

Dunk the Baby

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[0 : 00] Good to be here this morning. Again, my home parish is St. Peter's Fireside and greetings from our parish to yours. I should also say before I leave, just a couple of announcements.

So I will have to zip out probably at around 9.50 or 9.55. I've got to get over to do a sermon. So I'm unfortunately not going to be able to stay and linger. But I hope that what I say will spur some conversation amongst you all that can start today and continue.

Continue on into, well, the summer as you reflect on everything you've learned this past season at Learner's Exchange and also into the fall. Secondly, this will be the last time I'm with you all at Learner's Exchange because my wife and I have recently announced that we're going to be leaving St. Peter's Fireside in Vancouver.

Nothing bad, don't worry. I've been given a spot to do a Ph.D. in theology at Cambridge University in the U.K. So we are going to be moving to England, what's left of it at least.

We'll see if Great Britain is still intact by the time we get over there. My wife's field is international relief and development and London is a fantastic city if you work in that field. So it will be very good professionally for her.

[1 : 15] So this is also a farewell, my farewell session to Learner's Exchange. It's been wonderful to be with you all. I'm so thankful that there's a group of Christian men and women who are interested in probing theological topics, biblical topics at a deeper level than what you can get in a 25 to 30 minute sermon.

So keep up the commitment. May J.I. Packer's legacy in this particular community continue onwards. And we've tried to replicate that in our own way at St. Peter's Fireside through our Equip and Build Ministry.

This was the inspiration for that. So without further ado, let's talk about infant baptism. So that's the topic today.

And depending on your church background, if you have one at all, you may be more or less familiar with the practice of infant or paedo-baptism. This is an Anglican church, so I'm sure that most in here are, but I don't take that for granted.

There may be some in the room who are put off by the notion of infant baptism. And that's what I want to discuss this morning. I want to try to bring some light and some understanding in conversation with Scripture and tradition on the practice of infant or paedo-baptism.

[2 : 22] Today we're going to have what I call the why conversation. Most of us know the what. What do we do? We baptize infants. But why do we do it? And I hope to demonstrate that infant baptism is not a random activity.

It's not something that lacks a robust theological underpinning or basis. To the contrary, there are actually many good reasons for it, biblical reasons. As we plunge into this exploration, seeking light on a topic which has been known to generate a lot of heat, one thing I'd ask is that you make a determination inside yourself right now to journey in earnest in this exploration.

To come with an open mind and a receptive heart if right now in this room you're someone who's very opposed to infant baptism or has misgivings. So keep an open mind and receptive heart as we explore the biblical and theological rationale for baptizing children.

Be willing to test your convictions. And allow certain new convictions to establish, perhaps. Now given this particular context, let's make a start with the Anglican baseline doctrine of baptism.

That's situated in the 39 articles. You can find that, of course, in the back of the Book of Common Prayer. Let me read you Article 27. Baptism is not only a sign of profession and a mark of difference, whereby Christian people are discerned from others that are not Christian, but it's also a sign of regeneration or new birth, whereby, as an instrument, those who receive baptism rightly are grafted into the church.

[3 : 53] Moreover, the promises of forgiveness of sin and of our adoption to be children of God by the Holy Spirit are visibly signed and sealed. Faith is confirmed. Grace is...

Maybe. Nope, that won't work either. Thank you so much for trying. Yeah. Grace is increased by virtue of prayer to God. The baptism of young children is, in any manner, to be retained in the church as most agreeable with the institution of Christ.

That's Article 27. Let me offer a bit of commentary on that article. What we read there in Article 27 is not an innovation of Anglicanism. In fact, it reflects deep continuity with long-standing 1,500 years, at that point, of Christian practice.

And it reflects the spiritual and sacramental norm of the majority of Christian churches in the world today. At play in that outlook, that commitment to baptize infants, is the ancient Christian notion that sacraments are called holy, not because they're holy in themselves, so much as because they make people holy by virtue of their being instruments of Christ's grace.

Along these lines, sacraments have sometimes been dubbed, quote, visible symbols of an invisible reality or power. They've been characterized as signs and vehicles of God's grace.

[5 : 12] Against that theological backdrop, the baptism of children became commonplace in early, classical, and medieval Christianity. In that practice, the practice of paedo-baptism was carried forth by the vast majority of Protestant churches that emerged from the 16th century Reformation in Europe.

Anglicanism, as many will here know, is a product of that Reformation. And to that end, Anglican Christians have not regarded the validity of baptism as being contingent on whether one is an adult and able to make a conscious decision for Christ.

A statement from St. Augustine of Hippo amply captures this outlook. Let me read what he says. The custom of the church in baptizing infants is certainly not to be scorned, nor is it to be regarded in any way as superfluous, nor is it to be believed that its tradition is anything except apostolic.

That's from his commentary on Genesis. Notwithstanding the early and the classical and the medieval and Reformation pedigree of infant baptism, many of us, many contemporary Christians, carry misgivings towards this practice.

So I want to give a hearing to some of the grievances that have been lodged against paedo-baptism, some of the factors at play therein. Why are we uneasy about infant baptism? Why have Christians, certain types of Christians, certain houses of the church, been uncomfortable with that?

[6 : 35] At least three things to mention here. Let's do a brief survey. First, there are what you might call denominational reasons. The Anabaptist stream of Christianity, have you heard that phrase, the Anabaptist stream?

