

BAPTISM

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BAPTISM STATEMENT

Wellspring Church Baptism Statement

Credobaptism

Wellspring Church is a credobaptist (believers baptist) church. We believe that baptism is only for individuals who have made a personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Mode of Baptism

Wellspring Church baptizes by full body immersion to reflect symbolically the believer's being put to death and being buried with Christ because of his or her sins, and his or her being raised to life with Christ through His resurrection.

Wellspring believes full immersion is the mode of baptism most faithful to the interpretation of "baptism" ("*baptizō*") and the practice of baptism portrayed in Scripture. However, Wellspring also acknowledges that there are other, albeit less recognized, connotations of *baptizō*, so we consider the mode of baptism to be of secondary importance to baptism's primary focus -- a public profession of an individual's identification with and faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, Wellspring will accept as a valid baptism any believer's baptism conducted by sprinkling or pouring so long as, at the time of baptism, the baptized individual confessed his or her trust in Christ.

Membership and Baptism

Wellspring Church requires that all members be baptized as an act of obedience to the Lord's commands in Matthew 28:19-20. Applicants for membership who have not been previously baptized must promise to be baptized at the earliest opportunity. However, membership in a local church, including Wellspring, is never a pre-condition of baptism as demonstrated by Jesus' own baptism by John the Baptist outside of the context of a local church and Philip's baptism of an Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. The only condition necessary for baptism is a profession of faith. Therefore, Wellspring Church will, with joy, baptize anyone who professes faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, subject to their completing a Wellspring Baptism Class.

Baptism Class

Any individual seeking to be baptized at Wellspring Church must attend a Wellspring Baptism Class to give the church an opportunity to confirm the individual's understanding and profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and fitness to be baptized. A baptism candidate will be deemed to have completed the Baptism Class only after the Leadership Team has determined that the candidate is fit for baptism.

Paedobaptized Members/Prospective Members

As described above, and set forth in greater detail in its "Position on Baptism," Wellspring Church believes that baptism is only for individuals who have made a personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Therefore, we strongly encourage all Wellspring members who were paedobaptized (that is, baptized as infants) to be credobaptized (that is, baptized as believers).

Application for Baptism Exemption for Paedobaptized Members Hindered in Conscience

Although baptism is a very important issue of faith that Wellspring Church takes seriously, it is not essential to genuine faith. And though we believe Scripture teaches credobaptism, we recognize that a previously paedobaptized believer could have a conviction of conscience

that serves as a hurdle to being credobaptized by immersion. Therefore, a paedobaptized individual who professes faith in Christ with that kind of conviction of conscience may submit an application to the Wellspring Leadership Team explaining the conviction and to seek an exemption from credobaptism. The Leadership Team will, upon consideration of such an application, and on a case-by-case basis, determine whether the applicant has demonstrated a sufficiently strong conviction while still exhibiting humility and teachability in his or her desire to honor the church and the Lord to receive an exemption to credobaptism. All Wellspring members, even when holding firmly to views different from the official position of the church, must demonstrate a humble and teachable disposition with respect to the church leadership.

This application for exemption is available only to members, and not to any individuals holding any leadership position in the church. We agree with the following position of Bethlehem Baptist Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota:

Since we believe that the New Testament teaches and demonstrates that the mode of baptism is only the immersion of a believer in water, we therefore regard all other practices of baptism as misguided, defective, and illegitimate. Yet, while not taking these differences lightly, we would not elevate them to the level of what is essential. Thus, we will welcome into membership candidates who, after a time of study, discussion, and prayer, prescribed by the Elders, retain a conviction that it would be a violation of their conscience to be baptized by immersion as believers. This conviction of conscience must be based on a plausible, intelligible, Scripturally-based argument rather than on mere adherence to a tradition or family expectations. The elders will make all such judgments in presenting candidates for membership to the congregation. All candidates for membership, even when holding firmly to views different from the official position of the elders, must demonstrate a humble and teachable disposition with respect to the church leadership, as expressed in the Church Covenant.¹

Non-Christian Baptisms

Wellspring Church cannot accept as legitimate any baptisms performed by churches (e.g. the Roman Catholic Church) that believe that baptism in itself (ex opera operato) causes some aspect of regeneration. We also will not accept as legitimate any baptisms performed by churches (i.e. the Boston Church of Christ, Church of Jesus Christ and the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.) whose doctrines do not hold to the core tenets of orthodox Christian faith and theology. Candidates for Wellspring membership who have been baptized from any such churches must be credobaptized.

