

GRACE REFORMED CHURCH OF JERSEY CITY

COVENANT BAPTISM: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Many of us do not come from churches that practiced paedobaptism (children of believers are baptized), but rather only credobaptism (only professing adults are baptized). This FAQ is a reminder of important truths for those who have been in Reformed churches for many years and also a primer to new visitors and regular attendees.

Reformed churches baptize children of believers. I thought only those who have faith in Christ and publicly profess that faith should be baptized. Infants can neither have faith nor profess it. Why, then, do Reformed Churches baptize children of believers?

God commands us in Gen 17:1-14 to give the sign and seal of His promise to believers and their children. The OT sign and seal of God's promise was circumcision. The NT sign and seal is water baptism. The signs and seals of both OT and NT signify and seal the same promise: God will be God to us and to our children. As Professor B.B. Warfield (1851-1921) put it, "The argument in a nutshell is simply this: God established His Church in the days of Abraham and put children into it. They must remain there until He puts them out. He has nowhere put them out. They are still then members of His Church and as such entitled to its ordinances."

What we really should demand proof of is this— that a child of a believer, either in OT or NT, was not given the sign and seal of the covenant only until they were of a "mature age." That is, that either circumcision or baptism was withheld until the child could profess faith or give evidence of conversion. Such proof has not been forthcoming.

Wait, I asked about baptism which was given in the NT— why did you answer the previous question from the OT?

To understand the NT, you must start with the OT. The first verse of the NT (and all subsequent verses) is incomprehensible without a proper understanding of the OT. The Bible teaches us that the OT and NT are authored by the same God, who reveals the same plan of salvation in Scripture, and saves one people in the one Mediator, Jesus Christ. This one people of God has been rescued for the same eschatological hope of resurrected life with God. In other words, we should see that the Bible emphasizes a striking *continuity* between OT and NT, rather than a radical *discontinuity*.

The Bible says that the promise to Abraham is the basis of Christ's work. Abraham is the father of all who believe in God, apart from works, whether Jew or Gentile (Rm 4:11-12). The Law given by God through Moses (Mosaic Law) does not nullify the previous promise made to Abraham (Gal 3:17-18). The Mosaic Law, rather, is superimposed upon the Abrahamic promise. Gentiles and Jews who believe in Jesus Christ count Abraham as their father, and are counted by God as heirs of His promise (Gal 3:29).

Peter, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, repeats what God told Abraham: "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2:39). God's promise is for believing Jews, their children, and Gentiles and their children ("all who are far off"; the language of "geographical/spiritual distance" is a typical descriptor of Gentiles, see Eph 2:12, 13, 17, 19). The new element in Pentecost is not that children are included in the covenant but that Gentiles are included, in fulfillment of Gen 1:28; Ps 67:4-5; Is 2:1-5; 42:6; 49:6; Zech 8:20-23, and many other passages too numerous to mention.

In other words, nothing substantially changed in the way God deals with believers and their children from Abraham until now.

Isn't the New Covenant composed of only adult believers?

The Bible teaches that the New Covenant includes the children of believers. Consider the following references from the OT:

Dt 30:6: And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Is 44:3: For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

Is 59:20-21: “And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,” declares the Lord. ²¹ “And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,” says the Lord, “from this time forth and forevermore.”

Jer 30:10: Then fear not, O Jacob my servant, declares the Lord, nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and none shall make him afraid.

Jer 30:18-22: Thus says the Lord: Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be rebuilt on its mound, and the palace shall stand where it used to be. ¹⁹ Out of them shall come songs of thanksgiving, and the voices of those who celebrate. I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will make them honored, and they shall not be small. ²⁰ Their children shall be as they were of old, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all who oppress them. ²¹ Their prince shall be one of themselves; their ruler shall come out from their midst; I will make him draw near, and he shall approach me, for who would dare of himself to approach me? declares the Lord. ²² And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Jer 32:37-40: Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. ³⁸ And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. ³⁹ I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. ⁴⁰ I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

Zech 10:6-9: I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the Lord their God and I will answer them. ⁷ Then Ephraim shall become like a mighty warrior, and their hearts shall be glad as with wine. Their children shall see it and be glad; their hearts shall rejoice in the Lord. ⁸ I will whistle for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as many as they were before. ⁹ Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and with their children they shall live and return.

Joel 2:28-29: And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹ Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

Mal 4:5-6: Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

You mentioned that baptism had replaced circumcision. Where do you see that in Scripture?

