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The Baptism Of Infants

Its Meaning And Its Authority

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The Christian Sacrament of Baptism is to be administered not only to believers in Jesus Christ, but also to their infant children. Before they come to the age of decision, the children of believing parents are to be baptized on the faith of their parents.

In the Presbyterian Church we do not baptize all children, but only the children of Christian parents or those children who are under the guardianship of believers in Christ. A child is accepted for baptism if only one of the parents is a professing Christian.

This rite in the Presbyterian Church is not called "christening" but "baptism." We do not christen children in our church, we baptize them. When a child is christened he is given a name and the Presbyterian Church holds that the naming of the child has no part in the Sacrament of Baptism.

Some persons are of the erroneous opinion that there is a Sacrament of Adult Baptism and also a Sacrament of Infant Baptism. There is but one Sacrament of Baptism which is sometimes administered to adult believers and sometimes to the infant children of believers.

I. What is the **meaning** of the Sacrament of Baptism when it is administered to the infant children of Christian parents?

A. It is first an acknowledgement of church membership. By this rite the infant is acknowledged as a member of the church, which is the congregation of the Lord, the household and family of God. Our Confession of Faith says, "The visible church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children..." After administering the sacrament to an infant, the minister says, "This child, thus acknowledged as a member of Christ's Church, is commended to your love and care."

The children of believers are members of the church by birth and the sacrament of baptism acknowledges that membership in a public manner. The lambs that are born into the fold belong to the shepherd of the flock and are branded with the shepherd's mark. If the ewe belongs to the shepherd the lambs belong to him too and he marks them as his own. The lambs that are born into the fold of the Good Shepherd belong to Him and are branded with His mark in baptism. If the sheep are His, the lambs are His also and He marks them as His own in the sacrament of baptism.

The children of believers, acknowledged by baptism as members of the church, are enrolled as "non-communing members." They are not entitled to all the privileges of full membership for they are not permitted to partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper or to vote in congregational meetings. But when they come of age and do through their own decision confirm their membership in the church by a creditable profession of faith in the

Lord Jesus Christ, they are enrolled as full members of the church with all the rights and privileges thereof and thus admitted to the Lord's Table to receive Communion. Having been baptized in infancy, they are not baptized again.

A child born of American parents in a foreign country is a citizen of the United States and subject to the protection of our government until he is eighteen years of age. He is a citizen at birth, but when he reaches the age of eighteen years, if he expects to retain the protection of the American Government, he must sign papers confirming his citizenship and, before he can vote, is required to take an oath of allegiance to the United States. This is an excellent illustration of the child's membership in the Church of Christ. A child born of Christian parents is a member of the Church until he reaches the age of decision. He is a member at birth, but when he comes of age, if he expects to retain the benefits and protection of the Covenant of Grace, he must confirm that membership by his own profession of faith in the Lord Jesus. Before he is entitled to all the privileges of full membership, he must avow his personal allegiance to Christ.

B. The baptism of infants is secondly a token of the Covenant. In presenting their children for the sacrament of baptism, parents claim for those children the benefits of the Covenant of Grace and the blessings which the Lord has promised to give, not only to believers, but also to their children. The children of believing parents have always been included with their parents in the benefits and blessings of the covenants of the Lord. What God promises to parents, He promises also to their infant children, for the family and not the individual is the unit embraced in all the covenants and dealings of God (Gen. 9:9; 17:7; Ex. 20:5; Deut. 29:10-13). When God made His Covenant with Abraham, He said, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee . . . to be a God unto thee and to thy seed" (Gen. 17:7). On the day of Pentecost, Peter said, "Be baptized . . . for the promise is unto you and to your children" (Acts 2:38-39). Children, who are the seed of believing parents, are included in the Covenant, and their parents may rightfully claim the benefits thereof for their infant children in the sacrament of baptism.

