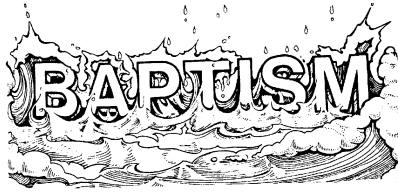


WATER BAPTISM AND CHILDREN



"Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off." - Acts 2:38-39

I. The Purpose of This Study is to:

- A. Display the arguments for and against infant baptism.
- B. Explain the position which New Life Church has taken regarding infant baptism.
- C. Answer questions concerning the baptism of young children.

II. Should Infants Be Baptized? - The question of infant baptism is one that has been debated for at least the last seventeen centuries. Although it has been the general practice of Christian churches down through the centuries to baptize infants, American Christianity is predominantly baptistic.

- A. **The Baptist Position** -- Baptists believe that no one should be baptized until they are capable of making a credible profession of faith. They argue:
 - 1. That none of the baptisms recorded in the New Testament mention infants -- In this they are quite correct. There is no example of baptism which distinctively mentions babies or young children.
 - 2. That the heart of baptism is a profession of faith in Jesus Christ (*1 Peter 3:21 - ". . . a pledge of a good conscience toward God"*). And they correctly make the point that this cannot be done by an infant. -- The Baptist believes baptism is improper until a person believes, because he views the act of baptism as primarily man's response to God. For the Baptist, baptism is a covenant ceremony which primarily bears witness to what we do in responding to God's grace.
 - 3. The absence of any direct reference to infant baptism prior to AD 215. -- There are no statements in any of the church documents that we have (prior to AD 215) that clearly mention infants being baptized.

4. The writing of Tertullian, a teacher in North Africa -- Tertullian expressed his doubts about infant baptism in a book entitled On Baptism, written in AD 205. He suggests postponing baptism for children until they have past the age of "youthful lusts."

B. Paedo-Baptist Position -- Those who believe that infants should be baptized are called "Paedo-baptists." *Paedo* is the greek word for "child." Paedo-baptists believe that God commands them to baptize their children and they point to the following as evidence for their position:

1. The mention of "household" baptisms in the New Testament -- Cornelius' household (Acts 10:24; 11:14), Lydia's household (Acts 16:15), the Philippian jailer's household (16:33), and Stephanas' household (1 Corinthians 1:16). Paedo-baptists (people who believe in the baptism of children) conclude that these passages indicate the solidarity of the family unit. In the ancient world, when the head of the family acted, he did so for the whole family. So the household (including infants) receives the mark of the covenant when the head of the house is saved.
2. The Old Testament parallels to baptism included the entire family -- The New Testament uses three Old Testament events as parallels to baptism (1 Peter 3:20-21; Colossians 10:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2). Noah and his family went into the ark and passed through the water (Genesis 7:7). Abraham, his infant sons, and Abraham's slaves were all to be circumcised (Genesis 17:9-14). And, of course, infants as well as adults passed through the cloud and the Red Sea (Exodus 14:22).
3. The whole family was baptized when Gentile converts came over into Judaism -- Converts to Judaism were called proselytes. When a family came over into Judaism from some pagan background, three things took place. The head of the family offered sacrifices. The males in the family were circumcised. And then everybody was baptized. The tiniest children went through the proselyte bath, even sometimes on the day of their birth. Indeed children were admitted to baptism even when only one parent joined Judaism. (Testament of Levi 14:6; Mishnah, Pesahim 8:8; Sibylline Oracles 4:165-67; J. Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 1960, 37-40.)
4. The silence of the New Testament concerning infants and the New Covenant -- This sounds like an argument which a Baptist would make, at first. And normally a person should suspect arguments from silence. But when Jesus, the fulfiller of Judaism, came to a people who for thousands of years had been admitting Jewish children into the covenant at the express command of God to Abraham and when for a long time they had been admitting the children of Gentile converts by baptizing them along with all the rest of the family, then the argument from silence becomes rather formidable. If Jesus had meant to change this age-old procedure, would there not be some mention of this in the New Testament? Other changes from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, like circumcision and law keeping, generated much debate and left traces throughout the New Testament (e.g. Acts 15).

