

PAEDOBAPTISM

A Biblical Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism

Many evangelicals have a knee-jerk reaction to the very term paedobaptism (Latin for child or infant baptism), because it looks, smells and feels like Roman Catholicism, and they certainly don't want to have anything to do with *that*. Due to such overreactions, let me clarify at the outset that what I'm advocating is *not* baptismal regeneration.

I should also stress from the beginning that I know this is a controversial and emotionally-charged doctrine. To help with this controversy, I'd like to quote the great Puritan John Owen whose whole life was riddled with controversies—theologically, denominationally, and even politically. He said, “When the heart is cast indeed into the mould of the doctrine that the mind embraceth—when the evidence and necessity of the truth abides in us—when not the sense of the words only is in our heads, but the sense of the thing abides in our hearts—when we have communion with God in the doctrine we contend for—then shall we be garrisoned by the grace of God against all the assaults of men.” John Piper comments, “I think that was the key to Owen's life and ministry: he didn't just contend for doctrine; he loved and fellowshiped with the God behind the doctrine” (John Piper from his sermon on Romans 4:11). My prayer and goal in “arguing” for paedobaptism is that this doctrine will cause you to worship God more. Paedobaptism is a precious doctrine to me, because in it I see that God's grace and love for me extends to my children, as well as my grandchildren, and even to a thousand generations, if God should be so gracious. And I want you to stand in awe of God's magnanimous, multi-generational faithfulness with me.

THE CONTINUITY OF THE COVENANTS

Perhaps the most relevant verse for paedobaptism in the OT is Genesis 17:7, where the LORD establishes His covenant with Abraham: “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.” God then elaborates on the covenant, “This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring... Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Gen. 17: 10-12, 14).

God never—I repeat—God never enters into a covenant with His people without also including their children. God doesn't just work with isolated individuals—He does work with individuals, but not *just* with individuals all by themselves—He is also working with you and your family together.

In Genesis 12:3, which is cited in Galatians 3:8 and called the gospel preached beforehand to Abraham, we're told that *in Abraham* (which specifically means *in Christ*, the seed who would eventually come from Abraham) all the *families* of the earth shall be blessed. We also have a reference to Genesis 12:3 in Acts 3:25: “You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘and in your offspring shall all the *families* of the earth be blessed.’” My point here is simply that God works with *families*—He always has and He always will.

I could take you to scores of passages to prove this point, but specifically I want you to see it in relationship to the covenants that God has made with His people. And we're mainly concerned with the Abrahamic Covenant, especially as it relates to the New Covenant, but this principle is stated explicitly in all the covenants.

You might be thinking, “I thought we were going to be talking about paedobaptism. What do the covenants have to do with this debate?” Answer: Everything! The debate between Baptists and paedobaptists

comes down to how one views the connection between the covenants, specifically how the New Covenant fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant. Baptists and paedobaptists alike concur that this is the decisive issue on which the whole baptism debate turns.

To help simplify and clarify the heart of the matter, we can boil it down to a single question: Does baptism replace circumcision as the sign of the covenant? In some ways the answer seems patently obvious: Under the Abrahamic Covenant circumcision was the initiatory sign, but under the New Covenant one enters through the waters of baptism. So why does any more ink need to be spilled? Because the connection is not easy or obvious to those of us who are entrenched in individualistic, baptistic, non-covenantal thinking. A little later we will address the question head-on, but first we want to deal with the relationship between the covenants. This is the necessary foundation that must be laid before we can give a good answer to whether or not baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the New Covenant.

When we talk about the *New Covenant*, we must realize that it is new in the sense that, according to Hebrews 8:6, it is enacted on better promises. At the same time, new doesn't mean that it is totally unrelated or disconnected from the previous covenants. Rather, new means that it is the fulfillment and fruition of the old covenants—like the Abrahamic Covenant. And I will show conclusively that this is so, because, among other reasons, the Abrahamic Covenant is an *eternal* covenant (Gen. 17:7).

So, to think covenantally, which will be a radical paradigm shift for some, let's look at the six covenants.

God established the first covenant with Adam—the Adamic Covenant. Hosea 6:7 says, “But like Adam (some translations say *men*; the Hebrew can mean both, but I believe *Adam* is correct) they transgressed the covenant...” When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he did so individually *and covenantally*—that is, as the covenantal head of the entire human race, including you and me. As a result, when Adam sinned, we sinned because we were *in Adam*. Romans 5:12 spells this out: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” Due to our individualistic presuppositions we want to cry out, “Unfair, unfair!” Well you can cry out all you want, but that will not make it go away, any more than crying out against gravity or the fact that there are only 24 hours in the day will negate those realities. This is how God had created the world—covenantally, with gravity, and 24 hours in a day, like it or not.

But before you get too upset, let me remind you that while the 1st Adam's sin was imputed to your account, the 2nd Adam's righteousness was also imputed to your account—through faith. “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:18-19). Yes, condemnation came covenantally, but so does justification and salvation. People aren't usually bothered by the positive aspects of a covenantal relationship, say when a rich uncle dies and leaves you an unexpected and large inheritance. However, while people joyfully embrace the positive aspects, they simultaneously chaff against the negative—as if they can have one without the other.

