

“A Biblical Case for Infant Baptism”

The following is a defense of the baptism of infants, as part of a dialogue between a “Baptist” (a person who does not believe in infant baptism) and a “Presbyterian” (a person defending the Biblical basis for the practice of infant baptism):

Baptist: “**Are infants with believing parents saved through their baptism?**”

Presbyterian: No, water baptism does not save or justify anyone. However, baptism is an important act of obedience to a Biblical command.

Baptist: “**Someone told me that infant baptism takes care of the "original" sin, but they didn't know if a commitment to Christ is required later.**”

Presbyterian: Many professing Christian churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, believe in baptismal regeneration (i.e., salvation by water baptism), which cleanses you of original sin. In Catholicism, if you later commit a "mortal sin," you lose your salvation and must do penance to get it back. That is not the Presbyterian view.

Presbyterians believe that any adult convert to Christianity should be baptized after he professes his faith in Christ and obedience to Him. However, the infants of one or more believing parents ought also to be baptized on the basis of God's covenant promise. The child still has to profess his faith in Christ and obedience to Him before he can become a communing member of the church, and his baptism neither saves him nor does it guarantee that he ever will be saved.

A New Testament passage that is key to understanding this doctrine is 1 Corinthians 7:12-16. In 1 Corinthians 7:14, the apostle Paul explains, “For the unbelieving husband is **sanctified** through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is **sanctified** through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are **holy**” (NAS, emphasis added). What does Paul mean when he says that the children of at least one believing parent are "holy"?

Dr. John MacArthur, president of the Master's College and Seminary in California, is a Baptist pastor. However, his understanding of Scripture often seems to correspond closely to that of Presbyterians, as it does in this case. Here is his explanation of this verse in the *MacArthur Study Bible*¹: **sanctified** “This does not refer to salvation; otherwise the spouse would not be spoken of as unbelieving. The sanctification is matrimonial and familial, not personal or spiritual, and means that the unsaved partner is **set apart** for temporal blessing because the other belongs to God. One Christian in a marriage brings grace that spills over on the spouse—even possibly leading them to salvation. **Children...are holy.** The Christian need not separate from an unbeliever because of fear that the unbelieving spouse may defile the children. God promises the opposite. They would be unclean if both parents were unsaved, but **the presence of one believing parent exposes the children to blessing and brings them protection.** The presence of even one Christian parent will protect children from undue spiritual harm, and they will receive many blessings, and often that includes salvation.”

¹ *The MacArthur Study Bible*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 1738.

The *New Geneva Study Bible*², edited by Dr. RC Sproul (a believer in infant baptism) describes 1 Corinthians 7:14 to be: “A striking affirmation of the special character of the home in which at least one parent is a believer. In Old Testament language [“unclean” v. “holy”], the whole family is regarded as being in covenant with God. Even the spouse who refuses to believe comes under the influence of God’s work—much more so the children who are not old enough to profess their faith.”

So the child of even just one believing parent is “holy.” (Sometimes “holy” can mean simply “set apart,” which is what it means here—as opposed to actually righteous.) A child of a believing parent is “holy.” Just as the nation of Israel under the old covenant was “a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 7:6-8), so also, under the new covenant, believers and their children are “holy” (**1 Peter 2:9-10**—Peter applies this term to the Church under the new covenant: “**you are** a chosen race, a royal priesthood, **a holy nation**, a people for *God’s* own possession.”). Interestingly, the prophet Joel described the assembly or congregation of Israel as including “the elders,” “the children and the nursing infants” (Joel 2:16). This description reinforces the idea of “covenant children”—that the children of at least one believing parent are part of the Church.

Therefore, Presbyterians believe that the child of at least one believing parent should be baptized as a sign of his “set-aparthood” from the world. He is a part of the church and subject to special blessings or curses, depending on whether he trusts in Christ or rejects the Word of truth that is proclaimed to him (cf. Hebrews 4:2: “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them [i.e., the Israelites whom Moses led out of Egypt but who responded in sin and unbelief—Heb. 3:16-19]; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*.)

As John MacArthur (who is Baptist) pointed out, children receive special blessings by being in a home with at least one believing parent. They are exposed to the Word of God and the Gospel repeatedly from an early age. They hear the preaching of the Word, see the Gospel displayed in baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and enjoy the fellowship, discipline, and mentoring of the church family. Whether baptized or not, in practice, they are participants in the community of faith (i.e., the congregation that their parents attend). A child attending a Baptist church, even though he is not baptized, still receives special blessings (and potential curses—see Luke 12:47-48; cf. Deut. 11:26-28) that an unchurched child raised by non-Christians or atheists would not receive. A child growing up in a pagan home, without a Christian parent, does not share in the blessings of God’s covenant and may never even hear the Gospel.

