

Doctrine of Infant Baptism

Relationship Between Circumcision and Infant Baptism

1. An analogy between circumcision and infant baptism is the foundation on which paedobaptism rests.
2. The Heidelberg Catechism, Number 74, addresses the relationship of baptism to circumcision.
 - Q. Should infants, too, be baptized?
 - A. Yes. Infants as well as adults belong to God's covenant and congregation. Through Christ's blood the redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit, who works faith, are promised to them no less than to adults. Therefore, by baptism, as sign of the covenant, they must be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the old covenant by circumcision, in place of which baptism was instituted in the new covenant.

Special Note.

Supporting Scripture is given for this answer.

Infants as well as adults are included in God's covenant and people.

- *Genesis 17:7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.*
- *Matthew 19:14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*

They (infants) are promised deliverance from sin through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith.

- *Psalms 22:10 I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.*
- *Isaiah 44:1 Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: 2 Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. 3 For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:*

- *Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*
- *Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

By baptism, the sign of the covenant, distinguishes them (infants) from the children of unbelievers.

- *Acts 10:47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?*
- *1 Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.*

Distinction from unbelievers was done in the Old Testament by circumcision.

- *Genesis 17:9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. 11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. 12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. 13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.*

Circumcision was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.

- *Colossians 2:11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;*
3. In like manner, the Reformed Churches of America which embrace the Belgic Confession, defend Article 34: The Sacrament of Baptism.

- We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, in whom the law is fulfilled, has by his shed blood put an end to every other shedding of blood, which anyone might do or wish to do in order to atone or satisfy for sins. Having abolished circumcision, which was done with blood, Christ established in its place the sacrament of baptism.

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By it we are received into God's church and set apart from all other people and alien religions, that we may wholly belong to him whose mark and sign we bear.

Baptism also witnesses to us that God, being our gracious Father, will be our God forever.

Therefore Christ has commanded that all those who belong to him be baptized with pure water "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

In this way God signifies to us that just as water washes away the dirt of the body when it is poured on us and also is seen on the bodies of those who are baptized when it is sprinkled on them, so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally, in the soul, by the Holy Spirit.

It washes and cleanses it from its sins and transforms us from being the children of wrath into the children of God.

This does not happen by the physical water but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God, who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, who is the devil, and to enter the spiritual land of Canaan.

So ministers, as far as their work is concerned, give us the sacrament and what is visible, but our Lord gives what the sacrament signifies—namely the invisible gifts and graces; washing, purifying, and cleansing our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts and filling them with all comfort; giving us true assurance of his fatherly goodness; clothing us with the "new self" and stripping off the "old self with its practices."

For this reason we believe that anyone who aspires to reach eternal life ought to be baptized only once without ever repeating it—for we cannot be born twice. Yet this baptism is profitable not only when the water is on us and when we receive it but throughout our entire lives.

For that reason we reject the error of the Anabaptists who are not content with a single baptism once received and also condemn the baptism of the children of believers. We believe our children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as little children were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises made to our children.

And truly, Christ has shed his blood no less for washing the little children of believers than he did for adults.

Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of what Christ has done for them, just as the Lord commanded in the law that by offering a lamb for them the sacrament of the suffering and death of Christ would be granted them shortly after their birth. This was the sacrament of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, baptism does for our children what circumcision did for the Jewish people. That is why Paul calls baptism the "circumcision of Christ."

Special Note.

Scriptural support is provided.

- *Matthew 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*
 - *Colossians 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;*
 - *Colossians 2:11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.*
4. Louis Berkhof defends infant baptism in his work, Systematic Theology. The Westminster Larger Catechism does likewise, based on circumcision. More support comes from Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, John Owen, John Murray, R. C. Sproul, and many other devout ministers and theologians.
5. The common theme can be discerned.
- Argument. Infants were circumcised and that circumcision was a sign they were included in the covenant with Abraham. God wants the children to be part of a covenant relationship with Him. Nothing short of an explicit revocation would justify setting it aside.

