Infant Baptism in Perspective

A Scriptural critique of Reformed paedobaptism

© Evert van Voorthuizen, February 2021.

Email: preteristadvocate@gmail.com.

Bible Versions
Scripture quotations marked **EHV** are from the Holy Bible, Evangelical Heritage Version® (EHV®).
© 2019 Wartburg Project, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked **ESV** are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®).
Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license.
The ESV may not be translated in whole or in part into any other language.

Scripture quotations marked **HCSB** are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®.
Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.
Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Holman CSB®, and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked **MEV** are taken from the Modern English Version.
Copyright © 2014 by Military Bible Association. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

(Note: All underlining of Scripture quotations for emphasis has been added by the author.)

Acknowledgments
1. The first part of footnote 1 is adapted from Benjamin Wills Newton, *Doctrine of Scripture Respecting Baptism, Briefly Considered.* Second Edition (London: Lucas Collins, 1907). [Originally published by Houlston and Wright in 1859.]
2. The section *Baptism in the Early Church* is adapted from Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 16-45.

Introduction

Reformed churches claim biblical support for infant baptism in their doctrine of the covenant.

Their argument runs as follows:

Children in the Old Testament (OT):

1. were members, with their parents, of the covenant of God's grace (Gen 17:7; Ps 105:6).
2. received the outward mark of the covenant: Circumcision (Gen 17:10ff.).
3. were to be taught the requirements of the covenant:
   Faith and obedience (Gen 18:19; Dt 6:4-7; Jos 24:15; Ps 78:1-8).

Children in the New Testament (NT):

1. still belong to the covenant and are to be taught its requirements (Mt 19:13-15; Ac 2:39; 1Cor 7:14; Eph 6:1-4).
2. are therefore to receive the NT counterpart to circumcision: Baptism (Col 2:11-12).

The regular practice of household baptism (Ac 10:47-48; 16:15; 16:33; 1Cor 1:16) is said to imply the baptism of covenant children along with their parents.

Evaluation

In evaluating Reformed paedobaptism, we shall examine the NT teaching concerning:

1) Baptism.
2) God's covenant.
3) Circumcision.
4) Children.
5) Household baptisms.

We shall further examine:

6) Proof-texts commonly employed by Paedobaptists.
7) John's baptism.
8) The practice of the early Church.
9) How infant baptism undermines the unity of the sacraments.

Baptism in the New Testament

The NT presents a unified and coherent "view" of baptism — its intended subjects, its signification, its doctrinal and practical implications, and its apostolic administration:

1) Baptism was instituted for disciples, believers (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16).

2) Baptism denotes those blessings attending faith in Jesus Christ — union with him, justification, cleansing from sin, new birth, the gift of the Spirit, sonship, etc. (Ac 2:38; 22:16; Rom 6:3ff.; 1Cor 6:11; 12:13; Gal 3:26ff.; Col 2:12; Tit 3:5; 1Pet 3:21).

3) Baptism in the NT presupposes faith and conversion:
   - Rom 6:2-4 (ESV): [2] … *How can we who died to sin still live in it?*
     [3] *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*
     [4] *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death …*
   - Gal 3:26-27 (MEV): [26] *You are all sons of God <u>by faith</u> in Christ Jesus.*
     [27] *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ <u>have put on Christ</u>.*
   - Col 2:12 (ESV): *… having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him <u>through faith</u> in the powerful working of God …*
   - 1Pet 3:21 (ESV): *Baptism … <u>now saves you</u>, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as <u>an appeal</u> to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*.[1]

4) NT baptismal practice is consistent with its doctrine:
   Ac 8:12 (ESV): *But when they believed ... they were baptized, both <u>men and women</u>* (cf. Ac 2:41; 18:8).[2]

---

[1] 1 Peter 3:21: Baptism "saves", though not the outward washing itself. Rather, just as was Noah in the Ark (3:20), so also <u>in Christ</u> the believer is borne above the flood of God's wrath and brought safely into a New World. Baptism joins us to him who died and who rose again above the power of death; through Christ we are forever separated from a condemned world and brought into new circumstances of life and blessing (Mk 10:38; Rom 6:3ff.; Col 2:12; 1Pet 1:3). [Adapted from Benjamin Wills Newton.]
Baptism involves an "appeal" to God (ESV, NASB), or a "response" (MEV), "answer" (KJV, WEB), or "pledge" (HCSB, NET, NIV) to him. The Greek noun here (*eperōtēma*) perhaps reflects the basic meaning of its verb *eperōtaō* (Strong's G1905), "to ask or question", so meaning here the believer's <u>appeal</u> or <u>earnest prayer</u> to God for a cleansed conscience.
Alternatively, it might denote the <u>answer</u> or <u>response</u> (see NET footnote) to interrogation or to the demands of a contract; if so, Peter's meaning is that in baptism the believer answers "Yes" to the terms of the gospel and pledges obedience to God.

[2] Nor did John's baptism include infants (Mk 1:4-5).

Baptism reflects the distinctive NT teaching about the covenant

To be sure the NT affirms the essential unity of God's covenant across redemptive history.
But its principal focus is on the covenant's fulfillment in Christ and our entrance through faith.

1) God's covenant is fundamentally made with Christ, then extended to all those "in him":
   - Gal 3:16, 29 (MEV): [16] *Now the promises were made to Abraham and his* Seed. *He does not say, "and to seeds," meaning many, but "and to your Seed," meaning one, who is Christ.*
     [29] *If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*
   - 1Cor 15:22 (MEV): *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*.[3]

   Accordingly, baptism denotes union with Christ, our (covenant) Head:
   - Rom 6:3-4 (ESV): [3] *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*
     [4] *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead … we too might walk in newness of life.*
   - Col 2:12 (ESV): … *having been buried with [Christ] in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*
   - Gal 3:27, 29 (MEV): [27] *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*
     [29] *If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

2) All men, without exception, are sinners and alienated from God.
   Acceptance by him is solely through faith in Christ:
   - Rom 3:22-24 (ESV): *[Now has been manifested]* [22] *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction [between Jews and Gentiles]:* [23] *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* [24] *and are justified by his grace as a gift …*
   - Gal 2:15-16 (ESV): [15] *We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;* [16] *yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we [Jews] also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified … because by works of the law no one will be justified.*
   - Eph 2:1, 3-5, 8 (MEV): [1] *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.*
     [3] *among them we all also once lived ... and we were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*
     [4] *But God, being rich in mercy ...* [5] *… made us alive together with Christ ...*
     [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith …*
   - Jn 3:36 (MEV): *He who believes in the Son has eternal life. He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

   Accordingly, baptism denotes acceptance with God through faith alone:
   - Mk 16:16 (ESV): *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved ..."*
   - Ac 10:47-48 (ESV): [47] *"Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these [Gentile believers], who have received the Holy Spirit just as we [Jews] have?"* [48] *And he commanded them to be baptized …*
   - With Ac 15:8-9 (ESV): [8] *"And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to [these Gentile believers], by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us,* [9] *and he made no distinction between us and them, <u>having cleansed their hearts by faith</u>."*

[3] Covenant relationship with God, forfeited in the Fall, is restored through the obedience of the New Adam (Rom 5:19; Rev 21:3).

