

I wrote [an article](#) several months ago about infant baptism. Having just had our church's first infant baptism, and understanding that many who know us have never thought much about infant baptism (also called paedobaptism), I decided to share some of what I found beautiful about it as opposed to the baptism only of new converts (known as believer's baptism or credobaptism). I did not at all intend for my former article to be an exhaustive defense of infant baptism, but rather an expression of ideas to get the wheels turning for people - to be exposed to what may be a new idea for some, and for others, to help them think through what they may have just assumed is the case due to their upbringing. But while that post served its purpose, I have felt the need to lay out a more exhaustive case for infant baptism, particularly as we look to baptize our son here in the near future.

### **Importance:**

Before I get into the issue proper, I do want to make a few things clear. First and foremost the issue of how we baptize does not determine one's Christianity. Just as those who take communion sitting down, standing up, dipping the bread, using grape juice, using wine, using crackers, eating separately, or eating simultaneously are all Christians if they have made Christ their lord, so those who baptize by sprinkling or those who baptize by immersion are Christians if they have made Christ their lord. This discussion should be a cordial, in-house discussion among Christians. While I disagree with believer's baptism and immersion, I know, love, and respect many who hold these views that are contrary to mine. I understand their view and I know they are trying to do their best to follow what they believe to be the biblical model of baptism. I understand that they have reasons for believing as they do, even if I disagree with their conclusion or believe that their case is outweighed by the case that I am about to make. I hope the same grace and generosity is afforded to me even if you end up disagreeing with me.

With that being said, some may think that this issue is then not that important. If it does not weigh on our eternal state, then why take the time to discuss such a topic? I think the simple answer is that God has commanded baptism. Baptism has been an integral part of the church's history and it is something that God himself has instituted. That means he intends to say something very important through this symbol. While we don't "need" the correct form of baptism to enjoy God forever, we may miss out on some beautiful theological truths that come in understanding what baptism is intended to convey. God wants to bless us and we should want to receive God's blessings - baptism being one of those blessings.

### **Scope:**

It is important to note that there is no place in scripture that directly details how a person is to be baptized in the New Testament. Since no direct "how" is given, it is our job to look at all of the cumulative evidence and build a case from the context of all scripture. It is very important to keep these notions of "cumulative" and "contextual" in mind, as far too often we use one passage - or even worse, one snippet of a passage - as evidence because we believe it to be clear, when in reality we are using circular reasoning and presupposing definitions based on our bias. We need to weigh the whole case and we need to do our best to understand the issue from the context of the early Christians and all of scripture, not from the notions ingrained in us from our own cultural context and upbringing.

Since the approach we use must be to build a cumulative case, it is very important to hear the evidence out until the end. Often times there are aspects of a cumulative case that don't tip the scales for a particular side in and of themselves, but taken in light of all the evidence they can be extremely weighty. Please hear the whole case out until the end. Since cumulative cases often entail a plethora of details and information to consider, I am going to do my best to keep the evidence short and sweet, with the briefest explanations I can muster, and with scriptural references you can look into further to cross-check. I will also provide significant resources for you with which you can follow-up should you desire to research the topic in more depth. Or you can just contact me and I'll talk your ear off.

Finally, though the main issue in view is infant baptism, you will find that it is helpful to understand the appropriate mode of baptism as well. The two often go hand in hand. If immersion only represents a burial and resurrection with Christ after a profession of faith, then obviously infants don't fit the requirement to receive such a symbolic gesture. If the notion of moving water, usually conveyed today by pouring or sprinkling, represents being consecrated into God's covenant community and a statement as to what God can do, then infants can, and likely should be included in such a symbolic gesture. The mode and the object of baptism tend to go together. For this reason you will find that many of the arguments below deal with the mode (sprinkling/pouring vs. immersion) rather than the object of baptism (new believers and infants vs. only new believers).

So, without further adieu, here is the cumulative case for infant baptism.

**The Old Covenant and its Connection to the New:** Most who hold to the practice of

infant baptism view the New Testament to be more of a continuation and fulfillment of the Old Testament rather than a largely new dispensation that is more disconnected than not from the previous dispensations. It is important, then, to begin by discussing the overarching foundation for infant baptism, which is God's continued work through the covenant he has thread throughout all of biblical history unto now.

- [Genesis 17](#) gives a clear command for Abraham and his descendants, the people of God's covenant, to be circumcised. They are to do this unto all generations. Though there are a number of promises God gives in this covenant, the core of the covenant promise here is found in verse 7, where God says, "And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you." God promises to be a God of his covenant people, which includes even the youngest of children.

- The sign of circumcision that God gave to Abraham was one that could only be applied to males, but represented the whole household. Though a woman couldn't be circumcised, were she to be married to a man who was circumcised or born to a father who was circumcised, she was considered a part of the people (e.g. Ruth).

- There is no direct command given to stop the marking of Abraham's descendants, God's covenant people. We, the Christian church, are Abraham's descendants and God's covenant people. [Galatians 3:7-9, 29](#) and [Romans 2:28](#). [Romans 11:11](#) ff. is also a great passage to see how we we are Abraham's descendants and part of Abraham's family, the true Israel. It seems, then, that if the covenant promise applies to us, as we are Abraham's descendants whom God says should be marked throughout generations as an everlasting covenant, then the sign and command God gave to mark his people still applies.

- While many OT laws have been done away with, this is only true of laws that have found their completion in that to which they foreshadowed. Whereas the moral laws (e.g. love your neighbor, do not murder, etc) never go away since those are tied to the nature of God and are an eternal obligation for us, other laws, the ceremonial laws, were instituted by God to foreshadow a future truth or accomplish a particular purpose in time. I believe Jesus would agree with this notion, as in [Matthew 5:17-20](#), he declares that he did not come to abolish the law, but rather to fulfill. So while Christ did not come to give us freedom from our moral obligations and do away with the OT, he did come to be the true sacrifice that freed us from the ceremonial obligations we were

required to fulfill due to our guilt, and he came to bring to fullness the covenant God made with his people so long ago. This is why we no longer sacrifice animals for our sins. That was accomplished in Christ. Hebrews is a great book to read on this topic for further reference.

- Circumcision, however, was commanded of God's community prior to the clear Mosaic Law and institution of the ceremonial law. It's the first command God gives to his people upon establishing them, and this command is not a foreshadowing of any idea that was completed. As long as new individuals are brought into the community through proselytization or through birth, there will be a need to mark God's people. This command is meant to incorporate new members into the visible community of God's people, whether proselyte or newborn. We continue to have new members added to God's visible community today. This command that was given to Abraham so long ago has not found fulfillment and is therefore still applicable.

- Since we have a command given to God's people that has not been nullified through direct command or the completion of Christ's work, the burden of proof lies on those who are against infant baptism to explain how God's command to mark a segment of his visible community who have always been included, is now nullified today - or how that command can be seriously hogtied and diminished by restricting individuals who were to be included in God's original directive, namely children.

- Those who advocate for infant baptism often point to baptism as a continuation of circumcision, and therefore consider that baptism is the adherence to God's command to circumcise, or mark his people. Circumcision was instituted to mark those under God's covenant. Baptism was instituted to mark those under God's covenant. Circumcision doesn't save. Baptism doesn't save. Circumcision represented the cutting away of wickedness (circumcision of the heart). Baptism represents the regeneration of the heart and the washing away of wickedness by the blood of Christ, or a consecration unto God. While the bloody rite of circumcision is not continued in the same form, it is continued in the same vein. As Christ accomplished his work on the cross and prepared a place for us by interceding on our behalf for the Holy Spirit to come upon us, we now have a marking not of our own blood and our own flesh, but of Christ's blood coming upon us through the Spirit's work. The mark of baptism represents the same thing, but is applied via a different mode because God has now fulfilled his promise to send his Spirit to circumcise not our flesh, but our hearts. Therefore, our own blood need not be shed, but rather the blood of Christ must come upon us just as all people and instruments of

old were sprinkled with the blood of purification and consecration. As we explore some of the scriptures in the next section, you will see how baptism and circumcision are sometimes linked together by the biblical writers.

- Romans 4 is a nice passage that helps us to see how the application of baptism can make sense with infants. While I have already argued that baptism is a continuation of the command to consecrate a people unto God, it is still hard for many immersionists to imagine baptizing infants, as they associate baptism with a professed personal faith in God. But [Romans 4:11-12](#) helps us to see how God would likely view such an event if baptism were intended for infants of believers. In Romans 4 Paul writes, "[Abraham] received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised." We see that circumcision was a sign that God gave to all of Abraham's descendants, not because they were a particular nationality, but because their father had a particular faith. The faith of Abraham's descendants was looked forward to through the rite of circumcision. Notice how the Bible says that Abraham is the father of those "who are not *merely* circumcised." Circumcision was the sign of the covenant, not the guarantor of faith, as we also see that it was not this circumcision that saved anyone, but rather having the same faith as Abraham. Despite the fact that circumcision represents a promise only to believers, and not all of Abraham's descendants believed, yet all Abraham's descendants were still marked with circumcision. The sign of belief preceded belief and was administered prior to belief for most (only proselytes were circumcised after belief). The NT is clear that if we have faith in Christ's work, we are descendants of Abraham. Despite the requirement of faith, God still instituted that a visible sign be issued for the visible community who came together to worship him, which in the context of scripture, seems to include our children as well.

