

CONGREGATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Polity Paper

INFANT BAPTISM, YES OR NO

by

Ronald A. Kline

Since early in the second century baptism has been an integral part of the religious movements in the Middle East. In early Judisim, circumcision was considered to be the same type of sacrament as Christians know view baptism. For a young Jewish boy to be accepted into the family of the church, he would have to be circumcised within eight days of his birth. This act would then signify that this young boy would be entitled to all of the rights and privileges of the Jewish faith and he would be entitled to eternal life. This of course was also providing the young man pursued his religious studies as he got older and followed the teachings of the elders.

As Christianity began to grow in popularity some of the old sacraments from the Old Testament were carried into this new faith while others were not and different type of acts were used in place of the old ways. The most prevalent change was the sacrament of baptism by water rather than the sacrament of circumcision.¹

People who converted to Christianity would give a statement of faith and receive the sacrament of baptism as well as be invited to break bread with the other Christians at the Lord's table.

Over the centuries men and women alike were baptized into Christianity as well as were their children. It was a commonly accepted policy that if believing parents had been baptized, then their children would also be entitled to the same sacrament no matter what their age.

Likewise, when a husband and wife converted to Christianity and only one of the parents believed in Jesus Christ, it would be ok for the children to be baptized. If at only one of the parents were believers, the early Christian church would still accept their children for baptism.²

Since those early days of the Christian church, the question of infant baptism has come up thousands of times. Board meetings; annual conferences,

deacon's meetings, and trustee's meetings have all weighed over this issue of infant baptism into the Christian church. On many occasions the discussions have become very heated and occasionally have been an issue that has been a dividing point for a congregation. Those for infant baptism and those against. Both sides claiming they are right and neither will to give in to the other because it just wouldn't be right.

Of those past centuries of discussion, the Congregational Church has not been left out of the controversy. For almost 375 years, the discussion and dialogue of infant baptism has sometimes raged on within the tradition.

The pilgrim fathers, the clergy, and the laity have debated the idea of the worthiness of an infant to receive the sacrament of baptism.

The question most often raised by those opposed to infant baptism, is that baptism should only be granted to a person who is fully aware of the meaning and purpose of the baptism. A person who is capable of understanding what the baptism means and why they are receiving it from GOD. Since baptism is a free and knowledgeable choice, made by an educated individual, an infant cannot possibly be aware of the act of the baptism nor could they understand what their responsibility is to GOD as they get older.

Because an infant cannot possibly receive an education about GOD, they therefore cannot be baptized and are not worthy to be members of the church.³

The pilgrim fathers struggled with the fact in the late 1600s, that people were drifting away from the church and many of them were losing their piety and religious fervor. There were of course, many faithful men and women who still supported the local church, but still, there were some who were very outwardly immoral and irreligious. There was a another group of people that had been baptized in the church and tried to raise their

families within the Christian way of life, but would not claim a religious experience before the church to keep their membership within the church.

The church, in the 1600s, would require all of their members to get up in front of the membership and state to the membership that they had had religious experience recently that would keep them in close contact with GOD and the church. If a member would not get up or could not make such a statement, that member would be banished from the congregation for a period of time until they could state a religious experience, at which time they would be let back into the fold.⁴

But even for those members that claimed they had experienced a religious happening in their lives, in some of the early churches, their infants could not be baptized. In the eyes of the church they had not stated a religious experience, therefore, they were not worthy of becoming a member of the church or of receiving any of the sacraments, especially baptism.

Families began to leave the church in large numbers and this began this perplexed the church leaders because of the lack of interest in the church. Because the church had been such an important part of their lives, the leadership could not understand why people were willing to leave their church behind.

The early church began to view the families that had left the church as themselves not worthy of the sacraments. They treated them as aliens within the community and completely barred them from receiving any of the covenants of GOD's grace, even sharing at the Lord's table. The church then began to take on the Baptist approach to the infant issue by stating that the church was no place for infant baptism and that infants were not worthy of church membership.

