

This morning we are going to baptize little Philip Carl Young. Since I have been your pastor I have felt that it is important to explain, from time to time, why we baptize infants. ^{Many} Most of you have come out of a background which rejects infant baptism. Some of you have come from a background which teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation. It is important, therefore, that baptism always be accompanied by the preached Word of God which tells us something of its meaning. It's also important to know something of the biblical basis for infant baptism lest ^{the} ~~the~~ sacred event of baptism ^{in the life of a family} become simply a meaningless tradition.

But where, some of you are asking, does the Bible speak of infant baptism? The NT contains a number of indications that the children of believers are to be baptized. First, there is the fact of household baptisms. Nearly half of all the baptisms mentioned in the NT are household baptisms, that is, everyone in the household was baptized. The Greek word for "household" includes the idea of husband, wife, children, and servants. These household baptisms make it clear that God deals with us, not as isolated individuals, but as individuals within families. When the head of a household becomes a Christian and enters the covenant of grace, his whole household is included in that

new covenant relationship. For example, Paul says to the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." ~~The Greek word for "thou" is singular.~~ Nothing is said as to whether every individual in the house believed, yet the whole household was baptized because all entered into a covenant relationship with Christ through the jailer's faith.

The second bit of NT evidence for infant baptism is found on the lips of our Lord. Jesus said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." The Greek text makes it clear that the children referred to are little infants. ^{was saying} Jesus ~~said~~ that infant children of believers are to be counted as members of Christ's kingdom. ^{of such children - Mark 10:14} We baptize the infants of believers therefore because baptism is the visible sign that marks us as members of Christ's kingdom.

A third piece of evidence comes to us from the apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 7:13 he writes, "if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 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." Paul says that the children of a believer are

holy. The word used is agios, that is, "saints". Paul does not hesitate to apply a word to infants of believers which is proper to use only of those set apart by God in baptism as his people.

Another line of evidence for infant baptism comes to us from the OT as it is interpreted by the New. NT Christians saw at least three OT events or practices which pointed to infant baptism. ~~Those~~ three were the Flood, the OT practice of circumcision, and the Exodus from Egypt through the Red Sea. Each of these three points to infant baptism.

First, the flood. In 1 Peter 3:20-21 we read, "God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also-- not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." This passage shows us that God, in his mercy, saved not only righteous Noah but his wife, three sons and three daughters-in-law from being immersed in the flood. All were saved through the water, and this water symbolises baptism. Now we don't know if Noah's family were believers. All we know is that God's covenant with Noah included his family. Noah's household was baptised symbolically through the waters of the flood

in the Ark. ^{In the same way} We bring our infant children into the church, ~~the visible expression of the kingdom of Christ and the~~ Ark of our salvation through the waters of baptism.

Secondly, NT Christians saw in the OT practice of circumcision a type and figure of baptism. Paul writes in Colossians 2:11ff., "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by 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." Here baptism signifies what the OT practice of circumcision signified, namely the putting off of our sinful nature. In the OT circumcision was commanded by God as a sign of membership in the people of God. He gave this command first of all to Abraham then he commanded Abraham to circumcise all the male children in his household from eight days old and up to signify that his children also were to be counted among the children of God. That covenant of grace with Abraham is still in affect because it is an everlasting covenant. St. Paul points out in Galatians 3:29 that "if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, and heirs according to the promise." The terms of that covenant of grace are the same in both

the OT and NT, only the sign of the covenant has changed. In the OT the sign of the covenant was circumcision and in the NT it is baptism. So just as Abraham gave the sign of the covenant to his children, so also we as Christians give the sign of the covenant to our infant children in baptism.

Thirdly, NT Christians saw in the Exodus from Egypt through the Red Sea a pre-Christian figure of baptism. Paul emphasises that the OT baptism included all Israel, children as well as adults. He writes, "our forefathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea. They were all baptised." How could the early Christians reading this fail to see a picture of infant baptism. Just as the children of the Hebrews were saved from the sinful and enslaving environment of Egypt as they were carried through the Red Sea on dry land in the arms of their parents, so also the infant children of believers are saved out of the sinful environment of pagan society through the waters of baptism which initiates them into the covenant community where Jesus is trusted, worshipped and obeyed. Paul warns, however, that most of Israel perished in the desert even though they were baptized. Church members, therefore, can not hope to be saved by their baptism as long as they are living in sin, idolatry, discontent, and unbelief.