I know the Regent people have, hopefully others. The Anabaptist stream of Christianity, represented locally by the Mennonite Brethren Churches, has, since its origin in the 16th century, rejected the baptism of babies.

In fact, it's a pillar of Anabaptist theology. Why? They have thoughtful reasons. They have reasons that are biblically attentive. In a nutshell, Anabaptists taught that conversion, teach that conversion always occurs in a specific order.

First, there's preaching or teaching. Second, there's the response of faith. And then third, there's baptism in response to the response of faith. It only occurs after steps one and two.

As you can see, steps one and two cannot apply to infants. With regard to the biblical scriptural foundation for that outlook, it's important to highlight several features of Anabaptist biblical interpretation.

[7 : 43] So, in handling New Testament texts that report families being baptized, i.e. Acts 16, the Philippian jailer, the Anabaptist interpretation argues that these acts, these household baptisms, did not include children.

I should note that that interpretation has been very plausibly refuted by a number of solid studies. Number two, Anabaptists also ground their refusal to baptize children in the testimony of 1 Peter 3.

Here, baptism is linked with the aperotema, namely the reception of a good conscience, that's what that word means, before God on account of Jesus' death and resurrection.

So, based on what St. Peter says there, having a good conscience for baptism, Anabaptists concluded that baptism's saving character is connected with one's conscious attitude. Again, you can see that that precludes children.

And then in reading Colossians 2, 11-13, which links circumcision with baptism, Anabaptists do not see baptism as the successor to circumcision in the Judaic tradition.

[8 : 51] It was not a mark, baptism was not a mark of inclusion placed on infants into the covenant people, right? In contrast, they read that passage as saying that circumcision does not function as a parallel with baptism's outer form.

Instead, circumcision is a figure of baptism's deeper significance, namely an inner spiritual reality that transpires through faith. So they put a sort of a wedge between circumcision and baptism.

So if we were to summarize the Anabaptist attitude towards baptism, these seminal features, at least, must be mentioned. Number one, Christian baptism necessarily involves a conscious appropriation of faith.

It must be connected to a conscious appropriation of faith. This conclusion is tied to three notable New Testament epistle texts that expound baptism as coming to participate in Christ's resurrection.

And such participation necessarily suggests that baptism must therefore be conscious and chosen. For Anabaptists, participation in Jesus' death and resurrection are the center of personal salvation.

[10 : 01] Therefore, one must be baptized as an adult who can choose and commit to that life. That, of course, disqualifies infants. Number two, Anabaptists also concluded that inward faith saves only if it is expressed outwardly through a public profession.

That outlook, of course, diverges sharply from the antecedent Catholic view of baptism, where the act of sprinkling water was seen as salvific in and of itself, ex opera operandi.

And number three, with regards to the church, Anabaptists believe that baptism not only entails a public identification with the church, but also voluntary submission to the power of the keys, Matthew 16.

The power of the keys refers to one's submission to church's authority to admonish and ban and pardon. It's about coming under church discipline, which Anabaptists take very seriously.

As is obvious, infants cannot do that. So that's one reason for misgivings towards infant baptism.

[11 : 06] A second, many of us don't come from an Anabaptist dream of Christianity. Perhaps some do, but many probably don't. But we might find ourselves in intuitive agreement with their position on infant baptism.

Because what was at one time a minority view, the Anabaptists was a minority view, their view of baptism, has become somewhat of a majority view, especially among evangelical Christians.

Some of that agreement, what's that intuitive agreement about? Well, first of all, there can be confusion and misgiving about sacraments in general. The word sacrament doesn't even appear in the New Testament.

And based on its absence, some Christians have questioned the validity of the whole notion of sacrament and have therein rejected infant baptism. If you extend that logic more broadly, you're going to eventually butt heads with the doctrine of the Trinity, too, however.

So you should be cautious there. Additionally, we could say that the conspicuous pattern of baptism in the book of Acts is a source of misgivings. So sometimes Christians have approached the question, should the babies of believers be baptized, with the expectation that the Bible will answer this question in an explicit statement of one or more verses.

[12 : 17] So we go to the book of Acts, for example, Acts chapter 2, verse 38, where we read, Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you'll receive the gift of the Spirit.

Or Acts chapter 16, verse 31, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. And immediately they were then baptized. In verses like that, the order of things seems very clear.

Repentance, belief, baptism. What could be plainer and simpler? Within that type of reasoning, many contemporary North American Christians have begun to eschew the practice of infant baptism.

Some have gone so far as not only to refuse to administer it, but also to refuse to even recognize it. I have a friend for whom that happened. Actually, he's an Anglican priest now, but went to work for a Midnight Brethren church, right?

And that he had been baptized as an infant was deemed invalid, so he couldn't work for that church because he refused to get rebaptized. Now, this observation dovetails with a third factor that bears a fine contemporary resistance to infant baptism.

[13 : 24] Third, and this is probably most relevant for us. While often stealthy and unnamed, I think there are cultural reasons at play in some of our misgivings towards infant baptism.

And these are very important to name. Given that they do not, these cultural factors do not have a solid biblical basis, they cannot serve as a valid foundation for opposition to infant baptism.

So, in his recent book, Impossible People by Oz Guinness, Oz makes an effort to describe the temper of our times. This turn of phrase refers to the sensibilities and norms of our moment in history, and in particular of our socio-cultural context.