- When new converts in the NT, especially Jewish converts, heard that there was a mark of baptism that brought them into this new religious community, all of their history and culture would have screamed to them that this mark was for their children as well. It only makes sense that if God's directive had changed to exclude the children of his people, the Apostles would have made the new parameters clear. Yet they use the language of family. [Acts 2:39](#) shows this very clearly when it is said that the new believers should be baptized, as the promise of God is for them and their children. It is

for everyone who enters the visible community. While credobaptists often argue that they would require a direct command from God to baptize their children, I wonder why their stipulation isn't rather that they require a direct command from God to stop incorporating their children into the visible community as had been done for millennia prior to the NT, and for the first 1,500 years of church history following the institution of baptism. The majority of Christians (Catholics, Orthodox, and many Reformed Protestants), for the majority of church history, have baptized infants.

**God's Mark on His People Under the New Covenant:** The main argument for the baptism of infants, then, is that we are simply continuing in the directive and symbolism that God has instituted and never expressly retracted. Though that concept is vital to discussing the argument for infant baptism, I now want to move into the mode of baptism, which I argue is done by having the element (water) come upon the object (individual being baptized). Paedobaptists (those who baptize infants) will argue that just as we can assume a continued directive as to the objects of God's mark, so we can find a continued directive as to the mode of God's mark. Since the bloody mark of circumcision seems to be done away with ([Galatians 5:2](#), [Acts 10](#), [Acts 15](#), [I Corinthians 7](#)), I will argue that the mark of water is a continued symbol from the OT by exploring how water or other elements were used to mark in the OT, as well as what those markings represented.

We will also be looking at what baptism is intended to represent in the NT and see if we can use the OT marking practices to help us understand the context of the NT marking practices. While proving the mode of baptism doesn't prove the object of baptism, the symbolism represented in the mode of sprinkling and representing a continuation of OT ideas would lend much credibility as to the objects of baptism. I do want to acknowledge here that I am not at all arguing that immersion is a forbidden means of practice. In fact, some of the earliest church literature speaks of immersion. However, the early literature also speaks of pouring. What seems to be most important is that there is moving water. As you will see in the "Church History" portion, one of the earliest church writings, the "Didache," implies immersion, but commands that this immersion be done in "living water," or running water. The importance of the water in baptism seems to be, then, that the element is coming upon the individual - running over, poured over, coming on, etc - not that the individual be completely submerged.

You should be aware that while there is enormous agreement on infant baptism in terms of both number of Christians who hold to it and the length of time to which the

belief was held in the early church, the mode is much more debated. Though it does seem that immersion was preferred in moving water, as I said, it seems that the movement of water was the most important. It's the common theme you tend to find in baptismal practices. It is also interesting to see that while the Orthodox tend to strongly favor immersion, the Reformed favor sprinkling, and the Catholics seem not to care too much in practice (though on paper they favor immersion), all modes are accepted by these churches. Catholics by and large don't care how you got wet, the Reformed generally don't care how you got wet (though different pastors may refuse to administer via certain modes themselves), and the Orthodox care a bit more that immersion be done, but pouring or sprinkling are accepted exceptions. In my opinion, such openness to the mode of baptism implies that the symbolism of baptism is found in what connects these modes. Again, I will argue that historically this thread is that the water is coming upon the object. This is obvious in sprinkling and pouring, and through historic immersion it came through being immersed in moving water. Many immersive practices have moved away from flowing water, even in the historic Orthodox church, but it seems this was the intended practice.

With all that being said, I am going to argue for sprinkling as the favored mode. But what is most important is to recognize that this is representative of the "coming upon" language which could also be symbolized via pouring or immersion in living water.

- [Ezekiel 36:22-32](#) is a good picture with which to lead. The passage describes Israel's sin, their need for God's salvation and restoration, and God's promise to clean them and lead them into a restored land. While some of these aspects were likely an initial prophecy for an Israel that would be exiled, there are also many elements that make it appear to be a double prophecy in that it describes a far future promise of God's Spirit and a truly restored kingdom. In this passage we see a few interesting connections to God's promised Spirit. 1) God says that he was going to sprinkle Israel clean. It is often his mode for symbolizing cleansing, consecration, and making an object holy. 2) God turning our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh - the same language used along with circumcision when God tells us he will circumcise our hearts - is sandwiched right between his declaration of sprinkling us clean and his giving of the Spirit, and is often the imagery used to show God's future work of sending the Spirit. 3) God's promise to put his Spirit within us. So we see a sprinkling clean, a connection with circumcision, leading to and seemingly symbolizing God's sending of the Spirit upon his people.

- [Acts 2](#) is another great place to look at baptism, as we can see a very long chain of

events occurring. What is interesting is that when you look at the broader scope of these passages that mention baptism, you often find that the Spirit is playing a major role in the overarching theme of the passage. Acts 2 is probably the best example, as it heavily emphasizes the spirit and baptism. The Spirit comes upon the believers at the beginning of the chapter, Peter goes into discussing God's promise of the Spirit being poured out on believers, and then he references Christ's death and resurrection, but only to highlight that *Christ's conquering of death was his key to providing us with the Spirit*. Christ's exaltation to God's right hand has given him the Spirit to pour out. At the conclusion of all this Peter tells them to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. This baptism theology highlights the emphasis of God's Spirit being poured out and of baptism symbolizing an application of God's work for the forgiveness of our sins.

- [Acts 11](#) and [Acts 1](#) also provide us with more theological context. In both Acts 11:16 and Acts 1:4-5 we see the author discussing how believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit and baptism are linked together time and time again. It is also interesting to see in [Acts 8](#) how believers who had been baptized in the name of Jesus alone had not received the Holy Spirit (it actually says the Holy Spirit had not come upon them yet). This is one reason the Orthodox church only views as valid those baptisms which are done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We also see such a requirement in one of the earliest Christian documents, the [Didache](#) (point 7). This idea of the Spirit and the coming upon or pouring out of baptism are linked time and time again in the book of Acts and throughout scripture.

- Outside of Acts we also see baptism linked with both the idea of the Spirit and the idea of being come upon. In [Matthew 3](#), during the baptism of Jesus, we see that immediately following his baptism, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and came upon Jesus. The passage also declares that Jesus comes to baptize us with the Spirit and with fire.

- Many immersionists attempt to deny sprinkling because there are several places in the NT where baptism is linked in some fashion with Christ's death and resurrection. We'll explore those instances next. But before we do, it is important to note how the application of cleansing and consecration were done in the OT. The Ezekiel passage above says that sprinkling was performed, and this is the common mode used for such an occasion. For a quick reference, [here are about 30 other verses](#) that discuss the mode used for applying blood for the purpose of cleansing or consecration. To be



baptized into a sacrifice's death and to be made clean and brought to new life, time and time again blood was applied via sprinkling.

- There are three commonly used references to deny the links above between baptism and the Spirit, and attempt to show that the mode of baptism should correspond with the burial and resurrection of Christ though the symbol of immersion. I Peter [3:18-22](#), Romans [6:1-14](#), and Colossians [2:9-15](#) are used frequently for this case, though upon closer inspection, they maintain this greater theme of the Spirit's work. The I Peter reference is interesting because it's just a complicated one to begin with. It uses some weird language and ideas. The passage isn't even about baptism, but rather suffering while being righteous and doing so with a clear conscience. When baptism is mentioned, however, it does mention Christ's death and resurrection in there. But it does so with two bigger ideas in mind. First, it highlights how this baptism is for washing, but not for physical washing. It represents the clean standing we have before God. And how do we have this clean standing? It isn't through Christ's death and resurrection alone. This is a minimalistic view of Christ's work many evangelicals have. Rather, Christ's work of death and resurrection allows Christ, the sacrifice, to plead his blood before God the Father. Just as a priest killing a sacrifice meant nothing in the OT without the priest's application of the blood before God, so Christ's death and resurrection were nothing without his application of the blood before God. We saw this in Acts 2 above - the notion that Christ's work was intended to exalt him so he could send the Spirit. Hebrews is also replete with the notions of Christ's application of the sacrifice, with [9:11-15](#) one of many great examples, as we see Christ's blood sprinkled on us before God, by the Spirit. The Spirit is almost always (or maybe always) the person in the godhead who is associated with water, application, or cleansing. Linking all of our symbolism (Eucharist = death and suffering, baptism = death and burial, change of the Sabbath day = commemorating the resurrection) to Christ's sacrificial work not only minimizes the rest of the godhead's work, it also minimizes Christ's extremely vital work of intercession, which without, his sacrifice would mean nothing. To the West's detriment, we have often become Christocentric to the exclusion of the Father, and especially to the exclusion of the Spirit.

