

Should We Baptize Infants?

Some of you may have Christian friends in other denominations (e.g., "Baptist" or "Assembly of God") who ask you why Lutherans baptize infants. They want to know what our reasons are for this practice. They think we are in error. How would you answer them? Below are **seven** common objections to infant Baptism, and I will give a very brief response to each objection. However, before I respond to each of these objections it would be helpful to briefly summarize what Lutheran's DO and DO NOT believe regarding Baptism and Infant Baptism.

First we must understand what Lutherans DO NOT believe about Baptism and Infant Baptism. **We do NOT believe that all infants who have not been baptized are going to hell!** Some wrongly think Lutherans teach this. Even though Baptism is **one** important way that God brings Christ and His gifts to infants, Baptism is not the **only** way that God does this. God also uses His spoken Word to bring infants to faith in Christ. *(In response to one of the objections to Infant Baptism below I will discuss what Scripture teaches about infant faith.)*

In addition, Lutherans do NOT believe that Baptism is a magical work of humans that guarantees salvation even if a person later rejects Christ and lives as an unbeliever. Sadly, some who were baptized as infants were not nurtured by God's Word over the years and in certain cases they eventually lost their faith in Christ. *(In response to one of the objections to Infant Baptism below I will explain how those who are baptized also must have their faith in Christ nurtured by God's Word throughout life.)*

Now that we know what Lutherans do NOT believe about Baptism and Infant Baptism, I would like to carefully explain what Lutherans DO believe Baptism actually **is**. Simply put, some Christians view Baptism as only an outward **symbol** of an adult's conscious decision to trust in Jesus. *However, Lutherans do not have this understanding of Baptism because in no place does Scripture ever speak of Baptism in this way!* Instead, Scripture always defines Baptism as something much more than a **mere** symbol. According to Scripture, Baptism is the work of **God** through which He gives us various gifts!

God uses Baptism to put His Name on us (see Matthew 28:19). God uses Baptism to give us "new birth," that is, faith in

Christ (see John 3:5 and Titus 3:5). **God uses Baptism to give us forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit** (see Acts 2:28 and 22:16; Ephesians 5:26). **God uses Baptism to connect us to the death and resurrection of Jesus** (see Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:11-12). **God uses Baptism to clothe us with Christ** (see Galatians 3:27). **God uses Baptism to save us by the power of Jesus' death and resurrection** (see 1st Peter 3:18 & 21).

Now that we understand what Lutherans DO and DO NOT believe about Baptism and Infant Baptism, I will give a brief response to the 7 most common objections to Infant Baptism.

The **first** objection is: *"But we're saved by Jesus, not by our work of Baptism!"* This objection wrongly thinks that Baptism is a human work. If that were the case, then Baptism could not save us. However, Scripture teaches that Baptism DOES save us (see 1st Peter 3:21) because Baptism is GOD'S WORK! In addition, this objection fails to understand that Baptism is one of the means God uses to give us the salvation of Christ. In other words, Jesus ACCOMPLISHED our salvation by His life, death and resurrection for us. However, this salvation is GIVEN and DELIVERED to us through God's "means of grace" – and one such "means of grace" is Holy Baptism! (See Acts 2:38-39 and Titus 3:5)

The **second** objection is: *"But infants are not sinners! Therefore, Baptism is not for infants because Baptism is for those who have consciously sinned."* On the contrary, Scripture clearly teaches that we are sinners from the time of our conception (see Psalm 51:5) because we inherit a sinful nature from Adam (see Romans 5:12). The fact that infants die is God's sign that they are sinners (see 1st Corinthians 15:22). We sin BECAUSE we are sinners, and we have this condition even as infants and little children (see Genesis 8:21 and John 3:6). Also, Romans 3:23 clearly shows that ALL have sinned and need the salvation that Jesus gives.

The **third** objection is: *"But infants can't have faith!"* First, Scripture clearly teaches that infants and children CAN have faith. In Psalm 8:2 we see that infants can give praise to God. In Psalm 22:9 we see that David trusted in the Lord when he was a breast-feeding infant. In Matthew 18:6 Jesus teaches that "little ones" can believe in Him. Jesus is speaking about the "child" mentioned in Matthew 18:2. The Greek word for child is "paidion" which can also refer to infants. For example, the plural form of "paidion" is used in Matthew 2:16 for the children who were 2 years old and younger. Also, in Luke

18:15-17 we see that Jesus uses babies as examples of sincere faith. The Greek word for babies is "brephos" which means infant. In addition, John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb (Luke 1:15 & 39-45). The fact is that Jesus holds up infants as ultimate examples of faith (Matthew 18:5-6 and Luke 18:16-17). Second, Scripture clearly teaches that faith is MORE than a conscious knowledge of facts about God. Faith is trust in God that flows from a heart made new by the Holy Spirit. If faith is ONLY a conscious awareness of God's Word, then does one lose his or her faith when asleep or in a coma? What about those with mental disabilities? Third, those who say "Infants can't have faith!" must either 1) say that infants who die are damned or 2) say that faith in Christ is not necessary for salvation.

