, *Disciple all nations, baptizing them (nations).* The pronoun “them” (*autous*), grammatically refers to “nations” (*ethnā*) a noun, not “disciples,” since “make disciples” (*mathâteuō*) is a verb.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Fred Malone, *A String of Pearls Unstrung: A Theological Journey Into Believers' Baptism* (Founders Press: Cape Coral, FL, 1998), p. 7.

<sup>7</sup>“Nations” (*ethnā*) is in the accusative case and is thus, the direct object of the verb. In this verse, the verb, “disciple” (*mathâteuō*, in the imperative form), is a *transitive* verb, since it has an object. I am aware that “them” is masculine in gender and “nations” is neuter. This usage is called the *ad sensum* use

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 Jehovah, 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). But Judaizers insisted, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (15:1) and “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 that 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 that “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).

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(according to the general sense). See for example, Matt. 25:32, “all the nations (*ethnā*, neut.) will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them (*autas*, masc.) from one another.”

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 (see Acts 15, discussed earlier).

The apostles repeat the promise to Gentile Christians, especially Paul. 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 point is true undeniable. But this means that children are included.

### Is Baptism in the Old Testament?

When reading the Bible from *left to right*, we see the deep reason that there is a consummate Commission to baptize. Many Baptists that I have talked with treat baptism as a completely new thing with John the Baptist and it was only for adults.<sup>8</sup> 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, the passing of Israel through the Red Sea, the laver in the synagogue, the ocean and basins on chariots in the temple, and finally the rivers of water in the new covenant (Zec. 14:8). Following the Fall, the pure waters of rivers flowing out, become rivers of purification which one must cross in order to come back to Eden. So it was that at every stylized garden of Eden in the symbols of the tabernacle or temple, the water cleanses those who enter, just as in Great Commission baptism (Matt. 28:19-20).

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.

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<sup>8</sup>For example, the popular series of recorded lectures by Rev. Bill Einwechter, “The Great Debate Over Baptism and the Covenant” (VisionForum.com) represents baptism as new with John the Baptist. See my critique here: [www.paedobaptism.com](http://www.paedobaptism.com).

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 where he teaches us that baptism is an image of the flood. 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 his 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. This is more like following Mohammed to Islam's Mecca, than being obedient to the Lord who has, as Luther teaches, “has sanctified and set apart the Jordan and *all water* for a saving flood.”

How was His baptism unique? We are told that Christ's baptism was “to fulfill (*plāroō*) all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). I hope that no one else will claim that their baptism was for this purpose, especially those baptized in the Jordan in the 1990s. Matthew uses “fulfill” (*plāroō*) 16 times. Except for the two cases in which it means “fill” in a quantitative sense (13:48 “full” & 23:32 “fill”), every other usage refers to “fulfilled” Scripture.<sup>9</sup> In this case (Matt. 3:15) it also refers to fulfilled Scripture, though it is an entire range of Scriptural typology, not a specific text.

We are told the baptism of John was for a temporary and specific purpose (Luke 1:17, Acts 13:25). John was a Levitical priest, as was his father (Luke 1:5). The prophetic purpose of John was to “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 1:17, Mal. 4:6). John tells us very specifically his purpose for the baptisms: “*in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water*” (John 1:31). How would John know who the Christ (*the anointed one*) was? “He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, *'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit'* (John 1:33).

Thus, John's baptism of Jesus involved a cleansing ritual for the purpose of recognizing the one anointed of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament typology, Levitical priests underwent a ritual washing for their cleansing (“sprinkle purifying water on them,” Num. 8:7). These ceremonial instructions for priests also speak over and over of “the priest who is anointed [with oil] and ordained to serve as priest” (Lev. 16:32, Ex. 28:41, Num. 3:3, etc.). The writer of Hebrews tells us, “For the Law *appoints* men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever” (Heb. 7:28). This means that the fulfillment of the oath of God's Messianic promise comes in the “appointing” of a perfect high priest, who is of course, Christ (Heb. 8:5). The term “appoint” (*kathistemi*) is the same term used of *ordaining* elders (Titus 1:5) and deacons (Acts 6:3), as well as the Levitical High priest, “every high priest taken from among men is *ordained* . . .” (Heb. 5:1 KJV).

Christ was thus ordained and “*designated* by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:10). But when was He “designated” as this?—When He received, not the *symbolic* anointing oil of the Spirit, but the *reality of the Spirit*, at His baptism. Christ said of Himself, “The Spirit of the

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<sup>9</sup>Matthew 2:15, 2:17, 2:23, 3:15, 4:14, 5:17, 8:17, 12:17, 13:35, 21:4, 26:54, 26:56, 27:9.

Lord is upon me, because He *anointed* me to preach the gospel . . .” (Luke 4:18). When was *anointed*? At His baptism, when the Spirit *descended* upon Him (Luke 3:21). Hence, the final and transitional Levitical priest, John, ordained the greater Melchizedekian High priest, Jesus.

