

Q. If infants were circumcised, why shouldn't they be baptized? Part 2

In Part 1, I explained that those who teach infant baptism base their practice on their claim that circumcision and baptism are just two outward signs of the same thing. They say, if infants were circumcised in the Old Testament, they can be baptized now because baptism is the New Testament continuation of circumcision. I pointed out that this is a false assumption because the Bible teaches that spiritual circumcision, not baptism, is the antitype of circumcision. Further, baptism is not an antitype of anything but a sign publicly declaring that God has spiritually circumcised or regenerated the sinner. Now, let's look at some of the proof texts that infant baptizers use and see how these Scriptures are really no proof for infant baptism at all.



Acts 2:39

A Scripture often cited to support baptizing infants is Acts 2:39. I concentrate fully on this verse in "Acts 2:39 and Infant Baptism" (http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/acts2_39.htm), but let's take a quick look here. This followed Peter's evangelistic sermon after God gave the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost: "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far off, even as many as the Lord our God will call to himself' (Acts 2:38-39). By telling the people to be baptized and saying that "the promise is to you, and to your children," this may certainly sound like it is supporting infant baptism. In reality, it is evidence against it.

I believe that Peter in Acts 2:39 has God's promise to Abraham, his seed, and the nations—spoken as "those who are far off"—in mind. This is further supported by the fact that the sign of God's covenant with Abraham was circumcision, which, remember, was a type of regeneration. What had just happened to these people in Acts 2:39?

Copyright © 2016 wordofhisgrace.org

Permission is granted to reproduce this article only if reproduced in full with no alterations and keeping the copyright statement and this permission statement intact. Unless otherwise noted, Bible references are from the World English Bible (WEB).

Verse 37 tells us that after listening to Peter's sermon, "they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" Cut to the heart? What does that remind you of? Yes. While they were listening to Peter's sermon, the Lord had circumcised them in their heart. They were born again. And Peter's response, in verses 38 and 39, is that they should be baptized because the promise is to them, and to their "children, and to all who are far off, even as many as the Lord our God will call to himself."

The Abrahamic covenant, with its promise and circumcision, looked to this event as the beginning of the fulfillment of that promise. By saying "the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far off, even as many as the Lord our God will call to himself," was Peter saying anything special to the people who heard him? Was he saying there was something in the promise that made them special above everyone else? What about their children? Was Peter saying that the children of these people were in a different relationship to God than anyone else? No! Why? Because, besides them and their children, "the promise is to...all who are far off...." The promise is to everyone! No one is excluded from that promise! Except, Peter tagged a big and very important qualification to the very end. The promise is to everyone, "even as many as the Lord our God will call to himself." The promise is to you, whom the Lord our God will call, the promise is to those of your children whom the Lord our God will call, and to everyone else, whom the Lord our God will call. In other words, the promise is to all of the elect!

The promise of the new birth is only to the elect of the three groups of people mentioned. Peter told those who asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" to be baptized because that question, coming after hearing his sermon about the death and resurrection of Jesus, was evidence of their spiritual circumcision, their regeneration, that God had given them faith to trust in Jesus. Thus, it was evidence that they were elect. This verse says nothing about the children of the hearers having any more of a chance of being elect than anyone else. Peter did not tell his hearers that their children should be baptized before professing belief. In fact, Peter no more says that these people's children should be baptized before professing belief than he says everyone in the world should be baptized before professing belief. All three groups are treated equally. When they show through their profession that the promise is indeed to them, because they are among those whom God is calling, then they are to be baptized as a symbol of the regeneration they have already received.

To administer baptism before regeneration puts it into the category of an Old Testament typological symbol that looks forward to an event not yet realized. This is a mistake. Circumcision was a shadow that looked forward to the reality of spiritual circumcision or regeneration. Baptism is a New Covenant sign of the spiritual circumcision or regeneration that has already taken place. Both center on spiritual circumcision/regeneration, but they are quite different. One is a type and the other a sign. It is quite wrong to say that circumcision and baptism are the same thing or that baptism is a continuation of circumcision.