Proponents of infant baptism have their beliefs based on several simple basic assumptions. Assumptions, that for generations have held true to form for believers and supporters of infant baptism.

First. It is believed that in GOD's covenant with humankind, we are HIS children and HE is our Savior, providing we do not forsake HIM by our disobedience. As HIS children, we must present ourselves to be people of GOD as well as offering our children also, into the presence of GOD. JESUS has great concern for all children. HE welcomes them openly into HIS arms and becomes angry when people try to keep the children away from HIM. HE tells us a hard truth for adults-that the things of GOD are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes.⁵

Infants should never be kept from the house of GOD. Even though they have not received the religious education of older children and adults, they are still the children of GOD and entitled to all of GOD's grace.

Second. The children will be presented and offered to GOD as children of faithful followers of GOD. Realizing that an infant cannot possibly receive a religious education because of their age, they are still members of a household of faithful members of the church. Because they are members of their immediate family, they should be gladly welcomed into the larger family of the church.

As with young children, their parents are responsible for their education. Not only for teaching them about everyday information issues, but also about religious matters and the matters of the spirit. When they become older they will be ready to become full members of a church of their choice because they have received their religious education and are old enough to understand what it means.

While the early pilgrim church leaders were divided on the infant

baptism, an agreement had been reached by religious leaders called the Half-Way Covenant. The Half-Way Covenant was a religious agreement reached in response to the growing number of people that were leaving the church and described way in which people could come back to the church without a lot of trouble.

Part of the Half-Way Covenant allowed for the baptism of infants as long as their parents had been baptized in the church and their parents were willing to testify before the church of a conscious religious experience and state that a change had taken place in their spiritual life.

As time went on, churches began to follow the "Parish Way" or the "Presbyterian Way", by baptizing children into the church and after several years of instructions permit them to be welcomed at the Lord's table for communion.⁶

Infants are not baptized to constitute a new relationship with GOD or the church, they are baptized as a matter of fact that they are children of Christian parents and belong to the larger family of GOD. They receive the right and privilege to the Christian teachings of the church and the Christian home.

While infant baptism is a right of the infant, it is still a free act on the part of the parents of the child and should be left to their convictions and beliefs and should not be regulated by any church body.

SUMMARY

This issue, like any issue of the larger church, is not one that will be answered overnight and cannot be approached as such. It is an issue of freedom of choice by an infant's parents that can only be made through

Careful consideration on the child's behalf.

The issue for me is that the sacrament of Holy Baptism into the house of the Lord is to be granted to all and any who believe in GOD. The fact that an infant has not had the education of the church to make an educated choice in the matter, does not preclude one simple fact: to enter into the Kingdom of GOD and to receive GOD's grace and blessings, we must be baptized of the water. And, we must be baptized as soon after birth as humanly possible.

If an infant or young child were to unfortunately die before they have had the opportunity to make an educated choice about baptism, they have no chance to reach the Kingdom of GOD. This great burden then would rest heavily on the shoulders of the parents who chose not to baptize the infant at birth and provide the child with the eternal life to which he/she was entitled.

While adults and educated young people have the freedom to accept or decline the sacraments, infants do not have the same luxury. It is the duty of their parents to make decisions for them and it is the duty of the church to educate the parents on the importance of the Christian upbringing of their children.

While there is not specific biblical text stating the an infant is required to be baptized, there is also no specific text that claims an infant is worthless and therefore not entitled to baptism.

We must remember that the sacrament of baptism focuses on the indispensable, primary and originative action of GOD, the divine work of reconciliation and renewal. Baptism declares, signifies, and seals not what we do, but what GOD has done, currently does and will do for us. All of us! No matter what our age.

1. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Children of Promise, The Case for Baptizing Infants, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1979. Pg 14.

2. George M. Moynton, The Congregational Way, New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1903, Pg 68.

3. Williston Walker, The Creed and Platforms of Congregationalism, New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1991, Pg 20.

