



# GETHSEMANE

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### INFANT BAPTISM

Many good, well-meaning people honestly believe we were baptized in the wrong way unless we were immersed. They also insist that we were baptized at the wrong time if we were baptized in infancy. Let us then once more examine our grounds for infant baptism.

1. Christ commands to baptize all nations. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them,” St. Matthew 28:19 RSV. The disciples were commissioned to Christianize the world, to make “disciples of all nations”. How is this to be done? Baptizing them (the nations, whose populations consist of men, women and children) “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.” In this divine commission we have but one imperative verb in the Greek, matheteusate, correctly translated “make disciples.” Two participles, Baptizontes and didaskentes, tell us how this is to be done: “baptizing them...teaching them.” Do you know of a nation that has no children or regards them not as part of the nation?

2. Children are born in sin (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12) and must be regenerated. They are born spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), outside of the Fold of the Good Shepherd. All of us “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” Ephesians 2:3. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit” John 3:5,6 RSV. We know of no way of giving an infant the new birth except by “water and the Spirit”. We believe this refers to baptism. Paul calls baptism “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost”. Titus 3:5

3. Christ commands that little children be brought to Him. We obey this command by baptizing them, giving them “the washing of regeneration” and then teaching them about God and the Saviour as early as it is possible to do so. Why did the disciples try to keep mothers from bringing their “infants” (Luke 18:15) to Jesus? They thought these little ones were too young to get any benefit from the touch and the blessing of Jesus. Let them grow up, thought the disciples. Then they will have at least some understanding of their need of a Saviour. Jesus thought otherwise. He was moved to indignation and said to his disciples: “Let the children come to me and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” Mark 10:14 RSV.

If the kingdom of God belongs to the children as well as to the adults, why should they be denied the sacrament by which we enter God’s kingdom? “Jesus did not baptize these children” do we hear you say? The New Testament sacrament of baptism was not formally instituted until the day when shortly before His ascension Jesus commissioned his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. “Moreover, Jesus Himself baptized no one.” (John 4:2) The little boys of the group of children had doubtless been circumcised at the age of eight days. They, together with their little sisters, stood in covenant relation with God according to the Old Testament dispensation.

4. As children were received into covenant relation with God during Old Testament times by the rite of circumcision, which was a type of baptism (Colossians 2:11,12), so now during the New Testament dispensation God desires that they be brought into covenant relation with Him by the sacrament of baptism. There is in this world such a thing as the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Grace. God made provision for the reception of babes into the kingdom of Grace during the Old Testament dispensation by the rite of circumcision. (Genesis 17:12-14)

Is it possible that He has made no provision for receiving these little folks into covenant relation with Him during the New Testament dispensation? If that were true, the new dispensation would be poorer than the Old Testament dispensation! That cannot be. Baptism is the rite of entrance into the kingdom of Grace. It is the sacrament of regeneration, for it imparts that higher life, even spiritual life, which is eternal life begun.

5. The promise of God’s grace belongs to the children. “For the promise is unto you and to you children” (Acts 2:39). When did God ever enter into covenant relation with parents without including their little ones. We note above that during Old Testament times infants stood in the same relation to the

*“Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane...”  
St. Matthew 26:36*

kingdom, and the covenant of God as did the parents, and the sign and token of this relation with God was the same, namely circumcision. This outward sign of the covenant relation with God was given to children as early as the eighth day after their birth. If baptism has not taken the place of circumcision, what has? Baptism is a step forward, for it is intended for all without exception, male and female. The exact time for this rite is not commanded, but it is certainly God's will that this very important matter be attended to early, very early in life.

6. Children have the capacity for faith. "whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea" St Matthew 18:6. We do not mean that a little child can have a full conscious faith made up of knowledge, assent, and confidence. But God can bring a child into a saved relationship to Him, and this blessed state and standing with God the Bible calls faith. The essence of Christian faith is trust. Who will say that the Creator is unable to instill in even the smallest child a trust in Him which is beyond human understanding? At any rate, the child and not the adult is the model subject for the kingdom of God. "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein". If the child is the model subject for the kingdom of God, why should he not also be the model subject for the sacrament which is the God-given rite of entrance into the Kingdom.

Objectors to infant baptism say that baptism is for believers only, implying that, when we baptize a little child, we are baptizing a little unbeliever. But Jesus holds up that child as the model. "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" St Matthew 18:3,4 RSV. And yet some want to tell us that a child cannot be reckoned as a believer because he has not yet grown up.

We teach that baptism kindles faith and imparts spiritual life in the infant. If the child cannot be brought into a state of faith he is lost, for "He that believeth not shall be damned." These children are either among the saved or among the lost. There are only two groups of people traveling toward eternity, the pardoned and the unpardoned, those who stand in a saved relation to God, and those who do not. Where are you going to put the children? Ignore them as nonentities; as not being part of the Lost whom Jesus came to save? We know that our baptized little folks are in a state of grace with God, for the very nature of a sacrament is such that it bestows and imparts grace where there is no willful resistance. A little child does not play the hypocrite as, alas, the adult so often does.

