

Why In the World Would We Baptize an Infant?

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I. Introduction

One needn't be all that acquainted with the Christian faith to be familiar with the sacrament of baptism. Perhaps you've never been baptized, you have an inkling that you should be, but you're not sure what it's all about. Maybe you were baptized as an infant and you're wondering if you should be baptized again. After all, what point is there in baptizing an infant? It didn't mean anything to you then; you can't even remember it. Infant baptism is the issue before us. In studying infant baptism, we will prayerfully adopt a deeper understanding of baptism in its general sense.

To the best of my recollection, I vehemently opposed infant baptism for the first fifteen years of my Christian life; seven of those years I was on the ministerial staff of a Presbyterian Church that performed infant baptisms. My distaste for the ritual constrained me from participating in the many infant baptisms that took place. I refused to hold the baptismal font or in any way be associated with baptizing infants. One of the interim pastors gave me a book on infant baptism that was so bad that I corrected it with a red pen and gave it back to him.

I mention this to convey that I am sensitive to the common notions among evangelicals regarding the issue of infant baptism. At first glance it just doesn't seem to make sense. It can seemingly be explained away with just one verse, "**He who believes and is baptized will be saved**" (Mark 16:16). Some negate its legitimacy by demonstrating that it is a sign of, "**having been buried with Christ**" (Romans 6:4). Obviously we can't know for sure that infants have been buried with Christ so why in the world would we baptize them?

Such a simple refutation of paedobaptism (baptizing infants) makes one wonder, at least it made me wonder, how it is that many of the greatest minds in the history of Christendom (Luther, Calvin, Knox, Hodge, the 121 divines of Westminster, etc.) could not see their obvious error. They seemed to be so willing to dispense with bags of Roman Catholic error, why did they continue to embrace this one?

With all due respect, we live in an age when Christians live by sound bites. We want our theology to be sufficiently stated via one verse hanging on our refrigerator. Understanding and embracing infant baptism requires an understanding of the entire flow of God's covenant. It requires understanding the continuity between God's old covenant and God's new covenant.

Time restricts an exhaustive study of God's covenants but it might help to think of it this way: God's covenant is a promise He made to a community of people to redeem them from sin and death. The means by which that covenant works is the preaching of the word and the administration of sacraments. In the old covenant that community was the nation of Israel, in the new covenant that community is the church. Sacraments are a means of grace that God uses to bless and redeem His elect people within that covenant community (not everyone in the community is necessarily elect). Understanding the way God worked in the old covenant is critical to understand the

way God works in the new covenant. Similarly, understanding the Old Testament is critical in order to properly understand the New Testament. Hopefully this will become clearer as we proceed.

I trust you will approach the words on these pages with a better attitude than I approached my early studies on infant baptism. However if you must break out the red pen, remember, so did I.

II. What does the sacrament of baptism represent?

Baptism is a sign and a seal of a covenant promise God has made to a people. A sign points to something other than itself. A seal is an endorsement. When a king desires to sanction a document, perhaps a scroll, he has wax melted on its edges to seal it. He will then take his signet ring or similar emblem-making device and push it against the soft wax to demonstrate it has his approval or seal. Similar to worldly kings, the King of kings places His seal upon that which He has sanctioned or separated for Himself (Romans 4:11).

Baptism is a sign and seal of a few things: It marks out who God's people are. It signifies that sinful man is in need of cleansing. It signifies that this cleansing comes by faith. The word baptism is used in the scriptures to designate intimate association. The Israelites, for over 400 years, were associated with slavery. After the exodus they became associated with Moses and deliverance. Paul expresses this new association by using the term baptism.

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Corinthians 10:1, 2).

III. What is the purpose of baptism?

Baptism glorifies God and blesses His people. Understanding the frailty of our human nature, God will occasionally give us some physical sign. He did this with regularity in the Old Testament having the Israelites mark out a certain place where He did a certain thing (Joshua 4:7). Through these memorials the people would remember what God had done for them.

Baptism is something we do in the church to show through sort of a physical drama the blessings and promises of God. When a person walks into a church and sees someone being baptized they might ask or think, "What is this ritual?" Their question is, or should be, answered by the preaching of the Word. This is why the sacraments should always be accompanied by the Word/preaching. The purpose of baptism is to put God's promise on display – to herald it.

Even in churches where the message of the gospel is waning, the sacrament of baptism in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, may be able to convey the gospel message sufficiently to save and bless. This is why it is known as a means of grace.