Infant baptism signifies a child’s inclusion into this community of faith (the Church) and in this covenant with God. It also emphasizes God’s special blessing to the children of believers and the special responsibility God demands of Christian parents (especially fathers) to whom He says: “do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Infant baptism does not signify whether or not the child is saved. In consideration of Paul’s warnings in 1 Corinthians 11:28-30, Presbyterian churches do not permit children to partake of the Lord’s Supper prior to their making a public profession of their faith in Christ and their understanding of what that entails.

² *New Geneva Study Bible*, ed. R.C. Sproul (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1807.

There is a lot more that could be said from the Old Testament, Hebrews, and other portions of Scripture. Many books have been written on this subject. I hope this provides a good overview of the primary arguments in favor of infant baptism. It's a lot to consider, but God chose to give us His inspired, infallible, inerrant Word in sixty-six books, and Jesus said to live by "every word of God" (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4), so sometimes we have to consider a lot of passages to understand a teaching of Scripture. Things aren't always as simple as we might like. God didn't give us a summary book of the "essential" points; we've got sixty-six books (thousands of pages) of Scripture to consider, which can be a challenge.

As with infant baptism, the Bible is not very explicit in teaching the doctrine of the Trinity (i.e., that God is three in person but one in substance/essence—There is one God, and God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). However, all orthodox Christians for two thousand years have agreed that the Bible teaches this doctrine based on considering a number of different passages and then working to reconcile them with one another. Such is the case with infant baptism.

Baptist: "Why were people in the New Testament baptized after they had made a decision to follow Christ?"

Presbyterian: That's a good question. Those in the New Testament who were baptized after having placed their faith in Christ were first generation converts to Christianity, and they were part of the transitional period between the old and new covenants (which period was marked by speaking in foreign languages, the offices of apostle and prophet, etc., phenomena that were not normative for the Church; they do not appear in the later New Testament books, and they do not continue today).

If we make the baptisms recorded in Acts and 1 Corinthians normative for the Church today, ignoring all other portions of Scripture (such as Paul's other epistles that I quote from below), then logically we would be led also to make the charismatic gifts recorded in Acts and 1 Corinthians normative for us today.

There are eleven instances of actual Christian baptisms recorded in the New Testament. All were recorded in the earlier, transitional-period books of Acts and 1 Corinthians. We read of the baptism of

1. Jews (Acts 2:37-41)
2. Samaritans (Acts 8:12-17)
3. The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35-38)
4. Paul (Acts 9:18; cf. 22:16)
5. Caesareans (Acts 10:44-48)
6. Lydia "and her household" (Acts 16:13-15)
7. The Philippian jailer "and all his family" (Acts 16:30-34)
8. Crispus and many of the Corinthians (Acts 18:8)
9. John's disciples (Acts 19:1-7)
10. Crispus and Gaius (1 Cor. 1:14)
11. Stephanas' household (1 Cor. 1:16)

Note that none of these instances involved people who were raised by Christian parents, and thus none of these baptisms address the issue of what happens to the child of a believing parent.

Jesus was both circumcised (as an infant) and also baptized as an adult, but, obviously, he did not “make a decision to follow Christ.” Jesus instituted baptism. Since baptism was new, any believing Jew would have to be baptized as an adult. They were part of the first generation of Christians. No mention is made of their infants or young children. But it is recorded in the Gospels that Jesus “blessed” little children and infants (cf. Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15).

Jesus commanded us to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .” (Matt. 28:19). When His disciples began to carry out this Great Commission, as recorded in Acts, we find “household baptisms” (e.g., Lydia, the Philippian jailer, Crispus, Cornelius; Acts 16:14, 30-34; 18:8; 10:47-48). We don’t know whether there were infants in these households or not. However, the household baptisms reinforce the principle taught in the Old Testament (and in such texts as 1 Cor. 7:14 and elsewhere in the New Testament) that God savingly works through families.³

Since, in the New Testament, there is no prohibition of infant baptism and there are no instances of children of Christian parents (at any age) being baptized, the Baptist view that we are not to baptize infants, like the Presbyterian view, is an argument from silence, an inference deduced from Scripture.