The context of the I Peter passage is intriguing, and when fleshed out it really doesn't seem to be the great support of credobaptism that it is claimed to be. It could be an interesting mention in a cumulative case for credobaptism, but as it stands, it seems like a wash on its own. But what's really cool about this passage, and the reason I lead with it, is because Peter provides us with some amazing context about Christ's work, the Spirit's work, and our participation in it. He provides this context a mere two chapters before the I Peter 3 passage. While he doesn't mention baptism, he explicitly lays out a

few key concepts about how a believer is born anew and who does what in this process. If baptism represents our participation in Christ's work, then it's important to understand this work, who does what in the process, and what symbolisms are present and/or valid.

In [I Peter 1](#):1-3, Peter says, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." So believers are sanctified (set apart, consecrated, etc) unto God by whom? The Spirit. Does this have anything to do with Christ's work? Yes, it involves his blood and through him God gives us a new birth through Christ's burial and resurrection. And how is Christ's blood applied to us? We are sprinkled with his blood.

Now I'm not going to overstep what this passage is saying. Peter by no means says that our baptism is supposed to be via sprinkling. But what Peter does show us is that even in Christ's burial and resurrection, the application of that sacrifice was applied just as it had been through the whole OT, via the sprinkling on the objects of mercy. This new life comes to us through the Spirit as he circumcises our hearts and indwells us, just as the believers of old needed the Spirit's work to soften their hearts of stone and make them hearts of flesh. Peter has no qualms here associating Christ's work with a sprinkling, so I don't see why so many immersionists think the whole imagery they put forward is scriptural. The very same author of one of the three "buried and raised" baptism passages lays out very clearly that such a thing is not so. While the remaining two "buried and raised" passages don't have the same level of clarification, I think you'll find that the broader context significantly undercuts their weight as an immersionist argument.

- As far as Romans [6:1-14](#) goes, this section must be taken in light of all the other evidence. While Paul does mention baptism, burial, and resurrection in close proximity, it is clear that he is making a theological point rather than a prescriptive point that supports immersion. In the context of the passage, Paul is discussing our death to sin and our consecration unto righteousness. We have new life. It is just as easy for me to draw the conclusion that Paul is not speaking of immersion here. When you read Romans 6 in light of [Romans 8:11](#), the notion that this passage supports immersion becomes extremely

suspect. In Romans 8 we see Paul talk about the resurrection of Christ. And how was Christ raised from the dead? He was raised by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon Christ to raise him up to new life. It is the Spirit's application of the blood that is life-giving, not Christ's death and resurrection alone. Christ's death and resurrection secured the Spirit for us, but it is the Spirit's work that resurrects. Arguably, when Romans 6 mentions baptism and resurrection together, it is just as easy to view this as a passage promoting baptism as being primarily the Spirit's symbol rather than Christ's symbol. Such a thing becomes even more likely in my mind as I read down through Romans 6:11-14 and see Paul's discussion of presenting our bodies as instruments which are consecrated to God. Such a notion screams of the OT consecration of the altar and instruments as they had an element sprinkled on them (see also the book of Hebrews), or the people as they had the blood of the sacrifice applied to them. At best, the passages are inconclusive when taken on their own due to the symbolism that also emphasizes aspect of consecration and the Spirit's work. But taken in the context of all scripture and the whole passage from which these verses are pulled, I believe these few verses used to support immersion become much more clearly a support for a baptism by sprinkling or pouring, where the element comes upon the object.

- **Colossians 2:9-15** is the last major verse used to argue Christ's death and resurrection are the focal point of baptism and best represented through immersion. If you just look at verse 12, it would be very easy to conclude (like in the Romans 6 passage) that Paul is showing us that baptism is done through immersion. But once again when we take this in full context, it becomes much more intriguing. First, it's important to note that once again this is not a passage prescribing how baptism should be done. It's filled with symbolism and metaphor. The passage, like the one cited in I Peter 3 and Romans 6, is putting baptism in the context of our freedom from sin or our death to sin, and our freedom in Christ and the resurrection. What's interesting about the passage in Colossians however, is that we see circumcision appear right alongside baptism, and it is used in a parallel manner. In fact, baptism is the example sandwiched between two instances of circumcision. In verse 11 we see Paul say that we were "circumcised" not literally with human hands, but figuratively by Christ himself. In verse 13 Paul comes back to that idea and discusses how God has circumcised our hearts. In the very middle of those two instances Paul mentions that we have died with Christ through baptism, and we are raised with him through faith. So we have a passage that Paul states is figurative. In the examples he gives, Paul's point is that our hearts needed to be trimmed of our fleshliness. Refer back to I Peter where he mentions being put to death in the flesh but made alive in

the spirit. Circumcision represented a death or a cutting away of the flesh, and baptism is a making alive in the Spirit. The cutting away of the flesh looked to a coming upon of the Spirit, as our hearts of stone were circumcised and filled by the Spirit to become soft hearts. We are sinners in need of cleansing. Yes, Christ's death and resurrection were vital in accomplishing this cleansing, but as we saw in other passages, so was the work of the Spirit. The Spirit is the application of Christ's work. The Spirit is what has been promised from ages ago as the one who would come and circumcise our hearts rather than our flesh. And as we read down through verse 14, Paul brings up our legal indebtedness, which once again takes our minds to the sacrificial system God instituted to foreshadow Christ's work. The death of the lamb was important, but no object was made clean or considered "alive" and consecrated until the blood (or water or oil ) was sprinkled or poured upon it.

- Even if we would concede that baptism is intended to depict a burial in its mode, it would still beg the question as to whether immersion best represents this idea. It seems anachronistic to believe that immersion is an accurate representation of burial and resurrection with Christ. While the imagery makes sense to us, as we are buried under dirt, would such a symbol make much sense to those often placed in above ground holding places? Under what element were they buried that would make being submerged under water a good symbol? In some ways we might consider sprinkling as depicting death and life more symbolically for the largely Jewish audience of the NT. The blood cleansings to which they were accustomed often involved the slaughter of an animal with the application of its lifeblood done via sprinkling on an instrument or individual. While the blood applied was representative of death, it was also representative of life. For the death that was dealt was administered to the sacrifice, yet it represented a new life for the one upon whom it was a substitutionally sprinkled. The sprinkling of an element (now water, formerly blood) upon an individual likely conveyed the notions of death and new life to individuals much more so than the anachronistic notions we attempt to impose upon their culture of being buried under the dirt. While one might argue that the depiction intended in immersion is a lying down and a rising up to symbolize death and resurrection rather than a submersion under dirt, that would then cause me to question how that links to the symbol of being immersed under a substance.

- While there are a handful of verses that link baptism with Christ and/or his death, burial, and resurrection (as seen above), there are two observations that diminish their weight for immersion in my mind even more. First, the language used in these passages is "into

Christ" or "buried with him in baptism" and differs from the language used with the Spirit, "by the Spirit" or "with the Spirit." That is an important distinction because one describes the method and the other the result. To paraphrase, we are baptized with the Spirit or by the Spirit into Christ's death and resurrection. A great place to see this is **I Corinthians 6:11** where we see that we were washed and sanctified. How or by what? "By the Spirit," but in the name of Jesus. Being washed, sanctified, and justified are all concepts bound up in Christ's death and resurrection, so of course death and resurrection are important. But it is "by the Spirit" that these things are applied to us. It is the Spirit's work that provides us participation in the death and resurrection of Christ through his application to us and through our regeneration.

Second, to focus on the few verses that associate baptism with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection overlooks the verses that directly associate baptism with the Spirit, which are just as numerous. In fact, I believe I have shown that in all places where we see baptism linked with Christ's burial and resurrection, we have also seen mention of the Spirit or Spirit's symbolism right alongside these mentions. Yet we see a number of places where baptism is mentioned alongside the Spirit without reference to burial, death, or resurrection. It seems very unfair to cherry-pick only the verses that associate baptism with burial and resurrection, or to say that these verses are somehow far more weighty and indicative of the mode than the multitude of other verses that emphasize the Spirit. For reference, here are some of the verses I found that link the Spirit directly with baptism: **Matthew 3:11**, **Mark 1:8**, **Luke 3:16**, **John 1:33**, **Acts 1:4-5**, **11:15-16**, and **19:1-6**, and **I Corinthians 12:13**.

- As I mentioned earlier, we often view Christ's intercessory role in an incomplete manner. He is not just the sacrifice represented in the Eucharist, he is the application of the sacrifice which I believe is represented through baptism. Christ's work was not completed on the cross or upon rising from the tomb, it was completed when he fulfilled his final role as our great high priest by interceding to the Father on our behalf. If Jesus Christ died and rose again, we would still be lost. A high priest not only makes a sacrifice, but makes intercession on behalf of an individual. Jesus's death and resurrection are only a part of his work, though a very important part. His pleading of the sacrifice before God on our behalf is the part that fulfills his high priestly role. This idea was a game changer for me. Not only was it one of the major ideas that helped to propel me towards the Reformed faith, it also more importantly helped to shape my view of the godhead. John Owen argues this notion very profoundly in his work, "**The Death of**

**Death in the Death of Christ.**" As you look through Hebrews and the OT, I think that notion of consecrating a people will become more clear, and that understanding will help give you a fuller view of God and the work that he does as a godhead. To help you look a little further into the topic I want to give you a few starting points for looking up how the Spirit is connected to consecration (often of a people or of instruments), and the language used for the work of consecration (coming upon, pouring out, sprinkling, etc). **Hebrews 9:19** , **Proverbs 1:21**, **Isaiah 32:15**, **Isaiah 44:3**, **Ezekiel 39:29**, **Joel 2:28-29**, **John 1:33**, **Mark 1:10**, **Titus 3:6**, **Acts 2:16**.