4. The Congregational Way, Pg 69.

5. Children of Promise, Pg 5.

6. The Congregational Way, Pg 68.

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INFANT BAPTISM
"Are They Worthy?"

by

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The topic question I have chosen to deal with in this paper is that of the propriety of Infant Baptism within the Christian Religion. I will be providing information from religious authors, priests and martyrs from the period beginning around 195 a.d..

Writers such as Clement, Origen, and Emperor Constantine will be reviewed in pursuit of this search of information, as well as the writings of the German authors Joachim Jeremias and Kurt Aland. Both of these gentlemen have done extensive research and written greatly on this specific topic.

I will be providing information as to the beliefs of the period of early Christianity with respect to Infant Baptism. Was this an actual part of early Christian religious tradition? Were all infants required to be baptized at birth by the early Christian church? Did all churches within the Christian community have the same belief and practices about Infant Baptism?

Finally, I will provide information from the practices and beliefs of the Puritan settlers movement concerning Infant Baptism beginning in the 1600s.

This paper is in no way written to sway opinion of a congregation or of a denomination with respect to Infant Baptism. What it will do is provide those interested parties with research data which will allow them to decide for themselves whether to have their infant baptized at birth or shortly after. Or, will the parents wait until the child has been schooled in the Christian tradition and able to decide for themselves whether or not to receive the sacrament of Baptism.

When one looks at the sacraments of the Christian church, one usually includes marriage, communion and baptism in the list. ^{not Protestants, who have only two sacraments}

Marriage, the joining of two people into one in the Christian faith, is usually clear cut and to the point.

Communion, the receiving and sharing of the blood and body of Jesus Christ within the family of believers also, is usually clear cut.

But - a problem arises around the topic of Baptism. What is it's purpose? Why should we do it? Is there a special age for being baptized? Do we have to take special religious classes before we get baptized?

All of these questions cause great debates within the Christian community today. We all say that we are believers in Jesus Christ and that Jesus Christ is our salvation. But, unfortunately, we seem to stop many times at that point of our agreement with other denominations. Even within the same family of believers, HIS followers can't even agree on whether or not an infant is worthy to receive baptism. Or, that the right should only be granted to people schooled in Christian traditions, which means, they feel that only people who can understand and reason about the importance of the baptism, should be allowed to receive the sacrament.

Each Christian denomination of today, as well as each individual church within that denomination, ^{has its} ~~have their~~ own particular methods of providing the congregations with the sacrament of baptism. Annual conferences of Baptists, Lutherans and Presbyterians have had their general meetings brought to a complete standstill because a question of Infant Baptism was raised and arguments ensued among the attendees. These modern day disagreements are not unique on the subject of Infant Baptism within the Christian faith.

Shortly after 200 a.d. the early Christian church put out an order called the "Church Order of Hippolytus" which laid out rules and regulations

that were to be followed by the new churches.¹

In this "Church Order", the idea of "Missionary Baptism" was strongly addressed. "Missionary Baptism" was the practice of giving baptism to a person on their death bed whom had not previously been baptized so that they would be assured of their spirits getting into heaven after they died². The Emperor Constantine and his son Constantius were the first in recorded history to be baptized in this fashion.³ Even though both of these men were strong supporters of the early church, they both however, put off their own baptism until just before they died. They felt that baptism was the doorway to a Most Holy Place and they didn't have a need for the sacrament until just before they were ready to die so they could make up for any bad things they had done while they were alive.

As Jeremias writes of his understanding of early churches involvement in Infant Baptism, he concludes that the early writings of "Child Baptism" actually meant "Infant Baptism." What was in question was the amount of time immediately following the child's birth that passed until the child was give the baptismal sacrament. He questions whether it was given immediately after birth, a few weeks after birth, or was it postponed by a few years until the child attained some understanding of the importance of the sacrament.⁴ Did the early church fathers intend in their beliefs and practices to have new-born infants be baptized or were they talking about children of early grade school years? He writes that Gregory Nazianzus wrote in his "Oratio 40" of the year 381 that counsels churches, children should be baptized about the age of three, because by then they would be able to answer at least some of the baptismal questions and possibly understand something about the Christian faith.⁵ At this point in time, we begin to see a differing point of view begin to appear over this question of

baptism and the age at which it was to be accomplished.