**"HE THAT BELIEVETH AND IS BAPTIZED SHALL BE SAVED."** Do not these words state that we are to believe first and then be baptized? I do not so understand them. He that believeth and is baptized -- is a baptized one -- he shall be saved. But he that believeth not is lost, whether he is baptized or unbaptized. Baptism may be administered before or after full conscious faith. In the case of an adult it should come afterwards, in the case of a child, before. Other passages of Scripture compel me thus to understand the words of Mark 16:16.

Moreover the word of commission as given by St. Mark: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," and the commission as given by St. Matthew: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...teaching them," refer to one and the same work; namely, Christianize the world; bring the gospel and, if possible, impart the gracious gifts of the gospel, to every creature, including the smallest babe. How are you going to bring the gifts of the gospel to the little child except through the sacrament which is primarily intended for him, for it is "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost". Titus 3:5.

7. The apostles baptized whole families, assuredly then also children. The apostles certainly understood the meaning and the scope of the divine commission. Their practice under this command must be taken as a clear and final explanation of what the Saviour meant when He sent them forth to Christianize the world. If they baptized children, we must certainly conclude that children should be baptized. The question then arises, "Did the apostles baptize children?"

St. Paul baptized Lydia "and her household" Acts 16: 14,15. In the same city, Philippi, of Macedonia, the same apostle baptized the jailer, "He and all his." The RSV translates the text thus: "And he (the jailer) was baptized at once, with his family" Acts 16:33. In I Corinthians 1:16 we read: "And I (Paul) baptized also the household of Stephanas." Cornelius of Caesarea was a devout man and one that feared God "with all his house," Acts 10:2. St. Peter was directed to visit Cornelius, who had assembled "his kinsmen and near friends." While Peter was preaching to them, "the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word". These people were baptized before that service ended. Have we not reason to believe that

with Cornelius the members of his pious family were also baptized, since we are expressly told that an apostle baptized the family of Lydia and of the jailer at Philippi and also Stephanas?

When we go to the history of the early church, what do we find? Tertullian, who died in 230 A.D., was the first of the church fathers who opposed infant baptism. The very fact that he opposed it proves that it must have been the general practice of his day... Why did he oppose the baptizing of children? Not because he considered it contrary to the divine commission, but he feared gross sins committed after baptism, could not be forgiven. Many serious people of Tertullian's day were so worried about the forgiveness of sins committed after baptism, that they delayed being baptized until late in life, or even until they thought death stared them in the face. The early church fathers, as they are called, including Polycarp (a pupil of St. John), Hermas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, etc., all sanctioned infant baptism.

8. Baptism is not law but gospel. What do I mean? So many people think of baptism as primarily something that man does in obedience to a divine precept. He thus desires to manifest submission to God's will and to indicate to the world that he wants to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus, and be known as one. In other words, many good people lay the emphasis on What Man does when he is baptized, and not on what a gracious God offers to do. They stress man's submissive act and not God's promise. In baptism a man personally and consciously takes a decided stand on the Lord's side. This is the chief thing the opinion of many. This is a sad mistake. No wonder that those who hold this view cannot understand how a little child can be a proper subject for baptism: "Can a babe personally and consciously take such a step?" they ask. "Does an infant desire baptism and confess faith in the Saviour?"

Baptism is not primarily law but gospel. The gracious heavenly Father, for Jesus' sake, desires to bestow an infinite gift upon the recipient of baptism, even forgiveness of sins, and reinstatement as a child of God and an heir of eternal glory. Can a child be the fortunate recipient of a gracious gift without the child's being aware of this blessed fact? Certainly he can. Thank God, that is just what takes place in "the washing of regeneration." What baptism signifies is not so much our conscious yielding to God, but it is a token of His infinite grace which is being bestowed upon us... Baptism is the sign of what God does rather than what we do... The imparting of divine grace always takes place in baptism, if the baptized one does not willfully resist and thus reject the proffered gift. A little child never thus resists. That is why the child is the model, and not the naturally proud, independent, and self sufficient adult.

9. The adult baptisms recorded in the New Testament are no argument against the divine sanction of infant baptism. We repeatedly find in Scripture such statements as these: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." "What doth hinder me to be baptized?... If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest." On these and similar instances of adult baptism the opponents of infant baptism lean heavily. They confidently believe that they are Scriptural proof for an exclusive adult baptism. They are certainly mistaken... Has it ever occurred to you that every one of these recorded baptisms was administered to a convert from either Judaism or paganism? Of course an unbaptized adult should repent and confess his sins before he is baptized... What Christian minister would demand less??? But where in Scripture do we find that an adult born of Christian parents was baptized??? To my knowledge neither Scripture nor the history of the first 150 years of the Christian era contains a single recorded baptism of an adult born of Christian parents. These descendants of believing ancestors must have been baptized in childhood...

"It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." It is the will of the heavenly Father that not one of these little ones be denied "The washing of regeneration." "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." Mark 10:14,15 RSV. ---Wm. N. Emeh