

# Debate on The Proper Subjects of Baptism

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and

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## Propositions

**The Scriptures teach that infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized.**

Affirmed: David N. Landon

Denied: Keith Sharp

**The Scriptures teach that the only proper subjects of baptism are penitent believers.**

Affirmed: Keith Sharp

Denied: David N. Landon

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**Affirmative**  
David N. Landon

**The Scriptures teach that infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized.**

There are some doctrines in Scripture that we may safely embrace as true primarily on the basis of good and necessary inference. The subject of our present debate is such a doctrine. Not that the doctrine of infant baptism wants explicit texts. Paul tells us of an instance where infants clearly were baptized, 1 Cor. 10:2. There are also examples in the New Testament of household baptisms. The ark, which Peter compares to baptism, saved Noah's house, although only Noah was found righteous, 1 Peter 3:20,21. But the truth of infant baptism is primarily propositional. The three following present a full demonstration of our doctrine.

First, we assert the unity of the covenant of grace in both dispensations, which covenant has always included infants. From the giving of the first promise of a redeemer in Genesis 3:15 there has been only one way of reconciliation with God, and that is the gospel. This gospel, Paul says, was preached to the Fathers, Galatians 3:8. This covenant of grace has been the same in character and substance through both dispensations. The salvation of God's chosen people has always been by faith in Christ. That which was previously given in types and promises is now in these last days fully revealed, but it is the same gospel. This covenant of grace which was first

revealed to Adam and further unfolded by promise and type to Adam's descendants, was later given in *full covenant form* to Abraham in Genesis 17. This covenant was established with Abraham and his seed. God instructed Abraham to be circumcised as a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith which he had (Romans 4:11). Abraham was further instructed to circumcise all those of his household as a condition of the covenant, Genesis 17:10. This covenant that God made with Abraham continues in force. The Mosaic covenant established on Sinai with the nation of Israel did not annul the covenant made 430 years earlier with Abraham, Galatians 3:17,18. There is then but one covenant of grace and one way of salvation, and if we are in Christ then we are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise," Galatians 3:29.

Secondly, as there is only one covenant by which men have been saved it follows necessarily that there is only one Church, only one people of God. New Testament believers are essentially one people together with those spiritual Israelites who made up the Church that was in the wilderness, Acts 7:38. Paul, in Romans 11, describes a single olive tree, or visible Church. There is but one common root to this tree (vs.16). The unbelieving branches of the Jewish nation were broken off, and the gentiles who believed were grafted in. There were never two separate and distinct trees [churches]. Paul writes concerning gentile believers that they were once "aliens from the *commonwealth of Israel*," Ephesians 2:12. This is no longer the case. There is one common identity to the people of God through both Testaments. There is to this one Church but one way of salvation, one promise and one way to obtain that promise, one mediator, Christ, who alone is Prophet, Priest, and King to His Church.

It follows from above that even as in the old dispensation of the Church there was a visible community of God's people, and these people, together with their infant seed, received an external mark to signify their membership in that Church, in the new dispensation also, adult believers and their seed are to be included in the covenant. If the sign of inclusion belonged to infants at any point in the history of the Church, they ought not, without clear instruction to the contrary, be denied it now.

Thirdly, it cannot be denied that there is a direct link between the Old Testament rite of circumcision, and the New testament rite of baptism.

A. Scripture affirms it. In Colossians 2:11,12 Paul clearly establishes the continuity between circumcision and baptism. We have been circumcised (vs.11) being baptized (vs.,12). Just as bodily circumcision pointed to heart circumcision, water baptism points to Spirit baptism. Therefore we (New Testament believers) "are the circumcision," Philippians 3:3. Perhaps the strongest text is in Romans 4:12 where Paul calls Abraham "*the Father of circumcision*" to us, "who are not of the circumcision."

B. That baptism has replaced circumcision as the initiatory ordinance of admission into the Church is further evidenced by the fact that both signify the same spiritual truths. Both refer to the necessity of inward cleansing. Both are signs and seals of the righteousness which is of faith (compare Romans 4:11, Galatians 3:27, and Romans 6:3-6).

C. The record of the early Church confirms our position. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, reiterated the promise of the Abrahamic covenant, "For the promise is to you, and to your children. ...," Acts 2:39. In the chapters following are several accounts of *household baptisms*, which carry strong presumptive evidence in favor of infant baptism. They do so because of the total lack of any explicit instruction or command indicating that the practice of applying the sign of the covenant to infants had now ceased. A covenant people who, for two thousand years had seen their infants thus blessed, would require nothing less than a direct prohibition of a practice

they had long used.

