

“Let the Little Children Come to Me”



By Pastor Jeremy

CONGRATULATIONS!

If you're either expecting or have been blessed with the birth of a child, the leadership at Truth Point Church wants to celebrate God's gift with you! We also want to help answer some questions you may have about celebrating the birth of your child at our church. This pamphlet will seek to answer the following four questions:

1) What is the biblical status of our child?

2) Why should our child be baptized?

3) What about the common objections?

4) How should we prepare for our child's baptism?

1) What is the Biblical Status of Our Child?

Many parents, who are blessed with a baby, ask themselves, "What does the bible have to say about the relation of believer's children to the church? When we bring our child(ren) to church, should we view them as part of the visible church community with distinct privileges and responsibilities? Or should they be viewed the same way as the children of unbelievers - cut off from the covenant community until they are able to make a profession of faith? Are the children of believing parents really any different? If so, in what way?

When believing parents were bringing their infants to Jesus to be blessed, Jesus taught his disciples not to forbid them and gave them the clear reason why. Jesus said,

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16).

The church is the visible expression of the Kingdom of God in the world. So what does it practically mean for us to bring our children to Jesus today? It means to bring them into the church (the visible body of Christ) as covenant members who are visibly set apart from the world. Jesus laid hands on the children as a covenantal act of setting them apart, not just patting little Susie and Johnny on the heads.

The Apostle Paul taught the same thing when he wrote,

“For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy” (1 Corinthians 7:14).

The word “holy” in this verse means set apart in contrast to being unclean. The language of being unclean was used of the pagan world that was outside the covenant mercies of God. Paul teaches that children of one or more believing parents are not “unclean.” They are not outside the visible community of God, but inside it as set apart members. As we’ll see in the next section, this is not a new way to view our children; this has always been the case. This is why Paul addressed children in his letters as part of the visible “saints” who are in Christ (see Ephesians 1:1, 6:1; & Colossians 1:2, 3:20).

So it’s the clear teaching of the New Testament that ...

Children of one or more believing parents are set apart from the world as members of the visible church.

This doesn’t mean that the children of believers are automatically saved. It teaches us that they are *in* the Kingdom (by physical birth), but not necessary *of* the Kingdom (by spiritual birth). We can think of our children’s status in the church much like how our U.S. Citizenship or health insurance works. A child is automatically an American Citizen by being born under the headship of an American parent. Now, this child may grow up to repudiate our country and not have “the American spirit,” but that doesn’t mean they aren’t considered a visible citizen with all the rights and privileges. The same is true with many health insurance programs. Little children aren’t required to purchase their own insurance. Why? Because they are automatically included under the representation of their parent or parents.

Likewise, children of believers are visible members and citizens of God’s kingdom. You start with their status, and leads to understanding why they should receive the sacrament. How do we celebrate and biblically identify members in God’s church? Baptism.

2) Why Should Our Child Be Baptized?

We've established that children of believing parents are visible members in the church. And the sign of visible membership in the church is baptism. Peter teaches that like the water separated Noah and his household from the unbelieving world, the water of baptism visibly identifies and separates individuals from the unbelieving families of the world (see 1 Pt.3:20-21). The water doesn't eternally save someone; it is the sign and seal of God's promise to save all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism is simply the new sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (now realized in Jesus).

We all believe that Scripture teaches that professing believers need to receive the sign of membership and be baptized, but where do we read that it's now ONLY professing believers that should receive the sign of promise? God's covenant promises have always been given to "You and your household."

Adam and his household	(Genesis 3:15)
Noah and his household	(Genesis 6:18)
Abraham and his household	(Genesis 17:9-10)
Rahab and her household	(Joshua 2:18, 6:22)
David and his household	(2 Samuel 7:12-16)

God has never made a covenant that does not visibly include the household. So, is it now ONLY believers that should receive the sign, and their children are now excluded from it? If so, we should expect there to be a clear repeal of this ancient biblical practice or some teaching on this somewhere. However, it's nowhere to be found. Why? Because the principle and practice still continues. Instead of a repeal, the New Testament repeats the "You and your household" principle as the basic understanding for faithful Christian parents.

"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" (Acts 2:39).

"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" (Acts 16:15).

Notice, faithfulness to the Lord meant Lydia's baptism AND her households as well.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

Baptism signifies the work of the Holy Spirit to unite people to Jesus, and wash their sins away. For the adult who is not already baptized in a Christian home but later professes faith, they are baptized as a sign of what we believe has taken place. However, a child of believing parents is baptized as a sign of what needs to take place. So when these children grow up and come to faith, do they need to be re-baptized? No, because their faith was the reality of what that sign pointed to, namely GOD'S commitment and faithfulness to them, not theirs to God. Baptism functions as a spiritual sign given to infants just like circumcision did.

“But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter” (Romans 2:29).

Just as the sign of circumcision was applied to male infants even though they could not verbally repent or believe, baptism functions the same way today. However, Christ has replaced the patriarchal representation in the family. Now, in Christ there is no longer male or female (Gal.3:28) and so now both sons and daughters receive the covenant sign. Like Abraham, Christian parents give their child this spiritual sign not by sight, but by faith, believing that God's promise includes their children.

Baptism signifies initiation into the life of Christian discipleship. From the time they're born, parents begin to make disciples of their children by teaching them about Jesus, the bible, how to pray, and disciplining them. But what did Jesus say was the first step in making disciples? He said,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, BAPTIZING them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” (Matt.28:19).

