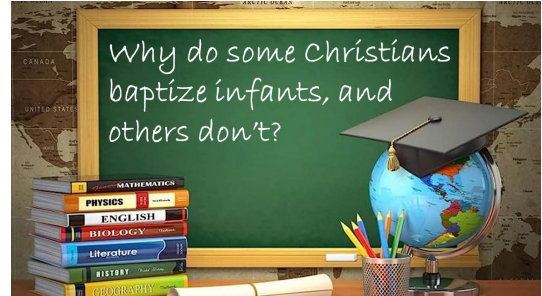


## It's Up to You 2023 (Week 2): Why Do Some Christians Baptize Infants and Others Don't?

### **Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less**



1. Most Christians around the globe for most of church history have baptized infants, as well as adults/teens, but the issue has been, and continues to be on occasion, a course of conflict among Christians.

2. The most straightforward way to get at the meaning of baptism is to go back to its roots: Christians didn't invent baptism, and in fact merged and adapted two rites from within our predecessors, the Jewish faith.

3. The first rite that lies behind baptism is circumcision (Genesis 17): this was performed as a sign of God's everlasting promises and commitment to that child and Israel.

4. One reason circumcision happens on the 8th day is that it signals that the child belongs to or is dedicated to God (see Leviticus 22.27).

5. The second rite is the "tevilah" (ritual bath or cleansing), which allowed a Jew who had been rendered unclean to reenter community life and worship.

6. Both baptism and circumcision were known and practiced among some other pagan religions in the Greco-Roman world as well, in the case of the latter usually around puberty and tied to fertility.

7. One reason the earliest Christians chose baptism, and not circumcision, as one of their community practices is that it included both sexes, a necessity of the egalitarian New Testament church that included many women.

8. So baptism understood in light of circumcision and ritual cleaning means that 1) we belong to God, which is also indicated by being baptized "in the name of" God, and 2) He gives us His promises and commitment before we can even ask for them.

9. Likewise, in light of the historical background, baptism also is meant 3) to mark the start of lifelong faith and growth, and 4) to welcome us into the spiritual community that is indispensable to our maturation and care.

10. All this being said, baptizing only adults and teens after they articulate their own faith commitment tends to put the emphasis in the wrong places: baptism is far more about God and His commitment to me than my commitment to Him and far more about community than the individual.

## **Summary Quotes about Baptism**

James Brownson (New Testament professor at Western Seminary, Holland MI): Baptism is God's gracious kindness and His summons for us to respond.

Alexander Schmemmann (Orthodox theologian): Truth be told, none of us understand much about the gospel at our baptism, regardless of age. It will take us a lifetime, and even all of eternity, to grasp it more completely. We are not saved by our knowledge, nor our ability to comprehend the mysterious of our faith...It is not what we do that makes us worthy of baptism, but what has been done for us.

Donald McKim (theologian and editor), in *Introducing the Reformed Faith*: All persons regardless of age are as helpless as infants before God. Yet God takes the initiative in salvation and draws us by faith into His promises and sacred community. God's love precedes any human decision to be baptized...Baptism is an act of God given by God. The power of baptism is lifelong...it has a continuing effect...It is given to sinners who groan, wearied, and oppressed by their own sin, in order that they may have something to lift them up and comfort them, so that they aren't plunged into confusion and despair.

## **Reaffirmation of Baptism Vows**

For your own devotional use this week, here's a reprint of those reaffirmation of baptism vows we took yesterday at the end of the service:

Adapted from the PCUSA's Reaffirmation of Baptism Liturgy:

Through our baptism we were made citizens of God's kingdom and freed from the bondage of sin, so we together renounce all evil in its many forms in the world which defies God's truth and justice, and separates us from His love.

We declare that Jesus Christ alone is our Lord and Savior, and with God's help, we will be His faithful disciples, obeying His Word and showing His love, all our days.

We will find our peace of mind knowing that we are sealed in God's promises, and that our baptism is a sign that they are never null and void in our lives.

We commit ourselves to nurturing the hope of baptism in one another, in young and old alike, without exception and without fail.

We thank God for the gift of baptism. To the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and forever, amen.

## More to Explore

The topic of baptism is vast, and we only touched on one very important aspect of it yesterday. These resources below will help you the subject even more widely - they are meant to not repeat what you heard on Sunday, 7/17:

- In this five minute video, New Testament scholar N. T. Wright shows how Christian baptism is tied to the Exodus story of the Old Testament: [N. T. Wright on Baptism](#)
- A simple, straightforward overview of how Presbyterians view baptism, which includes a lot of short answers to very practical questions about it: [What Presbyterians believe: the sacrament of baptism](#)
- Another five minute video from a Reformed scholar that shows we as Christians are Abraham's children, and baptism signals our linkage to him and the promises made to him: [Infant Baptism](#)
- A four minute video from one Anglican pastor in which he passes along how he explains infant baptism to his congregants, leaning on church history, Jesus' own words, and the proclamation of Peter in Acts 2: [Anglican Helps: Baptism of Infants](#)
- Interested in the significance of circumcision within Judaism, and why it's done on the 8th day? Check out these two resources (and thanks to Steph Lee for pointing out the medical reason for this!): [The Power of Circumcision - Jewish Theological Seminary](#) and [Why Wait Eight Days for the Circumcision?](#)
- We didn't talk about the baptism conducted by John the Baptist, which Jesus Himself observed...it's a tricky subject about which there is no consensus among New Testament scholars...check out how these events are described in Matthew's gospel: [Matthew 3 NRSVA](#)