“It is simply a historic fact,” writes Rev. Hoeksema, “that baptism forced circumcision out of the way.. And why? Because the Word of God plainly teaches, as we have shown, that essentially baptism has the same significance as circumcision, that two signs with the same meaning could not exist side by side, that circumcision belongs to the time of shadows, and, therefore, must make room for baptism as being the sign of fulfillment,” (quoted in Hanko).

It remains that we identify who the infants are to whom pertains baptism (for not all are baptized indiscriminately), and, secondly, indicate how, by God’s blessing, such baptism is efficacious. Concerning the first, we say that not all infants are to receive the sign of the covenant, but only the children of a believing parent. This was true even under the old covenant. The promise was to Abraham and to his “seed.” The identity of this seed is crucial to any discussion of baptism. The *natural* descendants of Abraham were never counted as the seed of Abraham. Paul writes, “they are not all Israel, who are of Israel; Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children, but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called,” Romans 9:6,7. All Abraham’s immediate descendants received the sign of circumcision, Ishmael as well as Isaac. But only Isaac was counted as the seed.

God saves His people, writes Herman Hanko, “in the line of the generation of believers.” Hanko notes that this was true even before Abraham. According to Hanko, “These covenant lines can be traced.. .from Adam to Seth, to Enoch, to Methuselah, to Lamech, to Noah.. .to Shem to Arphaxad, to Salah, to Eber, to Peleg, to Reu, to Serug, to Nahor, to Terah, to Abraham.” After Abraham the line continued through the sons of Jacob all the way to Christ, who eminently was the seed of Abraham. This believing line of God’s people were always commanded to give the sign of the covenant to their children. Although the sign has been changed, the covenant, the command, and the promise remain the same; to us, and to our children.

Secondly, a note concerning the efficacy of infant baptism. It must be said here that we do not teach baptismal regeneration, although it is certain that infants are a fit subject of regeneration, and in the case of infants who are regenerated in infancy it may be that water and Spirit baptism are linked. John the Baptist is a good example of infant salvation, he being sanctified by the Spirit *before* his birth. Further, we do not say that baptism guarantees the future salvation of any infant. There are many who, like Esau, grow to despise their birthright. We do say that in the case of infants baptism signifies two things. First, it is a formal recognition that infants are members of Christ’s Church. As in the case of infant circumcision, infants are not baptized in order to make them members of the Church, but because they already are. Secondly, to use Bannerman’s words, baptism gives infants “a right of property in the covenant of grace.” The children of believers, while not regenerate, are *federally holy*. This is the point of 1 Corinthians 7:14. The children of believers are sanctified, or set apart by the mark of the covenant. They are put in the way of blessing. The alternative is to be considered *unclean*.

We conclude that the covenant and Church have remained essentially one through both dispensations, and that by virtue of the command of God, the mark of the covenant belongs to the seed of believers.

### Works Cited

Herman Hanko, **We and our Children**.

James Bannerman, **The Church of Christ**.

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## Negative Keith Sharp

While admitting he primarily relies on inference, my friend attempts to find examples of infant baptism by appealing to biblical instances of household baptism. There are only four. Cornelius and his household were baptized, but they all spoke with tongues and magnified God (Acts 10:46). The household of Lydia was baptized (Acts 16:15), but no one can prove this business woman away from home (verse 14) was married, had children, had infant children, or had her children, assuming she had any, with her. The jailor's family was baptized (Acts 16:33), but they all "believed in God" (Acts 16:34). Finally, Paul "baptized the household of Stephanas" (1 Corinthians 1:16), but this household "devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints" (1 Corinthians 16:15). If the baptism of Israel (1 Corinthians 10:1-2) qualifies, then, contrary to Calvinism, circumcision and baptism were in force at the same time. No one in the ark was baptized, though they were "saved by water" (1 Peter 3:20, **King James Version**), and all on the ark were married (Genesis 6:10,18; 7:7; 1 Peter 3:20).

My friend makes three vain attempts to find authority by necessary inference.

The divine covenants have unity but are not identical. The promise of Genesis 3:15 is never referred to as a covenant, and, if it is, God entered into covenant with Satan, for the promise includes him, albeit negatively.

Galatians 3:8 simply quotes the spiritual part of the Abrahamic promise (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18), which promises blessings upon the world through the Seed of Abraham but reveals neither the basis (the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ), the means (obedient faith), nor the object (eternal salvation) of the blessing. If Abraham knew the gospel of our salvation, he knew more than the prophets of old or even the angels of heaven (1 Peter 1:10-12).

No one before Pentecost (Acts 2) was saved by the gospel, for to be thus saved one must believe Jesus died, was buried, and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), and that message was never proclaimed as an historical reality before Pentecost (Isaiah 2:2-3; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:1-8; 2:1-4,22-41).