We have now looked at just some of the biblical evidence for infant baptism. When all the evidence is investigated most Christians have come to believe that infant baptism is not only allowed but commanded of children of believers. And although I believe that one may be saved without baptism, it is, nevertheless, a great sin to neglect this sacrament and to withhold it from our infant children if we, ourselves, are Christians. Just as the twig on a live branch receives life from the trunk of that tree, so also the children of believers, who are like twigs on branches, receive life from Christ.

Not all Christians, however, believe in infant baptism. It is important for us to take a brief historical look at why some have rejected infant baptism. The first person that we know of who objected to infant baptism was a man by the name of Tertullian who lived in North Africa around A.D. 200. For a hundred years after the death of the apostles no one objected or raised questions about infant baptism. Some might say that no one objected to it because it was not practiced. But Tertullian did not object to infant baptism as though it were something new or contrary to apostolic teaching. He agreed that the words of Christ concerning little children apply to their baptism and he acknowledges that infant baptism was the accepted practice of his day.

Why then did Tertullian object to infant baptism? Because he believed that sin committed after baptism could not be forgiven. A child would certainly grow up and commit some sin for which there would be no forgiveness after baptism. Tertullian recommended that even adults should not be baptised too early in their life lest they also commit some sin. Tertullian's views on baptism influenced the church to such an extent that many people put off baptism until they were on their death beds. Infant baptism, therefore, was first opposed because the church was becoming infected with a magical view of the power of baptism to save.

In the sixteenth century the question of infant baptism was once again raised by the anabaptists. They rejected infant baptism because they believed the church is a voluntary organization composed of men and women who have ^{only} decided of their own free will to ~~accept~~ ^{had some kind of subjective religious experiences.} Christ and worship him. Children ^{can} ~~could~~ not believe or make choices of their own, therefore they ^{can't} ~~could~~ not be church members. The anabaptists, I believe, were influenced in their thinking by the growing tide of humanism which exalted the power of the human will, emphasised individualism, and placed great stress on subjective religious experiences as a source of truth and authority. These influences caused them to mis-

read the Scriptures and reject the biblical doctrine of the church. The anabaptists believed the church was composed only of those who could choose Christ. The Bible, however, teaches that the church is composed of those whom God has chosen. It is God's will and not man's will that is the determining factor. The church is the ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ, those who are called out by God, God's chosen people. As our Lord said, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." His covenant is not only with adult believers who are able to choose, but with their children as well.

This is something that needs to be emphasised. Saving faith is not something that we naturally become more and more capable of exercising as we grow out of infancy into adulthood. Saving faith is not something that is possible for adults but not for infants. An adult is no more capable of saving faith than is a helpless child. Saving faith is a gift of God. The anabaptist position is that a person must grow up and become an adult before he or she can enter the kingdom of God. But our Lord taught ~~just~~ the opposite. Unless you turn and become like a little child you will in no way enter the kingdom.

Let me emphasise this. If you are ever going to be saved we must get rid of the idea that there is something that we can naturally do such as believe. If you are to be

saved it will not be because you have come to an age of accountability whereby you are then able to choose and believe and be saved. If you are to be saved it will be only when you come to see yourself as unable to do anything to contribute to your salvation. You come to see yourself as a helpless child, unable to do anything for yourself, unable to change your dirty diaper sins, unable to bathe yourself and make you clean, unable to believe or to choose... but like a child, able only to cry. You cry out like a frustrated and helpless baby to your heavenly father. You cry for mercy. You cry out to have your dirty diapers changed. You cry out for cleansing. You cry out to be fed and clothed with the righteousness of Christ. You cry out, "Abba, father".

This underlines one of the major differences between those who practice infant baptism and those who do not. For those who reject infant baptism, baptism is a sign of what we do. We believe and then we are baptized. But for us baptism is a sign of what God does for us. In baptism God teaches us that just as the dirt of the body is taken away by water, so our sins are removed by the blood and Spirit of Christ. Baptism is God's divine pledge and sign by which he wants to assure us that we are just as truly

washed from our sins spiritually as our bodies are washed with water. And so as I sprinkle the water of baptism on the head of little Philip Carl let us be reminded of God's promises in the prophet Ezekiel, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

Not my will, but God's will be done.

AMEN

Let us pray: O God our Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name: please be present to bless Charles and Cindy as they present Philip Carl to be baptized as a member of your Church. Help Charles and Cindy and the God-parents to see the meaning of your saving Gospel; to make their promises sincerely and heartily; to pray for their children; and to teach them of holy things; so that they may all share in your gift of eternal life, now and for ever. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.