

Infant/Child Baptism Position Paper New City Church

It is the practice of New City Church to baptize two groups of people. The first group consists of men, women, and children, who show a genuine faith in Jesus Christ for salvation and a desire to join the church family. This is called *believers baptism*. The second group consists of *infants and children* who belong to a household, with at least one believing parent, and are Covenant Partners (members) of New City Church.

The question I am asked often: *“Why do you baptize infants and children who have not publicly professed faith in Jesus Christ? Is that even a biblical understanding of baptism from the Scriptures? Aren’t only children and adults who show signs of regeneration (being born again by the Spirit *John 1:12-13, 3:1-8) admitted to the rite of baptism?”*

These are great questions and our church would not want to do anything that is contrary to the Scriptures. My first response is always: (1) the teaching of paedo-baptism (infant baptism) should not be an issue Christians ultimately divide over. Many faithful, Bible-trusting, Jesus-loving, and godly Christians/churches historically have held differing positions on baptism, yet, (2) we are convinced from the Scriptures and by observing church history the practice of household baptism (which includes infants and young children) can and should be practiced in the local church.

Below you will find factors which led us to these conclusions:

Biblical Foundation

It is the belief of the *Christian Reformed Church in America* (CRC www.crcna.org), many Christian denominations (Presbyterian, RCA, Methodist, Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran, Orthodox, etc.), and New City Church, that God’s covenant of grace (His promise to be our God and have us as His people), seen in the Old Testament beginning with Abraham (Gen. 12-17), and culminating in the New Testament with the coming, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, (Gal. 4) extends to the children of believers. Such children, we believe, therefore have a right to the covenant sign, which in the New Testament is baptism (in the Old Testament the sign was circumcision).

Following is a detailed reasoning of why we will baptize infants and other children in a believing household who have not yet made a profession of faith. The pastors/elders of New City encourage all families who are Covenant Partners (members) of New City to consider baptizing their infants and children according to the Scriptures.

In the New Testament, baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the covenant.

- *Colossians 2:11-12* teaches that baptism is the full expression of circumcision. The covenant of circumcision required that the infant male be circumcised as a newborn infant (Genesis 17:12), and this covenant was to be an everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:13). Physical circumcision is clearly no longer in effect (Galatians 6:11-18), but the covenant it represents is still in effect (Romans 2:29). The new outward sign of this “everlasting” covenant with believers and their children is baptism (Colossians 2:11-12). Therefore, we believe it follows, then, that baptism is to be administered to the children of believing parents.

- *Acts 2:38-39* describes baptism with virtually the same language and terms with which *Genesis 17:9-14* describes circumcision. The promise connected with baptism in *Acts 2:38-39* explicitly includes the children of believers, as did the promise connected with circumcision in *Genesis 17:9-14*. No mention of a required age or profession of faith is made with respect to such children.

- As circumcision was a requirement for the Old Testament household (*Genesis 17:10, 12-13*), so, we believe, was baptism for the New Testament household (*Acts 16:15, 31-33; 1 Corinthians 1:16*). Never once are children said to be excluded from a household baptism, except in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, who obviously had no children.

- There is no biblical command given for believers to cease the application of the covenant sign with their children (OT= circumcision NT=baptism).

In the New Testament, believers' children were regarded as members of the covenant community.

- *In Luke 18:15-17*, Jesus said that God's Kingdom belongs to little children (from the Greek *brephe*, which literally means "baby" or "infant").

- *In Ephesians 6:1-4 and Colossians 3:20-21* Paul addresses children (from the Greek *tekna*, meaning "child") as believers in Christ. He speaks to them as he would any saint, regardless of age.

- *In 1 Corinthians 7:14* Paul refers to the children (*tekna*) of believers as "holy" (meaning set apart for God). The word translated "holy" (*hagia*) is the exact same word used elsewhere by the apostles in reference to believers (translated "saints" – see *Ephesians 1:1*, for example). The New Testament assumption, then, is that children of believers should be regarded and treated as believers, unless or until, they prove themselves to be covenant breakers (unrepentant sinners).

- *In 2 Timothy 3:15*, Timothy is said to have known the Scriptures from infancy (*brephe*).

- *In Luke 1:15*, John the Baptist is said to have been filled with the Spirit, "even from his mother's womb".

- The New Testament suggests nowhere that the sign of the covenant (previously circumcision, now baptism) is to be withheld from the children of believers until they make an informed profession of faith in Christ.