In Col 2:11-12: “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in

baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

Paul is relating three things in this one passage: OT circumcision, NT baptism, and Christ’s death and resurrection. Those in Christ Jesus have been circumcised in Christ’s death and resurrection (or, in the words of Rom 6:3-4, we were baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection). Christ’s death is both His circumcision (when “He was cut off out of the land of the living,” Is 53:8, fulfilling what OT circumcision signified and sealed) and His baptism (when the cup of God’s judgment was poured out on Him, Mk 10:38). In other words, Christ suffers death in our place. We receive the blessings of Christ’s circumcision and baptism in our baptism. In other words, OT circumcision is NT baptism through Jesus Christ.

Both circumcision and baptism point to the same salvation even as they exhibit substantial similarities and a few differences. Circumcision points forward to what God would do to save His people. Baptism points back to what God did save His people. Circumcision is bloody, anticipating the shedding of Christ’s atoning blood. Baptism is bloodless, testifying that Jesus shed His blood for His people. (Tangentially, in every baptism, someone always dies and someone always lives. Scripture speaks of the Red Sea as a baptism [1 Cor 10:2]. Two groups went down into the Red Sea, but only one came back up. But that truth gets us a little too far afield.) Circumcision was only for Jewish men and their sons. Baptism, the greater sign and seal, is for any believer— Jew or Gentile— and their children, male or female (Gal 3:27-29). The Gospel of God’s grace has not contracted to include only adults, but now is extended to the entire Gentile world, pass the boundary of the Israelite nation (Acts 1:8; 1 Jn 2:2).

You’ve mentioned the expression, “sign and seal,” a few times now. What are you talking about?

The language of “sign” and “seal,” found in Rom 4:11, describes Abraham’s circumcision, long after he had believed in God’s promise: “He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.”

A Biblical “sign” is a marker that points and/or gives meaning. For example, street signs that read “23rd St” and “Park Ave” tell you the significance of that intersection (it’s 23rd and Park) and are marking off that reality from, say, “24th and Park.”

A Biblical “seal” is a confirmation or attestation of the veracity of something. For example, kings and rulers in antiquity up until the modern era would *sign* an official document (make marks to show he authorized the document) and *seal* it by pouring wax on the document and imprinting the wax with some kind of official emblem (e.g., a signet ring which he alone possessed) to confirm the veracity of the document.

The signs and seals of the covenant function this same way. Baptism, like circumcision, formally and publicly marks off the recipient as an heir of God’s promise, a participant in the covenant of God, a recipient of His salvation. The sign and seal of baptism point to the righteousness of God, that is, to what God does to rescue us from our sin. Our baptism points to and confirms God’s love for us in Jesus’ death and resurrection.

The covenant sign and seal is not a testimony of personal faith. It’s important to note this essential aspect of signs and seals. Consider Rom 4:11 again: circumcision was “a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith.” Baptism does not point to my repentance. Baptism is a sign (points to) and seal (divine confirmation) of the righteousness of God that is to be received by faith. Baptism does not shout, *look at my faith!* But, rather, *look at God’s grace!* Baptism is telling us what God has done to save us and our children.

In Acts and the NT, the emphasis is on professing faith in Jesus Christ and repentance from sin and then baptism. Where do we see baptism of children?

The pattern of “repent and believe and be baptized” (e.g. Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38) is certainly common to Acts where the Gospel was breaking into pagan communities, and the faith of new converts had to be evident before baptism, just like the pagan Abraham believed and was then circumcised (Rom 4:11-12). This is to be expected in a missionary context where the Gospel has never been found— faith and repentance are Biblical prerequisites where there is no prior Christian faith. The Gospel is preached, people hear, believe, repent, then are baptized. The question is, what of their children? Pastor William Shishko comments: “But even as whole families were received as part of the covenant people in all previous ages, so that pattern continues in the New Testament. If, in fact, this household principle was abrogated in the new covenant, one would not expect the household formula to be used as it is in the New Testament.” The covenant promise to households (I am God to you and your children) continues in the NT. Consider a few examples.

The faith of Cornelius leads to his household being included in God’s promise: “And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household’ ” (Acts 11:13-14).

Lydia believed in God, and she and her household were baptized: “One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ ” (Acts 16:14-15).

