



baptism

DYING WITH CHRIST & RISING AGAIN



Let us sit and reason together

The elders of Damascus Road are charged with shepherding the flock. As shepherds, these men must protect the sheep from false doctrine, wolves that prey on the weak, as well as any individual or group that might seek to divide. It is imperative, therefore, to distinguish between issues that are primary, and those that are secondary in order to build security and preserve the unity (if only in agreeing to disagree) among the members and leadership within the church.

To help us in this endeavor, the elders have attempted to identify issues essential to join or lead our community and those considered non-essential. These definitions include:

Closed-handed issues are what Orthodox Christianity would consider essential or primary theological issues, doctrines, or church practices that *are not debatable and required* for membership at Damascus Road. These points are accepted as biblically non-negotiable. We are prepared to teach and defend any one of these points. Generally, to deny any one of these central doctrines is to deny what has come to define the necessary character of Christian Orthodoxy. In other words, one cannot be a Christian and deny these. Such issues include our belief in: one God, the Trinity, Jesus, the perfection and authority of the Bible, and salvation by grace and faith through Jesus alone.

Open-handed issues are what Orthodox Christianity would consider non-essential or secondary theological issues, doctrines, or church practices that we accept and respect difference of opinion on. This is to prevent constant and fruitless debate within the elder board on issues not of an essential nature. Allowing some level of diversity in the peripheral or non-essential issues should foster harmony in our community. In essence, we agree to accept *disagreement* on these issues but *not* divide over them. We ask those members and leaders in disagreement to study these issues and to agree to not be divisive. While these issues are not necessary for salvation, they exist in varying degrees of importance, and many Bible believing Christians disagree about them. They include issues such as speaking in tongues, different worship styles, and baptism.

The purpose of distinguishing between these two types of theological issues is to protect the truth and preserve the unity of the body. Our leadership is committed to truth and unity and, therefore, takes our positions of theology and practice seriously. Sometimes these two forces, truth and unity collide, leaving a path of destruction and pain in their wake. Our leadership wants to avoid any unnecessary divisions (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:25; Titus 3:10) recognizing, however, that they must give a confident account to God for the people in our church including their doctrine and resulting practices. The Bible commands those who choose to attend and join the church to obey the leadership of the church so that the leadership can fulfill their calling to shepherd to flock and not feel like they always have to beat the sheep into submission (Hebrews 13:17).

Lastly, the purpose of this paper is to explain our leadership's position on Baptism. When all is said and done, when all disagreements and arguments cease, regardless of whatever position we may take, let us agree to concern ourselves primarily not in the water baptism but in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which takes place when the individual accepts Christ as his or her one and only personal Savior.

Frequently Asked Questions about Baptism

What is baptism?

Once a person accepts Jesus Christ as their Savior and receive the seal of our faith in the person of the Holy Spirit, then the Bible calls us to make our private commitment a public declaration. Baptism is not "magical", nor does it come before salvation. Simply, Baptism is a visible representation of the invisible change that has occurred in the individual as a result of belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A believer is someone who realizes that their sin separates them from God. They know they will never be good enough to reach God through their good works or religious activities. They depend on Jesus Christ's death on the cross alone to pay the debt for their sins, declare us innocent, redeem us from slavery, appease the wrath of God, and, ultimately, bring us back into right relationship with our Creator.

Baptism is a physical act with spiritual meaning. The act of Baptism is the literal immersing of a believer under water and then bringing him forth out of the water. Symbolically, the person being baptized is plunged beneath the waters and brought forth in the same way that Jesus was buried in the earth and raised on their behalf in forgiveness of their sins. It symbolizes our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. (Romans 6:1–10; Colossians 2:12).



In summary:

- First, Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, fulfilled by individuals who have received His forgiveness and submitted themselves to His leadership (Matt 28:19-20).
- Second, Baptism is a symbolic representation of repentance and purification. In essence, Baptism is a public funeral symbolizing the individuals crucifixion with Christ and a public celebration of new life in Jesus Christ who now reigns as Lord and King in the life of the individual (Gal.2:20)
- Third, Baptism is public identification with Jesus. It provides an opportunity for believers to make a formal profession of their faith before the church and the world (Acts 10:48; Romans 6:3; Gal. 3:27)
- Fourth, Baptism is a biblical rite of initiation into the universal church (1 Cor 12:13) as well membership in the local church (Acts 2:41)

Why should Christians be baptized?

