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INFANT BAPTISM OR BELIEVER'S BAPTISM ONLY?

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INFANT BAPTISM OR BELIEVER'S BAPTISM ONLY?

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Sadly, what should be a great unifying feature in the body of Christ is often the center of controversy and cause of division. This is true of both communion¹ and baptism. The scope of this paper will be limited to baptism and more precisely, the debate between those who hold to believer's baptism only and those who hold to baptism of the infants of believing parents as a sign of the covenant. We reject baptismal regeneration outright and will not consider it here.

In general, those who hold to believer's baptism refer to baptism as an ordinance. That is, they consider baptism to be something *ordained* by Christ but that "does not produce any spiritual change in the one baptized....it serves as a form of proclamation. It confirms the fact of one's salvation to oneself and affirms it to others."² Ordinance, even though it is a synonym of sacrament in some dictionaries, "does not incorporate the idea of conveying grace but only the idea of a symbol."³

Those who hold to infant baptism normally refer to baptism as a sacrament. That is, they consider that baptism not only serves to "remind us of Christ and His death; these sacraments are actually channels of God's grace, linked to faith (in the case of baptism, looking forward to faith; in the case of the Supper, strengthening faith)."⁴

It is important to note that both positions, believer's baptism and infant baptism, are firmly entrenched in Scripture. The arguments for each have been well thought out and display high regard for the Word of God. Each manifests a desire for consistency with Scripture as a whole, as well as with theological systems. It is vital, therefore, to approach the topic with great humility and resist the temptation to commit the "straw-man" fallacy.

In fact, there is much we can agree on. We agree that baptism does not save the individual, whether infant or adult. We agree that baptism is somehow the sign a covenant between God and his people. We agree that baptism illustrates solidarity with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, and therefore demonstrates the great doctrine of imputation. We agree that baptism dramatically reminds us that we are cleansed of our sins by the blood of Jesus Christ. We agree that the mode, immersion or sprinkling, is a side issue since water baptism only requires that a person "come under" the water. What we do not agree on is the candidate for baptism.

The issue is this: Does the Bible teach that baptism should precede faith, or that faith should precede baptism?

Reasons for Baptizing Infants (Baptism Precedes Faith)

¹ Note the division rooted in the Reformation between Luther and Zwingli over communion that exists to this day.

² Erickson, 296

³ Ryrie, 421

⁴ Horton, 166.

1. *The baptism of infants is consistent with the Covenantal Theology approach to Scripture.* God always seals his covenants with a sign, such as Noah's rainbow and Abraham's circumcision. Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant to Abraham. "Circumcision separates the children of believers from those of unbelievers and places them within the protective wings of the covenant (Gen. 17:10-12). This was an outward sign of invisible grace".⁵

2. *God does not work with individuals primarily, but with families.* The three types, or foreshadows, of baptism found in the Old Testament are verified in the New Testament: the flood (1 Peter 3:19-20); the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1,2); and circumcision (Col. 2:11,12). In every instance, whole families were involved, and children were included because of their parent's faith.

3. *It is true that many who are baptized as infants never trust Christ for salvation.* But this is not damaging to the infant salvation position because many who were circumcised in Israel, were never circumcised inwardly (i.e., never put faith in God, Acts 7:51).

4. *In the New Testament, whole households were baptized at once.* (Acts 16:31-33; 1 Cor. 1:16; Acts 18:8). It is assumed that these households included infants.

5. *Baptism illustrates solidarity between the believer and Christ.* Both sides agree that this is one of the great purposes of baptism.

Christ was baptized with God's wrath so that we could be baptized with God's grace. In baptism we are identified with Christ and united to Him. He as truly saves us from God's wrath as Moses saved the Israelites, while condemning the Egyptians in the Red Sea.⁶

6. *Infant baptism is never prohibited in Scripture.*

7. *Church history attests to infant baptism as early as Irenaeus and Origen.* That infant baptism is attested to so early is evidence that this was the practice of the apostolic church.