5. Acts 2:39 -- On the day of Pentecost Peter stood up and said, "*Repent and be baptized. . .The promise is for you and your children. . .*". Paedo-baptists argue that the most natural way for a Jew to have understood Peter's statement was that both he and his children were to be baptized.
6. The statements of some of the church fathers -- It is true that the first explicit reference to infant baptism is that made by Irenaeus, about A.D. 180. This may seem quite late, but we do not have many documents from the very early days of the church. The documents we do have give us these statements:

Irenaeus (AD 180), speaks of "all who through Christ are born again to God, infants and children and boys and youths and old men" (Against Heresies, book ii. 22,4). "Born again to God" is a technical phrase in Irenaeus' writings meaning baptism, as clearly appears from comparing book iii. 17, 1.

Justin Martyr (AD 100-165), mentions "many men and women of the age of sixty and seventy years who have been made disciples of Christ from childhood" (From Justin's 1st Apology 15:6). This is likely an allusion to baptism and if so, then certainly at a very early age.

The Roman church leader, Hippolytus, in a work called The Apostolic Tradition (written AD 215), said, "First, you should baptize the little ones. All who can speak for themselves should speak. But for those who cannot speak, their parents should speak, or another who belongs to their family" (Apostolic Tradition, 21).

Three times Origen (born AD 185, died AD 254) mentions infant baptism as the custom of the church in his writings. For example, in his Commentary on Romans 6:5-7 he wrote, "For this reason the Church received from the apostles the tradition of baptizing children too." That's a strong statement that apparently he felt he could make without dispute.

7. The practice of the Roman Catholic church since the earliest times -- To be a Baptist you have to believe that the practice of the Roman Catholic Church is unbiblical and that somewhere in the first two centuries the church changed the practice from baptism of only professing believers to baptism of children of believers. If this is so, should we not have heard something about it in early church literature? We don't. (Tertullian's doubts about baptism of children imply that baptism of children was the normal practice. In fact, ten years later, when writing de Anima, Tertullian is happy for the baptism of children, even if one parent is not a Christian.)

C. **For Further Study** -- There is not time or space to completely discuss all the pros and cons of each side. If you would like to study the subject further I would recommend these titles:

1. On the Baptist point of view: Baptism in the New Testament by G. R. Beasley-Murray.

2. On the Infant Baptism view: Baptism: Its Purpose, Practice & Power by Michael Green.

III. What is the Position of New Life Church?

- A. **The Issue That Divides** -- The arguments over baptism and the division these arguments have caused among Christian brethren are a travesty to Christ's church. I believe Christ weeps over the brokenness this issue has caused. Which of us is prepared to say that Francis Schaeffer or R. C. Sproul or D. James Kennedy is not a Christian because he holds to infant baptism? Or that Billy Graham, Pat Robertson or Chuck Swindoll is not a Christian because he rejects infant baptism? All of these people are godly, intelligent men seeking to know and understand God's truth.
- B. **Is God Testing His People?** -- There are good Biblical and historical arguments on both sides of the issue. Anyone who does not know that has not really studied the evidence for both positions. I have often asked myself why God allows this confusion regarding infant baptism. He could have settled the issue by one simple statement in the New Testament or by the discovery of a church document from the first or second century which specifically accepts or rejects infant baptism. Perhaps God allows the confusion to test His people. Will we fight, compete, and sometimes seek to destroy each other? Or will we love each other, find ways to work together, and pray for one another's good?
- C. **Agreeing to Disagree** -- God has called New Life Church to a special ministry: a BUG ministry (i.e., a ministry of balance, unity, and giving). And because of this calling New Life Church has decided to agree to disagree about this particular issue. We have 18 essential doctrines listed in our Church Constitution which must be kept, but this is not one of them. That is not to say that this issue is unimportant--merely that it is not *essential* for the preservation of Biblical Christianity. Each brother and sister is encouraged to study the issue for themselves and to know what God's Word commands them to do. So you will find people in this church who baptize their infant children and others who do not. We will discuss the issue in love. We will share our beliefs. But we will not allow it to become a point of division among us.

IV. Questions Regarding Infant Baptism

- A. **Can Any Infant Be Baptized?**
 1. Infant baptism is only for infants of parents, either one or both of them, who are professing Christians.
 2. This follows the pattern of circumcision in the Old Testament, the pattern of proselyte baptism, and works against a magical view of infant baptism which parents sometimes hold.