The covenant of grace by which we receive salvation was not effective until after the death of Christ (Hebrews 7:25-28; 8:6-13; 9:13-17; 10:10-17).

The principle of salvation by grace has been the same in every age. Noah was saved by grace (Genesis 6:8). God spoke to him (Genesis 6:13-21), Noah believed the Lord (Hebrews 11:7) and obeyed Him (Genesis 6:22; 7:1,5), and the Lord saved him and pronounced him righteous (7:1,16). The same principle is true today: God speaks, man believes, man obeys, and God saves and justifies (Hebrews 11:7).

The covenant of Genesis 17 was the everlasting possession of the land of Canaan (verses 7-8). If this covenant is still in effect, Israel still is the rightful owner of Canaan, and if it applies to spiritual Israel, Christians properly own that physical land. If baptism replaced circumcision in the covenant, then only male children eight days old should be baptized (verses 10-12).

The only portion of the Abrahamic promise still in effect is the spiritual promise of universal salvation through the Seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:8,16), it is no where connected with circumcision, and only those who believe are its heirs (Galatians 3:26-29). There are no

infants in spiritual Israel.

If the covenant of grace by which we are saved is the same from the beginning, baptism cannot replace circumcision, for, once a covenant is ratified it cannot be altered (Galatians 3:15).

The “church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, **King James Version**) was the physical nation of Israel, for they were the fathers of the unbelieving Jews to whom Stephen spoke (verses 38-43), and of 603,550 of these soldiers (Numbers 1:45-46), all but two fell through unbelieving, disobedient rebellion (Numbers 26:63-65; Hebrews 3:7-19).

In the figure of the olive tree (Romans 11:17-21), the branch representing Israel was broken off (verses 17,21). If the branch is spiritual Israel, spiritual Israel was broken off. If it means fleshly Israel, and it does (“natural” - verse 21), and this Israel and the church of Christ, the true spiritual Israel (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:4-5.9-10) are one, then a fleshly nation whom God cut off for unbelief (Romans 11:20) and the church of Christ are one.

There is clear distinction between fleshly Israel and spiritual Israel negating the possibility of infant baptism. God’s covenant with fleshly Israel, a fleshly covenant (Hebrews 9:9-10) with a fleshly token of membership (Ephesians 2:11), was with them and their children (Deuteronomy 5:1-2;6:1-2). Jewish children were thus born into covenant relationship with the Lord and then taught the covenant (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Spiritual Israel is composed of believers who need not be taught to know God, because they must know Him to come to Him and to enter the covenant (John 6:44-45; Hebrews 8:6-11; Galatians 3:26-29).

Baptism of infant children of believers as a token that they are part of spiritual Israel necessarily implies God shows partiality based on fleshly descent, an absolute contradiction to New Testament teaching (Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:11). This principle is the clear teaching that no infants are in covenant relationship with God by virtue of physical birth to believing parents. God’s saving grace applies equally to all (Titus 2:11-14).

Colossians 2:11-12 does teach that in baptism Christ circumcises the believer’s heart by cutting away his sins, a truth Calvinists deny. But this is “through faith” on the part of the one being baptized (verse 12), eliminating infants.

If “water baptism points to Spirit baptism,” there are two baptisms presently in force by divine appointment, but Scripture says there is only one (Ephesians 4:4-6).

My friend misquotes Romans 4:12 and perverts its meaning (cf. Revelation 22:18-19; 2 Peter 3:15-16). When the Scriptures affirm justification by faith, Calvinists add the word “only” (e.g., Romans 3:28; 5:1-2). But in Romans 4:12 they drop the word “only.” Paul’s point is that Abraham is the spiritual father of the Jews (“the circumcision” - Romans 3:30), not just such Jews as are physically circumcised but who exercise the obedient faith of Abraham. It certainly does not place water baptism in the place of circumcision, for water baptism is administered by human hands, whereas the circumcision of the New Testament is of the heart without hands (Romans 2:28-29; Colossians 2:11-12).

Yes, the promise of Acts 2:39 was to children of those Jews and to “those afar off,” but the promise is “repent therefore and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (verse 38). The promise is only to those who repent.

The children of Abraham who receive the blessing are believers (Galatians 3:7,9,26-29), not infants.

The assertion, “God saves His people ... in the line of the generation of believers,” is

assumption without proof. No passage teaches that all in the lineage from Seth to Noah to Abraham were saved. This makes salvation a matter of having the right parents (cf. Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:11). Why “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15) if “God saves His people ... in the line of the generation of believers”? Does this not imply that children of believers are by natural generation, not regeneration, members of the church of Christ and all other children are bound for hell? If not, why not?