The earliest post-apostolic documents demonstrated an unchallenged practice of infant baptism. If that is true, the burden of proof in the debate falls on the shoulders of those who deny the practice. In other words, the relative silence of the New Testament with regard to announcing more specifically who should be baptized should be taken as an assumption that Christian baptism, in replacing Hebrew circumcision, was to still include covenant children.⁷

Critique of Infant Baptism

⁵ Horton, 167

⁶ Horton, 172

⁷ Horton, 170

1. Although infant baptism is consistent with Covenantal Theology, believer's baptism is consistent with other theological systems that recognize a distinction, or at least a minimal discontinuity between Israel and the Church. Even Covenantal theologians recognize a different dispensation between the Old and New Testaments that require a different understanding of how God governs his people.

Calvin acknowledges this point in his commentary on Colossians 2:11,12 :

Baptism, therefore, is a sign of the thing that is presented to us, which while absent was prefigured by circumcision. The argument is taken from the government and dispensation which God has appointed in his church; for those who retain circumcision contrive a mode of dispensation different from that which God has appointed.⁸

Also, how is it that infant girls are now included in what was formerly reserved for infant boys? And, does any church require baptism on the eighth day? Infant baptizers recognize the distinction at least between God's Israel in the Old Testament, and God's Israel in the New Testament. It is possible they have not gone far enough in their distinctions.

That baptism somehow usurps circumcision, is undeniable from Colossians 2:11,12. But in what sense? The question is open to debate precisely because in no other place is baptism and circumcision specifically linked. The Scripture proof texts offered to support the position of infant baptism in the Westminster Confession are as follows: Gen. 17:7,8; Gal. 3:9-14; Col. 2:11,12; Acts 2:38,39; Ro. 4:11,12; 1 Cor. 7:14; Mt. 28:19; Mk. 10:13,16; Lk. 18:15.⁹ Some of these verses mention baptism, some mention children, and some mention circumcision, but none of them refer to all three. And only Colossians 2:11,12 mentions both circumcision and baptism, strongly inferring that baptism replaces circumcision.

Even in this passage, infant baptism is not the point Paul is making:

Here Paul gives a further explanation of the spiritual circumcision he affirmed in the preceding verse. The context suggests that Christian baptism is the outward counterpart to that experience and as such is the means by which it is openly declared. The emphasis of the verse, however, is not on the analogy between circumcision and baptism; that concept, though implied, is soon dismissed, and the thought shifts to that of baptism as symbolizing the believer's participation in the burial and resurrection of Christ.¹⁰

Yet acknowledging the implied connection does not damage the believer's baptism position. Just as a Hebrew was circumcised immediately after he was born, the believer is baptized immediately after he is born again (John 3:3). He receives the sign of the new covenant upon regeneration, that is, once he is made alive in Christ (Eph.2:5).

There is certainly a kinship between the signs (circumcision and baptism). But there are also great differences. The fact that the one was given to infant boys on a fixed day is not argument for giving the other to all children some time in infancy. They belong, if not to different covenants, at least to different dispensations of the one covenant: one to a

⁸ Calvin, 185

⁹ Westminster Confession, 89,90

¹⁰ Vaughn, 200

preparatory stage, when a national people was singled out and its sons belonged naturally to the people of God; the other to the fulfillment, when the Israel of God is spiritual and children are added by spiritual rather than natural regeneration. In any case, God himself gave a clear command to circumcise the male descendants of Abraham; he has given no similar command to baptize the male and female descendants of Christians.¹¹

2. *We agree that God works primarily through families.* Therefore, parents should not abdicate their responsibility to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. However, we question that the three types or foreshadows of baptism referred to in the NT were intended to support infant baptism. If so, are we to conclude that “baptism now saves” infants (1 Peter 3:21)? Is it not better to understand that Noah’s experience in water illustrates how our sins, like a corrupt and sinful world, are washed away? Likewise, our experience in water illustrates how our sins have been washed away. Additionally, can we assume, and then dogmatically assert, that there were infants among the eight persons on the ark?

3. *We agree that many circumcised males were never justified by faith.* We even extend ourselves to admit that many people baptized on the profession of their faith have never genuinely trusted Christ (Mt. 7:21,22). But we maintain that when believer’s baptism is administered properly and candidates are thoroughly examined, the number of baptized “professors only” is severely limited.