Too often we assume that our private, individual sins don't hurt anybody, when in fact they hurt and affect everybody. Case and point: “But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah (as a side note, though not an unrelated note, it's interesting that Achan is described in terms of his father, as well as his grandfather and even great grandfather; this too is how covenantal people see themselves), took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel” (Jos. 7:1). Covenantal thinking permeates this verse and episode. Notice that only one man sinned, yet we're told that “the people of Israel” as a whole broke faith. Consequently, the anger of the LORD burned against—whom? Achan alone? No, it burned against “the people of Israel.” Everybody suffered for this one man's sin. Israel was defeated in their next battle against Ai, and about thirty-six men were killed by the enemy. When it was finally ascertained that Achan was the cause of their defeat, due to his sin, the Israelites stoned Achan, *along with his sons and daughters* (vv. 24-26). An individual, private sin that doesn't hurt anybody else doesn't exist in God's covenantal world.

Similarly, when Korah, Dathan and Abiram rebelled against Moses, these men “together with their wives, their sons, and their little ones” (Num. 16:27) all died when “the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods” (vs. 32).

These examples should not be misconstrued. Children are not always punished for the sins of their father. “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ez. 18:20). A corporate, covenantal paradigm isn’t to be taken as an automatic guarantee that one’s children will be believers, nor is it to be seen as fatalism for the children of unbelieving parents. In referring to the coming New Covenant, Jeremiah promises, “In those days they shall no longer say: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But everyone shall die for his own sin. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge” (Jer. 31:29-30). I believe this is a promise to curtail the impact of the father’s sin upon the next generation, without limiting the benefits of having a godly father. These passages should guard us from a deterministic mentality; nevertheless covenantal solidarity is still in place.

I’m emphasizing this *ad infinitum ad nauseum*, because to understand the Bible, the covenants and baptism correctly, we must replace our individualistic presuppositions with corporate, family, covenantal presuppositions. Francis Schaeffer explained, “Most people catch their presuppositions from their family and surrounding society the way a child catches the measles” (quoted in Robert Booth, *Children of the Promise*, p. 2). And, to add to Schaeffer’s metaphor, the measles can go undetected and therefore untreated for a life time. In fact, one can just assume that it’s normal to have the measles. “Doesn’t everyone have the measles?” No, actually everyone doesn’t have the measles. Presuppositions can be well thought out and very intentional, they can be the result of wrong or bad teaching, or they can be part of our thinking and way of life without our ever having given them a second thought.

Regardless, all of us have presuppositions and we approach life and the Scriptures with our presuppositions. See if you can detect any presuppositions in this statement by a popular Christian author and pastor, “Leaders in the first-century church had no model to follow and no traditions from which to draw. Consequently, they had no choice but to develop the structure of the church as they went along” (Andy Stanley, *Next Generation Leader*, p. 29). After I read that statement, I wrote in the margin: What about the OT? This author is approaching the NT with a radical discontinuity that is going to influence his interpretation of the NT. His presuppositions are glaring in those two sentences, and from those alone I could guess which side of the baptism issue he would fall, as well as a number of other ecclesiastical issues. But of course the same is true for all of us. The same could be said of something I’ve written or said. We all have presuppositions, but we don’t always get them from the Bible.

The second covenant was made with Noah, commonly called the Noahic Covenant. God said to Noah, “But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you” (Gen. 6:18). “Then the LORD said to Noah, ‘Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation’” (7:1). Only one person is said to be righteous before God, namely Noah, but because of his righteousness the covenant includes his family, as seen in their preservation from the flood in the ark. This is particularly relevant for our discussion, since Peter sees this as a type of baptism. “God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:20b-21).

After the flood, God expands the covenant: “I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth...When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth” (Gen. 9:11, 16). Since it is an *everlasting* covenant it is still in effect to this day.

The next covenant is the Abrahamic Covenant. “And I will establish my covenant between me and you

and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.” This also is an *everlasting* covenant, so God hasn’t set it aside. And the promise of this covenant is “to be God to you and to your offspring after you.”

The sign of the Abrahamic Covenant was circumcision, and all males were to receive this sign, including eight day old infants (Gen. 17:9-14). Now what did this sign of the covenant signify? John MacArthur and other Baptists have said that it is just an ethnic sign of temporal, physical blessings. They insist that it is not a spiritual sign of faith. However, this doesn’t square with Romans 4:11a: “He (i.e. Abraham) received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.”

Think of what Abraham received as “believer’s circumcision.” He believed *first*, and then was circumcised as a sign of his faith. But Abraham was also told by God to put the sign of faith upon his eight day old son, Isaac. This we could call “infant circumcision” or “paedo-circumcision.” Now, if you struggle with placing the sign of faith on infants through baptism, what do you do with circumcision? God is the one who says to mark the children of believers in this way. And we should not fail to point out that this was no light matter to God; He took it very seriously. God said, “Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has *broken my covenant*” (Gen. 17:14). On one occasion, the Lord almost killed Moses, because he neglected to circumcise his son, but Zipporah wisely intervened and circumcised their son and touched Moses’ feet with the foreskin, sparing his life (Ex. 4:24-26).

Another way of looking at the difference between Abraham’s circumcision and Isaac’s is to say that Abraham was circumcised based upon his profession of faith, while Isaac was circumcised based on *the promise of God*. Let me reiterate, God had promised Abraham in the covenant “to be God to you and to your offspring after you” (Gen. 17:7). This means that parents place the sign of the covenant upon their infants—in faith—trusting that as they raise them in the fear and instruction of the Lord their children will come to the place where they express their own faith in Christ.

