

ECCLESIOLOGY
THE VISIBLE CHURCH
Lesson 22

Infant or Believer's Baptism?

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. All Christians should try to learn as much as possible about infant baptism (paedobaptism) and believer's baptism in order that they might be objective in their evaluation of the subject.
- B. If nothing else, a thorough study might make a person tolerant of the other position so as to show true love to Christians who disagree.

II. INFANT BAPTISM

- A. Those who believe in infant baptism agree that infant baptism is not explicitly commanded in the New Testament, and it must be proven through a theological deduction. They believe that the facts are sufficient to make a sound inference from scripture.
- B. The Covenant. The foundation for infant baptism is found in the covenant concept of children and families (see Lesson 21).
- C. The Sign of the Covenant. In the Old Testament, the sign of the covenant was circumcision and in the New Testament it is water baptism.
 1. The key verse is Colossians 2:11-12: "In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 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."
 2. The sign of circumcision has been done away with (Gal. 5:6, 11; 6:15), and replaced by water baptism. An analogy of circumcision and water baptism is being made in this context. In both instances, spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism into Christ are mentioned. Circumcision (symbol), however, was a sign and seal of a circumcised heart (reality). By analogy, water baptism (symbol) is the sign and seal of Holy Spirit baptism (reality). Therefore, baptism becomes the sign of the covenant in the New Testament.
 3. Just as the sign of circumcision was placed upon infants in the Old Testament, placing the child under the covenant but not in the covenant (this comes when the child believes), so baptism is to be placed upon the children of believing parents as a sign of the covenant. Those who deny infant baptism are consistent only if they deny infant circumcision. Any argument used against infant baptism may be applied with equal force against infant circumcision.
- D. Household Baptism. Paedobaptists show that whole households were baptized in the New Testament, indicating that infants were baptized as well.

In the Book of Acts, there are four occurrences that deal with a household: Cornelius, Lydia, Philippian jailer, Crispus. Paedobaptists assume that in all or some of the households there were infants present, and these infants were baptized as covenant children when the father or mother believed in Jesus Christ.

E. Theological Problems

1. Does infant baptism automatically save a child? No, but infant baptism is a sign and seal that the child is placed under the covenant and must one day accept Jesus Christ for himself/herself if the child is to be actually placed in the covenant.
2. Since circumcision was performed only on infant males why don't Christians just water baptize male infants? Under the New Covenant, there is neither male or female in Christ, so the sign is placed on infant boys and girls (Gal. 3:28).
3. If infant baptism is so important, why is there no direct command to baptize infants? There is no command that says infants should not be baptized. There are other doctrines which the Church practices which are not clearly commanded in scripture but they are accepted because of a logical inference. Nowhere does the New Testament command women to partake of the Lord's Table, but it is assumed from scripture that it is the biblical practice. Again, nowhere does the Bible teach a changing of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, but it is the practice of the Church, based on a deduction from the Bible.
4. Does proving adult (believers) baptism prove infant baptism wrong? Repentance and faith apply only to those capable of repentance and faith. This requirement has no application to infants who are incapable of repentance and faith. Both infants and adults were circumcised.
5. Can a child be under the covenant without the sign of baptism? Yes, because water baptism is only a symbol. However, obedience is required for parents to put the sign on the child. Failure to baptize a child would be disobedience on the part of the parents.
6. Does a child under the covenant automatically become a member of the local church? Some paedobaptists believe infant baptism places one into the visible, professing body of Christ (non-communing members). Others, however, understand infant baptism as placing a child under the benefits of the covenant as a child of believing parents, but this does not give a child the right to church membership or participation in the ordinances (sacraments) until the child has believed for himself/herself.

III. BELIEVERS BAPTISM

- A. The problem is deeper than just believers versus infant baptism. The real issue is what constitutes the visible church. Paedobaptists say that the church is made up of believers and their children who have the sign of the covenant on them. Baptists say the visible church is made up of true believers who have been regenerated and water baptized.

- B. There is no command in scripture to baptize infants. There may be a few scriptures that can be used to support infant baptism, but this teaching is gained by inference, not any direct command.
- C. Colossians 2:11-12 has nothing to do with infants but is about people who believe and have been spiritually circumcised in heart and spiritually baptized into Christ by the Holy Spirit.
- D. In none of the household baptisms does it state there were infants. In the case of Cornelius' household, those who heard were saved and baptized (Acts 10:33, 44, 47-48). In the case of Lydia's household, it is stated she was a prominent businesswoman and this would most likely make her an older woman. Her children were probably older and were able to believe. In the case of the Philippian jailer's household, it says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). The phrase "you and your household" should be taken to modify the word "believe" not "saved." Paul and Silas "spoke the word of the Lord to him and all the others in the house" (Acts 16:32), so all who heard could not be infants. All those who heard and believed in the jailer's household were saved (Acts 16:33). What we have in these household baptisms is all in the family hearing, even young children, and being converted and then water baptized. What we have in Acts is not covenant families but converted families.
- E. In Acts 2:39, the promise of salvation was to all Israel (men, women and children), but even they had to be called by God, making salvation personal. One does not come into a relationship with Christ by physical birth but by the effectual call of God. Furthermore, this verse has nothing to say about infant baptism.
- F. In 1 Cor. 7:14, the emphasis is that children are set apart to the gospel in a Christian family. This context has nothing to do with salvation or moral and ethical holiness. Furthermore, it says nothing about infant baptism.

IV. GENERAL ARGUMENTS

- A. The paedobaptists baptize infants and they are not saved, but the Bible teaches believer's baptism, so say the Baptists. Paedobaptists point out that many adults are water baptized after making a profession of faith but they are not saved. Furthermore, many Baptists water baptize children at 4-5 years of age on profession of faith. Do these babes really know what they are doing? At least paedobaptists know they are baptizing unbelievers, but Baptists are baptizing very young children, telling them they are believers, when they may well not be at all. Which does more damage to the child?
- B. Paedobaptists point out that 2/3 of professing Christendom baptizes infants, so the majority must be right. Baptists point out that the majority is very seldom right in spiritual matters.
- C. Paedobaptists point out that church history supports infant baptism, for as far back as we can go, the church was practicing the ritual. The Baptists point out that the Bible, not church history, is the final court of appeal on doctrinal matters.