

Heidelberg Catechism Q&A74 –Baptism of Covenant Children

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ: Today you will hear from God's Words his teaching about infant baptism as outlined in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 74.

Our headings are: Covenant Children are promised forgiveness of their sins and so should be baptized, and Covenant children are qualitatively different本质上的区别 from non-covenant children and so should be separated by baptism.

Our goals are: That you will praise God for his love for you and your covenant children, and that you will fulfill your responsibility to God by teaching and disciplining your covenant children so that they are raised to serve God.

74 Q. SHOULD INFANTS, TOO, BE BAPTIZED?

A. Yes. Infants as well as adults are in God's covenant and are his people. They, no less than adults, are promised the forgiveness of sin through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith. Therefore, by baptism, the mark of the covenant, infants should be received into the Christian church and should be distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision割礼, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.

Covenant Children are promised forgiveness of sins and so should be baptized

1. Covenant children are people of God through the forgiveness of sins – forgiveness that only comes through Jesus Christ.

So when the Jewish boys were circumcised they were raised with an awareness of their sins, and their forgiveness through their Covenant Keeper. This was the Old Testament promise. God entered into covenant with his people.

Genesis 17:7...I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, **to be God to you** and your descendants after you.

When the Covenant Keeper **Jesus came he** surely showed that covenant children were holy when he put his hands on them and blessed them. He rebuked斥责 those who were trying to chase the children away. Also: Mk 10:14, Lk 18:16. He would not tolerate ill-treatment of the ones he had forgiven...especially no ill-treatment from his own disciples.

Matthew 19:14 But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." 15 And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.

The Apostle **Peter** quoted from the Old Testament to make the same point: Covenant children are forgiven.

Acts 2:38 ... "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 **"For the promise is to you and to your children**, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

And this promise continues even to the Gentiles, as the Apostle **Paul** said to the Philippian jailer.

Acts 16:31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Apostle Paul did not say that the members of your household will be saved when they are old enough to believe for themselves. No. He said that were saved when the jailer believed. So parents of covenant children dying in infancy婴孩 need not worry about their children's salvation – as our confession teaches. Covenant children are not "vipers in diapers." Treat them as forgiven children.

2. Some people don't like the idea that children are forgiven of their sins because, they argue, young children cannot speak so they must not be baptized. But forgiveness of sins is God's gift. Forgiveness is not based on what you do. Suppose you did not confess all your sins before you died, does that mean that you will be lost? Certainly not. Like you, Christian children get their forgiveness through Christ's work, not through their own work. You should confess all your sins as often as you sin, but rest in Christ's work for your forgiveness, not in your confession of your sins.

3. Without looking at details now, the Old Testament Christians were no different than New Testament Christians. Like New Testament Christians, Old Testament Christians and their children had the same Gospel, they had the same faith, they trusted in the same Savior, and they were in the same church. The promise of New and Old Testament was the same: Believers and their covenant children are forgiven all their sins. With all these things the same, it is logical to expect a covenantal 盟约的记号 sign to continue for believers and their children.

4. On the other hand, avoiding the covenant sign was a serious sin in the Old Testament. Remember Moses...God was going to kill him for not putting the covenant sign on his son. It is a sign of great ignorance, but a sign of great arrogance傲慢 to refuse to put the sign of the covenant on a covenant child. If God includes children into the covenant, you must not dare to exclude them.

5. But while you had to have a sign, the sign could be changed. The old blood sign was no longer a proper sign of the covenant after Christ shed his blood on the cross. So God changed the sign (not the thing signified from circumcision to baptism. **Neither Jesus nor the disciples revoked a sign of the covenant on children.** You are told not to make sacrifices anymore, you are told that you can eat all kinds of meat now, and many such things, but you are never told to stop putting the mark of the covenant on your children.

6. The Apostles reiterated重申 the new sign of the covenant on the whole family, not just adults.

Look at Luke's account of Lydia's family...and the Philippian jailer.

Acts 16: 14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.

15 And when she and **her household were baptized**, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay..."

Acts 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes洗伤 And **immediately he and all his family were baptized.**

Look at Apostle Peter's Words:

Acts 2:38-39 -...Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission得赦 of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 **For the promise is to you and to your children**, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Consider Apostle Paul's words:

1Corinthians 1:16 Yes, I also baptized the **household of Stephanas**. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other.

Consider also the households **Crispus' family** in Acts 18:8. The family were people of God.

Never was it recorded that one was baptized when he "came of age."