- After looking at all of the scriptures that deal with the Spirit and with washing, and after having laid God's view of his former mark of circumcision being given to his visible people, though he knew some would not believe, I now want to turn to **John 13:1-20**. Although this technically isn't called a baptism, I want you to take a very close look at the language Christ uses when he washes his disciples feet. There are four main things you should notice. 1) Jesus says that what he is doing is to wash his disciples. This is obviously figurative as he tells Peter that if the disciples don't have their feet washed then have no part in Christ. The washing here went beyond a simple foot washing. It was representative of Christ's work and a relationship with him, as he states that it was to cleanse and that if one did not participate, they were not a part of him. 2) Jesus declared that this cleansing was done by merely washing a part of his disciples, not their whole bodies. They were not submerged for such a cleansing or for an association with Christ to take place. 3) We are told that Jesus washed the disciples' feet, which at this time, included the disciple who would betray Jesus, Judas. So Christ expressly stated that this symbol represented a washing and a communion or relationship with him, yet he knowingly symbolically washed the one who would betray him - on the very night he would betray Christ and right before Christ knowingly declared this betrayal. Jesus knowingly marked Judas into himself with the knowledge of his soon to be, damnable apostasy (turning away without repenting, unlike Peter who repented for his betrayal). 4) After Jesus declares that all who he has symbolically washed are not truly washed or are a part of him, he states that "...I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me." The symbolic washing of the disciples, while representing a relationship with Christ and a washing, was really a looking forward to the sending of the Spirit. The true believer isn't the one who is symbolically marked, as Jesus himself even symbolically marked and washed an unbeliever. Rather, this sign looks forward to and represents the means whereby true believers will receive salvation and assurance of their washing and relationship. The

symbol of belief and communion was given prior to full belief, and was even given to one who had already apostatized in his heart.

In summary, Jesus symbolically cleansed and considered his disciples a part of him by applying water to a small part of them. He was even willing to apply this symbol to someone who didn't truly have a believing relationship with him. And finally, this act's symbolism found fulfillment in the future when and if the Holy Spirit was manifested in the ones whose feet were washed. The mark is not what washed or brought one into relationship, but rather the Spirit who Jesus said would soon come and would be accepted by those who were truly washed and truly believed. While I am not going to claim that this is baptism as we're attempting to lay out for believers today, it does give us insight into context, symbolism that would have been familiar to the disciples, and theological ideas and how they can be represented at times in the Bible. In this light, the baptism of infants could make perfect sense. We baptize infants who are part of the visible community, through the application of water to a small part of them, representing the Spirit's future work to cleanse them and bring them into relationship with Christ, even though we know that some of them will apostatize and never have a saving faith.

- It seems strange to have significant changes in customs and symbols that revolve solely around Jesus. While Jesus is very important, he is God just as much as the Father and the Spirit. To focus solely on Christ seems to border on hierarchicalism/subordinationism, a mistake that emphasizes one of the godhead without an appropriate weighting of the others. Emphasizing the substance, work, or importance of the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit above the other is extremely problematic for our theology. At the moment, we have the Eucharist that commemorates Christ's death and the change of the Sabbath day to Sunday which commemorates Christ's resurrection, and is a day on which we go to worship God, with worship mostly directed towards the Father. Yet for many immersionists, there is little to nothing instituted that acknowledges the vital work of the Spirit. In fact, for most non-charismatic denominations that practice immersion, the Spirit is generally only referenced as a catchphrase in prayer or Christian talk that simply means "I felt." "The Spirit lead me to do X," for most of us, just means "I felt like I should do X." Our paedobaptist denomination, and me personally, also have a huge problem with diminishing the Spirit. But infant baptism is always a wake up call for me as to the objectivity of the Spirit's work and importance. It is a fantastic reminder that God gives to me through his use of symbolism.



**Why Children of Believing Parents Can Receive the Sign of the Spirit:** If the sign of baptism is immersion and given based on our profession alone, then infants should not be baptized. But if, as I have made the case above, the sign of baptism is moreso a sign of what God is to do to us and for us through his Spirit, then it seems quite appropriate to baptize the children of believers. Children of believers have been given the mark of God before faith since the time of Abraham, but they were only ever given the mark because of faith - the faith of their parents. The Psalmist discusses in several places his connection to God from childhood or before his birth. Paul says that he was set apart by God even before he was born ([Galatians 1](#)), and says that all believers were chosen in God before the foundation of the world ([Ephesians 1](#)). The idea of God's covenant with us and his salvation unto us as being done at a moment in time is true from a particular perspective, but God's promise and his call on us, while not effected until later in our lives, is placed upon us from even before our birth. It makes sense, as with circumcision, to mark the children of believers - children for whom God's covenant holds true, and for whom their faith should be anticipated and expected. In their own right, children of believers are set apart because they join in the visible community of God, at least for a time, even if they eventually apostatize or never come to true faith.

I know that this application is hard to handle for many in our culture who strongly emphasize individualism and decision over community and communal responsibility (this may be why we have such difficulty in sympathizing with criminals who are result of broken systems, as they made *their own choice*, or accepting any culpability for past and present endemic and systemic racism). In any case, I want to lay out how God's view of a covenant family allows him to apply his mark to all members in the visible community.

- Many credobaptists get hung up on the idea that infants don't have faith yet and therefore their standing shouldn't be considered differently than any other nonbeliever. They understand that God gave circumcision to infants in the OT despite their lack of faith, though faith was necessary even then for salvation. But what is really cool is that God, in the NT, makes very clear that he views the children of his people differently. His view has not changed from the OT. In [1 Corinthians 7:14](#) we see Paul say, "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy." The children of at least one believing parent are considered as set apart and distinct because their parent represents them before God. As Peter said to the crowd who were to be baptized, this is a promise to you and your



children. This makes a lot of sense theologically. If Adam represented all of humanity, showing us what we all would have done if given the same opportunity, then we are all guilty. Unless you ascribe to the heresy of Pelagianism and don't believe that we are born in sin, then you believe we are born in a particular manner based at least in part on the one who has represented us before God (Adam). We are born in a different state than Adam was created because of Adam's actions and our descent from him.

In some ways this doesn't seem quite fair to most of us, as we didn't commit the sin of Adam. Yet we were in Adam. We come from Adam. And because of this - because of the fall - before anyone is born we can already be 100% confident that they will live a life of choosing evil. It is who we are. While this guilt in Adam is an unfortunate truth, federal headship (our actual standing due to our representative's standing) is also awesome because though through one man (Adam) we are all sinners, this representation allows us all to be redeemed through one man (Christ). Were any of us placed in Adam's position, we would have sinned, so to be represented by Adam looks beautiful to me. Why? Because federal headship, or representation, is vital to our salvation and is one of the ways in which God works. If representation on our behalf would not function in Adam unto sin, how could it function in Christ unto righteousness? If God had a system that could only ever view us based on our individual merits and not through representation, how could any be saved without a representative if we all would have sinned on our own anyway?

Knowing what I know, that God tends to work through families and he sets them apart (sanctifies, consecrates, etc), knowing that God calls the children of his children "clean" and "holy," and knowing that my God is powerful to initiate and save, I trust that my children have been called to him even now, should they die before faith is possible. If the Spirit could cause John the Baptist to leap in his mother's womb, surely he can work in my children. I am not reliant on my child's faith to save them. If I were, what children who died could be saved? Rather, I am reliant on God's mighty hand to seek and save the lost, in whatever condition those lost may be. And if my children do live to see a day where they have the capacity to place their trust in God, I trust that God will effectively call them to a faith in him.

**Contextual Evidence Shedding Light on Baptism:** Contextual evidence is, in my mind, the weakest of all the arguments I will put forward. In and of itself, context of the

distant past often involves a bit of conjecture. We have to fill in the gaps with what we think we know of the time, place, and people, as details of the text are often too sparse to paint a whole picture. However, when you add contextual evidence to the rest of the cumulative case, it tends to be the glue that holds everything together. If you can interpret a passage two different ways, then you get a story that applies some of the concepts in a real life example, that story can sometimes provide the context to shed light on unclear passages. The passages where we see baptism applied can help to shed light on what is actually said in the unclear passages, as we get to see what the authors of the NT actually did (or may have done). I provide several instances below that hit on both the mode and the object.

