

After I left the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada in the 1960s, I had been asked often how I could justify infant baptism. "Where do you find it taught in the Bible?" At the Central Baptist Seminary, where I did my undergraduate studies, we were shown a tract that had on its front cover the question, "What does the New Testament teach about infant baptism?" And when you opened up the tract, you would find a few blank pages.

In the Beginning Is God

Where do you find infant baptism taught in the Bible? This is an important question. Let me assure you that I would never have left the Baptist church if infant baptism was not taught in Scripture. The first baby I had the privilege of baptizing was our oldest daughter. I will never forget that precious experience. What happens when a baby is baptized? All you see is a minister pouring some water on the baby's forehead. Yet this simple ceremony has a profound meaning.

God is present. He promised to be the baby's partner. In baptism God says to the baby, "You are mine." In baptism He signs and seals His covenant promises. Who can fully understand what goes on between God and the child at that sacred moment? As a poet said it so well, "By faith, mighty faith, God's covenant power sees." And this faith rests upon the sure Word of God, upon the promises of our covenant God.

Why do we baptize infants? Let me hasten to say that we are talking of course only about the baptism of children born into Christian families. We don't christen babies. Baptism is not a name-giving ceremony. We don't baptize infants out of custom or superstition. We baptize infants because it is a thoroughly Biblical practice.

1. THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE

We baptize infants because the Bible has only one salvation story. The church father St. Augustine (354-430) rightly observed that in the Old Testament (OT) the New Testament (NT) is concealed and in the NT the OT is revealed. The Gospel, which was hidden in the OT is fully revealed in the NT. Yet the NT can never be understood apart from the OT. The way of salvation in the OT is the same as in the NT God did not have one plan of salvation for OT times and another one for NT times. The God of the OT is also the God of the NT. The OT believers were saved by looking forward to the cross of Christ. We are saved by looking back to the cross. The cross is at the very heart of both Testaments. In the OT is found the promise of Christ's coming. In the NT there is the fulfilment. How do these truths relate to infant baptism?

In the OT circumcision foreshadowed the bloody sacrifice of Christ on the cross, while in the NT baptism points to God's once and for all salvation in Christ. The question is: How are circumcision and baptism related? How can one compare the bloody rite of circumcision with a lovely baptismal service?

Circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant for Israel. Genesis 17 tells us how God made a covenant with Abraham, who was told, "You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household..." (vs.17f.). The apostle Paul compares baptism with circumcision. He wrote to the Christians in Rome, "We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (Romans 4: 9-11). By pointing to Abraham, Paul demonstrates that the righteous live by faith. Abraham was not saved through good works. So Paul shows that circumcision is the OT sign and seal of the covenant God made with Abraham. And he points out that with Christ's coming circumcision was replaced by baptism. In Colossians 2: 11f., Paul refers once again to the Abrahamic covenant and to circumcision as its sign and seal. Notice how Paul compares baptism to circumcision. "In Christ you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." But if infant baptism is scriptural, why then is the NT silent about it? Why can't we find a text which says, "You must baptize infants?" Let me assure you that the silence of the NT does not testify against infant baptism. The opposite is true.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

If the historical context would show that infant baptism was unknown, I would return to the Baptist fold. But the historical fact is that the Jewish believers accepted infant baptism as they were acquainted with the practice. Since baptism in the NT replaces circumcision, refusal to baptize infants would have required an elaborate defense by the apostles. Infant baptism needed no defense. The practice was understood. In the early church; infants were baptized on the 8th day. As in OT times children were circumcised on the 8th day, Jewish converts to the Christian faith believed that their children should be baptized on the 8th day. Baptism as such was a well known practice in the days of our Lord. He did not initiate an unknown rite when He commanded: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). In other words, baptism was known to the Jews, even the baptism of infants. But there is even more historical evidence. When a Gentile was converted to the Jewish faith, it was necessary for him to become a Jew. He had to be circumcised and baptized and present an offering.

The infant children of the convert were also baptized. The Jewish rabbis never asked whether these children **should wait until adulthood** and then decide for

themselves. Hence, in view of Biblical and historical evidence, the refusal to baptize infants would have caused quite a stir in the NT church. Infant baptism did not need any defense. It was the accepted practice.

3. HOUSEHOLD BAPTISMS

In the NT church the practice of household baptism clearly shows that infants were included. Complete households were baptized. After Lydia, the purple seller, had come to know Christ, she and her household received the sacrament of baptism. And the same was true of the Philippian jailer. After his conversion, he and all his family were baptized. Of course they were. A missionary friend in Pakistan shared with us how new converts to Christ always ask if they can have their children baptized immediately following their own baptism. They want to have their children baptized. They see them as children of God's covenant family. They think in terms of families, the same as in Biblical times. They can't imagine God excluding children from His family and their own. So when Pakistanis become Christians, they believe that also their children ought to be baptized. We had the same experience when we served as missionaries in the Philippines. When adult Filipinos become Christians, they want their children baptized.

In one worship service, one of my fellow missionaries baptized 35 people, all members of one family - grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, children and grandchildren. How biblical! Household baptisms! God works through families. This is the golden thread of the covenant. God works with His grace and mercy from generation to generation. As an old hymn testifies: "Jehovah's truth will stand forever; His covenant bonds He will not sever; The word of grace which He commands To a thousand generations stands; the covenant made in days of old with Abraham He doth uphold."

4. NO EASY BELIEVISM

Does infant baptism provide an automatic guarantee to heaven? No. Infant baptism does not exclude repentance of sin, conversion, and a personal commitment to Christ. When you have come of age, God will ask you, "What have you done with your baptism? Have you accepted the promise of salvation I gave to you?" The Lord is not a stranger to those baptized as infants. He has been close to them ever since their baptism. He worked in their hearts, showed His care and love for them. He stuck with them, even though they didn't always stick with Him.

The question for all mature young people baptized into the name of the Triune God is, "Are you seeking the Lord?" Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. And when you seek Him, you will find Him. When you trust the Lord as your Saviour, you can rest assured that you belong to His

family. As you look back to God's wondrous grace at work in your life, you will see then that your infant baptism was important after all.

I am convinced that infant baptism is Biblical. I still remember the day I baptized our first child. As I looked at her, I knew that she was not just our child, but also the Lord's. She was special in the sight of God. She had joined His family. Baptism is a mystery. How God works in the lives of His little ones, we don't know. But that He does, we do know. As a church, we welcome believing parents as they bring their children for baptism. And we say, "here too - in the beginning is God."

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