

# *Baptism of Infants*

**Francis A. Schaeffer (1912-1984)**

IN introduction, there are several things to emphasize as we begin this study.

1. We do not believe in Baptismal Regeneration. Let me remind you that it was over the question of the sacraments that Calvin and Luther differed during the Reformation Period. To Calvin, and those who have followed him, the important thing is the individual's coming directly to Christ for salvation. In regard to baptism, we who are Presbyterians, are interested primarily not in the water baptism but in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which takes place when the individual accepts Christ as his personal Saviour.

Our Confession of Faith, Chapter 28, Section 5, makes it very clear that our subordinate standards do not teach Baptismal Regeneration: "Although it be a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated."

Let us again say then, once for all, we do not believe in Baptismal Regeneration.

2. Further, in introduction, let us remind you that no one has to accept our view of baptism to join our churches. The door to membership in these local visible churches rests upon the individual's credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour.

3. Historically, Presbyterians have not made an issue over baptism. However, if we never teach or preach it, people forget the Biblical facts upon which our view of baptism rests. We should not ride our view of baptism as a hobby any more than any other teaching, it is not the center of our theology, but neither should we fail to teach it in its proper place.

4. At times people say that they believe in our view of baptism but do not practice it because of the abuse of the Roman Catholic Church. If this is good reasoning, then let us give up all use of the Lord's Supper, for the heart of classical Roman Catholic error has been its teaching concerning the Mass.

Further, let me remind you that the Cambellites, "the Christian Church" who practice immersion and adult baptism, are as in error concerning the teaching of Baptismal Regeneration as is the Roman Catholic Church. Hence, on this reasoning, those who are

Baptistic should give up immersion and adult baptism.

Further again, there are many outstanding modernists who are Baptists. Thus it is that the abuse of baptism by various parties proves nothing either way.

5. Finally, in introduction, let me remind you that we have good fellowship with our Baptist brethren. We all realize that a Christian's view of baptism should not be the determining factor of such fellowship. Even further, those who are Baptist are welcome to the Lord's Table in our church, and I praise God that we are welcome at the Lord's Table in many of the churches of our Baptist brethren. This is as it should be. However, this does not mean that we are lukewarm in our view of baptism. We believe that our view is Biblical, and that the position of baptism by immersion only, or for adults only, is a mistake.

#### IMMERSION

First, in regard to immersion, let me say that, personally, I will immerse if the individual desires this mode of baptism. Second, it is well to remember that the Greek Catholic Church and certain groups of Brethren have immersed babies as well as adults, and hence there is no necessary link between the mode of baptism used and the question of the baptism of infants. I have never immersed an infant, but I would not refuse to do so.

As a matter of fact, from evidence from the Catacombs before 200, it would seem probable that effusion, pouring, could have been the most common mode of baptism in the early church. That is, they stood in water and then had water poured on their head. Our position as to the mode of baptism is that immersion is not the only mode.

The words *baptizo* and *bapto* in the classical Greek are used with great latitude. Neither of these words can be said always to mean immerse. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word "baptize" is used in such a way that it could not possibly always mean immersion. For example, in Daniel 4:23 in the Septuagint, it says that Nebuchadnezzar was baptized with dew. Certainly no one would say that he was immersed in dew.

In the New Testament use of the word, it is equally true that the word "baptize" cannot always mean immersion. For example, in Hebrews 9:10, we read:

"Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation." The King James Version uses "washings" instead of "baptizings", but the Greek says "baptizings." This passage refers to the Old Testament ceremonial cleansings, such as the red heifer, and the Day of Atonement. These Old Testament cleansings were never by immersion, but always by sprinkling. Notice how Hebrews 9 itself, verses 19 and 21, emphasize the fact that the

Old Testament ceremonial cleansings were by sprinkling.

I Corinthians 10:1, 2 is another such passage:

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." In this case the Jews certainly were not immersed.

