

Why do Christians baptize infants?

In order to understand why Christians baptize babies, we first need to understand what the Bible says baptism *is* and what baptism *does*, in clear words.

1 Peter 3:21 ---This water [of the flood in Noah’s day] symbolizes *baptism that now saves you also*—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.

Truth: Baptism saves people.

Titus 3:3–7 ----At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit* whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Truth: Before God saved us, we were slaves to sin.

Truth: God saved us through baptism.

Truth: Baptism is that through which God gives us rebirth (see next passage).

Truth: Baptism is that through which God makes us new.

John 3:3–6 ----In reply Jesus declared, “**I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**” “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “**I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.**”

Truth: Baptism is “the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (see previous passage).

Truth: Jesus says no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again of water and the Spirit, that is, baptized.

Truth: However, when we are baptized, the Holy Spirit himself gives us new birth, so that we are God’s children, inheritors of his kingdom.

NOTE: The only baptism available at the time Jesus said this to Nicodemus was the baptism of John the Baptist (see next passage).

Mark 1:4 -----And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and *preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

Acts 2:38 -----Peter replied, “Repent and *be baptized*, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins.* And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 22:16 ----[Ananias said to Saul,] “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, *be baptized and wash your sins away*, calling on his name.”

Truth: God gives forgiveness and washing away of sins through baptism.

Mark 16:16 ---*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved*, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

John 3:16-----For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes in him* shall not perish but have eternal life.

Truth: Baptism does not benefit a person apart from faith in Jesus.

Truth: Baptism is necessary for salvation (“Whoever believes *and is baptized* will be saved”), but faith in Jesus is the only *absolutely* necessary thing for salvation (“but whoever does not *believe* will be condemned”).

Galatians 3:26,27-You are all sons of God *through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

Truth: In baptism, God clothes us with Christ.

Truth: This means that God gives us faith in Christ Jesus through our baptism. (Note how the passage makes “clothing oneself with Christ” equal to having faith in Christ Jesus and being a son of God.)

Romans 6:4–7-We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Truth: Before baptism, we were spiritually dead and slaves to sin.

Truth: In baptism, we not only had our sins washed away and were made holy, but we were also freed from sin so that sin no longer has mastery over our lives. We can say No to every temptation (though

we do not do so perfectly this side of heaven) are able to live godly lives in the sight of God.

When we see how the Bible describes what baptism *is* and *does*—it saves, it forgives, it gives new birth, it ushers into the kingdom of God, it takes off the body of sin, it puts on Christ, it buries with Christ, it raises with Christ, it gives faith in Christ, it gives the Holy Spirit, it removes from slavery to sin, it gives the power to live a godly life—then we can hardly imagine why we would *not* want to have our children baptized as soon as possible. Especially when the Bible tells us the following about our children:

Psalm 51:5 ----Surely I was *sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

John 3:3–6 ----In reply Jesus declared, *“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”* “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, *“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh...”*

Truth: Children are not conceived and born sinless, or with a blank slate. They are conceived and born in sin, and deserving of God’s wrath and eternal punishment.

Luke 18:15–17—People were also bringing *babies* to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, *“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”*

Matthew 18:3—And [Jesus] said: *“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Truth: Luke tells us that the “little children” mentioned here are babies.

Truth: Jesus tells us not to hinder babies from coming to him.

Truth: Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like believing babies.

Truth: Jesus tells us that those who do not receive the kingdom of God like a believing baby does will never enter it.

Truth: Jesus tells us that we must change and become like believing babies if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Note that the account in Matthew 18 is the same account as Luke describes in Luke 18.)

Truth: God works faith also in babies.

Acts 2:38–39 -Peter replied, “Repent and *be baptized*, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. *The promise is for you and your children...*”

Truth: The gracious promises of God connected with baptism are intended for Christians and for their children.

Matthew 28:19-“*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*”

Acts 16:15 ----When [Lydia] and *the members of her household were baptized...*

Acts 16:33 ----At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and *all his family were baptized*.

1 Corinthians 1:16-Yes, I also *baptized the household of Stephanas...*

Truth: The Bible does not limit baptism to any age group.

Truth: On the contrary, far from going out of its way to limit baptism, it says that Jesus’s apostles baptized entire households.

Limiting baptism only to those who can thoughtfully describe their faith in every case ends up making baptism into a good work by which we show our dedication to Christ. This not only goes against everything the Bible says about baptism being God’s work and not our own work (see passages on p. 1–4), but it also goes against God’s arrangement for salvation in general, which is “not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:9). If baptism is nothing more than an act symbolizing our dedication to Christ, then “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” means “whoever believes and does a good work will be saved.”