In describing this, Guinness notes that modernity, we're all products of it, has decisively shifted us from a stance of being under authority to a stance of preference.

We've moved from being under authority to a people of preference. And in that situation, God, as with pretty much everything else, is reduced to a consumer choice. So, God is something that people may choose, and if they do opt for God, then they're the ones who picked Him.

[14 : 34] In short, we want to be a choosing people rather than a chosen people. We want to be a choosing people rather than a chosen people. Guinness suggests that a lot of serious-minded North American Christians are, quote, especially vulnerable to this distortion of choice because of the exaggerated place that they give to choice in the call to conversion.

This can be an Achilles heel, spiritually speaking. The Jews of the Old Testament, the inaugural people of God, they knew they were a chosen people. Many of us seem to have lost sight of this.

It's no longer primary. We're a choosing people. The life of faith is merely our decision. That's where the primacy or the emphasis is placed. Now, this, of course, is not to say that human agency and our will has no place in the life of faith.

You better believe it does. Committing to Christ is the most important choice a person can make, but it's always a choice that comes because of God's prior choice. My analogy here is for the Easter egg hunt. The kids go find the eggs, but that's because somebody's already put them out there to find.

Now, against the backdrop of modern consumerism and choice, I don't think it's all that surprising that the lambasting of infant baptism has become a commonplace phenomenon.

[15 : 51] We should, however, notice how so very different this is from early Christian views. Representing the attitude of classical Christianity, here's what one scholar says. Quote, the rite of infant baptism, more than adult and even believer baptism, best pictured the nature of salvation as a work of God's unconditional electing grace, which operates on an essentially helpless and sinful creature.

That's something to think about. Along these lines, an article I came across several months ago now actually hits this nail on the head. Let me read you a few excerpts from this article.

Quote, for most evangelicals, what stands in the way of baptizing infants isn't a lack of biblical evidence, but an interpretive lens they wear when reading Scripture. That lens, which is shaped by revivals and rugged individualism and a sacramental theology untethered from the church's means of grace, makes conversion the chief article of faith.

In that posture, the core assumption is that you must have a conversion experience to be saved. You have to be ripped from a past life into a new one with tears and laments and arresting sincerity.

Now, to be sure, that approach to baptism is fitting in a missional setting. And Vancouver arguably is that type of setting, where we're engaging men and women who've long lived as unbelievers and pagans, oblivious to the reality and the love of God.

[17 : 10] Yet that outlook is an awkward fit when it comes to multi-generational faith. Let me quote again. This is where I think the chief difficulty with infant baptism lies, at least for North American evangelical Christians.

I don't believe that Baptist evangelicals really view their children as unregenerate pagans before their credible profession of faith. If they did, they wouldn't teach them to say the Lord's Prayer or sing, Jesus loves me.

I think what's really going on is a kind of alternative sacramentalism, where a dramatic conversion experience, rather than baptism, is the rite of Christian initiation. Something to think about.

Infant baptism, as classically conceived by the church, runs against that entire system. Romans 11, I think, illustrates this well. Paul talks about the branches. You know, the church of the people of God is a tree, as a branch.

He talks about branches that God grafts into his family. And those branches aren't sterile, right? They eventually do. They graft in, they bud, they blossom, producing new branches that have never drunk another tree sap.

[18 : 14] More importantly, this matches with the lived experience of believers' children. Rather than continually imposing a system on them, we should listen to that rather than imposing a system on them that was designed for first-generation converts.

These are different narratives, equally authentic, though. Anyone who's raised in a Christian home and still believes in Jesus knows that there wasn't necessarily a time when he or she transitioned from unbelief to belief, right?

You were never converted in the dramatic sense. It was simply inculcated. And for as long as you remember, you've trusted Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, whether you were baptized as a baby or not. That's Billy Graham's wife's story.

If you've ever heard her talk about that. Ruth Graham. You might think of it as a pregnant woman, right? One day she wakes up and she knows she's pregnant, but she doesn't know the moment of conception. So holding all this in mind, I want to turn back to Scripture again, for in the end it's the Bible that must be our first compass.

We can't embrace infant baptism solely in reaction to the individualist tendencies of our culture, or even just by appealing to long-standing church tradition. Those factors are great and they matter, but they work best when they complement a solid biblical foundation for infant baptism.

[19 : 26] So that's the task to which I want to turn now in the spirit of not sola scriptura, but prima scriptura, the Protestant principle, right? So we do, the Bible is our compass and foundation, but we don't read it in isolation from tradition, right?

Prima scriptura. So I want to make the case for infant baptism on biblical grounds, and the argument that I'm going to lay out for you draws from several hundred years of theological reflection on infant baptism and that sacrament as it applies to children.

As I trace this perspective, two preliminaries that I want to mention that you need to take note of. First, the reason that we baptize the infant is not the same as the Roman Catholic reason for baptizing the infant.

Same practice, different reason. One of the things that happened in the 16th century Reformation, which involved a return to the teaching of Scripture as the primary basis for Christian doctrine and practice, was a revision of the basis for infant baptism.

That's the legacy that has come to us and which I will be presenting here and now. And through that legacy, again, as I just said, we maintain the practice of paedobaptism, but we do it for different reasons. Second, the biblical case for infant baptism is just that.

[20 : 36] It is a biblical case, a canonical case. It is not simply grounded in the baptismal reports of the book of Acts. That would be a one book of the Bible in isolation from everything else case for infant baptism, and that is not what I am offering today.

