A Case for Infant Baptism

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Introduction

This essay is intended to set forth a biblical and coherent case for infant baptism, beginning with an understanding of roots in the Old Testament practice of circumcision and its parallels with a theology of baptism. This issue is not an issue for which proof-texts can be cited and then the issue decided. In many ways, the debate rests on (1) the matter of burden of proof and (2) which underlying theology best explains all Biblical passages. It will be argued that the theology behind infant baptism best expresses the Biblical passages that address the subject. Furthermore, it will be argued that the issue of "burden of proof" ought to rest on those who would seek to overturn the structures of the Old Covenant. It is my opinion that there is enough evidence in the New Testament for the Church to practice infant baptism.

Old Testament Background

The Structure of Old Testament Covenants

Old Testament covenants follow a pattern that is very similar to treaty documents and royal annals found in the Ancient Near East in the second millennium B.C. When a suzerain (king) captured or threatened to capture another state, the suzerain would many times offer a treaty to the king of that state. If the treaty was accepted, that state would become a vassal to the suzerain. In this case, stipulations would be given as to how the vassal state would serve the suzerain. Usually, there was a tribute and loyalty to be given to the suzerain in exchange for protection from enemies. A list of sanctions would be given to determine what would happen in the case of covenant fidelity or infidelity. If the vassal state was loyal to the suzerain and the stipulations of the covenant, that state would receive blessings, including protection from enemies, etc. If the vassal state was disloyal to the suzerain and the stipulations of the covenant, that state would receive curses, including the possibility of invasion and destruction of the vassal state.

In Ancient Israel, Yahweh was the great Suzerain and Israel was the vassal state. After God redeemed her from slavery in Egypt, Israel became a vassal state to Yahweh (Deut. 5:6ff). Stipulations were therefore given to set out exactly how Israel was to loyal to her suzerain (Deut. 5—26). Sanctions were also set down to explain the blessings and curses that Israel would receive for her covenant fidelity or infidelity (Deut. 27—30). If Israel obeyed the stipulations of the covenant, she would be allowed to remain in the land of Israel and would be protected from her enemies (Deut. 30:15-16, 18-20). If Israel disobeyed, she would eventually be exiled from the land of Israel (Deut. 30:1-2, 17-18). All this is not to say that in the Old Testament the Israelites received salvation because of their works. On the contrary, salvation was a promise given to them to be accepted by faith (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-6). Rather, the Mosaic covenant had to

do with whether or not the Israelites would keep the privilege of living in the land of Israel, not whether or not they were saved.

One dynamic that is consistent throughout all the Old Testament covenants (as well as the treaty documents and royal annals of the ancient near east[1]) is that these covenants extended to the children of believers. This can be demonstrated by a brief perusal of the passages dealing with the various covenants of the Old Testament:

· Adam: In Genesis 1:28, God commanded Adam, "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it…" Part of the way God structured the covenant with Adam was the command for Adam to produce offspring. Also, in Rom. 5:12-21, Paul contrasts Adam and Christ. Sin and death entered the world through Adam, salvation and life come through Christ. What is implicit in this passage (particularly in verse 12) is that it is the descendents of Adam were effected by his disobedience.

· Noah: In Genesis 9:1, God reiterated the same command He had previously given to Adam in Gen. 1:28, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." Also, in Gen. 9:8-9, God clearly states that He is going to establish a covenant with Noah and his descendents.

· Abraham: In Gen. 15:18, God says that it is to Abraham's descendents that he has given the land. In Gen. 17:1-4, God says that part of the covenant between God and Abraham was that He would multiply Abraham exceedingly. In Gen. 17:7, God explicitly states that the covenant is an everlasting covenant between God, Abraham, and his descendents.

· Moses: In Deut. 29:10-15, God states that the covenant extends to the "little ones," and "wives." Deut. 29:29 states that "the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever."

· David: In 2 Sam. 7:12-16, God clearly tells David that the benefits of the covenant with David will be extended to his children. Furthermore, Ps. 89:3-4 says that God will establish David's seed forever.

These verses, to name a few, demonstrate the fact that within the Old Testament framework, children were to be considered members of the covenant. Children were thus to receive the covenantal sign of circumcision, since they were covenant members.

The Nature of Circumcision

In order to properly understand baptism, it is imperative to first understand the nature of circumcision in the Old Testament.