The Philippian jailer believed in Jesus, and he and his household were baptized: Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family (Acts 16:30-33). Note that the Philippian jailer asks about the nature of salvation, and Paul and Silas give the Biblical answer which is inclusive of his household.

Why would God want to include children in the covenant he made with Abraham?

God did not cancel His original design for Adam and Eve to be “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion” (Gen 1:27a). God wanted, and wants, godly offspring, a mankind that worships Him (Mal 2:14-15) and fills the earth. In His good wisdom, God ordained that Christian households, beginning with the first household of Adam and Eve before the Fall, and then the Abrahamic household after the Fall, would be His chosen means of making His way known to covenant children and passing the faith down from one generation to another (Gen 17: 9 and 18:19).

Shouldn’t children make their own “decision” about their religious convictions and “choose” God on their own?

No, this is a modern heresy. We teach our children to imitate us in everything— what sports we love and teams we root for, what kind of food we like to eat, how to speak, how to dress, how to conduct themselves with good manners. Why would we exclude them from imitating what is of the greatest importance— our Christian faith?

To train a child to “choose” God on their own terms is to train them to be apostate and unbelievers. It’s akin to Israel leaving Egypt and their children behind— which was Pharaoh’s desire (Ex 10:8-11). This would have been unthinkable. The world and Satan say, *Let your children choose God, don’t force religion on them.* All the while, the world is forcing its religion on them. At the time of Exodus, God commands that all

Israel must go and worship God (Ex 10:9). No one was to be left behind. No part of your household is outside God's authority. Your children are holy to God (1 Cor 7:14) because they belong to Him.

Does anything "special" happen during baptism?

If by "special" you mean, "Is God doing anything in baptism?" then the answer is, "yes, God is doing several things in baptism."

First, God portrays salvation for us (just like He does in the Lord's Supper). God teaches us that we are conceived and born wretched, dead in our sins, and in need of a Savior given to us in Jesus Christ. It is hard to improve upon our historic, "Form For The Baptism Of Infants":

Baptism teaches that we and our children are conceived and born in sin. This means that we are by nature children of wrath and for that reason cannot be members of Christ's kingdom unless we are born again. Baptism, whether by immersion or sprinkling, teaches that sin has made us so impure that we must undergo a cleansing which only God can accomplish. By this we are admonished to detest ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and turn to Him for our cleansing and salvation.

Just as the water is sprinkled on the baptized person, so God sprinkles our consciences clean and washes our soul (1 Peter 3:21; Titus 3:5; Heb 10:22; 1 Cor 6:11; Acts 22:16).

Second, in giving us a picture of salvation, God formally and publicly declares that the baptized person is an heir of His promise (Gen 17:7 and Acts 2:39). God puts His seal of ownership on the baptized person so that they are now marked off and confirmed as belonging to Him in His covenant community (similar to circumcision in the OT). God seals unto them the whole of His salvation, to be received by faith (Gal 3:27). Again, consider our "Form For The Baptism Of Infants":

Baptism signifies and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. For this reason, we are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

When we are baptized into the name of the Father, God the Father testifies and seals to us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us as His children and heirs. Therefore, He promises to provide us with everything good and protect us from all evil or turn it to our profit.

When we are baptized into the name of the Son, God the Son seals to us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins. Christ unites us to Himself, so that we share in His death and resurrection. Through this union with Christ, we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God.

When we are baptized into the name of the Holy Spirit, God the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will make His home within us and will sanctify us as members of Christ. He will impart to us what we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives. As a result of His work within us, we shall finally be presented without the stain of sin among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third, the infant, child, teenager, or adult who is baptized is exhorted to hold steadfastly to God's promise and to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as their only hope. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom 10:13). All of God's promises, including those made in baptism, are received by faith. Again, quoting from our "Form":

Whereas in all covenants, there are contained two parts, therefore are we by God through baptism, admonished of and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in him, and love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life. And if we sometimes through weakness fall into sin, we must not

therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and indubitable testimony that we have an eternal covenant of grace with God.

Fourth, God calls all who witness this baptism to renew their hope and trust in God. Baptism is not just for the person being baptized, it is for the entire covenant community that sees it.

Are you saying that the baptism of the children of believers “automatically” saves them?

In baptism, whether of adult or child, God publicly and formally re-names us and makes us His own and promises salvation. But God's promise, whether to an adult or child, must always be believed and received by faith. Salvation is not “automatic” if by “automatic” you mean you can presume upon God and live like hell and expect to go to heaven.