That's not what we're after. When you do theology, you do it in conversation not just with one verse or one text from the Bible, but rather you incorporate the wider teaching. There's an aphorism that says a text without a context is a pretext for a proof text.

You ever heard that? A text without a context is a pretext for a proof text. That could be applied for any contemporary evangelical view of infant baptism if it takes it to you only from the book of Acts.

And there are certain types of danger inherent in that approach. We don't want to twist the Scriptures to make their reality accommodate our desires or our sensibilities. It needs to be the other way around. So, now on the surface, infant baptism seems problematic because baptism, especially according to the book of Acts, is supposed to accompany profession of faith in Jesus the Messiah.

Infants are incapable, therefore they shouldn't be a proper subject of baptism. Since they can't exercise faith, they are not members of the church. They have no standing in the church. If you just look at the book of Acts and some of those particular baptismal vignettes, for that reason they shouldn't be baptized.

[21 : 59] That's fairly straightforward. Therefore, in order to justify the baptism of infants, we've got to authenticate an idea of the church such that it includes the children of believing parents.

That's what you've got to do. You've got to authenticate an idea of the church such that it includes the children of believing parents. In short, infant baptism only makes sense if you have a proper understanding of what the church is.

This takes a little bit of work. A lot of people never get to it, which is why they just don't understand infant baptism. So, I want to do this. I want to do it through a set of propositions. I think I've got seven or eight of them.

We'll walk step by step. Number one, the visible church is a divine institution. Does anyone disagree with that? The visible church is a divine institution.

Any dissidents? Okay, good. We're all on the same page. Scripture teaches us that it is God's will that the church should exist on earth. And to this end, God has set up duties for His people on earth such that we should associate with one another as a visible body.

[23 : 02] That's what we're doing right now. That's what you do at St. John's, what we do at St. Peter's, what Christians do in all over the city. In like manner, God has established in Scripture certain conditions for membership in the church and certain guidelines for its leadership.

Would everybody agree with that? Let's make sure we're all on the same page, each step. Number two, the visible church does not consist exclusively of the regenerate.

Does not exist exclusively of the regenerate. Anybody disagree with that? All of them. Okay. I absolutely disagree with that.

You do, okay. Well, Paul, we're doing okay on time, so tell us why you disagree with that. If the church is the body of Christ, it is consistent of the members of Christ.

In order for it to be the members of Christ, they have to be the regenerate. There are those who can associate with the church, but they are not the church.

[24 : 08] So now you're, but you're then making the subtle distinction there that there's an invisible church within the visible church. I am saying that the church is the invisible church.

Fully synonymous. Hmm? Fully synonymous. Fully synonymous. Okay. I would disagree on biblical grounds and experiential grounds. I would disagree with you on biblical grounds.

Okay. Okay. We can debate that later. That's an important... Yeah. When you talk, the person comes in the hall. Yeah.

That's right. Yeah. I had one little thing that popped in my mind. I had a little funny, of an English preacher, he must be penitent, regenerate at all places, at all times.

Very good, but that, I don't think anybody could ever do that well. So, I mean, we try, but, you know. So, let me give you an example. I mean, I can think of, for example, a church I grew up in, right, where people who were members of that church that weren't really disciples of Christ, but they were active members of that church.

[25 : 09] And I would even say that that might be even true at a place like St. John's. And I think of my friend who's a Lutheran pastor in Sweden who baptized, who was asked to baptize, I should say.

He didn't, but many of his colleagues in the ministry, in the priesthood do. As to baptize. The infant of a couple, in the Lutheran right of, Lutheran Christian right of baptism, the parents were both explicitly expressed atheists.

But they are members of the visible church. I am the church that we see. Members of the visible church. That's right. I will definitely agree that they are members of the visible church. Yeah. They are not members of the invisible church. Bingo. So we're all on the same page now.

But, they are members of the visible church in two different ways. Yeah. And that's my issue. Yeah. You're using it in two different ways. Yeah. So I am using the Augustinian distinction, visible and invisible church.

That's right. That's an Augustinian extension, and he bases that on Jesus' parable, which I'll get to in just a moment. So. Good question, though. Good question. Yeah. So the visible church does not consist exclusively of the regenerate.

[26 : 09] By regenerate, it's an older term. It means people who are filled with the Spirit and active disciples of Christ. Right. People. Of course, the church is filled with regenerate people, but not only with the visible church as an institution.

One more question. Regenerate people means eschatologically, certainly in heaven, and at the end of all time. Well, you could come at it from that angle. Yes. Yeah. I was coming at it more from present discipleship, but yes.

That's right. So Scripture tells us that it is not the purpose of God that the visible church, the church as it has been comprised in human history, that it should consist exclusively of true believers.

That acknowledgement, that statement finds a biblical foundation and was given theological articulation by St. Augustine, who spoke of the visible and the invisible church, the latter being within the former.

But why doesn't the church consist only of true believers? For several reasons. The attainment of such a result in any society administered and governed by humans is an impossibility.

[27 : 11] It would require that leaders of the church have the capacity to read hearts and make infallible judgments of characters. Can anyone in the room do that? I'm a priest. I certainly can't do it. Number two, the conditions for which God has set up entry into His church are conditions which may be satisfied by people who are not truly regenerate.