4. *We agree that whole households were baptized at once in the book of Acts.* However, it is impossible to prove that those households contained infants. In fact, we are told specifically that Crispus’ household *believed*. This also tells us that whole households were also believing. We are therefore led to conclude that whole households believed and were baptized in that order. In Acts 16:31ff we are told that the jailer’s whole household was baptized, but also that his whole household believed.

Furthermore, if one insists, for instance, that *all* Cornelius’ household (see Acts 11:13 and Acts 10:2,44-48) included infants, consistency demands that they were not only baptized but that they all heard and understood the message, all spoke in tongues, and all exalted God. *All* certainly includes infants present if there were any, and that would be problematic. The best way to handle the problem is to understand that all of Cornelius’ household believed, and thus met the requirement for baptism.

At this point, the observations of G.R. Beasley-Murray are helpful:

Here it should be admitted in candor that the statement, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household’ (Acts 16:31) has been abused. It is not intended to teach that the faith of the householder suffices for his wife, children, and slaves. Alford rightly commented: *‘kai o oikos sou* does not mean that *his* faith would save his household, but that *the same way was open to them as to him*: “Believe, and thou shalt be saved; and the same of thy household”. That is why the word of the Lord was spoken to ‘all who were in his house’ (v.32), namely that all might hear and all might believe along with him. The process is the same as that which happened to Crispus and his family: ‘Crispus believed on the Lord *with his whole house*’; he did not believe *for* them,

¹¹ Bromiley, 115

but they shared his faith *with* him. Such is the common pattern in Acts: the Gospel calls for faith, and both come to expression in baptism. The baptized hear and believe.¹²

5. *We agree that infant baptism is never prohibited in Scripture.* However, this argument from silence can be two-edged. Neither is infant baptism prescribed in Scripture. Nowhere are Christian parents instructed to baptize their infants.

6. *Church history does not strongly attest to the early practice of infant baptism.* Horton's assertion that infant baptism in "earliest post-apostolic documents demonstrated an unchallenged practice of infant baptism" is boldly stated in his book, but he fails to record any supporting documentation. Furthermore, his argument relies on whether or not the practice of infant baptism was unchallenged. The way he has framed the debate means that if it can be demonstrated that infant baptism was challenged in early post-apostolic document, then the practice of infant baptism is invalidated.

In the history of the church, infant baptism did not become a common practice until the state church was established under Constantine. This Christian emperor made the Roman Empire "safe" for Christians. Until then, the historical evidence reveals that a persecuted church reserved baptism only for those who had been observed in a trial period to determine the sincerity of their profession of faith. In addition to the problem of persecution was the problem of pagan backgrounds that these new converts brought with them. By the beginning of the third century, this trial period, the "catechumenate", lasted three years.¹³ Therefore, the church practiced not only believer's baptism, but fully-devoted-follower-of-Christ baptism. In those days, the church had to be extremely cautious because ravenous wolves, if not more common, were much more ravenous.¹⁴

In response to Horton's challenge that infant baptism is unchallenged in the earliest post-apostolic documents, let us consider the following. The earliest reference to infant baptism is by Iraneus in 220 (Adv. Her. II:22.4). The earliest claim to apostolic custom and theological defense of infant baptism is found in Origen in 230 (Homily on Luke 14:5). The earliest explicit defense for baptism of new-born babes is found in Cyprian in 250 (Epist. 58). The best-known early defender of infant baptism was Augustine who used it as an argument for original sin against Pelagius in 430. By this time, infant baptism is a general practice in the church.

Is there evidence for believers' baptism that predates the documents supporting infant baptism? If so, Horton's argument falters. In 110, Barnabus wrote that baptism was for "those who place their hope in the cross" (11:8). In 160, Justin Martyr wrote that baptism was for "those who are persuaded and believe (Apol. I). In 220, Tertullian specifically opposed infant baptism. (On Baptism.18). Also in 220, Hippolytus clearly

¹² Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, Eerdmans, 1962. 319,320.