Jesus commanded that all Christians be baptized (Matthew 28:19). His apostles also commanded that all Christians be baptized (Acts 2:38). Therefore, Christians should be baptized because their God and His servants command it.

Do I need to be baptized to be a Christian?

Salvation is a gift given to people whose faith rests in the grace of God to forgive their sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Ephesians 2:8–9). For example, when the Philippian jailer asked what was required of him to be saved, Paul did not mention baptism, but simply said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus...” (Acts 16:31). Likewise, the thief who died on the cross next to Jesus was promised by our Lord that, “...today you will be with me in paradise,” though he had not been baptized (Luke 23:43). So, someone can be “un-baptized” and yet be a Christian who is destined for heaven.

How should baptism be conducted?

Arguing about the mode of baptism misses the meaning of baptism entirely. Damascus Road believes that the faith of the participant determines the value of the baptism rite (1 Peter 3:21) not the amount of water used or the way it's applied. Full immersion in water is our normal practice because we believe it best represents the symbolism of participation in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:1-11, Col. 2:12).

We also believe that immersion was most likely the mode used by the New Testament church (Mk 1:10; Acts 8:39). The Greek word used for baptism in the New Testament means to plunge, dip, or immerse in water. The New Testament is replete with examples of immersion baptism. They include John the Baptizer immersing people in water (Mark 1:5), Jesus himself being immersed (Mark 1:10), and Philip baptizing the Ethiopian by immersing him (Acts 8:34-39). Even in the Old Testament, conversion to Judaism underwent an immersion Baptism cleansing them from their sin and completing their conversion.

Who should conduct a baptism?

The Bible does not command exactly who should perform a baptism. In Scripture we notice that Jesus authorized his disciples to do the baptizing (John 4:2). Jesus did not baptize anyone but delegated the authority to perform this rite to leaders in his church. Even these disciples, however, occasionally ordered others to baptize and who exactly is baptizing is not clear (Acts 16:15, 16:33). The passages appear to descriptively teach that most, if not all baptisms were done under the care and authority of church leaders, but not exclusively by them. Typically, the elders will perform baptisms as they fall under the responsibilities of the leadership. We do, however, encourage participation of other individuals who are genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have played an integral role in the faith of the person being baptized.

At Damascus Road, the elders have chosen to baptize people as a public church event for the following reasons: so that new Christians may be welcomed into the church, so their unbelieving friends and family can hear their testimonies, and so fellow Christians may rejoice with them regarding God's work in their lives.

Who should be baptized?

Baptism is reserved solely for people who have “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Therefore, only those who are Christians should be baptized. The Bible is also that clear that baptism does not cause salvation but is simply an indication of what has already taken place, namely, repentance of a life of sin and faith in Jesus (Acts 2:38–41; 2:41; 8:12; 9:18–19; 10:44–48; 16:14–15, 40; 16:29–36; 18:8; 19:1–7; 22:16). Therefore, only Christians who have repented of sin should be baptized. Further, baptism represents a participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, only people who have trusted in Jesus' death on the cross alone for their salvation should be baptized.



In summary, repentance of sin and faith in Jesus are the marks of a Christian. And all Christians are commanded to be baptized in order to identify themselves with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Subsequently, no one but a Christian should be baptized, and this excludes non-Christians and children who are too young to demonstrate repentance and articulate faith.

How may I be baptized?

If you are a Christian who has repented of your sin and trust in Jesus for your salvation, but you have not yet been baptized, you should email life@damascusroadchurch.org and request to be baptized. We will ask you to attend a pre-baptism gathering where one of the elders will meet with you to hear your testimony, explain how we conduct baptisms, answer any questions you may have, pray for you, and schedule your baptism.

May I be baptized if I have previously been baptized?

Once someone has been baptized there is no need for him to be baptized again (Ephesians 4:5). The only exception to this is if someone was baptized as a non-Christian and desires to profess his faith and be baptized as a Christian (Acts 19:1–5). This exception would include people who were baptized in cults and heretical churches, as well as those baptized as infants at the request of their parents. Damascus Road not require that those who were baptized as children be re-baptized as believing adults, but leaves this decision to the conscience of each Christian.

How does Damascus Road recognize infants?