Children and Baptism²

Wellspring Church realizes that children can come to a true saving knowledge of Christ, even at very young ages. The Bible, however, does not give clear guidelines regarding an appropriate age for baptism. And while children can come to trust in Christ, we also recognize that children will go through various stages of development, maturity, trials, and experiences. We agree with the following statement of Capitol Hill Baptist Church of Washington DC concerning baptism of children:

We believe that the normal age of baptism should be when the credibility of one's conversion becomes naturally evident to the church community. This would normally be when the child has matured, and is beginning to live more self-consciously as an individual, making their own choices, having left the God-given, intended child-like dependence on their parents for the God-given, intended mature wisdom which marks

¹ http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/2005/1650_Baptism_and_Church_Membership_Questions_and_Answers_PDF/

² Please also read the Sovereign Grace Ministries paper on the Sacraments, especially the section regarding baptism and children.

one who has felt the tug of the world, the flesh and the devil, but has decided, despite these allurements, to follow Christ. While it is difficult to set a certain number of years which are required for baptism, it is appropriate to consider the candidate's maturity. The kind of maturity that we feel it is wise to expect is the maturity which would allow that son or daughter to deal directly with the church as a whole, and not, fundamentally, to be under their parents' authority. As they assume adult responsibilities (sometime in late high school with driving, employment, non-Christian friends, voting, legality of marriage), then part of this, we would think, would be to declare publicly their allegiance to Christ by baptism.³

While Wellspring recommends that a child be baptized only after reaching an age where he or she has had sufficient time to exhibit some level of adult responsibility, we believe there is wisdom in assessing the depth of a young baptism candidate's understanding of the Gospel and his or her desire to live it out in his or her life. Therefore, the Leadership Team will partner with the parents of any child who expresses an interest in being baptized to consider and examine that child's candidacy for baptism.

³ <http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/we-equip/children/baptism-of-children/>

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Wellspring Church

What Is Baptism?

In short, baptism is an act associated with water, which represents the identification and spiritual union of an individual with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Literal Definition

Literally, the word “baptism” comes from the Greek word *baptizō* which means “to immerse, dip, plunge” in water. Multiple texts in the New Testament of the Bible, including Mark 1:5, 10; John 3:23; Acts 8:36, 38-39, reinforce this definition.

Spiritual Significance

Throughout the New Testament, *baptizō* also connotes spiritual union with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Romans 6:3-4

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Galatians 3:27

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Colossians 2:11-12

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

1 Peter 3:21

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, baptism symbolizes a believer’s identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Baptism vs. Salvation

The act of baptism does not, by itself, confer salvation. (See Part II, below).⁴ Rather, baptism serves as a sign by which a believer professes that, in Christ’s death, he has died to his sins and that, through Christ’s resurrection, he has been raised to life. Baptism *represents* -- but *does not cause or effect* -- a believer’s full union with Christ and in Christ’s atoning work to save the believer from sin.

Baptism reflects an already existing, spiritual reality -- union with Jesus Christ⁵ -- so it follows that only a believer in Christ can appreciate the spiritual significance of baptism. Consequently, baptism is reserved for only those who profess faith in Jesus Christ. Wellspring Church affirms the following statement of Sovereign Grace Ministries concerning baptism:

⁴ Some, such as the Roman Catholic Church, hold a contrary, regenerative sacramental view of baptism -- that the act of baptism itself confers salvation (that baptism is *ex opere operato*, or “efficacy from the work done”). Wellspring Church does not hold the regenerative sacramental view of baptism and believes that the Bible opposes this view.

