

# Why Infant Baptism?

Infant baptism is firmly rooted in a view of the whole of scripture as Covenantal. Outside of God's historical working through covenants, our perception of scripture, and the relationship between Old and New Testaments (Covenants) would be such that we also would hold to the belief that baptism is only for professing adults. However, because of the underlying thread of covenant woven throughout all of scripture, there is most certainly more to what we read than meets the eye. We approach and read scripture through the lens of "Covenant." This is a very important point to be made before we dive into and explore the Biblical justification of infant baptism.

## **So what is the big deal about covenants?**

Good question. Covenant is very important in both Judaism and Christianity. Apart from understanding the importance of covenant, we cannot really know all we should about the wonder of our salvation. In order to gain understanding of the reasoning behind infant baptism, we must first understand the background and importance of covenants. God's dealings with man (believing man) are always by way of "agreements." ex. He will do this...this...and this... (His part of the Covenant) and we will do this..this..and this...which constitutes our part of the Covenant.

## **History of Covenants**

In the O.T. when we read that "they made a covenant between them" the word is really they "cut" a covenant between them. Why? Because a covenant was not entered into lightly. When two men entered into a covenant they each sealed their promises to keep the covenant by walking between several sheep that had been killed and cut in half or divided. Between the animals lying on each side of the path, each man walked and thus the covenant was made (cut) signifying "My word is my bond...let this happen to me if I break faith herein pledged."

When God instituted the Covenant with Adam (The Covenant of Works) there was no walking between dead animals because sin had not entered the world. God and Adam were in covenant that if Adam should obey God he and his would live forever. It was based upon Adam's obedience and the test of that obedience was not to eat the fruit of a tree they both agreed on. But man sinned, broke the covenant and he and his are doomed.

## **The New Covenant**

God in mercy and grace (He didn't have to do this) entered into a second Covenant with a new Adam! The new (or last Adam) was Jesus Christ. Christ promised the Father that He would perfectly fulfill the Covenant of Law (Mosaic Covenant), and that He would pay the penalty of death which was required to man, for breaking Adam's Covenant.

In return, God the Father promised He would accept this substitution of Christ for Adam, and solely upon the condition upon "Faith in Christ," the Father would forgive any and all of Adam's offspring who themselves could not make atonement (because they were themselves both polluted and therefore unacceptable).

The means of that Covenant of Grace (incidentally the covenant of grace is made between the Father and Christ the Son not primarily with man) included several steps.

### **1. Institution of Circumcision**

Preserving a seed of Adam's line (Seth) through which the messiah would come. This includes Noah and then Abraham. With each patriarch the covenant is illustrated and illuminated. With Abraham, God has him prepare the terms of the covenant (slay the animals and place them so God and he can walk between the carcasses and reiterate the covenant). But then when everything is prepared... God Himself walks the covenant alone, not allowing Abraham to participate. This signifies that the Covenant of God's Grace and Mercy will not depend on anything man can do. It will be wholly God's doing. Abraham will be the Founding Father of the Covenant People. "Circumcision" was instituted by God as the sign and seal that Abraham accepts the Covenant. Hence it became the first sign and seal, showing:

- a) the seed of man in covenant with God is segregated, from all the tribes of the earth.
- b) God has the right over the most secret part of the body from which life comes.

### **2. Institution of the Passover**

Other theologians see even more in this ancient rite, but it was Moses to whom God further illustrated the Covenant's scope and operation which was the institution of the annual-keeping of the Passover. The substitutionary nature of the Covenant was here displayed. The death of the innocent lamb and its blood placed on the door's top, sides, bottom (threshold). It is interesting to note that the application of the lamb's blood to the door would have made a cross. Now forever the two signs instituted by God as seals of the Covenant are Circumcision (cutting away the old part of the flesh) and Passover.

#### **The Importance of the Sign & Seal**

These signs and seals are important. Observing them was a testimony of the inward faith of the individuals. They are so important that when Moses neglected to circumcise his own son (born in the desert), God met Moses in the desert and appeared as though He would kill him and his wife then hastily performed the rite.

Both of these rites were "bloody" as were all the sacrifices later instituted, because they pointed us to the ultimate "blood" sacrifice in Christ. He is the founder of the new race (where in are neither Jew nor Gentile but one community of faith). In Christ the Messiah (Last Adam) fulfilled the terms of the Covenant. Christ is our Substitutionary Lamb slain for us! The Passover in its fulfillment is the Lord's Supper.

## Transition from Circumcision to Baptism

Well, there were in the Old Testament examples of "washings" indicating cleansing which was to purify. Sometimes it was done with blood (Lev. 14) and sometimes it was done with water. Hyssop was dipped and then "sprinkled" onto the people. 50 times the word "sprinkle" is used to describe the method of the application of the rite. In Ezekiel 36:25 (a description of the new covenant), God uses the word "sprinkle". Since Christ's death there is no longer any seal that uses blood. Hence Circumcision of the flesh (in the O.T.) always indicated the spiritual need for cleansing and since there were baptisms in the O.T. showing the same cleansing from pollution, hence Christ instituted by His command:

1. That we observe the Lord's Supper as the fulfillment of Passover
2. That we baptize with water as the fulfillment of our being washed inwardly (spiritually) by the atonement which He alone could (and did) make, thus making us a Holy Seed of God (which is the same sign that circumcision was to show in the O.T.)

**Important Note...** Paul tells us that baptism is the circumcision made without hands (he's speaking of the heart) in Colossians 2:10 and following. He is identifying the rite of baptism with water as replacing the rite of circumcision, which was bloody. Through circumcision, and now baptism, we are God's adopted children (Romans 8) because we are in the covenant!