3. It is very important for parents who choose to baptize their child to understand what the meaning of infant baptism is and is not. Some views of infant baptism threaten the very heart of the gospel.

B. Does Infant Baptism Mean My Child is Saved?

1. It does not mean the child is saved by/through the Baptism (Baptismal Regeneration). -- Just as the physical act of circumcision never saved anyone in and of itself, the act of infant baptism never saves anyone. Many who were circumcised are later called "unsaved," "damned," "cut off from the covenant" (e.g. Ishmael, Esau, Judas). Likewise many who were baptized were not saved, like Simon Magus (Acts 8:13,21ff) and some of the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 10:1-6). Baptism is not magic rite. It is not an assurance that if your child should die in infancy, he will go to heaven.
2. It does not mean the child does not need to come to personal saving faith in Christ. -- If New Testament families were baptized as households, this does not imply that every member of the household was saved. What it does mean is that the infant members of a believer's family had the right to the mark of the covenant until they made up their own minds whether or not to respond to the God who had taken the initiative and held out the olive branch to them.
3. It does not infuse them with grace or give them the Holy Spirit. -- Some churches teach that baptism washes away original sin and "infuses" a child with grace and the Holy Spirit (in other words, they teach that baptism actually gives a child the Holy Spirit and saving grace).
4. It does not guarantee that our children will be saved at a later time. -- Infant baptism is not God's promise to grant faith, but God's promise to save *if* faith is later present.

C. Then What Is Infant Baptism?

1. To the Child: A Call to Salvation

Baptists tend to see man's response to God as the most important element in baptism. For the Baptist, baptism is essentially a person's public profession of faith to God.

Paedo-baptists argue that baptism is a two sided covenant ceremony. Yes, the response is important -- vitally important. But baptism also witnesses to what *God has done* for us to make salvation possible. (See teaching entitled "What is the Significance of Water Baptism?")

Baptism is a covenant ceremony. Like all covenant ceremonies there is a part that is man's act, but there is a part that is also God's. When an adult is baptized, God's promises are demonstrated and they are demonstrated in audio-visual fashion. Here is God's part that is signified in the ceremony of baptism:

God's Part in Covenant Baptism

He will wash away our sins
We will live in a new world
He will give us new life
He will own us and set us apart
He will give us a new name
He will free us from our enemies
He will give us of His Spirit

An adult who is being baptized responds to God's offer by a public pledge of faith and submission:

Our Part in Covenant Baptism

To pledge ourselves to Jesus as Lord
To submit to the humiliation of soaked clothes and wet hair in public baptism

When a child is baptized God's promise of salvation is also offered to him and demonstrated. But the human side of baptism (the child's pledge of faith) is postponed.

God's Part in Infant Baptism

If the child repents & believes. . .

He will wash away his sins
He will bring him into a new world
He will give him new life
He will own him and set him apart
He will give him a new name
He will free him from his enemies
He will give him of His Spirit

The Child's Part in Covenant Baptism

POSTPONED

This should not seem completely strange to us, since it was the way that God worked in the Old Testament under the covenant sign of circumcision. The sign of circumcision was given *in anticipation* of the child coming to faith in God. Paul wrote, "A real Jew is not one who is outwardly a Jew, but one who is inwardly a Jew, who has been circumcised in heart" (Romans 2:28f; see also Romans 9:6; Galatians 3:7,29; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11). Infant baptism works in the same manner. Infant baptism is an adoption certificate into the Father's heavenly household. But it does not automatically or unconditionally get a child in. It is applied to the infants of God's people *in anticipation* of God bringing them to the reality of what baptism signifies. The child must repent and believe.

When a parent baptizes their child they are giving that child an audio-visual picture of what they hope he will become in the future (a washed, marked, anointed, dedicated Child of God). Infant baptism is meant to call a child to salvation. Children who have

been baptized should witness the baptism of other infants, be reminded of their baptism often, and of their need to personally profess faith in Jesus Christ.

2. To the Church: A Sign of Admission

Baptism is a sign of admission of the infant child into God's earthly covenant community - the Church. Though the child is not a Christian, he is surrounded by Christians. The child is placed in the environment of God's grace. In this sense your child is set apart (1 Corinthians 7:14). He is under the sanctifying *influence* of God's presence in the Church.