⁵ This understanding of baptism is also known as the credobaptism, or believers baptism, position. It is contrasted with the paedobaptism, or infant baptism, position. The two positions are described in detail in Part III below.

Water baptism is intended only for the individual who has received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work and become his disciple. Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the Church, oneself, and the world, a believer should be immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Water baptism is a visual demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of his death and resurrection. It signifies that his former way of life has been put to death, and vividly depicts a person's release from the mastery of sin.⁶

⁶ <http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/About/StatementOfFaith/Overview.aspx>

Is Baptism Required?

Baptism Not Required for Salvation

Baptism is NOT required for salvation. Scripture makes clear that we are not justified by any work -- including baptism -- but by faith alone through grace.

Romans 3:23-2

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

Galatians 3:26-27

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

The portrayal in Luke 23 of the thief who hung on the cross next to Jesus during the crucifixion further demonstrates that baptism is not required for salvation. Jesus promised the thief that he would enter Paradise with Christ even though the thief never had the opportunity to be baptized. Therefore, we can be certain that baptism is not a requirement for salvation.

Baptism Required as a Sacrament

Although baptism does not have the power to save, and is not required for salvation, it is commanded by the Lord according to His words in Matthew 28:19-20:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

As the church was being established, people turned to trust in Christ through discipleship. Baptism coincided with this discipleship. Jesus commanded that professions of faith and a pursuit of the Christian life should be marked by the sign of baptism. And Jesus promised that He Himself would watch over this process, even "to the end of the age."

Because Jesus commanded believers to be baptized, and the New Testament emphasizes this ordinance to be a sign of one's trust in the atoning work of Christ, baptism is a significant matter that Christians cannot view as optional. As Jesus tells us in John 14:21:

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

Consequently, as an act of obedience to the Lord's commands, believers should seek to be baptized, and churches should seek to baptize believers.

What Is the Difference Between Paedobaptism and Credobaptism?

PAEDOBAPTISM (Child Baptism)

Paedobaptism describes the practice of baptizing infants, or the view that infants may or should be baptized. The word *paedobaptism* comes from the Greek work *paidion*, which means "young child."

The Basis for the Paedobaptist View: Covenant Theology

The paedobaptist view that infants should be baptized is based on the theological principle that the original covenant between God and Abraham, as described in Genesis 15 and 17, continues throughout Scripture and transfers seamlessly from the Old Testament into the New Testament. Under this Covenant Theology, paedobaptists view baptism as the New Testament sign of God's continuing covenant, analogous to circumcision, which was the Old Testament sign of God's original covenant with Abraham. Just as male infant Jews were circumcised as a sign of membership in God's Old Testament covenant community, infants should be baptized as a sign of membership in the church, the New Testament covenant community.

Circumcision as the Old Testament Sign of the Covenant and Membership to the Covenant Community

In His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17, God promised that He would be God over Abraham and his descendants, and that they would be His people. God then established that covenant through Abraham's son Isaac. (Genesis 17:21). Consequently, the covenant community consisted of Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and then Jacob (that is, ethnic Israel). God further promised that those future descendants of Abraham would receive the blessings or curses that flow out of the covenant based on their keeping of their end of the covenant. Thus, God promised to bless His people of the covenant community if they kept the covenant stipulations (that is, obeyed Him), or to curse them if they failed to keep the covenant stipulations (that is, disobeyed Him).

As a sign of God's covenant with Abraham, God instructed that all male descendants of Abraham should be circumcised.

Genesis 17:9-11

As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

Thus, circumcision served as a sign of God's promise to the members of ethnic Israel that they were God's people and a part of the covenant community.

Circumcision as a Sign and Seal

Paedobaptists believe that in addition to serving as a *sign* of God's covenant promises, circumcision acts as God's *seal* of the covenant. A sign signifies nothing more than an outward representation of another event. But a seal, as a king's insignia, carries the king's authority that backs the sealed promise by the king's word and authority. As a sign, circumcision served as a reminder that God would bless Abraham's descendants so long as they obeyed and trusted in Him. But as merely a sign, circumcision did not guarantee the promises of the covenant. As God's seal of the covenant, however, circumcision also authenticated, validated, and guaranteed God's promises in the covenant.