Indisputable testimonies of the practice of Infant Baptism in the early church began early in the third century. The documentation comes from three reliable sources from this era: the Church Order of Hippolytus, a synodal letter of Cyprian, and from some of the writings of Origen.

The first of these documents comes from Cyprian who had had long discussions with the bishops in North Africa on this matter. He writes in his Epistle 64 to Bishop Fidus in response to the bishop's question on the matter of Infant Baptism that the baptism of infants should most assuredly take place within two or three days of the infant's birth, a decision totally supported by the other bishops but still held in contempt by Fidus. He felt that new-borns were too repulsive to look at in the first two or three days of their birth and that only those things pure and clean should be able to receive those things pure and clean, such as the sacramental baptism. Fidus also felt that new-born Christian males should have to wait the same required eight days as do the new-born Jewish males, which also was repudiated by the other bishops.⁶ Since this matter was dealt with in such a powerful manner by Cyprian, one must conclude, then, that Infant Baptism was not only a rule of the early church, but also a requirement. We also see here a valid testimony of the early Christian parents with regard to their concern for the religious upbringing of their children. The parents want to assure themselves that their children will be able to enter the kingdom of GOD through the receiving of the baptism and will follow whatever rule or rules the church establishes.

As we look at the writings of Origen, we see that he wrote of Infant Baptism while he was in Palestine from 231 to 250 a.d.. When his attitudes are closely examined, it is clear that he is against the need for Infant

Baptism, because a child has not actually committed any sins requiring forgiveness. Therefore, they do not require the baptism to forgive sins. Origen felt that the church was not following in ways of the Apostles by baptizing infants, because churches that did provide the sacrament to infants were breaking church tradition by actually baptizing infants. He believed that breaking of the church tradition was wrong and that it should be halted. What he failed to consider, though, in his writings, was the fact that the early Christian church in Palestine was still a very young church and had not yet had sufficient time to develop well ground traditions concerning all of the sacraments.⁷

The last document, the "Church Order of Hippolytus," was very clear on its stand on Infant Baptism. It states, "that first the little ones should be baptized, and those who can speak for themselves should speak, and for those who cannot speak for themselves, their parents or their family should speak for them."⁸ Here, we clearly see that the older children, those a little more mature, as well as even the youngest, should receive the baptism. It is not obvious at this point whether the baptism was obligatory to all in the congregation or just a rule of the church. The inference seen in the "Church Order" is that Infant Baptism was a common occurrence and was done often enough to be seen as an official regulation of the early church.

Also, near the end of the second century writings, we see Tertullian's opinion on Infant Baptism. He, however, approaches the topic from a different direction. He does not understand the need for infants to be baptized when they have not committed any sins. An infant has not worked yet in his young life to make any mistakes to ask for forgiveness from GOD, so why should he be baptized as soon as he is born? Tertullian feels that for anyone to be acceptable to be baptized, they must go through the proper

preparations as he explains in his "De baptismo 20." ⁹

Each candidate, he explains, should strive for total cleansing through fasting and night vigil which is to continue right up until the service of the baptism is to take place at which time the person will confess their sins and when the deliverance will be received from GOD.

This main focal point from Tertullian and his "De baptismo 20" brings the church to the end of the second century and the creation of a new and powerful tradition within the early Christian church.

Although Tertullian enters into many public arguments about Infant Baptism, the response from the people is so strong and powerful that his efforts to dissuade the people from Infant Baptism in lieu of waiting until their children were older became weaker and weaker,

and the movement towards Infant Baptism became stronger and stronger.