Nine times out of ten an objection or question is asked here, so let me address it. The question usually goes something like this: So are you saying that circumcision or baptism guarantees that a child will come to faith? The answer is: No. If parents abdicate their responsibility to faithfully train their children in the things of God the outcome will not be a good one. We can’t presume upon the promises, which is what we do when we neglect to disciple our children. The LORD said concerning Abraham, “For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him” (18:19). The promises of the covenant are limited to the faithful.

The fourth covenant is the Mosaic Covenant, and it is a continuation of the Abrahamic Covenant. When the Israelites were in Egypt groaning under the oppression, “God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Ex. 2:24). God raises up Moses as a deliverer, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We should not think that this covenant is a disconnected covenant without any relationship to the others. God is not beginning a new program with the Law, rather He is giving His people further revelation.

Corporate, covenantal thinking also permeates this covenant. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (20:4-6).

Deuteronomy 7:7-9 also shows the relationship between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Exodus, as well as God working with families for generations to come: “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of

Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.” Just for fun, let’s do the math. If a generation is 20 years, then a thousand generations would be 20,000 years. The earth is only a little over 6,000 years old, so when God says He will keep covenant and steadfast love to a thousand generations He basically means *forever*.

A friend of mine mentioned that he was talking with a Baptist friend who asserted that there is no difference between children who are raised in Christian homes and those who are raised in pagan homes. This is radical individualism, and it makes me wonder if this Baptist brother has ever thoughtfully read the Ten Commandments, let alone other passages that talk about the effect that parents have on their children. With this type of individualistic mindset we will never understand or appreciate God’s covenants.

The Davidic Covenant is the fifth covenant. The LORD said to David, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

Over and over again, we find God dealing with future generations “for David’s sake” (1 Kgs. 11:34; 15:4; 2 Kgs. 19:34). One could counter by saying that David is unique. I would answer yes and no. Yes, he is unique in the sense of the specific promise made to him concerning the throne of Israel. But I would also answer no. No, he is not unique in the sense that God dealt favorably with his descendants based on his righteousness. That is a principle that is not unique to David, but one that applies to all of God’s people equally. “But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments” (Ps. 103:17-18).

The final covenant is the New Covenant, and in the prophecies of the coming New Covenant we see repeatedly that the children of believers are still included, just as they were under the old covenant. Speaking of the New Covenant God says, “And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and *the good of their children after them*. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, *that they may not turn from me*” (Jer. 32:38-40).

That last reference to not turning away is an important one. We know that under the old covenant the people continually turned away from the one true God. The New Covenant will be better, since it is “enacted on better promises” (Heb. 8:6), which includes having the law written on our hearts, so that we will not turn away from God like they did under the old covenant. After mentioning that the New Covenant is better, the author of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34, which describes the nature of the New Covenant: “Behold, the days are coming, declare the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant” (Heb. 8:8-9). As Jeremiah 32:40 said, God “will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.”

Isaiah 59:21 also states that a believer’s children enjoy special blessings in the New Covenant: “And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, *or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,*” says the LORD, “from this time forth and forevermore.” Some scholars have argued that the New Covenant is individualistic, but these promises militate against such a radical individualism. I still insist that there is no reason to think that under the old covenant God dealt with families, but now under the New Covenant He only works with the individual.

Given the covenantal background of the Jews, and God’s expressed desire to continue to work with the

children of His people, how do you think they would have heard Acts 2:38-39? “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. 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.’” The Jew would have heard this promise just like he had heard all the OT promises. He would have understood that his actions—here repentance—would have had an influence upon his family. And even though many evangelicals read the covenantal promises in the Bible, and pay lip service to them, it’s still hard for them to interpret the Scriptures in light of them, because individualism is ingrained in them more deeply than they realize.

Radical individualism goes against the very nature of God, who exists, we could say, within the divine covenant community known as the godhead. God the Father is God the Father by virtue of his being in relationship with God the Son. Without the Son there wouldn’t be a Father, and vice versa. God created us in His image, which in part means that we are who we are due to those who are with us in the covenant community.

Consider one of the “hard texts”—according to Baptists. “And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household’” (Acts 16:31). Interpreted with an individualistic hermeneutic this is a difficult verse, but with a covenantal hermeneutic it’s rather simple: When you believe in Christ, you will raise your children in the faith, and God promises to be their God. What complicates matters is our faulty individualistic presuppositions, which don’t die easy.

The apostle Paul tells us in Galatians that if we belong to Christ then we are included in the Abrahamic Covenant, and the promises apply to us: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (3:29). “Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise” (4:28).

John Calvin saw the relevance of the Abrahamic Covenant for Christians: “Indeed, it is most evident that the covenant which the Lord once made with Abraham (cf. Gen. 17:14) is no less in force today for Christians than it was of old for the Jewish people, and that this word relates no less to Christians than it related to the Jews. Unless perhaps we think that Christ by his coming lessened or curtailed the grace of the Father...Now seeing that the Lord, immediately after making the covenant with Abraham, commanded it to be sealed in infants by an outward sacrament (Gen. 17:12), what excuse will Christians give for not testifying and sealing it in their children today?” (Robert R. Booth, *Children of the Promise*, p. 67-68).

