

Appendix VIII — Arguments Against Infant Baptism

The arguments against infant baptism generally fall into two categories. Some of them deal with the sinfulness of children, and others deal with the faith of children. The following is a list of various arguments that are leveled against infant baptism., and Scriptural responses to them.

ARGUMENT — Infants are too young and innocent to commit sin.

This argument doesn't acknowledge what the Bible says about original sin. In Psalm 51:5 King David writes that he was "sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Jesus explains in John 3:6 that, "Flesh gives birth to flesh." This Bible makes no distinction between "original sin" and "actual sin." There is no hint that God tolerates original sin. The Bible teaches that if sinful actions are done in ignorance, God still considers them sinful (cf. Hebrews 9:7). Sinful actions that are committed against our will are still considered sinful (cf. Romans 7:19). The Bible teaches clearly that God intends to punish the person who commit sin with hell (cf. Exodus 34:7; 2 Peter 2:4).

Additionally, this argument minimizes what is considered sinful. Attitudes and thoughts can be every bit as sinful as speech or actions (cf. Ephesians 2:3). The two-month old who screams in anger because he is hungry is guilty of actual sin, even though he doesn't know what he is doing.

All sin — both original and actual — is washed away through the miracle of baptism.

ARGUMENT — God doesn't hold infants accountable for sins they commit before they are old enough to understand what they are doing. (This is sometimes known as the "age of accountability.")

In order to deny the Biblical teaching of infant baptism you need to manufacture supporting "truths" which have no basis in Scripture. As stated above, there are clear passages declaring the sinfulness of children, and clear passages declaring God's intentions to punish sin. But there is no passage which suggests that God ever ignores sin because of the age of the sinner.

The "age of accountability" teaching is horrible, for it attempts to counter God's threats to punish sin with a man-made theory which is contrary to clear passages of Scripture. If the sinfulness of infants is plainly taught, and God's promise to punish sin is plainly stated, then the way that children escape that punishment must be equally plain. The way to escape God's threats to punish sin *is* revealed in God's Word. God offers forgiveness of sins through baptism.

ARGUMENT — God offers forgiveness through faith in Jesus. Infants and little children can not understand Jesus Christ and his work.

This argument assumes that saving faith is only the cognitive recognition that Jesus was born in a stable, that he lived a perfect life, that he died on the cross, that he rose again. But the Bible describes faith as more than an intellectual process. It is more than mere head-knowledge. Romans 10:10 — "It is *with your heart* that you believe..."

The Bible teaches that this heart-knowledge is something that we cannot come to possess by our own power. In Ephesians 2:8 Paul writes, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." Faith is given to us as a gift. And since God is all powerful, it is no more miraculous for him to give that gift to an unbelieving infant as it is for him to create faith in the heart of an unbelieving adult.

In addition to this, the Bible teaches that children can have faith. In Matthew 19:14 we read, "Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'" In Mark 10:15 Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Christ himself describes these little children as already possessing the kingdom of heaven. And there is nothing in the Bible that speaks of people possessing the kingdom of heaven outside of saving faith. Therefore when Jesus tells us that those little children have received the kingdom of God, he is telling us they possess saving faith. More than that, he even says children have faith we should emulate. Little children accept whatever is told them without questioning. You can point to the sky and call it green, and a little child will embrace your word simply because you spoke it. God asks us to embrace his Word in that child-like faith.

These are not the only examples of the Bible describing children having saving faith. In Matthew 18:6 Jesus says, "But if anyone causes one of these little ones *who believe in me* to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." The Greek word there for "believe in" is a form of PISTEUO. It's the same word that appears over and over in the following portion of John's Gospel, where saving faith is clearly described.

The Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone *who believes* (PISTEUO) in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes* in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. *Whoever believes* in him is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe* stands condemned already because he *has not believed* in the name of God's one and only Son." (John 3:14-18)

This might raise the question, "How young can a child be and still have faith? One year? Six months? Six weeks?" There would be no reason to limit. Consider the following two portions of Scripture.

People were also bringing *babies* to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Luke 18:15-17)

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the *baby* in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" (Luke 18:41-45)

The italicized words in those passages come from the same Greek word — BREPHAE. It's a word used to describe a child anywhere from inside the womb to the pre-toddler years. In that first section Jesus says that these babies possess the kingdom of God. In the second section, Elizabeth, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, explains that the reason her baby leapt was for joy. While the main purpose of this passage is not to establish an age at which God could create faith, it does illustrate there would be absolutely no reason to limit it. And if God can work joy at being in the presence of his Savior in an unborn infant, God can create saving faith in whomever he pleases.

[The disciples] asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:25,26)

The argument that children cannot have saving faith essentially makes faith into something we accomplish though out intellectual capacity. It makes faith, a gift of God, into a good work. While we can't understand how a child has faith, we believe it because the Bible tells us it is true.