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- Argument. Circumcision had a spiritual significance and the spiritual significance was the exact same significance as baptism. It speaks of union, and communion with God, and testifies to the removal of defilement of the heart.

Scripture. Romans 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

- Argument. Circumcision has been replaced by baptism as the sign and seal of the New Covenant.

Scripture. Colossians 2:11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

6. However, there are inconsistencies to these arguments.

- Infant participation in Holy Communion is not allowed by Paedobaptist. It is argued against by the Reformers. It could be argued that the Passover was a long practiced institution that included toddler participation. The Reformers allow one institution, circumcision, to “continue”, but not the other. The Passover was a covenant commemorative meal. Nothing short of an explicit revocation would justify setting it aside.
- Turning to Genesis 17, it is without dispute that male infants were circumcised, along with household servants as well. Those who were not circumcised were to be “cut off” or put to death.

But what did that circumcision mean? God plainly told Abraham what circumcision meant in Genesis 17:11 “...it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.”

Paul provides further clarification. *Romans 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:*

Abraham received circumcision with a unique and special significance for a specific purpose, “that, (Gk. hina, “in order that”) he might be the father of all those who believe.”

Now, the circumcision of Abraham signified something to him that was different than what circumcision signified to his descendants. For Abraham, circumcision was a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had while he was in an uncircumcised state.

An uncircumcised state + righteousness + circumcision = The Seal of Faith

This was not true of Ishmael or of the circumcised Jews throughout the centuries. The Jews were characterized in their circumcised state as wicked and stiff-necked. The circumcision of Abraham’s descendants was not a sign and seal of their righteousness in an uncircumcised state. That status, that unique significance, belonged to Abraham alone.

It does no good to appeal to a spiritual significance to circumcised children for that is too vague. Did the children stand in spiritual significance in the sight of God? Not that Scripture indicates. What then did the circumcising of the children in unbelief signify?

The Scripture states what the significance of circumcising infants meant. It meant that God had entered into a covenant with Abraham and was keeping His word to Abraham. Circumcision of children was about God, not the child. Circumcision was about God keeping His covenant. “*Abraham, every time you circumcise a male childit shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.*” (Gen. 17:11).

A male child + circumcision = A Token of the Abraham Covenant

Romans 4:11 cannot be appealed to by Paedobaptist to prove that baptism replaces circumcision for nothing like that is said in the text. Nor can this passage be appealed to in order to say that baptism means the same as circumcision, or even that the circumcision of children means the same thing as the circumcision of Abraham. There was one meaning for Abraham when he was circumcised. Another significance was given to children who were circumcised.

Romans 4:11 is careful to teach that what Abraham possessed, a righteousness of faith, was signified by circumcision.

If a male child possesses a righteousness of faith when he is circumcised, then, and only then, can it be said that he was circumcised for the same purpose as Father Abraham. Unless this can be said, then the circumcision of male children meant something distinct from the circumcision of Abraham.

In like manner, a professing believer who is baptized will have a different meaning than an infant who has baptism superimposed upon them. The baptism of a professing believer is a sign of their understanding of the gospel, their willingness to receive Christ as Saviour, and a desire to follow Him all the days of their lives. This baptism identifies the person by faith with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, in a unique way.

When an infant is baptized, however well-meaning the act may be, it is a superimposed ritual without any immediate corresponding reality in the heart and mind of the child. The ritual only means what the parents, the church, or tradition imposes on the moment.

The child, unrepentant, without faith, unpricked in the heart, cannot ask, as the people did on the Day of Pentecost, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Nor can the child hear the sweetness of the gospel calling them to “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). “Oh Christian parent, will you rob your child of this gospel grace?”

It is true that circumcision is identified with the covenant of Genesis 17. It is true that circumcision is identified with the blessing of that covenant. It is true that circumcision has a spiritual significance. It is true that there is an intimate relationship between the circumcision of the body and the circumcision of the heart. Both offer a change in the innermost being of a person.

