

BAPTISM

Chapter Seven

Can Infant Sprinkling Be Justified?

The so-called *Reformers* of Roman Catholic theology used some extreme logical presuppositions in order to justify infant baptism and later the sprinkling of infants. As we read their arguments for infant baptism and infant sprinkling, we must remember that their interpretations of various Bible texts are done from the presupposition that infants were baptized in the early church (a fact that is not found anywhere in Scripture or anywhere in early church history as admitted by all honest Bible scholars). Therefore, these so-called *Reformers* were looking for Bible texts that *allowed* them to argue for their *already established practices*. After all, if they could not somehow justify their practices, that would mean they would all have to become *Anabaptists* (re-baptizers). They had already been persecuting and murdering the *Anabaptists* for centuries. To admit that infant baptism/sprinkling was unscriptural would also be an admission to the heinous crimes against the *Anabaptists* that they and their predecessors committed. They used three Bible texts where Jesus allowed children/infants to be brought to Him to justify infant baptism/sprinkling. Their arguments in their use of these texts are ludicrous and ridiculous because the exegesis of these texts does not give any credence to their arguments.

“¹³ Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put *his* hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. ¹⁵ And he laid *his* hands on them, and departed thence” (Matthew 19:13-15).

“¹³ And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and *his* disciples rebuked those that brought *them*. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw *it*, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as *{like}* a little child, he shall not enter therein. ¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, put *his* hands upon them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:13-16).

“¹⁵ And they brought unto him also infants *{babes in arms}*, that he would touch them: but when *his* disciples saw *it*, they rebuked them. ¹⁶ But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and

forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. ¹⁷ Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as {like} a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (Luke 18:15-17).

Most people wrongly assume that every Christian denomination gets their theology from the exegesis of Scripture (biblical interpretation). As I have said previously, there were two basic theological positions of *Sola Scriptura* coming out of the Reformation. One said, *whatever the Bible does not disallow, we allow*. The other said, *whatever the Bible confirms, we confirm*. Therefore, there are many in professing *Christianity* with a *theology* of baptism that is completely separate from any exegesis of Scripture. For those holding to a true *Sola Scriptura* position, it is a complete *anathema* to try to establish a theological conclusion apart from finding those conclusions through direct exegesis of various Bible texts. Yet, this is a common practice regarding the issue of infant sprinkling. The following quote from a leading Methodist theologian from years ago gives us an example of his understanding that *theology* can be separated from any exegetical support from Scripture:

“J.R. Nelson affirmed: ‘That the New Testament says nothing explicitly about baptizing of little children is incontestable. . . . In current discussion therefore greater weight must be placed for the defen[s]e of the practice upon theological rather than scriptural grounds.’ *The Realm of Redemption*, pp. 129f.”¹

There is little disagreement among almost all true Bible scholars of all denominations that there is no biblical support for baptizing (immersing) or sprinkling infants. Neither is there any true, honest Bible scholar that can find any example of anyone other than believers being baptized in the Scriptures. This is also exemplified by Reformed scholars at the turn of the twentieth century.

“In a review of Continental {European} work on baptism, Reider Bjornard suggested that the present era in baptismal discussions should be seen as beginning with Heitmuller’s work, *Im Namen Jesus*, published in 1903.² Significantly that book was written in the conviction that baptism in the primitive Church was of believers only.³ The same position was adopted in a very different work by F.M. Rendtorff, issued two years later,⁴ by Feine in 1907,⁵ and by Windisch in 1908.⁶”² Item in { } added

¹ Beasley-Murry, G. R., *Baptism In The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) page 309, footnote #2

² *Ibid.*, page 307

“Leenhardt, for example, in his valuable treatment of the New Testament teaching on baptism, wrote, ‘It is generally agreed by defenders of infant baptism that the New Testament does not offer us explicit teachings capable of settling the problem of infant baptism. . . . It is the evidence of the facts which lead to this established position; *only the fanatics will contest it.*’ He goes on to ask ‘Why will people constantly take up arguments which have already been shown a hundred times to be untenable?’⁸ This is indeed a startling reversal of the cry, ‘*Schwärmerer –Fanatics!*’ addressed to the Anabaptists by both Lutherans and Reformed.”³

We have numerous statements from many *Reformers* (probably better referred to as the *Confusers*) using the statements of Jesus to justify allowing children to come to Him for *blessings* in Matthew 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16, and Luke 18:15-17. Perhaps the classic statement is that of Calvin:

“*Suffer children.* He declares that he wishes to receive *children*; and at length, *taking them in his arms*, he not only embraces, but *blesses* them by the *laying on of hand*; from which we **infer** that his grace is extended even to those who are of that age. And no wonder; for since the whole race of Adam is shut up under the sentence of death, all from the least even to the greatest must perish, except those who are rescued by the only Redeemer. To exclude from the grace of redemption those who are of that age would be too cruel; and therefore it is not without reason that we employ this passage as a shield against the Anabaptists. They refuse baptism to infants, because infants are incapable of understanding that mystery which is denoted by it. We, on the other hand, maintain that, since baptism is the pledge and figure of the forgiveness of sins, and likewise of adoption by God, it ought not to be denied to infants, whom God adopts and washes with the blood of his Son. Their objection, that repentance and newness of life are also denoted by it, is easily answered. Infants are renewed by the Spirit of God, according to the capacity of their age, till that power which was concealed within them grows by degrees, and becomes fully manifest at the proper time. Again, when they argue that there is no other way in which we are reconciled to God, and become heirs of adoption, than by faith, we admit this as to adults, but, with respect to infants, this passage demonstrates it to be false. Certainly, the laying on of hands was not a trifling or empty sign, and the prayers of Christ were not idly wasted in air. But he could not present the infants solemnly to God without giving them purity. And for what did he pray for them, but that

³ Ibid., page 307

they might be received into the number of the children of God? Hence it follows, that they were renewed by the Spirit to the hope of salvation. In short, by embracing them, he testified that they were reckoned by Christ among his flock. And if they were partakers of the spiritual gifts, which are represented by Baptism, it is unreasonable that they should be deprived of the outward sign. But it is presumption and sacrilege to drive far from the fold of Christ those whom he cherishes in his bosom, and to shut the door, and exclude as strangers those whom he does not wish to be forbidden to come to him For of such is the kingdom of heaven. Under this term he includes both little children and those who resemble them; for the Anabaptists foolishly exclude children, with whom the subject must have commenced; but at the same time, taking occasion from the present occurrence, he intended to exhort his disciples to lay aside malice and pride, and put on the nature of children. Accordingly, it is added by Mark and Luke, that no man *can enter into the kingdom of heaven unless he be made* to resemble a child. But we must attend to Paul's admonition, not to be children in understanding, but in malice, (1Co 14:20.)"⁴ (Bolding and underlining added for emphasis)

This all appears to be a very *logical* argument for infant baptism/sprinkling. However, that is all it is. It is *logical*. **It is not biblical** (*Sola Scriptura*). A basic biblical truth is that all children of all nations (*not just the children of Jewish parents or of Christian parents*) are held innocent of sin by God until an unrevealed age/time wherein God begins to hold them accountable for their own fallen nature and their own sinfulness. In the Wilderness purging of Israel after their failure in faith at Kadesh-Barnea, God held only those over the age of twenty accountable for the failure. I would hope this would be God's established *Age of Accountability*. It might be, but I highly doubt it. The Zadokite Community (the Qumran Covenanters with which John the Baptist was identified and from which his rite of baptism is most probably derived) would not receive a disciple into their community until an individual reached the age of twenty years old.

"Whether or not infants were brought by their parents to the baptism of John [*the Baptist*] is beyond our ability to prove or disprove. It is impermissible, however, to insist that John must have followed the precedent of [*Jewish*] proselyte baptism in this respect, presuming that he knew it. We ought not to dismiss from the mind the fact that John's nearest neighbors, the Covenanters of Qumran, did not admit children to the lustrations. From the Two-column fragment we learn that children began to receive instruction in the teaching of

⁴ Calvin, John, *John Calvin's Verse Commentary* (SwordSearcher Software 6.1)

the group when they became ten years of age, and they continued in it until they reached the age of twenty, at which time they became eligible for examination with a view to entering the community.¹ It is unnecessary to suggest that John followed in the steps of the Covenanters [*although this is the most probable*] in his administration of baptism as that he adhered to the procedure proselyte baptism when baptizing Jews, but it is worth reminding ourselves that there were other views in Judaism concerning the rightness of baptizing young children besides those which came to prevail in proselyte baptism. It is further necessary to recall the results of our comparison between John's baptism and proselyte baptism, for we found considerable differences between them: the strong eschatological element in John's baptism, referring both to judgment and hope, is absent from proselyte baptism, while the relation of proselyte baptism to the Temple worship and to sacrifice in particular has no analogy to John's baptism. In both respects John is nearer to Qumran than to the proselytization of Jerusalem. But if the two rites, John's baptism and proselyte baptism, have so little in common, in their associations and significance, why should it be assumed as axiomatic that their conditions of administration were identical?"⁵ (Items in [] added)

Of course, the Dead Sea Scrolls (fragments of close to 1,000 scrolls with remnants of about 870 separate scrolls) and the Zadokite Documents were not available to the Reformers. They were discovered between the years 1946 and 1956 and were not really made available to anyone but the Roman Catholics until the early 1990's. In the context of these documents, there is probably a much stronger reason why John was call the "Baptist" other than merely his practicing of water baptism. It most probably refers to his association with the Zadokite Community, who were also known as *the Baptists*.

