

## Infant Baptism

Jesus Christ gave these instructions to his apostles before his ascension into heaven:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."<sup>1</sup>

Christ instructed his apostles to make disciples of all nations, teach them to obey everything he commanded them and to baptize them. Clearly Christ and his followers understood the form of baptism to be an immersion in water:

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.<sup>2</sup>

Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.<sup>3</sup>

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot.

Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly also, Christ and his followers understood candidates for baptism to be those who believe the promise Christ embodied and accepted the need to repent (the first quotation is from Jesus Christ, the second is from the apostle Peter):

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned".<sup>5</sup>

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call."

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.<sup>6</sup>

The candidate for baptism must believe in Jesus Christ and understand the need for repentance. The exact age when this becomes so varies widely from person to person, but clearly cannot be applied to an infant. There is a more detailed discussion of the above two points in the essays "Baptism Part One" and "Baptism Part Two" on the website. Some practice baptism as sprinkling infants with water. Is sprinkling infants correctly following the instructions Jesus Christ gave to his apostles or is this practice another example of religious tradition that has wandered away from God?

First, there are no instances in the Bible of sprinkling with water being employed as a form of baptism. All the examples of baptism in the Bible clearly illustrate baptism to be an immersion in water. The apostle Paul compares this immersion to a burial and uses this to illustrate an important spiritual point:

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 28:18-20

<sup>2</sup> Matt 3:16

<sup>3</sup> John 3:23

<sup>4</sup> Acts 8:36-39

<sup>5</sup> Mark 16:16

<sup>6</sup> Acts 2:36-41

We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.<sup>7</sup>

Also, there is no instruction in the Bible to baptize infants and there are no examples of infants being baptized. Some infer that certain specific events must have included infants and we will discuss some of these specific examples later. So, there are no instances of infants being sprinkled with water to be baptized in the Bible. Is this modification of baptism acceptable to God? Or is this an example of wandering away from God's instruction? Is this tradition from God or from men? How would Christ and his apostles answer this question? Jesus had this reaction to the modifications of the Pharisees:

"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

"These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.  
They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are but rules taught by men.'

You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"<sup>8</sup>

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are."<sup>9</sup>

The apostle Paul also had a negative reaction to modifying the gospel of Jesus Christ; there are many examples of this. Notice what he says here to the churches in Galatia:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly strong words and interestingly, the condition of the churches in Galatia was much closer to Christ's teaching than the churches today that practice sprinkling of infants as baptism. What do you think Paul's reaction would be to these churches today? Is this an acceptable modification of the gospel or is this setting aside the commands of God in order to observe the traditions of men? Clearly the tradition of sprinkling infants is from men and sets aside the commands of God.

Onto a new point: there is an interesting incident recorded in Acts chapter 19. Remember John the Baptist came before Jesus Christ, preaching repentance and baptizing. The book of Acts records the work of the apostles spreading the gospel after Christ's ascension into heaven. The apostle Paul traveled from place to place spreading the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ:

<sup>7</sup> Rom 6:2-4

<sup>8</sup> Mark 7:6-9

<sup>9</sup> Matt 23:15

<sup>10</sup> Gal 1:6-12

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

Paul comes across some disciples who were baptized by John the Baptist but did not understand the promise of the Holy Spirit connected with baptism because they had not heard the complete instruction from Jesus Christ. So here we have an example of adults who were baptized needing to be baptized again because their understanding of baptism was incomplete. Once again we have a situation closer to the teaching of Christ than the sprinkling of infants: we have repentance, we have immersion, but we do not have the understanding of the promise of the Holy Spirit. This example prevents someone from reasoning: I was "baptized" as an infant then when understanding came that baptism now becomes valid. It is the same now just as it was then: such a person would need to be baptized once they understood both the promise and the need to repent. Infants cannot understand the promise, nor do they have any need to repent.

Now we come to the various passages in the Bible where some reason that the use of words such as "children" or "entire household" must imply that infants were baptized in these instances. I am reluctant to go into this argument for this reason: it is clear that the candidate for baptism must believe and repent in order to be baptized, this is what Jesus commanded, this what the apostles carried out. So if you see some blanket statement that might include infants it need not be stated specifically "everyone but the infants". For example, if I said to you: "I went to the home of Crispus, preached the gospel and wound up baptizing the entire household". Knowing that I teach belief and repentance are necessary to be baptized, would you think that included infants? Or if I said to you: "I went to the home of Crispus to sell Tupperware and wound up selling Tupperware to the entire household would you think that included infants? This is such a weak argument, even if the expression might include infants it still does not make the point that scripture instructs us to baptize infants.

Now let's look at some of the specific passages often cited. Acts chapter 2, the setting is Jerusalem; the day is Pentecost following Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven. The apostle Peter is preaching the gospel to a large crowd. Some were cut to the heart and asked Peter what to do:

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call."