IV. Doesn't the Bible teach believe (or repent) and then be baptized?

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized

in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38, 39).

It is a common assumption that the Scriptures teach faith always preceding baptism. We must therefore follow the Biblical model of not baptizing someone until faith is present in his or her life. But is it actually true that the Bible teaches faith always preceding baptism?

Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. ¹⁵ And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us (Acts 16:14, 15).

Lydia's family was baptized with no record of their having any faith at all; they were baptized by virtue of their association with Lydia. We see a similar example with Stephanas.

Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other (1 Corinthians 1:16).

How then are we to understand verses like **"He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:16)**, or **"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized'" (Acts 2:38)?** These verses seem to indicate that baptism should follow repentance or belief. But is that actually the case? We must be aware of the historically sensitive nature of these statements.

Mark 16 is Mark's record of the Great Commission. It is the beginning of the spread of the Christian faith to **"all the world" (Mark 16:15)**. Since baptism is a new covenant sign, no one would have yet been baptized. And since no unbeliever would be interested in being baptized, the natural order would be to believe and then be baptized. Note, however, that the verse itself is not necessarily chronological, i.e. it does not say, **"believe then is baptized"** but **"believe and is baptized"**.

The same thinking is applied with even greater force in the Acts passage. Consider the words of Peter which followed his admonishment to repent and be baptized.

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 2:39).

We must ask the question, "When Peter was giving this call and thousands were coming to faith, is it possible that mom and dad were letting go of the hands of their children, leaving them behind, and participating in the baptism without them?" I don't

ask this for sentimental effect but appealing to historical context. When Peter says the promise is for you and for your children, wouldn't the natural and most obvious thought be that they look at their children and bring them along to be baptized as well? After all, Peter mentions them in the charge!

In verse 39 Peter mentions something that every true Israelite would recognize as extremely important but many modern Christians would either overlook or not entirely understand. He mentions the promise. Every Hebrew would recognize the promise as referring to the covenant made to Abraham.¹ This promise was signified through a mark on infants (Genesis 17:11).

Every male child among you shall be circumcised;¹¹ and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.¹² He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations (Acts 17:10-12).

Would those hearing Peter's preaching, primarily Jews, (Acts 2:5, 22) assume that their children are excluded from this covenant/promise and its sign/sacrament when they had heretofore been included? Peter never says the new covenant excludes infants. He never makes that distinction, so why would we?

V. Why baptize infants when the Bible doesn't tell us we should?

I was once confronted with a frustrated member of our congregation whose simple argument was, "Why baptize infants? Why not just stick to Scripture?" His argument contained the assumption that his view was Scriptural and mine wasn't—he was thus begging the question. I don't believe it is unscriptural at all and neither did the vast majority of theologians in the history of the Christian church. (I will grant that if it is unscriptural then it is definitely wrong to administer it to infants.)

Hermeneutics (method of Bible interpretation) now moves to the fore. Implied continuity is more reasonable than implied discontinuity. In short, if God makes a law or sets a precedent in the old covenant, only He can repeal it. We should assume it still applies unless God, through the Scriptures, tells us otherwise.

God included the infant children of believers as members of His covenant in the old covenant and never repeals that in the new covenant. Again, put yourself in the place of a first century Israelite. All your life you have been taught that infants are part of God's covenant. In the new covenant (a superior covenant), why would you assume they were excluded if God hadn't told you? This is why New Testament silence (and I don't believe the New Testament is completely silent—Stephanas' family 1 Corinthians 1:16 and Lydia's family Acts 16:15) argues in favor of infant baptism.

We see two very clear Biblical principles that should help us draw a Biblical conclusion: 1) the sign of God's covenant is baptism. 2) The infant children of God's covenant people have always been included in God's covenant and have always had God's sign placed upon them. God doesn't have to repeat Himself.

¹ The promise made to Abraham that through his seed all the nations of the world would be blessed—be justified by faith (Gen. 12, 17; Gal. 3:8).

Some say that those who practice infant baptism are making assumptions when they include infants in God's covenant. I used to mistakenly say to a good friend (a father of seven), "What if we start circumcising Philistines?" He responded by saying, "Are you calling my kids Philistines?" He took it pretty well. If assumptions are taking place, it is on the part of those who, for no biblical reason, exclude what God has never told us to exclude. We are not to assume our children to be Philistines or heathens or pagans.

VI. Is baptism really a new covenant circumcision?

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Colossians 2:11,12).