Infants of Christian parents who are members of Damascus Road are welcomed into the church and counted as members in conjunction with their families. As a church, we partner with parents to help all of the children in our church know and love Jesus from a very early age. Paul said that Timothy had known the Scriptures since his infancy, which shows that it is possible for even young children to learn Scripture, love Jesus, and be vibrant Christians (2 Timothy 3:15).

We trust the parents to help the child decide when to be baptized. We expect that every child requesting baptism can articulate the gospel and understand the meaning of baptism. We do not expect some theological dissertation; rather, we hope each child will share his or her testimony to the church, explaining in his own words his relationship with Jesus. This is an encouragement to the church and an example to other young children that they too can walk with Jesus from a young age. As early as possible, we encourage parents to have their young children sit through the church service. We do not provide childcare for children over the age of ten, as we believe it is important for children to be integrated as vital and full members of our church as early as possible.

Lastly, our Gospel Class is, at this time, the basic theological education class required for official membership at Damascus Road. We hope that even our youth will elect to take the class with the approval of their parents, going on to make their own declarations of faith and covenanting to be active church members. Obviously, the maturity and individual personalities of the children will dictate when this happens. Quite simply, until that time we welcome our children in as members of the church with their families, but reserve their baptism until a time when there is evidence of repentance of sin and faith in Jesus; this often occurs at a young age.

Does Damascus Road ever baptize young children?

Damascus Road Church will baptize any adult or child (usually as witnessed by his or her parents) who is able to demonstrate repentance of sin and to express faith in Jesus Christ. Damascus Road does not baptize anyone (including infants) unless there is evidence that they are Christians.

Why does Damascus Road dedicate children?

As an infant, Jesus was not baptized, but was dedicated to the Lord by His parents (Luke 2:21–23). Likewise, at Damascus Road, we dedicate the children born into our church in an effort to rejoice with the parents as members of their spiritual family, welcome the child into the church, and commit ourselves to prayerfully supporting the family and the child in hopes that he will grow to love and serve the Lord.

How can I have my child dedicated?

If you would like to have your child dedicated, please email life@damascusroadchurch.org to schedule that event. There is a form you can download from the website at www.damascusroadchurch.org/gather/kids-road to help you prepare for the event.





refuting false teachings regarding baptism

the following was taken by permission directly from Mars Hill Theology Series

The issue of baptism for us is a secondary matter about which we would not break fellowship with Christians, provided that they were not divisive in the church. But, the fact remains that there are some important distinctions between our biblical convictions on baptism and the teachings of some other Christians. Therefore, in an effort to clarify and distinguish our beliefs, we will herein acknowledge these positions and explain why we disagree with them.

False: Baptism accomplishes something for an infant.

Though many Christian traditions do baptize infants, there is no consensus as to what exactly the act accomplishes for the child. Hence, it is difficult to understand why the baptism of an infant in any way benefits him as opposed to a child who is not baptized.

Catholics baptize infants by sprinkling, and they teach that it actually eradicates infants' sins and saves them. They also teach that regardless of whether a person ever demonstrates or professes faith after his baptism, he is still considered saved. For example, I (Mark Driscoll) was once asked to speak at the funeral of a man who had been baptized as an infant. He had never professed to be a Christian, and had never demonstrated any indication throughout his life that he was a Christian. But, at the beginning of his funeral service the Catholic priest with whom I was officiating reassured all of those in attendance that the deceased was in heaven because he had been baptized as a child. He said nothing about Jesus. Lutherans and Anglicans also baptize infants by sprinkling, and teach that baptism in effect provides salvation for the child. The only difference between Lutheran and Catholic theology on this matter is that Lutherans believe that the infant does have faith—though it is unseen—but that as the child grows he will show his faith by living as a Christian. Lutherans have discovered, however, that many people who were baptized as infants are not Christians with saving faith later in life. So, they have created confirmation, which is their attempt to teach Lutherans about the Christian faith and to compel them to live up to their baptisms as Christians. Confirmation has produced varying degrees of success. Calvinists (e.g. Presbyterians) baptize infants by sprinkling or pouring. Additionally, they teach that salvation in effect comes not only to individuals but also to families.