7. Some argue that some covenant children turn out to be wicked, so how can we possibly call covenant children people of God? Answer: When a minister says: People of God...do he mean refer to every single person in the church? Of course not. The church is never the "elected" ones only. The church is God's covenant people. There are hypocrites假冒为善的人 in the church. Similarly, you can rightly say in general that covenant children are God's children, though some may turn out to be wicked. The Apostle Paul assumes children are good and able to do good.

Ephesians 6:2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise:

3 **that it may be well with you** and you may live long on the earth."

And remember, for a work to be good, it must be done from faith in Christ, according to the law of Christ, and for the glory of Christ. Paul pointed out that children can please God. And another verse!

Colossians 3:20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.

Covenant Children are qualitatively Different from non-covenant children and so should be separated by baptism

1. God revealed to Abraham the real difference between covenant children and non-covenant children and God

demanded a sign on the covenant to show that distinction.

Genesis. 17:9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised受割礼; ... 13 "He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 "And the uncircumcised male child, **who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin**, that person **shall be cut off from his people**; he has broken My covenant."

God put these children in a special place-a privileged特权 place where they would be taught of their sins, taught of the Savior by Word and sacrament, and taught to put their trust in him. These children are in a place where they can be disciplined also. Those who were not circumcised were executed...or excommunicated...

2. God gave special protection to believers and their covenant children and killed non-covenant children. Let me illustrate.

On the night of the **Passover in Egypt, if a father put he Passover Lamb's blood on the door, the children were saved**. God did not let his covenant children die in Pharaoh's Egypt. Even wicked Ham was saved from the flood on account of being in the covenant with his father Noah. Being in the covenant (and being circumcised) put them in a special place. Similarly, believers and their children are in a special place, though in a richer fuller sense. You have the full knowledge what your Covenant Keeper did for you.

Colossians 2:1 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by

putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your trespasses 过犯 and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses...

Here you see the need for a non-blood sign as the covenant sign. But the result is the same: You and your children are forgiven and distinct from the world by being in the covenant and baptism. John MacArthur: God gave circumcision to protect the women from germs... Foolishness! The covenant and the sign put children in a spiritually clean place. The sign of the covenant was much richer than that!

Romans 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal 印记 of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe

3. God made the family the center of the covenant. Since children are in the family, they are included in the covenant and distinct from the world. Covenant blessings in the family flow to the other members.

1Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, **but now they are holy.**

If children are not to be baptized, it would mean that children in a worse place under the new covenant... even while you see God promises expanded to allow Gentile in. But children are not treated in a worse way –but in a better way. In Zechariah 10, you see that **little children living in the church** with the elderly.

4. God directly addressed children as members of the covenant, showing they are distinct from non-covenant children.

Exodus 20: 12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

This was the covenant law.

5. God called children "holy seed." How can a child please the Lord if the child is an unbeliever... or a reprobate 被丢弃的?

This is because the children are not reprobated but a part of the covenant.

6. God taught covenant children. He cast no pearls to swine 猪 Peter taught that is Acts 2 above. Consider Isaiah's words:

Isaiah 54:13 All your children shall be taught by the LORD, And great shall be the peace of your children.

7. You are called to teach, pray with, and discipline your children. If you children are not believers then they have no access to God and you therefore must not allow them to pray. But on the contrary, you know that God puts his mark on them and calls them holy. So pray with them. Let them read his Word. Discipline them. **Sing with your children:** "Jesus loves the little children" and "Jesus loves me this I know." And claim the Lord's promise. (Those who sing the same words as so called "baby dedication" are doing exactly the same thing, or what some call a dry baptism.) Isn't this clear that there's something different between covenant children and those outside the church?

Conclusion:

Covenant children are Christ's children and ought to 理当 be baptized. God treated covenant children as different and marked them by a covenant sign as they joined the church. Throughout the Scriptures from Abraham to Lord Jesus, and to disciples after him, they all treated believers' children as being distinct from children of non-believers. God marked those children by the sign of the covenant.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: First, what a precious promise baptism is to you and your children. But this precious mark came at a great price. The Lord Jesus had to have his blood flow to the ground for you. This is the message that must go to your heart and the hearts of your children. Second, what a comfort it is to know that you were marked by the Lord. He singled you out for salvation. He didn't have to. Third, let this motivate you to serve the Lord in fullness. You are the chosen of God, but you are not the frozen chosen. You have to spread the warmth of Christ's love so others may see Christ in you and be drawn to him.

Finally, neither you nor your children can have eternal life without the sacrifice of Jesus for sins. May this day not pass before you call on him and ask him to make you his child so that you and your children might receive his blessings.