

Argument 6

John's Baptism

Infant baptisers insist that when John the Baptist baptised he did so on the same principle as that which governed the Jews when they circumcised infants. Hanko, for instance, said that 'baptism was about to take the place of circumcision', but the change-over was smooth, since this was ensured by the continuity between the two Testaments. We have looked at these claims in previous pages, and found them mistaken; baptism did not replace circumcision, the church did not exist in the Old Testament, and while there is some continuity between the Testaments, the real discontinuity between them must not be glossed over. Nevertheless, based on the faulty foundation he had laid, Hanko proceeded to assert that the principle under which John baptised was 'believers and their seed'. This claim must be measured against Scripture. We know that in:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God... John came baptising in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And all the land of Judea, and those of Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptised by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins... In those days John the Baptist came preaching... saying: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'... Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptised by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them: 'Brood of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance...'... I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance, but he who is coming after me... he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mark 1:1-5; Matt. 3:1-12).¹

John baptised. Whom? He baptised only those who were repentant; he insisted on it. Clearly this excluded infants, not because they were infants, but because they could not repent. They were automatically excluded by John's demands for evidence of repentance before he

¹ Hanko: *We* p107.

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baptised. But according to the claims of infant baptisers, John was at fault. He should have baptised a man who was repentant, *and his children with him*, 'believers and their seed', as Hanko put it. Indeed, Hanko said that is the principle under which John *did* baptise. Yet John clearly did not. Hanko's claim, therefore, collapses.

John did not baptise those who repented *and their children*. Why not? Whatever the reason, it is clear that John was not operating under the principle of a man and his child. There is only one explanation. John was baptising in a new era; as Mark stated, it was 'the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ'. Just so. A new era! A new age! A new law or canon! The Old Testament principle had gone, the New had come (Luke 16:16). In the old covenant, it was a man *and his children*. Not so in the new covenant. John's baptism, far from establishing infant baptism, goes a long way to destroying it.

Hanko admitted that it was 'not likely' that John did baptise children, even though, he alleged, it was the 'background... principle... [and] context' of his ministry. Hanko's suggestion to explain this – which to be fair, he did not press – was that 'in the rugged desert country... it was not likely that people would take their children with them'. But as he rightly said: 'We may not make conclusions on the basis of silence'.² Reader, it is a pity that infant baptisers do not remember and act upon that principle when they do argue from silence, as we shall discover in coming pages. What is more, there is no need to reason from silence. We do not have to speak about what is 'likely'. We are told! John baptised those who repented. And only those. That is what it says in the Bible. John did not baptise those who repented, *and their children with them*; this is the point.

May I spend a moment on 'silence'? Although I will have more to say on it, the point here is this: Hanko claimed that John baptised children, working on the basis of the parent and his child, but, as he acknowledged, there is no proof or evidence of this in the scriptural record.³ Indeed, Scripture, as he recognised, is silent on the matter. Just so. But what does this 'silence' 'prove'? It certainly does *not* prove that John worked on the principle in question. Not at all! The

² Hanko: *We* pp105-106.

³ Where is the evidence that the hundreds? thousands? about to be baptised, first went home, fetched their (spouse and) children (and grandchildren and great-grandchildren), and then were all baptised together? Is it at all likely?

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silence at best 'proves' neutral – at best! In fact, of course, the silence here means there is no scriptural justification for the claim, and, therefore, that it should never have been made in the first place.⁴

Consider the disciples of Jesus, who were also baptising just after John; indeed, at the same time for a while (John 3:22-26; 4:1-2). Did the disciples of Jesus baptise those who repented, *and their children with them*? Of course not. There is no doubt that the disciples of Jesus baptised in the same way as John did. The alternative is unthinkable; imagine the chaos which would have ensued. Consequently, when the apostles came to baptise in Acts 2:38 – on the basis of repentance – why would they have altered their practice? According to infant baptisers, after Pentecost they baptised believers and their children. But why would the apostles restore the Old Testament system of the children along with the father, when before Pentecost they had already moved to the New Testament basis? Why would they suddenly go back? It is foolish to think it. They baptised only repentant believers; not believers *and their children*. In the light of this, the practice of Philip is very significant. Acts 8:12 reads: 'But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptised'. Notice, both men and women who believed were baptised – not men and women *and their children*. If only infant baptisers would baptise in the way Philip did! If only they would baptise those who repent and believe; and only those.

John baptised only those who showed signs of repentance. In this, he was completely consistent with the rest of the New Testament. It is not a question of infant or adult baptism. Baptism is always and only the baptism of those who repent (and believe).

⁴ John Davenant gave good advice: When 'no word [on an important topic] occurs in the holy Scriptures', 'it is rash to assert it' (Davenant p115). There is a world of difference in claiming scriptural warrant for a practice because Scripture does not forbid it, and denying scriptural warrant for a practice because Scripture does not sanction it.