The **fourth** objection is: "*Jesus was baptized as an adult!*" If one takes this assertion to its logical end, then you must say: "*Jesus wasn't baptized until he was about 30, so no one should be baptized BEFORE that age! In addition, Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, and so all baptisms must take place in the Jordan or they are not valid. In fact, Jesus was a man and so women should not be baptized!*" This is ridiculous, of course! One must note that Jesus was baptized for reasons completely different than why we are baptized. First, Jesus was sinless and so He did not need the forgiveness delivered in Baptism. Second, Jesus' Baptism was God's way of showing that Baptism saves us because Jesus has made Himself part of it. In other words, Jesus was not baptized to give us an example to follow (salvation by works!). Instead, He was baptized to show us the source and power behind the salvation given in Baptism. This becomes obvious when God uses Jesus' Baptism as a public witness to show us that Jesus is His Son, our Savior!

The **fifth** objection is: "*The Bible never says that we should baptize infants!*" First of all, the entire Old Testament assumes that infants were always part of the salvation acts of God. For example, God gave Abraham the ritual of circumcision as an outward sign that the Savior would come from his family line (see Genesis 12:1-3 and Galatians 3:6-9). The sign of circumcision was given to infant boys when they were only 8 days old! In Colossians 2:11-13 the Apostle Paul shows that circumcision has been replaced with Baptism through which Christ Himself works to give spiritual life to those who are dead in sin. The Jews who became Christians would have assumed that Baptism was for infants because infants had also received the Old Testament ritual of circumcision. In addition, the infants

and children of Israel participated in many of the Old Testament rituals (the Passover, the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement, etc.). The infants and children of Israel were included in the high priest's blessing which God used to put His Name on His people (see Numbers 6:22-27; also Matthew 28:19). The infants and children of Israel took part in the crossing of the Red Sea which was a picture of the New Testament gift of Baptism (see 1st Corinthians 10:1-4).

Secondly, Jesus says that we should MAKE disciples by baptizing them. He says to do this for ALL nations, and he gives no exceptions as to age. Then in Acts chapter 2:38-39 Peter tells the crowd who had been convicted by his preaching: **"Repent and be baptized EVERY ONE of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you AND YOUR CHILDREN."** Simply put, the bible assumes (especially based on the practice of the Old Testament!) that infants will be baptized, and Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38-39 confirm this. *Therefore, the burden of proof is not on Lutherans to find yet ANOTHER text that says infants should be baptized. Instead, the burden of proof is on those who deny infant baptism. They must find just 1 passage that says infants should NOT be baptized. However, there is no such passage! The reason there is no such passage is that Scripture assumes that infants will be baptized!*

The **sixth** objection is: *"Adults were taught first and then were baptized later. So we should wait for infants to grow up so we can teach them before we baptize them."* This objection fails to distinguish the difference between infants and adults. Scripture clearly teaches that humans are conceived in sin. However, unbelieving infants have one advantage over unbelieving adults. Infants do not yet have a rebellious reason! Scripture teaches that we are conceived in sin and if we grow up as unbelievers we develop a conscious reason that is hostile to the Gospel. So, unlike infants who are in a position to receive the Gospel, adults need to have their reason humbled through the preaching of God's Word. Adults must become like "little children" or "spiritual infants" before they can receive Holy Baptism. I use the following analogy: **Unbelieving infants are like a plowed field. They do not have the "seed of life" but they are in a position to receive it. In contrast, unbelieving older children and adults are like a field with hard soil (covered by weeds and rocks) that needs to be broken up and cleared out before it can receive the "seed of life."** This

explains why infants are baptized and then taught, whereas older children and adults are taught and then Baptized.

Finally, the **seventh** objection is this: *"Joe Lutheran was baptized as an infant. But now as an adult he never attends church and he lives a life of unrepentant sin!"* The Bible teaches that our faith must be nurtured by God's Word, or it will die! Sadly, some who were baptized as infants are now living as unbelievers because their faith was not nurtured by hearing and reading God's Word. Such people should be called back to faith in Christ by the preaching of God's Word! However, the fact that some fall away after Baptism does NOT mean we should stop baptizing infants! For example, some adults are brought to faith in Christ through the preaching of God's Word, but then later fall away from the Faith. Does this mean we should never preach God's Word to adults because some later fall away? Of course not! In the same way, we still baptize infants even though, sadly, some later fall away from the Faith.

I hope this helps you understand why we Lutherans baptize infants. For a much more thorough study of this issue, read the book ***Baptized into God's Family (The Doctrine of Infant Baptism for Today)*** by Dr. A. Andrew Das.

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