Not all in the lineage from Seth to Christ were circumcised. Circumcision began with Abraham (Genesis 17). And there was no promise from God peculiar to the lineage from Seth to Terah. The spiritual promise contained in mystery in Genesis 3:15 is for all obedient believers in Christ regardless of physical descent. Only the physical promises to Abraham, the nation and land, pertained to his physical descendants, and circumcision pertained to the land promise (Genesis 17). Baptism causes those who believe to become the spiritual seed of Abraham and heirs of the spiritual promise regardless of any fleshly considerations (Galatians 3:7-9,26-29).

The Bible nowhere teaches John the Baptist was regenerated before birth. He was filled with the Spirit from birth to do the work God ordained him to do (Luke 1:15-17). The Spirit came upon King Saul, and God gave him another heart (1 Samuel 10:9-10), but he was lost (1 Samuel 28:16).

The Scriptures do not reveal whether Esau was saved or lost. He despised his birthright, but nothing is revealed about whether he despised his salvation.

The sanctification of 1 Corinthians 7:14 is of the unbelieving spouse. If this is automatic, an unbelieving spouse is saved by the faith of the believing marriage partner. The Calvinist misinterpretation of the verse implies all children with one believing parent are saved, whereas all children who have two unbelieving parents are lost.

The Lord never commanded infant baptism, there is no biblical example of infant baptism, nor does any necessary inference support this Romish practice. Infant baptism is totally without divine authority (cf. Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2 John 9).

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## Response

David N. Landon

There is one thing that has been made evident by this debate, and that is how an unbiblical view of the gospel will lead to an unbiblical view of the sacraments.

Concerning the covenant of grace Keith writes, “The covenant of grace... was not effective until after the death of Christ.” The Abrahamic covenant, according to Keith, was primarily concerned with the possession of Canaan. If this covenant is the same as the covenant of grace then baptism cannot replace circumcision for a covenant once ratified cannot be altered. And much more of the same. I should like to know when, according to Keith, the covenant of grace was established and with whom? Keith denies that the promise in Genesis 3: 15 was in fact the first edition of the covenant of grace. How then were men saved after the fall prior to the coming of Christ? According to Keith, by some supposed *principle of grace*. This principle has been the same in every age. Keith cites the example of Noah to show how this principle works. The principle, according to Keith, is this: “God speaks, man believes, man obeys, and God saves

and justifies.” There are at least two objections to this position,- First, it should be obvious that there can be no principle of grace without a prior established covenant of grace. The principle did not just suddenly appear out of the blue. The covenant is nothing more than God’s promise to be gracious to sinners on the basis of faith in a promised substitute. Christians traditionally have considered Genesis 3:15 to be this promise. Secondly, I would like to know how Keith’s principle of grace is any different from the *principle of works*? Adam is the only example we can give of one who was under the covenant of works. Consider how it was supposed to operate: “God speaks; Adam believes, Adam obeys, and God saves and justifies Adam.” Precisely the same order and arrangement as Keith’s understanding of the principle of grace. Perform such arid such, and I will bless you is not grace, but works. Even in the case of Noah, before all his believing and doing, we find this verse, “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” Genesis 6:8.

Keith’s view of the gospel also comes short of the facts of Scripture. He writes that Abraham was ignorant of the gospel, and that men were not saved by the gospel in the Old Testament. This in spite of the fact that the bible says the gospel was preached unto Abraham (Galatians 3:8) and that Abraham rejoiced in seeing the day of Christ (John 8:56).

Keith’s view of the covenant of grace and the gospel make it impossible for him to accept infant baptism. Grace, for Keith, is something that men receive after they hear, believe, and obey; things that infants obviously cannot do. Once accept grace as a work of God whereby He efficaciously regenerates the heart of man it becomes easy to see why this mark of baptism belongs to children as well as adults.

The Bible does not teach two different covenants of grace; one in the Old Testament that was called the Abrahamic covenant that was essentially a fleshly covenant with worldly promises that included infants, and another in the New Testament that is essentially spiritual, and that no longer includes infants. As the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it, there are not two covenants, but “one and the same, under various dispensations.” In its first publication (to Adam) it was weak and obscure; yet It was a great comfort to those who heard it. In this first edition of the covenant there were no promises to infants. But with the calling of Abraham the infant seed of believers are now included. As the Puritan John Flavel points out, “here is a great addition made to the visible church, even the whole infant off-spring of adult believers.” With Moses the covenant of grace was recast together with a republication of the moral law. The moral law did not disannul the covenant of grace, which was already in effect, but was meant to be subservient to it. With the coming of Christ the promise that God would be a God to believers and their seed was renewed. Those Israelites who rejected the gospel were broken off from the visible church **together with their children**. Keith is incorrect to say that the branch broken off in Romans 11 is Israel. Only the **unbelieving members** of the nation were cut off. The believing members **together with their infants** continued in the same covenant, a covenant that now embraced Gentile believers. It is plain that this olive tree is the visible church, of which Abraham is the root, and covenant privileges the fatness and sap of the olive. It is the same olive tree through both dispensations. Under the old form the emphasis was on the earthly, yet there were spiritual promises; God promised to be a Father to them. Under the new covenant form of the church the emphasis is on the spiritual, yet there are promises for physical blessings as well, 1 Timothy 4:8.