This is sad, but it's true. You can have a competent knowledge and a credible profession of faith with some form of enacted obedience, but not yet be truly regenerate. I'm from the American South.

You better believe. I know that's true. Right? Go to church every Sunday, right? But we don't serve your kind in our restaurant. Oh. Okay? Number three, our Lord forbids us to attempt to make the church a society of true believers.

Jesus Himself compares His external kingdom or visible church to a field in which wheat and tares grow sideways. If you've read St. Augustine, you'll know he uses this passage a lot. With wheat and tares grow together.

In this teaching, Jesus charges the disciples not to attempt to separate and purify because they could not in all cases properly distinguish. Matthew chapter 13. Number four, Jesus to whom all hearts were opened admitted Judas into the number of His most favorite disciples.

[28 : 27] Number five, all attempts to make the church into a pure society have failed. Right? And they usually end up in sort of a cultish thing, a cultish type of existence. Right?

No such church has ever existed on the face of the earth as it presently exists. That's an eschatological reality. Right? Hence, the old adage, if you find the perfect church, don't join it because you will ruin it. That's proposition number two.

Now we move to proposition number three. In the commonwealth of Israel, in the Old Testament, the commonwealth of Israel was a form of God's one church. Now most of us should be in agreement here unless you're a dispensationalist.

Then you may have an issue. And if you don't know what that word is, you're probably not one. So you're safe. Okay? But just to put my cards on the table, I am not a dispensationalist. And the Anglican tradition is not dispensationalist.

We are reformed. In this area, at least. Israel as a form of God's one true church. That's what Israel is called in Scripture. Acts chapter 7. Form of God's one true church.

[29 : 29] Additionally, if we consider Israel's particular mode of existence, we can see that this was a nation entrusted with the oracles of God. Right? Given gifts from God, the covenant, the law, the promises, the adoption, all these things Paul talks about, right?

And the responsibility of service before God. All of this applies to the church in the New Testament. In fact, nothing more qualitatively can be said about it, except for perhaps Pentecost.

Right? We share those very gifts and responsibilities. Right? Why? Because the church is, Israel is the church in its original form. So we see continuity here.

I should also note that no person could become a member of Israel apart from a profession of trusting God. You had to profess that. Right? A commitment to obey God's commands and an acceptance of a sign of inclusion in God's people.

That was circumcision. Right? That's how you became a member. And there were Gentiles. Right? Prostitutes who came in. That was going on even at the time of Jesus and before. To quote one theologian, Charles Hodge, there is no legitimate biblical definition of the church which does not include the people of God in the Old Testament, the Hebrew people.

[30 : 37] They are included in our definition of the church. That's proposition three. Proposition number four. The church as it exists post-Christ, which means post-resurrection and ascension and Pentecost, as we exist now for the last two millennia, is identical with the church as it existed in the Old Testament.

Right? Now this statement might raise some eyebrows. Right? Because we can all think of things that are quite different. So let's unpack this. When we say identical, what we mean is that we're all part of the same olive tree. To use Paul's analogy in Romans 11, 16 and 17.

Christians are not a separate tree, but rather men and women grafted into an existing tree. That is Paul's key analogy. It also comes forth in Galatians chapter 3, whereby the promise of the covenant, that's Old Testament language, the promise of the covenant is actually called the gospel.

They are equated. God has one covenant with all of humanity. That covenant has several dispensations or expressions. Right? But all the dispensations are part of the same covenant, which is why they share one mediator, one requirement for entry, faith.

Paul makes that clear in Romans 4. And they share the same blessings. Justification being at the top of the list. One mediator. One way of entry. Faith, not by works.

[31 : 52] Right? Same blessings. Justification. The Jewish people, the descendants of Abraham, were the first to receive and benefit from this covenant. Within Christianity, there's not a new covenant. Rather, there's a new people included in the old covenant.

New people included in the old covenant, not a new covenant. That's how it is. So let's, by the way, this is, and if you're a dispensationalist, you're going to say two covenants.

Right? Not one covenant. Okay? But I think it's very hard to defend that biblically if you read the Bible altogether. Let's revisit the earliest parts of the Old Testament briefly. The covenant by which God established His people, the original church, was a covenant made with a man called?

Abraham. Abraham. Abraham. And his descendants. They're known as the? Israelites. Israelites. The Jewish people, right? But if we go back even further, if you go back further, you'll see that the covenant was actually an expression of God's desire to bring redemption to just a few people.

Is that true? No. No, I misspoke. To all people. Right? That's evident in God's responsive promise to Adam and Eve. The Jews were the first to share in that promise, but the promise was never just for them.

[33 : 02] Therefore, they were simply the first people group to come into the visible church, which is why Luke's genealogy of Jesus does not go back just to Abraham, but to Adam and Eve.

God has never had but one church in the world, and that means that the Yahweh of the Old Testament, the Holy One of Israel, is the Lord of the church. The God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob is our covenant God.

In a verse, it means that the Savior, Jesus the Messiah, is the Savior of all the saints who lived even before His advent and the flesh. One mediator. Again, this is very... This is...

I'm being polemical against dispensationalism right here. Gently polemical, hopefully. Premise five, principle five. The terms of admission into the church before Christ's advent are the same as required for the Christian church.

Okay, so let's think through that. What are the terms in the Old Testament? What are the terms of admission to the people of God? A credible profession of faith. That's the baseline. And Abraham believed, and God counted it to him as righteous.