Suffice it to say, then, the adult baptism of a Christian believer is not “following the Lord in believer’s baptism.” Rather, as Peter proclaims, Jesus as *the High Priest*, “having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear” (Acts 2:33). The shadows of the Levitical system illustrated that the priests were anointed for service with the symbolic oil, now Christ (literally, “the anointed one”) pours forth the *real oil* on the “royal priesthood”—the true temple (1 Pet. 2:9, 2:5).

Because John’s baptism was “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord,” Israel was to receive their anointed Messiah and were accountable to be identified with the Messianic kingdom of God (Luke 1:17, Matt. 3:2). However, many in that generation rejected Christ and His kingdom. See this key to John’s baptism, “But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected *God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John*” (Luke 7:30). In doing so, they rejected the *anointed of God*, the final and true High Priest. Thus, their temple was “left to you desolate!” (Matt. 23:38).

Jesus’ Commission to baptize, then, follows through with John’s teaching: “[John said] I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” The baptism in the name of Jesus signifies and confers a baptism with the Spirit.<sup>10</sup> The way we “follow the Lord in baptism” is to see that all of the great covenant promises are “Yes and Amen” in Jesus.

## Is Baptism in Place of Circumcision?

It is just because baptism relates to the Spirit, that 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, essentially, spiritual regeneration. Yet, baptism is greater than circumcision.

I can already see the Baptist hands go up in the back of the room. Many have objected to this kind of argument. I do not think all of 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 also*. The very first words we read about baptism in the New Testament say this. John said, “I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8). Peter connects baptism with “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). He says of Cornelius’ household, “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” (Acts 10:47). Paul alludes to the image of baptism in Titus 3:5 when he says, “He saved us . . . by the *washing* of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” Baptism signifies the heart renewal of those who are spiritual dead and unclean.

Therefore, 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?* Other doctrinal passages affirm this correlation (Col. 2:10-11).

Baptism signifies that a person is in covenantal union with God, just as circumcision did. For example, Romans 6:3-4 teaches that those “baptized into Christ Jesus” “have become united with Him in the likeness of His death” and “His resurrection.” Galatians 3:27 tells us that those “baptized into Christ have clothed [themselves] with Christ.” First Corinthians 12:13 likewise 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 that baptism signifies the work of God’s Spirit in our spiritual union with Christ.

Baptism most certainly signifies the work of the Spirit (Col. 2:11-12, Mark 1:8, Acts 10:47, Titus 3:5). It is commissioned to be a rite of cleansing which

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<sup>10</sup>It is only conferred” to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in His appointed time” says the Westminster Confession (28:6).

identifies one with the true 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 that *this is true, even if some baptized people are not living testimonies of it*. It is true, in the same way that Jesus saves us from our sins, even though all who believe in Jesus are still sinners. The truth of baptism is objectively true. But it is not *automatically* true of all the baptized. We can also see this in terms of circumcision. Many that had flesh-circumcision were lying about what it really meant. Going through the *ritual* does not automatically generate 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*. Therefore, it functionally replaces the Abrahamic rite of circumcision [befitting to the antecedent age], and is thus its *sacramental equivalent* [in the age of fulfillment].

	Circumcision	Baptism
Ritual	cut the 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 that since the reality signified in baptism is only true in regenerate people, that it is only proper to give this sign to those who demonstrate their regeneration first. Reasoning this way, one entirely overlooks what has just been Biblically proven, that 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?"<sup>11</sup> Abraham's circumcision was the sign and seal of his justification by faith. He "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the

<sup>11</sup>*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (4:16:9, McNeil/Battles ed., Westminster: Philadelphia), p. 1331.

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 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 that 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 and deacons. In many cases the Baptist position is I-feel-like-I-am-now-saved-baptism. Baptists are no better at baptizing only regenerate people than are presbyterians.

### Were Their Children Included?

Let us read our New Testaments with an understanding of the original audience and seek the original intent of the Apostles words. 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) that 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. . . that now his little children have no part in the people of God!

Or imagine the new proselyte family who have recently undergone the painful passage to covenant membership (circumcision) only to discover upon hearing of Messiah that 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 mind-set, this view of new covenant, Messianic-synagogue membership would be more than disappointing. It would be *Biblically inconceivable*.

To add, imagine the overwhelming status of inferiority that 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, their known beliefs, and what we know of their frame of mind, if the apostolic practice and teaching excluded the infant children of Jews (and Gentiles), it is very remarkable that 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. And this, I have found, is the most strenuous objection to infant baptism and to actually believing what the Bible says about baptism. It goes like this, if all that you have said is true, then are you saying that your children are saved? Are you saying that baptism *confers* the grace of salvation? (Westminster Confession 28:6). All the teaching of being in union with Christ (Rom. 6:3-4, Gal. 3:27) and that it represents heart cleansing — doesn't that mean that you think baptism saves? Even that it saves your children? The answer is No and Yes.