As discussed earlier, the communication between Cyprian and Bishop Fidus was coming into play at the same time as Tertullian's public discussions. Bishop Fidus suggestion of waiting for eight days, like that of the Jewish tradition, still did not sit well with the people, and the church itself could not come to a unanimous decision on the details of the Infant Baptism procedures. With this information, we see a strong hint that the tradition of Infant Baptism is not one that has been passed down from the earliest church fathers, but one that has been established in the young and growing early Christian church.

New evidence has been discovered to support the theory that Infant Baptism was a part of the early Christian Church as far back as 200 a.d. In Egypt, tombstones of infants from the early second century have been discovered which provide evidence that infants were definitely baptized at birth or just days after birth.

The tombstones show the name of the infant, the date of birth and death, and, the date of the child's baptism. This evidence truly supports the idea and fact that infants were baptized shortly after their birth with the act of the baptism being one of the most important things to be done for the child in the eyes of their parents. The stranger thing that does not appear on any of the tombstones found are the names of the parents of the children. None of the stones discovered has the family name or that of the parents to completely identify the child and their lineage.¹⁰ One of the tombstones found and the clearest to read was that of a young child called Zosimus. By the markings on the tombstone and the words used in the inscription, it stated that he was a child of Christian parents. The phrase that was translated was, "I, Ziosmus, a believer from believers, lie here having lived 2 years, 1 month, 25 days." The part of the phrase, "a believer from believers" proves to scholars that the child had been baptized at the earliest age, meaning at birth.¹¹

As the Christian church began to progress and grow over the next several centuries, very little changed in the ideas and the traditions surrounding Infant Baptism. Some churches still refused to baptize children until they had received a religious education which included learning about and understanding the importance of the sacrament of baptism. With that understanding and knowledge, the sacrament of baptism would then be offered to the children, and it would be their choice as to whether or not they chose to accept or decline. They would have the opportunity to accept and develop their own covenant with GOD and to join the family of believers and members of the larger church family. By joining the church family, they would become part of a covenant community known as the church, whose duty it is to teach the Word of God, administer the sacraments and provide for

*evangelism of the society in which it is located.*¹²

*Not until the time of Abraham did GOD formally establish a covenant relationship with mankind by calling upon Abraham giving him the promise for himself and his posterity. The promise cleared the way by establishing the covenant to be received by not only Abraham, but also by all of his infant children as being rightful heirs of those same covenant promises. Whereas the act of circumcision was the sign and the seal of the covenant for the peoples of Israel, it was also the sign and the seal of their infant children that were to follow in their paths. These children who would grow into adults would be entitled to receive the personal privilege of the grace of GOD as infants as was promised to them in the time of Abraham.*¹³

At this point I would like to share an analogy of a unilateral covenant with a condition imposed upon one party by another and the choices that may occur.

"A set of parents may provide for their child financially by setting up a trust. However, they may stipulate that the bulk of the trust shall be granted to the child only upon the condition that the first \$8,000 be used by the child to help secure a college education. The child may forfeit his right to the trust by refusing to go to college; that is his right. This makes it impossible to realize the purpose of the trust but in no way does the forfeiture alter the purpose of the parents who set up the trust, nor does it detract from the bona fide offer inherent in the terms of the trust."¹⁴

A point that must be made very carefully here, is that until the time the child actually refuses to meet the terms of the trust, he is presumably the recipient of the trust and is treated as though that would be the outcome.

In the same manner, the heirs to the covenant of GOD's grace may renounce his rights to that covenant by refusing to repent of sin and accept

Jesus Christ as his Savior. This act is done as a person gets older and comes of age to make his own decisions. While the individual nullifies any benefit of the covenant of grace to himself, this act does not affect the enactment of GOD's covenant of grace to mankind.