3) Acceptance with God requires, not birth privilege, but spiritual New Birth:

- Jn 1:12-13 (ESV): [12] *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,* [13] *who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*
- Rom 9:7-8 (based on YLT and the KJV): [7] *Nor because they are seed of Abraham are they all children, but "in Isaac shall thy seed be called."*
  [8] *That is, the children of the flesh — these are not children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned for seed*. (See also Galatians 4:28-29.)
- 1Pet 1:23, 25 (EHV): [23] *For you have been born again, not from perishable seed but from imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*
  [25] *… And this is the word that was preached to you.*

Accordingly, baptism signifies regeneration and our new life in Christ:

- Rom 6:4 (ESV): *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead … we too might walk in newness of life.*
- Col 2:11-13 (ESV): [11] *In him also you were [spiritually] circumcised ...* [12] *having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him ...*
  [13] *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.*
- Titus 3:5 (HCSB): *He saved us — not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*

4) Covenant admission requires confession of Christ as Lord and a calling upon him for salvation:

- Rom 10:9, 12-13 (ESV): [9] *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
  [12] *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.* [13] *For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*
- Mt 16:16-18 (based on the MEV):
  [16] *Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*
  [17] *Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon …* [for My Father has revealed this truth to you].
  [18] *... and on this rock [upon this basis and confession] I will build My church …"*

Accordingly, baptism requires confession of Christ and calling upon him:

- Ac 22:16 (my translation): *"'And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'"*
- Ac 2:21, 38 (ESV), Peter's address to the Jews gathered at Pentecost:
  [21] *"'And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"*
  [38] *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins …"*
- 1Pet 3:21 (ESV): *Baptism … now saves you, not [the outward washing itself] but <u>as an appeal to God</u> for a good conscience …* [4]

[4] See footnote 1.

5) Inclusion in God's covenant is sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit:[5]

- Eph 1:13-14 (MEV): [13] *In [Christ] you also, after hearing the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and after believing in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,* [14] *who is the guarantee of our inheritance ...*
- Eph 4:30 (EHV): *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*
- 2Cor 1:22 (my translation): *God has sealed us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.*
- Rom 8:16 (ESV): *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*
- Gal 3:14 (ESV): … *so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

Accordingly, baptism is inseparable from the gift of the Spirit given to believers:

- Ac 2:38 (ESV)*: … "Repent and be baptized … and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*
- Ac 8:15-16 (my translation): [15] *Peter and John … prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.* [16] *For he had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*
- Ac 10:47-48 (ESV): *[Peter declared],* [47] *"Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"* [48] *And he commanded them to be baptized …*
- Ac 19:2-3, 5-6 (ESV): [2] *[Paul] said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, ..."* [3] *And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" ...*
  [5] *On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*
  [6] *And ... the Holy Spirit came on them …*

6) All believers have equal status in Christ:

- Eph 2:18 (EHV): *For through him we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access to the Father by one Spirit.*
- Eph 3:6 (my translation): *The Gentiles are joint heirs, and joint body-members, and joint partakers [with Israel] of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

Accordingly, baptism denotes the unity and equality of all believers in Christ:

- Gal 3:26-28 (MEV): [26] *You are all sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*
  [27] *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*
  [28] *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, and there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
- Eph 4:4-6 (EHV): [4] *There is one body and one Spirit ...*
  [5] *There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* [6] *one God and Father of all …*
- 1Cor 12:13 (HCSB): *For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

Some of the above Scripture references may be viewed as answering the claims of the first-century Judaizers. Judaizers sought to impose on Gentiles converts certain OT requirements for covenant membership, notably circumcision, Sabbath observance, and kosher (food) laws (Ac 15:1, 5).

[5] The newness of the New Covenant is seen in the way God's Spirit effectually and inwardly applies salvation to the believer (Heb 8:8-13; 2Cor 3:6; Eze 36:26-27).

These were the so-called Jewish "identity markers" that emphasized Israel's holiness or set-apartness for God — in contradistinction to the unclean nations roundabout (Ex 12:43, 48; 31:13; Lev 20:24-26; Mt 15:26).
Gentiles were unclean and uncircumcised — "sinners" (Gal 2:15), excluded from God's favor (Eph 2:11-12).
Accordingly, close fellowship with Gentiles in daily life and within the Church was prohibited (Ac 10:28; 11:2-3; Gal 2:12-14).
The problem could be rectified, according to the Judaizers, only through circumcision and incorporation into Israel — along the lines specified in Exodus 12:48.

But in reality, the Mosaic Law emphasized "holiness" not so much to separate Israel as to show the need for moral perfection before God.
The law magnified people's sinfulness, pointing to their need for cleansing and forgiveness.
Rightly understood, the law declared all to be sinners — Jews no less than Gentiles.
All are guilty and in desperate need of God's grace.
Was this lesson learned? Evidently not by the Judaizers!

Paul's proclamation that mere faith in Jesus' death brings justification and acceptance for all — his message of "the cross" — was deeply offensive to the Jews, for at one stroke it nullified Jewish privilege.
This was the Judaizer's main complaint — see Galatians 5:11.[6]

Concerning the Gentiles, God had to make his will very clear to the early Church's leadership.
He did so by:

- emphatically pronouncing the Gentiles "clean" (Ac 10:11-16, 28; 11:5ff.).
- accepting them through faith alone and granting them the Holy Spirit just as he had to the Jews (Ac 10:44-47; 11:15-18; 15:7-11; Gal 3:2, 5).

In positing special entry for children "born within the covenant", Reformed paedobaptism reverts back to OT externalism and undermines the NT emphasis on justification solely by faith — the truth that God accepts all men the same way and on an equal footing through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:22-24; Gal 2:16; etc.).
Reformed teaching bears at least some resemblance to the errors of the first-century Judaizers.

[6] More than any other epistle, Galatians underscores acceptance with God through faith alone. Note its following emphases: Justification through faith, not works of the law (2:16); the Mosaic Law's temporary role as a pointer to Christ (3:23-25); the equality of all men in Christ (3:28); sonship, and the gift of the Spirit given to all (4:6); believers as constituting the New Israel (6:16).

Circumcision, in the NT, is fulfilled through faith

Baptism as the sign of covenant inclusion is without a doubt the NT counterpart to circumcision (Gal 3:26-29; Ac 10:44-48). Yet in response to the Jewish demand for (Gentile) circumcision the apostles set forth, not baptism as the Christian alternative, but the spiritual realities of the sign received through faith.

Both rites depict the necessary qualifications for fellowship with God — sin's removal, loyalty to God, etc.
Baptism pictures both cleansing from sin and our new life in Christ (Ac 22:16; Rom 6:4).
Circumcision similarly depicted the cutting off of sin along with the need for heart-circumcision (Dt 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:28-29; Col 2:11).
Conversely, uncircumcision denoted moral defilement and obstinacy (Eze 44:7; Lev 26:41; Ac 7:51).
Infants, born sinful, received circumcision as a token of God's grace (Gen 17:7, 11; cf. Rom 4:11).
Hence, the "sin" of childbirth in Leviticus 12 was partly offset by the male infant's circumcision.

Despite these similarities, the rites are not to be totally equated:

1. The Judaizers' demand for the circumcision of Gentile converts (Acts 15, Galatians, etc.) shows that they, at least, did not regard Christian baptism as having taken the place of circumcision.
   Their failure to equate the two is significant and surely proves that infant baptism was not practiced.
   Because, any baptizing of infants on the basis of household solidarity or covenant inclusion would necessarily be seen as equivalent to the Jewish rite, perhaps even as its replacement.
   But that never happened — the Judaizers didn't connect the two at all.
2. In answering these legalists, the apostles point not to baptism itself, but to the spiritual circumcision received by Gentiles when first converted. Baptism witnesses to this spiritual circumcision in that it speaks of cleansing from sin, the death of our old nature, and the new life we have in Christ.
3. The OT rite anticipated the provisions of the New Covenant: Christ as the true Seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16), and the gift of God's Spirit to impart genuine circumcision (Dt 30:6; Jer 31:33; Eze 36:26-27; Rom 2:29).
4. Christian Jews continued — with apostolic approval — to employ circumcision as the definitive sign of God's covenant set upon their male children (Ac 21:20-24).

Two key references

Colossians 2:11-13 (ESV):

11 *In him 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.*
13 *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.*

Though lacking the outward sign, believers have nevertheless been spiritually circumcised — they have (as their baptism shows) died to sin and been given new life in Christ.[7]

[7] "The circumcision of Christ" (2:11) perhaps denotes that which is performed by him — the spiritual circumcision accomplished "without hands". Alternatively, it might refer to what happened to him — his being "cut off" on the cross — with baptism denoting the believer's union with Jesus in his death. Or perhaps Paul intends both meanings.

Acts 15:8-9 (ESV):

[8] *"And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to [these Gentile believers], by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us,* [9] *and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith."*

Peter answers the Judaizers (Ac 15:1, 5) by pointing to the inner, spiritual cleansing the Gentiles had received through faith.

Further references emphasizing Gentile inclusion and equality apart from circumcision

- 1Cor 7:19 (ESV): *For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.*
- Gal 5:6 (ESV): *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*
- Gal 6:15 (ESV): *For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*
- Php 3:3 (ESV): *For we are the [true] circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh*.
- Col 3:11 (my translation): *... a renewal in which there is neither Greek or Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, … but Christ is all and in all.*
- Rom 2:28-29 (MEV): [28] *He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is external in the flesh.* [29] *But he is a Jew who is one inwardly. And circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit …*
- Eph 2:11-13, 18 (EHV): [11] *Therefore, remember that at one time, you Gentiles in the flesh — the ones who are called "uncircumcised" by those called "the circumcised" (which is performed physically by human hands) —* [12] *remember that at that time you were separated from Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise. You were without hope and without God in the world.* [13] *But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* [18] *For through him we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

OT circumcision finds ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus:
Positively, in his perfect obedience. The covenant promises are therefore his by right (Gal 3:16).
Negatively, in his death. Jesus was "cut off" as he bore our sins on the cross (Gen 17:14[8]; Dan 9:26; Isa 53:8).

The covenant made with Abraham with its sign of circumcision comes to a focus in Jesus Christ.
And "in him" NT believers are both circumcised and members of God's covenant.

[8] Genesis 17:14: Those not having their sin cut off in circumcision were to be "cut off" and excluded from the covenant community. Baptism and the (Communion) Cup likewise connote the overwhelming judgment of God — an inundation or pouring out of his wrath on account of sin. And so we find Jesus, in Mark 10:38, describing his coming sufferings and death as a "baptism" and "cup". Elsewhere, God makes the wicked drink wine from the cup of his wrath — see Revelation 14:10; 16:19; Psalm 75:8; Jeremiah 25:15.

The children of believers require faith before baptism

The NT (like the OT) affirms God's love for our children:

- He delights in their simple faith and is deeply concerned for their salvation (Mt 18:1-6, 10-14).
- Very young children — "infants" (ESV, HCSB, KJV, MEV) or "babies" (EHV, NASB) — are themselves privileged members of God's kingdom (Lk 18:15-16), beneficiaries of his rule and protection.
- God blesses children for the sake of their parents; salvation still comes to households (Lk 19:9).
- Children belonging to a Christian household are "holy" (1Cor 7:14), enjoying the benefits of a godly upbringing.
- Children "in the Lord" must obey, and be taught, God's commandments (Eph 6:1-4) — the requirements of his covenant.

We ought, therefore, never to doubt the salvation of our infant children whom the Lord chooses to call from this life.[9] Yet as children grow, Christian instruction is needed to inculcate personal faith in Christ (2Tim 3:15).

How should we regard the privileges and duties of children born into a Christian family?
Answer:

- Our children enjoy a status not unlike the NT Jews — recipients of God's promises yet needing faith in Christ for baptism (Ac 2:39; 3:25-26; Rom 1:16; 9:4-5).
- With privilege comes responsibility; failure to believe will incur the greater judgment (cf. Lk 12:48).[10]

[9] Charles Spurgeon was of the opinion that all infants who perish, including those born to non-Christians, are recipients of God's grace. Even those who die through infanticide.
For Spurgeon's scriptural defence of this view, see https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/infant-salvation#flipbook.
[10] Accordingly, the NT regards Israel's unbelief as unfaithfulness to God's covenant (Mt 12:39; 16:4; Rev 17:5-6; cf. Isa 1:21). Israel's privilege rendered her more culpable than her heathen neighbors (Mt 11:20-24; Rev 11:8; Am 3:2) and liable to covenant wrath — fulfilled in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Mt 22:1-7; Heb 10:25, 30; cf. Dt 32:35-36).

Household baptisms were instances of household salvation, not infant baptism

Household baptisms were evidently common, and Luke seems to assume his readers' familiarity with the practice. He records three such instances — the household of Cornelius in Acts 10, and the households of Lydia and of the Jailer in Acts 16.
In addition, Paul recalls that he baptized, in Corinth, the household of Stephanus (1Cor 1:16), concerning which we have no further information.

What should we make of these?
Three main points from the accounts in Acts:

1. Household salvation is their basis.
2. Each account emphasizes the necessity of faith.
3. In no instance are children mentioned.

First, household salvation is their basis:

- Acts 11:14 (literal translation):
  "[Peter] will *speak words to you by which you will be saved — and all your household."*
- Acts 16:31 (literal translation):
  And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved — you and your household."

A solidarity links the family members with their head so that the New Testament, like the Old, can speak of household salvation (Lk 19:9; Heb 11:7).
Household baptism and OT infant circumcision (Gen 17:7; 18:19; Ex 12:48) therefore share a common basis, which might suggest that infants received baptism with their parents.

But family solidarity is not the whole picture — the NT equally refers to divided households where some but not all the members believe (Lk 12:51-53; 14:26; 1Cor 7:12-16; 1Pet 3:1-2). The need for personal faith remains!
In fact, the NT accounts of household baptism are quite consistent with its emphasis on personal faith.

Second, each account preserves the NT order: *hearing → faith → baptism.*
Each account:

- reports the gospel proclamation to all those present (Ac 10:34ff.; 16:13; 16:32).
- notes the response of faith (Ac 10:44ff.; 16:14; 16:34).
- is completely silent concerning infants and children.

The Philippian Jailer narrative is particularly interesting:
Acts 16:34 (literal translation):
And he rejoiced greatly with all his household, he having believed in God.

The singular participle, stressing the Jailer's faith ("he having believed"), is said to imply the baptism of household members solely on account of his faith — he being the household head.

Perhaps so, but we note from the narrative:

- Paul and Silas at the outset declaring the need for faith (16:31).
- That "they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house" (16:32, ESV).
- The whole household responded with joy (16:34).

Given these details, we can be fairly certain that all the household members believed and responded in faith.

Note that Luke does record one instance where all the members of a household are converted.
Acts 18:8 (ESV):
Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household.
And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

Crispus and his entire household believed and were no doubt baptized with the other Corinthians.[11]
So here we have a clear instance of household conversion and baptism together!
And almost certainly, this is what happened with each of the recorded household baptisms.

Third, in none of these accounts are any children mentioned.
Very likely, no children were present:

- Cornelius' "household" (Ac 11:14) consisted of his "relatives and close friends" — "many persons" (Ac 10:24, 27, ESV).
- Lydia's household likely included some of the women gathered with her for prayer by the riverside. A businesswoman and head of her own house (Ac 16:14-15, 40), Lydia was almost certainly unmarried.
- Since Roman jailers were often older ex-servicemen, the Jailer's household probably consisted of older children and servants.
- Domestic servants were common in NT households (cf. Php. 4:22).

One final point:
Given that Luke earlier (in Acts 8:12) notes that those believing and being baptized included women as well as men, his failure to ever mention or include children is probably significant. And while just adults may have been present, there is no mention of parents later bringing their children for baptism. The silence is deafening.

[11] Writing later to the Corinthians, Paul relates that he himself baptized Crispus and a few others (1Cor 1:14) — presumably referring to the Synagogue Ruler of Acts 18:8.

Paedobaptist "proof-texts" examined

Here we examine four Scripture texts that are commonly employed to "prove" the case for paedobaptism.

Acts 2:38-39 (ESV):

[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 statement is said to prove that, also in the NT, God's covenant promise is for the children no less than their parents, that baptism as the sign of that promise is to be administered to them, taking the place of OT circumcision.

But this goes well beyond Peter's intent:

- "You and your children" is a reference to Israel's priority in the covenant.
  Peter is addressing the Jews as heirs of God's OT promises, urging repentance in view of their covenant privileges (Ac 2:14, 22, 36; cf. Ac 3:25-26; 13:32-33; Rom 9:4-5).
- Baptism here, as elsewhere, is for those who personally appropriate God's promise through faith:
  So those who received his word were baptized … (Ac 2:41, ESV).

Colossians 2:11-13 (ESV):

[11] *In him 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.*
[13] *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.*

Says the Belgic Confession (1561): "What circumcision was to the Jews, baptism is to our children.
And for this reason, St. Paul calls baptism the *circumcision of Christ*."[12]

But this is simplistic. Paul is rather showing how believers, though lacking the outward sign, have nevertheless been *spiritually* circumcised — they have (as their baptism shows) died to sin and been given new life in Christ!
Note the Greek aorist (past) tense here:
you were circumcised … having been co-buried with him … you were co-raised … he co-quickened you with him.

Romans 4:10-11 (HCSB)**:**

[10] *In what way then was [righteousness to Abraham] credited — while he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while he was circumcised, but uncircumcised.*
[11] *And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while still uncircumcised. This was to make him the father of all who believe but are not circumcised, so that righteousness may be credited to them also.*

[12] The Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 34: Of Holy Baptism.

It is argued that, children having received the OT sign of justification, so also now the children of believers receive baptism to seal to them the promise of the covenant.
This argument is not without merit; male infants did receive circumcision as a token of God's grace.

But note:

- Paul is here showing how God justifies Gentiles without circumcision, solely through faith.
  Abraham, himself justified prior to his circumcision, is the father (prototype) of all who believe and are thereby justified.
- Circumcision sealed (confirmed) what Abraham already possessed.
  Likewise, baptism seals the believer's prior salvation.[13]
- Principally, God's indwelling Spirit is his seal given to guarantee the believer's salvation.
  (2Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13-14; 4:30).

1 Corinthians 7:14 (MEV)**:**
For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean. But now they are holy.

The children's holiness is understood in terms of federal holiness and is said to imply the practice of infant baptism.

Paul here is responding to questions from the Corinthians about marriage (1Cor 7:1), specifically, is it right for a Christian to remain with an unconverted spouse.
About this Paul has received no direct revelation but gives his opinion (1Cor 7:12) that, since the unbeliever is "sanctified", separation is not to be initiated by the believer:

- The unbeliever is sanctified "in" the believing spouse (Greek text) — through the close tie with him/her.
- On the same basis their children are "holy".
- The unbeliever should be free to leave (1Cor 7:15).

The children and unbeliever are evidently holy through relationship with the believer:
God's grace works through the Christian for their benefit in their daily sharing together of family life.
So, in contrast to certain OT stipulations (e.g., Ezr 9:2; 10:3), separation is not necessary.

Yet even if the marriage continues, there's no guarantee that the unbeliever will become a Christian (1Cor 7:16).
Conversion may be the goal of the believer's witness — for the children as well.
But baptism is no more to be given to the (holy) children than to the (sanctified) unbelieving spouse.

[13] Baptism, on God's part, is a visible pledge and seal of the spiritual blessings signified therein.

John's baptism

John emphasized repentance and baptized those only who confessed their sins (Mk 1:4-5).
How significant is that fact for our present discussion?
Answer: Considerable, in view of the unity and continuity of the two baptisms:
John's baptism is the obvious model for Christian baptism. Indeed, John's practice was initially continued in Jesus' own ministry (Jn 3:22 – 4:2). It was this very practice that resumed after Pentecost — now ratified by the risen Lord and administered in his name (Mt 28:19; Ac 2:38; etc.).

John's baptism (like ours) portrayed:

- God's overwhelming judgment for sin (Mt 3:7-12; cf. 1Pet 3:20-21[14]).
- The need for repentance and conversion: dying to sin and the rising again to new life (Mt 3:8; cf. Rom 6:2-6).
- Cleansing via Jesus' death and the work of God's Spirit (Jn 1:29; Mt 3:11; cf. Ac 22:16; 1Cor 6:11; 1Jn 1:7).

Jesus, in his baptism, represented his people (Mt 3:13-15).
As our Sin-bearer he sank beneath the flood of God's wrath — an anticipation of his death (Mk 10:38).
And he emerged from the water as Head of a New Creation — the new Adam (Lk 3:22, 38) and New Israel (Lk 4:1-13; cf. Mt 2:15).[15]
Jesus' baptism anticipates that union with him expressed in our own baptism.

John's baptism introduced the NT demand for the personal repentance needed to enter God's kingdom:

- John was the forerunner, the promised Elijah, who would call Israel to repentance (Mal 3:1; 4:5-6; cf. Lk 1:17; Mt 11:10, 14; 17:10-13).
- From the OT, one of Messiah's roles was to purge the nation of evildoers.
  Only a godly remnant would survive (e.g., Zeph 3:11-13; Mal 3:1-5; 4:1-2, 5).
- Hence John's message of judgment concerning the "wrath to come" (Mt 3:7, ESV).
  Jesus, by means of the Holy Spirit, would thoroughly baptize (purify) the nation (Mt 3:11).
  The separation of the wheat from the chaff (Mt 3:12) began with Jesus' ministry and culminated in the nation's judgment and termination in the 66-70 AD War with Rome.
- Baptism (by immersion) was a picture of God overwhelming wrath, of death.
  But for the penitent, baptism became a sign of divine cleansing (forgiveness) in place of judgment.

John thus declared that to be a Jew was not enough: God's own people needed to personally repent, to believe, and to be born anew (Mt 3:8-9[16]; cf. Jn 1:12-13; 3:3-10).
From its inception Christian baptism has carried these same emphases.
Personal repentance and faith are prerequisites for receiving baptism (Mt 28:19; Ac 2:38; 18:8; 22:16).

---

[14] Baptism saves from judgment — through union with Christ (see footnote 1; cf. 1Cor 10:1-2).
[15] In his baptism Jesus was Spirit-anointed for his Messianic task. He was identified as Yahweh's anointed Son (Ps 2:2, 7), and as the anointed Servant whose death would result in salvation (Isa 42:1; 53:11; 61:1; Lk 4:18).
He was also set apart as the Head of a New Humanity; the Spirit's dove-like descent, initiating in Christ a New Creation, mirrors his earlier action over the primordial waters of creation (Gen 1:2).
Whereas Adam and Israel both failed as God's "son" (Gen 5:1-3; Ex 4:22; Hos 6:7; 11:1ff.), Jesus withstood the Devil and rendered perfect obedience to God's law (Lk 4:4, 8, 12).
[16] John's baptism was entirely different from the Jewish proselyte baptism of his day — the practice of baptizing heathen converts and their children upon entry to Judaism. Whereas John stressed his countrymen's own need of cleansing, proselyte baptism was exclusively for Gentiles and highlighted Jewish holiness: Jewish children, and those born to proselytes after their baptism, were deemed to be born in holiness and so to have no need of baptism. How contrary to the NT emphasis!

Baptism in the early Church

Church history witnesses to the gradual adoption of infant baptism over a 200-year period: 200-400 AD.
An emphasis on original sin, coupled with the notion that baptism itself washes sin away, led to acceptance of infant baptism — first in the Western and later in the Eastern Church.

Second century sources refer only to believer baptism:
The *Didache* (ca. 105 AD), the *Epistle of Barnabas* (ca. 125), the *Shepherd of Hermas* (150), Justin Martyr's *Apology* (ca. 153), Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* (180), and the works of Clement of Alexandria (195+).
Justin Martyr provides the most detailed account of early baptism, stressing its voluntary nature.[17]

Tertullian (Carthage, ca. 204 AD) is the first to mention infant baptism.
Insisting that those who receive baptism should understand its import, he opposes both the baptism of infants and the use of sponsors to vouch for them.[18]

Hippolytus, bishop of Rome, expressly teaches the baptism of infants (*Apostolic Tradition,* 217 AD).
Later, a synod of sixty-six bishops presided over by Cyprian (Carthage, 251) established that God's grace in baptism should be imparted at birth; any delay, even for eight days after the analogy of circumcision, exposed the child to the risk of eternal perdition.[19]

Origen in the Eastern Church refers to infant baptism as something "frequently questioned by the brethren" (*Homily on Luke,* 233 AD), to which he answers that baptism is necessary to purge away the pollution of inherited sin.

Eastern Church support remained sporadic: Infant baptism is not heard of again until taught by Asterius, an Arian (341 AD). Nor does it feature in Cyril of Jerusalem's detailed account of contemporary baptism (*Catechetical Lectures,* 348). Later still, Gregory Nazianzen (381) states his preference for baptizing children aged three who could answer the catechetical questions for themselves without the need of a sponsor.

Through Augustine (354-430 AD) infant baptism gained general acceptance. The sacraments (he claimed) are indispensable; infants dying without them are damned. Hence both infant baptism and infant communion must have derived from the apostles.[20] Augustine's emphasis on original sin, in opposition to Pelagius, commended infant baptism to many.

---

[17] Justin wrote: "As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and promise to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God … [these] receive the washing with water … there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father …" (*Apologia,* chapter 61).
[18] A sponsor (parent or godparent) answered for the infant and guaranteed his post-baptismal instruction. Tertullian wrote: "[Baptism] must not be given rashly … its delay is more profitable, especially in the case of little children … [For the sponsors] may either fail of their promise by death, or they may be mistaken by a child's proving of wicked disposition … [Let the children come to Christ] when they understand, when they are instructed." (*De baptismo,* chapter 18).
[19] Cyprian further refers to infant communion as the custom in Carthage.
[20] Augustine wrote: "[Infant baptism is something] the whole church practices, and which has not been instituted by councils but was ever in use; it is very reasonably believed to [have been] delivered by authority of the apostles." (*De baptismo contra Donatistas,* IV, 401 AD).

Infant baptism severs the unity of the sacraments

Reformed churches rightly restrict Communion to believers who have confessed Jesus Christ.
But this is inconsistent:

- Communion should follow on from one's baptism (cf. Ac 2:41-42).
  Hence the early custom of granting communion to catechumens immediately following their baptism.
  And the later practice of giving communion to young children.[21]
- If infant baptism is justified from circumcision, then child communion is equally justified from the fact that whole Israelite families partook of the Passover (Ex 12:3-4).[22]
- Reformed churches strongly emphasize the right reception of Communion.
  One must "discern" or "recognize" the Lord's body, so as not to participate "in an unworthy manner" (ESV) and incur guilt and wrath. Self-examination is vital (1Cor 11:27-34).
  Why not a similar insistence for baptism?[23]

Conclusion

While infant baptism can be derived logically from the covenant's continuity and the correspondence of its signs (baptism and circumcision), the NT itself lends no support to the practice.
Reformed paedobaptism sets aside the clear and consistent NT teaching:

- Concerning baptism as a sign of union with Christ, of cleansing and regeneration, and of the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Concerning God's covenant: of entry into it through New Birth, faith, and confession of Christ; of the Holy Spirit given as a seal.
- Concerning the apostolic Church's practice of believer baptism as related in the book of Acts.

Infant baptism reflects the OT covenantal emphasis — the privileged inclusion of all Israelites from birth.
But the NT is clear: God now accepts all men the same way, through faith in Jesus Christ (Ac 15:8-9; Gal 3:26-29).
The practice of baptizing infants apart from faith fundamentally undermines the NT doctrine of justification and of acceptance with God by faith alone.

[21] The earliest explicit reference to infant communion is from Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, in 251 AD (Treatise 3: *On the Lapsed*, sections 9, 25-26). Augustine (354-430 AD) and Pope Leo I (ca. 400-461 AD) also refer to the practice. Though later dropped in the Western Church, infant communion remains the standard practice of Eastern Orthodox churches.
[22] Child communion on this basis is still sometimes advocated by paedobaptists. Here is a website advocating for the practice: https://paedocommunion.com. The following Reformed website advocates against the practice: https://reformed.org/sacraments/the-history-of-paedocommunion-from-the-early-church-until-1500-by-tommy-lee/.
The issue was also considered by the Reformed Churches of Australia at their 2000 Synod, with a proposal for a three-tiered church membership: baptized infants, communicant children, and professing members with full privileges.
[23] Paedobaptists here contrast the two rites, stressing baptism's initiatory and unrepeatable nature and its passive reception — suitable for infants incorporated into God's covenant.

Appendix: The significance of baptism

The following is from Benjamin Wills Newton, *The Doctrine of Scripture Respecting Baptism, Briefly Considered.* Second Edition (London: Lucas Collins, 1907). [Originally published in 1859 by Houlston and Wright.]
Newton (1807-1899) was an early Brethren leader and a prolific writer.[1]
Excerpts from pages 1 –
(Scripture quotations are adapted or taken from the King James Version.)

It would be a happy thing, if, in questions of Christian Truth, we could confine ourselves to a consideration of the form in which it is first presented to us by God, without reference to its corruption by man. But this is impossible now. The darkness which has so long brooded over Christendom, has not been without its results. Not only has the light of truth been shrouded, but Satan has also kindled many a false light whereby he too successfully deceives. …

What for example is more plainly revealed in Scripture, than that Justifying Faith is, Reliance on God as effecting for us through Christ what we have no power to effect for ourselves. Justifying Faith, said the Reformers, is "reliance on the divine mercy remitting sin for Christ's sake." No definition can be more simple; none more exact. It does not say that justifying faith is an act of the understanding *merely;* it defines it to be a reliance of the heart on God as having Himself provided the reconciliation. Yet this definition, so simple and so true, Rome, followed by the greater part of Christendom, not only rejects but pronounces accursed. "If any one shall say that justifying faith is nothing else than reliance on the divine mercy remitting sin for Christ's sake, let him be accursed." (Canons of Council of Trent, Sess. 6, Can. 12.) … But alas! Rome is not the alone corrupter of this precious Truth. We find even Protestant teachers saying that "Faith is not to be regarded as a separate and simple virtue, but that it denotes all the conditions of the Gospel covenant, that is, it includes within itself all the works of Christian piety." (Bishop Bull.) And Bishop Burnet says, that "Faith, in the New Testament, stands generally for the complex of Christianity": and that "as including our hope, our love, our repentance, and our obedience, faith is the condition that makes us capable of receiving redemption and free grace." According to this, faith, as being something that includes within itself every moral excellency, justifies by its own intrinsic meritoriousness, and not as the link which connects with the meritoriousness of another. A sinner brings to God hope, love, repentance, obedience — in a word, every excellency — and, on the ground of having these excellencies, receives free grace! Such has been the teaching of Protestants in England. Rome herself has not more audaciously dared to make faith void, and the promise in Christ of none effect. …

If then the primary doctrine of the Gospel — Justification by faith — has been systematically perverted, we cannot wonder that Baptism, the primary ordinance of Christianity, should have been perverted likewise. The doctrines and the ordinances of the New Covenant stand or fall together. Before we turn, however, to the painful subject of their perversion, let us first consider in what aspect Baptism is presented to us in Scripture.

Baptism, like the Lord's Supper, is an ordinance attached to the *New* Covenant, which is a Covenant not of works but of PROMISE and GRACE. … "I will write my laws upon their heart that they shall not depart from me." "Their sins and iniquities *I* will remember no more. I WILL BE their God, they SHALL BE my people." All these words are authoritative. The promises are absolute, attended by no conditions except such as God has undertaken to

[1] Many of Newton's works can be found here: https://www.brethrenarchive.org/people/benjamin-wills-newton.

secure. In this covenant the place of stipulation and bestowment is occupied by God: that of recipiency and acknowledgment by ourselves. Baptism, therefore, as being connected with such a Covenant, is necessarily an ordinance of GRACE. In it we present ourselves not as stipulators, but as recipients: not as basing our hopes on *our* future obedience to God, but as heirs of the blessings due to the obedience of our heavenly Surety. …

Nothing, perhaps, shows more clearly how peculiarly Baptism is an ordinance of GRACE than the period in the life of faith that is appointed for its administration. When we consider the extent and greatness of the blessings of which Baptism is the sign, we may be disposed to ask whether its administration should not be delayed until increased experience and knowledge enable us in a measure to appreciate its meaning. But God has appointed otherwise. It is not an ordinance reserved for the advanced and experienced in the school of Christ. It meets us in the infancy of our faith and knowledge. It meets us where the Cross finds us. Therefore, although Baptism is the sign and the pledge of blessings that will not be developed fully till we are conformed to the image of Christ in glory, yet, the babe in faith receives the seal of their being his, in token that they are inherited entirely on the title of the name of Another.

The narrative of the conversion of the Eunuch in the eighth chapter of the Acts sufficiently proves that as soon as we have received the gospel and confessed the name of Jesus, we have instantly a title to be baptized. The Eunuch was reading respecting Him who "was led as a lamb to the slaughter." He read, but he understood not until Philip came and preached unto him Jesus; then his eyes were opened. He recognized the substitutional sufferings of Jesus as the object proposed to him by God, that he might look thereto and live. He turned in faith to Jesus, and from that moment he stood before God no longer in his own individuality, but as associated with the perfectness of Another. And although as yet he might imperfectly estimate the extent of his blessings, yet he was known by God as covered by all the preciousness of the name of Jesus. He desired to be baptized in that name, and his request was granted. He was not commanded to wait until his faith was more develop, or his knowledge enlarged. God's promises in Christ pertained to him, not because he had a certain quality of faith; nor because of any future results that might be expected from that faith; but simply because he *had* faith; whether weak or whether strong was not the question. "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." [2]

The aspect in which we are wont to regard Baptism when we first believe, is as the appointed ordinance in which we confess the name of Jesus, and show forth the remission of sins through Him received, and also as the ordinance by which we are formally and visibly introduced into that body which as baptized in the name of Jesus, stands, or should stand, as His confessing people in the midst of a gainsaying world. These aspects of Baptism are indeed of great moment; but we must beware of making them exclusive aspects. Baptism is not merely an act of confession on our part, or a rite by which we visibly enter the communion of God's people; it is also on the part of God towards us His seal and sign of a work which His grace has effectually accomplished for us in the death and resurrection of His Son.

[2] I omit the intervening verse, viz., "And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart," &c,. because it is universally admitted that the whole of this verse is an interpolation. Nor would the Scripture so speak. If such words were found in the Scripture, weak believers might long torment themselves with the question, whether they believed *with all their heart*. The Scripture is very careful never to present justifying faith as anything else than simple reliance. Such reliance may be, or may not be firm; and the results that flow from it may vary. But our acceptance is not affected thereby, because God has not connected acceptance with reliance of a certain degree or quality, but with reliance as such. Some have sought to alter God's definition of justifying faith, and have said that no faith is justifying except that which so consciously appropriates the promises in Christ, as to be attended with present peace and joy. This is to confound the results of faith with faith. The promises of God are to him that believeth, and are not limited to those who have conscious peace in believing, although it is true that conscious peace should be the result.

The work which God has accomplished for us in Christ extends far beyond the forgiveness of our sins. It is indeed true that in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of God's grace. But Christ by His death has not only liberated us from the consequences of our sins, He has also liberated us from our sinful selves. Christ in becoming the sin-bearer for His people became their Representative. As such He entered those clouds of wrath which burst upon Him on the Cross: as such He entered those clouds of glory which awaited his ascension into the heavens. When, therefore, our Representative placed Himself beneath the power of death and died, we judicially died. Judicially, though not actually, our existence as the fallen and corrupt children of the first Adam terminated then. In that sabbath, during which Jesus rested in the grave, we see a sabbath of rest for all the people of God, for they there found the rest of deliverance *from themselves* as well as from their sins. "If," says the Apostle in a passage not sufficiently meditated on, "if one died on behalf of all, then DID THE WHOLE DIE" (2 Cor. 5:14)[3] — that is, if Christ died substitutionally on behalf of all His believing people, then did the whole of that people die. The moment, therefore, any have Christ as their substitute, they are regarded in the courts of heaven as having received the award due to their sins, and also as separated judicially from their natural selves. This was the truth expressed by the Apostle when he said, "I HAVE BEEN crucified (co-crucified) with Christ." (Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι. Gal. 2:20) The word "I," indicated to the Apostle all that he characteristically was as a fallen child of the first Adam, and so regarded, he met judicial death on the Cross of his substitute. Again, he says, "our old man" (another name for our natural selves) WAS crucified with Him." (συνεσταυρώθη. Rom. 6:6) So also in Colossians 3:3, "Ye are dead," or more literally, YE DIED (ἀπεθάνετε) — that is, when Christ, your Representative, died in your stead. On this ground also we are said to be circumcised — that is, separated from the flesh by anti-typical circumcision received in Christ.[4] He who is viewed as one with Christ in His death and resurrection cannot but be effectually separated from every thing beneath the heavens.

The recognition of this truth is of infinite importance in our present conflicts. Our great present sorrow is ourselves. Daily and hourly we feel the necessity of struggling against our "old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." Indeed, in it is hidden the seed and principle of every evil that has ever been manifested beneath the sun. Often in struggling with its corruption, we become so absorbed in the present circumstances of the conflict, as to forget what was effected for us at the Cross in respect of the old man and all its evil. We may, however, be sure of this, that in proportion as we fail in apprehending the nature of the victory achieved for us at the Cross, gloom is likely to overspread, and disaster to attend our best efforts. But when we see that we are struggling with a foe already conquered; that our old man *has been* co-crucified with Christ; that we ourselves have judicially died; that in the estimate of Heaven we have left behind us in the grave of Christ all the accompaniments and characteristics of our earthly fallen being, then we find in these truths that which is as wine to the fainting lip — light to our eyes — marrow to our bones. We thank God that we have been not merely freed from our guilt, but that we have been also cleansed from ourselves. We wage the conflict with renewed courage, and find how the Spirit who comes to glorify Jesus owns and uses every remembrance of Him.

[3] ὅτι εἷς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν, ἄρα οἱ πάντες ἀπέθανον.

[4] The words in Colossians 2 are as follows: "In whom (i.e., Christ) ye were also circumcised by a circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision received [or accomplished] in Christ." The words, τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, are a Hebraism — the two last words being adjectival — "Christ-circumcision," i.e., circumcision effected for us in Christ, in virtue of our having passed through death into resurrection-life in Him. Circumcision therefore and baptism both signify separation from the flesh; but baptism signifies also the *means*, viz., union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Circumcision typifies only the end.

Nor do the Scriptures speak only of our having died in Christ. They teach us also that in Him as a new Covenant-Head — the Second man, the Last Adam — we have representatively been raised into glory. In the sixth of Romans it is said that "we are alive unto God IN Christ Jesus our Lord (ζῶντας τῷ θεῷ EN Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.) In the Colossians we read, "Ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Col. 3:3) And again in the same chapter we are addressed as those who have been "co-raised with Christ." (εἰ οὖν συνηγέρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ.) Again, in the second chapter of the Ephesians, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, co-quickened us with Christ … and co-raised and co-seated us with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ … καὶ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.) If the first Adam by his one downward step from Paradise, brought us into this world of sorrow and sin and ruin, so certainly has Christ, the second and last Adam, by His one upward step from death into glory, borne with Him all who are in Him — that is, all His believing people. Personally, we are on earth: representatively, we are above.

We might expect that it would be the desire of God to make this wondrous act of His grace very prominent before the hearts and consciences of His people. Accordingly, the first ordinance appointed to us as soon as we have believed, signifies to us this mercy. Baptism is, on the part of God, a SIGN to us that He has caused us to go down into death as into deep waters, and that He has also raised us up again out of those waters into new circumstances, where death and judgment have no longer any title against us. It signifies to us that we have died and been raised in ANOTHER. "Buried with him" (i.e., with Christ) "in baptism, wherein also ye were raised with him (συνηγέρθητε) through faith in the operation of God who raised him from the dead." (Col. 2:12) [5]

We cannot wonder that WATER [into which we descend as into a grave, for it is said, "buried with him" (i.e., with Christ) "in baptism": and again, "planted with him in the likeness of his death" (see Rom. 6:3-5 and Col. 2:12): we cannot wonder that water should be used in Baptism to denote the power of death and of wrath. If we had beheld that vast abyss of waters of which we read in Genesis, where there was no light nor any life, where all was silence and darkness, we should instinctively have felt that such waters were a fitting symbol of death. Yet out of those dark waters, when the power of God acted thereon, this fair creation was brought — born as out of the womb of death. So early did God indicate His design of causing life, order, and gladness, to spring out of the intensity of the power of darkness and death.