This is the same pattern found in the Old Testament. God's people were marked with a covenant sign and by this act was placed in the nation of Israel (Genesis 17:9-14), but it was always understood that not everyone who had the sign was a true believer (Romans 2:28-29). There was always a circle of true believers within the larger circle of Israelites (Romans 9:6-7).

Even Baptists talk as if their children were in some sort of special relationship to God.



Even though there has been no profession of faith, Baptist parents act as if their children were something more than just heathens yet less than entirely saved. Baptist Sunday school teachers tell their students that Christ will forgive their sins when they confess them. Yet this is entirely unbiblical if they are heathens. Baptist parents teach their children the Lord's prayer and encourage them to use it, even though God is not yet their Father.

Paedo-baptists apply the sign of the New Covenant because of what Baptists themselves recognize: believers' children are part of God's earthly covenant community and in a special (though not saving) relationship to Him.

3. To the Parents: A Dedication

Baptism is the setting aside of our children to God, i.e. a dedication. As parents we need to realize that our children are not our own. They are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3) which will one day be returned to Him (1 Samuel 1:11,28). The infant is the

Lord's child and our stewardship. Baptism helps us to recognize and publicly profess this reality. This is why the baptism of the infant is accompanied by solemn vows made by God's covenant people, to raise the child in the "training and instruction of the Lord." As Hippolytus, the bishop of Roman, said: ". . .for those who cannot speak, their parents should speak . . ." (Hippolytus in The Apostolic Tradition, 21 - circa AD 215).

I am sometimes asked what the difference is between infant baptism and dedication. It is this:

- (1) In dedication God's promises are neither stated nor symbolized. It is a man-oriented ceremony in that all the action is done by the parents and the pastor: the parents offer, the parents promise, the pastor prays. Verbally or symbolically God does nothing in the ceremony of dedication. His offer of salvation is usually not even mentioned.
- (2) The child is not given any outward sign of admission into the earthly church. Dedicated children are not usually set apart to the church (except here at New Life). In most dedication ceremonies they are only set apart to God. On the other hand, baptism is both a setting apart to God and a symbolic uniting with all other baptized people. You are baptized into a family by water baptism. I've never heard anyone talk about being dedicated into a family.
- (3) The Biblical basis for infant dedication is even less clear than that for infant baptism. Jewish children were dedicated according to a law in the book of Exodus. But only males and only the first born male of a household were dedicated (Exodus 13:2,11-13). There is no command given by Jesus or the apostles for dedication of adults or infants.

In my opinion, infant baptism has far more Biblical justification than infant dedication. And infant baptism is a ceremony with fuller meaning than infant dedication. Infant baptism involves the element of dedicating your child to God, but it also does much more.

What then is infant baptism? Infant baptism is *for the child*: a call to salvation, *to the church*: a sign of admission, and *to the parents*: a dedication of their child to God. Finally, infant baptism is a prayer and a promise.

4. To God: A Prayer / and From God: A Promise of Blessing

When believing, sincere parents bring their child before God in baptism and ask for Him to bless their child, we can be sure that God hears that prayer and will work in the life of that child. The Scriptures tell us that parents in the 1st century brought their children to Jesus, and asked that he pray for them (Matthew 19:13). We are told that Jesus eagerly received them: "*He took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them*" (Mark 10:16).

Infant baptism is a prayer to God that He would place our children under His blessing. God's attitude is positive toward that prayer. God's promise to bless is not a guarantee

of salvation, but a guarantee that God will not abandon our children to themselves. He will work in our child's life.

D. Conclusions:

1. Infant baptism should be administered only to those who have at least one Christian parent.
2. Some views of infant baptism threaten the very heart of salvation by faith. These views need to be rejected as superstitious and unbiblical.
3. Infant baptism should be looked upon as the title deed to the kingdom of heaven, the pledge of God's acceptance in Christ, His arms extended to embrace us. It is rather like the marriage service where, after the exchange of vows, the minister pronounces the couple man and wife. But the pastor knows that the signing of the marriage certificate must follow to make it legal and the consummation must follow later on. If either of these two conditions is missing, the couple is *not* married even though liturgically they have been said to be!
4. Infant baptism is very similar. It offers the child a wedding certificate to the Lord Jesus Christ, or, if you prefer, an adoption certificate into the Father's household. It does not wed us or adopt us automatically or unconditionally. The child must repent and believe. But the symbolism of God's side of the bargain is already given. And the child's baptism should be a constant reminder of his need to accept in faith what God has offered. This was the function of circumcision in the Old Testament. It is the function of infant baptism in the New Testament.