“The argument in support of infant baptism is based upon the essential unity and continuity of the covenant of grace administered to Abraham, unfolded in the Mosaic and Davidic covenants, and attaining to its highest fruition in the new covenant. The new covenant is the administration of grace that brings to fulfillment the promise given to Abraham: “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 22:18). It is the blessing of Abraham that comes on the Gentiles through Christ (Gal. 3:14). Abraham is the father of all believers, and they are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to promise (Rom. 4:16-18; Gal. 3:7-9). The promises fulfilled in Christ were given to Abraham with covenantal confirmation. So it is proper and necessary to say that the new covenant is the fulfillment and unfolding of the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gal. 3:15-17)....

...Since the infant seed of the faithful were embraced in the covenant relation, and there is no indication that this feature of covenant administration has been abrogated under the new Covenant, the conclusion derived from the unity and continuity of covenant grace is that the same privilege belongs to the infant seed of believers under the new covenant” (John Murray quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 66-67).

BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS TOGETHER IN THE SAME COVENANT

It’s not uncommon after an initial study of a new doctrine to find yourself more confused than ever. Some of you may be there at this very moment. However, if we persevere and press on through the dark tunnel of confusion with study and prayer, study and prayer, by the grace of God we will see the light of truth at the end of the tunnel.

Charles H. Spurgeon gives us this good counsel to help us consider new doctrines: “Lay aside your

prejudices: listen calmly, listen dispassionately; hear what Scripture says; and when you receive the truth, if God should be pleased to reveal and manifest it to your souls, do not be ashamed to confess it. To confess you were wrong yesterday, is only to acknowledge that you are a little wiser today; and instead of being a reflection on yourself, it is an honor to your judgment, and shows that you are improving in the knowledge of the truth. Do not be ashamed to learn, and to cast aside your old doctrines and views, but to take up that which you may more plainly see to be in the Word of God. But if you do not see it to be here in the Bible, whatever I may say, or whatever authorities I may plead, I beseech you, as you love your souls, reject it; and if from this pulpit you ever hear things contrary to this Sacred Word, remember that the Bible must be the first, and God's minister must lie underneath it. We must not stand on the Bible, to preach, but we must preach with the Bible above our heads" (Ibid., p. 11). So, with that spirit in mind, let me reiterate some points I made earlier, and then try to advance the argument forward.

God never enters into a covenant with His people without also including their children in that covenant. We looked at the six main covenants that God has made with His people since the creation of the world, and we saw that they all included the children. Of special interest to us was the Abrahamic Covenant, because the New Covenant is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Actually, all the covenants find their fulfillment in the New Covenant, but the parallel that is the most relevant for our purposes in addressing the issue of baptism is the Abrahamic Covenant. In Galatians 3:29 we see this fulfillment, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." Therefore, we can sing with the children in Sunday school, "Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had father Abraham, I am one of them and so are you..."

We also looked at Romans 4:11, but I would like to look at it again here, and expand on what we said previously. As always the context is crucial. Therefore, notice that 4:11 follows 3:21-26, which John Piper calls the most important paragraph in the Bible, a passage that addresses justification by faith. Then Paul begins chapter 4 by using Abraham, an OT saint, as the example, par excellence, for NT believers to emulate. Paul can do this because the Bible, OT and NT, is one continuous work of God, with *one* people of God, even though the specific sign of the covenant has changed.

Abraham was justified by faith, and then "He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (vs. 11a). We called this "believer's circumcision." Abraham believed first, and then was circumcised. And this *spiritual* sign was then given to Abraham's household, including eight day old infants, according to God's command. We referred to this as "paedo-circumcision." Here you receive the sign and seal of the covenant first, and then you believe. Repeatedly, God told His people to circumcise their hearts. They were already physically circumcised, but that outward sign needed to be followed by the inward, spiritual reality of the heart.

Let's consider the two terms, *sign* and *seal*, that are found in Romans 4:11. Bryan Chapell, president of Covenant Theological Seminary, writes, "We can easily understand how circumcision was a sign of the righteousness provided through God's covenant. The putting off of uncleanness by the shedding of blood and the marking of the faithful as God's special people resonate with many familiar New Testament concepts. However, the concept of a seal is less familiar to us today.

"The image that the apostle calls to mind is that of the wax affixed to a letter or document and marked with a signet ring (or other instrument) to authenticate the source and validity of the contents of the document. The seal acted as a visible pledge by the author of the letter to honor what he had covenanted to do in the document when the conditions it described were met. Circumcision was God's way of marking his people with a visible pledge to honor his covenant for those who expressed faith in him. Just as a seal is the pledge of its author that he will uphold his promises when described conditions are met, so circumcision was God's pledge to provide all the blessings of his covenant when the condition of faith was met in his people" (Gregg Strawbridge, ed. *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, p. 15). This means that adults were circumcised based on a profession of faith, but that their household, including infants, were circumcised based on the promise or pledge of God.

Consequently, within the covenant community, the people of God, those who are marked as belonging

to Him, we have believers and unbelievers together; both the regenerate and the unregenerate alike make up the covenant. Gregg Strawbridge mentioned that when he held to the Baptist position, one of his two biggest reasons for doing so was that he thought the members of the new covenant were exclusively regenerate people. In other words, he thought the New Covenant was only made up of believers. You can see how this relates to the issue of baptism, since baptism is entrance into the covenant. I can relate to what Strawbridge says, because the issue of believers and unbelievers together in the covenant was my last hurdle to get over if I was going to embrace paedobaptism. I had most of the pieces of the paedobaptism puzzle in place, like God working with families and not just isolated individuals. I also understood the continuity of the covenants. So much of paedobaptism made perfect sense to me, but I just couldn't get unbelievers (and therefore infants) into the New Covenant, thus I keep wrestling until it all fit together.