Baptism, like circumcision, brings the promise of God to the heirs of the promise. But heirship contains covenantal demands and responsibilities, too, not merely privileges.

Parents must believe God's promise and raise their children in the fear of the LORD and all aspects of covenant nurture: weekly worship on the Lord's Day, catechized in God's truth, engaged in full-time Christian education, reading the Bible, singing God's praises, and praying together in family worship, continually disciplining and instructing their children to live for God and not for self, and grounding all aspects of intellectual development and academic and avocational study back to the love of God and His revelation in His Word and the world. Christian nurture is a Deuteronomy 6 life:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (vv4-9).

In sum, parents are always to be instructing their children in all of God's commandments.

Baptized children, too, must grow in faith in Christ and obedience to His Law, in age-appropriate ways, attending to the instruction and example of their parents, and conducting their lives in line with that profession, all the days of their life.

Are you saying that I should view my children and treat as Christians?

Yes, precisely. They are not pagan. They are consecrated and made holy by God (1 Cor 7:14).

From what you've said, it seems like infants who are baptized can walk away from the faith. So, why bother baptizing them?

Of course, adults, too, can walk away from the faith. Baptism is not finalized salvation and is not a “guarantee” that baptized children or adults will be saved. Apostasy does exist.

Nevertheless, apart from God commanding it, it must be pointed out that Christian baptism does not stand alone. It anticipates a life of nurture by the child's parents in the love of God and His truth (see the entire book of Deuteronomy and Proverbs, for starters). This nurture and discipleship in the home is the normative way God brings covenant children to faith and spiritual maturity. It is an indisputable fact that the overwhelming majority of Christians throughout Church history came to faith because of the domestic instruction and example of their parents or some other family member who was a Christian.

Pastor Robert Rayburn notes:

The largest number of Christians in the world do not receive the gift of faith only subsequently to a life of conscious rebellion against God and by means of a crisis of conversion. [...] Further, it is emphatically clear from Deuteronomy to Proverbs to Ephesians that nurture, not evangelism, is the paradigm of child-rearing in the covenant home, a nurture which presupposes a heart,

however young, set free, or soon to be set free, from the native blindness and opposition to the truth into which the fall has cast all mankind from conception (Ps 51:5). It can only be thought remarkable that the contrary paradigm—adolescent unbelief—overcome in an experience of new birth—now so securely fixed in the evangelical mind, never once appears in Scripture in an exemplary role and almost never appears at all. Instead, there is everywhere the assumption that the covenanted grace will overtake covenant children at the headwaters of life so that, in response to a faithful parental and ecclesiastical nurture, they will both claim the promises made to them and respond to the summons issued to them in a way appropriate to each stage of life according to the measure of faith.

Christian baptism (whether for infants or adults) is part of something bigger and must lead to this greater reality: Christian baptism serves as the beginning of a life of faith in God and obedience to Him from the heart. Physical baptism does not save any more than outward circumcision saved: God's divine work is always essential (cf. Deut 10:16 and 30:6). The children of Abraham show their lineage by walking in the faith of their father Abraham (Romans 4:12; Gal 3:9, 29; John 8:39-41, 56). Although physical baptism is not salvation, it is also not a bare ritual that can be isolated from the means God has ordained to covenant children to a lively faith in Him. We must not make the mistake of thinking that baptism is nothing. Holy baptism is the means of God's grace for His people, adults and children alike, to be performed in faithfulness to God.

What else can you tell me about nurture in the Christian household?

I'm going to let Professor Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) answer this question, in an extended quote. Allow me to first point out that a constant theme in his four-volume work, *Reformed Dogmatics*, as well as in his shorter works, like *The Christian Family*, is the truth that "grace perfects nature." That is, the original design God establishes for mankind—worship of God alone, cultivation and dominion of the world, work, marriage, fruitfulness, keeping of the Sabbath, etc.—although vitiated and marred by sin, has not been abrogated altogether because of man's fall into sin.

The Bible is the story of how God re-establishes His creational design for mankind through the Last Adam, the New Man, Jesus Christ. Hence, the original design for the family, though broken by sin, is restored in Jesus Christ (see the "NT household codes" in Eph 5:22-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet 2:18-3:7). The Christian family not only has a responsibility to teach its children about Jesus and the Bible. It has a responsibility to teach its children about *all of life*, now in its proper place under the headship not of the original Adam, but of Jesus Christ, the Last Adam: mathematics, logic, history, the trades, literature, law, mechanics, singing, science, art, work, play, hobbies, relationships — all of it! — is now to serve Christ, to advance the Kingdom of God, and to bless mankind. In the reverent and humble discovery and learning conducted in all areas of life, we learn about who Christ is and about who we are in Him.