V. I Don't Believe in Infant Baptism. But My Four Year Old Has Invited Jesus Into His Heart. Should He Be Baptized?

When we ask this question, we are really asking, "How do I know if my child's faith is genuine?" We want to see our children saved, but we want to make sure that their salvation is real. The Lord Himself encouraged children to come to Him. We should do the same, but in a wise and Biblical manner.

A. Children are Different -- That doesn't sound like a very inspirational statement, but it has everything to do with how we lead a child to faith, how we know that their faith is genuine, and if this child is really ready for baptism. If we are not careful there is a real possibility of leading a child into a false profession and baptism. He may rest upon this false assurance for the remainder of his life. Be careful of the following childlike tendencies:

1. Children before the age of eight think literally. -- A well-meaning Sunday school teacher told a child who inquired about salvation, "Give your heart to God." The child broke into tears, sobbing that he couldn't do that. When asked why, the child answered, "If I give my heart to God, I won't have it and I will die!"

A parent told her child to "invite Jesus into your heart." The child later asked, "Can we go to the hospital and have my heart X-rayed? That way I'll know if He's inside or not."

Prior to age eight most children are incapable of thinking in any other manner than literally. Between the ages of eight and fourteen most children go through a stage of brain development which allows them to think symbolically and conceptually. Some salvation concepts are hard to grasp prior to that age.

If you use an expression that your child takes in a wrong way, don't panic. If you say something and later realize your child misunderstood what you meant, don't give up and quit talking with your child about the Gospel. Go back and say, "Now remember what we were talking about yesterday?" and readdress the issue in terms they understand.

There is nothing innately wrong about a child's inadequate concept of God or Christianity. As 1 Corinthians 13:11 says, "*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.*" The Bible doesn't criticize a child's way of thinking.

Nevertheless, certain concepts must be understood before one can be saved. Salvation is not *entirely* a head action, but it includes the head. Those working with children need to proceed slowly and to consistently question the child to make sure he does understand the basics of the Gospel message.

Simple sentences must be used. Avoid evangelical jargon: "invite Christ into your heart," "give your life to Christ," "pray to receive Christ," "be covered by the blood of Christ." All of these are phrases that we use to describe the salvation experience, but you may be surprised to learn that none of these phrases are ever found in the Bible.

The Gospel of John tells us 98 times to *believe* on Christ. The word simply means "to trust or depend." God simply asks each person, child or adult, to trust Jesus in everything we do and to let Him be our leader. Children understand "trust." Trusting Christ is *the* issue in salvation. One is never saved until he's come to a point of relying on Christ.

Remember that children think and understand differently than adults. Watch how you communicate the gospel to them. Don't assume that they understand all your evangelical jargon. "Trust" is the one common concept, however, that adults and children can both understand. Focus on this word when talking to your child about the Lord.

2. A child will often say or do whatever he thinks will please you or God. -- Sunday school teachers are especially aware of this. One child reports that he "invited Jesus into his life." The teacher claps her hands and hugs the child and writes their name in a new Bible. Next Sunday, watch how many "conversions" take place, just because the other children want hugs, claps, and a Bible, too.

A teenager came forward at a meeting to be saved and was asked to explain his reasons by a counselor. "When I was very small," he said, "I said a prayer inviting Jesus into my heart. But I never knew He died for me. I just thought that God liked that prayer so much, he'd let anyone into heaven who said it."

Children are great mimickers. They learn by imitation. If you are unsure if a child understands, ask them to rephrase ("tell me what I said in your own words"). If you find them merely parroting back your words then wait for the Holy Spirit to do more work.