A lynch-pin for this particular issue is whether or not baptism is the anti-type (new covenant version) of circumcision. The above passage is a bit complicated so let's see if we can piece it together properly.

Christ is the high priest who circumcises his people as the high priests of the old covenant circumcised the children of believing parents. In the new covenant Christ performs this. It is not an outward circumcision – made without hands – not by a human priest. It is a spiritual circumcision. When and how did this happen to me? Verse 12 tells us having been "**buried with him in baptism.**" My spiritual circumcision came about by being spiritually baptized in Christ, by having entered into union with Christ. Baptized into Christ means you were spiritually circumcised. Christ did it. The circumcision of my heart is a result of having been buried with Christ in baptism. If you want to understand baptism, it makes sense to look at the meaning of circumcision as the historical precedent.

If you are struggling making this connection observe that baptism and circumcision are signs of the same thing. There may be some distinctions between baptism and circumcision,² but what they both signify is overwhelmingly similar.

First, both baptism and circumcision mark out who God's people are; circumcision showed who belonged to God.

But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it (Exodus 12:48).

In order to take the Passover the person must first be circumcised.³ He must be covenanted to God. He is no longer identified with his previous citizenship but now

² Many of these differences can be assigned to the distinctions between the old and new covenant. Baptism is a bloodless sign because the blood has already been shed. Only males were circumcised because we were looking for the seed to come through Abraham. In the new covenant there is no male or female to consider in this regard.

³ This is why people must be baptized prior to taking the Lord's Supper.

belongs to the kingdom of God. He is no longer a stranger. Circumcision is the mark of those who belong to the Lord.⁴

Baptism makes this same distinction. The Great Commission of the new covenant requires the giving of this mark.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19).

From the very beginning of the church it was the mark of conversion.

And Peter said to them, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38).

These covenant signs mark/distinguish God’s people from the world. From the time of Abraham to Christ, the outward sign that you were a child of God’s covenant promise was circumcision. From the very beginning of the church the outward sign that you were a child of God’s covenant promise was baptism. These are the outward signs. As discussed earlier they both signify the same thing, a circumcised heart

Secondly, both baptism and circumcision denote the need of purification from defilement; being uncircumcised denoted uncleanness.

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Colossians 2:13).

Uncircumcision described the sinful pollution of man’s nature.

And Moses said before the LORD, “Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips” (Exodus 6:30).

Jeremiah uses the term circumcision in reference to the sinful human heart.

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart (Jeremiah 4:4).

Why was the rite applied to the male genital organ? For one, it brings children into the world in their fallen state—children of Adam. The male genital organ demonstrates the uncleanness of man from generation to generation. All who enter the world through man’s seed are unclean (Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:22). This is one reason why Christ was born of a woman but not a man. From here we see circumcision pointing to the need for God’s gracious work of cleansing and redemption.

Baptism, similar to circumcision, points to the need for remission of sins.

And Peter said to them, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the

⁴Continually be reminded that belonging to the Lord never meant that the person is saved in every instance (2 Peter 2:1).

name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

This statement by Peter assumes our spiritually dirty position. Baptism is a symbol of the washing that takes place when Christ's blood sets us free. Ananias said to Paul,

"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

Both circumcision and baptism point to the purification from defilement that is necessary for salvation.

Thirdly (and perhaps most importantly), both baptism and circumcision point to the righteousness that is imputed by faith alone as the way of salvation. Circumcision was a sign and seal of righteousness by faith.

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised (Romans 4:11).

When Abraham was circumcised it was a sign of the justification that he had by faith. The idea of being accepted before God by faith is demonstrated in the rite of circumcision.

Baptism is also a sign of justification by faith.

There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21).

Baptism is a sign of the righteousness of believing, the righteousness of faith, a sign of acceptance before God resulting from faith in Him and His word.

Circumcision and baptism: 1) both mark out who God's people are; 2) both denote purification from defilement; and, 3) both denote righteousness by faith alone as the way of salvation.

VII. Why put God's mark on those who may not be saved?

Isn't it possible, even likely, that we are baptizing the faithless? If baptism is a sign of faith, why would we baptize infants? A common argument against infant baptism is that it is wrong to administer the mark of faith on someone who has no faith. Is this wrong? If it is wrong, in principle, to put the mark of faith on someone who has no faith, then what do we make of the common Old Testament practice of circumcising those who had no faith, e.g., Ishmael and Esau? And what do we make of God's command for them to do it?

