

God's Promise Demands Infant Baptism

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A Simple Conclusion

Baptists frequently defend their exclusionary practice by claiming that there is no biblical support for infant baptism. Their practice (refusing to baptize infants) is exclusionary because everyone agrees and recognizes that those who are baptized are members of the church. By refusing to baptize the infant children of believers, Baptists are telling us that these infants cannot (at least yet) be considered members of the church. However, the biblical support for infant baptism is rich and can be demonstrated in various ways. One of the simplest proofs is as follows:

1. Baptism must be administered to all those who receive the Spirit (Acts 10:47).
2. Infants of believers are promised the Spirit (Isa. 44:3).
3. Therefore, infants of believers must be baptized.

The First Proposition Proved

Both these propositions are simple and easy to prove from holy Scripture and the third follows. We will treat objections later. Since the first proposition is less contentious for Baptists, I will offer only one Scripture as proof:

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? (Acts 10:47).

Peter spoke these words immediately prior to commanding that Gentiles gathered in the home of Cornelius should be baptized (v. 48). He spoke these words immediately after the Holy Spirit had fallen on those who heard him. These Gentiles had just displayed the same miraculous gifts and signs of the

Spirit which had been shown at Pentecost. It was this outward evidence, confirming the vision that Peter had been given, which convinced him that these Gentiles were clean by the washing of the Spirit, just as much as the believing Jews. This was the message of the vision: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common [i.e., unclean]" (v. 15).

Peter's conclusion was very simple. If God has given them the spiritual reality signified by baptism (washing by the Spirit), then who are we to dare to refuse to give them the sign? Our conclusion is essentially the same, if God has promised to give the infant children of believers the spiritual reality signified by baptism, then who are we to dare to refuse to baptize infants?

The Second Proposition Proved

At this point, Baptists will contend that God has not promised any such thing. But, in fact, our second proposition is far easier to prove than the first. I doubt that any could exhaust the wealth of scriptural proof that could be offered for this. We will content ourselves with a non-exhaustive list of verses, with a few limited comments to drive home the point of each for the sake of our erring Baptist friends, although most speak for themselves and far more could be said. I have excluded many that would take too much time and effort to explain to those coming from a Baptist persuasion. I have also treated the references in biblical order rather than systematically, so that it can be more easily understood as the natural and progressive development of this doctrine in Scripture itself rather than a carefully crafted argument from a selection of cherry-picked verses.

And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you (Gen. 9:9).

Notice "you" is the second person plural here. These words were spoken to Noah and to his sons with him (v. 8), so that God here promises to establish His covenant (singular) with Noah and his sons, and the seed of Noah and the seed of Noah's sons after them. This covenant with believers and their seed is for "perpetual generations" (v. 12).

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting

covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee (Gen. 17:7).

This speaks of at least four distinct generations: Abraham, his seed, and the generations (plural) of his seed. It is also more than four generations, since the covenant is everlasting. The covenant includes the promise that God will be their God and will give them the world or cosmos as pictured by Canaan (Rom. 4:13). This is essentially the same covenant as with Noah, since God calls it “my covenant” (singular). God does not say “one of my covenants” but “my covenant.”

And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me,
and keep my commandments (Ex. 20:6).

In the context, “thousands” refers to thousands of generations of fathers with their children (cf. I Chron. 16:15). Here God promises that His mercy will extend from generation to generation unto thousands of generations in the way of our love for God and keeping His commandments (cf. Gen. 18:19). This is not a condition upon which the covenant depends but the necessary manner in which God maintains His covenant.

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation (Ex. 34:6-7).

This teaches us that the promise of God to save the children of believers unto thousands of generations in an everlasting covenant is actually part of the revelation of God’s name. It is who God is. Baptist err grievously when they neglect this doctrine. They have not properly understood who God is in this important respect.

And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt (Deut. 4:37).

This does not suggest that God's election of the seed was conditioned upon God's love of the fathers, since God's love of the fathers was itself unconditional. But the two are joined together necessarily. God's election and love runs from generation to generation.

Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations (Deut. 7:9).

This is, again, a reiteration that the mercy of God in His covenant from generation to generation is part of His name, the revelation of who He is and His glory. We do not rightly worship and glorify God, if we do not acknowledge and love this doctrine.

What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:12-13).

This reiterates the promise made to Abraham and his seed, that the children of believers will inherit the world. Part of the peace and comfort enjoyed by the godly is that God is gracious to our children.

I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed (Ps. 37:25-26).