Flavel writes, “This therefore being the design of God, and the steady course of his covenant of grace, more and more to enlarge itself in all ages; nothing can be more opposite to

the nature of this covenant, than to narrow and contract its privileges in its farther progress, and cut off a whole species from it, which it formerly took in.”

The covenant of grace is now **substantially** the same as under the Old Testament. Only the external initiating sign has been changed. The substance is found by comparing Genesis 17:7, where God promises to be a God to His people and their seed with Acts 2:39 and Hebrews 8:10 where the same promise is repeated. We conclude that the infants of believers have a covenant-right to the sign of the covenant.

### Work Cited

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### Affirmative

Keith Sharp

I count it a privilege to engage in this eleventh written debate over differences between the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the church of Christ with my esteemed friend, David Landon. This discussion concerns the proper subjects of baptism, i.e., who may properly be baptized. I affirm: **The Scriptures teach that the only proper subjects of baptism are penitent believers.**

In our debate on the purpose of baptism I sufficiently defined the terms employed and will not repeat those definitions. I will only add what Dave and I understand, that we are concerned with New Testament baptism, baptism by the authority of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-19; Acts 2:38; 10:48). There is only one such baptism (Ephesians 4:5).

As before, I will not make indirect arguments based on a theological position but will only examine passages that state or imply the proper subjects of water baptism. This will assure my position is based on the Scriptures rather than prejudice. Assuredly, the Lord reveals His will through necessary implications (e.g., Acts 17:2-3). But the farther away we get from passages that deal directly with the subject at hand, the more we depend on fallible human reason rather than infallible divine revelation. It is especially dangerous to make arguments based on analogies from the Old Testament, since, without a New Testament application of the Old Testament type, we are adrift at sea guided only by the broken compass of human speculation. Even the Old Testament prophets who foretold salvation in Christ could not understand the subject they prophesied (1 Peter 1:10-12). Men infer many things the Scriptures do not imply.

### Questions

I have five questions for Dave. In the New Testament:

- (1) Where is an example of infant baptism?
- (2) Where is a command to baptize infants?
- (3) Where is a statement infants should be baptized?
- (4) Where is infant baptism necessarily implied?
- (5) Where is it taught that baptism has taken the place of circumcision?



## The Great Commission

The Lord commanded His apostles, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). The phrase “make disciples” translates one Greek word which means “*make a disciple of, teach*” (Arndt & Gingrich. 486). Christ instructed His ambassadors to first disciple or teach then to baptize. This is to be done “of all the nations” in the same way the Lord will one day judge “all the nations” (Matthew 25:32), one individual at a time. One must be disciplined, taught, before he is a proper subject of baptism.

The parallel account, Mark 16:15-16, states, “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.’” This explains how we “make disciples of all the nations.” We “preach the gospel to every creature.” We are to baptize those who believe as the result of the preaching of the gospel.

From the two passages that mention baptism as part of the Great Commission, we have proven half our proposition. **The Scriptures teach that the only proper subjects of baptism are believers.** The Lord only authorizes us to baptize those who come to faith in Him through the preaching of the gospel.

## Examples in Acts

On the first Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection, the audience in Jerusalem consisted of devout Jews (Acts 2:5). They were “cut to the heart” by the apostle’s sermon and responded, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38). “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41). Those who were baptized were devout Jews who gladly received the apostolic word and repented. Unless a passage can be found that authorizes another kind of person, such as infants, to be baptized, the proposition is already sustained. **The Scriptures teach that the only proper subjects of baptism are penitent believers.**

The Samaritans who were baptized consisted of “both men and women” who “heeded the things spoken by Philip” and “believed” (Acts 8:6,12-13).

Philip next baptized the treasurer of Ethiopia, who was reading about Christ from Isaiah chapter fifty-three and believed (Acts 8:26-39).

Saul believed in Jesus after seeing Him in a vision on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6). He subsequently brought forth the fruits of repentance (Acts 9:9,11). Ananias commanded him, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

The entire household of Cornelius was saved (Acts 11:14). But they all “heard the word” (Acts 10:44), believed (Acts 15:7-9), and repented (Acts 11:18) before they were baptized (Acts 10:44-48).

Paul and Barnabas baptized Lydia “and her household” (Acts 16:15) in Philippi. She was a business woman away from home (Acts 16:14). Unless it can be proven she was married, had children, at least one of her children was an infant, and the infant was with her on this trip, this case does not alter the pattern, and none of these four necessary facts can be proven.