Below I will explain why Presbyterians believe that although the New Testament is silent with respect to the baptism of infants of believers, based on the teachings of Scripture, we should assume that God intends for them to be baptized.

Baptist: “Why do Presbyterians baptize infants if there is no explicit command to do so in the New Testament?”

Presbyterian: All of the baptisms recorded in the New Testament are of first generation Christians. There is not a single instance in the New Testament (after the first generation when Jesus had instituted baptism as a new ordinance of the new covenant) of a baptism of an adult who was the child of at least one believing Christian parent at the time of his birth.

Based on our understanding of the continuity of the covenant made with Abraham (Genesis 12-17) and the relationship between circumcision and baptism, there would have to be an explicit repeal in the New Testament of the command to apply the sign of God’s covenant to the infants of believers. Absent such a command, we have no reason to stop the practice.

³ The few instances of household baptisms, recorded in Acts, may suggest infants and/or older children (not to mention their servants / bondservants / slaves) were baptized by virtue of their household including a new convert to Christianity (i.e., a believing parent). It would seem likely that these households included young children. However, this remains an argument from silence because we are not given detail as to the household members’ ages nor whether they all possessed true faith or were merely following the lead of their believing head of household. We are not sure if the entire household was regenerated at once by the Holy Spirit, or whether they merely received the sign and seal of baptism on account of the faith of the parent or head of household who believed. In other words, the household baptisms recorded in Acts seem to be inconclusive if we are seeking to prove that infants and young children were (or were not) baptized.

In Colossians 2:11-15, the two ordinances/sacraments (I will use this term interchangeably) of Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism are explicitly related:

Colossians 2:11 “and in Him [in Christ] you were also circumcised with a **circumcision made without hands**, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the **circumcision of Christ**; 12 having been **buried with Him in baptism**, in which you were also **raised up with Him through faith** in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us *and* which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.” (NAS, emphasis added)

Paul here compares **spiritual** circumcision (“a circumcision made without hands”) and **spiritual** baptism (“buried” and “raised up” = spiritual death and resurrection; cf. Col. 2:13; Eph. 2:5-6).

Both circumcision and baptism are signs of faith (as we will prove below), a covenantal sign of the Spirit’s act of cleansing from sin’s defilement. Baptism also signifies union with Christ in His crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-6; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27-28; Col. 2:11-12), and Christ’s work of baptizing His people with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 2:33; 1 Cor. 12:13). Otherwise stated, baptism is a sign of our ingrafting into Christ, our partaking of the benefits of God’s covenant, and our engagement to be the Lord’s (i.e., to live for Him and not for ourselves).

The Apostle Paul explains in Romans 2:28-29: “For **he is not a Jew who is one outwardly**; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But **he is a Jew who is one inwardly**; and **circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit**, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God” (NAS, cf. Deut. 30:6; Deut. 10:12-16; Jer. 4:4).

Physical circumcision never saved a Jew. A true Jew, a spiritual Jew, is one who has been born of the Spirit, born from above (i.e., born again). Circumcision, like baptism, was only an outward sign of an inward reality of faith. Water baptism is only an outward sign of spiritual baptism.

Paul later adds, “For **they are not all Israel who are of Israel**, nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.” (Rom. 9:6-8, NKJ, emphasis added)

Physical descent from Abraham did not guarantee one’s salvation; only those who possessed the faith of Abraham were true Jews, true children of Abraham.

Elsewhere, Paul teaches, “Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7, NKJ).

Again, Paul states in Galatians: “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but **a new creation**. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon **the Israel of God**” (Gal. 6:15-16, emphasis added).

“If anyone *is* in Christ, *he is a new creation*” (2 Corinthians 5:17, emphasis added).

Paul says that only those who are in Christ, who have been born again, who are “a new creation,” are the true Israel of God and genuine children of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). A true Jew, a member of the Israel of God, is not marked by his physical circumcision but rather by his faith in Christ (i.e., that he has become “a new creation”) (cf. Rom. 2:28-29).

John the Baptist warned the Jews: “Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones” (Luke 3:8).

The Pharisees said to Jesus: “‘Abraham is our father.’” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father. . . . You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.” (John 8:39-41, 44)

Paul declares in Philippians: “for **we are the true circumcision**, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3, NAS, emphasis added). Paul here again declares that Christians are the *true* circumcision, in other words, the spiritual Israel.

