

## Why do you baptize infants?

*At Zion Church we believe in the great commission that Christ gave His Church to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Mt 28:19). In the evangelical church today there remains a question as to who should rightly be baptized: 1) adult disciples or 2) adult disciples and their children. Consider the following reasons why we hold the latter position:*

### I. The Old Testament Pattern

In the Old Testament God initiated a special mark that was to be placed on His people: the sign of circumcision. On the eighth day after birth the male child was to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant relationship between God and His people. The sign of circumcision was a *visible mark* which set apart God's people from the world. It was a sign of the covenant relationship Abraham had with God. Genesis 17:7,11 records the promise God made to Abraham:

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. . . You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

Whoever does not receive the sign of the covenant is to be "cut off" from Israel (17:14). In the Old Testament, God clearly places His mark of ownership--a mark of

salvation--on adults who believe *and their children*. In similar language, the apostle Peter exhorts the New Testament throng in Jerusalem to

Repent and be baptized, every one of you. . . The promise is for you *and your children*. (Ac 2:38,39)

### II. The New Testament Pattern

In the New Testament we see God continuing to place a mark of ownership on His people. The sign, however, no longer involves the shedding of blood. In the sacrament of baptism God visibly sets his people apart for Himself. We believe the Old Testament pattern of setting apart believers *and their children* is the same pattern to be followed in the New Testament. Consider the example of the apostles. They practiced *household* baptism. The Bible records twelve scenes of one or more Christian baptisms. Of these twelve, three are explicit cases of household baptism (Ac 16:15; 16:31-34; 1 Co 1:16). The Greek word for household or house ("oikos") clearly includes households with infants in them (cf. Ac 7:20).

The apostolic witness of the Bible is that they baptized households. Following the apostolic practice, Zion Church baptizes households--households that include infants as well as those that do not.

### III. Other New Testament Evidence

In the New Testament the apostle Paul explicitly compares baptism with the Old Covenant rite of circumcision:

In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been *buried with him in baptism*. . . (Col. 2:11,12a)

If the sacrament of baptism is a New Covenant sign which fulfills an Old Covenant form (circumcision) then we would expect it to involve the same participants: adult believers and their children.

We see other indications that the children of believers have a special standing with God. They are called "holy," or set apart (1 Cor. 7:14). Jesus repeatedly reminds his disciples that "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these [children]." (Mt. 19:14). And Paul includes a word to the children in his letter to the "saints" in Ephesus (cf. 1:1; 6:1).

We are *not* saying that all children, by virtue of being the children of believers are automatically saved. However, we *are* saying that the children of believers are set apart unto God and are to be raised with the *expectation* that the Holy Spirit is at work in their lives, until their actions prove otherwise. We consider children to be a vital part of Christ's Church and raise them with the hope--and expectation--that they will grow up to boldly profess Christ as their Savior.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

*Westminster Confession of Faith* (XXVIII)

*Christian Baptism*, John Murray

*Infant Baptism: What Christian Parents Should Know*, J.

Sartelle