This is much like the Old Testament wherein all members of a family were included in the covenant and circumcised (which Calvinists teach has been replaced by baptism). They do not teach that baptism itself saves the infant, but that faith is present in the child in seed form and will show forth in Christian living as he grows older. If, however, he should later live as a non-Christian, he is considered apostate for having not continued in the covenant to which he was born. The only problem with each of these positions is that they are traditions that search, in vain, for Scripture to support them. Even if we were to agree that a child born into a Christian home is welcomed by God into covenant with Him by virtue of his family, there is still no compelling reason from Scripture to baptize an infant from that family.

Lastly, many parents are rightly worried that if their infant should die, his eternity would be in jeopardy. (This was particularly true in previous ages when infant mortality rates were considerably higher due to inferior medical provisions.) So, some parents have their child baptized in hopes of securing his eternity. But, seeking to manipulate God in such a way is counter to a faith which simply trusts God to do what is best. After all, the Bible tells us that God is the Father (Matthew 6:9), that He welcomes children and has made the kingdom sponsored church baptized them as children. Church leaders throughout history have adamantly opposed this entire system of national religion, and the founding fathers of our own nation established the separation of church and state in hopes of protecting the church from government control and manipulation; the United States is simply not Israel.

False: Baptism of infants does no harm, and is therefore innocent.

Some people who advocate infant baptism often claim in varying degrees that, while the justification for the practice may be thin, it is in fact an activity that does no harm (and should therefore be permitted). But, such an argument is void of both Scriptural support and plain reason.

First, the act of baptizing infants assumes that they are in relationship with God. This is prone to give people the false assurance that they are saved simply because they were baptized as infants. Indeed, many people who were baptized as infants lack zeal for Jesus. They are not concerned with living lives of holiness because they believe that baptism functioned for them in some magic way to secure their eternity.

Second, belief in infant baptism basically assumes that children are Christians and will remain so throughout life, providing they are well parented. Therefore, the assumption is for them (Matthew 19:14), and that salvation comes



from Him alone (Jonah 2:9). Therefore, God is good, and parents whose faith rests in baptism rather than God's character alone are thinking in a way that is contrary to faith.

False: Baptism of infants is essential to the functioning of a Christian state.

In the Old Testament, Israel was a theocracy, meaning that it was ruled directly by God apart from human kings. Circumcision marked entrance not only into a covenant with God, but also into citizenship in the nation of Israel—even for those who did not trust in God (e.g. Genesis 17:23). In this way, circumcision functioned politically—much like the obtaining of a Social Security number does for residents in our nation—as evidence that they were citizens.

Throughout history, particularly since the time of Constantine in the early church, some nations—operating under an outdated Old Testament mindset—wed the church and state together as effectively one and the same. Subsequently, in many nations throughout the history of the church (as well as in our present day), baptism was administered by the state, or state church. Hence, virtually every citizen was baptized into the nation, regardless of his or her religion or beliefs. The Danish Christian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard was so outraged by this practice, he accused the state church in his day of minting Christians like money through baptism. Even in our present day, state churches in some nations receive tax dollars as an arm of the government, not unlike our executive, legislative, and judicial government branches. Such state churches have frequently been known to lack a true love for Jesus, existing instead simply to endorse and pacify the whims of the politicians who ultimately control the churches' theology and leadership. This dismal abuse of baptism has led to nations filled with godless people who believe they are right with God because the government that if someone should go apostate and stray from God after having been baptized, it is likely due to poor parenting. Placing this kind of pressure upon parents is simply unkind and unreasonable, as even the best parents occasionally have children who do not walk with God.

Third, for those who do become Christians, infant baptism eliminates the wonderful opportunity to publicly testify about what God has done in their lives. For many people, baptism is an event of joy and gladness in which they publicly identify themselves with Jesus and share the Gospel with people who do not know Him. Robbing people of this opportunity is a grievous misdeed.

False: Baptism should be conducted by sprinkling or pouring, not by immersion.

Some churches practice baptism not by immersion in water—which is clearly taught in Scripture and was practiced by the early church—but by sprinkling or pouring water upon the person being baptized. The Bible does speak of our salvation in terms of being cleansed from sin (Titus 3:5), being sprinkled by Jesus (Leviticus 16:14–15, 19; Ezekiel 36:25; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 1:2), and having the Holy Spirit poured out upon us (Joel 2:28–29; Acts 2:17–18, 33; 10:45). However, it is important to note that none of the instances in which sprinkling or baptism is mentioned in the Bible are in any way related to baptism.