In the following excerpt (from *The Christian Family*, pp 106-108), Bavinck captures the wonder and truly awe-some and indispensable nature of the Christian family in nurturing its children toward the Lord and also toward His created world:

The family is and remains the nurturing institution par excellence. Beyond every other institution it has this advantage, namely, that it was not constructed and artificially assembled by man. A man chooses a woman to be his wife, and a woman chooses a man to be her husband, but if things go well, they don't so much choose one another as they are chosen by each other; by means of a secret bond, in a manner ineffable, they are brought to each other. Children are then born from their intimate fellowship, but those children are granted to them, having a different sexuality, a different nature, a different disposition — perhaps different than what the parents

would have wished and, had it been up to them, would have given their children. The family is no fabrication of human hands; it is a gift of God, bestowed according to his good pleasure. Even though the family has existed for centuries, we cannot create a likeness; it was, it is, and it will continue to be a gift, an institution that God alone sustains.

Furthermore, the family does not consist of a number of empty forms that we need to fill, but it is full of life. The husband and wife, coming from differing families, each contributes their own genetic makeup, tradition, nature, character, disposition, and life. And each child born to them is a member of humanity, a person with capacities like those of everyone else, and yet distinguished from all those others, whose relation is close or distant, with a unique existence and character. A wealth of relationships, a multiplicity of characteristics, a treasure trove of gifts, a world of love, a wonderful intermingling of rights and duties—all of these, once again, are brought together not by human determination but by God's sovereign determination. A novelist, a playwright or poet, can portray a number of types, but exhausts the choices available; the characters described in subsequent works are often copies of what has appeared already in his earlier work. But there is no end to the variety present in real people; for what is involved is an almighty, omniscient, creating power. For that, the family is the primary and preeminent revelation.

Therefore the nurture that takes place within the family possesses a very special character. Even as the family itself cannot be imitated, so too one cannot make a copy of family nurture. No school, no boarding school, no day-care center, no government institution can replace or improve upon the family. The children come from the family, grow up in the family, without themselves knowing how. They are formed and raised without themselves being able to account for that. The nurture provided by the family is entirely different than that provided by the school; it is not bound to a schedule of tasks and does not apportion its benefits in terms of minutes and hours. It consists not only in instruction, but also in advice and warning, leading and admonition, encouragement and comfort, solicitude and sharing. Everything in the home contributes to nurture, the hand of the father, the voice of the mother, the older brother, the younger sister, the infant in the bassinet, the sickly sibling, grandmother and grandchildren, uncles and aunts, guests and friends, prosperity and adversity, celebrations and mourning, Sundays and workdays, prayers and thanksgiving at mealtime and the reading of God's Word, morning devotions and evening devotions. Everything is serviceable for nurturing each other day by day, hour by hour, without plan, without appointment, without technique, all of which are set beforehand. Everything possesses power to nurture, apart from being able to analyze and calculate that power. Thousands of incidents, thousands of trivia, thousands of trifles all exert their influence. It is life itself that nurtures, that cultivates the rich, inexhaustible, multifaceted, magnificent life. The family is the school of life, because it is the fountain and hearth of life.

Such nurture encompasses the whole person. [...] A family does not operate with such apportioned attention. Everything is integrated and unified, like the blossom within the bud. The child does indeed learn within the family and receives instruction; the child gradually becomes oriented within his surroundings and gets to know his small world, expressing a multitude of observations, emotions, imaginations, words, and thoughts; in terms of proportion, the child learns more in his early years than in his subsequent years. But all of this happens unnoticed, automatically, gradually, uninterruptedly; it is life that nurtures and it does so through life and for life. The powers of observation, memory, and judgment are exercised, but also the powers of imagination, of the will, of conscience, of character, and of the heart, as are the muscles and the nerves, together with the head, hands, and feet. Vices are resisted—stubbornness, selfishness, and jealousy, virtues are cultivated—purity, order, obedience, cooperation, compassion—as in no other school. A person's becoming human occurs within the home; here the foundation is laid for the forming of the future man and woman, of the future father and mother, of the future member of society, of the future citizen, of the future subject in the kingdom of God.

