

## Infant Baptism and the Early Church

1. Because the subject of infant baptism is such an emotional issue, Christians have found it better to divide and form various denominations, and allow freedom of conscience on this matter, rather than engage in endless debate on the issue, or drown Christians who insist on professing believer's baptism. History notes that in Zollikon, outside Zurich, Ulrich Zwingli attempted to silence the teaching that there must first be a change in a person before the sign of salvation is given to them. By order of the city council, he had Felix Manz put to death by drowning in January of 1527. He also drove Georg Blaurock out of the canton.
2. So, Anabaptist, in particular, are thankful they no longer have to fear being thrown into the nearest lake, or river, for their doctrinal persuasion. Of course, passion can still run high when the subject of infant baptism is seriously discussed, which is why conversations have to take place in limited form, over a long period of time. This Blog offers one such venue for discussion in the quest for the mind of the Lord, and unity of heart, based on Bible doctrine. *Sola Scriptura*. As the Scriptures are considered and appealed to, so is church history.
3. History testifies that good and godly people have stood on both sides of the issue, and been effectively used by God.
4. John Wesley, for example, was spectacularly used by God, and practiced, and defended infant baptism. The Anabaptists, however, who lived out a powerful restoration of the apostolic faith in the 16th century, rejected it. Charles Spurgeon preached against the Church of England bringing babies for baptism, and invited them to bring the children to Christ.
5. Because both sides appeal to antiquity in support of their position, an inquiry into the historical record is valid.
6. The search begins with the Apostles. What did the Apostles say directly about baptizing infants?
7. The honest answer is nothing. There is not a single verse in the New Testament that teaches the apostolic practice of infant baptism.
8. This sound of silence does not phase paedobaptist. Their position is that infant baptism was so obvious that not a word needed to be said about the practice. In contrast, when the rite of circumcision was introduced, instruction was given concerning the children.
9. Many Christians are not so confident that they know the mindset of first century Jewish Christians on this matter, and hesitate to declare conclusively what others knew and practiced. What non paedobaptist are content to say is that they know of no Biblical instruction to baptize infants.

10. What Luke records is that the “Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Luke says nothing about the saved going home and adding to the church unbelieving infants. Perhaps they did, but there is no historical, or biblical, record of that happening. There is no chapter and verse in the Bible to support a major doctrine, and practice, so common today being done in the name of Christ.
- *Acts 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*
11. In all honesty, the modern church knows nothing, really, about whether the apostles baptized infants.
12. For all the arguments, and the supposedly clear statements of Scripture, there is no good and certain proof that infant baptism is, or is not, apostolic.
13. We know that Paul baptized the Philippian jailer's household, and Peter baptized Cornelius' household. Did these households include infants? Paedobaptist are confident there were infants in both households, and a Jewish mind would assume that.

***Special Note.***

Again, Paedobaptist present a major argument from silence, and insist that their opposition also argues from silence. Perhaps not. Here is what the text says concerning the Philippian jailer's household. Observe that the gospel, the word of the Lord was preached to all that were in the house, and all in his house, with the jailer, believed in God. Now, if there were any infants, they were of necessity infants with the ability to believe in God.

- *Acts 16:32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*
14. Those who are opposed to infant baptism argue that only believers should be baptized.
15. The Scripture does talk about believing and being baptized.
- *Acts 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.*
16. However, this is not a strong enough argument for Paedobaptist who know beyond all reasonable doubt in their heart the first century Christians made exceptions for babies of believers. They know this without a single Bible reference, or first century historical document to support their position.

17. The position of Paedobaptist is not only that those who believe and are baptized shall be saved, but those who are baptized unsaved might someday believe and be saved (or they might not ever believe, but die having received the sign of the New Covenant on their body).

- *Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

***Special Note.***

Being concerned about children being placed into a covenant relationship with God as an infant, Paedobaptist should be equally concerned about these same “children of the covenant” being put out of their covenant relationship with God, for honest parents know that not all shall be saved. The Paedobaptist might want to answer the question, “When does God put one of the alleged “children of the covenant” out of the covenant?”

18. Because God gave circumcision to Abraham as a sign of God’s covenant with Abraham, Paedobaptist assume that giving the sign of the New Covenant to children is the will of God.

19. A Paedobaptist might argue that even in the New Testament era, the sign of the Old Covenant, circumcision, was not prohibited. This is a valid observation. In fact, Paul had Timothy circumcised in Acts 16:3. But then again, Paul absolutely refused to let Titus be circumcised in Galatians 2:3-5.

Paul said that the truth of the gospel was at stake. For Paul to have allowed Titus to be circumcised would have been tantamount to abandoning the gospel of justification by faith, apart from works of the Law.

In Titus situation, a clear theological issue was at stake. In Timothy’s situation, the issue was how unbelieving Jews might best be won to Christ. Paul did not want to allow a stumbling block to be placed before Jews in his witnessing to them, and so the sign of the Old Covenant was allowed to be given in the New Testament era.

