

Discipleship: An Introduction to Systematic Theology and Apologetics

The Doctrines of Redemption: Key Protestant
Reformation Doctrines - Sacraments

The Heights Church July 8, 2018

Baptism- Should we baptize babies or believers?

- Setting aside the Lutheran view of baptism there are three main views of baptism within Protestantism that have been debated for hundreds of years.
 1. **Covenantal Baptism** (baptism is a Sign and Seal of the New Covenant) is the common doctrine of Reformed and Presbyterian churches.
 2. **Believer's Baptism** (baptism is an outward symbol of personal faith in Christ) is the common doctrine of Baptist churches. Baptism is neither sacramental nor covenantal but purely symbolic.
 3. **Methodist Baptism** John Wesley saw spiritual rebirth as a twofold experience in the normal process of Christian development. Salvation included both God's initiating activity of grace (Prevenient grace) to be received through baptism in infancy and upon reaching the age of moral accountability, a willing human response to God's grace in repentance and faith. Without personal decision and commitment to Christ, the baptismal gift was rendered ineffective.

Baptism- Arguments for the Paedobaptist view

- Paedobaptists (paedo is derived from the Greek word for child) believe that baptism is to be administered to all infant children of believing parents for the following reasons.
 1. Infants were circumcised in the Old Covenant.
 2. Baptism replaced circumcision in the New Covenant. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Colossians 2:11-12)
 3. There were household baptisms in the NT which must have included infants/ children: Lydia (Acts 16:15), The Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33), the household of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 1:16), and Acts 2:39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

Baptism- Arguments for the Paedobaptist view

4. "Infant baptism has a long history; first mentioned explicitly by Tertullian in his book *de baptismo (Concerning Baptism)* written between 200 and 206.

NOTE:

- Tertullian actually questioned the practice in *Concerning Baptism*.
- The writings of the early Church Fathers provide interesting historical information but their writings are not authoritative. Indeed they were often very wrong doctrinally. We must remember **only Scripture is authoritative**.

5. Infant Baptism is the "*Majority Report*" among Protestants.

Baptism- Arguments against the Paedobaptist view

- While there are similarities between circumcision and baptism there are also differences.
 1. Circumcision was given to every male born of Jewish parents and to every slave serving a Jewish master regardless of their spiritual condition. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, (Genesis 17:12)
 2. In the NT real circumcision is a matter of the heart. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. (Romans 2:28-29)
 3. The only covenant community in the NT is the Church and the only thing that matters is whether one has saving faith not physical heritage.
 4. The physical elements and activities in the Old covenant are consistently called a shadow of what was to come spiritually in the New Covenant.

Baptism- Arguments against the Paedobaptist view

5. Therefore, it was appropriate to circumcise infants in the old covenant since membership in the covenant community was based upon birth. In the New Covenant baptizing infants is inappropriate because "*membership in the church*" is based upon faith in Jesus not physical heritage.
6. **The Philippian jailer:** Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And **they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house**. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and **he was baptized at once, he and all his family**. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And **he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God**. (Acts 16:30 – 34)
7. **The household of Stephanas was baptized (1 Corinthians 1:16)** but Now I urge you, brothers--you know that the **household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia**, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints (1 Corinthians 16:15)

Baptism- Arguments against the Paedobaptist view

8. In two cases entire households believed but there is not a mention of baptism in the passage.
 - The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And **he himself believed, and all his household.** (John 4:53)
 - Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, **believed in the Lord, together with his entire household.** And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. (Acts 18:8) **HOWEVER**, I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, (1 Corinthians 1:15)
9. In the case of Lydia we can infer she believed and was then baptized with her household but we are not told about her household and if they had also believed.

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. **The Lord opened her heart** to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And **after she was baptized, and her household** as well, she urged us, saying, "**If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord**, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16:14-15)

Baptism- Arguments against the Paedobaptist view

10. Reformed Paedobaptists can only say baptism symbolizes a possible or perhaps probable future regeneration. Ironically while Reformed Paedobaptists strongly defend Limited Atonement as only efficacious but always efficacious for the elect versus the Arminian view that the atonement makes it possible that everyone could be saved but does not guarantee that anyone will be saved. Surprisingly Reformed Paedobaptists then teach a view of baptism that symbolizes a possible not certain regeneration.
11. There is not a NT passage that commands or forbids baptizing the infants of believers.

Baptism- Arguments for Believers Baptism

- In addition to those points already presented, the main argument for believers baptism is that in the NT the consistent pattern is that regeneration occurs and then the convert is baptized. **Of course**, in the NT era no one would have been previously baptized as an infant so this argument is conclusive only from the perspective of conversion of unbaptized people who are old enough to comprehend and express belief.

Baptism- Arguments for Believers Baptism

- The “Great Commission” commands us to make disciples (*learners and believers*) followed by baptizing them. Namely, believe and then be baptized, followed by life-long discipling to grow from “baby Christians” to increasingly mature believers.