Our position on infant baptism does not reflect a belief that baptism itself saves a child. In order to be saved, a child must possess his / her own personal faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. The initial seeds of faith may or may not be in chronological union with the time of baptism. When a child professes faith at some point after baptism, that is the time in which the baptism and all that it signifies takes full effect. Until that time, the child's baptism is regarded as the sign of the child's inclusion in the church community (and all its benefits,

except the Lord's Supper *until appropriate time and understanding agreed on by family) by virtue of his / her parents' faith and the promise of God to be "their God and the God of their children."

Historical Rationale

While the Scripture does not speak specifically to the baptism of infants in the early church, there is Biblical suggestion as well as historical evidence that household baptism was practiced at that time:

- *Irenaeus* (a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John) speaks of infant baptism as a universal practice in the early church.
- *Tertullian* (end of 2nd century) acknowledged the universal practice of infant baptism.
- *Origen* (2nd and 3rd centuries) spoke of infant baptism as the common practice of the early church.

These things being the case, were household (and consequently infant baptism) not the New Testament church practice, then the conclusion must be made that a full reversal of the early church's practice occurred immediately following the death of the last apostle. Because there is neither biblical nor extra-biblical evidence indicating so much as a debate about this issue in the first or second centuries, such a reversal is extremely unlikely. We conclude this in large part because there is a wealth of documentation about virtually every other theological debate and/or alleged "heresy" in the early church. The baptism of households (infants/children) never made the list because of its common practice.

Our Attitude

We encourage household baptism at New City Church, but do not require it of those who cannot accept it. To us the biblical and supporting historical teaching seems clear, so we do encourage NCC parents to have their children baptized. However, parents who are not convinced of our position are not required to have their children baptized in order to be fully active and fully received church members, and will not in any way be pressured to do so. This is an issue about which we are happy to disagree without it being any hindrance at all to full Christian fellowship. We will under no circumstance make this "non-essential" issue an essential one. We pray for those who disagree with our position will not make it an issue either for the sake of Christian/gospel unity.

Summary

What does infant/child baptism signify?

1. ***An outward sign of God's promises to children of believer's.*** According to Scripture, baptism signifies the promise of God that He will give His Spirit to believers and their children. We understand this in two ways: (1) The child will be exposed to the Spirit's work through being raised in a Christian home and church where the Word of God being taught and lived. (2) The parent can wait expectantly, humbly, and prayerfully for the salvation of their children, as their children are brought up in the ways of God.
2. ***An outward sign of the child's inclusion in the community of faith.*** Like circumcision, in Scripture, the sign included the child in the community of faith before they made a

profession of faith. By virtue of their baptism they become a member, and receives all the full benefits of an adult member except (1) Voting on big decisions in the church (2) Lord's Supper until agreed upon by believing parents. We leave this conversation up to the families.

3. ***An outward sign of Jesus' heart toward children.*** Through children baptism the entire church community acknowledges Jesus' heart when he says: the Kingdom of God belongs to little children. Jesus regularly included children and babies into his fellowship.

What Does Child Baptism NOT Mean?

Baptism of children does not mean they are automatically saved at the moment of applying the rite. There is no "magic" that takes place when the child is baptized. The child will secure salvation at the moment they are converted to Christ through faith and repents of their sin, not the moment of baptism.

The Parental Promises of Baptism

At New City, it is important the believing parents of children reflect and meditate on the promises they are making with God and the covenant community (church). The spiritual nurture and upbringing of a child in a gospel community is of utmost importance. Take time to examine, reflect, and study on these promises/vows to make before the congregation:

1. Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, accept the promises of God, and affirm the truth of the Christian faith, which is proclaimed in the Bible and confessed in this church of Christ? By saying, "yes," you are acknowledging a living and active faith and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation and growth in godliness. You accept the promises of God and adhere to the teaching of this local church.
2. Do you believe that your children, though sinful by nature, are received by God in Christ as members of this covenant, and therefore ought to be baptized? By saying, "yes," you acknowledge the need for your child to personally receive Christ and repent of their sins at some point. Baptism and growing up in a Christian household does not make a child a Christian. They are sinners who still need the grace of Jesus in the gospel by faith. In the meantime, these children are full participants in God's covenant promises and part of this Christian community.
3. Do you promise, in reliance on the Holy Spirit and with the help of the Christian community, to do all in your power to instruct these children in the Christian faith and to lead them by your example into the life of Christian discipleship? By saying, "yes," you acknowledge the need to "practice what you preach" by God's grace and empowered by the Spirit. It also means, taking advantage of all the discipleship resources available through New City Church. Regular times of corporate and family worship, prayer, Christian community, hospitality, service, and other spiritual means and habits.