- Many put forward the Ethiopian eunuch as an example of immersion ([Acts 8:26](#)). The only reason such a concept is drawn is because the passage says that "they went down into the water" and "they came up out of the water." Ironically, I believe this passage is one of the most powerful pieces of contextual evidence for sprinkling, as there are three facts from this passage that make sprinkling much more probable than immersion. 1) We see in verse 26 that the eunuch is traveling in Gaza, on a "desert road." We know that Gaza has very little running water, and especially not much water of significant depth for immersion. I imagine that a "desert road" may have even less water than average for this region, assuming it is aptly named. It seems extremely improbable that the eunuch would have been able to find such a significant amount of water for immersion from where his chariot was stopped. 2) The eunuch had just been reading from Isaiah. Yes, the short passage quoted from where he was reading was from Isaiah 53, but it seems highly likely that the eunuch didn't just open his scroll down to that particular passage. More than likely he was reading through the whole book of Isaiah - which didn't have chapter breaks at the time. And what is the context of this section of scripture? Well, right before we get to the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, we see that the suffering servant idea actually starts at the end of [chapter 52](#). And what does it say? It says that this suffering servant will "sprinkle many nations." In context, then, the eunuch was trying to figure out who this suffering servant was, as being from a nation outside Israel, he knew he had hope in this redeemer because this suffering servant promised to "sprinkle many nations." "Why then," this eunuch must have thought, "should I not be sprinkled?" While we can only imagine the conversation between the eunuch and Philip, what little information we do have makes the scenario I laid out highly likely. There is no context to think immersion was on the eunuch's mind, but there is reason to think that sprinkling was. 3) The passage says that both Philip and the eunuch came up out of the water. To many, that sounds like it must indicate immersion. But was Philip baptized

and put under the water as well? The passage says that they both came up out of the water. Of course not. Rather, they likely walked down the bank into the ankle deep water they may have found in the largely barren land, and then both walked up out of the water, up the shallow bank.

- Some cite Jesus's baptism as an example of immersion where he "comes up out of the water" in [Matthew 3](#). Just as with the eunuch example it's easy to see that John the Baptist likely also came up out of the water yet he wasn't baptized. It makes more sense that we're speaking of walking down a bank into the water and back up out. Christ's baptism in [Mark 1](#) makes this notion of consecration even more convincing as we see that immediately following Christ's baptism, the Spirit drove him into the desert. This seems to extend the notion of being set apart or dedicated to God. When you couple this with the imagery of the Spirit coming upon Christ given directly in the passage, as well as the OT consecration through sprinkling, Christ's baptism makes just as much, if not more sense as a sprinkling/pouring instance.

- The logistics of mass immersions seems highly improbable. Not only are some of the places mentioned for baptisms watered sparsely or with shallow water, but the multitude of individuals who were baptized could not have been handled logistically (or at least such a feat is hard to fathom). When John the Baptist baptized the masses that he did in the short period of his ministry, or when Peter baptized the 3,000 or so converts after his sermon, how was everyone baptized so quickly? With hostility by the Jews in some of these regions, access to a public water supply of sufficient size and for a sufficient time to immerse a crowd, the lack of sufficient water supply in certain regions, the great masses in need of baptism, or the logistics of decency when baptizing by immersion (did the mixed crowds disrobe to get baptized? Did they bring a spare change of clothes? We're often not talking of planned baptisms but rather baptisms at the spur of the moment). In [Hebrews 9:19](#) we see how baptism could have been easily accomplished by a sprinkler with such logistical limitations. They could simply take a hyssop branch, as would have been familiar to them from some of their customs in the OT, and after dipping it in the element, waving it over a large number of people. You can see more [verses on hyssop here](#), and you can notice how it commonly accompanies water or blood and sprinkling. Such a method not only makes much sense out of how the large congregation of Israel may have been baptized during some of their public ceremonies, but also how John the Baptist or Peter could baptize so many people in such a short period of ministry. Waving a hyssop branch over a crowd could make very short work of baptizing a crowd the size of the one Peter baptized. It could also be done

with very little water in this manner and with no issues in regard to spontaneous baptisms as it related to decency or clothing changes.

- The notion of baptism as a consecration seems clear. While consecration or setting apart may involve cleansing from sin, some examples in the OT show a sprinkling or pouring used for a setting apart of rather than a cleansing of. Anointing by pouring oil over one's head is the first major reference that comes to mind. [Matthew 3:15](#) declares that Jesus had to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness. If Jesus was not in need of a cleansing from sin, the symbolism represented under immersion is difficult to explain. Did Jesus need to die to his sinful self on the cross as depicted in an immersive baptism? [This site](#) goes into a much more detailed explanation of why Christ would have to be baptized. I think it is worth pursuing if you find this aspect interesting. If light is shed on Christ's baptism it may also help to shed some light on how he intended baptism to be done for his followers if his specific baptism is prescriptive for us. Even if Christ's specific baptism isn't for us, understanding that the process and symbolism aren't what most credobaptists claim today is helpful to undercut their argument.

- Consecration along with cleansing make sense of the family baptisms we see. [1 Corinthians 1:16](#) and [Acts 10](#) show us two baptisms where households were baptized. We find also find two household baptisms in [Acts 16](#). The second baptism in Acts 16, the one of the Philippian jailer, is the most interesting for our discussion. When the jailer accepts the gospel, he and his *household* were baptized. Now if it were just the jailer and his wife, we presume the word "household" would not have been included. Presumably there were others in the household, possibly children. While that is a nod towards a potential example of the baptism of individuals under the representation of their believing parent or head, though of course that is inconclusive, it also takes away credibility from immersionists. If the jailer was in charge of watching the jail - the jail that just had all the prisoners unlocked on its own - it's the middle of the night, there is a decent chance that in a "household" either children or elderly are present - then were they really to go down to a river or some other significant body of water in the middle of the night (also considering they likely didn't have swimming pools, so any sufficient body of water was likely very public)? Paul is in jail, so obviously the region is pretty hostile to Christianity. What kind of scene would an immersive baptism require and how does that work logistically? While none of these household baptisms say that infants or children were involved, and none of the baptisms say that sprinkling or pouring was the method, it seems very likely that there were some who were baptized in at least one of the households who could not believe due to their age. And in the case of the Philippian

jailer, it seems that immersion was most likely not the method used.

**Church History:** When looking at church history it's important to note that just because a respected church father wrote something about a topic and just because something was common practice early on doesn't mean it was right. The theology of the trinity is a great example, as it wasn't fully fleshed out until several centuries after the Apostles. There were many who held some strange views early on as they wrestled through difficult doctrine. That being said, there are a few important ideas we can draw from the church history about baptism that we see below.

1) There doesn't seem to be a ton of very early documentation about the mode of baptism or about the objects of baptism. Sure, the Bible talks about believers being baptized (and households), but if there weren't any Christians prior to this time, you would expect all of the baptisms to be of new believers. Of course you wouldn't see infant baptisms even if infant baptism was believed, as you didn't yet have any significant number of Christian parents having children. Belief and baptism would go hand in hand because there weren't yet established families in the church bringing their children in large numbers to be baptized. But beyond that, if nothing is explicitly mentioned, it seems more natural to assume that the mode and method are that which is common throughout the whole of scripture. I have yet to find a place in the Bible where immersion is used to represent the Spirit's consecration of something, and I have yet to see where God forbids the children of his people to enter into his visible community. A silence as to the mode and object seems to indicate that the mode and object were common and continued and didn't need to be detailed for the people to change.

2) You'll notice that some of the men quoted below were alive within one to two generations of the Apostles. That is very important, as these men are living at a time as it lends more credibility to their understanding of what the Apostles taught. A closer proximity to what was originally taught means that it would be harder to change commonly understood practices without serious push-back.

3) When we do see baptism mentioned in the early church, the references are often not just the individual arguing for their view, but rather describing thoughts on or observations of what is common practice within Christendom.

4) You will notice that some of the respected church fathers did view baptism as washing someone clean and saving them. But then again, who can blame them when

they're reading passages like I Peter 3:21. While this idea is not something I advocate, the merits of such a theology is a different discussion to have. This wrong view doesn't negate the speaker's observation that the church throughout its early history was practicing infant baptism. As a good analogy, think about early church history and the trinity. The early church was littered with [trinitarian heresies](#). Was Jesus fully man and fully God or was he just God in a man body? Was Jesus distinct from God or was he just God in a different mode? If Jesus was distinct from God and not just another mode, then was he still the same substance as God? If he wasn't of the same substance, were there then two Gods? Who can blame the early church for trying to interpret the specifics of a trinitarian theology. Yet we wouldn't view this confusion and inappropriate theology as evidence for the trinity being false. There was obviously a core belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were God, they just didn't know how it worked. I would argue that the same thing is true with infant baptism. You will see from the quotes below that infant baptism was extremely common from a very early point in church history. While we have a limited number of texts from the first and second centuries, by the third and fourth we begin to compile a plethora of documents that solidify this notion that infant baptism is the common practice of the early church. Yes, there are heresies that accompany this (see Origen's quote below). However, while various heresies come and go surrounding the nature of what infant baptism and baptism in general symbolize, the common thread is that infant baptism is in the air and is being discussed. If you want to throw out infant baptism for the reason that it has, at times, been accompanied by heresies or that there were times of uncertainty, I can't see how you can cling to the trinity - or most other Christian doctrine for that matter. Heresies and mistaken ideas are prominent as doctrine is hashed out. Infant baptism seems to be established as the main practice of the church around the same time that our current understanding of the trinity was hashed out, as well as the same time the Canon of scripture as we know it was recognized and solidified. Around the time that church councils are trying to pull everything and everyone in Christendom together, you see infant baptism is almost the universal practice for the next 1,000 years. While these church fathers could have been wrong, you can't do what many immersionists do and attempt to call infant baptism a corruption of doctrine at a time when the church and its leaders were particularly nefarious. If you want to make such a disparaging and sweeping statement about these men, you must also say "goodbye" to the canon and the trinity for the same reason, as the same men who solidified these ideas helped solidify the practice of infant baptism.