If a rich relative should die and in his will leave a great estate to an infant child, the parent or guardian of that child would be required, by signing certain papers, to claim for the infant the benefits of the legacy. Desiring to make certain that his child would receive what belonged to him by the terms of the will, the parents would take certain steps to hold the estate in trust and thus the child could begin immediately to receive the benefits of the inheritance. So in presenting their children for baptism, parents claim for those children the rich legacy which God has willed to them in Jesus Christ, and thus the children begin immediately to receive the benefits of the Covenant and the blessings which God gives through Christ.

The richest benefits which parents claim for their children in this sacrament are the Holy Spirit and Everlasting Life. The parents, as symbolized in sprinkling, claim God's promise to pour out upon their children His Holy Spirit, Who shall by His operation in their hearts as the years pass work faith in them, open their minds in the knowledge of God and His will, lead them to embrace Jesus Christ as Saviour, give to them every Christian virtue which is the fruit of the Spirit including love and joy and peace, and lead them at last unto Everlasting Life.

C. The baptism of infants is thirdly a sign of dedication. In presenting them for the sacrament of baptism, parents dedicate their children to the Lord and promise to instruct them in the principles of the Christian religion, to pray with them and for them, to set before them an example of Godly living, and to bring them by every means at their command to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. In this rite, the parents acknowledge that their children belong to God, Who has but lent those children to them for a season. The children are accepted as trusts from God and parenthood is sanctified thereby.

In this sacrament, therefore, the child baptized is marked with the token of the Covenant and the badge of membership in the church, and the parents offer a petition for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the child, promising to cooperate with the Spirit to bring the child into fellowship with God through Jesus Christ and thus prepare him for everlasting life.

It is a glorious privilege which Christian parents have to acknowledge their children thus as members of Christ's flock and to claim for them the benefits of His Covenant, and it is a solemn vow which they take to teach their children the things of Christ and to set before them an example of Christian living.

II. What is our **authority** for baptizing the infant children of believing parents? Our authority is none other than the Bible, which is God's Word and in which we find His instructions for the organization of His Church and the institution of her sacraments.

A. In the Old Testament the infant children of believing parents were included in the Abrahamic Covenant and, in the rite of circumcision, were marked with the token of the Covenant and the badge of church membership. In Genesis 17:11 God called circumcision the token of the Covenant and ordered it to be administered to Hebrew children when they were eight days old. By this rite the infant was acknowledged as a member of the congregation of the Lord, the Covenant promises were claimed for him by his parents, and the child was dedicated to the Lord. None will deny that in the Old Testament Church circumcision, which was the token of the Covenant and the badge of church membership, was administered not only to adult converts but also to the infant children of believing parents.

B. Now the Church in the New Testament operates under the same Covenant and promise as the Church in the Old Testament. The Covenant made with Abraham was, in God's own words, "an everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:7). Peter on the day of Pentecost speaks of the promise of God to Abraham as being still in effect (Acts 2:39), and Paul in his Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians grounds



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his whole argument upon the fact that, even though they are gentiles, they are through Christ the children of the Abrahamic Covenant and the heirs of the promise made to Abraham. To the Galatians Paul says: "If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). Now if the Covenant included the infant children of believing parents in the Old Testament, it still includes them in the New Testament. If the sign of the Covenant was given to the infant children of a Hebrew home, it should now be given to the infant children of a Christian home.

C. Baptism under the New Testament occupies the same relation to the Covenant and the Church which circumcision did. What circumcision was, baptism now is: the token and seal of the Abrahamic Covenant and promise, and the badge of membership in the Church. Since circumcision, which was the badge of church membership in the

Old Testament, was administered not only to adult converts but also to the infant children of believing parents, baptism, which is the badge of church membership in the New Testament, is likewise to be administered not only to adult converts but also to the infant children of believing parents, for the Church in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament is One Church.