¹³ Gonzalez, 96

¹⁴ The question may be raised, How then, did the doctrine of infant baptism arise in the early church, if the apostles did not teach it? Relative to this topic, Beasley-Murray develops the thesis that 1 Cor.15:29 demonstrates the possibility of the early church falling into early error on the doctrine of baptism due to Greek and pagan influences. He pursues the proposition that the practice in Greek cults of involving infants to secure the benefits of sacrifice, etc. influenced the idea of infant baptism in the early post-apostolic period. p. 354, ff.

stated that baptism was for believers only (Apo. Trad. v.13). Note that 220 seems to be a watershed year in this debate.¹⁵

Reasons for Baptizing Believers Only (Faith Precedes Baptism)

Not surprisingly, much of the support for believer's baptism comes from the critique of infant baptism found above. However, there are some positive observations to consider.

1. The word order in the Bible is always "believe" then be "baptized". In other words, faith precedes baptism. (Acts 2:41; Acts 8:12,12)

2. All clear examples of baptism, referring to specific people, have to do with believers. There is no positive example in Scripture of infant baptism. At most, one can only say it is *possible* that the baptism of whole households included infants, but as shown above, this position is fraught with difficulty. "On the day of Pentecost, for example, Peter told the conscience-stricken people to repent and be baptized; he did not mention any special conditions for infants incapable of repentance (Acts 2:38)"¹⁶

3. There is evidence of rebaptism for those who were baptized before they believed in Christ (Acts 19:1-5). However, this example is of those whose first baptism was by John the Baptist prior to the resurrection of Christ and the Great Commission. We concede that there is no example in the Bible of rebaptism for those who were baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

4. In every positive example of Scripture, baptism is an initiation into a believing community. There is an obvious difference between the church and the theocracy for which circumcision was an initiation in the Old Testament.

5. Church history does not preclude believer's baptism. It is true that some church fathers supported infant baptism, but this may only indicate that they fell into error early. Some in the early church also taught baptismal regeneration but that does not validate the position. Frankly, the historical argument has been used by both sides of the debate. To this day, scholars are not in agreement as to whether the early church baptized infants. By the early third century, there are indications that sometimes the children of Christian parents were baptized as infants. But all earlier documents, and many later ones, provide such scant information that it is impossible to decide one way or the other.¹⁷

Critique of Believer's Baptism

Naturally, most of the critique of believer's baptism is found in the reasons for infant baptism. In general, churches that hold to infant baptism are not as exclusive when it comes to joining members to their church who were not baptized as infants. For obvious

¹⁵ This section is a summary of class notes on History of the Early Church, by Dr. John Hannah.

¹⁶ Bromiley, 114

¹⁷ Gonzalez, 97

reasons, one cannot return to infancy to receive the sign of the covenant. Therefore, whether their baptism precedes faith or faith precedes baptism is ultimately not an issue when receiving believers into local church membership. They are more concerned that at some time, somewhere, somehow, they received the sign of the covenant.

The Tension

Bromiley describes the problem this way: “To be sure there is no direct command to baptize infants. But there is also no prohibition. Again, if we have no clear-cut example of an infant baptism in the NT, there may well have been such in the household baptisms of Acts and there is also not instance of the child of Christians being baptized on profession of faith. In other words, no decisive guidance is given by direct precept or precedent.”¹⁸

Why is there no “decisive guidance”? Of course, there are those who believe decisive guidance has been given. We obviously think so, or we would not hold to our positions so tenaciously. Surely God foresaw that his church would be faced with the issue of what to do with the children of believers. This cannot be a case where we are both right, can it? Why did God not dedicate a paragraph in Scripture to settle this issue? It might begin like this: “Now here is what you do for infants of believing parents regarding water baptism....”

In the wise sovereignty of God, no such passage exists. And logic demands that we cannot both be right. Can we live in peace with one another and still differ on something so important? We don’t know exactly why God allows this condition to exist among genuine believers who love God and His word, but I propose a possible solution. Without vigilance, those who baptize infants will begin to assign some meritorious worth to baptism. Without vigilance, those who baptize only believers forget that God primarily works through parents to train children. Perhaps the church needs those who hold to believer’s baptism to remind us that salvation is freely given only upon their personal faith in Christ. And perhaps the church needs those who hold to infant baptism to remind us that God primarily deals with individuals through families and generational solidarity.