5) I have found a number of immersionist counter-quotes from the early church fathers that are put forward as examples favoring believer's baptism. The problem I have with

many of these is that they often seem inconsequential. Many of the quotes discuss fasting or repenting before baptism, which any paedobaptist would agree is a good thing for an adult convert who is coming to Christ. Showing that there were stipulations for adult believers to be baptized says nothing about whether children of believers were baptized. Second, the early church was trying to figure theology out. They didn't even nail the foundational doctrine of the trinity until the fourth century. They had some pretty clear parameters for it, but it was still very complex. My goal here isn't to use any quotes to trump other quotes or passages of scripture. I simply want to show that the idea of infant baptism didn't just come out of the blue. It was mentioned, discussed, and practiced throughout church history. To some, it was one of the commonsense applications of baptism. It was not some far later doctrine that arose during a particularly nefarious time in church history. Third, as you will see with some of the quotes below, there was an idea that went through the early church which said that baptism washed away your sins. Everything you did after baptism became problematic for you. For this reason, a number of early church fathers thought it best to wait until as late as possible to be baptized. Knowing that this idea was floating around during part of this time period, you have to ask who is being quoted and what was their belief on this. If they believed that one should be baptized later in life so they would be more clean, then of course they would want to discourage paedobaptism. And finally, a few church father quotes do nothing for your case if you don't have a significant case to begin with. I have laid out what I believe to be an extremely substantial case up to this point, and now I seek to bolster it by looking at church history. Immersionists can throw around a few church father quotes if they want, but until I see a substantive case for which those quotes can support, I won't be convinced on a few quotes alone.

- The "[Didache](#)," 7:1-7:7. I've seen this early document dated as early as 70 and as late as 150. It is the earliest church document outside of the NT of which I am aware. It appears to be a church handbook, of sorts, describing early practices. It is important to understand that this is a snapshot of one early church. Just because something is written here doesn't mean it is gospel truth. However, it does give us a glimpse as to what at least one early church practiced. While this document doesn't specifically mention infant baptism, it does highlight a few interesting things. First, baptisms were supposed to be done in living water (or running water). Second, baptisms were to be done in the name of the trinity, not just Jesus. If you couldn't make it to running water, pouring over the head from standing water was legitimate.

There's not too much you can conclusively draw, but again, given the context I've laid

out, I'd like to think some of these elements fit nicely. The emphasis on living water and pouring seem to imply that the symbolism here is more about a coming upon and a quickening. It's a cleansing. We don't want standing water. We're talking about the Spirit coming upon you and cleansing you to new life. I also think the emphasis on the trinity is huge. I've seen plenty of churches make baptism all about Jesus, because if you're an immersionist that's the scope of the symbol. From my point of view and from those beautiful passages on baptism that show the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit together, I think this wholistic picture of the trinity's work is much more accurate.

[Most of the following taken from [this site](#)]

- Irenaeus, the disciple of Polycarp who was the disciple of John the Apostle, born around 100. "He [Jesus] came to save all through himself; all, I say, who through him are reborn in God: infants, and children, and youths, and old men. Therefore he passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, sanctifying infants; a child for children, sanctifying those who are of that age . . . [so that] he might be the perfect teacher in all things, perfect not only in respect to the setting forth of truth, perfect also in respect to relative age" (Against Heresies 2:22:4 [A.D. 189]).

- Justin Martyr, born around 100, not only likens baptism to circumcision, but says that they are to be received in the same way. "We have not received a carnal but the spiritual circumcision by baptism - And it is enjoined to all persons to receive it in the same way."

- Hippolytus, born around 170. "Baptize first the children, and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them" (The Apostolic Tradition 21:16 [A.D. 215]).

- Origen, born in 184. "Every soul that is born into flesh is soiled by the filth of wickedness and sin. . . . In the Church, baptism is given for the remission of sins, and, according to the usage of the Church, baptism is given even to infants. If there were nothing in infants which required the remission of sins and nothing in them pertinent to forgiveness, the grace of baptism would seem superfluous" (Homilies on Leviticus 8:3 [A.D. 248]).

"The Church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants. The apostles, to whom were committed the secrets of the divine sacraments, knew there are in everyone innate strains of [original] sin, which must be washed away



through water and the Spirit" (Commentaries on Romans 5:9 [A.D. 248]).

- Cyprian of Carthage (born around 200). "As to what pertains to the case of infants: You [Fidus] said that they ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, that the old law of circumcision must be taken into consideration, and that you did not think that one should be baptized and sanctified within the eighth day after his birth. In our council it seemed to us far otherwise. No one agreed to the course which you thought should be taken. Rather, we all judge that the mercy and grace of God ought to be denied to no man born" (Letters 64:2 [A.D. 253]).

- Augustine (born around 354). "What the universal Church holds, not as instituted [invented] by councils but as something always held, is most correctly believed to have been handed down by apostolic authority. Since others respond for children, so that the celebration of the sacrament may be complete for them, it is certainly availing to them for their consecration, because they themselves are not able to respond" (On Baptism, Against the Donatists 4:24:31 [A.D. 400]).

"The custom of Mother Church in baptizing infants is certainly not to be scorned, nor is it to be regarded in any way as superfluous, nor is it to be believed that its tradition is anything except apostolic" (The Literal Interpretation of Genesis 10:23:39 [A.D. 408]).

"Cyprian was not issuing a new decree but was keeping to the most solid belief of the Church in order to correct some who thought that infants ought not be baptized before the eighth day after their birth. . . . He agreed with certain of his fellow bishops that a child is able to be duly baptized as soon as he is born" (Letters 166:8:23 [A.D. 412]).

"By this grace baptized infants too are ingrafted into his [Christ's] body, infants who certainly are not yet able to imitate anyone. Christ, in whom all are made alive . . . gives also the most hidden grace of his Spirit to believers, grace which he secretly infuses even into infants. . . . It is an excellent thing that the Punic [North African] Christians call baptism salvation and the sacrament of Christ's Body nothing else than life. Whence does this derive, except from an ancient and, as I suppose, apostolic tradition, by which the churches of Christ hold inherently that without baptism and participation at the table of the Lord it is impossible for any man to attain either to the kingdom of God or to salvation and life eternal? This is the witness of Scripture, too. . . . If anyone wonders why children born of the baptized should themselves be baptized, let him attend briefly to this. . . . The sacrament of baptism is most assuredly the sacrament of regeneration"

(Forgiveness and the Just Deserts of Sin, and the Baptism of Infants 1:9:10; 1:24:34; 2:27:43 [A.D. 412]).

- Those are just some of the quotes from the first 350 years of church history by some of the more recognized church fathers. You can find some more quotes [here](#) or in the books I recommend at the end of this post. Needless to say, very early on, the theology behind the inclusion of children into the community, the association with circumcision, and infant baptism were the recognized church tradition. This was not something that developed a millennium later by a devious church alongside things like indulgences.

### **Archaeology:**

- I would have loved to do a whole section on archaeology in the early church, but as there is so much reading to do on that and most of the books are pretty expensive and my time is thin, I'll just give it mention here under "Church History." There seems to be a lot of back and forth between immersionists and others as to the interpretation of two relevant components of early Christian creations. The first is the art Christians used to depict baptism, and the second is the structure of the ancient baptisteries.

It is interesting that we find plenty of Christian art that depicts a pouring of water over an individual's head. It is also interesting that many of the pictures that depict Jesus's baptism show him standing in hip-deep water (he could have been immersed or there could have been pouring), but most of the pictures I have seen depict the water as flowing. To me, this seems to bolster the fact that one, baptism via pouring was an early and accepted practice, and two, that even if there were baptisms via immersion, a vital part of such a baptism was the movement of water. I find it interesting that the mode of pouring/sprinkling/immersion could vary, which seems impossible if the symbolism is intended to directly depict the burial and resurrection of Christ. However, the one thing that seems to be continuously important is the movement of water.

- There is also a lot of archaeological back and forth on the structure of early baptisteries. While we do find baptisteries that are large enough for immersive baptisms, we also find baptisteries that seem far too small to be used for immersion. Again, this seems to indicate that while immersion may have been present, sprinkling or pouring were also legitimate. I think the whole debate between immersion only and sprinkling/pouring only misses the evidence, and even worse, misses the whole point. It is pretty clear that there is no well-defined winner. There wasn't just immersion or just pouring. The significance, rather, seems to lie in the concept of moving water, the

common thread in each of the applicative modes.

- Beyond the direct creations of the Christian community, there is also a big discussion focused on the development of immersive baptism in the Jewish community. While sprinkling or pouring far outweighed the use of immersion in the OT, and immersion was typically prescribed for priests after a particular ritual or for garments, it seems that immersive rituals eventually made their way into Jewish practice. The earliest archaeological evidence I saw cited was a Jewish baptismal pool dated between 50 and 150 BCE. It's likely that by the time of Jesus, immersion was practiced on a larger scale. While the OT doesn't prescribe baptism for proselytes, it appears as though immersive baptism eventually made its way as a requirement for proselytes and is still practiced in Judaism today.

