

Should Babies Be Baptized?

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When there's disagreement about baptism, avoid two pitfalls:

1. Undermining unity among Christians.
2. Weakening witness to non-Christians.

Areas of agreement

1. The Bible is God's Word. God created all things. Jesus is God and Savior. The Holy Spirit connects us with Christ.
2. Baptism is to be done with water in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
3. Baptism is about God's grace, not our goodness. It is a sign of cleansing by Jesus' blood and union with Christ's death and resurrection.

Areas of agreement

4. Baptism calls for ongoing response of love and obedience.
5. Any unbaptized person growing up outside a Christian family and church must profess faith before being baptized.
6. Every baby born into a Christian family is a special blessing and responsibility.
7. Personal, public commitment is necessary at some point (whether before baptism or some time after baptism as an infant).

Clutter to clear away

1. Baptism removes past sins or causes rebirth.
2. Jesus' adult baptism disproves infant baptism.
 - a. *Should everyone wait till age 30?*
 - b. *Was the timing of Jesus' baptism delayed because he wasn't yet committed to God?*
3. Arguments from silence: what Bible doesn't say
 - a. *Scripture doesn't command infant baptism or give examples of it. Likewise, Scripture doesn't forbid infant baptism.*
 - b. *Scripture doesn't mention women at Lord's Supper. Does that prove anything?*

Discipleship and belonging

“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.” (Matt 28:19-20)

- Baptism is a sign and seal of becoming a disciple and joining the church of Christ, the blood-bought, Spirit-filled community.
- In thinking about infant baptism, a central question is: Do babies belong to the church, and should parents disciple their little ones?

Key considerations

1. Status of believers' children
2. Household baptisms
3. Covenant continuity for generations
4. Circumcising converts and baby sons
5. Relating old-covenant circumcision and new-covenant baptism
6. Personal faith and family solidarity

1. Status of believers' children

“Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” (Luke 18:16)

- Jesus was indignant at disciples who tried to keep babies away.
- God's kingdom belongs to believers' babies.
- Babies don't have to become like adults to connect with Jesus; instead, adults need to receive God's kingdom like a little child.
- Jesus hugged and blessed believers' babies.

2. Household baptisms

- “She [Lydia] and the members of her household were baptized.” (Acts 16:15)
- “‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household...’ he and all his family were baptized.” (Acts 16:31,33)
- Crispus "and his entire household" came to Christ and were baptized. (Acts 18:8).
- "I also baptized the household of Stephanas."
(1 Cor 1:14)

3. Covenant continuity

- **Covenant:** a relationship grounded in promises and confirmed by a sign. (270x in Scripture)
- God's covenant includes a believer's household and descendants: "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." (Gen 17:7)
- God "announced the gospel in advance to Abraham." (Galatians 3:8)

4. Circumcising converts and babies

- Abraham came to faith as an adult. His adult circumcision was “a seal of the righteousness he had by faith” (Rom 4:11), “a sign of the covenant” between God and him. (Gen 17:11)
- Abraham’s baby son Isaac and baby boys in future generations were to be circumcised at eight days, marking them as part of God’s covenant people of faith. (Genesis 17:12)
- Any foreigner who joined the covenant community was to be circumcised, along with all males in his household. (Exodus 12:48)

5. Relating old-covenant circumcision and new-covenant baptism

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 (Col 2:11-12).

Baptism is the sign of a new and better covenant:

- no more pain or blood, as in circumcision
- no longer limited to males
- no longer limited to Jewish ethnicity and law

5. Relating old-covenant circumcision and new-covenant baptism

- Those who think only professing believers should be baptized say, *Would the new, better covenant sign be a matter of physical descent and family ties? Surely not! It must be totally based on spiritual rebirth and personal faith.*
- Those who think babies of believers should be baptized say, *Would the new, better covenant sign exclude babies who would have received the sign under the older covenant? Surely not!*

Circumcision and baptism

- Circumcision pictured "the putting off of the body of the flesh" (Col 2:11); so does baptism.
- Circumcision was the sign of becoming part of God's covenant community; so is baptism.
- Circumcision called for a heart in tune with God (Deut 10:16; 30:6); so does baptism.
- Circumcision was for believers and their children; so is baptism.
- Circumcision as an outer sign called for inner faith; so does baptism.

6. Personal faith *and* family solidarity

"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

"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" (Acts 2:38-39).

Branches on a vine, not just marbles in a box

"I am the vine; you are the branches" (John 15:5).

Two ways of adding to the vine:

1. New branches can be grafted (converts).
2. New twigs can grow on a vine. If a branch is connected to the vine, so are any twigs connected to the branch. (covenant children)

Dead branches are cut off, thrown away, and burned (John 15:2,6). Baptized persons who rebel and reject Christ will perish unless they repent.

Why baptize babies?

1. Status of believers' children
2. Household baptisms
3. Covenant continuity for generations
4. Circumcising converts and baby sons
5. Relating old-covenant circumcision and new-covenant baptism
6. Personal faith and family solidarity

Dunking or Sprinkling?

- He will sprinkle many nations. (Isaiah 52:15)
- I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean... I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. (Ezekiel 36:25-26)
- "obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood." (1 Peter 1:2)
- "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and have our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:22)

Dunking or Sprinkling?

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. (Romans 6:4)

dunking under, rising out

- Dunking and sprinkling each symbolize much biblical truth. Each points to the same reality.
- Fighting over dunking vs. sprinkling is like fighting over whether bath or shower is better.

Heidelberg Catechism

Q. 72 Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins?

A. No, only Jesus Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins.

Q. 74 Should infants, too, be baptized?

A. Yes. Infants as well as adults are in God's covenant and are his people. They, no less than adults, are promised the forgiveness of sin through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith. Therefore, by baptism, the mark of the covenant, infants should be received into the Christian church and should be distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.

Joyful Confidence

- Covenant children do not have to grow up before receiving a family and a name. They receive a family and a name before they can understand or choose.
- It's conceivable that a child could grow up to change his name and disown his family. But that's not the usual pattern, especially when believing parents practice discipleship at home.
- “He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands” (Deut 7:9).