In Mark 10:38, Jesus used the word “baptism” to refer to His death. Indeed, it would be inconceivable to view His forthcoming brutal murder as something that was merely “sprinkled” upon Him, rather than as a total plunge into death and burial within the grave. Therefore, churches that baptize by sprinkling or pouring rather than by immersion do so solely out of convenience rather than biblical conviction. The motives for this pursuit of convenience include: not wanting to hassle with installing a baptismal in the church or meeting near a large body of water, a pastor not wanting to get wet every time someone is saved, and the fear that submerging an infant would drown him (even though infant baptism is not mentioned in the Bible). Subsequently, those wanting to baptize infants and avoid the inconveniences associated with immersion baptism are prone to grab proof texts from the Bible in an effort to justify what it simply does not teach.

False: It can be inferred from the Bible that children were baptized.

Some Christians who argue for infant baptism insist that—though the Bible never expressly prescribes (or describes) that such a thing was done—it is permissible to infer from Scripture that infant baptism was, in fact, done. In response to this, it should simply be stated that no one has the right to add anything to the Scriptures by adding that which God has chosen to omit. As Proverbs 30:5–6 says, “Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.” In addition, when children are present at an event, the Bible mentions them clearly, by distinguishing between adults, children, and infants (e.g. 1 Samuel 22:19; Joshua 8:35; 2 Chronicles 20:13; Jeremiah 40:7; Matthew 14:21; 15:38). Placing people into the Bible who simply are not mentioned is a very dangerous precedent to set, and is akin to the way a cultist uses the Bible.

Some people also argue from Acts 2:39, in which a promise is made that salvation is intended for the children of believers. But, the entire section of Acts 2:38–41 explains that everyone present was old enough to hear the Gospel



preached, and was told that they needed to repent of their sin before being baptized. They were then promised that the Holy Spirit would be given to them and to their children who also repented of sin and believed in Jesus. These people, young and old, who became Christians, were baptized AFTER they were saved. Those who assume that this account refers to infants conveniently overlook the fact that not all “children” are infants. They likewise overlook that all the children present on this day of Pentecost were old enough to hear a sermon, repent of sin, trust in Jesus, be baptized in water by immersion, and receive the Holy Spirit—in this particular order. Lastly, some people argue that when the Bible states that an entire household was baptized, we can infer that those households included children (e.g. Acts 10:33 and 44–48 cf. 11:14; 16:15, 23; 1 Corinthians 1:16). But, the Bible is also careful to explain that each member of these households was old enough to do things like believe in Jesus, be filled with the Holy Spirit, or serve God (John 4:53; Acts 18:8; 1 Corinthians 16:15). Therefore, the Bible does not permit us to infer that the households mentioned in relation to the New Testament baptisms included infants.

False: The Old Testament act of circumcision and New Testament act of baptism are the same.

Those who argue for infant baptism contest that circumcision as practiced in the Old Testament is replaced with baptism in the New Testament. They base their assertion on Colossians 2:11–12, which says, “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 and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.” But, in these verses Paul is merely saying that Jesus circumcises the hearts of Christians who are then baptized to demonstrate God’s power and their faith in Him. The order here is conversion and then baptism, which is consistent with the teaching of the New Testament. It is inconsistent with the argument of those who support infant baptism, that baptism should precede conversion. And, while circumcision may be analogous to baptism, it is simply not identical for a number of reasons:

First, circumcision has been put away (Acts 15:1–2; 21:21; Galatians 2:3–5; 5:2–6, 12; 6:12–13, 15; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 3:11; 1 Corinthians 7:19). Therefore, to argue that baptism is in effect the new circumcision is erroneous.

Second, Abraham circumcised his males on the eighth day (Genesis 17:10–13). But, infant baptism is not performed on the eighth day of a child’s life.

Third, while circumcision was performed solely on males, baptism is intended for males and females, and therefore differs greatly from circumcision (e.g. Acts 16:14–15).

Fourth, in becoming circumcised, a person was welcomed as a citizen of the nation of Israel and therefore became a rightful heir to the land promised to him by God. But, baptism today does not confer citizenship to Israel, nor does it come with any real-estate privileges.

Fifth, circumcision was performed on both adults and children. But, baptism occurs only for adults in the Bible without any exception.

Sixth, slaves and servants who worshiped other gods and had no saving faith were circumcised in the Old Testament (e.g. Genesis 17:27). But, in the New Testament only disciples of Jesus Christ are to be baptized (Matt.28:19–20).