The psalmist refers to the ordinary case in which the hard-working righteous man earns bread for himself and his children. The psalmist recognizes this as a reflection of the spiritual reality that the children of the one who is merciful and who lends (to those who lack bread, for example) are blessed. This blessing is the salvation identified with the same promise made to Abraham: "such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth" (v. 22).

For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah: that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. The seed also of his servants shall inherit it: and they that love his name shall dwell therein (Ps. 69:35-36).

This promises salvation to the children of God's servants, consisting in

inheriting and dwelling in God's land. These children will love the name of God which is only possible by the Spirit (I Cor. 12:3).

He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor (Ps. 72:4).

The poor of the people and the needy are those of whom Christ spoke: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). This is a description of the spiritual citizens of God's kingdom. God promises here to save their children.

The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee (Ps. 102:28).

Because God does not change and is eternal, the children of God's servants will continue and be established before God (cf. Mal. 3:6). The wicked are like chaff before God (Ps. 1:4-5). To be established before God is salvation.

But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children (Ps. 103:17).

This is a good example of poetic parallelism. From everlasting to everlasting is explained in terms of children's children. The children's children are those that fear God. And God's righteousness to children's children is His mercy to them, because He is righteous to keep the merciful promises of His covenant (cf. I John 1:9). This verse promises God's everlasting saving mercy to the children's children of believers so that these children's children will fear God.

Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed (Ps. 112:1-2).

Again, to be blessed by the Lord is salvation, and this blessing is promised to the generation of the upright man who fears the Lord. The might referred to here is a spiritual might (cf. Gen. 32:28).

The LORD hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron.

He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great.
The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your
children. Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and
earth (Ps. 115:12-15).

First of all, a house is a family, and the house of Aaron and the house of Israel certainly included children. God promises to bless these families, both the small (children) and the great (adults). This is emphasized in that God promises to increase us and our children (yes, Gentiles are now included in Israel; Eph. 2:11-14). This blessing is by the one who is in the heavens who has done whatsoever He has pleased (Ps. 115:3). It is an effectual blessing of salvation, therefore.

The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed
after him (Prov. 20:7).

Here is wisdom. As the just man walks in his integrity, he has the assurance that God will bless his children after him. The unjust have no such confidence.

Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also,
and he praiseth her (Prov. 31:28).

Recall God's words to Abraham: "I will bless them that bless thee" (Gen. 12:3). The children of the godly mother bless her as a token that they themselves are blessed by God.

For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon
the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my
blessing upon thine offspring (Isa. 44:3).

This verse very explicitly refers to the pouring out of the Spirit on the children of God's servant (v. 2). The Spirit was poured out on Pentecost and on the Gentiles in the home of Cornelius. On the basis of this outpouring, they were baptized. Here the very same pouring out of the Spirit is promised to the children.

But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall
be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered:
for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I
will save thy children (Isa. 49:25).

Here God promises salvation to our children in the way of contending against our enemies. The devil and the world would seek to take and destroy our children, but God will save them.

For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation (Isa. 51:8).

Again, God's eternal immutability is related to His faithful promise to save our children from generation to generation. God's unchanging faithfulness to His promise of salvation to our children is described as God's righteousness. If God cannot change, His promise to save our children cannot change.

And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children (Isa. 54:13).

This teaches the salvation of our children with regard to spiritual illumination. God will teach our children by the inner work of His Spirit and, therefore, they will enjoy peace with God.

As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever (Isa. 59:21).

If a stalwart Baptist is still hanging on here, convincing himself that all the references to seed (singular) are references only to Christ (cf. Gal. 3:16), and that all the references to children are references to Christ's spiritual children, then this verse will put that to rest. God's Spirit is upon Christ the Redeemer (v. 20). God's words will never depart from Christ's mouth or from the mouth of Christ's seed (believers) or from the mouth of Christ's seed's seed (the children of believers).

And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed (Isa. 61:9).

Christ quoted the words at the start of Isaiah 61 near the beginning of His earthly ministry (Luke 4:17-19). This refers to New Testament salvation and

this salvation includes the salvation of our children by the blessing of God in an “everlasting covenant” (Isa. 61:8).

And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me (Jer. 32:38-40).

This is the same “new” covenant spoken of in the previous chapter (Jer. 31:31-34), which is applied to the church in the New Testament (Heb. 8:7-13), in case some Baptists are attempting to hide behind dispensationalism. In this covenant, God gives us one heart and one way so that we will fear Him for ever. This is for our good and for the good of our children after us. This is an everlasting covenant. The people to whom this covenant promise is given includes us and our children. God puts His fear in our hearts and the hearts of our children.

Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, that thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire for them? (Eze. 16:20-21).

God claims the children of Israel as His own children and uses this fact to underscore the enormity of the wickedness done here.

And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever (Eze. 37:25).

This verse refers to God taking “the children of Israel from among the heathen” to dwell in the land for ever (v. 21). This is fulfilled in the salvation of the Gentiles in the New Testament age. David is a type of Jesus Christ our eternal King, as the land of Canaan was a type of the world promised to

Abraham. Gentile and Jewish believers with their children, and children's children, will dwell in the kingdom of Christ forever. This is an "everlasting covenant" of God (v. 26).

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions (Joel 2:28).

This prediction is cited by Peter as the explanation for Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). This is a description in Old Testament forms of the pouring out of the Spirit. It refers to a catholic church, not only of young and old, but also of sons and daughters. The sons and daughters of believers are promised the Spirit of Pentecost by this prophecy.

And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD. I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have increased. And I will sow them among the people: and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again (Zech. 10:7-9).

These verses speak about the redemption and gathering of the church. God's people will be among the Gentiles and throughout the world. God will cause His people with their children to be glad and rejoice as they live together in the way of repentance.

And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth (Mal. 2:15).

One of the purposes of marriage, according to this Scripture, is godly children. This was the case in the beginning with Adam and Eve, and in Malachi's day, and it is still the case today. God builds up His church in the way of godly marriages producing godly children.

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them (Mark 10:13-16).

Jesus Christ blessed the children of believers in His earthly ministry. There were no requirements except that their parents brought them. Not only did He teach here that a little child may receive the kingdom while still a little child, but no one receives the kingdom except in the same way as a little child receives it. He also taught here that the kingdom is comprised of such little children, so little they had to be carried (Luke 18:15 calls them “infants”).

For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15).

I include this verse to prove that infants can receive the Spirit even before they are born. The unborn John the Baptist “leaped ... for joy” in the presence of Christ (v. 44), thus indicating that he was indwelt by the Spirit.

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation (Luke 1:50).

Mary quite naturally repeats the revelation of God throughout the Old Testament that His mercy is from generation to generation. She connects the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus the Son of David to God's faithfulness to His everlasting covenant to believers and their children.

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the

Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him (Luke 10:21-22).

Again I include this merely as evidence that Almighty God is not limited by an infant's limitations as Baptists seem to imagine. God has revealed the kingdom of God to babes, while the wise and prudent who are not born again cannot see it (John 3:3).

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:39).

Peter had not quite grasped yet that the Gentiles were now going to be saved *en masse*. When he refers to those "afar off" he presumably had in mind the Jewish diaspora. Quite naturally and uncontroversially, he tells the Jewish audience that this promise of the Spirit is for them and their children. Those called by God would therefore come, in the way of faith and repentance, with their children.

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house (Acts 16:31).

Paul's gospel message is consistent with Peter's, even though he is speaking to a (presumably Gentile) jailor in Philippi. He does not hesitate to promise that salvation is for the believer and the believer's family. This is demonstrated when we are told that the jailor believed "with all his house" (v. 34).

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy (I Cor. 7:14).

The context is explaining why a believing husband should not put away his unbelieving wife and a believing wife should not leave her unbelieving husband. He or she is not made unclean by dwelling with an unbeliever (as they would be ordinarily) because, in this limited sense, the unbelieving spouse is sanctified. As irrefutable evidence for this, the apostle points out the obvious fact that their children are viewed and treated as holy, which they would not be otherwise. The children of unbelievers are ordinarily not holy. This helpfully shows us that the promise of God to save our children is not related to

whether or not our spouse is unbelieving. Even if our spouse falls away, we do not need to doubt the promise of God to our children. As with all other members of the church, they are holy.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.
Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth (Eph. 6:1-3).

Naturally we see children addressed in the church since they are viewed and treated as members according to the promise of God. These verses also teach us that God promises salvation to the children of believers in the way of their honouring their father and mother. Honouring their father and mother is not a condition they fulfil in order to obtain or earn their salvation, since God's promises are never conditional and cannot be since God has determined all things. Rather, God promises them salvation, and according to that promise He saves them in the way of causing them to honour their parents. This is the necessary manner in God's covenant.

Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord (Col. 3:20).