To Sprinkle or Immerse

As stated earlier, the debate over the mode of baptism is not nearly as the significant as the candidate of baptism. If the emphasis is on the washing away of sins, both modes serve well. If the emphasis is on the sprinkling of the blood as a cleansing agent, sprinkling seems to serve the purpose better. If the emphasis is on the believer being unified with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, immersion is superior. However, the symbolism is completed by both modes since the one being baptized “comes under” the water in both cases. There are also practical matters to consider, as finding enough standing water in first century Palestine to baptize large numbers of converts by

¹⁸ Bromiley, 116

immersion. We prefer immersion for the following reasons. Note how sometimes the evidence can be used to support sprinkling.

1. *Jesus was immersed, since Mt. 3:16 says “he came up out of the water.”* This language does seem to support immersion, since to “come up out”, you must first “go down in”. It is hard for some to believe that with all the water in the Jordan River, Jesus was merely sprinkled. However, this phrase could be argued to mean that he simply walked out of the river onto the bank.

2. *Other baptisms, such as Philip’s (Acts 8:38,39) mentions that he “came up out of the water.”* The same notes above apply here.

3. *Immersion best symbolizes the solidarity that the believer has with Christ.* It is a superior way to illustrate that the believer is united to Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.

4. *“Baptizo” means immersion.* The debate often swirls around the meaning and etymology of this one word. Thayer defines the verb as “to dip or submerge.” Sprinklers may contend that a cup is dipped or plunged into the water and then sprinkled on the one being baptized. Immersionists may counter that it is not the cup that is being baptized.

5. *The cleansing aspect is enhanced, rather than denied, in immersion.* After all, what gets you cleaner?

6. *It best illustrates the Old Testament circumcision in that the recipient experiences a direct threat to his life that is immediately followed by deliverance.* The Egyptians would not have drowned in a sprinkling!

7. *The history of the apostolic and early post-apostolic church favors immersion.* This is the evidence that may shift the weight onto the immersionists side. Calvin himself acknowledges that immersion was the practice of the early church.¹⁹ Karl Barth, albeit neo-orthodox speaks from a reformed heritage and is less prejudiced on the issue when he writes:

The Greek word, *baptizo*, and the German word *taufen* (from *Tiefe*, depth) originally and properly describes the process by which a man or an object is completely immersed in water and then withdrawn from it again....One can hardly deny that baptism carried out as immersion--as it was in the West until well on into the Middle Ages--showed what was represented in far more expressive fashion than did the affusion which later became customary, especially when this affusion was reduced from a real wetting to a sprinkling and eventually in practice to a mere moistening with as little water as possible.²⁰

¹⁹ Calvin, Institutes, 4:15;19

²⁰ Barth, *Teaching*, pp. 9-10 (cited in Erickson, 1105)

Does First Bible Church Require a Believer Who Was Baptized as an Infant to be Re-baptized as a Believer?

Baptism is required for membership at First Bible Church because submission to baptism is an act of obedience. A professing Christian who refuses to be baptized, is a willfully disobedient Christian and willful disobedience disqualifies a person from church membership. If the person requesting membership has been baptized as a believer in another church prior to coming to First Bible Church, we honor that baptism and do not require re-baptism for membership.

In the case of a person requesting membership who was baptized as an infant in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, prior to placing saving faith in Christ, we will honor their baptism if the person's conscience is satisfied with their baptism, and we will not require re-baptism as a believer for membership. We have adopted this practice for the following reasons:

1. Though we believe that the preponderance of evidence favors believer's baptism by immersion, we also believe that Scripture is sufficiently ambiguous on this issue for us to leave this decision to the individual seeking membership.
2. Carrying out the analogy with circumcision, infant boys were circumcised and adult Gentile men who converted to Judaism were circumcised, but even if genuine faith was absent, there was no way to be re-circumcised later when it was present. There was only one receiving of the sign of the covenant, even if it was not accompanied by saving faith. Subsequent faith validated the sign.
3. We believe that while this is an important point of doctrine, we do not believe that disagreement on it should preclude the fellowship and partnership enjoyed in church membership. In our opinion, to deny membership to another believer because of disagreement on this issue would be overly strict.

If the person who was baptized as an infant, as a result of further study, comes to the conclusion that believer's baptism is taught in Scripture and desires to be baptized by immersion as a believer, it will be our joy to baptize him or her. However, to protect the unity of the church and guard our own consciences, we will not baptize infants, or anyone else who is unable to express a credible profession of faith in Christ alone. We will baptize believers only.