Operating under the same Covenant and promise, the Church in the New Testament is but an extension of and identical with the Church in the Old Testament. The Book of the Acts indicates that the Church was in existence on the Day of Pentecost for it says that the new converts received on that day were "added unto the Church" (Acts 2:41,47). Jesus spoke of the Church as though during His ministry on earth it were already in existence (Matt. 18:17). And Stephen says of Moses: "This is he which was in the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:28), thus testifying that the Church existed in Moses' day. God did not organize a new Church with new principles and new sacraments either with John the Baptist or with the disciples in the upper room. Christ effected no original organization but built His Church and her sacraments on the foundations laid by the Prophets in the Old Testament. Thus does Paul say to the Ephesian Church: "Ye . . . are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20). In the New Testament a new branch was grafted into the Church, but the trunk and roots of the tree remained the same" (Rom. 11). New sheep were brought into the fold, but Shepherd and the sheepfold preserved their identity (Jn. 10:16). Now with this identity in mind, it is clear that if the Church included the infant children of believing parents in the Old Testament, it still includes them in the New Testament. The Church since Christ, being identical with the Church before Him, continues to include in her membership not only believers but also their infant children.

As would be expected, there is an identity of the sacraments of the Old Testament and the sacraments of the New Testament. Just as the Church in the New Testament is but an extension of the Church in the Old Testament, so the sacraments of the New Testament Church are extensions of the sacred rites of the Old Testament Church. The Lord's Supper was instituted in immediate connection with the observance of the Passover and in such a manner as to show clearly that it is the Jewish Passover Christianized (Matt. 26:17-30). Both are communal meals setting forth the sacrifice of Christ. While the form of the sacrament is changed, because the truth symbolized has passed from prophecy into history, yet the sacrament preserves its identity. The Apostle Paul confirms this when he says: "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Baptism sustains the same relation to circumcision that the Lord's Supper sustains to the Passover, it is the same sacrament christianized. Paul says: "As many as have been baptized into Christ are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:27,29). He thus indicates that baptism is now what circumcision was: the token of the Abrahamic Covenant and the seal of the promises of the Covenant. That Baptism is what Circumcision was is seen in the fact that they represent the same things. Circumcision was the token of the Covenant (Gen. 17:11), and so is baptism (Acts 2:38-41; Gal. 3:27,29). Circumcision was the badge of church membership (Ex. 12:48), and

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so is baptism (Matt. 28:19). Circumcision was the seal "of the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:11), and so is baptism (Acts 3:19). Circumcision was the symbol of purification, the "putting off the body of the sins of the flesh" (Col. 2:11), and so is baptism (Rom. 4:4). Circumcision is used by the Apostle Paul interchangeably with baptism, as another word for the same thing, and in explaining the nature of baptism he speaks of it as Christian circumcision, calling it "the circumcision of Christ" (Col. 2:11-13).

We conclude therefore that since circumcision in the Old Testament was administered, not only to adult converts, but also to the infant children of believing parents, and since baptism is in the New Testament what circumcision was in the Old, in the absence of any command to the contrary, the sacrament of baptism ought to be administered not only to adult converts but also to the infant children of believing parents to signify their membership in the household of God and their participation in the promises of the Covenant. We do not find in all the Bible any indication that the infant children of believing parents, who were undeniably included in the Church in the Old Testament, are to be excluded from the Church in the New Testament and denied the token of the Covenant. By His own command in Genesis 17:11, God put the children of believing parents into His Church and He has never taken them out. By His own command (Gen. 17:11), God ordered believers to mark their infant children with the token of the Covenant and the badge of church membership and, although the token was changed from circumcision to baptism, His command still stands. God still expects believers to mark their infant children with the token of the Covenant and the badge of church membership in the Sacrament of Baptism.

D. In the New Testament record we may expect to find the infant children of believing parents

being marked with the sacrament of baptism. Turning to the New Testament, that is just what we see. We find the apostles baptizing whole families on the faith of parents. In Acts 16:14-15 we read: "And a certain woman named Lydia . . . whose heart the Lord opened that she attended unto the words spoken of Paul was baptized **and her household.**" Only her heart was opened, according to the record, but her household was baptized. The same is true of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30-33. He asked Paul: "What must I do to be saved?" And Paul said: "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved **and thy house.**" And we read: "And he was baptized, he **and all his** straightway." Paul promised the jailer that if he would believe both he and his house should be saved, and so when he believed both he and his household were baptized. In I Corinthians 1:16, Paul says: "I baptized the household of Stephanas." If there had been children of age in the household, he would have said: "I baptized Stephanas, and John the son of Stephanas, and Mary the daughter of Stephanas." In all these incidents only the faith of the parent is mentioned but the apostle baptized the whole family. Infant children must have been baptized on the faith of their parents.