Granted, the idea that there was an inter-testament sect known as the *Baptists* is a questionable conjecture. I certainly do not propose the Zadokites were a *Baptist denomination*. The term *denomination* cannot be used with the nomenclature *Baptist* in that it denies a basic tenet of Baptist theology; i.e., the autonomy of a local assembly. True local, Baptist churches associated, affiliated, and fellowshipped together, but never formed *denominations*. Nonetheless, members of the Zadokite Community were known as the *Baptists* – like the Anabaptists later, it was a name probably given to them by their contemporaries.

Study of the three documents from the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly the Damascus Document, the Habakkuk Peshier (Commentary), and the Community Rule, gives us a community of inter-testament believers and their *understanding* of

⁵ Beasley-Murry, G. R., *Baptism In The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) page 332

eschatological events surrounding the coming of Messiah. That does not assume these understandings were perfectly correct in that the Church Age was a mystery to the Jew.

The Zadokite Community would have come from the group of Jews that returned to Jerusalem under Nehemiah and Ezra. Ezra was a descendant of Zadok (Ezra 7:1-5) who was a descendant of Aaron, therefore of the High Priestly line. This group of devout Jews returning from exile was referred to as the Sons of Righteousness (another name given to the Zadokite Community). Another title was the Hassidim (the Pious Ones). The word Essenes is most probably the Greek transliteration of the Hassidaeans. The etymology of Hassidim is from two words; Hesed (piety) and Zedek, which is a “dichotomy, descriptive of man’s relationship to Deity, i.e., ‘thou shalt love the Lord thy God.’ Taken with the second, ‘loving one’s neighbor’ or ‘Righteousness towards one’s fellowman’, the two comprise the sum total of the ‘commands of all Righteousness . . .’”⁶

All the various sects of Judaism at the time of Christ would have been descendants coming from the 42,360 Jews and their “servants and maids” (7,337; Ezra 2:64-65) that returned from exile. They all began as the Hassidaeans. When many of these Jews began to be Hellenized by the Greek culture, many others separated themselves from the Temple Order in that they believed the priests ministering in the Temple were defiled (the Damascus Document deals extensively with the “pollution of the Temple”).

During the time of the Hasmonean decadence and Roman conquest, the Zadokite Community increased in numbers. Therefore, there were many variations of sects within this sect (as there are among *Baptists* today).

The Dead Sea Scrolls were most probably deposited in the caves (where they were found) just before Herod’s decimation of Qumran in about 37 B.C. (a severe earthquake occurred there in 31 B.C.) The site was vacant for over a generation. Many believe the group relocated its headquarters to Damascus during Herod’s reign, later returning to Qumran. Many of these Zadokites (separatists) controlled the Sanhedrin until Herod the Great had all but two of them slaughtered. They were predominantly anti-Herodians.

Millar Burrows⁷ list a number of the beliefs of the Zadokite Community.

1. They held the Scriptures in high esteem. The Law and the Prophets are quoted extensively in the Dead Sea Scrolls.
2. The leader of the *Community* was known as *The Teacher of Righteousness* who, it appears, was believed to have special interpretive abilities regarding the Scriptures. The result of this was that the interpretation of a text (like

⁶ Eisenman, Robert, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the First Christians* (Element Books Limited) page 427

⁷ Burrows, Millar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Chapter XII* (The Viking Press)

Habakkuk) was often interpreted in the light of recent historical events (and therefore distorted).

3. Entering the *Community* (formal membership) involved “taking an oath to return wholeheartedly to the Law of Moses.” A considerable commitment was required of each covenanter to the study and interpretation of the Law. “Only within the community was true obedience to the law supposed to be possible.”

4. “The sons of Aaron” (priests) governed the *Community*.

5. They believed in demonic forces of evil (the “angel of darkness”) and the “Sons of Light” (i.e., righteousness). The defiled priesthood and their followers were referred to as the “men of Belial’s lot.” One of the Scrolls is “The War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness.”

6. The *Damascus Document* divides the history of mankind “into five periods, in each of which God has set apart a saved remnant under the leadership of His chosen servants.” This was a precursor to modern day Dispensationalism.

7. Election was viewed dualistically. True Israel was the “elect.” Individuals became part of the “elect” group by becoming a covenanter in the *Community*.