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.<sup>12</sup>

Some reason that the use of the word "children" indicates that some of the three thousand baptized that day were infants. The Greek word "teknon" here translated as children carries the meaning of offspring (as produced). So what is Peter saying here? Remember he is in Jerusalem, speaking to a predominantly Jewish crowd. What he is saying is that this promise is not just for you people standing here, this is for you, your offspring and even for the gentiles for now and in the future, in fact everyone who God will call. This spreading of the gospel from Jerusalem to the rest of the world is a

<sup>11</sup> Acts 19:1-5

<sup>12</sup> Acts 2:38-41

main theme of the Book of Acts. Notice the words of Jesus Christ when he instructs the apostles to wait in Jerusalem:

“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”<sup>13</sup>

Back to Acts chapter 2 now, also notice in the verse that follows (Acts 2:41) it says: “Those who accepted his message were baptized”. Who were baptized? Those who accepted his message were baptized. Could this possibly include infants? No. But we’re talking about three thousand being baptized, is it reasonable to accept that this number did not include infants? Indeed so, in fact women and children were often not included in such counts. All of the instances in the Old Testament, where the nation of Israel was numbered (a census taken), they only counted adult males. In the New Testament when Christ feeds the five thousand, did that number include women and children?

The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.<sup>14</sup> Mathew relates the count in the usual form and adds the note that women and children were also fed. There is no reason to think it odd that the count in Acts chapter 2 did not include infants. To summarize: clearly the text does not support the inference that infants were baptized that day. In Acts chapter 10 the apostle Peter is led by the Holy Spirit to the house of Cornelius (a gentile). Peter preaches the gospel to a gentile audience. Some cite this verse as another that must have included infants:

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.<sup>15</sup>

Some say the word “all” must include infants. The point of this passage, not to mention the entire chapter (also most of chapter 11) is to demonstrate the gospel being spread to the gentiles. Remember the words Jesus spoke to them in Jerusalem before his ascension:

“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”<sup>16</sup>

Before the events recorded in Acts chapter 10 the church was predominantly Jewish. Despite the words of Jesus, Peter (and some others) had difficulty with the concept of the gospel going to the gentiles. That is the point of this passage; infants are not in view here. Clearly the text does not support the inference that infants were baptized that day.

In Acts chapter 16 the apostle Paul is in Philippi (a Roman colony) and a woman named Lydia responds to Paul’s message:

When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home.<sup>17</sup>

The phrase “members of her household” is cited as including infants. The Greek word “oikos” translated here as “household” means dwelling and by implication a family. The word has no specific meaning to include infants. Although members of ones family could include infants, clearly the text does not support the inference that infants were baptized that day. Later in Acts chapter 16 we have the incident with the Philippian jailer. He asks Paul and his companions the question: “What must I do to be saved” and this follows:

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then

<sup>13</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>14</sup> Matt 14:21

<sup>15</sup> Acts 10:44-45

<sup>16</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>17</sup> Acts 16:15

immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family.<sup>18</sup>

Could this passage that mentions “household” and “whole family” be understood to include infants? Notice what the apostle Paul says here, he tells them to “believe” as we stated before, not possible for an infant. Also notice the reaction of the jailor to being baptized: “he was filled with joy” why, because he believed, “he and his whole family”. Once again, it is not possible for an infant to believe. Clearly the text does not support the inference that infants were baptized that day.

Finally we come to Acts chapter 18 and Crispus, this is very similar to the previous passage we looked at:

Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.<sup>19</sup>

The Greek word here translated as “household” is “oikos” which we covered earlier. Is the phrase here “entire household” meant to include infants? Notice it says “his entire household believed in the Lord” infants cannot understand, infants cannot believe in the lord. So when Luke writes “entire household” he most assuredly does not mean to include infants here. Clearly the text does not support the inference that infants were baptized that day.

The apostle Paul also mentions in 1 Corinthians having “baptized the household of Stephanas”. This is the same thing as the other examples above. It’s all basically the same pattern. They all hear the gospel, they all believe, they all are baptized. That excludes infants because infants can’t hear and believe. The “household” then is defined as “those capable of hearing, understanding, believing.” That’s the definition of the “household” as it applies here.