Mark 7:4 is also clear: "And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables." Again in the King James Version, the word "washings" is used, but the Greek again is "baptizing". If baptize always means immerse, it means that the Jews, each time they came from the market place, had to fill a tub with water and go under, head and all. This is impossible, for most of them had no such accommodation in their homes. Further, this passage would also say that they constantly immersed their tables. This is again obviously impossible. Many of the ancient versions add "and couches" to this passage. To say that they regularly immersed their beds, even if they did use bed rolls, is foolish.

At least three of the baptisms mentioned in the New Testament are difficult to imagine as immersion. The eunuch was baptized by a desert road. The jailer was baptized in the middle of the night. Three thousand were baptized on the Day of Pentecost. It is easy to see how these took place if sprinkling or pouring were used, it is difficult if immersion is taken as the only mode.

### **Baptistic Arguments**

The Baptistic argument that "Jesus went down into the water and came up out of the water" means nothing. One year we took our vacation at the seashore. one of my little daughters went down into the water and came out of the water every day, but she would not put her head under for all our coaxing. The simple fact is that the meaning of this passage is altogether fulfilled if Jesus went down until His feet were in the Jordan.

As to Romans 6:3,4b: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death". This passage cannot be used to prove immersion. In the first place, if it is taken to mean water baptism, many of us believe that it proves too much, and that we would then logically have to believe in Baptismal Regeneration. Surely, it is not the water baptism which baptizes us into Christ's death, but the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, however, even if it is taken to mean water baptism, this passage means more than the totally inadequate picture of burial that going under the water can give. What these verses teach is. the great and marvelous reality that, when we accept Christ as our Saviour, we actually have died with Him.

These things are enough to show that the Word of God does not teach that baptism must be by immersion only.

Lastly, concerning this matter of immersion only, we would remind you that if immersion is the only mode, then the catholicity of the sacraments is destroyed. The Lord's Supper obviously can be given anywhere. Sprinkling can be performed anywhere, but if baptism is by immersion only, there are many parts of the world in which Christians must be denied this sacrament. Those in the desert, those in the land of unending cold, and those on beds of sickness cannot be baptized by immersion, even if they want to.

The fact is that the position that baptism is by immersion only is *not* tenable.

#### INFANT BAPTISM

We do not believe that those who are Baptist have any more Biblical grounds for teaching adult baptism only than they have for teaching immersion only.

As we begin our thinking on this subject, let us place ourselves in the position of a Jew who has been saved in the early Christian era. He is a Jew, and now he has put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. His mind has not changed overnight, and certain great truths which his people have known and believed for two thousand years are much in his thinking.

#### **Salvation by Faith Alone**

First of all, a Jew saved in the early Christian era would realize that even as he had been justified by faith alone, so also Abraham had been justified by faith alone two thousand years before. Romans 4:1-5 makes this abundantly clear: "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scriptures? Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Galatians 3-6 is just as definite: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

The fact is that the Bible carefully emphasizes that Abraham was justified by faith and that only, just as we are. It is a serious mistake to believe that anyone in any dispensation, has been or can be saved in any other manner than by faith plus nothing. Religious or moral obedience has no place as far as personal salvation is concerned in any dispensation. Notice that it is Paul's writings that stress this fact so clearly.

#### **The Covenant Is Immutable or the Unity Of the Covenant**

Secondly, the Jew saved in the early Christian days would realize that the Covenant made with Abraham is Immutable, that is, unchangeable. Hebrews 6:13-18: "For when God made promise to

Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself. Saying, surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

This passage is very definite that, first, the Covenant made with Abraham is unchangeable, and that, second, it includes us who are saved in this dispensation.

### **Covenant Is Primarily Spiritual**

This Jew would also remember that the Covenant made with Abraham was primarily spiritual. For those of us who are Gentiles saved in this era the national promises made to the Jews do not apply, but the spiritual promises do apply. Romans 4:16 is clear concerning this. The 13th verse tells us definitely that God is here speaking of the promise to Abraham, and yet verse 16 is equally clear that we, the Gentiles saved in this present era, are the fulfillment of that promise. "Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all." Therefore, the promise could not be primarily national, but spiritual. Galatians 3:7,8,13,14 and 25 tell us exactly this same thing. We, the Gentile Christians, are the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham; therefore, (though there is a natural, national portion of the Abrahamic covenant) the promise is not primarily national but spiritual. These passages also show that there is a spiritual unity in all dispensations.