Sign of the Covenant

When God established His covenant with Abraham, He mandated that His covenant be accompanied by a sign (Gen. 17:9-14). In verse 11, God says, "And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you." In verses 10 and 12, God also says that Abraham's descendents were to be circumcised as well. What is important is that circumcision was considered to be a sign of the covenant God had established with Abraham. This covenant consists of God's promise to Abraham that He would bring him and his descendants into the land of Canaan. Thus circumcision was a sign of the promise God had made to Abraham and his descendents. It was God's pledge to His covenanted people that He would fulfill the promise He had given to Abraham.

As a consequence to being a sign of the covenant, circumcision was also a sign of the blessings and curses of the covenant. As Meredith Kline explains, circumcision in the Old Testament symbolized an oath of allegiance to Yahweh. The cutting of the foreskin was only a token cutting. Should the covenant-child grow up and become a covenant breaker, he would receive the curses of the covenant. He was to be "cut off"—that is, circumcised—from his people by death (Gen. 17:14; Ex. 4:24-6; Num. 15:30; Eze. 14:6-8). Of course, the hope was that the child would be faithful to the covenant. As such, the circumcision oath was also an act of consecration. This fact is evident in the "circumcision of the heart" passages in the Old Testament (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 6:10; 9:24; c.f. Rom. 2:29). Jeremiah exclaims in an effort to spare the people of Judah from judgment, "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; circumcise your hearts!" (Jer. 4:4).[2]

This is ultimately fulfilled in Christ, for Christ was "circumcised" on our behalf by His death on the cross (Col. 2:11-12). Here the phrase "circumcision of Christ" ought to be seen as an "objective genitive"—that is, the circumcision done to Christ when he was crucified on our behalf. Note Paul's use of the phrase "body of death" in Col. 1:22 and 2:11. In Col. 1:22, it is by Christ's "body of flesh through death" that God reconciled us. In parallel fashion, in Col. 2:11, it is by "stripping away [Christ's] body of flesh" in His circumcision (i.e., crucifixion) that we are "circumcised" to Him. Meredith Kline calls it "the mystery of a divine circumcision—the circumcision of God in the crucifixion of his only begotten."[3] It is also worth noting the verbal parallels when Paul's baptismal expression in Col. 2:11-12 is compared to Rom. 6:3-4. Here, the individual is to identify with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. Likewise, in Col. 2, the believer is identified with Christ in His burial and resurrection, with "the circumcision of Christ" functioning in a parallel manner to Christ's death in Rom. 6.[4]

By His death on the cross, Christ took upon Himself the curses of the covenant for His own (Gal. 4:10-13) so that we might receive the blessings of the covenant—eternal life with Him in the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 4:14). In the present age, those who are circumcised are seeking to be justified by works of the law instead of by faith in Christ. Therefore, Paul says they are bound to keep the whole law (Gal. 5:3). However, no one can perfectly keep the law, so those who seek

justification through the law rather than by faith receive the curse—i.e., they are "cut off" (i.e., "circumcised") from Christ (Gal. 5:4).

Sign of Faith

Not only is circumcision a sign of the covenant, but it is a sign of faith. Romans 4:11 states that Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised." Paul describes circumcision as a sign of faith. This concept is quite consistent with the Old Testament understanding of circumcision. In the Old Testament, circumcision symbolized purification from defilement.[5] Furthermore, the Old Testament routinely makes use of circumcision imagery to describe a change in the attitude of the heart towards serving and worshipping the living God. In Deut. 10:16, God's covenanted people are commanded, "Circumcise your heart and stiffen your neck once more." Jer. 4:4 exclaims, "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart" (see also Lev. 26:41; Deut. 30:6; Jer. 9:26; Eze. 44:7, 9; Acts 7:51; Rom. 2:28-29). As mentioned before, the outward sign of circumcision was a symbol of an inward "conversion" and consecration to serve the living God. The true Israelite in the Old Testament was the one who had circumcised his heart as well as having been circumcised in the flesh (Rom. 2:28-29).

This concept is wonderfully illustrated by Paul in the New Testament. In Romans 9:6-8, Paul claims that not all of Abraham's physical children are his true descendents. Rather, he claims "it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." In Gal. 3:7-8 Paul claims that it is really "those who believe who are children of Abraham." These statements do not reflect a truth that had just become true in the New Testament. Rather, they reflect a dynamic that has been operative throughout the Old Testament. This is precisely Paul's argument in Galatians. Those who seek justification through the law are not even being faithful to their Old Testament Scriptures (let alone to Christ), for the promise of salvation was given to Abraham apart from works (Rom. 4:11) and was received by faith (Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:6), and the giving of the Law under Moses did not do away with that promise (Gal. 3:17). It was only those who had faith who would receive the promised salvation. Because of this, the children of Abraham by natural birth were circumcised in the flesh in anticipation of the time when those children would circumcise their hearts to become children of Abraham by faith. The following diagram illustrates this principle.

New Testament Baptism

The Question of Burden of Proof

There are no explicit passages in the New or Old Testament which either affirm or deny the practice of infant baptism in the New Testament. Therefore, the question of infant baptism, in many ways, boils down to one of burden of proof. The credo-baptist (one who believes in

believer's baptism) says that the burden of proof is on the paedo-baptist (one who believes in infant baptism), because there is no explicit warrant in the New Testament for baptizing infants. The paedo-baptist, on the other hand, claims that the credo-baptist needs to find warrant from the New Testament to overturn the structures of the covenantal structures in the Old Testament.

One thing that must be understood when discussion baptism in the New Testament s that the New Covenant extends to children of believers. This is prophesied in Jer. 32:38-40 and indicated by Acts 2:39—"The promise is for your and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." This concept is entirely consistent with the covenants of the Old Testament. In all the covenants described in the Bible, there is an explicit statement that the covenant extends to the children of believers. This is also inferred in 1 Cor. 7:14, where the children of one believing parent are called "holy"—that is, we must infer, set apart from the world by the child's relationship to the church by virtue of the believing parent.[6]

Another thing that must be understood is that baptism in the New Testament serves the same function as circumcision in the Old Testament. In the same way that the Lord 's Supper is the New Testament expression of the Passover meal,[7] baptism is the New Testament expression of circumcision. Intuitively, this is seen to be true, for in the book of Acts, new converts are not told to be circumcised as they would have been in the Old Testament. Instead they are told to be baptized (Acts 2:38). Furthermore, Col. 2:11-12 makes this connection clear: "and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." In this passage, circumcision and baptism are clearly linked—baptism is considered the New Testament expression of circumcision.

These two considerations make one thing clear: the New Testament believers would have presumed that they should baptized their children unless there was a change effected in the New Covenant which would reverse the structures of the Old Covenant. In other words, the burden of proof is actually on the credo-baptist, not on the paedo-baptist. If the structure of the New Covenant is the same as the Old such that the covenant extends to the children of believers, and baptism serves the same function that circumcision once held, then the subjects of baptism should be considered the same unless explicitly told otherwise in the New Testament. This truth can be stated another way. It was a good thing that infants were circumcised in the Old Testament. The sign of circumcision was given to those who were in the Old Covenant, and it was a good thing to be in the covenant. In fact, it was a gracious thing to be in the covenant and receive the covenant sign. Why would this gracious thing be taken away in the New Testament? Why would grace diminish under the New Covenant? The credo-baptist ought to justify how it

is that children are now excluded from the covenant and therefore no longer suitable recipients of the covenant sign.

Continuity and Discontinuity in the Book of Acts

There are three areas in which one might expect either continuity or discontinuity in the book of Acts regarding the practice of baptism. These are: (1) the baptism of both males and females, (2) the baptism of Jews and Gentiles, and (3) the baptism of believers and their children. On the first two, we have explicit statements of discontinuity with the Old Testament. On the third, we have none.

Baptism of Both Males and Females

In Acts 2:17,18, Peter quotes a passage from Joel in which it is prophesied that in the New Testament times, God would pour out His Spirit on men and women alike (baptismal language) and both sons and daughters will prophesy. Furthermore, in Acts 8:12 we find that it was the common practice to baptize "men and women alike." In Acts 16:15, we are told that Paul and his companions baptized a Philippian woman named Lydia, along with all those in her household. Under the Old Covenant only male children were circumcised; therefore, Luke explicitly makes known this discontinuity between the Old and New Covnenants. Under the Old Covenant only males were circumcised, while in the New Covenant, both men and women are to be baptized.

Baptism of Jews and Gentiles

In Acts 2:38-39, Peter states that the promise is not only for Jews and their children, but "for all who are far off" as well. Gentiles were to be baptized along with Jews upon conversion to Christ. This was the practice of the Apostles throughout the book of Acts, though not without some controversy. In Acts 8:38, Phillip baptized an Ethiopian eunuch. In Acts 10:44-48, Luke records how it became the policy of the apostles to baptized Gentile converts along with Jews, for the Spirit had been given to them as well as to the Jews. Under the Old Covenant, male, Gentile converts to Judaism were to be circumcised; however, circumcision still remained a large barrier between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11-18). Under the New Covenant, however, this barrier was taken out of the way. Both Jews and Gentiles can and should be baptized together. Luke was careful to make clear the nature of this discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants.

Baptism of Believers and their Children

When it come to the question of whether or not the children of believers are to be baptized, however, we find no hint from Luke that there is any discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants. In stead, Luke records Peter's words in Acts 2:39: "The promise is for you and for your children." Certainly there are many accounts of new believers being baptized as adult converts, yet this is to be expected when missionary activity is taking place. Paedo-baptists

believe that adult converts ought to be baptized, since they are now included in the covenant.[8] What is striking in the book of Acts is that Luke records several accounts of "household baptisms."[9] For instance, in Acts 16:15, Lydia and all those in her household were baptized. In Acts 16:33, Paul baptized the Philippian jailor along with everyone in his household. In neither of these instances is there any record that anyone in the households of these believers were converted before being baptized. Nor is there any statement that anyone preached the gospel to those in the household before they were baptized. In fact, in Acts 16:33, Luke records that in the very hour the Philippian jailer was converted, he washed their wounds and then immediately he was baptized along with his household. It does not appear that anyone even had time to preach the gospel to the household.[10] It seems that the family did come to believe, but we are not given any clear indication that they believed before they were baptized.

Nevertheless, it is certainly possible that the households of these believers contained no infants and were converted before being baptized. Therefore, there is no ironclad proof of the practice of infant baptism in these passages. However, this is more than an argument from silence. Luke has been careful to delineate areas of discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants with regard to the practice of baptizing women and Gentiles. Yet when it comes to the practice of baptizing the children of believers, Luke has not delineated any areas of discontinuity. In fact, if Luke was not a paedo-baptist, then he was somewhat careless when he wrote about these household baptisms. These passages in Acts 16 would have provided him with a perfect opportunity to make known any discontinuity on the practice of infant baptism. Luke could have written, "and when the household of Lydia [or the Philippian jailor] believed in the Lord Jesus, they were baptized along with Lydia [or the Philippian jailor]." Since there is no indication of any discontinuity in the practice of infant baptism, and since we have evidence of household baptisms in the book of Acts, it would certainly seem more likely that Luke understood that there was continuity between the Old and New Covenants on the practice of infant baptism. After reading the book of Acts, we are left to conclude that the subjects of baptism include the children of believers, in continuity with the practice of circumcision in the Old Testament.

Objections to Infant Baptism

Baptism is a sign of Faith

Some object to infant baptism on the basis of passages such as Rom. 6:3-4, 1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:27-28 and Col. 2:11-12. These objections usually center around the idea that baptism is closely linked with the faith of believers, so that only believers are the proper recipients of this sign of faith. This objection may take one of four forms:

Objection #1—"Baptism is a sign of the faith already existing in the believer. It is an outward expression of an inward commitment. If that inward commitment is not present, the sign should not be given." Such a theology of baptism is in many ways a man-centered theology. It invests the sign only with a meaning generating from an inward conversion, not God's grace. In fact, as

we have already noted, the covenant signs are signs of the covenant of grace. They are gracious signs, not human commitment signs. As with circumcision (see above), baptism is a sign of God's faithfulness to His covenantal promises in Christ. He promises in the sacrament that He will save the believer. The flip side of this reality is that should the child never ratify the covenant with his faith, he will receive the curses of the covenant. Furthermore, covenantal signs are communal signs, not individual signs. Baptism does not symbolize one person's commitment to God as much as it consecrates the person to God by virtue of being included within the covenant family, the family of believers. Paedo-baptism is thus a much-needed correction to the rampant individualism that has influenced American churches.