3. Children's minds develop at different rates. -- One child at six years of age may clearly understand the substitutionary death of Christ upon the cross. Another may need much more time. Be sure to lead children into conversion. Don't drive them. We sometimes assume that if Johnny has come to faith in Christ, Billy, who is the same age, should too. But Bill and Johnny are different individuals. We must give the Holy Spirit time to do His work instead of pushing the child into a false pledge.

B. Elements of the Gospel to Look For -- What is essential to understand to be saved? You should look for your child to express in his own words these truths:

1. There is a God. -- This is a truth that the Bible says is essential to know: "*Anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists. . .*" (Hebrews 11:6).
2. God loves me and desires relationship with me. -- To put this in childlike language: "God wants to be my friend." This truth is taught in Romans 5:8 and other places. Hebrews 11:6 says that God is "*the rewarder of those who seek Him.*"
3. I know that I am a sinner. -- The issue of sin needs to be addressed. Jesus said that He came to earth to invite "sinners" to Himself, not people who thought they were righteous (Matthew 9:13).

Many have debated about when a child develops a sense of guilt and personal responsibility. But our experience tells us that many young children are sensitive to sin. That sensitivity may be a seed implanted by God in their hearts.

A child may put this idea into different words: "I have bad inside of me and so I can't live with God" or "Something about me just doesn't work right and I am unable to fix it myself." However it is expressed, every person who wishes to be saved must recognize their inability to please God and save themselves.

4. Jesus is the only one who can save me ("fix the bad and take me to heaven") -- Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me*" (John 14:6). See also Acts 4:12. Understanding that trust in Jesus is the only means of salvation is another essential truth.

The eventual aim, of course, is to show children that Jesus took our sins on Himself. A simple illustration of this is to place an object in your right hand, explaining that this object represents all our sins. "When Jesus died on the cross," you say, "God took our sins and laid them on His son." Then place the object in your left hand. "Where are those sins now? They're on Jesus, not me. He took them. They are put on Him by God the Father." The illustration can be repeated again and again.

5. I want God to forgive my sins ("take my sins away," "fix the bad in me) -- The Bible says that recognition of our sin is a prerequisite to being saved: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us"* (1 John 1:9).

At some point a child should come to a crisis experience when he or she definitely acknowledges his sin and confesses Jesus as Savior and Lord. Children raised in Christian homes often "commit" their lives to the Lord Jesus several times in different ways as they're growing up. One of these was an actual, true and genuine first-time commitment. It isn't important really to know which one. Billy Graham's wife, Ruth, says that she can't remember a specific day when she committed her life to Christ, but she can't remember a day when she didn't trust Him either.

6. I want Jesus to be my friend and leader -- Children (and frankly, most adults) don't understand the concept of Jesus' Lordship. Most of us think of the term "Lord" as just another way of saying that Jesus is God. But actually the title "Lord" means much more. The word "Lord" means "master, superior, sovereign, boss, king."

To put this in language that children understand we would say that Jesus must become your leader. The Bible says, *"If we confess with our mouth that Jesus is our Lord and believe in our heart. . .then we will be saved."* (Romans 10:9).

If your child intellectually understands these truths and agrees with them in his or her heart, then they are ready to receive the New Covenant sign of baptism and enter into the family of God. You should explain the purpose of baptism and encourage them to be baptized as soon as possible.

C. After the Baptism:

1. The child will need instruction on how God expects him to live in His forever family. Emphasize the importance of building a relationship with God. One way of doing this is reading or having the Bible read to him daily. This is God talking to him (God's letter to him). Stress that the child may talk to God or Jesus any time or place about anything (since Jesus is his friend). Show him how to pray. Remind him to tell others about Jesus. And tell him that Jesus wants him to attend Sunday school and church -- not as a duty, but so that he can learn more about God and be with God's forever people. And finally teach him that he must obey Jesus (since Jesus is his leader) and do what Jesus tells him to do. He will often need God's help to do what is right, so teach Him early to call upon the Holy Spirit for "right feelings" (godly desires) and to do the "right thing" (obedience that comes by faith - Romans 1:5).

2. Often a child who comes to Christ at an early age will have doubts as he grows older. As his understanding of salvation deepens, he may wonder whether he was really saved. When he asks his parents about it, they frequently respond, "Now, Johnny, of course you're saved. You remember what happened on (and they cite a date, age, or experience). We even wrote the date in your Bible." The adult remembers better than the child does.

