

DEVOTIONAL AID FOR 9 NOVEMBER 2020 – 15 NOVEMBER 2020



**UPPER
HUNTER**
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Dear church family,

This week, we touch on a topic that is controversial. Infant baptism. Should we baptise infants or not? Christians who sincerely believe the Bible as God's Word disagree on this question. I have many Christian pastors, theologians, and authors who believe infants should not be baptised. I believe they are mistaken, but I still love them and respect them. If you are someone who do not believe the Bible teaches the infant baptism, you are still welcome at our church. However, as a denomination, the Presbyterian Church of Australia, believes and teaches that infants of believing parents should be baptised. Needless to say (or perhaps it needs to be said actually), I also believe in infant baptism, but I hope what I say below will come across with respect and love whether you believe in infant baptism or not. Here, I'm not laying down all the arguments, but just a few key points for us to remember.

Baptism is the sign of the covenant of grace.

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant in the Old Testament. Circumcision of males signified that the person and the household belonged to the covenant that God made with Abraham. More than a physical sign for the nation of Israel or Jewish people, it signified the spiritual reality that the person (and the household) was justified before God because of the faith. In the same way, baptism also signifies the spiritual reality that the person baptised is justified before God because of the faith in Christ. We can see how the Bible assumes such a parallel between circumcision and baptism in passages like Colossians 2:11–12: "11 In [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."

Baptism itself does not save the child.

Being the sign, not the thing signified, means that baptism is not what saves the child. Just because you are baptised does not mean your salvation is secure. What or who saves the child should be obvious to all of us. It is Christ who saves the child. The child does need to grow up and trust the Saviour with her or his own faith. Nevertheless, the sign of the covenant ought to be given to infants just as circumcision was given to (male) infants in the Old Testament times. The fact that some baptised infants grow up to be unbelievers should not surprise us (although it grieves us). We should remember that not all who were circumcised were saved or the true believers in God in the Old Testament times. Likewise, not all baptised infants will turn out to be true believers in Christ. Nevertheless, the sign of the covenant must be given to the children of believing parents, just as it was given in the Old Testament times.

Jesus welcomed little children.

In Mark 10:13–16, we read how Jesus welcomed and blessed little children, in contrast to His own disciples who tried to keep them away from Jesus. This incident does not merely teach us that Jesus is kind to children and more patient than His disciples. It teaches us that little children are recipients of Jesus's blessings in a very similar way as children of Abraham received his blessings. We must not treat children as little pagans to be evangelised (although we must tell them the gospel again and again as much as we, adult believers need to hear the gospel again and again), but rather, treat them as people who already belong to Jesus. This does not contradict what we have already mentioned above, i. e., we are not presuming that the children are already regenerate or are God's elect. Children of believing parents belong to the covenant community, and we teach and train them up in hope and faith that in time they will own the faith themselves.

A lot more could be said on this topic, but I hope these will prove helpful starting point for you to consider infant baptism.

Yours in Christ,

Timothy Lee

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THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM¹

Lord's Day 27

Q72) 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.

Q73) Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism the washing of rebirth and the washing away of sins?

A) God has good reason for these words. He wants to teach us that the blood and Spirit of Christ wash away our sins just as water washes away dirt from our bodies. But more important, He wants to assure us, by this divine pledge and sign, that the washing away of our sins spiritually is as real as physical washing with water.

Q74) Should infants, too, be baptised?

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.

COLOSSIANS 2:11–12

11 In [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."

The Apostle Paul is talking about the spiritual reality of believers here. He first speaks of the spiritual circumcision in verse 11. Believers in Christ are no longer a people of the flesh, i.e., we are no longer controlled by sin, because a spiritual circumcision has been done to us. Likewise, in verse 12, Paul speaks of the spiritual baptism where the believers are said to have been buried, i.e., died, and rose again to resurrection life together with Christ. Both of these are talking about the spiritual reality that the old life is gone and the believer now lives the new life. It is significant (pardon the pun) that both circumcision and baptism are mentioned here with an unseen spiritual reality attached to them. There are at least a couple of lessons for us here: (1) As Paul uses circumcision and baptism to teach us the same spiritual reality of being given a new life in Christ, there is a parallel between circumcision and baptism. (2) The physical circumcision was not the end in itself, but it was a pointer (a sign) to the spiritual reality, that is, a new life in Christ. Likewise, water baptism is not the end in itself, but it is a pointer (a sign) to the spiritual reality, that is, a new life in Christ. So, if you are baptised with water, whether as an infant or as an adult, do you believe in the powerful working of God who raised Jesus from the dead? Do you believe that God has given you the new life as you trust in Jesus?

ACTS 2:38–39

Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, "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. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

Peter's first sermon impacted the hearers greatly. When they were convicted in their hearts about their sins and God's coming judgment, they asked Peter what to do. The above verses are Peter's reply to them. Here we see how tightly faith and baptism are bound together in the Bible itself, "Repent and be baptised," it says. Also notice though how Peter says the promise of forgiveness of sins and the giving of the Holy Spirit is "for you and for your children." Sure, this is not a water-tight argument that ends the discussion, but it points strongly towards the practice of infant baptism, because as the promise is for children too, the sign of baptism ought also to be given to our children. In any case, the generosity of God should be seen in this that God promises to forgive sins and give the Holy Spirit to all who repent and be baptised (in faith).

¹ The text of the Catechism is usually from <https://threeforms.org/heidelberg-catechism/>, but time to time, for the sake of clarity, I have also adopted the translation used in *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung.