

Infant Baptism

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The Westminster Confession of Faith says, “*The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added...*” (I:VI) This paper is intended to point out some of the reasons why the baptism of infants born to believers is not only “good” but also “necessary” for the church in its obedience to Scripture for the glory of God.

It is more historically accurate to refer to “Baptists” as “Anabaptists”. The term “Anabaptists” means “re-baptizers”. The “re-baptisms” began in 1525 at Zurich, Switzerland. The disciples of Ulrich Zwingli concluded that their “infant baptism” was invalid, and thus they needed to be re-baptized in a more proper way and for purer reasons. This launched the beginning of various traditions and denominations of the Anabaptist: which today include Mennonites, Baptist, Quakers, and any other Christian group that rejects the practice of infant baptism.

Now there is a major point where we would agree with Anabaptist concerning baptism: **it visibly marks or identifies church members**. To be a New Covenant church member, one has to go through water baptism. Non-baptized people are outside the visible church body. Here we agree. Now based upon this *one particular point*, I want to explain the problems of the Anabaptist position. Then I will explain why infant baptism is good, Biblical, and necessary for the church.

I. 3 Problems With Anabaptist Inconsistencies and Impracticalities

1. **Christian Children** – Anabaptists are inconsistent with raising their children as Christians. By treating them as Christians, dedicating them to the Lord, teaching them to pray, affirming them in Christ's love, catechizing them, taking them to worship, are all inconsistent with the meaning of baptism. They *say* one thing by not baptizing them, yet *do* another thing in raising them. Refraining a person from baptism means that you deny their membership in the church, and thus exclude them from the New Covenant. (This was Peter's sin against the believing Gentiles in Galatians 2. By not eating with those Gentiles, he acted as if they were excluded from the church, yet Paul pointed out that their baptisms said otherwise. Gal 3:27-28)

When Anabaptists try to be *consistent* with their view of baptism in raising children, the consequences are severe and tragic. This is more often seen in some Reformed Baptist circles where they use baptism in an attempt to protect God's decree of election. In other words, they seek to make the visible church identical with the individuals whom God has chosen to save from before the foundation of the world. This type of understanding yields to some destructive practices as the following.

Since God's decree of election is remotely knowable only with enough observable evidence and endurance in life, children of believers are initially seen and treated as unbelieving pagans from birth. This assumption is perfectly consistent with what their practice of baptism is saying: believers' children are outside of Christ. Therefore, to be consistent, *some* (not all) parents do not pray with their children, because God does not hear the prayers of the wicked. To be consistent, *some* (not all) children are not told that God genuinely loves them, lest God's love be affirmed upon a reprobate. Therefore, the

Anabaptists who are *consistent* with their view of baptism, trying to align the church perfectly with God's eternal decree election, will end up raising their children in an unbiblical and destructive manner.

Excluding their infant children from church membership is an attempt to purify the visible church. Yet, ironically this attempt of church purification makes the church *less* pure. Concerning children Christ said, "*of such is the kingdom of God.*" (Luke 18:16) The disciples sought to exclude little children from Christ, but Jesus included and brought those children to Himself. Certainly it is not our children who make the church less pure. We adults are the ones responsible for defiling the church.

2. Re-baptisms - This is related to assurance of salvation. According to the Anabaptists, one's baptism is only legitimate if it comes *after* one's conversion or regeneration. The problem is – what happens in the life of 99.9% of genuine believers? They go through times of weak faith, tumultuous trials, doubts and fears, or even sinful backsliding. This often causes one to question their salvation – and thus the legitimacy of their baptism.

Since their baptism is only legitimate after the true conversion experience, the whole of one's salvation will be called into question when various times of trouble occur. Then they look back at their baptisms and attempt to "get it right" with a re-dedication, marking the now-true-point of conversion. They are re-baptized legitimately because of what they now "know" to be true. Therefore, one's baptism can be repeated as many times as one needs assurance, or to validate a more sincere point of conversion. This allowance for re-baptizing renders baptism impractical and very pointless if tomorrow's fall into sin will raise doubts about yesterday's baptism.

Instead, they should rather see the Christian's journey (Pilgrim's Progress) to include growth pains of needful discipline and steps of maturity. Only someone who is unfamiliar with the struggles of the Christian life, and the daily-war against Satan, could embrace such a naïve paradigm of the believer's life. Thus it is impractical to say that one must be *objectively* certain of a *subjective* regeneration for one's baptism to be legitimate.

In summary, the Anabaptist doctrine of baptism is not sufficient to encompass the Christian's life from the cradle to the grave. And even less does it allow for that journey to begin in the cradle or womb!