One of the most difficult things for twentieth century American Christians to understand and accept is that baptism is *God's* sign rather than *man's* sign. How often we hear people quip, "I wanted to be baptized as a result of a decision I made, not my

parents.” The very statement reveals a lack of understanding from whence deliverance comes.

Baptism is not primarily a personal testimony of having saving faith for oneself as much as it is (as we learned earlier) a testimony that God justifies, or saves sinners, by faith. To baptize someone is a rite that points to the truth that righteousness comes by faith. It points to the fact that salvation is based on God’s grace and that we can do nothing to merit it. Baptism points to that truth! It does not necessarily point to the salvation of the person baptized. Baptism is not primarily designed to be a personal testimony of personal saving faith. God commanded circumcision be applied to those whom He knew full well would not be children of faith (e.g., Ishmael, Genesis 17:23).

Does this mean the circumcision was wrongly applied to Ishmael or that it meant nothing? No! It was a sign of man’s only hope. It was a testimony to the saving work of God. Many people are baptized who aren’t saved (see Hebrews 6 and Acts 8). Simon Magus was baptized in Acts 8:13, then in verse 20 Peter says to him, **“May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!”**

Baptism is not a testimony of an individual’s saving faith. It is a testimony that God saves by faith. It is not my personal expression to God. It is God’s expression to me. It is valid and its message is true regardless of the worthiness of the recipient. Baptism is not so much a sign my personal faith as it is a sign and a seal of a covenant promise that God has made to a people – to His people. It’s a beautiful sign when given to an infant because it portrays the spiritual impotence of man and the grace of God toward His powerless creatures.

The whole idea that we would only baptize true believers is a flawed concept at best. B.B. Warfield stated the obvious when he asserted that it would be impossible to only baptize true believers because only God knows who the true believers are. He goes on to explain that if we are to baptize based upon our best guess, we should only baptize the children of believers because there is greater likelihood that the children of believers will continue to walk in faith than those who are seemingly converted as adults at crusades and such.

We often hear Baptist (those who oppose infant baptism) parents, who wish to have their children baptized, offer explanations of their children’s salvation based on outward observations. Maybe they said a prayer or made a cohesive statement about the nature of salvation by grace. These are precious and probable causes for the parents to believe their children are following in their spiritual footsteps. The parents still, nonetheless, are making an assumption. If we are going to make assumptions, should they not be Biblical ones?

The New Testament teaches that your children are holy by virtue of your faith and involvement in the covenant community of God.

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy (1 Corinthians 7:14).

This does not necessarily mean they’re saved. It is God and God only who can make that determination. What it does mean is that we should consider them part of

this family, this body, and this community. We do not consider them pagans until they prove otherwise. We consider them members of the household of faith until, like Esau or other apostates in both the Old and New Testaments, they prove themselves otherwise by openly denying their birthright and spiritual heritage.

VIII. Isn't infant baptism based on an assumption that God will save the baptized child when we don't know for sure that He will?

Obviously, we can't know for sure if a child will come to faith, so why baptize a baby? Infant baptism does not presume faith in the infant. That is not the point of the sacrament. It is true that in Roman Catholicism there is the belief in baptismal regeneration (i.e., the act of water baptism somehow saves the child), but this is not the Protestant, Reformed, or, in our opinion, the Biblical position regarding infant baptism.

When it comes to adult converts all views are similar; adult converts are baptized as a sign that they are entering into Christ's covenant community. They are having the mark of the covenant put on them. But when it comes to infant baptism we must follow the biblical model for administering God's sign and recognize the reasons for which it is done.

Baptism is not a testimony that God did or will save the infant. It is a testimony that salvation comes only by faith. It is not a personal testimony of the salvation of the child who is baptized. Infant baptism is a rite that points to the truth that righteousness comes by faith. It points to the fact that salvation is based on God's grace and that we can do nothing but trust in Him for it. Infant baptism points to that truth. It does not point to the salvation of the person baptized. And it certainly does not save the infant! It is a sign of man's only hope. It is a testimony to the saving work of God.

IX. Wasn't circumcision a sign given during a time when men were under a salvation-by-works covenant?

The above question is based upon the incorrect notion that the old covenant was a covenant of salvation by works. It therefore incorrectly assumes that infant baptism wouldn't logically follow circumcision since they would be signs of separate and opposing systems. Clearly the new covenant is a covenant of salvation by grace but, to the surprise of many, so was the old covenant. This is why it is important to understand the continuity of the covenant.