Appendix: The Scholarly Debate Between Christians Who Love God

What is striking to credobaptists (those who hold to believers' baptism only) about the position of pedobaptists (those who hold to infant baptism as a sign of the covenant) is the apparent inconsistency. If baptism corresponds to circumcision and the Lord's Supper corresponds to Passover as signs and seals of the covenant, then these ought to be applied in the same way. As infants received circumcision prior to faith, so infants receive baptism prior to faith. As children received the Passover meal prior to faith, so children

receive the Lord's Supper prior to faith. Only the historic position of pedobaptists in the Reformed tradition is that not only should children be kept from the Table prior to faith, but *everyone* should be kept from the Table prior to faith, since this is what the New Testament clearly teaches. The Lord's Supper is for believers only. So if the new covenant required a shift in the memorial meal, then why not a corresponding shift in the covenant sign?

Jonathan Edwards, the 17th century Puritan theologian, followed Calvin in keeping children from the Lord's Supper, and Sell notes that Calvin followed the Lateran Council. (Alan Sell, "Baptized Non-Communicants and the Celebration of the Lord's Supper," *Reformed World* 39[1986]:528-537). Calvin concedes that the ancient church commonly admitted infants to the Lord's Supper but that this practice had "deservedly fallen into disuse" (John Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:30). Calvin bases this on the fact that while circumcision was prescribed for infants, the Lord's Supper was "eaten only by those who were old enough to inquire into its meaning" (Ibid.). Calvin may overreach here. Does he really believe that circumcised infants and children in the Old Testament who were not old enough to inquire were not permitted to eat at the Passover meal?

Keidel charges his Reformed brethren (and presumably Calvin) with inconsistency in disallowing their baptized infants and children to participate in the Lord's Supper and recognizes that either infant baptism has to go, or infant exclusion from communion has to go. That is, if we keep infants and children from communion, then we must also keep them from baptism. He chooses to continue admitting infants to baptism and then argues for their admission to the Lord's table. (Christian Keidel, "Is the Lord's Supper for Children"?, *Westminster Theological Journal*, 1975, 37[3], 301-341).

Beckwith concurred with Keidel a year later, but arrived by a different route. He argued that if it could be shown that "at least probably" the Lord's Supper was intended for infants (contra Calvin), then an inconsistency does not exist and infants should be included at the Lord's Supper (Roger Beckwith, "The Age of Admission to the Lord's Supper", *Westminster Theological Journal*, 1976, 38[2], 123-151).

Husband admits that Keidel "is very persuasive in arguing these points from the perspective of the continuity of the covenant relationship and presents credible exegetical evidence that infants and small children did partake of the Passover Meal" (Husband, 76). In the end Keidel, Beckwith, and Husband, who advocate infant baptism, choose to resolve the inconsistency by calling on the Reformed churches to admit infants to the Lord's Supper.

On the other side, those who advocate believer's baptism choose to resolve the inconsistency by keeping infants from baptism. And since Scripture clearly bars unbelievers from the Lord's Supper, those who hold to believer's baptism naturally claim to be more consistent. The irony is that credobaptists make their point by pressing the logic of the assertions of Calvin's *Institutes* and the Westminster Confession which affirm that I Corinthians 11:28 bars infants and children from the Lord's Supper (see Question 177 in the Larger Catechism).

Schaff implies that in the early church, the practice of infant baptism comes after the catechumenate (the assimilation process for new believers) is established when he writes: "The catechumenate preceded baptism (of adults); whereas, at a later period, after the general introduction of infant baptism, it followed." (2:256).

This means that the early church, the immediate successors of the apostles, at first held that a person must be baptized prior to becoming a member of the church and must be instructed prior to being baptized and therefore must be old enough to be instructed. Therefore, they did not baptize infants, which seems rather consistent with the Biblical data, which offers no examples of pedobaptism.