3. Brethren in Christ - A Trinitarian baptism visibly identifies God's covenant people. To reject another person's baptism is to effectively say that they are not Christians. Treating other denominations as "brothers in Christ", but rejecting their baptism, is highly inconsistent.

This mindset of rejecting the infant baptism of others could potentially cause an Anabaptist to think they are the "true church", and to act accordingly. This has often occurred in history, and even today with some groups. Again, this is *consistent* with their practiced of baptism. Sadly, this mindset can easily lead to dividing the church which is united under "one baptism" (Eph.4:5), and exalting one member the Lord's body over another. (I Cor.12:13).

Therefore, the Anabaptists become impractical when applying baptism to the whole of one's life. In some cases, a zeal for baptismal consistency will cause them to approach children in a harmful manner. Thus to raise children rightly, to give assurance to the weak in faith, and to embrace others as brethren, the Anabaptists are forced in many ways to live *contrary* to their meaning of baptism. And thankfully most of them do so. Their love and nurture for Christian children, their love for other denominations in

the Lord, are merely inconsistencies of what they mean by baptism.

The following are some brief notes that show infant baptism to be consistent with the Bible, and necessary for raising Godly children.

II. 12 Advantages and Incentives For Infant Baptism:

1. **A child's identity:** Who am I? Who do I belong to? Who loves me? Am I safe? Why am I here? Children are born with all these questions, infant baptism answers them. In this way the church-militant combats the world-militant. The world would love to name and claim our children. The church as a loving and protecting mother would never stand for such an atrocity. Mother church identifies, names, and nurtures the heavenly Father's children. (Gal.4:26-27)

2. **A child's discipline:** Parents and the church discipline their children *because they are* Christians. Through infant baptism, God names our children with His Triune Name. They are disciplined for the sake of His Name they bear. Without bearing God's name, why should God ever mind disciplining those who are not His children? (Heb. 12:7-11)

3. **A child's growth:** Though God's discipline will cause a child to improve upon his baptism, a child can never out-grow his baptism. It gives him a foundation for the rest of his life. Baptism is not a reactionary signal forever pointing backwards to an experience during adolescence. Instead, baptism anticipates the future inheritance. Baptism is a trajectory looking forward to all that it signifies. No one can ever mature beyond their baptism, requiring them to "get it right" some time later. The baptized infant is trained to grow *in* his baptism, seeking to be conformed more and more to the Savior's death and resurrection. That final work of conformity will occur in the future resurrection, the event to which baptism is pointing. From the cradle to the grave, baptism is used to remind and encourage a person in all the privileges and responsibilities of being in covenant with God. (Rom.6)

4. **Anti-Gnostic:** Gnostics were notorious for claiming to know something from another world to deny what was clearly knowable in this life. Gnostics denied the objective material visible realities of this world. Some higher unknowable truth was used to question or doubt the earthly realities before us. This same mindset that led to severe heresies, like rejecting Jesus' humanity, also leads Christians to question what God presently says with earthly material. Through the waters of infant baptism God is telling parents and the church that a child is in the visible covenant. This is brazenly anti-Gnostic. The baptismal waters have meaning, and what God means by them should never be questioned, nor doubted. In baptism, God is declaring who a child is, who he/she belongs to, and that a covenant is in effect. There are objective realities that can not be denied, just as much as a marriage is in effect when vows are made. In summary, the privileges and responsibilities of the visible covenant are real. And the consequences of breaking or keeping that covenant are eternal.

5. **Doing God's revealed will & acknowledging His secret will:**

- a Living by God's promises: God wants us to live by His promises, not by what He has predestined to happen in the future. That predestined future is only knowable to Him, and seen by us in hindsight. Thus God's will of foreordaining whatever comes to pass is hidden from us, and is regarded as a secret until it occurs. This means it is wrong to use God's secret will of an eternal decree to determine if a person should be

a member of the visible church. Infant baptism helps to close the gap between the truths we acknowledge and the responsibilities we have. We acknowledge that God has unconditionally and secretly decreed to save certain individuals. Yet what is unconditional and secret, is only knowable to us by whether or not the conditions of a visible covenant are met. As we do His revealed will, His secret will is carried out.

Through infant baptism God reveals objective promises to a visible people. Therefore, parents and pastors are to live by those promises. Those promises are revealed to us and should be embraced accordingly. The secrets belong to God, what He has revealed “*belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*” (Deut. 29:29, cf. Acts 2:38)

b. *Parenting and Pastoring God's people:*

Through infant baptism God declares that our children are in a real covenant with God that has privileges and responsibilities. Considering the reality of God's covenant, the Scripture often regards the visible church as God's elect people. As the visible nation of Israel was considered the elect of God in the Old Covenant, so also the New Testament regards the visible church as God's elect. When the visible church is considered God's elect the “benefit of the doubt”, or “judgment of charity” is given to those covenant members. And those covenant members are treated as God's elect people.