Neither circumcision under the old covenant nor baptism under the new has ever been the cause of one's salvation; in both cases, only faith in the Messiah, only faith in Jesus Christ, is the means of salvation.

Baptist: “**Baptism is a sign of placing your faith in Christ. Someone told me that circumcision never had anything to do with faith.**”

Presbyterian: You are right, baptism is clearly a sign of faith; the New Testament also teaches that circumcision was a sign of faith.

Paul says that the Gospel of justification by faith apart from works was preached to Abraham in Genesis 12:3: “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, **preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying**, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham” (Gal. 3:8-9, emphasis added).

In the midst of his exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Romans, Paul discusses Abraham's faith and circumcision as a sign of faith.

Abraham was justified by faith apart from works (Rom. 4:2-5, 9; Gen. 15:6), just like David (Rom. 4:6-8). Paul explains in Romans, chapters 1-3, that all people are sinners from birth (see, for example, Romans 3:23). We all are spiritually dead in our trespasses

and sins as a result of Adam's fall (Eph. 2:1, 5); this is what we call "original sin." But God's righteousness, as witnessed by the Law [of Moses] and the Prophets comes through **faith** in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-22). We are justified ("declared righteous") freely by His grace" (Rom. 3:24) "through faith" (Rom. 3:25, 26) by God (Rom. 3:26). It is God's gift, of His grace alone, so all boasting is excluded (Rom. 3:27; cf. Eph. 2:8-9). In fact, men are justified by faith alone, for it is faith apart from works (Rom. 3:28).

Romans 4:11 "And he [Abraham] received **the sign of circumcision, a seal of** the righteousness of the **faith** which *he had while still* uncircumcised, **that he might be the father of all those who believe**, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, **and the father of circumcision to those** who not only are of the circumcision, but **who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham** which he had while uncircumcised." (NKJ, emphasis added)

Paul says that circumcision is a SIGN and SEAL of Abraham's faith. He also says that **Abraham is the "father of all those who believe."** In other words, we, as Christians who share in Abraham's faith, are true, spiritual children of Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:14). Paul says that "we are the *true* circumcision" (Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11).

The Bible teaches that **the Abrahamic covenant is "an everlasting covenant"** (Genesis 17:7, 13, 19). Genesis 17:13: "He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised⁴, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant" (NKJ). Since we interpret this statement literally, the Abrahamic covenant must still be in effect. However, we believe that the New Testament teaches that, under the new covenant, baptism has replaced circumcision as the *outward sign* of God's covenant. Both ordinances have essentially the same meaning. However, Christ instituted baptism, because it applies to more people (e.g., women and Gentiles), and it more appropriately symbolizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the cleansing/purification of Christ described in the New Testament.⁵

In a similar fashion, the Lord's Supper is a more appropriate ordinance for the church under the new covenant than its Old Testament counterpart (the Passover), although the Passover foreshadowed Christ's cross work—those who are covered with the blood of the Lamb of God, who was delivered up as a sacrifice for us all, have been freed from the sting of death (Rom. 4:7; 8:32; 1 Cor. 15:55-56).

Many New Testament passages reinforce this idea that Christians today are under the Abrahamic covenant and that therefore the covenant of Christ is the fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham:

Galatians 3:29 "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise [i.e., the covenant made with Abraham]." (NAS)

⁴ Note the presence of household circumcisions under the old covenant just like the household baptisms of new covenant (Christian) believers featured in Acts and 1 Corinthians.

⁵ Presbyterians teach that water baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling. For further study on the mode of baptism, we recommend the article "Sprinkling is Scriptural" by Dr. Francis Nigel Lee, featured on the Resources page of Wabash Bible Ministries www.wabashbible.org.

Romans 4:13 “For **the promise to Abraham** or to his descendants **that he would be heir of the world [i.e., the father of all the believing faithful, Jew and Gentile, of all generations]** was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.”

Romans 4:11 “And he received the sign of circumcision, **a seal of the righteousness of the faith** which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also” (NKJ).

Note what Paul says in Romans 4:11—Abraham was circumcised AFTER he had faith. But his son Isaac was circumcised as an infant (Gen. 21:4), BEFORE he had faith, as were all the other sons of believers under the old covenant (as God had commanded in Genesis 17). If baptism is the new covenant sign and seal of faith, then it seems that this same pattern would continue unless there was an explicit repeal of this practice of applying the sign of faith to the children of those who profess faith in the God of Abraham. For we are also saved by faith, through the covenant made with Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:29; Rom. 4:13).