Objection #2—"Baptism symbolizes union with Christ. This union with Christ is only achieved by faith; therefore, only believers should be baptized." It is certainly true that baptism symbolizes union with Christ; this is entirely correct. In fact, the Westminster Confession of Faith teaches and affirms this fact.[11] However, the conclusion that only believers are to be baptized does not follow from the premise. We must not confuse the sign with the thing signified. The sign symbolizes union with Christ is given to the children of those who believe and have been united with Christ by faith. The children of believers are part of the covenant Christ has established with His people; therefore, the sign of the covenant is to be given to the children of believers.

Objection #3—"In these passages, baptism symbolizes purification from sins. This forgiveness and purification is only achieved by faith; therefore, only believers should be baptized." Certainly it is also true that baptism symbolizes purification from sins (see also Tit. 3:5; Cor. 6:11). Yet once again, the conclusion that only believers should be baptized is unwarranted, for again, the sign is not to be confused with the thing signified. Children of believers are baptized in anticipation of the day when they will come to faith and receive purification from sins. Furthermore, this objection would also negate the validity of circumcision in the Old Testament. As stated before, circumcision in the Old Testament symbolized purification from sins and circumcision imagery was used to describe that inward "conversion" and consecration to serve and worship the living God. Yet circumcision was administered to infants; therefore, it is not inconsistent to baptize infants as well.

Objection #4—"It is presupposed that those who are reading these passages were baptized as believers. Therefore, only believers should be baptized." For the sake of argument, let us assume that this is true. Even if this is the case, it is to be expected that the original recipients of these letters were baptized as adults. We must remember that these letters were written to missionary churches, and the recipients of these letters were often the first generation of Christians in these churches. Certainly, therefore, most of the leaders of these churches were baptized as adult converts. It is not surprising, therefore, that Paul would assume that the readers were baptized as adults.

Ultimately, since baptism is merely the New Testament expression of circumcision, any theological argument against baptism works equally well against circumcision. However, we have clear indication of the practice of infant circumcision. Therefore, credo-baptists ought to be extremely careful about how they question the practice of infant baptism, for many times they disallow the practice of infant circumcision on the same grounds.

The Mode of Baptism

Some argue that the Greek word baptizō (βαπτίζω) meaning "baptize" actually means "immerse" and therefore baptism ought to be given only to those who are believers. However, Greek dictionaries give many meanings for the word βαπτίζω, and while some do include the meaning "immerse" or "dip," they also include other meanings. The Baur-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon, for instance, notes that it can be used "of Jewish ritual washings" (Mk 7:4; Lk 11:38).[12] Similarly, the Louw-Nida lexicon writes that the word means "to wash (in some contexts, possibly by dipping into water), with a view to making objects ritually acceptable—'to wash, to purify, washing, purification,'"[13] clearly implying that other contexts involved washing without dipping in water. In Acts 8:38, we are told that both Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch "went down in the water" but this does not appear to be a statement about the mode of baptism, for Phillip went down in the water with the Ethiopian. The phrase simply means that they both walked into the water so that Phillip could baptize him; they didn't perform the baptism at the shoreline. In other words, βαπτίζω in the New Testament simply means "baptize" pure and simple—it does not convey a mode of baptism.

Beyond this, many passages use the word βαπτίζω in a way that conveys a mode other than immersion. In 1 Cor. 10:2 and 1 Peter 3:20-21, βαπτίζω is used, but in neither case is the baptism by immersion. In 1 Cor. 10, the baptism was by the glory cloud and the sea, and the Israelites were not immersed in either. In 1 Peter 3, Noah and his family were baptized in the ark precisely because they were not immersed in the flood waters. Romans 6:1-4 describes our baptism in terms of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, but Jesus was not immersed in the ground; he was placed in a tomb above ground. In John 3:23, John describes the location (Aenon near Salim) where John the Baptist chose to baptize as a place with "plenty of water" (literally, "many waters"). This location cannot be identified with certainty, but it is likely to be a place about "seven miles south of Besian," where there are "seven springs within a radius of a quarter of a mile."[14] If this is the case, the phrase "many waters" refers to the seven springs found there. These springs are not deep enough to immerse a person. However, there is plenty of water there to baptize by sprinkling or pouring. It is therefore impossible, if the location of John's baptism has been identified correctly, that John baptized by immersion.