The entire family of the Philippian jailor was baptized (Acts 16:33), but they all heard Paul and Barnabas speak the word of the Lord (Acts 16:33), and they all believed (Acts 16:34).

We read concerning the fruit of Paul's work in Corinth, "Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). The pattern remains unaltered.

In Ephesus Paul baptized twelve men who were believers and had formerly received the baptism of John (Acts 19:1-7).

Thus, as we close our survey of examples of baptism in Acts, our proposition remains unaltered. **The Scriptures teach that the only proper subjects of baptism are penitent believers.**

### **New Testament Letters**

Paul reminds the Christians in Rome that after we are baptized we "should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4). In baptism "our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Romans 6:6). When we were baptized, we "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which" we "were delivered. And having been set free from sin," we "became slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18). Obviously, one must repent to be a proper subject of baptism.

The apostle Paul personally "baptized the household of Stephanas" (1 Corinthians 1:16). Since this entire family "devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints" (1 Corinthians 16:15), the pattern is still unchanged.

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27). The word "For," both in verses twenty-six and twenty-seven, translates the Greek term "*gar*," which is a "conjunction used to express cause, inference, continuation, or to explain" (Arndt & Gingrich. 151). Verse twenty-seven explains how we become "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." It is by being "baptized into Christ." The proper subject of baptism is one who has faith in Christ Jesus.

*In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead* (Colossians 2:11-12).

"Through faith in the working of God" we are raised with Christ when we come forth from the waters of baptism. The proper subject of baptism is one who has faith in God.

In baptism "our hearts" are "sprinkled from an evil conscience" by the blood of Christ, "and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22). Only one who is conscious of guilt which he seeks to escape may be properly baptized.

"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21, **New American Standard Bible**). The proper subject of baptism is a person who is conscious of his guilt, believes in the resurrection of Christ, and is appealing to God to cleanse his conscience.

### **Conclusion**

We have examined every New Testament passage which directly states or implies the

proper subject of the one baptism authorized by the Lord Jesus Christ. We have found consistency from beginning to end without even one discordant note. Thus, the proposition is sustained. **The Scriptures teach that the only proper subjects of baptism are penitent believers.**

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### Work Cited

Arndt, W.F. and F.W. Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.**

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### Negative

David N. Landon

There is perhaps no better way to assess a person's views on a subject than by the questions he asks concerning it. The five questions Keith has asked about infant baptism reveal not only his position on baptism, but his whole approach to Biblical interpretation as well. Notice that his proposition reads "*The Scriptures teach etc.*" In the Arrangements and Rules that Keith and I both signed before this debate the following rule appears: "The Scriptures will constitute the evidence to be presented." Why has he then, in the preface to his five questions, limited our inquiry to the New Testament? Keith knows that my position rests upon considerable testimony from the Old Testament. Indeed, virtually every doctrine that belongs to the New Testament Church rests upon an Old Testament foundation. But it is dangerous, writes Keith, "to make arguments based on analogies from the Old Testament.. without a New Testament application of the Old Testament type." Well, I am glad that Keith admits that circumcision is at least an analogy and type of baptism. Will he admit then, that what circumcision was to the Old Testament, baptism is to the New Testament? Circumcision, we say, was a sign and seal of the faith that Abraham, the father of all believers, had. Circumcision was to Old Testament believers the token of their membership in the one Covenant of Grace, and the one Church of Christ. This Covenant and this Church have existed from the time that God made the first promise recorded in Genesis 3:15. The primary difference between Keith's position and mine boils down to how we view the whole of Scripture. I hold that there is continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Keith believes there is discontinuity. According to the one motif all things, whether doctrine or precept, continue in force, unless clearly abrogated in the New Testament. According to the other view all things are considered as belonging to the time of shadows and types, and are to be reckoned as no longer in effect unless clearly repeated in the New Testament. Certainly in the light of such passages as John 10:35, "the Scripture cannot be broken," and Matthew 4:4, that man should live by "*every* word that proceeded out of the mouth of God," there is a strong case for continuity between the Testaments.