This teaches us that children are not only expected in the church but that they are expected to walk in a way that is "well pleasing" to God. This implies that ordinarily they are born again, and have the Spirit of God working in them to cause them to obey their parents from the heart out of a true faith and for the glory of God (cf. I Cor. 10:31; I Tim. 1:5; Heb. 11:6). Merely external obedience is not well pleasing to God.

The First Objection Answered

The most obvious objection that a Baptist will have to this promise of God to save the children of the believers is that it is a matter of painful experience for many, as well as the historical and scriptural record, that not all the physical children of believers are actually saved. What ought particularly to commend to Baptists the truth that God promises salvation to the children of believers is that Scripture itself answers this obvious objection directly:

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed (Rom. 9:6-8).

In the context, Paul has expounded the gospel of justification by faith alone for Jew and Gentile alike, relating the doctrine to sanctification and to predestination and to glorification. He then comes back to the question of the Jews which he had introduced in chapters 2 and 3. He has in mind now, considering the unbelief of so many Jews, that the wonderful things concerning predestination and glorification (of which he has just spoken so highly), do not apply to them. He expresses his deep sorrow. Since Paul acknowledges that the promises pertained to the Israelites, he therefore explains the apparent failure of the promise.

Very simply, the promise of God did not fail because it was never intended to be for every single child of Abraham head-for-head. This was clear from the very outset (even from Cain and Abel!). Even before they were born, Jacob was chosen not Esau. Sovereign, unconditional election and reprobation is explained and defended in Romans 9, not as an abstract treatise but to explain why God's promise to save the children of believers has not failed, though some physical Jews are saved and others are not. This is why a "Calvinistic Baptist" or "Reformed Baptist" is almost a contradiction in terms. The preeminent passage in all of Scripture underscoring unconditional election and reprobation is designed to defend the promise of God to save the children of believers.

The promise was always to the elect children, with the understanding that there may be reprobate children who are not included in the promise. Yet it is clear that all the children (and, indeed, even the whole nation of Israel) was viewed and treated in accordance with the promise. The wheat field is still treated as a wheat field, even if tares are growing up with the wheat. When children grew up to show themselves to be wicked, unbelieving, and impenitent, then Israel recognized them as "sons of Belial" (I Sam. 2:12), but otherwise they were always viewed and treated as God's beloved elect people.

The Second Objection Answered

This leads us to the next most obvious objection for a Baptist: the children of believers may not actually have yet received the promised Spirit as infants (as, in fact, some may even be reprobates). Infants of believers may be regenerated from their earliest years as a rule but some may not be. Are we “jumping the gun” by baptizing them already as infants? We could protest that the Baptists do not know either if they may be baptizing a hypocrite but they claim to have warrant based upon the subject’s credible profession.

But we have warrant to view and treat the children of believers as members of the church according to the promise, just as they were viewed and treated throughout the Old Testament. Circumcision illustrates this clearly. Both Jacob and Esau were circumcised. Eli’s sons, who turned out later to be “sons of Belial,” were also circumcised. Baptists may object that circumcision is not a direct equivalent of baptism but the similarity will suffice to make this point.

Circumcision also symbolized membership in the covenant community. Circumcision also signified a spiritual reality equivalent to that signified by baptism. Baptism signifies being washed by the Spirit, while circumcision signified the sinful flesh being cut away. Circumcision was also administered based upon the same promise of God to save the children of believers as we administer baptism. Yet circumcision was administered to infants who had not made any credible profession, nor advanced to years in which they could have shown themselves to be “sons of Belial.” If the Baptist claims that a credible profession is required for baptism because baptism is a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith, then we respond that circumcision was also such a sign and seal, and yet required no such profession:

And he [i.e., Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also (Rom. 4:11).

Therefore, this whole objection falls apart in the face of clear biblical precedent. But, even if we did not have the clear example of circumcision to illustrate this, the fact remains that the promise of God to save the children

of believers demands that we view and treat the children of believers in accordance with this promise and as members of the church just as much as the adults. Therefore, they must be baptized as a sign that they belong to Christ as washed by His Spirit.

As children of believers grow up and increase in understanding, they ought to consider their baptism and the reality signified by it. Their baptism, as with every baptism, places upon them the solemn responsibility to live according to the reality signified by their baptism, in faith and daily repentance. When children grow up and show themselves to be impenitent and unbelieving, they sin against their baptism. They also sin against the church which baptized them, and which viewed them and treated them as members of the church, raising them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Such children must be admonished, called to repentance and disciplined by the church. Godly children will grow up to be grateful for their baptism and thankful for the church's viewing and treating them as members of the body of Christ. In this way, God saves us with our children.