

How is baptism of babies a blessing?

First, we must ask how it is a blessing to baptize anyone.

What we are asking is - why don't we still use circumcision as the sign and seal of God's covenant? Or, why don't we just preach the Word and do away with this practice of baptism altogether? The answer is that we baptize, because of the command of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20, "*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."*" That is why we baptize. Which brings us back to the question 'How is baptism of babies a blessing?'

The children of believers belong to Christ's covenant, which explains the blessing of baptism.

1. Baptism's legitimate recipients.

By being born to (or adopted by) a believing parent (or both believing parents), the children of believers are legitimately baptized without possessing faith and repentance, because they already belong to the promise of the covenant.

This is where we disagree with our Baptist friends. Who are the legitimate recipients of baptism? It comes down to this question - is baptism a sign and seal of the faith of the recipient, OR is baptism a sign and seal of the covenant? We are

driven back to understand Old Testament circumcision. Romans 4:11 says, "*...he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised...*" Circumcision was not a seal of faith, but rather circumcision was a seal of covenant righteousness! Circumcision was not given as a seal of Abraham's faith, but rather circumcision was a seal of the covenant righteousness which was received by Abraham's faith.

The gospel always says: because of what God has done, therefore repent and believe. The covenant always says: because of what God has promised, therefore repent and believe. Because of this, we can baptize babies, and then, as they grow, God requires them to believe. The meaning of circumcision was not, "Abraham got saved" but rather the meaning of circumcision was, "Salvation will come to the world." In the same way the meaning of baptism is not, "this baby got saved," but rather the meaning of baptism is, "salvation has come to the world."

2. Baptism's official seal.

Because of the fact that their parent/parents trust in Christ and have become church members, these children in their household are also belong to Christ's covenant. The children are church members. Therefore the children must be officially declared as belonging to Christ's covenant by this formal action of receiving the sign of the covenant of grace, which is water baptism.

If you have a diploma from Harvard, you did not also go to Yale. They are different schools. It is that simple. Baptism is a sign of the covenant of grace, not of another covenant promise.

Why do we still see a rainbow in the sky after it rains?

When a Christian today sees a rainbow, it confirms the integrity of God. The God who made this rainbow, made a promise never to cover the earth with water again in a flood. The rainbow is not a seal as to whether we believe that or not! The objective fact is that whether we believe it or not, it still happens that the earth was never flooded a second time, because the promise continues to be upheld. We have only been flooded once. Rainbows keep coming, floods do not.

A sign shows which blessing is being given, and the seal confirms which blessing is applied. Genesis 9:12, *“And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations...’* Everyone who has ever lived since Noah climbed out of the ark, has enjoyed this blessing, whether they believe in God or not.

Then why don't we have the sacrament of the ending of a rainstorm, or the sacrament of the marriage covenant, or the sacrament of ordination to become a pastor, elder, or deacon, or the sacrament of foot washing, such as Jesus performed? We have two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and these are sacraments because they are signs and seals of one special covenant. The

covenant of grace! The rainbow is a sign and seal of the covenant of never again to flood, not the covenant of grace. A wedding is the beginning of a covenant of marriage, not the covenant of grace. Footwashing is a metaphor for loving one another, and is not a covenant at all. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments because they are signs and seals of the covenant of grace, they are not signs and seals of another covenant.

3. Baptism's promise of nurture.

Christ's covenant demands that all of us support the nurture of all of the children of the covenant. It would be better for us not to baptize them at all, than to baptize them and then be unfaithful to Christ in our nurture of them, and thus unwittingly cause them to stumble or lead them astray.

Baptism of infants is not a blank check - meaning that no matter what the parents do or fail to do, no matter what this child does or fails to do, whether the child embraces Christ or not, this child is saved? No! That is not what infant baptism shows! Rather, we must always think of baptism with the covenant in mind, and especially covenant nurture in mind. The parents and the church are training up the children! The new covenant, like the old covenant is a reality in which a promise to a parent is extended to that baby. Circumcised Israelites did leave the people of God (they turned their backs on God or they apostatized), despite frequent and severe warnings. It was never OK to belong to national Israel

without having faith in God! In the Old Covenant, children fell away from faith in God into apostasy. What do we learn from that? Not to be complacent, but to look to God, and to train, train, train the children.