Other than the covenant given to Adam (Genesis 2:15-17), God's covenants, both old and new, are covenants of salvation by grace. Grace is what was demonstrated by all the sacrifices of the old covenant. In short, there have always been two groups of people in the world – those in God's covenant and those outside of God's covenant. Those in God's covenant have always fallen into two categories – the faithful and the unfaithful. Clearly there were people in the old covenant that had no faith just as there are people sitting in churches in the new covenant, that have no faith. This is why we see warning passages in the Scriptures which look as if someone might lose their salvation. It is possible to be removed from God's covenant, but God never repeals the justification of the sinner. Understanding that all people included in God's covenant are not necessarily saved makes sense of passages that look as if people lose eternal salvation⁵

Works never saved anybody. Moses (in the old covenant) was a Christian. He esteemed **“the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Hebrews 11:26).**

⁵ In the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22) there is a record of a man who was at the wedding (in the kingdom) but not properly dressed (presumably in Christ) so he was cast out.

The old and new covenants essentially contain the same message.

X. Doesn't the Bible teach that baptism is a sign of a good conscience toward God? Isn't it a public testimony of my faith?

There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21).

Another objection to infant baptism is found in 1 Peter 3:21 which talks about a good conscience toward God. How can an infant have a good conscience toward God? The obvious answer to this question is by the grace of God and blood of Christ. That we don't see faith at work in the infant doesn't mean faith is not present. After all, David wrote, **"You made Me trust *while* on My mother's breasts. ¹⁰ I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You *have been* My God" (Psalm 22:9, 10).**

But it doesn't require too close of an examination to see that this passage is not addressing water baptism at all. This passage is talking about a spiritual baptism, not water baptism, hence the statement **"not the removal of filth from the flesh."**

Let us be wary of the downside of the rugged western individualism that is pervasive in our society. We, even in the church, have taken God's sign and tried to make it our sign. How many times have you heard baptism described as a public testimony of your faith? Yet the Scriptures do not suggest that purpose for baptism. God made a promise to Abraham and gave him a sign to proclaim His promise. That promise was fulfilled in Christ and God gave a new, bloodless, sign of His covenant. When people walk into church and see an infant being baptized it is a picture of a promise that God has made to certain members of the human race indicating that He has determined not to leave them in their sins. Let us not lose sight of this magnificent truth by trying to make it our sign.

XI. Why model the new covenant sign after the old covenant sign?

Since God has always put His sign on the children of the faithful, why would we assume that He has changed His mind when He never so indicates? It is not uncommon for people to acknowledge that, at least at some level, their children are part of the covenant community (church), but they don't want them baptized until they have sufficiently demonstrated faith. But what passage of Scripture teaches us that we shouldn't baptize our covenant children until they have faith? And how can we possibly know when someone else (even our own child) has faith? How righteous must they be? How much Scripture must they know? How sound must they be in doctrine?

You and I, as mere men, are not given that information. So do we make our best guess? As discussed earlier, the "best guess" method is a flawed method. If we are going to follow the Biblical example we should assume our children are faithful until they demonstrate otherwise.

Why would we model the new (baptism) after the old (circumcision)? As stated earlier, because God has not repealed that portion of the old. But also, and of equal importance, is what I wrote earlier about understanding the continuity of God's covenant. If the new covenant is superior to the old covenant and more inclusive (male,

female, slave, freeman, gentile, and Jew, etc.), why would we consider it at this point less inclusive? Why would a superior covenant exclude that which is included in an inferior covenant?

XII. What about males and the eighth day?

Circumcision was to take place, on males, on the eighth day. As mentioned earlier the new covenant has clearly defined itself as having no regard for male or female. Circumcision, in part, was based upon the Savior coming through the seed that is signified through circumcision. This is one of the reasons that we no longer practice circumcision; Christ has been born. Days and seasons have also been repealed in the new covenant (Galatians 4:10). But if a good argument can't be made for the abrogation of the eighth day, it should still be recognized.

XIII. Isn't immersion necessary?

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

The above passage is often appealed to regarding mode of baptism, that it should be full immersion. Romans 6, though, does not address water baptism at all and never states that baptism should be by immersion. The word baptism does not necessitate immersion. It was a word used to signify watering a lawn. As we read earlier it was used by Paul to signify intimate association. The common washing practices of Israel included a laver or basin (Exodus 30:18), not a swimming pool.

Although I don't think mode is a huge issue, sprinkling paints a beautiful picture of the sprinkled blood David speaks of in Psalm 51. Peter also speaks of the sprinkled blood of Christ. Ezekiel, speaking of the new covenant states,

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:25, 26).