And Jesus came and said to them, "**All authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go **therefore** and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded** you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.“ (Matthew 28:18 – 20)

Initial Belief (“baby Christian”): because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Romans 10:9 – 10)

The need to grow into mature believers: for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:13 – 14)

Baptism- Arguments for Believers Baptism

- While neither position can be absolutely proven, the weight of evidence from a consistency view favors Believers Baptism namely:
 - The number of NT cases where a person(s) believed and are then baptized.
 - The lack of a clearly stated case of an infant being baptized.
 - Since the universal Protestant belief is that the Lord's Supper and the Church (the body/bride of Christ) are only for believers, it follows that the symbol of a believer's union with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus would only be given to believers.
 - The early Protestants wanted to distance themselves from Rome regarding false doctrines. By baptizing only professing believers this is accomplished much better than by various Protestant justifications of infant baptism.
- Billy Graham was fond of saying everyone Jesus called was called publicly. Therefore, believer's baptism by immersion beautifully symbolizes the union of believers with Christ's death, burial and resurrection, but it also provides a public forum for the previous unbeliever to testify to their rebirth.

Comparison PCA Vow 1 & 2 vs Parental Dedication Questions 1 & 2

1. Do you acknowledge your child's need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?
2. Do you claim God's covenant promises in (his/her) behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for (his/her) salvation, as you do for your own?
3. Do you recognize these children as the gifts of God and give heartfelt thanks for God's blessing?
4. Do you now dedicate your children to the Lord who gave them to you, surrendering all worldly claims upon their lives in the hope that they will belong wholly to Jesus Christ?

Comparison PCA Vow 3 vs Parental Dedication Questions 3-5 :

Do you now unreservedly **dedicate** your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him/her) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him/her), that you will teach (him/her) the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring (him/her) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

3. Do you pledge as parents that, with God's fatherly help, you will bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, making every reasonable effort, with patience and love, to build the Word of God, the character of Christ and the joy of the Lord into their lives?
4. Do you promise to provide, through God's blessing, for the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs of your children, looking to your own heavenly Father for the wisdom, love and strength to serve them and not use them?
5. Do your promise, God helping you, to make it your regular prayer that by God's grace your children will come to trust in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of their sins and for the fulfillment of all his promises to them, even eternal life; and in this faith follow Jesus as Lord and obey his teachings?

Baptism- Charles Spurgeon on Infant Baptism*

Where did the errors of the church of Rome come from? Were they all born in a day? No, they came by slow degrees. It happened thus:—I will trace but one error, against which as a denomination we always bear our protest, and I only take that as a specimen of the whole. Among the early Christians, it was the practice to baptize those who believed in Christ Jesus, by immersing them in the water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Well, the first wrong doctrine that started up, was the idea that perhaps there was some efficacy in the water. Next it followed that when a man was dying who had never been baptized he would perhaps profess faith in Christ, and ask that he might be baptized; but as he was dying they could not lift him from his bed, they therefore adopted sprinkling as being an easier method by which they might satisfy the conscience by the application of water. That done, there was but a step to the taking of little children into the church—children, unconscious infants, who were received as being members of Christ's body; and thus infant sprinkling was adopted.

*[New Park Street Pulpit, Sermon # 307](#)

Baptism- Charles Spurgeon on Infant Baptism*

The error came in by slow degrees—not all at once. It would have been too glaring for the church to receive, if it had shown its head at one time with all its horns upon it. But it entered slowly and gradually, till it came to be inducted into the church. I do not know, an error which causes the damnation of more souls than that at the present-time. There are thousands of people who firmly believe that they shall go to heaven because they were sprinkled in infancy, have been confirmed, and have taken the Sacrament. Sacramental efficacy and baptismal regeneration, all spring from the first error of infant baptism. Had they kept to the Scripture, had the church always required faith before baptism, that error could not have sprung up. It must have died before the light of the truth, it could not have breathed, it could not have had a foothold in the Christian church. But one error must lead to another—you never need doubt that. If you tamper with one truth of Scripture, he that tempts you to meddle with one, will tempt you to tamper with another, and there will be no end to it, till, at last, you will want a new Bible, a new Testament, and a new God. There is no telling where you will end when you have begun.

*[New Park Street Pulpit, Sermon # 307](#)

Baptism- Jonathon Edwards on Infant Baptism*

All that acknowledge infant baptism, allow infants, who are the proper subjects of baptism, and are baptized, to be in some sort members of the Christian church, yet none suppose them to be members in such standing as to be the proper immediate subjects of all ecclesiastical ordinances and privileges: ...And some who are baptized in infancy, even after they come to be adult, may yet remain for a season short of such a standing as has been spoken of; being destitute of sufficient knowledge, and perhaps some other qualifications, through the neglect of parents, or their own negligence... Though I have no doubts about the doctrine of infant baptism, yet God's manner of dealing with such infants as are regularly **dedicated** to him in baptism, is a matter liable to great disputes and many controversies, and would require a large dissertation by itself to clear it up,

* [Part I Covenant Theology - God's Master Plan to Give His Son Jesus Christ a Bride](#)