The importance of the above remarks will be evident as we consider the following answers to Keith's questions. Keith, in his first question, asks for an example from the New Testament of infant baptism. In my affirmative I gave 1 Corinthians 10:2 as an example Paul gives where not only one infant, but presumably several hundred infants were baptized at once. There are also in the New Testament several accounts of household baptisms. The next three

questions are essentially identical, and Peter's charge to his audience on the day of Pentecost may be considered a sufficient text to cover all three. Peter tells the men assembled that the promise of the Holy Spirit "is unto you, and to your children," Acts 2:39. Keith's fifth question asks where it is taught that baptism takes the place of circumcision. Colossians 2:11-12 could hardly be clearer; we have been circumcised, writes Paul, being baptized. Paul, in joining together these two signs, could not make the continuity between them more evident. These answers will not, admittedly, satisfy Keith. He would have a bona fide example of an infant going down into the water, nothing less. Keith certainly would point out that after Peter's sermon we read only that those who received the word gladly were baptized. But the question in debate is not whether in Scripture we have an explicit example of infant baptism. The question is who is a fit subject for baptism. And it is our position that the language of the New Testament favors infant baptism. Favors it, that is, if your presupposition of the connection between the Testaments is that of continuity. For that being the case we should not expect to find any *new command* to apply the sign and seal of the covenant to children of believers, for that command had been given once already. Given, however, the presupposition of discontinuity we should expect to find a command to no longer apply the sign. A people that for two thousand years had seen their infants thus blessed would absolutely require such a command. The silence then of the New Testament and, I might add, the absence of any controversy in the polemical writings of the first few centuries of the Church, speak eloquently in support of our position. How then did those who heard Peter's sermon interpret his words? When anyone in the first century read of a household being baptized, what was understood? Concerning the household baptism of Lydia, Keith insists that I must prove that Lydia was married, that she had children, that at least one child was an infant, and that this infant was with her on this trip. Why so? On the supposition of continuity between the signs, these proofs are not necessary. Were Keith's position true one might expect to find something like the following, - "Lydia believed and was baptized, and the believing members of her house were baptized also." Or, "the Philippian jailer believed and was baptized together with the believing members of his house." We simply do not find such language. These early accounts were written exactly the way we would expect on the supposition of the sign and seal of the covenant of grace being the birthright of the infant seed of believers.

I have not given myself much space to answer the greater part of Keith's affirmative. That is because I agree with one hundred percent of what he is evidently attempting to prove. His paper is a masterful defense of the following proposition: Penitent believers are proper subjects of baptism. It is this word "**ONLY**" that is in Keith's original proposition that required proof, but received none. Surely Keith understands that proving believer baptism is not the same as disproving infant baptism. The word *only* in his proposition obliges him to disprove infant baptism. In our debate on the doctrine of justification I took the position that we are justified by faith *alone*. Keith was right in insisting that I prove the word *alone*. I pointed out in that debate that there were in Scripture equivalent words and phrases that were stronger, and even more scandalous than the word *alone*. Phrases where Paul claims that we are justified "without the works of the law," and that God "justifies the ungodly." Keith's word *only*, like my word *alone*, is not in any of the texts he produces in support of believers only baptism. Is Keith able to scandalize us? Think how the Jews, with their strong belief in the necessity of good works, must have been scandalized upon hearing that God justifies the ungodly. Can Keith produce words or phrases from the New Testament that support, strengthen, and even go beyond this word *only*? By citing, in full detail, the requirements that adults need to comply with prior to baptism, Keith

has not devoted so much as a single sentence demonstrating that infants are now excluded from the covenant.

Everything Keith has written concerning believer baptism in the New Testament could as easily have been said about believer circumcision in the Old Testament. Circumcision was never a bare sign. Circumcision, writes Paul, is *not* that which is outward in the flesh. Rather, true circumcision is that of the heart, Romans 2:28-30. Anyone listening to an evangelistic message under the old Covenant would have heard of their need to circumcise the heart. That is, of their need to hear and believe the message, repent of their sins, and promise to live in obedience to the God of Abraham. But if these same new believers had asked, “What about our children,?” they would have been told that the promise, and therefore the sign, of the Covenant belonged to them as well.

I will tell Keith plainly what is needed if he will prove his word *only*. A direct command in the New Testament to no longer include our infants in the Covenant promises will be accepted as proof. Or an example from the New Testament historical narratives of a believer bringing his infant for baptism, and being turned away, will be considered sufficient proof. But the complete New Testament silence on this matter is deafening. It was business as usual; the promise once given to the seed of believers was given still. There was neither rescission, nor interruption, of the sign of the Covenant.

Given the absence of such proofs as are required for demonstration of the proposition that penitent believers are the *only* proper subjects of baptism, we conclude the following: the Old and New Testaments are one Scripture, there is one Church, and one Covenant of Grace through both dispensations, and infants have always been included in the Covenant community.

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## Response

Keith Sharp

My dear friend Dave Landon has, in my opinion, done as masterful a job of denying a true proposition as is possible, and he has done this without personal rancor. I congratulate him.