Notice, it's baptism, not teaching that is the first step in fulfilling the Great Commission, and this commission begins at home. Therefore, when a child receives the sign of baptism they are being initiated into the community of disciples who will be taught the ways of Jesus.

3)What About The Common Objections?

“Infant baptism” is not commanded in Scripture.

This objection comes from a misunderstanding and inconsistency in interpreting the bible. There are plenty of biblical practices that do not have clear biblical commands. For example, nowhere is it clearly commanded to now worship on Sunday, for women to receive the Lord's Supper, or to join as members in a church. These are inferred from Scriptural teaching, other descriptions and principles. Furthermore, the danger of “subtracting from God's Word” is just as dangerous as “adding to God's Word” (see Rev.22:18-19). Those who deny the covenant sign to believer's children are repealing a practice nowhere repealed by God and are, in a subtle way, subtracting from God's Word.

Furthermore, dedicating a child with oil is not commanded in Scripture and is done as a replacement of baptism because Christian parents instinctively recognize that their children are different from the unbelieving world. Lastly, clear evidence of “infants” being baptized is not necessary because it's not just infants that God is concerned about receiving the covenant sign, it's the entire household.

Baptism is only for those who can “repent and believe.”

The reason baptism was given to adults who repented and believed in the beginning of Acts was because these adults had never received the covenant sign of baptism before. And as we have shown, not only did believing adults receive the sign but also entire households (see Acts 16:15,17:30-34). Like circumcision the spiritual sign of baptism is given to those who cannot show forth signs of repentance and faith yet. For them it is a sign of need.

Shouldn't we model Jesus and be baptized as an adult?

Jesus was thirty years old when he was baptized (see Lk.3:23) because he was entering into the priesthood of Melchizedek, and all priests were to be baptized at age thirty (see Num.4:3,23,30, 35). And his baptism was not done by immersion, but by sprinkling (see Num.8:6-7). Jesus' baptism is not meant to directly compared to our baptisms today. (see Acts 19:3-5).

But my children won't have the same "experience" that an adult would have who could remember his or her baptism. It won't "mean as much" to them or if they are baptized as an infant.

A child being born into an American family is not going to have the same experience of an adult immigrant who later becomes a citizen, but it doesn't mean the child's citizenship is any less of a privilege. Being baptized as an adult is admitting that you were cut off from God's visible people since birth, but this is not the case of children in believing homes. A child that was baptized as an infant should rejoice at a later age that their parents acted in obedience to Scripture and didn't withhold the King's sign and seal that was rightfully theirs. Second, if taught to the children appropriately, it can "mean just as much" if not more, because the children who later believe should rejoice in God's faithfulness and loving actions towards those who are weak and helpless. Furthermore, parents should not base their actions on what they want their child to experience, but upon what they believe God is teaching in Scripture.

What If We're Not Convinced?

We recognize that not every family will be convinced with these answers of why baptism is the most appropriate way to celebrate the birth of their children. Therefore, it is the position of our church, that after the parents have read this pamphlet to let them decide, according to their conscience before the Lord, whether to dedicate their children in baptism or wait until they can make a profession of faith. We believe Scripture teaches the former and would like to celebrate your child's birth and baptism at service, but we do not look down upon parents who choose the latter or keep them from joining our fellowship as members or leading ministries in our congregation. We only ask that they would continue to seek the peace and purity of our church by not causing dissension over their disagreement.

However, if you have decided to pursue household baptism for your family, the following page will help you to prepare for this exciting day.

4)How Should We Prepare For Our Child's Baptism?

Preparing to Give Thanks

First, when parents present their children to the Lord in baptism it is an act of praise and thanksgiving. The parents are recognizing that “the fruit of the womb is a reward” (Ps.127:3). In essence, parents are saying publicly, “Lord, we acknowledge before you and this congregation that each child is a gift of your grace. We thank you for this life you have created and entrusted to us. Thank you for blessing us with the privilege of raising up new disciples who will be taught to love and serve you.”

Preparing to Admit Your Need

Second, when parents present their children to the Lord in baptism it is an act of admission. The parents are thankful to God yet also humbly admitting before God that they are unworthy and unqualified to be parents. They're acknowledging their dependence upon God and so come confessing their need for God's grace and also the assistance and accountability from those in the congregation. In essence, parents are saying publicly, “Oh God, we need your help. Please grant us all the love and wisdom to be godly parents.” And also, “Oh Church, we need your help, please pray for us and assist us in the raising of our children to honor the Triune God.”

Preparing to Make a Commitment

Third, when parents present their children to the Lord in baptism it is an act of commitment. The parents are committing themselves to raise up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Lastly, as the Pastor pours water upon your child in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (representing the child's need for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit) you are committing the life and salvation of your child into the loving and gracious hands of God.

Again, congratulations! We're so excited for you and your family, and we are here for you to answer any further questions you may have about celebrating the birth of your child with us at church.

MORE RESOURCES ON HOUSEHOLD BAPTISM: *To A Thousand Generations* by Douglas Wilson; *Jesus Loves the Little Children* by Daniel Hyde; *Christian Baptism* by John Murray; *William the Baptist* by James Chaney; *Parenting by God's Promises* by Joel Beeke