In Genesis 17, we see that GOD is making HIS covenant with Abraham for all time to come. It will cover all generations and all descendants of those generations to follow for all time. To receive this covenant, each male who is eight days old, will be circumcised which will be the sign and mark of the covenant with GOD. This covenant is for servants, foreigners and strangers in your house that believe in GOD and the covenant. But, those males who will not be circumcised will break the covenant of GOD and shall be cut off also from his people.¹⁵

We see throughout the history of Christianity that the discussion of Infant Baptism is never really solved nor is it placed by the wayside to be discussed at a later date. Parents of newborns, depending on where they lived, might have their child baptized as soon as possible after the child's birth, or they may wait until the child has received some formal religious education. This is the same type of response received by parents as well as the church in the early 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries. Like today, the final decision of the Infant Baptism rested and rests upon the shoulders of the child's parents.

Within Christianity, it has long been assumed that a child born to parents who were believers in Jesus Christ would automatically be entitled to be baptized as an infant, because the parents would speak for the child by promising to raise the child in the Christian tradition to the best of their abilities. Even though this is the case, many Christians would not baptize their children as an infant, because they felt so strongly that the child

should make their own choice when they became old enough to understand the importance and meaning of the sacrament.

As with any denomination, the roots of Congregationalism have also been involved in the controversy of Infant Baptism. For almost 375 years, the discussion and dialogue of Infant Baptism has sometimes raged on within the tradition and, on occasion, even brought an annual meeting to a halt, while delegates argued the topic on the meeting room floor.

The pilgrim fathers, the clergy, and the laity have debated the idea of the worthiness of an infant to receive the sacrament of baptism. But still, no central focal statement or policy has been made or even decided. The most often raised question by those opposed to Infant Baptism is that baptism should only be granted to a person who is fully aware of the meaning and purpose of the baptism. Their opinion and basis for that opinion is almost two thousand years old and has been argued by every theologian through time with no definitive answer being derived.

While they believed it to be a choice of a free and knowledgeable person they could not accept that an infant could possibly understand the ramifications of the sacrament. Even though infants born of Christian believers promised to raise their children in the ways of the LORD, an infant was just not worthy enough to warrant a baptism.¹⁶

The pilgrim fathers struggled with the fact in the late 1600s that people were drifting away from the church causing many of them to loose their piety and religious fervor. In those days the church was the focal point of the activities of the community, and when people would begin to get disinterested, a void would begin to open in the community.

There were, of course, still many faithful men and women who still supported the local church, but still, there were some who were very

outwardly immoral and irreligious. Another group of people existed that had been baptized in the church and tried to raise their families with the Christian way of life, yet they also had a problem with the church. In the early colony of Plymouth, the church required that you claim in front of the entire community that you had had a religious experience, a sort of vision, and you would be able to keep your membership within the church. If you couldn't get up in front of the membership to make the statement that you had experienced a religious experience, you would be banished from the congregation for a period of time until you could once again come before them, claim a religious experience, at which time, they would let you back into the fold. This requirement drove an even deeper wedge within the people of the church community because those who truly believed in Jesus Christ and did not experience this vision, were kept from participating in the church and receiving the sacraments. And since the community relied so heavily upon the fellowship of the church, not receiving the sacraments and not having their children baptized was very much a concern of the parents.¹⁷

But, even for those members that claimed they had experienced a religious happening in their lives, in some of the early churches, their infants still could not be baptized. In the eyes of the church, they, the infants, had not appeared before the leaders of the church, stated a religious experience; therefore, they were not worthy of becoming a member of the church or of receiving any of the sacrament--especially baptism.

Families began to leave the church in large numbers and this perplexed the church leaders because of the lack of interest in the church. Because the church had been such an important part of their lives, the leadership could not understand why people were willing to leave their church behind

and not have their lives fulfilled.

The early church began to view the families that left the church as themselves, not worthy to receive the sacraments. They treated them as aliens within the community and completely barred them from receiving any of the covenants of GOD's grace, and they went as far as denying them the rights at the LORD's table. While the people were now being treated completely as outsiders, the church began to take the Baptist approach to the Infant Baptism issue by stating that the church had no place for Infant Baptism and that infants were also not worthy of church membership.