Galatians 3:17 makes it abundantly plain that the spiritual promise made to Abraham was not set aside by the giving of the Mosaic Law four- hundred and thirty years afterward. The spiritual unity was not broken by the giving of the law on Sinai.

This Jew of ours, therefore, would have in his mind that Abraham was saved in the same manner as we are saved; and that the promise made to Abraham is Immutable and primarily spiritual; and further, that we who are saved in this dispensation are included in that promise. He would have in mind the Unity of the Covenant.

### **The Outward Sign**

This Christian Jew would also remember that the spiritual promise in the Old Testament days was sealed with a physical sign. Romans 4:10, 11a: "How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith, and that after he was justified,

circumcision was given as a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised." This passage says that Abraham was justified by faith, and that after he was justified, circumcision was given as a seal of the righteousness which was his by faith before he was circumcised.

The Old Testament and the New Testament alike also remind us that the circumcision of the flesh was to be an outward sign of the true circumcision of the heart. In other words, that true circumcision was a spiritual thing. Deuteronomy 10:16 reads: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked." Romans 2:28, 29 says the same thing; "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Circumcision, therefore, was primarily spiritual.

Further than this, we must never forget that circumcision is not just a sign through the years of Abraham's faith, but it is a sign of the faith of the individual father. The case of the proselyte and his child proves this. Exodus 12:48; "And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof." In other words, when a Gentile became a true believer in the living God and wanted to have a part in the religious observances of the Passover, first of all he had to be circumcised, but all his children had to be circumcised too. Thus, circumcision was the sign of personal faith and not just the faith of Abraham.

Therefore, this Jew, saved in the early Christian era, would remember that not only was the promise made to Abraham primarily spiritual, but the outward seal, that was given to show the individual's faith, was also primarily to be of spiritual meaning.

This, of course, is exactly what baptism in the New Testament is; and, therefore, circumcision in the Old Testament was in that dispensation what baptism is in this, Colossians 2:11, 12 is the final proof of this. The King James Version is not as clear as it might be. The American Revised is more accurate and we quote from it. By omitting that which should be in parentheses, this is when we have: "In whom ye were also circumcised in the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism." This being so, the Bible declares that Old Testament circumcision was what baptism is in the New Testament.

#### **Sign Applied to Infants**

Now, however, realizing that baptism in the New was what circumcision was in the Old, the Jew of whom we are speaking, saved in the early days of the Christian era, would also know that, in the Old Testament, circumcision as a sign of personal faith was applied not only to the believer himself, but also to all the boy babies in the home.

In applying this sign to the boy babies in the Old Testament, circumcision was still primarily spiritual and not just national. The sign was applied not only to Isaac who was the sole representative of the racial blessing, but to Ishmael as well. Deuteronomy 30:6 makes it plain that the circumcision of the child was primarily spiritual just as was the circumcision of the adult. "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

The Jew living in the early New Testament days would know something further. He would know that in the Old Testament there were two great ordinances the Passover and Circumcision. I Corinthians 5:7, 8, as well as the fact that Christ instituted the Lord's Supper at the time of the Passover meal, makes it plain that the Lord's Supper took the place of the Passover. Colossians 2:11, 12 and the other facts which we have considered make it evident that baptism took the place of circumcision.

These things all being so, it would be impossible for the saved Jew not to expect that, as in the Old Testament the Covenant sign was applied to the believer's child, so also the sign of his faith, baptism, should likewise be applied to his child. Why should he expect less in this dispensation of fullness than he would have possessed in the Old Testament era?