ARGUMENT — Baptism is described in Scripture as something that we do as an act of obedience to Christ's command. Infants are too small to make a decision to obey Christ and be baptized. Therefore baptism should be delayed until the child is old enough to decide to be baptized.

This argument really gets to the heart of the matter of what baptism is. Is baptism something we do for God, or is baptism something God does for us? Consider the following passages.

Christ loved the church and *gave himself up* for her *to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.* (Ephesians 5:25,26)

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. (Colossians 2:11,12)

Christ gave himself up. Christ made the church holy through washing. Christ cleansed the church. The circumcision (here meaning a cutting off of the sinful nature) was done by Christ. Those passages don't speak of baptism as something that we do, but something that Christ does for us.

The mistake is often made over a misunderstanding of passages such as Acts 2:38, "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'" This passage is understood to mean that baptism is a part of repentance. Indeed, it would be for an adult (or adolescent) who has already learned about Jesus, perhaps through reading God's Word or through the witnessing of a friend. The people whom Peter is addressing in that passage have already heard a sermon about their sinfulness (in allowing Jesus to be killed) and the purpose of Christ's work. The people were sorry for their sin, "cut to the heart," and wanted to know what they should do (Acts 2:37). Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized."

Repentance is defined as: 1) being sorry for your sin, and 2) relying on Christ for forgiveness. The people Peter preached to were sorry for their sin, and one way that God would create or strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ is through baptism. That is in perfect harmony with what all of God's Word says about baptism.

In addition to this, it's important to read the rest of that misunderstood passage. Peter's entire response is found in Acts 2:38-39 and reads: "Peter replied, '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* and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.'" The promise of forgiveness which comes through the gift of the Holy Spirit (which is what faith is) is for "you and your children."

Baptism, therefore, has two abilities — to create faith and to strengthen faith. People who come to faith through reading or hearing God's Word will choose to be baptized because they understand that in baptism God strengthens their faith in the forgiveness they have in Christ. For infants (who are obviously too young to read the Bible or listen to a Gospel presentation) God creates faith through baptism. Parents claim this glorious gift for their children.

ARGUMENT — There is no mention of infant baptism in the Bible. It is anti-Biblical, since all the baptisms described in the Bible are of adults.

The mistake made here is that it is assumed that since there aren't stories about children being baptized, then the Bible must not teach it. If God's Word teaches that children are conceived sinful, that baptism washes away sin, that "all nations" are to be baptized, and if there is no other passages which limits who should be baptized, then *God's Word does teach infant baptism*. In addition to this, most likely there are examples in the Bible of infant baptism. Consider the following portions of Scripture.

He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."

Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and *all his family* were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and *his whole family*. (Acts 16:30-34)

The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together *his relatives and close friends*... So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days. (Acts 10:24,48)

I also baptized *the household* of Stephanas. (1 Corinthians 1:16)

Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and *his entire household* believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. (Acts 18:8)

In every one of those examples there must not have been any young children living in those homes if there is no such thing as infant baptism. The word “household” is often used in Greek as an idiom for the entire family — from newborn to great-grandparents — who are living in that home. The simplest reading of those passages tells us that if any children were present, they too were baptized.

These passages should *not* be used to teach the need for infant baptism. That comes from Christ’s command to baptize all nations and from the understanding that all children are conceived with original sin. But these passages do suggest that there are Biblical examples of infants being baptized.

In addition to this, we should not misinterpret the fact that the majority of accounts of baptisms in the New Testament are adult baptisms. At that point in the history of the New Testament church, when the sacrament of baptism was new, there would be more adults baptized than infants. As time went on and the number of adult converts grew, and as they got married and had babies, the ratio of infant baptisms to adult baptism would rise. The early church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, and Hippolytus, write about infant baptism as a widely accepted practice.

ARGUMENT — The doctrine of infant baptism makes baptism into some sort of magic formula, so that if a child is baptized he/she will automatically go to heaven no matter what.

Some Christian churches might, unfortunately, hold to that notion, but it is Biblically inaccurate. In Mark 16:16 Jesus says, “Whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Baptism is only a beginning. God creates faith, but faith can be lost. It is significant to note that in the Great Commission, Jesus links “baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” with “teaching... everything I have commanded you” (cf. Matt. 28:19,20). Baptism needs to be followed by instruction in the Word so that the Holy Spirit may keep the person in the faith.

SUMMARY

Our good and gracious God wants all to be saved (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4). He has laid out how that salvation is accomplished in his Word. God’s Word teaches that all are sinful from conception, and that he intends to damn the sinner. Therefore little children are in grave spiritual need for the forgiveness that is found in Christ Jesus. The way that God saves is through faith (Ephesians 2:8). No other method of salvation is hinted at in Scripture (John 3:5). The Bible teaches that baptism is one way the Holy Spirit creates saving faith. Therefore unless it can be shown clearly from Scripture that God *didn’t* intend children to be baptized, there would be no reason not to. In fact, the need is imperative.