Proponents of infant baptism have their beliefs based on several simple basic assumptions. Assumptions, that for generations have held true to form for believers and supporters of infant baptism.

First. It is believed, that in GOD's covenant with humankind, we are HIS children and HE is our Savior, providing we do not forsake HIM by our disobedience. As HIS children, we must present ourselves to be people of GOD as well as offering our children also into the presence of GOD. JESUS had great concerns for all children. HE welcomes them openly into HIS arms and becomes angry when people try to keep them away from HIM. HE tells us a hard truth for adults--that the things of GOD are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes.¹⁸

Infants should never be kept from the house of GOD, even though they have not received the religious education of older children and adults. They are still the children of GOD and, as such, entitled to ALL of GOD's grace.

Second. The children will be presented and offered to GOD as children of faithful followers of GOD. Realizing that an infant cannot possibly receive a religious education because of their age, they are still members of a household of faithful members of the church. Because they are members of

their immediate family, they should be gladly welcomed into the larger family of the church.

As for the young children, their parents are responsible for their education. Not only for teaching them about everyday information issues, but also about religious matters and matters of the spirit. When they become older, they will be ready to become full and active members of a church of their choice, because they have received their religious education as was promised to them by their parents and are now old enough to understand what it means.

While the early pilgrim church leaders were divided on the Infant Baptism issue, an agreement had been reached by religious leaders called the "Half-Way Covenant." The Half-Way Covenant was an agreement in response to the growing number of people that were leaving the church and described ways in which people could come back to the church without much difficulty.

Part of the Half-Way Covenant allowed for the baptism of infants as long as their parents had been baptized in the church and their parents were willing to testify before the church of a conscious religious experience, plus state that a change had taken place in their spiritual lives.

As time went on, churches began to follow the "Parish Way" or the "Presbyterian Way," by baptizing children into the church after several years of instructions and permitting them to be welcomed at the Lord's table.¹⁹

SUMMARY

Infants are not baptized to constitute a new relationship with GOD or the church. They are baptized as a matter of fact that they are children of Christian parents and belong to the larger family of GOD. They receive the rights and privileges to the Christian teachings of the church and the Christian home.

This issue, like any issue of the larger church, is not one that will be answered overnight and cannot as such be approached. It is an issue of freedom of choice by an infant's parents that can only be made through careful consideration on the child's behalf.

The issue for me is that the sacrament of Holy Baptism into the house of the LORD, is to be granted to all and any who believe in GOD. The fact that an infant has not had the religious education of the church to make an educated free choice in the matter, does not preclude one very simple fact: to enter into the Kingdom of GOD and to receive GOD's grace and blessings, we must be baptized of the water. Therefore, we must be baptized as soon after our birth as possible.

If an infant or young child were to unfortunately die before they have had the opportunity to make an educated choice about baptism, what chance do they have to reach the kingdom of heaven? This great burden of choice then only rests heavily on the shoulders of the parents who chose not to baptize the infant at birth and to provide the child with the opportunity to receive eternal life to which they would be entitled.

While adults and educated young people have the freedom to accept or decline the offer of the sacrament, infants do not have that same luxury. It is therefore the utmost duty of the parents to make the decisions for them, and it is their duty, as well as the duty of the church then, to educate these infants as they grow in the Christian traditions.

While there is not a specific biblical text stating that an infant is required to be baptized, likewise, there is not specific text that forbids an infant from being baptized.

We must remember that the sacrament of baptism focuses on the indispensable, primary and originative action of GOD, the divine work of

reconciliation and renewal. Baptism declares, signifies and seals not what we do, but what GOD has done, currently does and will do for us. ALL OF US!!

ENDNOTES

1. Kurt Aland, Did the Early Church Baptize Infants, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1963, Pg 43.
2. Did the Early Church Baptize Infants, Pg 44.
3. Did the Early Church Baptize Infants, Pg 44.
4. Did the Early Church Baptize Infants, Pg 46.
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