If we're going to understand the covenant—biblically—we need to realize that being in the covenant is not to be equated with salvation. My Baptists brothers tend to assume that these are synonymous, so that if you're saved you're in the covenant, and if you're not saved you're not in the covenant. Now I think we would all agree that this certainly wasn't the case in the OT. "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Rom. 9:6b). Many Israelites were a part of the covenant community—they had received the outward sign—but they were not true Israelites. They didn't believe God, and they weren't saved. I hope to demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that in the New Covenant we also have those who are not saved.

In the OT you had covenant keepers and covenant breakers. And they were *all* called the people of God, even though many of them received the grace of God in vain. Did you know it was possible to receive the grace of God in vain? Paul wrote, "Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1).

In the book of Hebrews we see several passages that warn the people of God—those in covenant with Him—not to receive God's grace and blessings in vain, so as to fall away or apostatize, just like God's people did in the old covenant. "Take care, *brothers* (notice the covenantal language), lest there be in any of you an evil, *unbelieving* heart, leading you to fall away from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). This is something that could be said to God's people in any church on any given Sunday. The author goes on to say, "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.' For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?" (vv. 13-16). Without any qualification, the author of Hebrews applies an OT rebellion episode to NT saints, because it obviously is possible for them to behave in the same way. The author makes this parallel directly: "For good news came to us *just as to them*, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened... Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience" (vv. 4:2, 11). The assumption is that New Covenant members can apostatize; they receive God's covenantal grace in vain, because it's not combined with faith. And before we continue on with another example, let me assert that these "warning passages" are real and not hypothetical. Some scholars state that these warnings are hypothetical, because a child of God couldn't do what the author is warning them about. That's utterly ridiculous. If apostasy isn't a real possibility, the warnings are pointless and a waste of time. Need I say more?

Hebrews 6:4-6 also warns *brothers*: "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt." Sorry Arminians, this is not saying that a person can lose their salvation. Rather this person is rejecting the blessings that he has received as a member of the covenant, and the consequences are severe—to say the least.

Similarly, Hebrews 10:26-31 says, "For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the

evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has *profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified*, and has outraged the spirit of grace? For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Several observations need to be made. First, we see that those who are in the covenant can become God’s adversaries, and experience fire (i.e. hell). Related to this is the fact that the Lord is not afraid to “judge his people.” They are called His people, due to being in the covenant, but this doesn’t guarantee salvation. Finally, and this is what causes many to stumble, this possible covenant breaker was *sanctified* by the covenant. Thus, sanctified doesn’t always imply salvation. In other words, you can be sanctified, but not saved. Such is the case here. This person is sanctified, meaning set apart for God, but this sanctification doesn’t necessarily lead to salvation, since they can still spurn the Son of God and profane the covenant.

As an example of sanctification that *can’t* mean salvation, let’s consider 1 Corinthians 7:14. In this verse Paul addresses the issue of mixed marriages, an unbeliever married to a believer, and talks about the affect the believer has on the children: “For the unbelieving husband is made holy (some translations say sanctified) because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy (sanctified) because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy.” We know that this sanctification doesn’t mean salvation, because Paul tells the spouse in a mixed marriage to stay because “how do you know whether you will save your husband...wife” (vs. 16). So the unbelieving spouse is sanctified, but not saved, which is the situation of the person in Hebrews 10. But the sanctification is for the benefit of the children: “*Otherwise* they would be unclean, but as it is they are holy.” “Unclean” is from the OT. If a person was unclean, they were excluded from the people of God; they were numbered among the Gentiles. Due to the presence and blessing of one believing parent, the children are holy or sanctified, which means included as members of the covenant community. So we still have unbelievers in the covenant.

Some think that Jeremiah 31:34 cancels out these other verses. Before I briefly comment on this verse, let me warn against allowing one verse to trump dozens of others. It’s not uncommon for me to talk about all the verses related to apostasy and breaking the covenant, only to have someone object because of one verse that seems to work against all the others. In more than one theological issue, I’ve seen that an inability to account for one verse often hinders people from accepting the clear teaching of many others. Jeremiah 31:34 says, “For they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” The whole verse says, “And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Your eschatology will govern your interpretation, but I believe this verse is describing the full glory of the New Covenant. Put differently, this is where the New Covenant is headed. Not yet are teachers unnecessary. We still need them to say, “Know the LORD,” but a day is coming when they will not be needed, because they will all know the LORD, from the least of them to the greatest. In this day “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14).

Therefore, I say again that children have always been included in the covenant, and there is no reason to think that this has changed under the New Covenant. It seems to me that the burden of proof for a dramatic shift in the history of redemption lies upon the Baptists. What Baptists are saying is that since the creation of the world God has entered into relationships with His people via covenants, and these covenants, without exception, have always included the children, but now in the New Covenant—the covenant that fulfills all the others; the covenant with better promises—children aren’t welcome.

Imagine a Jewish woman whose presuppositions have been molded and shaped by the OT Scriptures. She comes to faith in Jesus Christ, is baptized into the New Covenant, and then says, “Now baptize my children, so that they can be a part of the covenant with me.” She’s politely told, “I’m sorry, but in the New Covenant children are excluded.”