Seventh, in the Old Testament, circumcision was of primary importance. But, in the New Testament, a spiritual circumcision of the heart has replaced the physical circumcision of the flesh, therefore replacing the old circumcision, which has been put away (Romans 2:28–29).

Eighth, to assume that baptism was adopted from circumcision is quite a stretch, as getting wet and removing skin from one of the most sensitive parts of a man’s anatomy are as similar as washing ones face and undergoing surgery. A more likely scenario is that Christian baptism took its cue not from Abraham’s circumcision, but from the proselyte baptism that was performed upon non-Jews who had converted to Judaism. Proselyte baptism was conducted by immersion in water, and performed only upon those who had come to faith. It therefore closely resembles the New Testament baptism.

False: Baptism should follow the example of Abraham.

Proponents of infant baptism argue that Christians should simply follow the example of Abraham, as he is our spiritual father. While in principle this is true, it leads to a host of complex problems that I will briefly explain.

First, because Abraham circumcised his entire household (including slaves), we are told that Christian fathers should likewise baptize their entire families. But, Old Testament households were often very large, like Jacob’s, which



numbered sixty-six people (Genesis 46:26). Likewise, Abraham's household had literally hundreds of men (Genesis 14:14), all of whom were circumcised (Genesis 17:27). If this logic is applied to baptism, then a man should not only baptize his children, but he should also baptize all of his employees, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, regardless of whether any of them love Jesus—because they are part of his covenant relationship with God, which somehow includes upwards of hundreds of other adults. This erroneous view of salvation by family ties is carried forth with the greatest illogical consistency among Mormons, who believe that even dead relatives can be counted among their covenant relationship. This explains why Mormons are so zealous about tracing their family genealogy, as they believe they can save their deceased relatives by undergoing baptism in their place.

Second, Abraham circumcised himself (Genesis 17:23–27). Therefore, if baptism is to be conducted as Abraham administered circumcision, people would correspondingly be able to baptize themselves.

Third, those who were in Abraham's household were circumcised, regardless of whether they desired to be, because it was mandatory. Correspondingly, if a man should come to faith at the age of fifty, he would be required to force everyone in his family and extended family to be baptized, regardless of whether they are Christians or desire to be baptized.

Fourth, some argue that the children of Abraham were circumcised, and so their children should be baptized. But, not all of Abraham's physical children by birth were his spiritual children by new birth (Romans 9:6–8). In addition, the true children of Abraham are his spiritual children who are born again by faith (Galatians 3:7). Therefore, if we were truly to follow the example of Abraham, we would recognize only those people who have faith in God as he did as candidates for baptism.

Fifth, while Abraham was a man of faith whom Christians should learn from, he was not perfect; he is, therefore, not the perfect example. But, Jesus Christ was and is perfect, and if Christians are seeking to follow the example of one person, they should select Jesus and be baptized as He was—by immersion, as an adult. False: God works primarily through our physical birth. In the Old Testament, there was an emphasis upon a person's birth because (as even a cursory reading of the Old Testament proves) God often works through families and generations. But, the Jews erred in thinking that having Abraham as their father gave them any privileged status with God. Jesus rebuked their smugness when He informed them that their real father was the devil (John 8:37–48). He subsequently taught that He could make mere stones into children of Abraham, which means that God saves and brings into His family whomever He pleases, regardless of their last name (Matthew 3:9). Paul further taught that one is a descendant of Abraham not by birth, but solely by faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 2:29; 9:6–8; Galatians 3:7). Therefore, whereas infant baptism and the theology promoting it are highly concerned with blood and birth, the New Testament is primarily concerned with the blood of Jesus and new birth. This is exactly what Jesus was referring to when He commanded the Jewish Nicodemus to be “born again” (John 3:5).

Lastly, when the emphasis is placed upon physical birth and not new birth, arrogance is prone to creep into Christian families. This was the case for Jews who missed the new birth offered by Jesus. Their faith rested in their birth to a believing father, rather than in a new birth to their heavenly Father.

False: Parents' faith can be transferred to their children.