What is not true is that the circumcision of Abraham has the same meaning as the circumcision of the male children.

Abraham had what his circumcision symbolized, which was a righteousness of faith.

Abraham’s male descendants had what their circumcision symbolized, which was the sign of the covenant of the faithfulness of God to Abraham. This was done according to explicit command.

What Abraham’s male descendants did not have was the spiritual dynamics of circumcision which was the circumcision of the heart. By the time of Jeremiah, the whole nation was condemned. Jeremiah 9:26 “...and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.” The centuries passed and the spiritual significance of circumcision identified with Abraham was not found in those circumcised in the flesh. Steven railed against the Jews who crucified Christ saying, “*Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye*” (Acts 7:51).

A professing believer has what his baptism symbolizes, which is a vital union, and communion with the living Lord. This baptism is based upon an explicit command.

A baptized infant has no symbolism divinely associated with it. Whatever symbolism is associated with infant baptism is superimposed by well-meaning parents, priests or church tradition, but it is all done without divine command as Louis Berkhof admits in his work, *Systematic Theology*.

As B. B. Warfield said, "It is true that there is no express command to baptize infants in the New Testament, no express record of the baptism of infants and no passage so stringently implying it that we must infer from them that infants were baptized. If such warrant as this were necessary to justify the usage, we would have to leave it completely unjustified."

Having made an honest confession, Warfield continues.

"But the lack of this express warrant is something far short of forbidding the rite; and if the continuity of the church through all ages can be made good, the warrant for infant baptism is not to be sought in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament where the church was instituted and nothing short of an actual forbidding of it in the New Testament would warrant our omitting it now."

However, when attention is turned from the Old Testament to the New Testament, something significant is observed. In the New Testament, in the New Covenant, baptism is associated with those who have been circumcised in heart. There is a spiritual dimension associated with the ritual of baptism that characterizes the church, the spiritual Israel of God, as a whole, unlike Israel of old.

Colossians 2:11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

The only praise a person receives from God is to be spiritually circumcised (to be spiritually baptized).

Romans 2:29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Can God be pleased when an infant, in a state of unbelief, is given the sign of the covenant which speaks of a vital union and communion with Him? The church has "seen this picture before, and it did not end well." Church history is repeating itself because the trappings of the Old Covenant are insisted on being applied to the New Covenant apart from divine command.

Philippians 3:3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

7. It is instructive to note that because the Jews did not have the circumcision of the heart, they were broken off from the community of the faithful. The New Covenant was established with those who repented and believed.

- *Romans 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; 18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. 19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.*
8. The distinguishing characteristic of the New Covenant is that the people of God have the faith of which their baptism is a sign. Infants do not have this distinguishing characteristic. To arbitrarily assign it to them is without a single command.
 9. Question. “Why would a Christian parent want to practice, considered to be the equivalent of, a ritual that has been diminished and done away with because it was a ritual without any profit?”
 - *Romans 2:25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.*

Abrahamic Covenant	
Abraham Faith	Abraham’s Physical Seed A circumcision made by hands on the body was the distinguishing mark of the Old Covenant
Abraham Faith	Abraham’s Spiritual Seed A circumcision made without hands on the heart was the distinguishing mark of the New Covenant
The ritual of infant baptism is more closely associated with the distinguishing mark of Abraham’s physical seed, and not with the distinguishing mark of Abraham’s spiritual seed which is a circumcision of the heart.	

10. The New Covenant is associated with the spiritual seed of Abraham, not his physical seed.
 - *Jeremiah 31:31 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: 32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: 33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*
11. The New Covenant is “not according to the covenant” made with the fathers. The New Covenant has distinguishing characteristics.

12. The distinguishing characteristic of the New Covenant is to belong to Christ. Then, and only then is a person Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise, with the right and privilege of receiving the sign of faith, baptism. Baptism is the covenantal expression of belonging to Christ.

- *Galatians 3:29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*