For pastors and parents to be nurturing and affirming, it requires the revealed and knowable perspective of the visible covenant. This visible covenant is initiated within history at the time of baptism. Therefore, pastors and parents are called to shepherd and raise God's visibly elect people who are first identified in baptism, and strive for even more fruitful evidence of that high and holy calling in the years to come.

6. **Humility:** Within the church there is not an A-team or B-team. The least among us is the greatest. (Mark 9:37) Parents and children, elderly and infants, all have the same identity and status. Infant baptism levels the ground in the church, so that elitism is ruled out. (Some argue that this is the fault of distinguishing between communing members and non-communing members. Yet, this distinction encourages children to mature in their baptism, and helps the church instruct children in the Faith. Distinguishing levels of maturity is different for distinguishing from those who are “in” or “out” of the covenant. Whether a fig tree is just sprouting, or full grown, it is still a fig tree.)

7. **Unity:** We consider other denominations who administer a Trinitarian baptism to be members of the visible church. We focus on the meaning of baptism, not primarily the mode or manner in which it is administered. Regarding others infant-baptism denominations as brethren is consistent with the meaning of baptism.

8. **Understanding Apostasy:** The promises of heaven and the threats of hell are biblical, real, and should be applied to every baptized person. Often times Anabaptists will regard the warnings of hell, and the warnings of trampling over the blood of Christ, as merely hypothetical for the Christian. (Heb.10:29, II Pet.2:1) It is hypothetical *if* the Christian is only defined through the lens of God's eternal decree of unconditional election.

Yet, seeing the Christian through the lens of the visible covenant into which he was baptized as an infant, we can see that these warnings are real. Thus, a covenant member who does not persevere in the church with faith and repentance will end up neglecting or rejecting the salvation promised at baptism. Thus a greater condemnation will be experienced. (Heb.2:3) Infant baptism enables us to take the warnings of

Scripture seriously, while at the same time, proclaiming that according to God's secret decree of election, not one will perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of His hand. (John 10:28)

9. Anti-Individualistic: God saved Noah's family from the flood, He did not just save Noah as an individual. Joshua decided that his house would serve the Lord. (Josh.24:15) The nation of Israel as a whole was baptized into Moses, and in covenant with God at Mt. Sinai. Continuing into the New Testament, households were baptized throughout the book of Acts, not simply individuals. Because infants are not mentioned in the household baptisms in Acts, the Anabaptists accuse us of reading *into* these passages a wrong justification for infant baptism. But they miss the point. These passages declare a God who makes His covenant with households and families – like He has always done. The Anabaptist are guilty of reading *into* these household passages an individualism that is foreign to the Bible, contrary to family unity, and merely a symptom of Western Enlightenment thinking where the personal "I" is the chief concern. Infant baptism does not allow the wedge of individualism to divide a family. It replaces the motto of "I" with "others". It defines a child's culture, or household, so that the child should never have to wonder who "I" am, because the "others" have always told him.

10. Continuity of Old & New Testament: There is much discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. Yet, one thing that stays the same is that the children of Old Israel and the children of the "New Israel" church are regarded as a part of that visible body. To say that God no longer regards our children as part of the covenant body is to read *into* the Bible a foreign and alien concept. Infant baptism continues the theme of God's promise to us and our children. (Acts 2:38)

11. In and of the Lord: Paul explicitly says children should "*obey your parents in the Lord.*" And parents should "*bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*" (Eph.6:1-4) To assume that Paul did *not* consider children as part of the visible church is to divorce Paul from himself. For Paul, the Lord's training and teaching is found only within the church body. (I Cor. 12) That body is not identified by buildings. It is initially identified by baptism. Without baptism, Paul would have never considered a child to be part of Christ's body. The only way our children can be regarded as being "in" and "of" the Lord is if they are also baptized in the Lord. By baptizing our infants we consistently bring them up "in" the Lord's training.

12. Training a child to believe: By baptizing our infants we are placing our hope and trust in the promises of God, not in any so-called "innocence" or intelligence of infants. The focus is not on their abilities, but God's promises. By trusting and claiming those promises declared through baptism, we also teach our children how to believe and *not doubt*. Faith and repentance are indeed a gift. And God ordinarily uses parents to teach children how to use those gifts. Many parents, by way of life or with words, have trained their children to doubt God's promise. This is a tragedy. Infant baptism consistently gives parents every right to look at their child, or teenager, and say, "*Son, Jesus loves you and He is your Lord and Savior. It is true. Believe it.*"