Think of the analogy of marriage. The wedding event is critical to a marriage. But no one treats the wedding in and of itself, *as the totality of the marriage*. A faithful marriage is not automatic because of a beautiful wedding. We all know of exceptions. Neither is a life of salvation automatic because of baptism.

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. And a person may trust Christ unto salvation without baptism. But this is clearly irregular. There is something quite important about a wedding for a marriage. And 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.

Instead of relegating baptism to complete unimportance, we should simply see it in relation to a life of faithfulness. Baptism is to be the official beginning of that 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 oh how practical it is. 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 were given the sign of covenant membership, 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 that every person that 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” (2Tim. 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. Henceforth, baptized children are to be viewed not as those who have merely been dedicated to Christ, but as those who are signified and sealed with the blessings of salvation in Christ. This does not mean *automatic* faithfulness and salvation. Rather it demands responsibility and faith in the promises of God on the part of both the parents and the individual child. And it is a sobering challenge to remember that those who break the covenant signified in baptism will receive a greater condemnation than the unbaptized (Heb. 10:28-30).

The baptism question is most essentially about the relationship of our children to our God. It is perfectly clear that 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, Stephanus' households, too)

### The Central Line of Objection

There are, I am sure, objections in the minds of many. Given the brevity of this study, let me examine what I take to be the central objection.<sup>12</sup> The basic structure of the Baptist argument seems to be this: Since we have (1) an explicit basis for "believers' baptism" and (2) no explicit warrant (an example or command) for "infant baptism," infant baptism is not biblical. Since (3) the new covenant is made with exclusively regenerate individuals (and believers' little children cannot be assumed to be regenerate), such children are not to be baptized until they confess their faith and show their regeneration.

<sup>12</sup>Other objections and critical reviews of anti-paedobaptist books may be found in the writer's, *Covenantal Infant Baptism: An Outlined Defense*.

The succinct answer to this central line of objection is (1) to recognize that a million cases of adult converts professing their faith prior to 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!<sup>13</sup> 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. I need not explain why the eunuch cannot help us with how to deal with children, do I? But 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.*

(2) Explicit warrant 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. The eunuch example cannot teach us how to deal with children.

(3) 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). Moreover, are all those under the terms of the new covenant regenerate? 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 that 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 that 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). The point here is that the new covenant is similar in its administration to the older covenant administrations. No one needed spy glasses to see who was regenerate in the old covenant, and neither

<sup>13</sup>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."

do we need them in the new covenant. Rather, we need to be faithful in light of all that Christ has accomplished.

### 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 understanding, for infants it is “*remembered*” with understanding. *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 that 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, believers'-baptized children, and adult converts who were baptized with the most ardent professions of their faith. 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.
- ! *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). In fact, according to official statistics, one prominent Baptist denomination reported that over 40% of its baptisms one year were for “*rededication*.”<sup>14</sup> I have argued (above) that this is a misunderstanding of baptism.
- ! *Do you believe that infant baptism saves the child?* No. Neither does adult baptism save the adult. But because baptism is not the totality of salvation, we should not dismiss it as unimportant. (See the discussion above about wedding/marriage.) Baptism only saves a person in the sense that a wedding marries a person. It is the start of the union, but does not automatically provide a perfect married life.

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<sup>14</sup>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](http://www.founders.org)

- ! *Shouldn't baptism be done by immersion?* If we compare baptism with the Lord's Supper, whether the Lord's Supper is actually a “supper” (*deipnon*, an evening meal) is not essential to its purpose, meaning, or sacramental quality. In the same way, the *mode* of baptism, whether by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling, is surely less important than its meaning and recipients. Reformed Christians do not usually *require* a particular mode to be *necessary* for baptism. However, a good case can be made that most Biblical baptisms or “washings” in the Tabernacle were performed by sprinkling (*baptismois* in Heb. 9:11, see verses 9:13, 19, 22). And, the baptism of the Spirit is spoken of as the Holy Spirit “*poured* out upon the Gentiles” (Acts 10:45-47).
- ! *If you believe in infant baptism, do you have to believe in infant communion?* I have written on this elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Actually the earliest historical sources on infant baptism, like Cyprian and later Augustine, make clear that infant baptism and infant communion were normative in the post-apostolic Church. But one does not have to slavishly commit to the historic Church's practices nor commit to paedocommunion as a result of infant baptism. 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, “What does this mean?” (Ex. 12:26), and (c) whether in the new covenant there are any additional qualifications.<sup>16</sup> The Princeton Theologian B. B. Warfield said, “The ordinances of the Church belong to the members of it; but each in its own appointed time. The initiatory ordinance belongs to the members on becoming members, other ordinances become their right as the appointed seasons for enjoying them roll around.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>See my online articles, [www.paedobaptism.com](http://www.paedobaptism.com) and the book, *The Case for Covenant Communion*, GS ed. (Athanasius Press, 2006) available at [www.wordmp3.com](http://www.wordmp3.com).

<sup>16</sup>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), p. 73-76.

<sup>17</sup>*The Polemics of Infant Baptism* in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. IX (Baker, 1991 [1927]), p. 408.