Besides the Bible, what are some writings you have found helpful on the subject of covenant baptism or paedobaptism?

So often, we can be quick to answer theological and Biblical questions from contemporary authors without first looking to the Confessions of Reformed churches. These were carefully written from Scripture and vetted by the broader Church for centuries. I would suggest a careful reading of our confessional standards plus what the Westminster standards say on baptism and sacraments in general.

Belgic Confession (1561), Articles 33-34

Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Questions 65-74

Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), Articles 27-28

Westminster Larger Catechism (1647), Questions 161-167

Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647), Questions 91-95

In terms of books by individual authors, here are a few. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Section IV.16. This is one of the classic treatments of paedobaptism from a magisterial Reformer. *Ad fontes!*

Gregg Strawbridge edited a volume of essays, *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, by a “Who’s Who” lineup of contemporary Reformed authors. A must own.

Benjamin K. Wikner’s edited tome, *To You and Your Children: Examining the Biblical Doctrine of Covenant Succession*, is an excellent starting point that deals with how we view our covenant children. The entire volume is excellent. A must own.

Robert Rayburn’s excellent article, “The Presbyterian Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture, and Covenant Succession” covers much historical and theological ground. Rayburn convincingly shows how Christian nurture of covenant children in the home and Church is the normative means of passing the Christian faith to the next generation. You can find it online for free.

Rayburn’s article is actually a distillation of Lewis Bevens Schenck’s 1940 publication, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant: An Historical Study of the Significance of Infant Baptism in the Presbyterian Church in America*. You will be refreshed by this historical study of what the Reformers consistently taught and how the Revivalism of the first and second Great Awakenings in America compromised the Reformed doctrine of covenant nurture.

One of our URC pastors, Danny Hyde, wrote an accessible treatment of paedobaptism, *Jesus Loves the Little Children: Why We Baptize Children*. This is a good introduction to the doctrine that focuses on the Biblical theology and history of covenant baptism.

Another recent entry is J.V. Fesko’s exhaustive treatment, *Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism*. Fesko has a careful eye for the theological and literary connections of Scripture, as well as the judgment and penal aspect of baptisms and other covenant signs and seals throughout Scripture.

John Murray’s mid-20th century classic, *Christian Baptism*, like all of his works, is a tight and short read that packs a big punch. The same can be said of B.B. Warfield’s 1899 essay, “The Polemics of Infant Baptism” (available online for free). Murray and Warfield are products of classic “Princeton theology” and every sentence counts in their writing.

[You can hear the sermon that was the occasion of this FAQ here.](#)
[From Genesis 1:28 and 17:1-14 and Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 2:39:](#)
[“God’s Salvation Through the Redeemed Household”](#)

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The claim that children of Christian parents do not belong to God is foreign to Scripture (Ps 22:9-10; 71:6; Is 46:3-4; Luke 1:15).

1. **Objection**— we don't find children baptized in the Bible.
 1. Actually, we do. Gen 17 and 1 Cor 10 and Col 2:11-12. Baptism and circumcision are the same in essence

1. How does the Bible talk about baptism? Baptism is the outward washing of water done by hands that is intimately tied to (although it is not the same as) the inward washing of the soul done by God alone (1 Pet 3:21; Col 2:11-12).

2. Does baptism save? The outward washing of water does not save. But no one can be saved unless his soul has been washed by Christ's blood and the Spirit which is a work God alone can do (Titus 3:5; Rom 6:3-11). The outward act is a sign that points to the reality of God's work in man (Col 2:11-13).

3. So, why do we baptize? Christ Himself instituted the practice of baptism (Matt 28:19).

4. Does anything magical happen during baptism? No. In Christian baptism, neither the minister nor the water has any magical value. The sacraments do not work *ex opera operato*. That is, the efficacy of baptism is not automatically given in the simple act of baptism. This is what Roman Catholicism believes. The Biblical teaching is that the promises of God are always received by faith.

2. Tom **Trouwborst**, p 59. Do we have covenant succession or covenant chaos? Has God revealed Himself and His will for Christian parents or not? Or, do we have to grope in the darkness for what to do as parents and how to think of our children? p61. The way we view covenant children will affect how we raise them. How we view/raise them will affect how they view themselves.

Jer 31:1: *At that time, declares the Lord, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people.*

Jer 31:17: *There is hope for your future, declares the Lord, and your children shall come back to their own country.*

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