[34 : 09] That's still the case. One must simply profess love and commitment to Christ, to God, and then submit to baptism. The only notable change is the initiatory sign and seal of the covenant.

By divine authority, baptism has been substituted for circumcision. The meaning of these distinct external acts is the same, biblically speaking. And there's a great study on that that if you want to, you can email me and I'll give you that.

How baptism, the meaning of them is considered, it's the word, it's the same in the New Testament. Principle number six. However, infants were members of the church in the Old Testament economy.

So we've just said that the terms of admission was a credible profession of faith followed by submitting to baptism. But number six, which seems to contradict, says, but infants were members of the covenant in the Old Testament economy.

Right? In the Old Testament, that is decisively proved by the fact that infants, by the command of God, divine appointment, were circumcised on the eighth day after birth. That was the sign of the communal covenant between God and the Hebrew people.

[35 : 14] Circumcision, right? And infants were circumcised. It was a tangible recognition of a child's place within the covenant. But you ask, weren't the church and the state indistinguishable in the Old Testament?

Right? That's kind of a, that's a seeming pitfall here. Weren't church and state kind of one? The answer is yes and no. Membership in the nation of Israel was membership in the nation of Israel wholly equivalent with membership in the church in the Old Testament.

Right? And therefore, wasn't circumcision more about national identity than about spiritual or covenant identity? And if that's true, shouldn't, shouldn't it, shouldn't the New Testament successor to circumcision, namely baptism, shouldn't that be withheld apart from a profession of faith?

Let's think about that. Here's what we need to see. Circumcision was nationalistic from the time of Moses onward. Right? But it was never solely nationalistic because circumcision was commanded by God long before the nation of Israel existed.

It goes back to Abraham. Remember that bizarre story in the book of Genesis? Some of you are like, yeah, some of you are like, I haven't read Genesis in years. Anyway, it's okay. It's worth reading if you're bored one day. You could read it instead of having coffee one morning.

[36 : 30] It'll wake you up. It goes back to the time of Abraham. And at that time, children were circumcised simply to show their inclusion in the church of God as it existed at that time, not in the nation of Israel because there was no nation of Israel.

But circumcision is only for males. That's true. Yes. That's true. Don't relate to this. That's true. Yes, that's right. Great question. Hold that question.

We'll come back to a Q&A.; That's a great question. But we're looking at what circumcision meant, right? So bracket that question. That's a very important and valid question, but just bracket that temporarily if you would, right?

So circumcision begins as a sign of the covenant, not as a sign of national identity. That's the point here. Okay. What type of covenant does it indicate?

Well, according to Genesis 12 and 17, it's a covenant that God made with Abraham, not just to bless Abraham's family, but all the families of the earth. That's the intention stated very early there in Scripture.

[37 : 27] We should highlight another essential non-nationalistic element of circumcision here. Beyond functioning as a badge of national identity in Israel, it did also, in the Old Testament economy, symbolize a cleansing from sin, just as baptism now does.

That was part of the meaning of circumcision. Many Old Testament passages, Deuteronomy 10, Jeremiah 4, Ezekiel 44, made a list where the act of circumcision is connected to purification and deliverance from sin.

Circumcision meant a lot of things. That's one of them. Not all of them, but that's one of them. We should notice that that's the very same language that Paul applies to baptism in the New Testament on multiple occasions. So in all of this, we're saying that by God's mandate, children in the lineage of Abraham were included in the covenant of grace and therefore were members of the church as it existed in the Old Testament.

Yes, we're talking about male children, but the point here is just that were any children at all admitted and the answer is yes. In the sight of God, parents and child are one.

That's sort of, you might say, a theme that's being laid out here. Parents are the authoritative representative of their children. They act for them. They contract obligations in their name. When parents enter a covenant with God, they bring their children with them.

[38 : 47] That's the reasoning of the Old Testament. That is why Deuteronomy 24, which is a very covenantal text, says this, you stand this day before the Lord your God, your captains of tribes, your elders and your officers, and all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, even the stranger that's in your camp, that you should enter into covenant with the Lord your God.

Pretty much everybody that was there. What we see is this, is that when a man and wife joined the covenant of Israel, they secured for any children they might have or had the benefits of that covenant.

That's how the church was and is constituted, in part. As such, when a person becomes a Christian and adopts the covenant of grace, he or she brings his or her children into that covenant, in the sense that God promises to give them in his own time the benefits of redemption, provided they do not willingly renounce their baptismal engagements.

Number seven, principle seven, building on that foundation. There's nothing in the New Testament which justifies the exclusion of Christian children from membership in the church.

The onus to exclude children rests on those who think that they should be excluded, not those who think they should be included. If the children of believers are deprived of a, quote, birthright, which they have enjoyed ever since there was a church on earth, there must be some positive command for their exclusion, some clearly revealed change in the conditions of membership which would render that type of exclusion necessary.

[40 : 26] Christ does not give any such command. Moreover, there is no explicit teaching in the New Testament to suggest that the conditions for church membership as they existed in the Old Testament have been revised. If there was to be a decisive negation or aggregation on that front, we should expect an apostolic revelation equivalent to Peter's vision about food in Acts chapter 10.

And there isn't anything like that. Thus, when Christ calls his apostles to preach the gospel of God to the nations, it can be very plausibly assumed that they were to act on the principle to which they had always been accustomed because it had not been negated.