God promised to Abraham that he would be a “father of many nations” (Gen. 17:4-5; Rom. 4:17, 18). Abraham never fully grasped what God meant. Paul teaches in the book of Ephesians that this was a “mystery.” But now God has revealed the mystery. Paul says that “the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:4), “which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit” (Eph. 3:5) is that “the **Gentiles** are **fellow heirs** and **fellow members of the body**, and **fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus** through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6, emphasis added). The implications of this revelation are breathtaking. Under the new covenant, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Paul teaches in Ephesians that the church is the Israel of God (cf. Gal. 6:16). Unbelieving, uncircumcised “Gentiles in the flesh” have now been engrafted into “the commonwealth of Israel” and made fellow heirs of the “covenants of promise” (cf. Eph. 2:11-12; 3:6; Gal. 3:14; 4:28). Through Christ’s blood shed at Calvary, Jew and Gentile have been reconciled into **one body**, as He has broken down the barrier that once separated them (Eph. 2:13-14, 16, 19).

The word chosen by the writers of the New Testament to describe the new covenant people of God displays this connection between Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament. The word translated “church” in the New Testament (ekklesia, ἐκκλησία) is the same word used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament written hundreds of years earlier and in common use at the time in which the New Testament was written) to refer to Israel in the Old Testament. By choosing the same word for the Church under the new covenant, the writers of the New Testament showed the unity between the people of God under the old covenant (“the assembly or congregation [ekklesia] of Israel”) and under the new covenant (“the Church [ekklesia]”).

Paul explicitly states the similarity between Isaac (who received the sign of God’s covenant as an infant) and New Testament believers: “And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise” (Galatians 4:28).

Paul says that Abraham “is the father of us all” (Rom. 4:16). All true believers, Jew and Gentile, are children of Abraham and inheritors of the promise given to him (Rom. 4:23-25). If we “belong to Christ, then we are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29). Therefore, if we are Abraham's children, then like Isaac, we, too, should receive the sign and seal of God's everlasting covenant with Abraham, which under the old covenant was circumcision but under the new covenant is baptism.

As a *first generation* convert from paganism, Abraham was circumcised AFTER he professed faith in God. However, his son Isaac was circumcised as an infant BEFORE he professed faith, as were his two sons Jacob and Esau. Both received the sign of God's covenant (i.e., circumcision) as infants. Jacob believed in God and received the blessings of circumcision, but Esau rebelled against God and received the curses due unto him for breaking God's covenant and dying in unbelief.

Furthermore, note that 99-year-old Abraham, his 13-year-old son Ishmael, and all the males in his household were circumcised (Gen. 17:24-27). In this manner, Abraham's household was set apart as “holy.” In the same manner, we find “household baptisms” recorded in the New Testament book of Acts. For example, Lydia “and her household were baptized” (Acts 16:15). Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). So also Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, “believed on the Lord with all his household” (Acts 18:8). God works savingly through families. Whether or not the children of believers actually come to salvation or not, Paul says that the children of at least one believing parent are “holy”; they are set apart, included in the Christian community (1 Cor. 7:14).

Lest we should have any confusion about the relationship between the Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant, Paul explicitly teaches that the *everlasting* Abrahamic covenant finds its consummate fulfillment in Christ, in the new covenant. “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise” (Galatians 3:16-18, NKJ). Paul says that “the law” of Moses cannot annul the Abrahamic covenant and its promise. Because they are “in Christ,” united with Him in His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection, Jewish and Gentile Christians are “Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). The distinction between Jew and Gentile has been abolished (Gal. 3:28).

Under the old covenant administration (dispensation) of the Abrahamic covenant, *circumcision* was the sign of the entrance into the covenant community / the congregation / the assembly / the Church. Under the new covenant administration (dispensation) of the Abrahamic covenant, *baptism* is the sign of entrance into the Church.

Since the covenant made with Abraham is an everlasting covenant, and the infant children of believers under the old covenant received the sign, we believe that God intends for the same to be the case under the new covenant. If He did not intend this, then He would have explicitly told us that things had changed and that the children of

believers were *excluded* from the community of faith (or at least from receiving the symbolic sign of inclusion).⁶

Under the new covenant, females also receive the sign (cf. “women were baptized” [Acts 8:12]; Lydia in Acts: “she and her household were baptized” [Acts 16:14]; and Paul says that in Christ there is “neither male nor female” [Gal. 3:28]). Thus, the Abrahamic command to apply the sign of the covenant to infants now applies to both boys and girls.