While immersion may not have been foreign to the Jews during Christ's time, there are a few interesting items to observe. First, the notion of living water seemed to be present also in the Jewish baptisms. They did not fill their pools up with drawn water, but rather designed them to be filled with springs or by rain. Second, when baptism for proselytes gained popularity, infants and children began to be included in this ceremony. A proselyte and their whole household were baptized - making the use of the word "household" seem even more clear in the "household" baptisms of the NT. I did see mention of some other reasons for baptizing infants that weren't related to being a proselyte as well. Finally, the Jewish baptisms tended to be related to cleansing or washing. They took this so seriously that the one officiating often would not place their hands on the individual until after they were completely submerged. They didn't want to risk that even one spot of their body wasn't touched by water (which may be the sort of idea Jesus was pushing back against when washing Peter's feet?). But the point is that this idea of washing or regenerating seems much more indicative of the Spirit's symbolism and work. If we're going to try to use Jewish practice to paint a picture of Christian practice, it still doesn't look good for the immersionists.

[This site](#) is about the best free site I could find that details much of what I've mentioned. But again, this sort of angle is a harder approach due to the lack of readily available research. In the end, I don't think the Jewish baptisms do much to overturn the case of infant baptism. In fact, they seem to support such a notion. While they do lend much more credence to the preference for immersion in the early church, their use of living water still speaks volumes to the symbolism intended in baptisms that comports more with the position I've laid out.

I understand that I don't provide much here for easy follow-up. It's definitely an area you should pursue in research if you're interested. Let me know what you find!

### **Possible Rebuttals:**

- I see several ways one can try to avoid the great weight of the cumulative case I have laid out above. The first is to argue that Israel and the church are different entities. This is how John Piper argues. I think the multitude of passages that call us Abraham's offspring, the true Israel, etc, should be weighty enough to determine that there is at least a huge similarity which warrants a continuation of such an important directive as that of marking the visible covenant community. In fact, we know there is. Even if baptism isn't a direct continuation of circumcision but rather a new way of marking God's people, both ideas are still accomplishing the same type of thing. Even if the church is distinct in some ways from the covenant community of Israel, I don't see how we escape the similarity of the requirement to mark community members, and I don't see how we can mark members in a way that is less inclusive than before. The marking of the covenant community now includes women and anyone who professes faith. The gospel expands, not contracts the scope for inclusion. How sad for the covenant community of Christ to expel those whom God formerly included in his community - infants and children - from the markings of the visible community.

- The second way one can avoid the cumulative weight of the argument is to look for "zingers." For instance, one might refer to Naaman's washing to cleanse himself from leprosy. The Bible says that Naaman "dipped himself" into the river. Did he do this according the way God intended lepers to be cleaned by sprinkling ([Leviticus 14:1-7](#))? I haven't looked into this particular passage much, but assuming there were no other explanations and there was no other context provided to argue against immersion here, what would this passage by itself prove? Exceptions do not make good rules. A cumulative case is one that is not disproven on one example written in a passage that is not intended to speak to the issue at hand. That's what I feel is done with the three baptism and burial passages (I Peter [3:18-22](#) and [Romans 6:1-14](#) [Colossians 2:9-15](#)). It seems like it is often a small snippet or phrase is observed and clung to without looking at the style of passage (descriptive, prescriptive, figurative, etc), the context of the passage, or the context of the broader Bible in general. If you have a, "but XX verse says this," unless that verse is a directive given by God, and unless that one verse comes with a clear context, then you're going to have to do a lot of work building your own cumulative case that becomes more weighty than the one I have laid out here. Verse

wars and "zingers" are no good. Most of the time this tactic is simply people looking for easy outs and taking verses out of context. As one of my favorite apologists says, "Never read **A** Bible verse." You must always read with context in mind.

- The third way some try to negate the cumulative case is by pointing to the Greek word used for "baptize," *baptizo*. In almost all of the literature of the time the NT was written, the usage of *baptizo* in secular literature meant "to immerse." While that may be the case in secular literature, John Church makes a compelling argument for why this is rebuttal carries little weight in the discussion. You can buy his book "Why Baptize by Sprinkling" on Amazon, or find it [online for free](#). Several of the other sources I link at the bottom also address the issue of *baptizo*, but I think Church does the best job. Church says,

We have given these illustrations and have said these things in order that we might say this; it is our contention that the word *baptizo* is not use in its classical sense in the New Testament. A long time before Jesus ever came into the world, this word had undergone a change in meaning and had come to have a very definite religious significance. The Jews had once spoken the Hebrew language and expressed their ideas through this medium. However, a long time before Christ came, the common people of the world had adopted the Greek language as the medium for expressing their thoughts. When the Jews changed over from the use of Hebrew and came to use the Greek language, they did not find a Greek word that exactly conveyed the idea of ceremonial cleansing or purification. They were in need of a word to convey this idea, for it held a very important place in their religious life. In their search for such a word they adopted the Greek word *baptizo*, and used it to convey the idea of ceremonial cleansing or purification regardless of how it might be done. In the days of Christ they did not use the word in its classical sense, but they used it to express the idea of cleansing or purification. When a Jew was *baptized* he was *cleansed*. This was the major meaning of the word to him. He was not so much interested in how it was done as what was done. He might be baptized either by sprinkling, pouring or immersion, but the thing that counted most with him was the fact that he had been cleansed. This was the idea the word conveyed to his mind. This was the way he thought about it. A careful study of the way the word is used in the New Testament will verify the thing we have been saying. The translators of the New Testament recognized this fact and, in many instances in the King James version, they use the English word *wash* where the Greek gives it *baptizo*. We have already called attention to three instances in the New Testament where this is the case. In Hebrews 9:10 the Greek gives the word *baptizo*, but

in English it is translated divers washings. In Mark 7:4 the Greek word *baptizo* is used but in our version it is translated *washing*. In Luke 11:38 the Greek used the word *baptizo* but in English it is translated *washed*.

In fact, anywhere you find the word baptize in the New Testament you can take that word out and insert either the word cleanse or purify and it does not change the meaning of the sentence in the least. As an illustration let us take the statement of Christ in Acts 1:5 "John indeed baptized (purified or cleansed) with water; but ye shall be baptized (purified or cleansed) with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." Now while you can do that, and it does not change the meaning, yet you could not insert the word immerse and not change the meaning of many sentences. For the question would naturally arise, immerse in what? There is no water in the word immerse. You might immerse a person in many different things. Neither is there any water in the word sprinkle, for the same question would arise. Sprinkle with what? However, there was water implied in the use of the word baptize as the Jews understood it, for it had come to convey the idea of ceremonial cleansing with water. When a Jew had water sprinkled on him, with a bunch of hyssop, he was baptized. He had been purified or cleansed. This was the meaning of the word as it was used in the days of Jesus. This word had come to have this definite meaning a long time before Christ ever came. It had been used to convey this idea to the minds of the people. This is illustrated in the case we have mentioned from the book of Judith. She washed herself at the horse trough by sprinkling, but the historian calls it baptism. Josephus tells us of people that were baptized and he says it was done by sprinkling, and yet he uses the Greek word *baptizoin* speaking of it. These two illustrations show us how the word was used by reliable Jewish writers at that time. It is not used in its classical sense but has a different meaning. It conveyed a definite idea to the minds of the people in the days of Christ. When they heard and used the word they were thinking of cleansing or purification, regardless of how it might be done. Now this is the meaning we are most concerned about. We are not so much interested in how Socrates used it and what it meant to him, but we are very much concerned about how Jesus used it and what it meant to the people that heard him speak.

The *baptizo* argument is interesting and is an ok component to have in a cumulative case for immersion. But placed against the great weight of the cumulative case for sprinkling and infant baptism, I just don't see that it holds up. It relies on applying a specifically secular usage to the term that isn't applied in every biblical passage where the term is used, and wasn't the way the Jews used it in replacement for their various

ceremonies that sprinkled or poured. Even in the NT, [Hebrews 9](#) provides a wonderful example. In Hebrews 9:10 we see *baptizo* translated as "washings," referring specifically to ceremonies in the OT that were not immersive. Moving on to 9:13 makes this ever more clear, as the author parallels Christ's blood with these ceremonies and discusses how his blood is "sprinkled." With all of this context I just think the *baptizo* rebuttal holds little to no weight.

- The fourth argument is probably the most common I hear, and it is focused what some perceive as the unhealthy consequence of ascribing to infant baptism. There are many denominations and individual churches where infant baptism is viewed as a saving work. Some churches want to baptize a child very quickly because they believe this act will ensure their salvation should the child die. While this is undoubtedly a view held by many churches which practice infant baptism, it is a terrible argument against the practice because we could point out all sorts of good works that are turned into something that takes the focus off Christ. Some churches view baptism in general as a saving work. There are plenty of churches that don't baptize infants, but who view baptism of converts as a necessity for salvation. Does this disprove baptism? When I was growing up our evangelical circles glorified the sinners prayer. I doubted my salvation for a good decade because I was taught (in not so many words) that it is my sincerity that saves me. Christ wasn't good enough for me, so I spent ten years trying to muster up enough of my own faith and sincerity for him to accept me, but I could never be sure I had enough. Does the idolization of individualism, a sinner's prayer, and faith mean that these things are wrong in and of themselves? Of course not. The misuse of a practice by no means disproves it. All practices and denominations have pitfalls that accompany them.