20. It is equally true that Paul does call baptism a spiritual circumcision. The true circumcision that pleases God is the circumcision made without hands.

- *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.*

21. If there is any parallel between circumcision, and baptism, according to gospel terms, it is that the true baptism which pleases God is the baptism of the Spirit by which we are baptized into Christ after becoming one of His disciples.

- *1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

22. With these thoughts in mind, it does not seem to be too difficult to determine the general time frame when the practice of infant baptism arose, and it was not in the apostolic age.
23. As Paedobaptist enjoy pointing out in their support of antiquity for their position, by the middle of the 3rd century baptizing infants was practiced.
24. Hippolytus and Origen speak rather generally of infant baptism in the two decades before 250, and Cyprian discusses on which day infants should be baptized, not whether they should be baptized:
- “But in respect of the case of the infants, which you say ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, and that the law of ancient circumcision should be regarded, so that you think that one who is just born should not be baptized and sanctified within [i.e., before] the eighth day, we all thought very differently in our council. For in this course which you thought was to be taken, no one agreed; but we all rather judge that the mercy and grace of God is not to be refused to any one born of man” (Cyprian, Letter 58:2 from Ante-Nicene Fathers).
25. It is important to remember that before the time of Origen and Hippolytus, no one spoke clearly of infant baptism in the 2nd century, for, or against, the practice, according to the known record.
26. However, Justin Martyr does give a reason for baptism that absolutely precludes infant baptism. Justin Martyr says that the church in Rome received instruction from the apostles. This quote is from approximately A.D. 155:
- “And for [water baptism] we have learned from the apostles this reason. Since at our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, by our parents coming together, and were brought up in bad habits and wicked training; in order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed. (Justin, First Apology 61)
27. In his writing, Justin specifically teaches that baptism is associated with personal choice and knowledge. It is not a ritual to be forced upon another person, but a reality to be enjoyed in maturity. Children lack this choice. That is what the apostles taught, according to Justin. Infant baptism is contrary to choice. The infant has no saving knowledge of Christ. Infant baptism is against the apostolic purpose, according to Justin Martyr.
28. This early quote from someone who was part of the church in Rome, is an important quote in considering whether Christian parents should give their infants that which should speak of choice, based upon saving knowledge of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

29. Between the years AD 155 and AD 230, prominent Christians, such as Irenaeus, through inference, did promote infant baptism while equally prominent Church Fathers, such as Tertullian, opposed the practice. In other words, the early church was just as divided as the church is today.

- Irenaeus, c. AD 185. “He came to save all through means of Himself—all ... who through Him are born again to God—infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission ...” (Against Heresies II:22:4)

***Special Note.***

The term, "born again", was synonymous with baptism to early Christians. That theological understanding really did not change until the time of the Pietists in the 17th century.

- Tertullian, c. AD 210. “According to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each individual, the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children. ... The Lord does indeed say, "Do not forbid them to come to me." Let them come, then, while they are growing up! Let them "come" while they are learning, while they are learning where to come to! Let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ. Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the remission of sins? ... Let them know how to ask for salvation, that you may seem to have given "to him that asks." (On Baptism 18)

30. It is not unreasonable to conclude that, as far as the clear historical record show, infant baptism began in the second century, and gained wide acceptance in the church by the middle of the third century.

31. When Justin Martyr gave the apostolic reason for baptism, based on choice and knowledge, he placed himself in contrast with Paedobaptist, who baptize infants for a variety of reasons.

- The Roman Catholic Church believes infants should be baptized in order to remove original sin.
- The Lutheran Church believes that in baptism the infant is converted and salvation is theirs to lose.
- The Presbyterians tend to baptize infants as a form of baby dedication.

32. What these various theological positions by Paedobaptist reflect, is that infant baptism means whatever a particular denomination, or parent, wants the act to mean.

33. But baptism should mean something biblically. Baptism should mean that a person has, actually and with knowledge and consent, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and has had an inward transformation of the heart. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward transaction. And so, in the Baptist tradition, a person is symbolically buried in the pool of baptism with Christ in the likeness of His death, and symbolically raised again, in the likeness of His resurrection to walk in newness of life.
34. If children are no longer to be given the outward sign of a covenant relationship with the Lord in the New Covenant, how then should children of believing parents be treated?
35. The Biblical answer is that every child should be brought to Christ to be blessed, and every child should be brought up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).
36. A delay in giving children the sign of the New Covenant is not a denial. The delay is part of the “better covenant” which emphasizes the “new heart”, and arrests the false assumptions of the unregenerate heart in believing it is more righteous in the sight of God because of an imposed ceremonial ritual. What the Old Covenant allowed, the New Covenant does not. The abuses of the Old Covenant are designed not to be repeated in the New Covenant.