XIV. Doesn't infant baptism mislead people into thinking they're saved by the baptism?

Some consider infant baptism to be a stumbling block leading to misguided hope. There are, no doubt, some people who think they are saved because they were baptized as infants. But if something is right, true, and biblical, then its being a stumbling block is not a reason to dismiss it. To the Jews, Christ was a stumbling block. The Reformed, Protestant, and, in our opinion, Biblical position that we're putting forth does not suggest that infant baptism saves the recipient so that argument is a straw man.

We could just as easily argue misguided hope in praying the sinner's prayer at a crusade as a means to salvation – an argument that would be much easier to make. Clearly we must teach our children that if their baptism isn't accompanied by faith it

becomes unbaptism (Romans 2:25). The “I was saved as an infant” statements are usually made by Roman Catholics who actually teach the heresy of baptismal regeneration. Because people misunderstand a doctrine is no reason to dismiss it.

XV. Isn't infant dedication good enough?

Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the Lord (Leviticus 10:1, 2).

Infant dedication has become a very popular practice. It's sort of a compromise. This seems to be a way to get the children involved without administering baptism. It's as if we instinctively know that our children should be a part of it all so we have created our own sacrament. Ironically, the same people who are up in arms about the supposed absence of infant baptism in the Scriptures have no problem with the absence of infant dedication in the Scriptures. Appeals are made to the dedication of Samuel by Hannah, but the unique nature of that dedication is hardly a precedent for a common sacrament. Samuel was a prophet whom Hannah turned over to the temple priests

We must be careful not to create our own sacraments and methods of worshipping God. He does not give us that option. God had determined how He is to be worshiped. The old saying, “It's now how you worship but whom you worship” was bitterly disproved by the sons of Aaron. God has given us a sacrament. It is a beautiful sign. It is His sign. We shouldn't seek to alter it for the sake of compromise.

XVI. Is baptism really that important?

And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, “Surely you are a husband of blood to me!” So He let him go. Then she said, “You are a husband of blood!” – because of the circumcision (Exodus 4:24-26).

It is possible to put too much stock in the sign and not enough in the thing signified. It is also possible for the opposite to happen. The lack of emphasis on the sacraments in evangelical circles has been to the detriment of the faith. The sacraments are a means of grace and should be highly regarded. They may merely be signs and seals but they are God's signs and seals. It is through them that He blesses and the neglect of them results in curses. Delinquency regarding God's signs can have disastrous consequences. As we see from the passage above the oversight regarding circumcision became a life threatening trespass. With a greater covenant, how much greater is our responsibility to display the signs of God's grace.

XVII. What's the historical perspective?

The historic record is silent regarding infant baptism until about 150 A.D.

Some believe this to be an argument against infant baptism. This makes sense until we realize that in 150 A.D. the records show infant baptism was widespread. If infant baptism were viewed as wrong in the early church, it seems that plenty would have been written to refute it before it had spread throughout the entire Christian church. There wasn't a huge debate on the issue until the 1500's with the Anabaptists.

Perhaps the most reliable explanation of what the scriptures teach regarding the Christian faith was put together in the 1600's in the throes of the Protestant Reformation. The Westminster Confession of Faith, should be the subject of every Christian's study. Of baptism it states,

Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.

XVIII. Closing Remarks

I have personally gone full circle from opposing infant baptism to regarding the sacrament of infant baptism as my most joyous pastoral duty. It is not merely the joy of holding an infant and seeing the happiness on the faces of the parents and the congregation. As one who was at one time opposed to the sacrament I remember not being moved by those things at all. The joy comes when I consider that I am participating in one of the two ordained sacraments of God that proclaim His covenant promise to the human race.

Kings, kingdoms, nations, and presidents come and go. Their institutions and constitutions become dust, even in history. But the kingdom that is proclaimed during infant baptism is a demonstration of God's promise from generation to generation. As ministers have done for thousands of years, I stand with a child of the covenant and proclaim God's glorious promise.

When I leave this world and move from the church militant to the church victorious this covenant will continue to be proclaimed. The infants I have baptized will grow old and as they prepare to leave this earth they will see God's covenant proclaimed through baptism on those new members of God's covenant; this will proceed until the end of history. When we participate in the sacrament of infant baptism we are participating in something much bigger than ourselves. We are participating in a great truth—a great promise. A promise that will continue to be proclaimed until Christ comes for His bride. Praise God for His glorious and gracious gift!