Finally, even those who reject infant baptism must admit that the historical record of the early Christian Church shows that Christians immediately after the time of Jesus and the apostles baptized babies. In some cases, these Christians knew people who were personally taught by the apostles, or they themselves were taught by the apostles—and infant baptism was their regular practice. There were out-of-the-ordinary exceptions (for example, St. Augustine was not baptized until shortly before his death), but these exceptions were based on clearly false teachings about baptism (for example, St. Augustine thought that baptism only washed away the sins you had committed up to the point you were baptized). It was not until the time of Luther (1500s AD) that there began to be a growing movement of “Christians” (known as Anabaptists) who doubted what the Bible said about baptism and doubted baptism’s power, and so rejected infant baptism.

Every argument against infant baptism is based on human reason and not on the clear words of Scripture having to do with baptism.

Common Questions Against the Practice of Infant Baptism

1. Isn’t belief in infant baptism a belief in *forcing* the faith on a baby?

Answer: No. Jesus forces faith on no one. He always *wins* people to faith in him, never *forces* them. Besides, if the faith were truly *forced* on someone in baptism, then everyone who was ever baptized as an infant would remain a believer forever. But there are (sadly) many cases of baptized infants who grow up and abandon the faith.

2. How can a baby believe in Jesus through baptism?

Answer: I don't know, because the Bible doesn't tell us. It is a miracle, just as much as when an adult believes in Jesus, just as much as if a dead person were to come back to life.

The false idea behind this question is that *faith* is the same as (or proportionate to) *knowledge*, and indeed many people who reject infant baptism seeing coming to faith as an *informed decision*. The Bible does not describe faith as an informed decision originating in a human. Faith is simply confidence in Christ for salvation. We see confidence demonstrated all the time in babies and little children. When a toddler jumps off the top step of a flight of stairs into the arms of his father who is standing at the bottom, it is not because the toddler has thought about his jumping ability or analyzed his father's strength. He simply trusts his father. This is what the Spirit does in baptism—leads a baby to trust in (throw himself into the arms of) Jesus for spiritual safety and salvation.

If *faith* were the same as *knowledge*, then the more mentally challenged Christians might be, the more we would have to doubt their faith. But as many Christians well know, it is often the mentally challenged who demonstrate the greatest faith in Jesus, and are consequently often the happiest Christians. Also, if *faith* were the same as *knowledge*, without any further distinction, then in order for one's faith to grow, one would have to grow in knowledge. Sometimes this is the case, but sometimes a person grows in faith with the same amount of knowledge, or even after a decrease in knowledge.

3. Peter says, "*Repent* and be baptized." Baptism comes second, not first.

Answer: True, but Jesus says, "...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them." Here baptism comes first, and teaching second.

The fact is, we don't get our teaching about baptism from word order all by itself. We get it from clear passages of Scripture about what baptism is and does. Since Scripture says baptism saves, and does not limit whom it is meant for, then we should encourage Christians to bring also their children to be baptized in order to be saved.

It should also be noted that repentance is often falsely viewed as our own doing. Repentance consists of two parts: 1. Sorrow over sin, and 2. faith in Jesus for forgiveness of sins.

If #1 is being emphasized, that is God's work through his law (his holy will concerning what we should do and not do). This part of repentance does not save us; if it did, Judas would have been saved, since it was precisely his sorrow over his sin that caused him to commit suicide.

But if #2, faith in Jesus, is being emphasized, as it often is in Scripture when the words *repent* and *repentance* are used, that is God's work through the gospel, which saves us. That is why in Acts 5:31 and 11:18, repentance is described as something God *gives*, not something that we *do*.

It is true enough that we say, "*I* repent," not, "God repents for me *or* in me," just as we say, "*I* believe," not, "God believes for me *or* in me." But even though we do both, repent and believe, both are equally described as something that has been worked in us by God; they do not come from us, nor are they done by our own power (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Thus, when Peter says, "Repent," he is not giving us something that *we* must do before we are baptized. He is offering a gracious invitation from God—an invitation that has the power to give what it invites people to do.

(This is exactly the same as in Acts 16:30–31, when the jailer asks, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas reply, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." They are not giving the jailer some sort of obligation he must fulfill before he can be saved, but simply inviting him to trust that his salvation has already been won by Jesus through his death and resurrection.)

4. If infant baptism is so important, why isn't there an explicit command in Scripture to baptize babies?

Answer: There is. Christ says to make disciples of *all nations* by baptizing them (Matthew 28:19). And nowhere does he put a limit on the age of those to be baptized. It is only because we doubt what his Word says about baptism that we think he should have added the words "babies included."

To repeat what was said earlier: The Bible says that baptism saves, forgives, gives new birth, ushers into the kingdom of God, takes off the body of sin, puts on Christ, buries with Christ, raises with Christ, gives faith in Christ, gives the Holy Spirit, removes from slavery to sin, and gives the power to live godly lives. Does a person not want this for their children? Especially when the Bible says they are conceived and born in sin, and when Christ says not to hinder them from coming to him?

Jesus says our children are doomed to hell unless they are born again. He has given our infant children no other means by which to give them such rebirth except for the washing of rebirth, baptism.