Conclusion

In sum, Presbyterians believe that any adult convert to Christianity should be baptized after he professes his faith in Christ and obedience to Him.

Additionally, the infants of one or more believing parents ought to be baptized on the basis of God’s everlasting covenant with Abraham, which finds its consummate fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant (Gal. 3:6-4:7).

The silence of Scripture with respect to infant baptism provides the strongest evidence that infant baptism was indeed the practice of the apostolic church and is the biblical practice. Surely there would have been serious controversy in the early church if a practice (i.e., giving the sign of God’s covenant to the infants of believers) that was in effect throughout the ages was suddenly terminated.⁷ Yet, no such uproar is to be found. No such controversy ever arose. Scripture is silent. There is no command not to apply the new covenant sign of faith (baptism) to infants.

There is not a single instance in the New Testament of a child born to a believer being baptized after he professes faith. Every recorded baptism is of “first generation” Christians. Those baptized in the book of Acts are all Jewish or Gentile converts to Christianity.

⁶ Theologian Robert L. Reymond comments that those who oppose infant baptism “must acknowledge that there is no direct command “Baptize *only* those who themselves make a personal profession of faith.” Their restriction of baptism, then, only to those who can and do make a credible profession of faith in Christ is as much a deduction from Scripture as is the paedobaptist’s practice. . . . Biblical principles have the force of commands by good and necessary consequence; as a biblical principle . . . “the sacramental continuity between the testaments is so strong that *not* to baptize children of believers would require some explicit word of repeal.” . . . Not only are believing parents to regard their children as blessings from God, but also they are to regard them as bonafide members of both the covenant of grace and the church of God (see Heidelberg Catechism, Question 74; Westminster Confession of Faith, XXV/ii). . . .” Theologian John Murray declared, “The basic premise of the argument for infant baptism is that the New Testament economy is the unfolding and fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham and that the necessary implication is the unity and continuity of the church” (John Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 48). . . . “The Old Testament practice of reckoning children among the covenant people of God and having the covenant sign administered to them in infancy is nowhere repealed in the New Testament.” Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 936-937, 940.

⁷ If Baptists are correct, one would expect the New Testament to warn not to apply the sign and seal of faith (baptism) to children, infants, and to “their household.” To the contrary, Scripture features household baptisms (Acts and 1 Corinthians) reminiscent of the household circumcisions found in the Old Testament (see, for example, Genesis 17:13). And, prior to the advent of contraception in modern times, one would expect most households to include younger children.

Whereas with Abraham we are told when his son was circumcised (as an infant), **we are never told when the children of those first generation Christians featured in Acts were baptized.** Scripture is silent. We have no way of knowing if they were baptized as infants. But Presbyterians interpret Scripture's silence as evidence that they were. The Christians of the early church who were schooled in the Old Testament would likely have assumed that these believers' children received the sign of God's covenant just as Abraham's sons did.

Because the sign of God's covenant (i.e., circumcision) was part of the *everlasting* covenant with Abraham, it would be expected to continue throughout the ages. Under the new covenant, circumcision has been replaced with baptism, the new covenant sign of God's promise. It seems reasonable to Presbyterians that this sign should be given to Abraham's spiritual descendants today, just as the old covenant sign of faith was given to his children and their descendants (as infants) under the old covenant, because both covenants are part of one and the same *everlasting* covenant.⁸

Copyright © 2018 Wabash Bible Ministries.

⁸ "The ground of infant baptism is not then presumptive election or presumptive regeneration but rather the covenant relation in which the child stands and the ordinance or command of God. . . . Reformed paedobaptists believe therefore that the baptism of their infants and young children today is a justifiable deduction from three undeniable biblical truths:

1. infant males received the sign and seal of the covenant of grace under its Old Testament administration;
2. the covenant of grace has a continuity and organic unity; the people of God are essentially one in all ages . . . ; and
3. one can find no repeal in the New Testament of the Old Testament command to place the sign of the covenant of grace upon covenant children."

Reymond, 938, 944. See Reymond, pp. 923-955, for an excellent defense of the Biblical teachings regarding baptism, including an examination of church history and an exposition of key Biblical passages.