Moreover, as a sign, circumcision was for *all* of God's people, regardless of who they were, how old they were, or even how faithful they were. (Joshua 7). Because all members of the Old Testament covenant community (all Jews, whether they were believers or non-believers) were given the covenant promises, all male members of the covenant community were circumcised as a sign of membership in that community. As a seal of the covenant, circumcision guaranteed that if the stipulations of the covenant were ultimately met by any member of the covenant community, the blessings of the covenant that God had intended for His people would apply to that member.

The paedobaptist view of circumcision as a seal of the covenant is based on Romans 4:11, and the understanding of that text as Apostle's Paul's exegesis of Genesis 15 and 17 in the context of God's covenant with Abraham.⁷

Romans 4:11

He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well.

In light of their view of Covenant Theology, paedobaptists believe that just as circumcision was a seal of God's promises to all of ethnic Israel -- including believers, non-believers, and infants -- baptism acts as the same seal of God's promises to the church. James Boice adds:

That is, after Abraham had believed God and God had imparted righteousness to him, God gave the seal of circumcision to validate what had happened. In the same way, baptism is a seal that the person being baptized has been identified with Jesus Christ as his disciple, and the elements of the Lord Supper, when received, indicate that the person has taken Jesus himself as intimately and as inseparably as eating bread and drinking wine.⁸

This seal does not mean that a person within the covenant community is guaranteed election (*contra ex opere operato*). Rather, it signifies that if the stipulations of the covenant are met by a member of the covenant community (i.e. true faith in Christ), the blessings of the covenant that God had intended for His people applies. Bryan Chapell adds:

A seal's validity does not depend on the time that the conditions of the covenant accompanying it are met. Like the seal of a document, the seal of circumcision could be applied long before recipients of promised and signified blessings met the conditions of the covenant. The seal was simply *the visible pledge of God that when the conditions of his covenant were met, the blessings he had promised would apply.*⁹

As a seal and a sign, the mark of circumcision meant that blessings would be poured out to God's covenant people regardless of their faith, just as blessings were poured out for all ethnic Israel regardless of personal faith. But the blessings of the covenant apply only after the covenant stipulations are met. In the Old Testament, that meant perfect obedience to God's every command. From a New Testament perspective, the covenant stipulations are satisfied by faith in Christ.

The New Covenant Community and the Changing of the Signs

Originally, the covenant community was extended only to the descendants of Abraham, and

⁷ One paedobaptist notes that this sign-seal connection is the "linchpin for many who baptize infants," to which John Piper responds that if you "pull it out, the whole doctrine falls." (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1999/1088_How_Do_Circumcision_and_Baptism_Correspond/).

⁸ Quoted from Mark E. Ross, "Baptism and Circumcision as Signs and Seals," in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge, (Philipsburg, NJ: PR, 2003), 90.

⁹ Bryan Chapell, *Why Do We Baptize Infants?*, (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R), 12.

therefore, only to ethnic Israel. But the New Testament teaches that, due to ethnic Israel's failure to keep its covenant stipulations, the church (which comprises Jews and Gentiles) now constitutes the people of God. (Romans 9:6-8). Under the covenant perspective, the promises originally made to ethnic Israel as covenant keepers and God's people were transferred to the church in Christ as the successors to the covenant and as the new covenant keepers. Consequently, the promises of the original covenant continue with the church (and not just ethnic Israel) as new covenant keepers. Accordingly, whereas ethnic Israel made up the covenant community in the Old Testament, the "new covenant community" now consists of the church.¹⁰

For the paedobaptist, circumcision was a sign and seal of the old covenant people of God, whereas baptism is the new sign and seal of a new covenant people of God, the church. The paedobaptist position rests on the strength of this analogy between circumcision and baptism. Is this correlation between circumcision and baptism a biblical reality or simply a theological theory without exegetical merit?

According to paedobaptists, the following are the biblical connections between these two signs:¹¹

- a. The two have similar meanings -- both at some level mean "cleansing." (Colossians 2:11-12).
- b. Both mean 'consecration'. (Genesis 17).
- c. Colossians 2:11-12 connect these two signs.