In the New Testament we find also Paul addressing the children of the church in Ephesus as though they were members of the church. The letter is written to "the saints (i.e. church members) which are at Ephesus" (1:1) and he has a word of exhortation, not only for husbands, wives, fathers, and servants, but also for "children" (6:1). He reminds them all that "we are members of His (Christ's) body" (5:30), and addressing them thus he includes the children as members of the Church.

In the New Testament we find still another thing. In every book there is an **absence of any argument** concerning the matter of infant baptism or the membership in the church of the children of believers. Wherever in the New Testament there is any reinterpreting or changing of the Old Testament customs we find the record of heated arguments and long discussions. Witness for example how much discussion is to be found on the subject of whether Jews are permitted under the Gospel to eat those meats which Moses had declared unclean. Now if under the Gospel the children of believing parents were to have been suddenly excluded from the Church and denied the token of the Covenant after having been included since Abraham, the Jewish converts would have protested vigorously and there would have been much discussion and argument. This silence of the New Testament speaks as forcefully as anything else in support of the fact that infants were included in the New Testament Church and given the token of the Covenant in baptism as they had been in the Old Testament in circumcision.

It seems as if anticipating such questions about the inclusion of their children, Peter assured his Jewish listeners on the day of Pentecost, that under the Gospel of Christ, as under the law, their children were still included in the blessings and promises of God. "The promise," he said, "is unto you and to your children." (Acts 2:39).

In summary: If in the Old Testament not only adult converts but also the infant children of believing parents were marked with the token of the Covenant and the badge of church membership in circumcision; and if the New Testament Church, operating under the same Covenant and promise,



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is but an extension of the Old Testament Church; then we may rightfully assume that, in the absence of any command to the contrary, it is God's intention that the token of the Covenant and badge of church membership, which is now baptism, shall in the New Testament Church be applied not only to adult converts but also to the infant children of believing parents. This assumption finds support in the fact that the apostles baptized whole families on the faith of parents and that the writers of the New Testament include the children of believers in the Church.

III. What then are some of the **objections** to the baptism of infants?

A. The objection is raised: "I do not want to make the decision for my children." Let it be said first that these same parents make many other decisions for their children. They send them to school whether the children want to go or not. They send them to the dentist whether the children want to go or not. Why they will then hesitate to make this greatest of all decisions is hardly understandable. Was God wrong in instructing Hebrew parents to make the decision for their children, placing the token of the Covenant upon them and initiating them into the congregation without their consent? Was Abraham wrong in making the decision for Isaac and marking him with circumcision?

It is better however that we think of the act of presenting our children for baptism, not as making a decision for them but as claiming a blessing for them. God has already made the decision for them when He put them into our homes. We as parents when we present them for baptism only claim a blessing which is theirs by right of birth. If some-

One died and left a rich estate to a child, no parent would say: "I will not make the decision for him. I will wait and see if he wants these riches." No, he would sign the papers and hold the estate in trust for the child, using the money perhaps for his development and education. When the child came of age he could still reject his inheritance if he chose, but at least the parent had claimed the blessing for him.

No American parent would say: "I will not make the decision for my child whether he will be an American citizen or not. He may want to be a citizen of Russia. I'll wait." No, the child is an American citizen by birth and the parent would proudly claim the right for him. If when he is of age he wants to renounce his American citizenship, he may do so, but that is his decision. The parent has given him every benefit of a good heritage.