#### **New Testament Practice**

These questions would be further aggravated by what this saved Jew himself would have heard taught in the New Testament time. For example, he would have heard Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2: 38, 39: Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 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." Remember, Peter said this to Jews, Jews who were used to having the outward sign of their faith applied to their children.

With all these things in his mind, he would expect his child to be baptized. If it were refused, what would you have done in his place? You would have asked the Apostles the reason why. So would the thousands of Christian Jews in that day. The question would have been asked in a hundred meetings; and Peter, John. Paul, and the others would have sat down and written in their Epistles to clear up the matter, just as they answered other questions that arose. The New Testament would have contained the clear answer as to why in the Old Testament the Covenant sign was applied to the infants of believers, but in the New Testament it was to be withheld from them.

The only reason possible for the New Testament not dialing with this problem is that the problem did not exist. The only possible reason that there was no problem in the Jews' minds was

that the believing Jews did apply the covenant sign to their children. They baptized their babies as they had circumcised them in the Old Testament dispensation.

In the light of the teaching of the whole Bible, for w not to baptize babies there would have to be a clear command in Scripture not to do so. Instead of that, the emphasis is all the other way. Of the seven cases of water baptism mentioned in the New Testament, three were of families. Someone may say, "But it does not say that them were infants involved." I would point out to you that in the light of the natural expectancy of the saved Jew, if babies were not baptized, the Scripture would have made it clear that such was the case. God deals with families in the o. T. and in the N. T. too. The promise made to the Philippian jailer, Acts 16:31b, "And thou shalt be saved, and thy house," adequately shows this. No matter what interpretation we, individually, may hold concerning this passage, certainly God here does show that He deals with families not only in the Old Testament but in the New Testament as well.

Let us never forget, God's use of signs is found in every era. He gave Noah the rainbow He gave circumcision and the Passover to the Old Testament Jew. He has given the visible church in this age the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The dispensational change from Circumcision to Baptism is no more than that of the change from the seventh day to the first as the day of worship.

#### **Church History**

Church history continues with the same lesson concerning infant baptism. Origen was born about 180 A.D. and he was baptized as an infant, Remember, this was eighty years or less after the death of the Apostle John. There are still earlier references which seem to speak of infant baptism, but there is no question in the case of Origen. The first ones who argued against infant baptism, for example Tertullian, did not do so as though it were a new practice being brought in, but did so because they had come to the un-Biblical position that one should wait until just before death to be baptized. Their arguments are therefore an incidental proof that the Church baptized infants from the beginning, for, if it were an innovation, these men who were against it because of their un-Biblical views would have delighted to have pointed out that infant baptism was not an Apostolic practice. Saint Augustine, writing concerning infant baptism, said, "This doctrine is held by the whole church, not instituted by councils, but always retained." Those who would teach that the practice of the early Church was not infant baptism should be able to show in Church History when it started. There is no such break recorded.

In the light of this, the claim that infant baptism is a product of the Roman Catholic Church is totally mistaken.

Therefore, for now almost four thousand years, since the day of Abraham, those who have

been saved by faith have been marked at the command of God by an external sign, and this external sign has, without a break, been applied not only to them but to their children.

We believe in Infant Baptism because of the unity of the spiritual promises in all dispensations. The national promises are for the Jews alone, but there is a unity of the spiritual promises throughout the whole Word of God. The basis of this unity is the great central fact of Scripture that all men of all eras are saved on the basis of the finished work of Christ through faith in Him, plus nothing, or they are not saved at all. This spiritual unity does not disturb the fact of the differences between the different eras, nor does it disturb our peculiar privileges as those saved and living in this age.

### **Baptistic Arguments**

Let us look at the usual Baptistic arguments against infant baptism.

a) "Believe and be baptized." Notice that the same thing was said in effect to Abraham concerning circumcision, "Believe and afterward be circumcised," but that it is altogether clear that the sign of his personal faith was to be applied also to his child.