And they did. That's evident from the family baptisms reported in Acts 17, 1 Corinthians 1. 16, etc., etc., etc. And number eight, children need and are capable of receiving the benefits of redemption.

Nearly all Christians in multifold church traditions, Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Reformed, Anglican, agree that infants need Christ's salvation. Do you might disagree with that? As few as they are, as few as my two nieces and nephew are, they need redemption.

Baptism is an acknowledgement of that need and that necessity. It's a recognition of God's desire to give it to them as affirmed and welcomed by those who have the right to represent their children in the context of the covenant.

[41 : 50] So in all of this we see that it's not the age of the person so much as the faithfulness of Christ that matters the most. Now in terms of whose children should be baptized, a couple things to say here.

I think the short answer is twofold. First, children of those who are members of the visible church, right, who profess faith. And I agree there needs to be a profession of faith on the part of the parents, right?

Whether it's sincere or not, we can't judge, right? We have to take people at their words. My friend in Sweden, by the way, didn't baptize those children because his parents refused to profess the faith.

There are a lot of priests who would because it's just custom now, right? But there are folks who perhaps, have professed faith, but it's really, my friends in England, for example, who's a priest there, right?

The parents are glad to profess faith and get that child baptized so that child can go to the church of England school that's in the parish. church. That does happen. But as a priest, you have to go on what people say, right?

[42 : 53] Because we don't read hearts. So the children should be baptized are those who are children of visible, members of the visible church, and then those who are willing to express responsibility by pledge for the spiritual nurturing and training of their baptized children.

So in that sense, our prerogative and spiritual privilege of baptizing our children is in no manner akin to the christening customs that have become part of Christendom, where, you know, sort of the hangover of Christendom, where it still lingers.

So baptism is not a cultural rite of passage. It must not be administered in either a superstitious or sentimentalist manner. All right, I'm going to wrap it up there so we can have a few questions before I have to go.

Those were the eight points. So dunk the baby. Thank you. Okay. I will start here. I had something comparable, two things to what you've said.

A third of my co-workers are Filipino. She went to the Filipino St. Pat's Catholic Church to get the baby baptized. But she's a divorced Filipino Catholic that priest says, I'm not going to baptize a child unless the husband's there.

[44 : 07] she diverted down to the Holy Rosary Cathedral, the Roman Catholic, and got the baby baptized there. And my mom at the fellowship church in Gabriel, they want to baptize her with immersion to make her member.

The guy said he one time had to baptize a person by immersion twice. So I've heard that story you said of the minister who wouldn't baptize a child because the parents didn't profess faith.

It reminded me of the Roman Catholic priest's decision at the St. Pat's, but however the cathedral was different and at the fellowship church some people have a very strict view about certain things and just the way some people are.

And okay, yes, baptism by immersion, but you've got to get all your clothes so bloody soaking wet and got to change all over again. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Hey. Yes, sir.

So in the background to what you've laid out, I detect what I would call a platonic essentialist view of family, tribe, and community.

[45 : 13] Mm-hmm. And I have trouble with that. Yeah, I don't know if there certainly may be on the surface parallels between an Old Testament understanding of families in the context of covenant and Platonism, right?

But I don't think the two were materially connected because Platonism is absent from the Old Testament, but that doesn't mean at certain points things are going to look a little bit Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Let's just go with essentialism. Yeah. There is something absolutely over time unchanging about family, tribe, and community.

And in a sense, the church needs to be a tribe in a society that is de-tribalized. It could be.

I don't know. I haven't thought of it from that angle, but it's a good comment. Yeah. Yes, sir? I thought about just the expansiveness as we are here now after the coming of Christ.

[46 : 15] Somebody raised the valid point of how circumcision was only for men. But even in the Old Covenant time, 1 Corinthians 10, Paul says that all were baptized into Moses.

That's right. I know that there was a mixed multitude there, that there were infants there, women, and everybody was baptized into Moses. That's right.

And I think that there was a richness of the history of baptism. This is something that's always struck me, is no one ever seemed to come to John the Baptist and say, what do you mean by baptism? Right.

They never asked that question. They always said, by whose authority do you baptize? Or who are you? Yeah. They only had a rich history, I think, of baptism. Yeah. And I think that the entire nation was baptized into Moses.

And I think that Christ is bringing that foreshadowing of what we now have in the Christian era. That's right.

[47 : 12] He's talking about the Israelites passing through the Red Sea, which is likened to the baptism of a nation because literally everybody went through the water. Whatever it looked like.

Everyone passed through the water there. And so they included everyone. I think on the subject, just to briefly treat the male issue, I actually sometimes wonder if that's why the male circumcision, Israel wasn't the only one who did that.

There were other people who did that, other surrounding cultures, but it was selected as a symbol and invested with meaning in the context of the covenant. And this is how human symbols all work, by the way.

And it reflected something that was familiar in the context, but then it took that and made it a little bit distinct. Now, one of the big themes in the context of the wider width of Scripture is that theme of widening of inclusion.

Now, in a patriarchal ancient Near Eastern context, if the husband or the son got circumcised, then everyone else in the family was included in that. It was deemed sufficient. But I wonder if actually, in terms of the shift of the symbol, moving from the act of circumcision to the act of water baptism, actually reflects that very widening, because that's something that everyone can participate in.