The practice of infant baptism assumes that children either do not yet have saving faith in Jesus, or that they do but cannot yet demonstrate it in word and deed. Therefore, the parents' faith is said to be credited to their children. Again, this line of thinking is very similar to that of Mormons, who believe that the faith of one person is sufficient to place another person in relationship with God. Such thinking is completely foreign to the Bible. Indeed, many parents and children will pass through the narrow gate into Heaven; but they will clearly do so in single-file fashion, and only if they each possess saving faith, as we are saved by personal faith alone (John 3:15; 5:24; 20:31; Rom. 5:1; 10:9).

False: If a father is a Christian, his children are included in the covenant of salvation.

Proponents of infant baptism argue that a man who is in covenant with God includes the children under his headship in that covenant. But, they will likewise (rightly) argue that we are born as sinners (Psalm 51:5), because we are in covenant with Adam (Hosea 6:7), and that when he sinned he did so on behalf of us all (Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:21–2). On this point, Mars Hill is in agreement. But where we disagree is in how this relates to salvation. We do not believe that sin and salvation are transmitted in exactly the same ways. A person becomes a member of the new covenant only by being in a covenant relationship with Jesus. Put another way, a person gets to heaven because he has a personal relationship with Jesus—not because he has a personal relationship with his father who has a personal relationship with Jesus. In this way, salvation is between a person and Jesus only, not between a



person and his father. Paul teaches this explicitly in the verses quoted above, where he tells us that we are either under Adam and condemned, or we are under Jesus and redeemed. No option of being under our fathers is given.

Those who support infant baptism by virtue of a believing father are prone to lean heavily on 1 Corinthians 7:14, which says, “For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.” Here, Paul is writing to those who were married as non-Christians, who later became converted while their spouse did not. People under these circumstances were wondering if they should divorce the unbelieving spouse; they subsequently worried what might happen to their children, since one parent was not a Christian. Paul instructed these couples to remain married, as God would take special care to bless the Christian, the unbelieving spouse, and the children for being faithful to God under tough circumstances.

Supporters of infant baptism further argue that the faith of the believing spouse is sufficient to cover the children, therefore enabling them to be baptized. But, the verse says nothing about baptism or salvation; rather, it simply guarantees God’s grace upon faithful Christians and their children who have a spouse/parent that is unsaved. If we are going to argue that, for example, a Christian man with an unbelieving wife should have his infants baptized—because they are under the covenant of their father with God—then we must be consistent. To do so, we would then also have to baptize the unbelieving wife because she, like the children, is under the covering of the man. His faith would then cover both the children and the wife, as the promise given to her would be the same as that given to the children. Supporters of infant baptism understandably refuse to baptize Christians’ unbelieving spouses based on 1 Corinthians 7:14; however, they are illogically willing to manipulate the same verse where their children are concerned, conveniently overlooking their inconsistency.

In addition, to be consistent with teaching that the presence of one believing parent is sufficient grounds to baptize an infant, we must also accept that children with at least one Christian parent should be allowed to partake of communion, even though the Bible warns against partaking without introspection and repentance (1 Corinthians 11:27–32). Permitting infants to partake of Communion is consistent with the doctrine of infant baptism; if one wants to include a child in the parents’ Covenant with God—and wants to demonstrate that covenant with baptism—there is simply no logical reason to not allow young infants to partake of communion. Communion is, like baptism, a sign of the covenant. Many orthodox churches, in an effort to be consistent in their reasoning, do practice infant Communion along with infant baptism, and while they are wrong, at least they are consistent in their illogic.

While all of this begins to sound very silly and indefensible from Scripture, I would merely say that indeed it is, which is exactly my point. Neither the baptism or Communion of young children, or anyone else for that matter, is permissible unless they know Jesus.

False: God places the elect in Christian homes.

Another line of reasoning in defense of infant baptism is the presumptuous assertion that God intentionally places elect children in the homes of elect parents. Baptizing Christian parents’ children is then seen as logical, as the children are destined for salvation anyway. This argument falls apart on two levels. First, experience shows us that there are in fact many Christians who parent well, but who, tragically, do not see their children grow up to love Jesus.

Second, we see this pattern in Scripture as well. Abraham’s son, Isaac, was circumcised and loved God (Romans 9:7), but his brother, Ishmael, who was also circumcised, was not called of God (Galatians 4:28–31). Likewise, the godly Isaac had the godless son Esau (Romans 9:7; Hebrews 12:16), the godly Samuel had godless sons (1 Samuel 8:1–4), and the godly David had the godless son, Absalom. Perhaps God does indeed make some children Christians from their birth by placing the Holy Spirit in them, but to assume that every child born of every Christian is a Christian (or will be a Christian) is neither justifiable from experience nor from Scripture.