Note that nowhere in all Scripture is there an explicit command to baptize adults either. Or women. There is also no explicit command to give Communion to women. Yet no Christian argues against these practices. The Lutheran theologian David Hollaz (1648–1713) wrote: “No explicit divine command is given that Transylvanians should be baptized. So then, should no Transylvanian be baptized? No explicit command is given that the Eucharist [Lord’s Supper] should be offered to women. Should it therefore not be offered to them? But just as from the words, ‘Drink from it, all of you,’ we make a correct deduction regarding women, so also on account of the words, ‘baptize all nations,’ we argue irrefutably regarding infants.” (Some might argue that there are examples of adults and women being baptized. True, but everything the Bible *describes* isn’t something that the Bible is telling us *should happen*. For example, the Bible *describes* Jesus and the apostles performing miracles, but that doesn’t mean that *we* must perform miracles in order to be Christians. In order for us to know that something must be done, we must have a clear instruction in the Scriptures that it should be done.)

6. Jesus was not baptized until he was an adult. Shouldn’t we follow his example?

Answer: Indeed, Jesus was not baptized until he was about 30 years old (Luke 3:23). But which Christian would insist that this means that we should not be baptized until we are 30 years old?

The fact is that the sacrament of baptism was first begun by John the Baptist not long before Jesus was baptized. Jesus could not have been baptized as an infant, because baptism was not around yet.

Jesus lived during the transition period between the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the covenant of circumcision existed for babies as the way to seal them as the people of God (Genesis 17). (Paul compared baptism to circumcision in Colossians 2:11–12; see below.) And we know that Jesus *was* circumcised on the eighth day of his life, as a baby (Luke 2:21). Once baptism was instituted, Jesus was baptized, and he too made it a prominent part of his own ministry and emphasized its importance from the very beginning (John 3:3–6, 22; 4:2). With his death on the cross, circumcision was abolished (Galatians 5:6; Colossians 2:13–14). And before he ascended into heaven, he commanded that his followers make disciples by baptizing and teaching (Mt 28:19–20).

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Other Passages and Truths and Other Truths from the Passages Above

1 Peter 3:21 ---Truth: Baptism is God's pledge that we will always have a good conscience before him. (NOTE: The fact that baptism is *God's* pledge and not *our* pledge is clear from Titus 3:3–7.)

Titus 3:3–7 ----Truth: Baptism is not a righteous thing we do, but an act of mercy on the part of God.

Truth: Justification (being declared not guilty of sin) is something that happened *before* our baptism (on Good Friday), but *through* baptism justification is applied to us personally, so that we actually become heirs of heaven and have the sure hope of eternal life after we die.

Truth: The Bible wants us to equate the turning point in our lives, from damnation to salvation, with our baptism.

John 3:3–6 ----Truth: The reason that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is baptized is because flesh gives birth to flesh, that is, from our sinful parents we inherit only sin and damnation.

Colossians 2:11–12--In him [i.e. Christ] you were also circumcised, when the body of the sinful flesh was taken off, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, by being buried with him in baptism. In baptism you were also raised through faith in the power of God who raised Christ from the dead.

Truth: Baptism is a circumcision done by Christ in which he takes off the body of the sinful flesh.

Truth: Again, baptism does not benefit a person except through faith in Christ.

Truth: However, it is also clear from this passage that precisely in baptism Christ gives us faith in him. (NOTE: This is what “raised through faith” has to mean, since before being baptized the person is described as still having the sinful flesh on, and someone who still has the sinful flesh on cannot believe in Jesus. Also, the raising through faith that Christ works in baptism is compared to the raising from the dead that God did for Christ. Someone who is spiritually dead cannot do anything, including believing in Jesus.)

Truth: The fact that God gives faith in Jesus through baptism is also evident from the 1 Peter and Titus passages above, which describe baptism as saving us. Since we are only saved through faith in Jesus (Mark 16:16 and John 3:16), then in order for baptism to save us, God must give us faith in Jesus through baptism.

NOTE: Here baptism is compared to the Old Testament covenant of circumcision, which was for male babies who were eight days old.

Luke 3:21–22; 4:1–2-When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” ... Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

Truth: Even Jesus, who was sinless, received the Holy Spirit and strength for carrying out God’s will and fighting temptation through baptism.

Luke 18:15–17 and

Matthew 18:3-NOTE: Those who do not believe in infant baptism go directly against these words of Jesus in chiefly two ways: First, they hinder babies from coming to Jesus by keeping them from the only means he has given them to come to faith in him, namely baptism. Second, by making children wait until they reach the “age of accountability” to decide for themselves whether they want to believe in Jesus and be baptized, they are in essence telling them they must first change and become like adults before coming to Jesus, instead of what Jesus says in Matthew 18:3, that we must change and become like believing babies.

NOTE: How can we possibly hinder babies from coming to Jesus if baptism is not meant for babies? What is Jesus warning us against if baptism is not meant for them too?