If circumcision and baptism are corresponding signs and seals of the Old and New Covenants, respectively, where faith is not a requirement to belong in the covenant community, then infants can be baptized -- not as a sign of their faith, but as a sign and seal of God's grace in His everlasting covenant with His people. This does not mean infants are saved by or through baptism. Rather, baptism serves as a reminder of God's covenant promises to the baptized infant, and also as a seal to guarantee that the infant will be given the privileges of being a part of God's covenant people once the covenant stipulations are satisfied. Bryan Chapell writes the following about the blessings of infant baptism as covenant keepers:

The devotion of the parents who present their children for baptism places each child in a privileged position both to hear and to understand the truths of the gospel.¹²

Baptism and the Church

The perspective on baptism necessarily influences the perspective on the church and its spiritual makeup. For the paedobaptist, the church comprises mixed membership (that is, believers and non-believers alike), where Christians and non-Christians come to worship God.¹³ John Calvin argued:

¹⁰ Even the Old Testament, in Jeremiah 31:33, foreshadows the new covenant community -- "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Scripture tells us that God has established through the new covenant a law that has now been embedded into the hearts of His people. People will no longer turn away from Him. Instead, they will choose to follow Him. And in the context of the rest of Scripture, we know that this is only made possible through the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

¹¹ Ross, 100-109. Meredith Kline argues the case further in *By Oath Consigned* (http://www.covopc.org/Kline/By_Oath_Consigned.html).

¹² Chapell, 26.

¹³ John Murray argues that while faith in Christ is the prerequisite for membership in the invisible church, the visible church will always have a mixed membership simply because there will always be those who are unregenerate in the church mix on this side of heaven. In this way, there is a parallel between Israel and the church since there is a mixed membership visibly, but a pure people of God invisibly (the elect).

By baptism we are initiated into faith in [Christ]; by partaking of the Lord's Supper we attest our unity in true doctrine and love; in the Word of the Lord we have agreement, and for the preaching of the Word the ministry instituted by Christ is preserved. In this church are mingled hypocrites who have nothing of Christ but name and outward appearance.¹⁴

For the paedobaptist, infants are included in the church among the "mingled hypocrites." And because the church serves as God's New Testament covenant community, infants should be inducted into the covenant community and baptized.

Credobaptists, on the other hand, believe that the church is a "pure church" that comprises regenerate, professing believers in Christ who have been baptized. Consequently, infants, who are unable to profess a faith in Christ, are not members of the church, and should not be baptized.

Despite these differences, paedobaptists and credobaptists still have much in common when it comes to its view of the church. As Shawn Wright notes: "Both agree that the membership of the church on earth (the visible church) is not coextensive with the membership of God's elect (the invisible church). This is an important point to make, for it shows that for both paedobaptists and Baptist membership in a local church does not necessarily equal salvation."¹⁵

CREDOBAPTISM (Believers Baptism)

The credobaptist and paedobaptist positions have some similarities that overlap. Like paedobaptists, credobaptists appreciate the role of the covenant in baptism and its significance in understanding the church. Further, credobaptists agree that baptism is not a prerequisite for salvation. Finally, credobaptists agree that baptism is a sign; but for credobaptists, baptism is a sign of one's faith and of a new covenant with God that is through Christ.

Below is a discussion of some of the bases for the divergence of the credobaptist understanding of baptism from the paedobaptist understanding.

There Is No Evidence of Infant Baptism in the Bible

The most straightforward basis for the credobaptist position is the lack of any evidence in the Bible that an infant was, or was instructed to be, baptized.

Paedobaptists try to distinguish this point in three ways:

- a. When the Bible refers to households being saved and then baptized, there must have been infants in those households (e.g. Cornelius' family in Acts 10:47 or the baptism of Lydia's household in Acts 16:15).
- b. The New Testament portrays only the first generation of believers, so there would have been no infants to baptize.¹⁶
- c. The Old Covenant sign and seal were always intended to include membership of entire households, therefore, the analogous New Covenant sign and seal should be the same. (Genesis 14:14-16; 17:23; Exodus 12:3-4).