How do you think she might respond? I think she would be thoroughly confused, and might say something like, “I thought you told me this was a better covenant, with a better mediator and better promises.

How is it better if under the old covenant my children were included, but now they're excluded? Frankly, I think I'd rather have the old covenant, because at least in that covenant my children have a place." I know this is anecdotal, but when we try to enter into the mindset of a Jew, we see how individualistic thinking doesn't work.

Baptists are insisting that a 2,000 year old practice of including children in the covenant suddenly stops without a single word about it in the NT. And not only in the NT, but also in the history of the early church there is not a shred of evidence to indicate that a change had taken place in applying the sign of the covenant to infants. There is not a single mention of controversy in baptism in the literature of the patristics in the 1st century or the 2nd century, and then finally in the middle of the 3rd century we have a reference to paedobaptism by Tertullian, who says that it is the universal practice of the Church.

R. C. Sproul comments, "Now it's possible that in a hundred to two hundred years the whole Christian church could have departed from the apostolic practice without one word surviving in written complaint against that despite the mountain of information that has survived from the first three centuries about a host of other theological controversies about which the patristics were divided. And isn't it strange that this departure and deviation from the purity of the apostolic church took place to the extent that it captured the whole of Christendom and not one single word of protest survives from that period. Now this is an argument from silence, but it's a very screaming silence. I'm saying the reason why there's no explicit command to baptize [infants] in the NT is that it would be clearly assumed by any Jewish or early Christian believer...that the same practice and principle of including the children of believers in the reception of the covenant sign would continue unless God said, "Stop it!" (From a message on baptism).

BAPTISM REPLACES CIRCUMCISION AS THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT

We mentioned that the first reference to infant baptism in church history came at the beginning of the third century, when Tertullian stated that it was the universal practice of the church. But we can take this a step further. A step further being 1250 years further, since infant baptism continued to be the universal practice of the church, with the exception of a few unique situations, until the rise of the Anabaptists in the 16th century.

It's instructive that in early church history the debate wasn't over whether or not to baptize infants, but over *when* to baptize them. The testimony of Cyprian, a Latin father of the third century, and contemporary with Origen illustrates this point: "In the year 253 after Christ, there was a Council of sixty-six bishops or pastors held at Carthage, in which Cyprian presided. To this Council, Fidus, a country pastor, presented the following question, which he wished them, by their united wisdom, to solve—viz. Whether it was necessary, in the administration of baptism, as of circumcision, to wait until the *eighth day*; or whether a child might be baptized at an earlier period after his birth? The question, it will be observed, was *not* whether infants ought to be baptized? That was taken for granted. But simply, whether it was necessary to wait until the eighth day after their birth? The Council came unanimously to the following decision, and transmitted it in a letter to the inquirer.

"Cyprian and the rest of the Bishops who were present in the Council, sixty-six in number, to Fidus, our brother, greetings:

"As to the case of Infants,—whereas you judge that they must not be baptized within two or three days after they are born, and that the rule of circumcision is to be observed, that no one should be baptized and sanctified before the eighth day after he is born; we were all in the Council of a very different opinion. As for what you thought proper to be done, no one was of your mind; but we all rather judged that the mercy and grace of God is to be denied to no human being that is born. This, therefore, dear brother, was our opinion in the Council; that we ought not to hinder any person from baptism, and the grace of God, who is merciful and kind to us all. And this rule, as it holds for all, we think more especially to be observed in reference to infants, even to those newly born" (Cyprian, Epist.66; Robert R. Booth, *Children of the Promise*, p. 170-171).

This episode is fascinating not just because it demonstrates that the early church baptized its infants, but

also because we see the early church doing covenant theology, and not dispensational theology. These leaders saw continuity between the two testaments, and dealt with the question of baptism based upon its relationship with circumcision, though they did recognize discontinuity, since God is even more merciful and gracious in the New Covenant.

So beginning with the Abrahamic Covenant (around 2100 B.C.) to the Renaissance (with its unusual and unbiblical emphasis upon individualism) you have 3600 years of giving infants the sign of the covenant—be it circumcision or baptism. Thus, the exclusion of children from the covenant, because they can't express their individual faith is new when you look at it from the perspective of biblical and church history. What brought about this change was the Renaissance with its individualistic presupposition that replaced a covenantal one.

But perhaps the Baptists are correct, and the church has been wrong for 1500 years, and still is in circles that continue to baptize infants. We need to at least recognize the possibility. Baptists are quick to point out—and they are right—that there isn't a single reference to an infant being baptized in the NT.

However, it's interesting that of the 12 baptisms mentioned in the NT, five refer to household baptisms. Consider the 12 NT baptisms:

Adult Baptisms:

3,000 (men) at Pentecost (no households present)

Samaritans (“both men and women”)

Simon the sorcerer

Ethiopian eunuch (no household)

Paul (no household)

Disciples of John (12 men) (no households present)

Gaius

Household Baptisms:

Cornelius and household

Lydia and household

Philippian jailer and household

1 *Corinthians*:

Crispus (and household [inferred])

Stephanas and household

Let's consider just two of the household baptisms. First, look at Lydia: “One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and *her household as well*, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us” (Acts 16:14-15). Did Lydia's household publicly profess faith in Christ? Baptists will assume that they did—they have to assume that—but the text doesn't tell us. Were there infants present? We don't know. Could it be that the text doesn't tell us, because it doesn't matter? Could it be that it is sufficient that Lydia believed? The answer is “yes” if you're operating within a covenantal framework.