He has even correctly identified a basic, underlying principle that causes us to differ. Dave maintains of the Old Testament that “all things, whether doctrine or precept, continue in force, unless clearly abrogated in the New Testament.” The Old Covenant allowed polygamy (Exodus 21:7-11; 2 Samuel 5:13; 12:8; 1 Chronicles 3:1-9; Acts 13:22), and the New Covenant never clearly abrogates this approval. Thus, the Presbyterian position on the covenants implies the Lord still allows polygamy.

If John 10:35 means nothing in Scripture can be abrogated, then animal sacrifices are still in effect. If Matthew 4:4 means nothing in Scripture can cease, the priesthood is still of the tribe of Levi and the lineage of Aaron. In fact, Dave’s argument on these verses eliminates the Calvinistic position that Old Testament laws may be “abrogated in the New Testament.”

I did not admit “that circumcision is at least an analogy and type of baptism.” In baptism one is metaphorically “circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh” (Colossians 2:11-12). Christ does the circumcising without hands by removing our sins when we are baptized, a truth Calvinists deny. But this is “through faith” on the part of the one being baptized (verse 12), eliminating infants. If there has been “one Covenant

of Grace” since Genesis 3:15, baptism can’t replace circumcision, for “Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it” (Galatians 3:15). If baptism is in the place of circumcision, only males eight days of age should be baptized (Genesis 17:10-12).

Dave asserts I “would have a bona fide example of an infant going down into the water, nothing less.” No, my questions gave Dave five choices: a New Testament statement, command, example, or necessary implication authorizing infant baptism or New Testament proof that baptism has taken the place of circumcision. He has failed to produce any.

Yes, my proposition is exclusive, and the word “**only**” is indeed crucial. All Presbyterians must do is produce one New Testament statement, command, example, or necessary implication authorizing infant baptism, and the proposition would fall. Dave’s failure to do this has further established the proposition. I examined every New Testament passage dealing with the proper subjects of baptism, and each supports the fact that “**The Scriptures teach that the only proper subjects of baptism are penitent believers.**”

My proposition is parallel in form to Dave’s on justification by faith “**only**” but totally different in proof. The Scriptures explicitly deny justification by faith only (James 2:24), but no passage denies “**that the only proper subjects of baptism are penitent believers.**” The Scriptures plainly affirm “that justification before God is by the obedience of faith” (e.g., Hebrews 11:7), but no passage can be found that affirms infant baptism. An exclusive proposition concerning the Bible is sustained by examining all Scripture evidence pertaining to the subject and demonstrating all supports the proposition. In my affirmative I examined every New Testament passage pertaining to the proper subjects of baptism, and each harmonizes with the truth “**that the only proper subjects of baptism are penitent believers.**”

If the baptism of Israel (1 Corinthians 10:1-2) is the baptism in force today, then, contrary to Calvinism, circumcision and baptism were effective at the same time.

The promise of Acts 2:39 is only to those who repent.

In three of the household baptisms we know there were no children (Acts 10:46; 16:34; 1 Corinthians 16:15), so the language in no way sustains infant baptism. In the case of Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), infants are neither mentioned nor implied.

Since the Presbyterian position on the continuity of the covenants is false, the demand for a passage that forbids infant baptism is without force. Dave and I agree that instrumental music is unauthorized in New Testament worship. The Old Testament commanded it (2 Chronicles 29:25; Psalm 150), and the New Testament doesn’t forbid it. Why do Reformed Presbyterians not use instruments of music in worship?

Nothing could have been more scandalous to Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation period than the rejection of infant baptism, for they persecuted to the death those who insisted that baptism was limited to penitent believers (Schaff. 8:81-85).

Far from being “business as usual,” Christ “takes away the first (covenant -KS) that He may establish the second”(Hebrews 10:9).

My friend writes, “But the complete New Testament silence on this matter is deafening.” Indeed! It is so in the same way New Testament silence on polygamy or instrumental music in worship is deafening. Since we must have authority from Christ for all we practice (Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2 John 9), and there is complete New Testament silence on this matter of infant baptism, it is sinful to baptize infants.

Christ taught that faith preceded baptism in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16), the apostles and first century evangelists only baptized penitent believers (Acts 2:5,38,41;

8:6,12-13, 26-39; 9:1-6, 9,11; 22:16; 10:44-48; 11:14,18; 15:7-9; 16:14-15; 16:33-34; 18:8; 19:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:16; 16:15), and they taught that only penitent believers are to be baptized (Romans 6:3-4,6,17-18; Galatians 3:26-27; Colossians 2:11-12; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 3:21).

### **Conclusion**

We have examined every New Testament passage which directly states or implies the proper subject of the one baptism authorized by the Lord Jesus Christ. We have found consistency from beginning to end without even one discordant note. Thus, the proposition is sustained. **The Scriptures teach that the only proper subjects of baptism are penitent believers.**

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### **Work Cited**

Schaff, Philip, **History of the Christian Church.**