Col. 2 and Rom. 6 teaches us that the bloodless rite of baptism in the New Testament era symbolized the Christian's union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection and served in the place of physical circumcision. This identification is not made superficially by the mode of baptism, being somehow immersed in and raised out of water. The reason for this identification

is that water itself is indicative of judgment and death. Noah was baptized and saved though the waters of judgment surrounding him (1 Pet. 3:20-22). Moses was baptized and saved by crossing through the waters of judgment in the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1-5). In neither of these examples were those saved immersed in water; the waters surrounded them, bringing death as judgment on others, though God's people were saved. Just as the Israelites were baptized "into Moses" as he led them through the waters (1 Cor. 10:2), so we are baptized "into Christ" and spared the judgment of eternal death (Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:12). Our baptism "into Him" thus consecrates us to Him (like circumcision of old) as the One who is sufficient to lead us through the waters of death into eternal salvation. It expresses the union between Christ and His covenanted community.[15]

There is no instance in the Bible where a mode of baptism is prescribed for us. While immersion is a possibility, so is sprinkling and pouring. For instance, in Ezekiel 36:26-28, God speaks of what the New Covenant times will be like. He says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean." In Hebrews 10:22, we are told, "let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." For pouring, there is a connection in the Gospels between the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" and the "outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 1:33; Lk. 3:16; Acts 2:17; Tit. 3:6). While possible examples of sprinkling and pouring can be found in the Bible, none of these passages provide us with a prescribed or commanded mode of baptism. There simply is no mode of baptism commanded in the Bible. All three forms—immersion, sprinkling, and pouring, therefore appear to be acceptable modes of baptism.

The mode of baptism cannot be used as a case against infant baptism. A strong case can be made for modes other than immersion and it is entirely possible to immerse infants.[16]

Conclusion

Certainly there is no proof-text for the practice of infant baptism that would produce an iron-clad case for the practice. If there were, there would be no debate. Yet I believe that a coherent and biblical case for infant baptism can be made. The burden of proof in this debate appears to be on the credo-baptist who seeks to deny that the children of believers are worthy recipients of the covenant sign any longer and introduce a discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants. However, credo-baptists appear to be unable to demonstrate this discontinuity. Paedo-baptists believe that there is continuity with the Old Covenant in the baptism of infants. There are no passages which teach any discontinuity in this area and there is some confirming evidence that infant baptism was practiced in the book of Acts. Therefore, the practice of infant baptism in the Church today appears to be warranted by Scripture.

This argument for infant baptism is not a Roman Catholic argument. Presbyterians do not believe in baptismal regeneration or that baptism in any sense saves. Presbyterians and Reformed Christians believe that baptism is a sign to be given to those who are part of the

covenant of grace. A person is not part of the covenant because of baptism; baptism is a sign given to those who are part of the covenant. Those who are part of the covenant are not necessarily saved; rather, children are brought up in the covenant so that they might be raised in the context of the family of believers, so that the church may provide the child with a "climate of plausibility" that would make the Christian faith seem real and vibrant and true. Baptism is administered in anticipation of that time when they will come to faith and receive the forgiveness of their sins and be normal, communing members of Christ's church.

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[1]Niehaus, "The Covenantal Household: A Study of the Destruction and Salvation of Households in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," (not yet published). This paper demonstrates that the blessings and curses of the covenants in Hatti, Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, and Israel extended to the households of those who are members of the covenant.
[2] Meredith Kline, By Oath Consigned (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 44-5.
[3] Kline, 45.
[4] Ibid. 71.
[5]John Murray, Christian Baptism (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 5.
[6]The word "holy" need not be understood as "saved," but simply as "set apart" or "consecrated." There is a sense in which the children of believing parents are "set apart" because of their parent's relationship to Christ.
[7]In fact, the meal the disciples ate with Jesus in the upper room was a Passover meal.
[8]This, of course, assumes that these were not baptized as children by their believing parents.
[9]It should be noted here that the issue is not whether or not specifically over whether or not infants are to be baptized, but whether or not the children of believers are to be baptized. These children may be older than infants, yet still members of the household of their parents.
[10]See also 1 Cor. 1:16 for a reference to a household baptism.
[11]WCF 28.1.
[12]William, F. Arndt, Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature : A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, c1979).

[13]Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains. electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., LN 53.31 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989).
[14]Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 210.
[15]Meredith Kline, By Oath Consigned (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 67-69.
[16]The wife of one of my professors, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, was baptized by immersion as an infant.