Further, in the case of the first days of the Christian era, everyone who believed was of necessity baptized an adult, because, the new Testament teaching being new, no one would have been previously baptized as an infant. The same thing is true on any new mission field of any day. There are no baptized infants until there are some Christian parents.

b) Often those who are Baptistic ask why we baptize both boys and girls, when only males were circumcised in the Old Testament. Galatians 3:28 gives the answer: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye all are one in Jesus Christ." In this era, there is no difference between the man and the woman before the Lord in worship.

c) The question is sometimes asked, "If baptism took the place of circumcision, why did baptism and circumcision exist side by side for a time among the Jewish Christians?" Many Jewish believers in the early Christian Church kept various Old Testament practices at least until the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. As long as these were not thought of as adding something to Christ's finished work for personal salvation, they were allowed. Notice in this regard Paul's circumcision of Timothy, Acts 16:3, and also his partaking in the Temple worship, Acts 21:20, 26. The Bible says that Paul did these things for the sake of the believing Jews who still kept these practices. The answer, therefore, as to why baptism and circumcision existed together for a time is that this was part of the gradual clarifying of the dispensational changes.

d) Perhaps the most used Baptistic argument is that there is no definite command in Scripture

in baptizing babies. There is also no command in Scripture to change the day of worship from the seventh day to the first. In certain parts of the United States, there is a small group known as the Seventh Day Baptists. I feel that they are mistaken on both of these counts, but at least they have the virtue of consistency. To be consistent, everyone who is Baptist should worship on the seventh day.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as we have our babies baptized, let us realize that it is not a matter of magic. As parents, what we do is to covenant with God to be faithful toward the child. It is the parents' work to train the child. It is the parents' privilege in many cases to lead the child to Christ. Christian parents should not depend upon the church's evangelistic services when the child becomes an adolescent, or even a full-grown adult, to lead him to Christ. The little child should learn of Jesus Christ from his parents from his earliest childhood, and in many cases when he is yet a child he should be led to a personal acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior by his father or his mother.

Take advantage of this God-given privilege of infant baptism. The Christian parent's heart, moved and guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit, has a natural urge to bring his child to God. This is so strong that even those who are Baptist have come to the place of dedication of their children. There is no command for the dedication of children in the New Testament, but the saved parent feels such an urge to this that most Baptist churches of necessity have dedication services for the children. They are not wrong in this - their only mistake is that they do not go far enough.

Let us not stop short of all that God means us to do and to have as Christian parents. If you are a Christian, your child is a child of the Covenant, and God means him to have the engagement sign of the Covenant. As a born-again parent, it is your privilege to apply it to him.

In the Old Testament, God disciplined those who did not circumcise their children. Moses and Zipporah found this out to their sorrow. God does not deal with His people in this age in this way. We are not killed for picking up sticks on the Lord's Day, but we keep the Lord's Day nevertheless because we love our Lord. We are not killed in this age for not baptizing our children, but we should do it nevertheless because God wants us to. The Baptism of your infants is a part of your privilege as a Christian. Take it with thanksgiving along with the other good things God gives you.

#### **Questions Asked Publicly of Parents Before Infant is Baptized**

I. Do you yourselves know that you are saved through faith in Christ, not through anything you have done or ever will do, but simply through your faith in Christ's finished work on Calvary's cross

- as He died in space and time, in history?

2. Do you realize that this is not a saving ordinance and that this child will have to accept Christ as his own Saviour when he comes to the age of accountability?

3. Have you covenanted with God to give back this child to Him, so that, if He sees fit in His providence to call this child home to Himself, you will not complain against Him, or if the child grows to adulthood and is called to some form of special Christian service, you will not stand in his way but rather encourage him?

4. Do you realize that this sacrament is not a matter of magic, but that in it you covenant with God to raise this child in the fear and admonition of the Lord, to pray for and with him, to keep him in the house of God and with God's people, to be faithful in your home life for Christ as you live it before him, and to do your utmost personally to lead him to a saving knowledge of Christ at an early age?

"Baptism of Infants," from the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, ed. Philip Schaff, Vol. 1, p. 209.



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