A Christian parent ought to never say to his or her baptized child, “You have been baptized, don’t worry, you don't need to repent.” No! May we never say such a dark and false thing! Rather, we instruct our baptized children like this, “Because you were privileged to receive the sign and seal of the covenant of the grace of God, and all that we have taught you, therefore you know that your whole life MUST include repentance and faith.”

4. Baptism’s designed outcome.

When these children grow to become adults, they must trust Christ and stay in His church as believers themselves, or else they are walking away from Christ’s covenant in rebellion.

Even though baptism does not save, it signifies a better promise than circumcision did.

If we cannot guarantee that a baby baptized today will be saved, why baptize him? The simple answer is obedience – Christ commanded us to baptize. And applying the sign of the promise is a covenant command with a covenant promise. The promise is for the babies’ parents, and for THEIR children. We baptize the baby, because his parents believe in the Christ of the covenant.

This is where the question arises, what about people who receive infant baptism and the covenant nurture of family and church, but do not grow up to be believers? We weep for them even more than we weep for the lost, because to whom much is given, much is required. Circumcision did not save babies in the Old Testament times, and Baptism does not save babies in the New Testament times. Christ saves by grace through faith. Salvation is of the LORD.

In writing about the coming of the Spirit, Luke never suggested excluding the children, but instead Luke recorded the words of Acts 2:38-39 from Peter's sermon, so that his readers (including us as later readers) would know about the transition of signs to represent a circumcised heart – a transition of signs from circumcision to baptism.

If someone has not been born into a Christian household, he does not have the sign of the covenant promise, nor does he have the covenant promise, unless God calls him to believe. Since those to whom Peter spoke were never baptized before, when they were cut to the heart or convicted by Peter's sermon, they asked Peter what to do, and Peter said to "*Repent and be baptized...*" Notice that Peter did not tell them to repent and be circumcised. Instead, Peter told them to repent and be baptized. In our text, Peter is speaking to Jews in the very first sermon of the New Covenant Age in Acts 2. It was a sermon that cut the listeners to the heart, which the prophets called the circumcision of the heart! The people cried out,

seeking what they should do. Peter told them to repent and be baptized, and comforted them with the news that the glorious Old Testament covenant promise from God to Abraham applied to them and to their children! Peter went on to say that the covenant promise is even offered to those who are far off. In fact, the covenant promise is given to *“everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.”* (v.39)

What was the debate that Luke was addressing by writing Acts 2? What were the issues that Peter settled by preaching this sermon? Their central debate was which sign should Gentiles use to mark their children as part of the Covenant. Was it circumcision, or what is baptism? They all agreed, both Jews and Gentiles agreed, that children were included in the sign of the covenant. They never debated whether or not to include their children. The thought that their children would not be included, is a thought that never occurred to them!

Look at Acts 2:41. *“...So those who had received his word were baptized...”* When a preacher preaches the gospel, and people receive his word, that is the same as believing. This seems to suggest adults only were baptized, right? Infants are not capable of hearing the word and receiving it yet. So the Baptist argument goes.

Consider verse 44. *“...all who believed were together, and had all things in common...”* The adults gathered, and brought their children and infants. The infants were there. When people shared food and clothes, they shared for the

needs of the babies, too. Infants go where their families go. Babies share in the household property and possessions of the family, such as a house, electricity, clothes, food. Infants share in the household spiritual possessions - being baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The children of Christians have an interest in the covenant of grace by virtue of being born the son or daughter of a Christian.

CONCLUSION:

So, what is the blessing of baptism? A baby of Christian parents is baptized because the believing parents AND THEIR BABY are included in the promise of God to Abraham that they will be saved. We are called to baptize the babies, rejoice that they have God's official seal of His covenant of grace, nurture them constantly, and expect the desired outcome.

Three applications.

- 1) To parents and to the church – we really must train our children in the things of God and His Word. These must be the best-trained children about Christianity in the whole world. We model for them to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind.
- 2) To those of you who are baptized. You are still called to improve on your baptism! You are still called to pursue God with your whole heart. Now

is the time to love God and serve God. Now is the time to embrace Christ.

- 3) To those of you who have never been baptized. Luke would urge you and Peter would urge you and I would urge you, Repent and be baptized. Anyone of you can come to the Lord our God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and you can embrace Him by faith, and the you can be baptized as adults here, too. As you turn to Christ, your baptism will show what you have received – forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Next week, we talk about that gift of the Holy Spirit.