Now let’s look at another passage that gets quoted in connection with infant baptism:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>20</sup>

This passage is not talking about baptism; humility is the topic under discussion here. Instead of attempting to enter the kingdom of heaven on the basis of your accomplishments or earthly status you need to humble yourself like a child. This is not a command to baptize infants. Paul, who was a big deal as a Pharisee makes this point:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Now that’s humility, all the things he took pride in before, he now considers rubbish for the sake of Christ. He has let go of his previous status and accomplishments. The following passage is also often quoted in connection with infant baptism:

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little

<sup>18</sup> Acts 16:31-34

<sup>19</sup> Acts 18:8

<sup>20</sup> Matt 18:1-4

<sup>21</sup> Phil 3:7-8

child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.<sup>22</sup>

This passage is about God's special care for children. These children are innocent because they are too young to either reject or accept the truth. Christ does not baptize them. What does he do? He pulls them into His arms and He demonstrated that special care by blessing them. Baptism is not in view here.

Now Christ's comments above seem to conflict with the reason most denominations "baptize" infants these days: this idea of "original sin". The concept basically is that children are born guilty of sin because of Adam's sin. This idea is a teaching from John Calvin. There is no mention of "original sin" in the Bible and passages like the one above contradict the concept. Some cite Romans 5:12 when discussing "original sin" so let's look at that now:

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned<sup>23</sup>

The apostle Paul here is in the middle of a discussion of having peace with God and joy through the work of Jesus Christ. He then makes a contrast with Adam. The point is Adam began the pattern of death through disobedience and this has been passed on from generation to generation because all have followed in disobedience. He is not saying Adam's sin is transmitted to you at birth. If that were so the verse would read:

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because *Adam* sinned

But that is not what it says. The concept of "original sin" does not come from the Bible. It comes from man. This type of error though is similar to the misunderstanding that the children would be punished for the sins of the fathers which cropped up about a thousand years or more before the time of Christ. The Bible teaches that all are responsible for passing on God's instruction to later generations so that it will go well for them, notice this instruction to the nation of Israel:

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders — great and terrible — upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to

<sup>22</sup> Mark 10:13-16

<sup>23</sup> Rom 5:12

obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."<sup>24</sup>

Clearly the parents are responsible for passing on God's instruction. That is not to say that anyone is punished for anyone else's sin. Notice this from the book of the prophet Ezekiel:

The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel:

"The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'?"

"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son — both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die."<sup>25</sup>

If you read the rest of Ezekiel chapter 18 he goes into detail with specific examples, but the theme continues: "The soul who sins is the one who will die." Infants are not born guilty of Adam's or anyone else's sin. People are guilty of the evil they actually do:

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?<sup>26</sup>

God would rather see people repent and be saved, that is what the apostle Paul is talking about in Romans 5, he is comparing the man Adam with the man Jesus Christ and how, what God accomplished through Christ is more powerful than the power of disobedience Adam represents.

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup>

But you have to do something to be associated with either of these two men. To be like Adam you have to sin like Adam. To be like Christ you have to obey like Christ. There is no need to baptize infants because they have not done anything wrong, they have not sinned. So not only, according to the Bible, is there no instruction to baptize infants, there is no need to baptize infants.

Some say that infants are baptized because baptism is the new testament equivalent to circumcision. The Bible never makes that connection. Circumcision was connected with the promise made to Abraham of the land his offspring would possess. All males, on the eighth day after their birth, were circumcised. Females weren't, so that poses a real problem in paralleling the new covenant since females are baptized also. The apostle Paul used circumcision in his discussions, as a figure they were all familiar with, to help illustrate his point. Nowhere does he make the connection that would indicate infants should be baptized. Here is an example some connect with baptizing infants:

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him 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.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Deut 6:1-9, 20-25

<sup>25</sup> Ezek 18:1-4

<sup>26</sup> Ezek 18:23

<sup>27</sup> Rom 5:17

<sup>28</sup> Col 2:9-15

This is another one of those passages where the apostle Paul employs old testament conventions to make the point that the new covenant in Christ is superior to the old. If anything, Paul is distancing us from the concept of circumcision. He is not connecting baptism with circumcision.

Let's sum up this essay. Jesus Christ commanded his apostles to make disciples of all nations, teach them to obey everything he commanded them and to baptize them. We see, in the book of Acts his apostles teaching followers who believe to repent, be baptized, follow in the apostles teaching and receive the Holy Spirit. We do not see any command to baptize infants or any examples of infants being baptized. We have also pointed out that infants cannot believe or repent which are required for baptism. The tradition of sprinkling of infants for baptism did not come from God, it came from man.

Today we see many religious teachings that include infant baptism. Clearly these teachings are examples of wandering away from God's instruction. We also noted that the only mode of baptism practiced in the Bible is immersion. There is no instruction for sprinkling. There is no instruction for baptizing infants.

Clearly one who has been sprinkled as an infant has not been baptized. Such a person (like the rest of us) needs to believe, repent, be baptized and follow in the apostles teaching. This follows the pattern that God has chosen for his relationship with man that we see demonstrated throughout the entire Bible:

Believe the promise.  
Follow the instruction.

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