

# GRACE AND PEACE

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## COMMUNITY CHURCH

### Why We Baptize Infants

*“The argument in a nutshell is simply this: God established his church in the days of Abraham and put children into it. They must remain there until he puts them out. He has nowhere put them out.”*

-- B.B. Warfield

At Grace and Peace, we celebrate the unity we have through Jesus Christ and the good news of his life, death, and resurrection. We want this unity to transcend any differences among us, so that anyone who worships the triune God, trusts in Christ alone for their salvation, and seeks to follow Jesus can join our local church. At the same time, we have to address secondary issues that are common to all churches. One of these issues is infant baptism.

Our leaders baptize the infants of believers for one simple reason: we believe the Bible tells us to do so. Of course, many Bible-believing Christians disagree with this view. They point out that infants cannot believe or repent, and that the Bible links baptism to faith and repentance (Acts 2:38-39). Moreover, the New Testament does not contain a single definitive example of an infant being baptized. Given that, why baptize infants? Why not wait until they are old enough to make their own decision?

These are good questions. They are also questions to which the Bible has answers – answers that lie at the beginning of God's word, in the Book of Genesis.

#### Abrahamic Covenant

In Genesis, we see God make a covenant -- an agreement that establishes a relationship -- with Abraham and his descendants. God promises Abraham that he “will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you” (Genesis 17:7). We know that this covenant continues today, not only because God promises that it will be everlasting, but because Paul tells us that those who follow Jesus are “Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:29). Moreover, we know that God gave Abraham circumcision as a sign of his covenant, and told Abraham to circumcise every male in his family -- including infants (Genesis 17:10-12).

Since the time of Abraham, then, God has included the infant children of believers among his covenant people, which is why Paul taught that such infants are “holy,” or set apart (1 Corinthians 7:14), addressed the children of believers in his letters to the churches in Colossae

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and Ephesus, and baptized entire households (Acts 16:15, 16:33-34; 1 Corinthians 1:16). Moreover, from Abraham onward God has commanded us to give infants the sign of his covenant. In the Old Testament era, that sign was circumcision, and today that sign is baptism, as we see when Paul clearly connects circumcision to baptism in Colossians 2:11-12. God numbers the infants of believers among his people, and we should mark such infants with his covenant sign, just as Abraham did thousands of years ago.

### Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews also teaches that the children of believers are part of God's people. We read in Hebrews that those “who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing **the blood of the covenant that set them apart**, and who has insulted the Spirit of God? For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge, I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge **his people**.’ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:28-31). Some Christians interpret the underlined parts of this passage as speaking of those who came to faith but then walked away from Jesus. Yet the Bible teaches us that all those who trust in Jesus will persevere in faith until the final judgment (see Jeremiah 32:40; Philippians 1:6). Given such perseverance, Hebrews 10 is speaking not of converts who abandon their faith, but of those who became members of God's people by virtue of their birth into covenant families and were raised in the church, yet rejected Jesus and thus face eternal conscious torment.

### Counterarguments

Many godly Christians -- including members of Grace and Peace -- oppose infant baptism. Some believe that because the New Testament links baptism to faith and repentance, baptism should be reserved for those who can exercise faith and repent. Yet circumcision was also linked to faith and repentance -- Paul called it a “sign [and] seal of the righteousness that [Abraham] had by faith while he was still uncircumcised” (Romans 4:11) -- without being forbidden to infants. God used circumcision to mark adult converts’ entry into his covenant community (Exodus 12:48), and he commanded his people to circumcise their infants. In the same way, we baptize both adult believers who come to faith and their infant children. Moreover, Scripture often sets forth different commands for infants and adults. The Bible says that “if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10), but someone who applied this precept to an infant would be a monster rather than a Christian.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Bible teaches that adults must repent and believe before they can be baptized, but does not apply this same rule to the children of believers, because God numbers such children among his covenant people.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin originally made this point about 2 Thessalonians and baptism.

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Other Christians believe that we cannot baptize infants because we see no examples of such baptisms in the New Testament. This argument assumes that none of the persons who received the household baptisms of Acts 16:15, Acts 16:33-34, and 1 Corinthians 1:16 were infants. But even if this assumption is true, we cannot conclude that the Bible forbids an activity simply because it lacks a clear example of that activity. As John Calvin wrote, “[i]f such kinds of argument were good, it would be necessary, in like manner, to [block] women from the Lord’s Supper, since we do not read that they were ever admitted to it in the days of the apostles.”

### Why This Matters

If you’ve read this far, hopefully this paper has helped convince you that Christian parents should baptize their infants. But you may also be wondering whether this topic has any real importance. After all, we agree with Baptists that baptism does not save us. Given that, does it really matter whether we baptize our infants?

In an ultimate sense, the answer to this question is no. Our views about baptism cannot justify us – only Jesus can do that. And we welcome into membership everyone who follows Jesus and trusts in him alone for salvation, regardless of what they think about infant baptism.

At the same time, we believe that baptism has deep practical importance in how we raise our children. As Mark Jones has written,<sup>2</sup> if our children are members of God’s covenant community, then we can teach them to pray to God as their Father and assure them that he forgives them when they sin. But if our children do not belong to God’s family, if they are simply pagans and reprobates, then we have no grounds for assuring them that God is a loving Father who will forgive them. In other words, how we think about baptism and our children’s status with respect to God and his people will directly affect how we teach them about their relationship with the Lord and his church. Baptism does not save our children, but it does usher them into God’s covenant community, a community in which they have uncles and aunts in Christ and a loving Father who watches over them.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.reformation21.org/blogs/why-i-baptize-babies.php>.