So in presenting our children for baptism, we only claim that inheritance which is theirs by right and give them every benefit of a good heritage. Our children may later choose to renounce their inheritance and their citizenship in the Kingdom of God. If they do the decision is theirs, but at least we have done all that we could to prejudice them for the best and highest.

B. The objection is raised: "The baptism of infants is foolish; it can do the child no good because he does not know what is happening." This objection questions the wisdom of God. If it is foolish to sprinkle a little water on the head of a baby, then it was criminal to mutilate an infant by circumcision. Who dare accuse God thus? It is true that the child does not know what is happening, but the parents do and God does and the child shall in years to come.

C. The objection is raised, "The New Testament teaches only believer's baptism," and if we ask the authority for such a statement, Mark 16:16 is quoted, which reads: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." "Believing must precede baptism," it is argued. Let it be said first that if the first part of this text (Mk. 16:16) excludes infants from baptism, then the second part excludes infants from salvation, for it reads: "But he that believeth not shall be damned." Shall we say: "Infants cannot believe and therefore they shall be damned?" No! this text simply cannot be quoted in connection with infant baptism.

If one argues that Paul says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," and that here again belief precedes salvation and baptism, we answer that the rest of that text must also be quoted for the whole text is: "Believe . . . and thou shalt be saved **and thy house.**" But if belief must always precede salvation and baptism, then infants are excluded not only from baptism but also from salvation.

The New Testament teaches "believer's baptism" but it does not teach **only** believer's baptism. It must not be forgotten that in the Old Testament circumcision, the token of the Covenant and badge of church membership, was given to the children of believers as well as to adult converts. No one will argue that in the Old Testament there was only "believer's circumcision." What right have we then to limit baptism only to believers and exclude their infant children?

D. It is objected that there is no explicit command to baptize infants in the New Testament. We

answer that an explicit command in the New Testament is not needed for there are numerous commands in the Old Testament to give the token of the Covenant to the children of believers, which commands have never been rescinded. The burden of proof is upon those who would show that they have been rescinded and that the children of believers, included in the Old Testament Church, are excluded from the New Testament Church.

But if one seeks an explicit New Testament command for every practice of the New Testament Church, let him show us an explicit command or an example which permits women to take Communion. We permit women to take Communion however because it is clearly implied in the New Testament and because it is in keeping with the whole spirit of the gospel. So we permit infants to be marked with the token of the Covenant in baptism because it is clearly implied in the New Testament and because it is in keeping with the whole spirit and plan of God's Word.

E. It is objected that: "Infant baptism presupposes infant damnation." As taught by some churches which say, "Not baptized, not saved," infant baptism may presuppose infant damnation, but as taught and practiced by the Presbyterian Church it does not.

According to our view, here is a child of unbelieving parents who dies unbaptized. We can **hope** in the mercy of God as revealed in Jesus Christ that God has carried that little soul to Heaven. We can **expect** that our Lord Jesus who so loved little children during His earthly life will fold them in His arms and carry them to be with Him forever. On the other hand, here is a child of believing parents who dies after having been presented to the Lord in baptism. We can **know** that that child is numbered in the congregation of the Lord and is one of that great company about the Throne of God and the Lamb. We can know because God has told us so.

No, infant baptism does not presuppose infant damnation, but it offers the certainty of the salvation of the infants of believing parents.

In closing, let it be said, that the joy and the privilege of marking our children with the token of the Covenant and claiming for them the blessings and promises of God should be cherished by Christian parents and should by no means be neglected. The baptism of their infant children cannot be neglected by Christian parents without disregarding the Covenant which was made in Abraham and, at great sacrifice, fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Let believers in Christ gladly present their children to the Lord in baptism, singing:

"Our children, Lord, in faith and prayer
We now devote to Thee;
Let them Thy Covenant mercies share
And Thy salvation see."

World Missions Receipts

Apr. 1, to Dec. 31, 1948	\$638,170.44
Apr. 1, to Dec. 31, 1949	627,792.10
Decrease	\$ 10,378.34

Program Of Progress

Apr. 1, to Dec. 31, 1949 (Net)	\$159,003.80
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