Schaff later asserts that “it seems an almost certain fact, though by many disputed, that with the baptism of adult converts, the optional baptism of children of Christian parents in established congregations, comes down from the apostolic age” (2:258). Of course, at this point Schaff can quote no apostolic source and that is precisely the cause of the age-old dispute. Instead of appealing to the authority of Scripture, he appeals to his reason: “Pious parents would naturally feel a desire to consecrate their offspring from the very beginning to the service of the Redeemer, and find a precedent in the ordinance of circumcision.” (2:258). Thoughtful adherents of believer’s baptism do not quarrel with pedobaptists about the rather early entry of infant baptism into the church. They concede it came early, along with other questionable doctrines (i.e., baptismal regeneration). They also fear that it came early primarily because pious parents “naturally” felt a desire to do it.

John Hannah refers his readers to David Wright for a discussion on infant baptism in the early church that “seems to be both extensive and unmarred by prior ecclesiastical commitment” (See David Wright, “One Baptism or Two? Reflections on the History of Christian Baptism”, *Vox Evangelica* 18 [1988]: 7-23). Hannah summarizes Wright’s argument: “The *Apostolic Tradition* makes reference to children being baptized but they are old enough to receive and comprehend instruction. Since the original language did not distinguish infants from young children, a misunderstanding of the *Apostolic Tradition* led to the error of babies being baptized. Only later was the link between circumcision and baptism, as a sign of the covenant, developed.” (Hannah, *Heritage*, 360).

In another article, Wright asserts that “All the available evidence indicates that the early baptismal rites were originally established to cater solely for those able to speak for themselves, and were only slowly and sometimes awkwardly adapted to infant (baby) subjects”. (David F. Wright, “The Origins of Infant Baptism—Child Believers’ Baptism?” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 40 [1987] 5.)

Everett Ferguson seems to corroborate this view when he writes: “The earliest explicit reference to infant baptism occurs ca. 200 in Tertullian, *On Baptism* 18, a passage that appears to be a relatively new practice...It [the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus] and later baptismal liturgies, however, describe procedures that presuppose believer’s baptism as the norm.” (Ferguson, “Baptism”, 133). By using the qualifier “explicit” Wright does not have to mention the possible implicit reference to infant baptism by Iranaeus in *Against Heresies* (2.22.4).

Schaff continues: in the ante-Nicene church “there is not a single voice against the lawfulness and the apostolic origin of infant baptism” (2:259). Of course, if his argument stands here, then his argument against a New Testament office called “priest” must fall. There were apparently no voices against that either. In the end, Schaff has to admit: “No time can be fixed at which it was first introduced” (2:259).

E. Glenn Hinson notes that the debate has remained active since the sixteenth century since there is an absence of “conclusive evidence for infant baptism prior to the

early third century.” Claims to earlier attestation rest on the “uncertainty of the crucial prop—the baptism of ‘households’ which may or may not have included infants. (E. Glinn Hinson, “Infant Baptism”, *Encyclopedia of Early Christian History*, 462).

This leads us back to Jonathan Edwards who tells his readers in *An Humble Inquiry* that he has “no doubts about the doctrine of infant baptism” (David Hall, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 12, *Ecclesiastical Writings*, [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994] 175). It is not wise to pick a fight with an intellect the caliber of Edwards, but it is intriguing that credobaptists often arrive at their conclusion on this matter as a result of following Edwards’ example. He initially accepted and later rejected the position of his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, regarding the issue of the Lord’s Supper as a converting ordinance. He acknowledged that he initially accepted the innovation of communion as a converting ordinance mainly “in deference to so venerable a man, the seeming strength of some of his arguments, together with the success he had in his ministry, and his great reputation and influence, prevailed for a long time to bear down my scruples.” But through study and reflection, Edwards was brought to “closer diligence and care to search the Scriptures” and through “long searching, pondering, viewing and reviewing” he changed his mind (Ibid., 169). One wonders what would have happened if he had pondered more about the implications for infant baptism when he followed Calvin in rejecting infant communion.

Pedobaptists who admire Edwards lament that Edwards not only steered clear of the debate in *An Humble Inquiry*, but also in the rest of his works. Gerstner admits that Edwards “says surprisingly little about it...it is surprising that Edwards, who had to oppose the separatists of his own day, did not appeal more to this crucial doctrine” (Gerstner, *Rational*, III:431). To many credobaptists, it is not so surprising, and thus the sad debate continues.