[48 : 30] So, that's just my thought. Let's go to her and then we'll come back to you. Yes, ma'am. You may have a double-lift individual who was christened from the United Church by non-believing parents and then was baptized by immersion upon professional faith in a southern Baptist church in the 19th.

Which of those, how does the Anglican church regard those two baptisms? You know, in that my parents grew up in the United Church who didn't have faith and started going to church with their kids going, we should probably do this.

Right? Yeah. Yeah, so that's often negotiated pastoral level. I mean, sometimes the Senate or the Bishop will speak into that. But it does come up at St. Peter's from time to time.

We've got a fair number of what are called nomads or prodigals that come into our church. So some of them will have a background in the church and have had infant baptism.

And they come in and there's a revitalized relationship with the Lord. And they want to mark that or celebrate that. And that's a good thing. We don't countenance. We don't do re-baptism, though, if they had a Trinitarian baptism in the first instance.

[49 : 41] Do you keep christening in the United Church by unbelieving parents? No. Yeah, yeah. If it was a Trinitarian baptism, no. But what we do say is we can do, because we believe in baptism, that while it is the family involved, God's also involved.

Right? And the name of God was invoked. And people were gathered in that name. So we believe there is a reality there, too, right? I mean, of course we believe that. So what we do suggest is that we can do a rededication, or we can suggest confirmation, which is also a very meaningful service.

It's kind of fallen out of use. I don't know why, because it's absolutely beautiful, and it involves laying on of hands in prayer. And so if you want to kind of recommit and rededicate in a public way, that's great. These are a couple options we have for you.

Well, I mean, I was baptized in my teens, I'm saying, but I'm just saying, suppose I hadn't been, I'm just curious. If you hadn't been baptized in your teens? Yes.

Yeah. And you were baptized as a child in a Trinitarian baptism? Yeah, we would have to look, but if it was Trinitarian, we would say, yeah, you don't need to be re-baptized.

[50 : 51] But it sounds like, you know, we can draw a little bit from the old tent revivals. Come on, let's all do a rededication. We're all about that. So, yeah. Yes, sir. I'll do one more after him.

Roger, there's a couple problems with your historical case. I wish it hadn't actually gotten to the part where you said what baptism really represents because a lot of, I think, opposition to it is based upon what does it actually mean.

So if you had gotten to that, that might have actually explained a lot more. But given that, you didn't get there, there are a few issues with your historical case. First is the equivalent of the circumcision with baptism.

Baptism is a right that preceded the Christian era by many hundreds of years. And the great controversy of John the Baptism, and the reason why nobody asked what does baptism mean, was because it was an initiation right into priesthood, not the church.

For some, but not for others. It had lots of meanings actually in the context of first century Palestinian Judaism. It was unless you were a woman, in which case it was the alternate to circumcision.

[52 : 10] But that practice only started around 200 BCE. Prior to that though, it was primarily an initiation done into priesthood. The mitveh, the ritual cleansing.

That's right. That was one expression of it. That was the primary expression of it. Your second problem with your historical case is your, I think you overplayed too much the patristic agreement on the practice.

If anything, it was quite a controversial practice in the patristic period. authors like Tertullian and Irenaeus both say have really grave hesitations to that.

Especially given the fact that baptism was such held in high regard by the early church. In fact, you couldn't even get baptized in the early church unless you had a certain amount of teaching, usually about three years worth.

Now, there's some issue whether that was a biblical practice in and of itself. But that just says to how high regard it was. So I think if you had more nuanced say the patristic case and basically maybe had given McVeigh a little more of its, let's say, less cherry picking as far as your evidence goes, I might have bought it.

[53 : 41] I have a lot that I could offer in response because I've actually traversed both of those points. But unfortunately I don't have time. So you may yet buy it. But let me say this quickly about Tertullian and you said Irenaeus of Lyon, right?

Yes. So to be sure, there were differences of opinion on infant baptism, paedobaptism in the church, and there were a few voices that spoke out strongly, right? And so we can look at those two voices and say, see, there was great contention, right?

But actually that would be to misinterpret those two perspectives because that's isolating them from the wider context and the normative practice, right? They're the vocal minority based on the study by Atland and the folks who are involved with MBS for it.

Well, you need to go check out that book. Aaron Harris, vocal minority. Look, that's the North African, those are two Latin voices. I'm going to allow him to have the last word as a speaker and welcome you back to discuss these and other points.

I would love to, unless for one day I have to go. However, I would suggest that you check out, you email me, I'll send you some of the works on that, right? Because people always go, I've done my own study on this.

[54 : 53] People always go to, they always go to Tertullian, right? See how contentious it was? And that, I think that's what some people have called the Tertullian fallacy, right? Because you overweight what he says and it's actually not as representative of great contention as you would think.

Because the practice was very common. Maybe not book of Acts, right? But then you're dealing with a Gentile, multi-generational covenant context. If it was so, I'm not saying that.

I love it. I love it because this is true learners exchange. And I know that we have reached the pinnacle of our goal of learners exchange when we actually have interjections in the middle of the talk.

Yay, women. But I think Roger has done an amazing job. He's got limited time. Please just join me in an enthusiastic way. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Roger. Again, if you want reading or follow up on this, he's going to email me.

[55 : 56] Just email me. We'll send things along. I don't claim to have the definitive view, but I have done my homework. Of course, you have no doubt. All right. Thank you, Roger.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.