Colossians 2:11

A Scripture used by those who believe in baptizing infants (paedobaptism) is Colossians 2:11. Let's look at it in context:

For in him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, and in him you are made full, who is the head of all principality and power; in whom you were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Colossians 2:9-12

This passage speaks of "circumcision not made with hands." Obviously, then, this cannot mean Old Testament, physical circumcision. Further, those who want to say that the baptism mentioned in the passage is water baptism and that it is a continuation of Old Testament circumcision have a serious problem. The problem is that water baptism is also performed with hands.

It should be plain that the "circumcision not made with hands" is spiritual circumcision. Paul calls spiritual circumcision that puts off "the body of the sins of the flesh" the "circumcision of Christ" to picture it as Christ taking away our sins by cutting them away as the flesh was cut away in the Old Testament rite. Paul then shows that this spiritual circumcision is what is symbolized in baptism. In that sign, we show that we have been buried with Christ and raised with Him through faith by the work of God.

Baptism is not a new way of doing Old Testament circumcision. Baptism symbolizes God's work done in our lives, the cutting away of

our sins, the death of the old man, the resurrection to a new life. Paul says it again in Romans 6:5-7: "For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will also be part of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be in bondage to sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin."

Is there a link between baptism and Old Testament circumcision? Yes, but it is indirect. Old Testament circumcision was a type of spiritual circumcision made without hands, the miraculous creation of the new man in regeneration. Another way of looking at the creation of this new man is by seeing that our old man died and was buried with Christ and that God raised us to new life with Christ's resurrection. Baptism, far from being merely a continuation of physical circumcision, is a symbolic looking back to that new birth.

Philippians 3:3

This verse says, "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." The way infant baptizers use, or rather abuse, this verse is by pointing out that it says that New Testament believers have been circumcised. Since they have not actually received the Old Testament rite, then, they reason, this must mean that baptism is their circumcision.

These people first assume that baptism is New Testament circumcision. They then see circumcision mentioned in this verse, so they say it must mean baptism.

Paul is saying that, not those who have been physically circumcised, but we believers are the true circumcision. Because we have been spiritually circumcised, we worship God in the Spirit and have no confidence in the flesh, such as confidence in fleshly circumcision.

Acts 15 Precludes Baptism as Circumcision

The decision in Acts 15 formalized the understanding that circumcision is unnecessary for believers. We should also see that it also precludes baptism as being a continuation of circumcision. The decision reached in Acts 15 didn't say that the actual cutting of the flesh should stop because baptism is the New Testament form of circumcision. The decision can be summed up very neatly. The question considered was,

Must you be physically circumcised and keep the law? The answer: We give no such commandment. Since Jesus commanded baptism, it cannot, then, be a continuation of circumcision. The Acts 15 decision does not allow for a New Testament continuation of circumcision in the practice of baptism. No physical circumcision is no physical circumcision whether done with a knife or with water. Period.

Summary

What have we learned? Circumcision was a ceremony that admitted all male descendents of Abraham to the Abrahamic and Old Covenants. It was also a shadow or picture or type of spiritual circumcision or regeneration. Those who have received the reality of regeneration don't need the type, which was physical circumcision. They have entered the New Covenant. The evidence of regeneration is a profession of faith, which cannot come from an infant. Only those who profess faith should be baptized. Baptism is an outward, public sign that the person has faith that springs from regeneration and that the person is under the New Covenant.

The baptizing of infants is an unbiblical conflating of the Old and New Covenants. It is a return to pre-Cross types and to a defunct and shadowy covenant. Baptizing infants based on their parentage is an attempt to admit people to the kingdom who have climbed up some other way and bypassed the Door (John 10:1) or who have tumbled over the wall the way some did in *Pilgrim's Progress*. As the seventeenth-century Baptist writer, Thomas Patient, said, infant baptism, "is a doctrine virtually denying that Christ is come and fully manifested in the flesh" (Thomas Patient, *The Doctrine of Baptism, and the Distinction of the Covenants* [London: Henry Hills, 1654] 93).

Infants were circumcised because the covenants that circumcision admitted them to were for Abraham and his physical descendents. Infants should not be baptized because baptism is not a continuation of circumcision but is a public sign that the person has been regenerated and is professing faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Such a profession cannot be made by infants.

Peter Ditzel