Again, at the Flood — if we had lived at the hour when the fountains of the great deep were broken up and the windows of the firmament opened; if we had beheld the mighty floods advancing on every side to destroy all life, and had seen creation overwhelmed, and heard the agonising cry of those who were swept into destruction: we should surely have recognised in those waters the expression, and the power, of wrath and of death. At the Red Sea also, when Pharaoh and the hosts of Egypt perished, when they sank as lead in the mighty waters,

[5] These words, "BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM," sufficiently show, that in order to preserve the figure on which the typical significancy of Baptism altogether depends, it is necessary that the baptized person should be placed under the waters, as if therein *buried*. Indeed, few dispute that immersion was the original form in which Baptism was administered. Even the Church of Rome says, "The Pastor will briefly inform the faithful, that according to the common practice of the Church, baptism may be administered by immersion, infusion, or aspersion. … *Immersion was for a considerable time the practice in the early ages of the Church*. … The faithful will follow the practice of the particular Church to which they belong." *Catechism of the Council of Trent*. Part II. The Rubric of the Church of England also directs that if the Priest be certified that the child may well endure it, "he shall dip it into the water discreetly and warily" — otherwise, "it shall suffice to pour water on it." Archbishop Secker says, "Burying, as it were, the person baptized in water and raising him up out of it again, without question was anciently the more usual method." Lectures on Catech. xxxv. It is very evident that sprinkling cannot supply the type of *burial with Christ;* and we may be very sure it would never have been adopted, unless the true signification of Baptism as pointing to our death and resurrection in Christ as our Representative and Head, had not first been lost.

waters again become the power of wrath and of death. And how vividly do the words of Jonah express his sense of being enfolded, as it were, in the power of death. "I cried by reason of my affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me: out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. … The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD, my God." [Jonah 2] And when a greater than Jonah went down, not under typical floods, but under the real power of wrath, how often are "waters" and "floods" used in Scripture as the typical expression of that which poured in upon His holy soul. "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul: I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. … Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me." (Psalm 69) And again, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. … Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. They came round me daily like water; they compassed me about together." (Psalm 88) Other instances might be cited, but those adduced are sufficient to prove how frequently in the Scripture WATER denotes the power of wrath and of death.[6]

The apostle Peter also speaks of the deliverance of Noah at the Flood as typically pointing to the same deliverance which Baptism typifies to us.[7] The waters descended from on high, and broke up from beneath. They overwhelmed, and for a season buried the ark and Noah in it. But the ark was fitted to confront their power. It was a covered vessel, and by reason of its own native buoyancy it rose upon the surface of the waters, which thus, though the cause of destruction to all beside, became, because of the ark, a means of deliverance unto Noah. They separated him from a judged and ruined earth; they bore him away from the ruin that lay hid beneath; they raised him above its power, and they bore him on to his appointed resting-place in a new world. Thus, that which was destruction unto others, because it met them apart from the ark of refuge, became to Noah and all who were in the ark, deliverance and typical salvation — the ark typifying, not the Church, as some have deceivingly said, but Christ. Christ is the true Ark, who hath borne safely through real floods of wrath all who are in Him. The wrath that was caused to pour down upon Him, and upon ourselves as represented by and one with Him, has been the means of separating us for ever from a condemned world, and of causing us to enter, in Him when He rose above the power of death, into new circumstances of life and glory and blessing for evermore. Water at the Flood typified the power of wrath commuted in the case of Noah into a means of blessing because of the ark: water in Baptism typifies also the power of wrath commuted into a means of life to us because of Christ. Water, therefore, as used in Baptism, being a corresponding type (ἀντίτυπον) to water as seen at the Flood, is said by the Apostle, *typically* to save. As Noah was raised above the waters by means of the ark, and borne into a new world, so we are raised above the power of wrath in Christ, and are, in Him our risen Head, brought into the new creation of God.

---

[6] See for example Lam. 3:54: "*Waters* flowed over my head; then I said, I am cut off." And again, Terrors take hold upon him as *waters*." (Job 27:20) "The *waters* had overwhelmed us, the proud *waters* had gone over our soul. (Psalm 124) "When thou passest through *the waters* I will be with thee." (Isa. 43:2) "In the *floods of great waters* they shall not come nigh unto thee." (Ps. 32:6) "Water" is also used as emblematical of the destruction caused by devastating armies: "Behold, *waters* rise up out of the north, and shall be an overflowing flood, and shall overflow the land, and all that is therein." (Jer. 47:2)

[7] The Apostle (1 Pet. 3:20), speaking of the Ark, says: "Wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water, which, that is to say, baptism (not the washing away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience unto God) doth also now save us by means of the resurrection of Jesus Christ," &c. The right reading in this passage is διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος ὃ (not ᾧ) καὶ ἀντίτυπον βάπτισμα.

In the Epistles, Baptism is frequently referred to as the sign to believers of their death and resurrection in Christ their Representative. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we WERE BURIED WITH HIM in baptism into death,” &c. (Rom. 6:3-4) And again, “If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” (Rom. 6:5) And again, “BURIED WITH HIM in baptism, wherein also ye WERE RAISED WITH HIM (συνηγέρθητε) through faith in the operation of God who raised him from the dead.” (Col. 2:12) No words can be more plain than these. When, therefore, at Baptism, we are placed beneath the typical waters of death, God by that sign signifies that He regards us as having gone under that power of death into which Jesus went as our Representative; and in commanding us to be raised from the water, God further signifies that He regards us as raised IN, and TOGETHER WITH, Him who continues to be our Head and Representative in the new world of glory. Baptism is on the part of God *a seal* also, whereby He visibly pledges His faithfulness and His power to maintain the blessings and effectuate the results that are in this sign signified.[8] Baptism, therefore, viewed as a sign directs our thoughts to blessings already secured by the finished work of Christ. It symbolizes not any uncompleted or future act of God towards us, but that which He hath already accomplished for us by the death and resurrection of His Son. If any one were to teach that the emblems of the broken body and shed blood set before us in the Lord’s Supper, did not point to the finished work on Calvary, but to some work of the Holy Spirit or other uncompleted or future operation of God, should we not reject such doctrine as heresy? Let us then be equally careful not to corrupt the doctrine of Baptism.

TO BE CONTINUED

[8] The force of the past tense in the texts above quoted should be noted (συνετάφημεν αὐτῷ) “we WERE or DID BECOME buried with Him.” These texts refer to a work *already accomplished* for us, and therefore cannot be interpreted of any that is yet un-accomplished, such as the continuous mortification of our “old man.”
Some, I scarcely know on what principle, have objected to our speaking of Baptism as “a seal” on the part of God. But surely if we may speak of circumcision as being to Abraham a seal of that righteousness which God imputed to him whilst yet uncircumcised, we may equally say that Baptism is a seal of that forgiveness and those other blessings which God grants to a believer whilst yet unbaptized.