Also, consider the Philippian jailer: “And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, *he and all his family*. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that *he* had believed in God” (Acts 16:32-34, ESV; other versions, such as the KJV and NIV offer a very different translation, which is related to this debate, but beyond what I wish to address here). Once again, we have a household being baptized, but we're only told that the head of the household believed. Baptists have to assume that all who were baptized believed, but that is an assumption. My case for infant baptism isn't dependant upon showing that infants were baptized as part of the household—we don't know. All I'm seeking to do is show that these household baptisms are *consistent* with the OT practice of bringing in the whole household into the covenant at the same time, and not one by one as each member of the family believed. When we look at all the NT baptisms, it seems that household baptisms are a common occurrence when the

whole family is present.

Commenting on these household baptisms, “J. A. Alexander observed, ‘Both parties reason in a circle from foregone conclusions; one contending that as infants are incapable of faith, there either were none, or they were excluded from the ordinance; the other, that as households include children, we have no right to except them from the general statement. The real strength of the latter argument lies not in any one case, but in the repeated mention of whole houses as baptized’” (Ibid., p. 147).

While household baptisms may seem unusual to us, given our reflexive bent toward individualism, this isn’t true of all cultures. “Vern Poythress observes, ‘In modern times, there are incidents where the tribal chief announces that ‘we are becoming Christians,’ and the whole tribe asks to be baptized. Individualistic Americans are not used to this type of procedure, but it is not rare or absurd’” (Ibid., 148). Our problem—and it is a problem—is that we view ourselves as disconnected individuals, who just happen to be associated with a family or community. The Jew did not look at himself that way; rather he saw himself as *one* with his family and community, so that when one person suffered all suffered, or if one person was honored all were honored. He understood that for better or worse “We’re in this together.” Due to this covenantal thinking Jews and others would cringe at the very suggestion that children should be excluded from the covenant. Again, my only point in mentioning the household baptisms is to say that they are at the very least consistent with this corporate, covenantal mindset. There’s no debate that the OT was covenantal, and if that has changed in the NT, the household baptisms don’t appear to point in that direction.

Hopefully the groundwork we’ve laid is adequate to now answer the question we mentioned at the beginning of this study: Does baptism replace circumcision as the sign of the covenant? Of course I believe it does, so let’s look at how and why this change came about. First, we should recognize that the change was gradual—over many years, not over night. Circumcision was an issue for many years, which is why the apostle Paul addresses it in his letters on more than one occasion, and why he used such hard, even harsh, language (Gal. 5:11-12). The following chart can help us visualize the change and transition:

	OT	John & Jesus	The Apostles (Acts 15)
<i>Signs of the Covenant</i>		<u>Baptism</u>	
	<u>Circumcision</u>		

The OT sign of the covenant was circumcision, and that continued to be the sign until the Jerusalem council met in Acts 15 and considered the place of the law (including circumcision) in the life of Gentile believers. They concluded that circumcision was no longer necessary. Baptists point out that the council could have ended in five minutes if the apostles had just mentioned that baptism replaces circumcision (an argument from silence). The apostles don’t specifically mention that because the issue was more complex. The council wasn’t just concerned with baptism, but with the whole law of Moses. Besides, as you can see from the chart, there was a period of time in which there were dual signs of the covenant, thus by removing circumcision that only left baptism as the sign of the covenant.

We shouldn’t be bothered by the dual signs, because they are related, yet at the same time baptism replaces circumcision by being the sign of the better covenant. So, we have continuity and discontinuity with the signs of the two covenants, just as we do with the two covenants themselves. Colossians 2:11-12 illustrates this: “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, 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.” The *spiritual* circumcision is done by Christ, and it happens by “having been buried with him in *baptism*.” There is much that we could expound upon here, but let’s just focus on the simple point that circumcision and baptism are related, yet the

circumcision we really need is now found in baptism, so that physical circumcision is now longer necessary. Therefore, due to baptism, Paul could write to uncircumcised Gentiles and say, “For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3).

John Sartelle demonstrates that baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the covenant by posing these questions:

1. When a person believed in the God of Abraham and trusted in Him in the Old Testament, what happened? He was circumcised.
2. What was the outward event that represented the clean heart in the Old Testament? Circumcision.
3. What was the outward sign that marked a person’s entrance into the community of believers in the Old Testament? Circumcision.

Then we ask the same questions, replacing “Old Testament” with “New Testament”:

1. When a person believed in the God of Abraham and trusted in Him in the New Testament, what happened? He was baptized.
2. What was the outward event that represented the clean heart in the New Testament? Baptism.
3. What was the outward sign that marked a person’s entrance into the community of believers in the New Testament? Baptism. (John P. Sartelle, *Infant Baptism: What Christian Parents Should Know*, p. 10-11).

Why this change from circumcision to baptism? After all God could have just kept the same sign for both. Robert Booth writes, “Reformed paedobaptists agree that the new covenant brought significant changes to the history of redemption. However, these changes were not so significant as to invalidate the principles of the older covenants. Yet, the new covenant did expand upon the previous covenant administrations and usher in a greater degree of blessing, thus extending the application of these blessings to more people than before. There was a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17). Gentiles were now included on a par with Jews (Gal. 3:14), and women now received equal covenant privilege (Gal. 3:28). These and other blessings were not minor changes; they called for fresh signs that would draw attention to the new circumstances” (*Children of Promise*, p. 111).