False: Baptism precedes salvation

Because Old Testament circumcision was conducted upon an infant before he demonstrated saving faith, those who seek to replace circumcision with baptism likewise seek to have it precede salvation. But, as noted above, the consistent pattern of the entire New Testament is that faith precedes baptism. And, even circumcision began when Abraham first demonstrated saving faith before he was circumcised as a sign of his faith in God. Romans 4:1–12 explains this fact in great detail, particularly 4:9–11, which says, “Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised...”



Simply, even if one agrees with the claim that circumcision is replaced by baptism, then it should still only happen after someone has saving faith in Jesus Christ, as the pattern with Abraham was faith first and then the sign of faith.

False: What matters is the objective fact of faith, not the subjective.

Those who believe in baptizing only Christians who articulate and demonstrate faith are often criticized by proponents of infant baptism for demanding evidence of faith prior to baptism. They do so in part by arguing that salvation is an objective fact known only by God, nearly impossible to prove subjectively. They reason that, since there is no objective way to truly determine who is saved and who is not, it is impossible to assert that only Christians should be baptized. While this logic may at first glance appear convincing, it is, in fact, self-refuting. To begin with, a supporter of infant baptism will state that if only true Christians can be baptized, then no one should be baptized, as there is no objective way to test whether someone is truly saved. However, they will then contradict themselves by stating that an infant should be baptized. When pressed to answer why one child should be baptized while others are not, they will argue that, since we know objectively that certain parents are Christians, we can confidently baptize their children. Illogically, to undermine believer baptism, they will argue against the ability to objectively ascertain if an adult is saved—and then argue that we can objectively know who is saved, and therefore baptize their children.

Fortunately, an entire book of the Bible was written to help us ascertain who is and is not saved: the book of 1 John. It explicitly claims to have been written so that people can know whether they have eternal life from Jesus Christ (1 John 5:13). The book easily breaks into three categories of transformation that occur in a person who has been saved by Jesus: theologically, they believe Jesus is God in human flesh; socially, they love to fellowship with other Christians; and morally, they hate their sin and want to live new lives in Christ. Therefore, since the Bible is clear that salvation can indeed be known and observed—as it simultaneously commands that only disciples be baptized—then we should only baptize those who we know have salvation and who are living as disciples of Jesus.

False: People baptized as infants who later deny Christ are apostates.

Advocates of infant baptism have a difficult time articulating what has gone wrong when a child born into a covenant home, baptized into a covenant church, and raised by covenant parents grows up to live as a non-Christian with no interest in Jesus or His church. While they do not want to believe that the child was saved at his baptism—continued to be saved as long as he lived at the same address with the Christian father as members of his covenant with God, but then lost his salvation once he got his own address—they are still hard-pressed to explain this phenomenon. Subsequently, they have argued that such a person was indeed in the covenant but later in life became apostate, or turned his back on God. However, while the Bible does speak of apostasy, it is not defined by someone who was once in the new covenant who later walked out of it, because in Jeremiah 31:31–36 we are told that the new covenant cannot be broken. So, the concept of an apostate as understood by supporters of infant baptism simply crumbles. There are only Christians and non-Christians—nothing more. circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised...” Simply, even if one agrees with the claim that circumcision is replaced by baptism (which Mars Hill does not), then it should still only happen after someone has saving faith in Jesus Christ, as the pattern with Abraham was faith first and then the sign of faith.

False: The Bible teaches infant baptism.

In case the obvious point has been completely missed, the bottom line is that anyone (child or adult) who can profess faith in Jesus Christ and who has a life that demonstrates salvation should be baptized by immersion, under water, like Jesus was. Anything other than this simple fact is a departure from the clear teachings of Scripture. In closing, the words of the famous Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon summarize it best:

“If I thought it was wrong to be a Baptist, I should give it up and become what I believed to be right... If we could find infant baptism in the Word of God, we would adopt it. It would help us out of a great difficulty, for it would take away from us that reproach which is attached to us—that we are odd and do not do as other people do. But we have looked well through the Bible and cannot find it, and do not find it in there; nor do we believe that others can find infant baptism in the Scriptures, unless they themselves first put it there.”