

Conclusion

The testimony of church history shows infant baptism to be an ancient practice having its origins in the days of the apostles. God's order for the human family, so foundational to infant baptism, has its roots in his own triune nature and economy. This order, whereby parent and offspring are organically related, can be observed in every major covenant in the unfolding history of redemption: The pre-Fall probationary covenant of works, the proto-Gospel of Genesis 3:15, the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Sinaitic covenant (including its subordinate legal function as a covenant of works), the Deuteronomic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant. The terms of every major biblical covenant expressly extended to the seed or offspring of its human subjects.

The prophets expounded and amplified the promise associated with the covenant of grace announced in Genesis 17:7, including its pediatric embrace, as they set forth its new covenant fulfillment in Christ. The intergenerational promise, therefore, cannot be summarily dismissed, as though it were limited to the old order of things now rendered obsolete by the new covenant.

The application of the promise to the minority sons and daughters of the covenant subjects, much as with the subjects themselves, has always depended, and continues to depend upon God's sovereign election. Consequently, the promise represents no security to unrepentant parents; nor does it, in itself, guarantee salvation universally to the children of professing believers. God's command in Genesis 17 to administer the covenant sign, however, applied to *all* the believer's male offspring. Under the New Testament the sign of baptism applies to both sexes. The application of the covenant sign to infants is not based upon the confession of the infants themselves, but upon the established scriptural testimony of God on their behalf, and upon their parents' credible confession of faith in Christ according to a rational/charitable judgment of elders and congregation.

Christ himself is the Seed of Woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Son called out of Egypt, David's Greater Son, the Mediator of the New Covenant, and a minister of the circumcision. Bearing this composite identity in one person, and

in his messianic office as Prophet, Priest, and King, Jesus welcomed, embraced, and blessed the infant offspring of his people. In keeping with the Old Testament promises issuing from Genesis 17:7, and surpassing them in splendor, Jesus promised infants being brought to him (and those like them) the kingdom of heaven.

The argument from silence, commonly employed to reject infant baptism, has to be applied in both directions. While there is no explicit New Testament command to baptize infants, neither is there a prohibition. While there is no specific mention of an infant being baptized in the New Testament, neither is there mention of baptism being refused to an infant, a baptism being postponed from infancy to adulthood, or a rebaptism of one previously baptized as an infant. The weight of the relevant evidence in the Old and New Testament record, however, overrules any supposed silence and establishes infant baptism by implication.

Most opponents of infant baptism have minimized the Old Testament and confined themselves to the New Testament in dealing with infant baptism. To ignore the testimony of the Old Testament does not reflect the methodology of Christ's apostles; therefore, it cannot be said to be a New Testament perspective. For the apostles appealed to the major events and institutions of the Old Testament to illustrate and establish New Testament doctrine and practice. The institution of circumcision, the Exodus, the Passover, the Flood, Israel's historic covenant assemblies, the Psalms, the promises, and the covenants all attest to the propriety of infant baptism and explain why infant baptism represents an ancient landmark for the church.

Contemporary churches need to reflect carefully upon God's self-proclaimed title as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He is the God whose righteousness extends to children's children. The church is not merely a *fellowship*, as the modern world has so loosely used that term; it is the *institution of Christ*. It is not a mere human institution, for "the power of the Lord Jesus is present" in the congregation. If men would dispense with the divinely-instituted outward covenant sign, to be

consistent they must also deny the promise associated with it and the power represented by it. If they refuse to discard the promise or deny the power, what logic remains for them to refuse the sign--the lesser of the three?

The matter of infant baptism, however, also involves a *command*, for the obligation involved in infant baptism was also involved in infant circumcision. One cannot reject the obligation in the one case without rejecting it in the other.

God's command concerning circumcision of infants, was either lawful and not to be trifled with, or it was deserving of censure. If there was in it nothing incongruous or absurd, neither can anything be found in the observance of infant baptism (Calvin 1960, 2:1343-44).

Paul's declaration in Romans 3:1-4 makes it plain that nothing was unlawful or disadvantageous with regard to the practice of circumcision or the promises associated with it. What is more, the apostle, in another context, employed the figure of circumcision to describe New Testament regeneration. In one apostolic stroke Paul defined regeneration as "the circumcision done by Christ" and by analogy associated baptism with it (Col. 2:11-12). Because God's institution of the covenant of grace required that circumcision be applied to the infant sons, one cannot deny baptism to infants without at the same time overthrowing the institution of the covenant thereby doing violence to the unity and integrity of Scripture. By the same token, the church that has been practicing infant baptism with little regard for her inherent responsibility in the matter must renew her covenant with her God.

Like any other divinely-instituted ordinance, infant baptism can be abused. Biblical guidelines for applying the covenant sign must be observed if it is to be rightly administered. God's blessing cannot be anticipated if infant baptism is allowed to degenerate into superstition or an empty ritual, or if it is applied to those to whom it does not belong by God's institution.

The religious group which only carries on the momentum in belief and practice of an age which has passed away, and has not made its own the covenant of the fathers, will find that the covenant is no longer valid, and the living God has passed on to seek a new people for Himself (Scott 1963, 139).

A covenant that is *outward* only, involving no engagement of the heart on the part of the parent or congregation, or in which the baptized merely *exists* with no engagement of the heart, is ultimately no covenant at all.

In the final analysis, the baptism of infants is a sacrament, a mystery of the faith. One cannot finally come to terms with it apart from faith any more than one can come to terms with the doctrine of the Trinity apart from faith. Sacraments, like great theological truths, while not illogical, do transcend human logic. The rationalist can never know the blessing of God's covenant of grace, because he chooses to restrict his knowledge to what he can mentally comprehend. The Christian goes with the overwhelming weight of the evidence knowing that unbelief represents the ultimate in irrationality. In the case of infant baptism, the overwhelming weight of the evidence lies in the strength of God's covenant as it applies to the believer's offspring and in the Savior who said, "Let the little children come to me and do not forbid them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Luke 18:15-16).

Infant baptism touches a wide range of major articles of the Christian faith: The Incarnation, the Virgin Birth, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the fatherhood of God, the attributes of God, the Holy Spirit, regeneration, justification, the church, the Great Commission, prayer, parenting, church government, original sin, and election and reprobation. To embrace infant baptism intelligently is to face squarely, and critically, such issues as Arminianism, crisis theology, Dispensationalism, modern social egalitarianism, religious liberty, baptismal regeneration, infant dedication, and

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abortion. The church must resist the elitest establishment of modernity that gloats in the spiritual depravity of its offspring while subordinating spiritual dignity to a state-sponsored, egalitarian, socio-economic agenda--the very perspective Scripture condemns (Exod. 1:15-16; 10:10; Ps. 127:2-5; Matt. 2:16; 21:16).

God has established an intergenerational covenant of grace with the elect. And if the elect do not mark this covenant by baptizing their infant offspring, they soon lose sight of the covenant itself, lose all hope concerning the succeeding generations, and then their worst fears are realized through their own dereliction. On the other hand, where infant baptism is maintained in such a way as to keep in focus the intergenerational covenant, the promise is believed, children are valued for their future promise, and the church endures through succeeding generations. This, it seems to me, is the clear implication of Psalm 112:1-2:

PRAISE the LORD!
How blessed is the man
 who fears the LORD,
Who greatly delights in
 His commandments.
His descendants will be
 mighty on the earth;
The generation of the up-
 right will be blessed.

The Ancient Landmark

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