Furthermore, keep in mind that every NT doctrine has its roots in the OT. The sacrifice of Christ has its roots in the OT sacrificial system and Passover. We know from the OT that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins, but that fulfillment is found in Christ. The change in signs is intended to direct us perpetually to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the entire OT (Matt. 5:17). Christ is our Passover Lamb, so we celebrate the Lord’s Supper by remembering His death. Christ is the One who cuts away our sinful nature when we are united with Him in His death and resurrection that takes place in baptism. As New Covenant believers we have the sacraments especially to keep us Christ-centered. Therefore, just as the Lord’s Supper replaces Passover, so baptism replaces circumcision.

SO WHAT?

Now I’d like to address the question that many of you have been thinking all along: So what? What practical difference does this make? Isn’t this just ivory tower theology for academics? I’m just concerned that my child goes to heaven, does this relate to *that*? It does. Consider two points for starters.

First, this relates to the promises of God for parenting. Baptism is God’s promise or pledge that if we

raise our children in the fear and instruction of the Lord He will be their God; He will bestow upon them all the benefits of the covenant, including salvation; He will bring about regeneration and new life in Christ.

Some time ago I was at a conference and well-known pastor said that we raise our children the best we can, but we never know whether or not they are among the elect. I thought to myself, “Do you know what you just did to all the parents here? You stole their parental hope. You basically said, ‘Parenting is a crap’s shoot. You roll the dice and hope for the best.’” Is that how God wants His people to parent? Hardly! God has given us precious promises concerning our children to empower us.

If I say to my little children, “Clean your room,” they will obey—usually. But if I say, “Clean your room, and then we’ll go to Great America amusement park for the day,” they will obey with enthusiasm. God motivates and empowers us similarly. This is why we have so many promises that include our children. “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Pro. 22:6). “But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to *children’s children*, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments” (Ps. 103:17-18). And there are scores of other passages that we could cite. God has given us these promises to let us know that our parenting is not vain; it will bear fruit as we persevere. Douglas Wilson stated it well, “When all the teaching of the Bible is taken into account, parents who fulfill their covenantal obligations have every reason to *expect* that their children will be saved” (Douglas Wilson, *Standing on the Promises*, p. 16).

Second, baptism relates to the paradigm of God for parenting. God told Abraham to raise his children *in the covenant*; to raise them *as children of God*. If you want to do all you can to help your children get to heaven, then listen very carefully as God instructs you about how to teach your children. And he says to teach them from day one *as children of God*, not as little pagans outside the covenant and blessings of God.

A Baptist will protest by saying that it is presumptuous to call these little ones “children of God.” It is not presumptuous, if God says to do that; it’s a matter of faith. This is why we addressed the issue of the regenerate and the unregenerate in the same covenant. Without qualification God refers to those in covenant with Him as “my people.” Now God’s people can change their gods, but they do this horrendous act as *His* people. “Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But *my people* have changed their Glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declared the LORD, for *my people* have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:11-12, italics added).

The question that may logically flow from this is: “Then what advantage is there in being baptized?” What Paul says concerning being a Jew and being circumcised would apply even more so to the baptized: “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God...They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 3:1-2, 9:4-5). Couldn’t this, and more, be said of a baptized child reared in a Christian home? Like the Jews, raise your children as members of the covenant, and make sure they are marked with the sign of the covenant. No, they will not be able to see the sign, but they will know it is upon them, because you will tell them—repeatedly, and you will raise them in light of that sign and all that it signifies.

EIGHT-POINT SUMMARY

1. God never enters into a covenant with his people without also including their children in that covenant. God promised Abraham, as an everlasting covenant, “to be God to you *and your offspring after you*” (Gen. 17:7). And when we turn to the New Covenant promises we see that children are still included in the promises: “‘And as for me, this is my covenant with them,’ says the LORD: ‘My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth *or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,*’ says the LORD, ‘*from this time forward and forevermore.*’” (Isa. 59:21).

2. To demonstrate the continuity between the OT and the NT, we saw that the New Covenant is the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenants, and specifically we focused on the Abrahamic Covenant. “And if you are Christ’s, *then you are Abraham’s offspring*, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29).
3. Circumcision, according to Rom. 4:11, as well as other passages, was a spiritual sign and not just an ethnic sign: “[Abraham] received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was uncircumcised.”
4. The sign of the covenant was given to 8 day old infants before they could profess faith. The sign was God’s seal (or pledge) to bestow upon their children all the benefits and privileges of the covenant when they believed in the God of Abraham.
5. Children, of at least one believing parent, are considered holy (1 Cor. 7:14), and are therefore to be included in the covenant community, the church. Baptism is the initiatory sacrament that grants them entrance.
6. The NT “household baptisms” are consistent with this OT practice of including children in the blessings of the covenant.
7. How we view the sign of the covenant (i.e. baptism) has implications for how we will raise our children. First, baptism is God’s promise to regenerate our children when we rear them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Also, baptism is an indication of God’s paradigm for how we are to rear our children, namely as children of God, with his grace, love and favor already upon them.
8. Nothing in the NT or 1500 years of church history suggests, explicitly, by way of example, or even inference, that the 2000 year old command to give infants the sign of the covenant, and to raise these infants as covenant children, has been reversed or rescinded in the New Covenant.

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