Going back to a date or an experience for assurance of salvation can be very misleading. If what you think happened did indeed happen, the child is saved. But if it didn't, the child is not saved. If he is not saved, then the doubts that are being raised are from the Holy Spirit who is working on your boy or girl to bring him into real saving faith. If you assure him that he is already saved by pointing to a false experience, then you are working against his genuine conversion. If we don't see any spiritual light in a son's or daughter's eye, we can't afford to cling to the testimony we've been giving for that child.

Say to the child who is troubled about his salvation, "Let me ask you something. Who are you trusting right now to live your life and to get you to heaven?" If he understands it's Christ alone, then say, "That's right. And if you are trusting Christ alone, you are saved regardless of when and where it happened. The important thing is that you're trusting Christ right now." Then remind him of the promise of John 5:24: *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned. He has crossed over from death to life."*

Lack of assurance is a normal sign of immaturity. Even saved children will need reassurance. Parents can move alongside a child and say, "You know, aren't you glad that Jesus will never, ever let you out of His hands? See how close His hand is? You're inside there. He's never going to let you go. You're part of His family forever." It's helpful to memorize with your child Biblical promises like John 5:24 or John 10:28. The Bible is where we need to go when doubts come.

3. Also in the area of assurance, allow the child to be what he is -- saved but nevertheless able to sin if he so chooses. When he misbehaves, don't say, "If you were really a Christian, do you think you'd do that?" The Biblical answer is yes. Even adult Christians in the New Testament did some pretty shameful things (James 4:1-3).

If you condition a child to think that when he behaves he is a Christian and when he misbehaves he must not be, you've taught salvation by works, rather than faith in Jesus. This is something the New Testament never does. Your child will never have assurance of his salvation, if it's entirely based on what he does. If he's trusting Christ to get him to heaven, even days when you feel like putting him up for adoption, he's still saved. Don't tell him to come to Christ on the basis of faith and then give him assurance totally on the basis of behavior.

As a parent you may need to memorize Philippians 1:6. It says, "*I am confident that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*" We may not always be able to see the good work God is doing in our children's lives, but we can trust the Father of our children to do what He promised.

VI. Summary

- A. Things are always difficult with children. This is no less true in the issue of baptism. Concerning the baptism of infants, there is abundant ammunition on both sides of the fence to make strong cases for either baptism of small children or against the baptism of infants. I grew up in a tradition which practiced infant baptism in an unbiblical manner. I rejected that tradition and became a Baptist for many years. Now I'm back in the infant baptist camp believing that it is the best Biblical position. I understand the concerns of both camps. I refuse to fight or divide over it. Given more understanding and study, it's possible that I may become a Baptist again.
- B. If we are going to practice infant baptism, we must understand what it is. A Biblical understanding of infant baptism sees it as a Covenant ceremony in which God's promises are offered in expectation and hope of the child later receiving those promises. Baptism of an infant does not save that infant or give him the Holy Spirit. Salvation and the Spirit come when the child commits his life to Jesus as Lord and trusts in Him alone. Infant baptism also serves to mark the infant as part of the earthly family of God -- within the environment of grace, but not yet possessing grace inwardly. Furthermore, infant baptism is a dedication of our children to God. It is a recognition that they are ultimately His. Finally, infant baptism is a prayer that God would bless them and that they would be led to Him.
- C. Those who do not practice infant baptism, but instead would hold to the position of baptizing believers only, must exercise special care to not push their children toward baptism before they are spiritually ready. There are certain elements of the gospel which must be understood in the heart and mind before a child pledges his life to Jesus Christ. Teachers and pastors down through the years have tried to set an "age of accountability" at which they thought children could make their own baptismal decision. The Jews bar mitzvah their boys at age thirteen. The church Father, Tertullian, said children were not ready to take the pledge before age 19 or 20 because they fall into youthful lusts. If I were forced to pick a date, I'd say never before age 8. But the decision is best left up to the parents who love their children and know their children's hearts. Snatch every opportunity you can to lead children to faith in Christ. But think and deal with them Biblically and with wisdom.

You may also wish to read the following teachings:

What is the Meaning and Purpose of Water Baptism? by Dennis Rupert
What is the Proper Way to Baptize? by Dennis Rupert