Each of these positions is problematic. The first two points are based on assumptions where

¹⁴ Ibid., 220.

¹⁵ Shawn Wright, "Logic of Reformed Paedobaptists," in *Believer's Baptism*, ed. Thomas Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 218-219.

¹⁶ Louis Berkhof argued for this position, "Although the NT contains no direct evidence for the practice of infant baptism in the church this is due more to the fact that the apostolic age was primarily a missionary period which focused on the baptism of adults." (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 632-634). This argument is based on an inference and an assumption that is not expressly supported by any biblical text.

Scripture is silent. Assumptions based only on scriptural inferences may be used to defend any argument or position, so they require extra careful consideration. Giving undue deference to a position not expressly supported by Scripture can undermine the credibility of God's Word and open the door to unwarranted positions.¹⁷ The third point focuses on the fact that Abraham, in addition to being circumcised himself, had every male member of his household circumcised. (Genesis 17:23). This point assumes that baptism and circumcision are analogous as a sign and seal of God's covenant. But as this paper describes in further detail below, the circumcision described in Abraham's case was a *physical* circumcision that operated within the Old Covenant paradigm, and there is no biblical evidence that God intended for there to be a direct correlation between the Old Covenant and New Covenant communities.

Baptism in the New Testament Always Corresponds with a Profession of Faith

Every instance of baptism in the Bible involved an individual who professed a faith in Jesus Christ. From John the Baptist to Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, the act of baptism followed an expression of personal faith.¹⁸ The following are some examples:

Mark 1:4

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Acts 2:41

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 8:12

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Acts 10:44-48

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Acts 16:33

And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

¹⁷ Under basic, albeit not dispositive, principles of biblical hermeneutics (theory of interpretation), we should give greater deference to express biblical statements and principles over implicit ones. And we should favor straightforward interpretations of the Bible over arduously-derived, theological ones.

¹⁸ Articles on baptism and Scripture written by Andreas J. Kostenberger, Robert Stein, and Thomas Schreiner detail the various places where baptism and a profession of faith are tied together. Schreiner and Wright, 11-96.

There Is No Biblical Support for the Position that the Old Testament Covenant Community (Ethnic Israel) Directly Continues as the New Testament Covenant Community (the Church)

The notion that there is direct continuity between God's Old Testament covenant community (ethnic Israel) and God's New Testament covenant community (the church) is crucial to the paedobaptist position. The crux of the paedobaptist position rests on the theological argument that ethnic Israel, as receivers of God's promises and consisting of a mixed membership of believers and non-believers, parallels the New Testament people of God (the church), also consisting of mixed membership.

Writing from a paedobaptist position, Randy Booth states: "God has had one people throughout all the ages. Although the *one church* has developed through various stages, she is still the *same church* from age to age."¹⁹ The significance of this theological point is profound for the paedobaptist. The church merely continues what was started in Israel, not as a whole new people of God, but rather as a continuation of the mix of elect and non-elect people of God.

But no biblical text expresses this theory of direct correlation between biblical Israel and the church. Romans 9:3-4 comes closest when Paul writes:

For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

Paul suggests that his brothers (those who are ethnically his brothers as Jews) were given the full rights of the covenant promise. But just three verses later, in Romans 9:7-8, Paul rebuts the theory of direct correlation between Israel and the church when he writes:

Not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

In other words, the majority of ethnic Israel (who ultimately did not have faith in God through Christ) were not receivers of the covenant as God's people. Verse 8 reminds us that "the children of the flesh" (those circumcised and part of the Old Covenant) are ultimately not the same as the children of God (God's New Covenant people). Only the "children of the promise" (those who have faith in God through Christ) are counted as children of God.

So there is actually a *discontinuity* between the Old Covenant people of God and the New Covenant people of God. Paul expressly instructs that the mixed composition of the Old Covenant people, who are marked by circumcision and are "children of the flesh," does not constitute the New Covenant people (the church), who are the "children of the promise." Scripture does not identify a people of God who are NOT also children of the promise.

