

A Friendly Dialogue On Infant Baptism

Mr. Brian Crossett

How things usually go ...

Bernard Baptist: *Hey, Paul, you go to one of those churches that baptise infants, don't you?*

Paul Presbyterian: *Yea, that's right Bernard.*

Bernard: *So where do you get that from then?*

Paul: *Well, its just something that our church does, always did do, I think.*

Bernard: *Paul, don't you realise that infant baptism is nothing but a tradition that is left over from Romanism?*

Paul: *Oh, no way, that can't be true. Our church is very much against the pope and the mass and all that stuff.*

Bernard: *So where else does it come from? Certainly not the Bible, that's for sure! Show me just one single, solitary instance of infant baptism in the Bible.*

Paul: (Long uncomfortable pause) *Now you come to mention it, Bernard, I can't think of one off the top of my head. In fact, the last time it was done in the church, I think I can remember the minister saying that infant baptism wasn't exactly in the New Testament, but that it had to be proved from the Old Testament, which seemed a bit strange. Then he went into all this twaddle about something called 'the covenant' which was a bit beyond me, to be honest.*

Bernard: *Don't you see? It's not even in the Bible. It is a Roman tradition that Presbyterian ministers try to justify by going back to the shadows and bondage of the law, just like the priesthood and sacrifices and all that.*

Paul: *I suppose maybe so. When you put it like that, it sounds quite a big sort of error.*

Bernard: *Yes, Paul, it certainly is. You know, if you are serious about your faith, you should think about going to a church which is free from Romish trappings and traditions, one that is based solidly on the teachings of the New Testament.*

Paul: *You may be right, Bernard. What time is your Sunday morning service at again?*

How things should go ...

Bernard Baptist: *Hey, Paul, you go to one of those churches that baptise infants, don't you?*

Paul Presbyterian: *Yea, that's right Bernard.*

Bernard: *So where do you get that from then?*

Paul: *Why, from the New Testament, of course!*

Bernard: *The New Testament? Don't be absurd, dear brother Paul. There is not one single, solitary instance of infant baptism anywhere in the Bible, especially not in the New Testament.*

Paul: *Oh really. What about I Corinthians 10:1-2 then? Is that not in the New Testament?*

Bernard: *Of course its in the New Testament ... but remind me what it says again; I just can't remember off the top of my head.*

Paul: *It simply states the fact that when the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea after coming out of Egypt they were baptised.*

Bernard: *So - I'm still waiting to learn that this has to do with the Romanist rite of infant baptism, Paul.*

Paul: *Let me ask you one question, my anti-papal friend. Were there infants among the children of Israel?*

Bernard: *Yes, I suppose so.¹*

Paul: *Well then. There you have it. Since the whole of Israel was baptised, and since there were children among their ranks, it follows that these infants were baptised. Hence, you have infant baptism plainly recorded in the New Testament.*

Bernard: *What? Just hold on there just a minute, Paul. That was an Old Testament event. Christian baptism was not even instituted yet. I admit that*

¹Ex. 12:37: "And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Soccoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, *beside children.*"

the text does use the word 'baptism' but it is really speaking of pictures here, examples rather than realities.

Paul: *OK then Bernard. If it is speaking only of pictures, then were there any infants in the picture?*

Bernard: *Yes, I've already admitted to that.*

Paul: *So what we've now agreed on is that this text is painting a picture of infants being baptised, and that this picture is to serve as an example to the New Testament church.*

Bernard: *What you are doing is reading into the text things that aren't actually there. There is no mention of individual infants in these verses at all.*

Paul: *Actually, Bernard, the whole point of this passage is that the infant church was really baptised at this point although it did not realise the significance of what was happening at the time. The Apostle Paul is pointing back to this baptismal event and saying, "Don't you know that you have already been baptised?" They needed to be told this because, just like an infant being baptised, the church did not know what was occurring, but could only understand the meaning and significance later. That is why, in this part of Exodus, the church is constantly referred to as "the CHILDREN of Israel." The apostle is making the point that the New Testament church is really the one church of God which has now reached maturity, having already been baptised as an infant-church in the Red Sea.*

Bernard: *Maybe that's all true, I don't know. But one thing is certain. If the church was baptised there in its infancy, and had infants among them, then the mode was by immersion, as they were covered by the Red Sea. Ha - got you now!*

Paul: *Bernard, to be honest, I have to admit that you are right at this point. There certainly were people immersed that day in the Red Sea. But, unfortunately for you, it was the Egyptians, not the children of Israel, who were immersed, although they were not baptised.² In fact, on this occasion,*

²Ex. 14:28; 15:19: "And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them ... For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea."

true baptism depended on not being immersed. If anything, the Bible suggests elsewhere that the children of Israel had water poured upon them at this point.³ You see, Bernard, in the Bible, immersion is a picture of death, not deliverance.⁴

Bernard: *I don't care. I can't understand all this deep theology. All I know is that the Bible says "Repent and be baptised", and that's good enough for me. You've given me something to think about though. I will hear you again on this matter. What time did you say your evening service is at?*

This article was authored by Brian Crossett, an elder and Education Transport Officer.

Francis Turretin on the sacraments in the Old and New Testaments: "Thus Christ crucified (who is as it were the nucleus of the sacraments) is signified with all the saving benefits which he purchased for us by his death, for the commemoration of which these things were instituted, to confirm both its truth and its utility - signifying the truth, exhibiting and sealing the utility. As Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever (Heb. 13:8), so he has always declared the same grace to his church and sealed it by different sacraments. This is the reason why with respect to the internal matter Paul ascribes the sacraments of the New Testament to believers under the Old (I Cor. 10:1-3); and in turn the sacraments of the Old to believers under the New (Col. 2:11; I Cor. 5:7)" (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 3 [Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997], p. 340).

³Ps. 77:17-20; 68:7-9. For more on the bearing of I Cor. 10 to the manner of baptism see *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism* by Jay E. Adams (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975), pp. 28-35.

⁴See I Pet. 3:20-21, in which Noah and those in the ark are said to have been "baptised" although not immersed, while those "immersed" in water were the wicked world, which was a type of the final "immersion" of the wicked in the lake of fire.