8. The closing hymn of the *Manual of Discipline* reveals the *Community* members lived in “humble reliance” upon God.

9. The *Manual of Discipline* speaks of the coming of two Messiahs. These two Messiahs would rule Israel. One would be King and a descendant of king David. The other would be High Priest and a descendant of Zadok. The words “the Lord’s anointed,” from which the word Messiah originates, was applied to both the king of Israel and to the High Priest. Several references are made to “the Messiah of Aaron and Israel” occur in the *Damascus Document*. The “Messiah of Aaron” would be the High Priest. The “Messiah of . . . Israel” would be the King. This application would have been in compliance with the Law’s command against the High Priest and the King being one person.

10. Although they did believe in resurrection, they believed THEY would not be resurrected, but translated without death into the Kingdom of God. They referred to this as the “assumption.” It is similar to what Dispensationalists believe regarding the Rapture.

11. They believed in eternal punishment in Hell for the “men of Belial” and “eternal joy in the life of eternity” for the “men of Light.”

12. Justification by faith is somewhat difficult to see. In the Habakkuk Peshet it is said, “God will save those Jews who are *Torah-Doers* from *the House of Judgment* because of *their works and their faith* in the Righteous Teacher.” This would be very close to what James teaches in James 1:22 and 2:14-26 and his teaching regarding Abraham’s faith as exhibited by his work; i.e., his willingness to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to God.

It is said by John M. Allegro, “Of all the recorded varieties of Judaism, that of the Essenes, as far as it is known, seemed the closest to the religion of the New Testament.”⁸ Claims that the Zadokite Community can be identified with Gnosticism and Zoroastrianism are really far-fetched.

Since there is undoubtedly an age of accountability that goes beyond infancy and toddler age, it is nonsense to try to justify some kind of *ritual* like infant baptism/sprinkling to *keep a child safe until he can believe for himself* (which is essentially the argument for the need of infant baptism/sprinkling in the first place). Therefore, all children of all kindred of people are SAFE until they reach an undetermined age whereat God begins to hold them accountable and at which they must be “born again” to enter the kingdom of God.

THE INNOCENTS

The general premise of Reformed theology is to connect infant baptism or infant sprinkling with salvation to insure that children are *safe* until they believe. Their argument is that infant baptism is the sign of the New Covenant and it replaces circumcision as the sign of the Old Covenant. However, they fail to recognize that neither the Mosaic Covenant nor the New Covenant connect either circumcision or water baptism with salvation.

The *ordinances* of circumcision and water baptism are connected with *practical sanctification*, not salvation. Children do not need some invented ritual of infant baptism/sprinkling to make them *safe* from God’s wrath should they die before believing. They are already *safe*. In the book of Jeremiah, God addresses the adults of Israel who had begun to practice Baalism, which involved sacrificing infant children to the pagan idol.

“³³ Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love? therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways.³⁴ Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents: I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these.³⁵ Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned” (Jeremiah 2:33-35).

“¹ Thus saith the LORD, Go and get a potter’s earthen bottle, and *take* of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests; ² And go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, which *is* by the entry of the east gate, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee, ³ And say, Hear ye the word of

⁸ Allegro, John M., *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Myth* (Prometheus Books)

the LORD, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. ⁴ Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; ⁵ They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire *for* burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake *it*, neither came *it* into my mind: ⁶ Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of slaughter” (Jeremiah 19:1-6).

In Jeremiah 2:34 and 19:4, God refers to these children as “innocents.” This is translated from the Hebrew word *naw-kee'*, which literally means *exempt from guilt of sin*. Children do not need some invented ritual to make them *safe* from God’s wrath in the event of premature death, because God Himself declares them *safe*.

Another Bible text showing that uncircumcised children or infants, never baptized, are safe is the text regarding the death of king David’s son from his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. Two things we must note in reading II Samuel 12:15-23 is that the child died before he was eight days old (the age of circumcision) and that David says he will “go to him” in the afterlife.

¹⁵ And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. ¹⁶ David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. ¹⁷ And the elders of his house arose, *and went* to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. ¹⁸ And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead? ¹⁹ But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. ²⁰ Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed *himself*, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. ²¹ Then said his servants unto him, What thing *is* this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, *while it was* alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst

rise and eat bread.²² And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell *whether* GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?²³ But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (II Samuel 12:15-23).

Notice that once the child was dead, David saw no need to mourn the child’s death (“should I fast,” vs. 23) or to continue in lamentations over him. David understood that the child was *safe* with God in eternity. David understood that he would see his child again in eternity. Although there was a sense of *grief*, there was no *loss*. David knew where his child was. The child was *safe* in the presence and protection of the Creator although the child was never circumcised (or infant baptized).

Therefore, is infant baptism/sprinkling wrong or hurtful? This question takes us back to where we began.

“¹ At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? ² And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, ³ And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. ⁶ But whoso shall offend {*the idea is to live in such a way or teach something that leads a child astray from ‘the way,’ John 14:6*} one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:1-6).