The Connection Between Covenant Signs (Circumcision and Baptism) Lacks Exegetical Proof

As John Piper noted, the linchpin of the paedobaptist argument rests on the parallel between circumcision and baptism. But more than just a parallel or correlation of signs, paedobaptists argue that there was a replacement of signs. This paradigm only works, however, if circumcision constituted more than just a physical sign. John Murray writes:

With reference to circumcision it must be fully appreciated that it was not essentially or primarily the sign of family, racial, or national identity. Any significance which circumcision passed along the line of national identity or privilege was secondary and

¹⁹ Stephen Wellum, *Believer's Baptism*, 111.

derived Circumcision is the sign and seal of the covenant itself in its deepest and richest significance, and it is the sign of external privileges only as these are the fruits of the spiritual blessings which it signifies.²⁰

But is this true? Does Scripture present circumcision as having a spiritual significance in and of itself?

According to Apostle Paul, circumcision does not have any inherent spiritual value. He writes in Romans 2:25-29:

For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

According to Paul, circumcision does not have any spiritual identity by itself, but must be accompanied by faith. In fact, Paul indicates that circumcision without faith leads to uncircumcision, and also to legalism and condemnation.

Classically, paedobaptists refer to Romans 4:10-11 to argue that circumcision is spiritual by nature:

How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well.

However, any attempt to interpret this text as an indication that circumcision has a spiritual significance already assumes that Old Covenant Israel (ethnic Israel) and New Covenant Israel (the church) represent the same people. But, as described above, that assumption has no scriptural basis.

Circumcision cannot be viewed as merely a holdover from the Old Covenant that makes way for baptism. The New Testament informs us that God congregated His new people (the church) on the basis of faith in Christ, and no longer on physical markers such as circumcision, Temple worship, or sacrifices. (Romans 9:7-8). In fact, Jesus, himself, tells us that we are a New Covenant people solely through His blood. (Luke 22:20). The Holy Spirit's sovereign work *in our hearts by faith* (Romans 3:28) is what marks us as believers, and baptism is a sign of this living reality.

Circumcision indicated that the Israelites were Yahweh's people. It was the physical sign that separated them as a special people. It reminded Israel that Abraham's covenant with God was with them, they would be inheritors of a land, and their descendents would be like stars in the sky. (Genesis 17). But circumcision also reminded them that circumcision was *not* sufficiently similar to the animal sacrifices to atone fully for sin. (Hebrews 1-13). Thus, Ezekiel prophesied to Israel that there would come a day when the Lord would no longer see physical circumcision as a sign of God's people, but would look for a circumcision of the heart, that is, a person who has true faith in Christ. (Ezekiel 36:25-27). Circumcision of the heart (and thus the sign of God's people) does not extend to infants, who are unable to have a true faith in Christ.

The only other text that comes close to linking circumcision and baptism is Col 2:11-13.

²⁰ Quoted in Wellum, 119.

Apostle Paul writes:

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.

Paedobaptists argue that Paul is linking *physical* circumcision to baptism. But this argument is misplaced. Paul says that the church was circumcised “without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh” and “by the circumcision of Christ.” Paul is referring to a *spiritual* circumcision, and not a physical circumcision that has spiritual implications. The “circumcision of Christ” is the same “circumcision of the heart” in Ezekiel 36, which is ultimately faith in Christ. So baptism is the symbol of our being “buried with him,” and our being “raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God.” We are saved by Christ and His work, and our faith is in response to God’s initiating work. Baptism is the sign of such faith.