"Faith" is by itself a wonderful term but it is always in need of an object. Faith in what? Faith in Christ! But what does faith in Christ mean? Faith in Christ is spelled out in the covenant which Christ said He was instituting. And the Covenant is wonderful.

God graciously receives us for the merit of Christ alone (Passover) and God graciously puts His Spirit in us because Christ has "cleansed us" (shown by baptism). In the book of Hebrews, all of these pre-New Testament washings pictured and illustrated in the Old Testament (Moses and the Priesthood and the various "washings" in the rituals of cleansing) are called "baptisms." But when we read about these washings in the texts of the O.T. we discover they were all accomplished by "sprinklings."

One wonders why they chose "sprinkling?" Could it be because (like the simplicity of the New Covenant) the Seals of the New Covenant can be done, "anytime," and "any place." We don't need to tell the Alaskans - we have to wait until the ice thaws before we can baptize. We don't need to tell a dying man in hospital... "we can't give you the desired 'seal' of baptism because you're too feeble to be immersed." Therefore, we believe that the correct understanding of the text, *Buried with Christ in baptism* is not talking about the **mode** (or method). It is actually talking about the **effect** of the covenant pictured.

## If scripture is silent, how do we proceed?

Hence in a Covenantal theology, we see a continuity of faith in both testaments that cause us to understand the recipients of the O.T. rites to be valid recipients of the N.T. rites. Interpretation, children are included in the Old Covenant, and are assumed to be included in the New Covenant.

If we used the same logic that brings a person to the conclusion of "Believer's Baptism" we would not invite women to Holy Communion, since nowhere in the New Testament are women shown to take communion. We know that women did partake of Holy Communion because they also ate the Passover in the O.T. Churches that insist on "only doing what the N.T. says," have no grounds in the N.T. for serving women communion. Likewise, churches that have "baby dedication" are missing out on the whole "Covenantal idea" of O.T. circumcision. Though they are "dedicated," they are still biblically outside of the covenant. Which begs the question, what does "baby dedication" mean? Most churches that "dedicate" babies would have an explanation that would sound a whole lot like churches that "baptize" babies.

The idea of infant baptism can be thought of in terms of an "insurance policy." When two parents have children, those children are covered and insured under their parent's policy. They are protected. It would be unheard of for children not to be insured, and illogical to wait for them to be old enough to decide for themselves. The role of the parent is to protect and provide for their children until the point comes in their children's lives when they are "on their own." At that point, they are responsible for their own protection, and must decide whether to purchase insurance for themselves or not (which would obviously not be wise). Similarly, circumcision / baptism are signs given to show that the children of believers are covered (through the faith of their parents) in the Covenant with God. There certainly comes a point where the children of believers must decide for themselves if they want to continue walking in Covenantal obedience to God or not, and our children's profession in Christ is certainly the day that believing parents pray diligently for.

Did God include the children of believers in the O.T. Covenant? Why would He change His mind in the N.T. Covenant? There is, in fact, no place in scripture which tells us that they are no longer included. Paul tells us our "children are holy" (I Cor.). We would assume, had children now been excluded from receiving the covenant sign & seal (which is now baptism), that Jewish Believers during the 1<sup>st</sup> Century would have made a great uproar as to this unthinkable change. History tells us they did not. Therefore, we can assume in great confidence that no such change ever occurred.

### **Baptism points to Faith in Christ**

Believers from a Covenantal perspective do more than "acknowledge children, dedicate them, and pray for them." We administer the sacred sign and seal of the Covenant (which is water baptism), and we pray in faith that that which is outwardly done in time and space will be ratified in their own experience so that they will profess their faith in Christ and "fulfill their baptism" in personally accepting and knowing Christ as Lord and Savior.

### **Is Re-baptism necessary?**

We do not re-baptize any more than we would "re-circumcise" anyone. And we do all we can to persuade parents to have their children baptized, based on how seriously God was angered at Moses for not circumcising his son.

### **Does Baptism save?**

No. But it is so closely tied to the Scriptural Display of what Salvation is all about that Peter speaks of it as our testimony... "wherein baptism saves." Not the rite by itself. No rite ever performed has power in itself to do anything. This is where we differ with the Roman Catholic Church. The rite

doesn't save. Our pray is that the picture the rite demonstrates outwardly is truly being accomplished inwardly.

**OK, If Baptism is for children, then why not the Lord's Supper?**

Great question! The question before some in the church today is this... if O.T. families partook of the Passover...why should not children of believers who have been baptized partake of the Lord's Supper? There is division on this point, and here are the reasons.

**Opposed**

Those who oppose paedo-communion do so on Paul's grounds they do not "discern the Lord's body." (means the whole concept of the atonement).

**In Favor**

Those who favor it assert that our covenant children learn as did the covenant children in the O.T. "by precept (question and answer) and example (actual experience). The Jewish children (or the father) asked "what is the meaning of this night?" And the father explained the reason for the Passover.

**What do you think?**

"Faith, Dedication, New Birth, Saved" are all wonderful words and the New Testament story can be preached in its simplicity, but the New Testament alone without the Old Testament background of these rites and customs can lead to assumptions that are off target.

In her haste for Evangelism some of the churches have "prettied-up" simple rites, built baptismal pools, concentrated on adult baptisms, changed the intended meaning of baptism, excluding children of believers, weakened the concept of Covenantal understanding and instilled ideas of Gentile's onto the more historic ideas one would get from seeing the N.T. not as a separate entity but as the extension of the Old Testament.

**Baptism's True Purpose**

The true purpose of baptism is not as a "testimony" to the world that you are a Christian. No. Baptism is merely a regular but important part of personally receiving the benefits of the Covenant. If one is an adult, the water ceremony isn't the highlight of demonstration of conversion and faith, living the life is!

Blessings on you,

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