- The fifth argument I've heard is that since circumcision was still advocated by some in the early church, baptism was clearly not intended to take the place of circumcision. However, I don't think this is a good argument. First, even if baptism isn't a continuation of circumcision, it doesn't mean it couldn't run parallel to it. God marked his people Israel in one way, and he marks his people in the church in another way. Continuous or parallel, it doesn't matter.

But I don't think we need to even fall back that far. It makes complete sense to me that the Jews in the early church would have difficulty leaving things behind. Yes, Paul mentions circumcision, but he also has to work hard to stop the churches from fighting over all sorts of emphases on works, observing feasts, etc. There was a lot of conflation

of the old and new, the law and grace going on. I would expect to see circumcision continued by some even if it was replaced by baptism, as circumcision was a law in the OT and Christian Jews and judaizers had a tough time being free in Christ and moving into his work and his grace.

- The final way I see to escape the case I have put forward is to say, "Yes, the evidence is very weighty for sprinkling and/or infant baptism. However, I just think that the symbolism changed." Fair enough. It is possible that the symbolism did change. I cannot provide a zinger to show that baptism should be done the way I have advocated. All I can do is provide the full weight of a very cumulative case. Christ's burial and resurrection are very important and I can understand the beauty that comes along with the baptism of immersion and the baptism only of believers (though I think it is less beautiful than the alternative I have offered). I cannot show with 100% certainty that the case I have laid out is correct. But if you are unable to build a weighty rebuttal to what I have put forward, I think it is important to take another look at the evidence and do some serious searching as to why you believe what you do, and what your view of and parameters for truth and faith are. One of the biggest complaints lodged against Protestants by the Catholic and Orthodox churches today is that we have so many denominations because we all like to interpret things on an individual basis rather than in light of church history and the broader context. We like to pick the parameters for what we believe, and when faced with a weighty case against us, we fall back to our own interpretation and feelings. I feel as though there are many well-intentioned Christians who, in an attempt to paint a beautiful Christocentric picture centered around individual choice, demolish the intended picture of the full godhead, the sovereignty and power of God in his work, and the inclusion of our children into the covenant community. You lose far more than you gain when you change God's intended depiction.

### **Conclusion:**

God's covenant has always been for his people and their children. He has always incorporated even newborns in the visible community. At the same time, he has always been clear that it is faith that is required to be his true people, not any outward symbolism. Despite God's requirement for our individual faith, he expressly views the children of his people as distinct. The outward symbolism is then not something we do for God, but a recognition of God's promise towards us and our children. Just as the circumcised Israelite's blood was shed and flesh removed, so a savior's blood would one day be shed to put our flesh to death and to circumcise our hearts. Infant baptism is in



keeping with this beautiful theme of including the children of believers in the covenant promise of what God must do for them to be saved, and what God has promised to do should those with the outward sign seek to be in true relationship with him through personal faith. Infant baptism upholds the continuity of God's work throughout scripture. It refuses to subordinate the importance of the OT to the NT, but rather allows each to shed light on the importance and connection of the other. This view makes God's work a continuing work rather than a segmented one, and it ensures the emphasis of the symbol is on God's work towards us, not our work towards him. God does this work through the Holy Spirit, as Christ intercedes with his own blood for the Holy Spirit to come upon us and wash us clean in the sight of God. We are Christ's instruments sprinkled and consecrated before God for his use. We can see from the many references to baptism, circumcision, and the Spirit how these notions go together, and how consecration and the Spirit almost always involve a coming upon by the element, not a submersion of the object under the element.

Like the Old Testament, The New Testament has little or nothing to say in the way of immersive symbolism, and absolutely nothing to say directly in terms of the mode of baptism. We do know that households were baptized. We do know what the Jewish mind would think about who God's covenant is for. We do know the logistical issues immersionists would have in the mass baptisms or baptisms in dry places, not to mention the issues future generations of Christians would face in following Christ's commands. What do Siberians do to immerse themselves? What do nomads or those who live in sparsely watered areas do to immerse themselves? What have some North Koreans who have been under close watch or who have been converted in prisons do to immerse themselves? We do know that the passages that seem to link baptism with the idea of burial or resurrection are also linked with the Spirit and consecration or washing. We do know that the earliest records of church history seem to indicate that infant baptism was an accepted practice. In fact, it isn't until the mid 1500's that we really see immersion and believer's baptism come on the scene with force, in what seems to be an overreaction favoring personal decision because of the tyranny believers had experienced within the overbearing and corrupt church at the time. Immersionists simply swung the pendulum too far as humans are prone to do, throwing off too much church tradition and losing biblical continuity for personal interpretation. Rather than throwing off only the late creations of man (e.g. indulgences), the immersionists threw off a well-established practice that is much easier to link to the Bible and the Apostles than their immersionist mode and method.

The context of everything screams for the symbolism of moving water, and screams for the inclusion of our children. While this isn't a primary issue in Christianity, it is extremely important. Baptism is one of the two sacraments many protestants recognize, and we take the other sacrament, the Eucharist, pretty seriously. God intends to speak to us through the sacrament of baptism as well as through the Eucharist. In fact, all denominations but some of the modern Evangelical denominations view the sacraments as a special means of grace given by God. While it's too long to explain what that means here, in essence, the majority of the church for the majority of history have viewed the sacraments as being a special means of real grace that God gives to his people. To the majority of the church, the sacraments aren't just symbols, they're God's real interaction in a mysterious way with his people. It is vital that we listen to what he says as he says it, not turn his symbolism and interaction with us into what we think it should be, potentially turning the godhead into a hierarchy that emphasises the work of the Son and diminishes or subordinates the work of the Spirit.

The evidence, to me, shows that baptism represents a promise of God for his cleansing to come upon me and wash me - to consecrate me to himself - a promise he gives to my children as well if they come to a faith in him, and as they even now are - through both heritage and practice, are a part of the visible church and called holy by God ([1 Corinthians 7:14](#)). While I understand where immersionists are coming from, I often feel as though this aspect of the view of children is what hurts their position the most. A Christianity that views children as distinct from the church until their faith is declared tends to treat children differently. Whether stated or unstated, children are outsiders. That message they receive - whether explicitly stated or merely implied - I believe has a significant impact on them. There is a great satire on the way we often view children today in our culture ([here](#) and [here](#)) and hits on the potential message we send our kids by viewing them as not yet part of the visible community and holding them up to the standard of "Christian" even before they profess faith, despite nearly all of church history contradicting such a methodology. While no Christian parent intends ill for their child, the way we believe God views our children is vital to shaping how we view our children as well as how we view our God. I believe that a theology of baptism that incorporates children is not only most biblical, but also helps us to create a view of children that is less dismissive, less patronizing to them, has higher and more appropriate expectations, and is more spiritually healthy.

In the end, the most important thing is that you trust in Christ as your lord and savior

and that you obey his command to be baptized and discipled. That is why I love our denomination's stance on baptism. If you come from the baptist church down the road where you were immersed after a profession of faith, we won't baptize you again. In a somewhat similar vein to the Augustinian response on the [Donatist controversy](#), we recognize that the power of the sacrament of baptism isn't in the mode or the one administering the sacrament, but rather in the source of the sacrament - God himself. Whether you were baptized in a Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Orthodox, or Catholic church - whether you were baptized by immersion, sprinkling, or pouring - or whether you were baptized by a serial killer pastor or Jesus himself - it doesn't matter. So long as the baptism was administered in good faith (baptism by a priest of Satan, baptism in a universalist church if they do that thing, baptism by an unordained five year old sibling, etc) without a reason to doubt that it was done in the name of the trinity, we won't baptize you again. Baptism is from God. While we believe the symbolism he intends is meaningful and important, to place more burden and requirements on this symbol would seemingly undercut the beauty of the grace God intends to show us through it. I pray you will consider this issue beyond what God requires of you and figure out what God is trying to teach you and lovingly show you through his commands. He is a wise teacher who loves us and our children.

#### **Resources:**

[Testimony of a Paedobaptist](#) - This is a good article that discusses why a pastor changed views from immersion to paedobaptism (infant baptism). He doesn't take the discussion as broadly as I've laid out above, but he takes some of the points and goes into more depth.

[William the Baptist](#) - A step by step approach using story format focusing mainly on sprinkling and pouring. This is from the 19th century and may be a bit difficult to read.

[The Impotent Argument Against Biblical Baptism](#) - A more logical and partitioned argument focusing mostly on infant baptism. This is from the 19th century and may be a bit difficult to read.

[Why Baptize by Sprinkling](#) - A good look at the mode of baptism. This book does a particularly good job looking at the semantics of the text, particularly at the meaning of the word *baptizo*.

[Difficulties About Baptism](#) - This takes a pretty comprehensive look at baptism, as I hope I have done. The author may provide different nuances that may be helpful.