The Church Constitutes the New Covenant People Who Are Saved in Light of a New Covenant Set Apart from the Old Covenant

The church is not a mixture of unregenerate and regenerate people, but rather a New Covenant people who have professed faith in Christ and are given the sign of baptism as a symbol of that faith. In Jeremiah 31:31-34, the Prophet Jeremiah writes:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah’s prophecy is clearly fulfilled in the New Testament through Christ and His church as described by Heb 8-10. Jeremiah is speaking about much more than a physical induction into the New Covenant Community as paedobaptists believe. He addresses the reality that the New People will be changed internally and spiritually by this new covenant. This change is not something that could potentially happen (as in the case of an infant being baptized without faith), but it will most certainly happen, as God will “write it on their hearts.” Verse 32 makes clear that there will be a change in the nature of the Old and New Covenants, “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.” So the church consists not of unbelievers, but those seated with Christ (Eph 2:5-6), are all sons of God (Gal 3:26-27), and are united in Christ through His work as symbolized by baptism (Rom 6:1-4).

But does this mean that all who are baptized in a credobaptist church are saved, and that credobaptist churches are truly pure? No. The reality of the visible church is that there will always be some who are baptized as professing believers but who will later fail to bear the fruit of one who trusts in Christ. But this does not mean that the church should baptize those without faith simply because of the possibility that one might turn from Christ. The church baptizes believers trusting that God is the one who does the sovereign work of salvation, and that the baptism is a sign of an inward reality of faith in Christ. The church does what it can to fulfill what we believe is Scripture’s call, to operate within a pure church framework.

Does the Mode of Baptism Matter?

Baptism by immersion of an individual's entire body in water reflects the literal definition of *baptizō* and the only examples of baptisms conducted in Scripture. Further, other biblical references to baptism, such as the Romans 6:1-4, demonstrate that the spiritual significance of baptism is better reflected by full immersion of the body than by sprinkling or other mode of baptism.²¹ Immersion depicts more fully than other methods of baptism the spiritual reality of being buried with Christ by baptism into death, and then being raised with Christ from the dead.²² Because of these reasons, we believe immersion reflects the primary mode of baptism as taught by Scripture.

However, we also recognize that *baptizō* could have other, albeit less recognized, meanings,²³ so we consider the mode of baptism to be of secondary importance to baptism's primary focus -- a public profession of an individual's identification with and faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we accept as valid baptism any believer's baptism conducted by sprinkling or pouring so long as, at the time of baptism, the baptized individual confessed his or her trust in Christ.

²¹ Douglas Moo, in Romans 1-8, *Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), argues that baptism in Romans 6 "functions as shorthand for the conversion experience as a whole It is not, then, that baptism is a symbol of dying and rising with Christ." (p. 371). He says that "there is no evidence in Romans 6, or in the NT, that the actual physical movements, immersion, and emersion, involved in baptism were accorded symbolical significance." (p. 379).

While baptism in Roman 6 does function as shorthand for the conversion experience as a whole, we cannot exclude the symbolism of dying and rising with Christ, for the following reasons: (1) The physical actions of going down into the water (where human beings cannot live for more than a few minutes) and coming up out of the water are so closely parallel to the actions of going down into the grave and coming up out of the grave, that the connection is evident on its face without need for further detailed explanation; (2) The Old Testament background of being immersed by waters of God's judgment confirms this; (3) When Paul says, "You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12), it is hard to imagine that any of Paul's readers, even children, would have missed the evident parallel between the actions of baptism and dying and rising with Christ.

²² Wayne Grudem also adds in his *Systematic Theology*, 968, footnote 7: "In fact, the waters of baptism have an even richer symbolism than simply the symbolism of the grave. The waters also remind us of the waters of God's judgment that came upon unbelievers at the time of the flood (Gen. 7:6-24), or the drowning of the Egyptians in the Exodus (Ex. 14:26-29). Similarly, when Jonah was thrown into the deep (Jonah 1:7-16), he was thrown down to the place of death because of God's judgment on his disobedience -- even though he was miraculously rescued and thus became a sign of the resurrection. Therefore those who go down into the waters of baptism really are going down into the waters of judgment and death, death that they deserve from God for their sins. When they come back up out of the waters of baptism it shows that they have come safely through God's judgment only because of the merits of Jesus Christ, with whom they are united in his death and resurrection. This is why Peter can say in 1 Peter 3:21 that baptism "corresponds to" the saving of Noah and his family from the waters of judgment in the flood.

²³ <http://www.girs.com/library/theology/syllabus/ecc4.html>

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