

## Why Do We Baptize Our Children?

We begin our study of Scripture this morning in Genesis 17—a text that says nothing about baptism, but a text that says a great deal about the nature of a covenant. God appeared to Abram for the purpose of establishing His covenant with him and his posterity (17:1,2). Immediately one needs to take note of the wording here. God does not ask that there might be a covenant between Him and Abram, but He establishes the covenant by condescending graciously to engage in a mutual covenant, but observe carefully how God states it, “**I will establish My covenant between Me and you.**” It is to be noted that it is God’s covenant and He unilaterally sets out the covenant, I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you and then God changes his name from Abram to Abraham. It is most evident, God purposes to do this, it is not conditional. One thing further needs to be noted, this covenant promise is made, not just with Abraham, but with his descendants after him.

It is at this time that God introduces the sign of the covenant in verses 10 and 11, “This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.” Notice it is merely a sign, a witness to the promise; it is neither the promise itself nor is it the cause of the promise. However by appropriating the sign of the covenant, Abraham is demonstrating his willingness to enter into the covenant. It is important to note that Abraham already has an existing relationship with God therefore circumcision simply ratifies or affirms that existing relationship. God also makes it clear that this covenant sign was to be continued by his posterity by saying “This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you.”

### A. Circumcision then was to be a perpetual sign

1. A few observations:
  - a. For Abraham, the sign of the covenant followed faith.
  - b. Abraham willingly chose to demonstrate his allegiance to God by appropriating the sign, which He had ordained.
  - c. But we should also note that the sign is not simply for Abraham, but for “**every male**” in this community.
2. Some will accept it by choice by reason of age
  - a. Others will receive the sign of the covenant simply by birth
  - b. That is, others will become a part of the covenant not by their personal choice but by the act of Abraham’s acceptance.
  - c. We see here the office of headship established as was practiced by Joshua when he stated that he and his household would serve the Lord. (cf. Josh 24:15)
3. God established this covenant sign with Abraham as the head but it will establish a relationship with families that follow
  - a. For Abraham, the sign follows faith, but for his son, Isaac, the sign precedes any understanding (21:4).
  - b. We can safely conclude then from Genesis 17, that an individual may enter the covenant through the faith of another.
4. A qualification is necessary at this point: *Being a part of a covenant community does not guarantee salvation.*
  - a. The covenant community is not necessarily the same as the heavenly community.
  - b. The earthly or natural community is not the same as the chosen community
  - c. The words of Peter on the day of Pentecost when they ask what shall we do and Peter commanded them to repent and be baptized then added these words; “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, **as many as the Lord our God will call.**” Acts 2:39
  - d. God, through the prophet Jeremiah reminds us of what ultimately matters when He says, “**Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart**”(Jer. 4:4).
  - e. In Jer. 9:25-26 God promises to punish the circumcised with the uncircumcised **because they are uncircumcised in the heart.**

### B. Thus far been talking about circumcision, but we no longer practice circumcision

1. But what Jeremiah has just said speaks clearly to us of the similar sign in both circumcision and baptism
  - a. Circumcision speaks to sinful man of the need to have the filth of the flesh cut away
  - b. Scripture tells us that circumcision spoke of the need of the heart not the flesh
2. In the same manner baptism speaks to sinful man of his need of cleansing, not the cleansing of the flesh, but of the heart
  - a. Peter makes this clear in *1 Peter 3:21-22 There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*
  - b. Here we understand that our cleansing is by the work of Christ
  - c. Baptism clearly speaks to us of the shed blood of our Savior by which our sins are covered

3. We can conclude the following:
  - a. Circumcision did not convey salvation
  - b. That is, the sign does not automatically transmit the reality of what it represents.
  - c. It is possible then, to have the sign without faith, but it is **not possible to have what the sign signifies without faith.**
4. But what does all of this have to do with baptism?
  - a. Hopefully, some of you are connecting the dots with me here.
  - b. The Old Testament teaches us that God made a covenant with Abraham and his posterity, and that the sign of this covenant was circumcision.
  - c. The New Testament speaks of the establishment of a new covenant, mediated by Jesus Christ (Heb. 8).
  - d. With the changing of the covenants, we witness points of continuity and points of discontinuity.
5. We see that the covenants are similar, but not identical, therefore the signs of the covenant are similar but not identical
  - a. And, as we consider the change in covenants, we need to ask: *Does the new covenant have a sign? And, if it does, what is the sign?*
  - b. The sign of the old covenant being bloody pointed to what the Christ and His sacrifice would accomplish
  - c. The sign of the new covenant is no longer bloody pointing back to what the Christ and His sacrifice has accomplished
6. And we learn from the writings of the Apostles that the sign of the New Covenant is *baptism*.  
 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19).
7. Now, *to whom, is the sign given?*
  - a. On the day of Pentecost the sign was given to all who repented and believed. (cf. Acts 2:41; 8:35-38)
  - b. Be we also read in the Book of Acts where entire households are baptized when only one member of the household is explicitly said to have come to faith in Christ.
  - c. In Acts 16:14, we read that Lydia responded to Paul's teaching and, subsequently she, and her entire household was baptized.
  - d. In Acts 16:33 we read that upon the faith of Philippian jailer he and his family were baptized.
  - e. One can conclude then there may there may not be a command to baptize infants but the pattern is plain, households were baptized by the Apostles.
8. At the same time baptism of children is not practice indiscriminately for only children within the covenant community, that is only children of parents who are within the visible household of faith are to be baptized

CONCLUSION: We can conclude that the sign of the old covenant was circumcision the sign of the new is baptism

We may ask then *what degree of continuity do we find between the sign of the old covenant and the sign of the new covenant?*

There is a difference in the form of the sign, the sign of the new covenant is not circumcision; it is baptism, however, to be tremendous continuity in terms of what the sign signifies.

*Circumcision signified a being in a right relationship with God (Gen. 17).*

Moses and the prophets clearly teach that only circumcision of the heart can accomplish this right relationship.

In a similar manner, *baptism signifies union with Christ (Rom. 6:3-5).*

But similarly we read that baptism is a work of God in a similar sense as Paul writes, *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."* Cor 12:13

Baptism speaks of a "better covenant" (cf. Heb. 8:6) in that Jesus Christ has provided for us the cleansing promised under the old covenant.

Heb 9:11-12 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Why do we practice infant baptism, why do we baptize our children? Because the promise is to us and to our children.

We have no other reason other than God commanded it to Abraham and we as children of Abraham follow that command given under the old by practicing the command given under the new when Jesus said, *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Amen. Matt 28:18-20