

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

A POSITION PAPER EXPLAINING SACRED JOURNEY'S APPLICATION OF THE HISTORIC PRACTICE OF INCLUDING CHILDREN IN THE COVENANT COMMUNITY

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5/2010

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this position paper is to answer the simple question of whether or not the Church should baptize the infants and small children of Christian parents. As such, this paper does not really address concerns of new adult Christians, but rather those from evangelical and baptist persuasions who have been taught that the church should not be baptizing their children. The bigger question behind these concerns is really whether or not Christian parents should include their children in the Church. It is the position of Sacred Journey Church that the biblical and historic answer to this question is a resounding yes. The following will show both historically sociologically and theologically the critical import of including our children in the Church as that best path to the potential and ultimate salvation of their souls.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a great deal of disagreement and debate regarding Baptism since the time of the Reformation. Most flavors of Protestants, whether they be mainstream evangelicals and Baptists who will not baptize infants, and those who still do like the Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Reformed Church, all disagree with Roman Catholic baptism. This is because of the implications of "baptismal regeneration." This is the idea that the child receives the Holy Spirit and new spiritual life by the operation of the Church and its authority rather than the exercise of faith. In other words, in baptismal regeneration, the baptism creates faith in the person. All evangelicals and protestants hold the general protestant dictum that salvation comes through justification by faith alone.

The point which evangelicals and protestants disagree often on is the question of whether or not to include the children in the church through Baptism. We must underscore the biblical doctrine agreed on by most on both sides of the debate, that Baptism identifies a person with the Church and therefore constitutes membership in the universal church. It is generally agreed upon by all evangelicals that if you are baptized you are part of the church, and if you are not baptized, you are not. In this proposition, we are speaking of membership in an earthly physical local body of Christians. This is to say, that baptism does not make you saved. Where it get fuzzy is that for most evangelicals and Baptists, baptism is documentation of being saved, where for the Reformed (my position) it does not even document my personal salvation but is actually a call to the person and the entire church to "be saved." In effect, as a

sacrament and sing of the covenant, it calls the entire church to active repentance and faith. It is not monument saying "this person has faith."

The real point of disagreement between those who baptize their infants, and those who don't is the question of whether or not a person can be allowed in that visible, physical local community through baptism even though they are not yet old enough to make a personal expression of faith. For those who will not baptize their infants, the answer is "no they cannot be included." For those who do, it is a clear "yes they must." This is because those who do baptize their infants know that outward expression or confession, while it may partially indicate a person's faith, it never does accurately or objectively. In other words, we can never really know beyond a shadow of a doubt that every person who confesses Christ actually is "saved" or "regenerated." In fact, the New Testament makes it clear that the Church is at all times inhabited by those who do not actually believe the Gospel. Jesus' parable of the four types of soil makes this patently clear (Matt 13:1-23).

Also in Acts 8:9-24 we also see Simon the magician who "believed" the Gospel, and was baptized, but then tried to buy the Holy Spirit. He then later apostatized and became one of the early Church's first heretics. This is an important New Testament example because it demonstrates a person who expressed "belief" in the Gospel message, was admitted to baptism and continued for some time as a disciple and then apostatized. This example clearly shows that that refusing to baptize someone until they can express a so called "credible profession of faith" is at best naive. The text says Simon believed and was baptized, but even the Apostles were not able to identify this wolf in sheep's clothing. Also we may note that John 6 records the story of the departure of some disciples at the offensiveness of his teaching on eating his flesh and drinking his blood. According to 6:66 "many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him." In fact, 6:64 states "for Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe." The point is, in each of these cases, it is clear that an expression of faith as an adult is no guarantee of authentic faith. In each of these cases, people had expressed faith and a will to follow the Gospel to a point, but at some point turned away. Most importantly is that when they are called disciples it implies they had been baptized. These people who turned back and eventually rejected Jesus and his ministry had first been baptized as disciples. This makes very clear that during Jesus' own ministry, there was no naive attempt to try guarding the purity of the church by withholding baptism until a profession of faith or some expression was made. More also, neither was this kind of suspicious and probationary approach to administering baptism employed in Acts. As Act 8 demonstrates, even the apostles could not see a false conversion of Simon. At every turn, the authenticity of faith is tested over time in the context of a discipling community. This leads us to a simple conclusion that the Church is not able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart and must leave that to God. Furthermore then, baptism was not used as a symbol of an individual's personal faith, but of the faith and identification with the local body.

So then this forces us to ask a critical question: How was baptism applied in ancient Judaism and Christianity? Did they exclude their children from the covenant community because they had not yet expressed faith. Or did they in fact include them in the covenant community through baptism, bringing them into the process of discipleship so they could grow up to embrace the faith. This latter position is the

correct one and what is suggested here. In this study below, we will begin with a sociological analysis of the practices of baptism current in Judaism from which context the Christian faith grew out of. Here we will see how in the practice of proselyte baptism, the governing principle was to include the whole family in conversion. We will then move to showing how this is based in a very biblical theology of the family. This is to say, that this paper does not seek to answer all the questions concerning baptism, but one in particular, which is objectively showing historically, sociologically, and biblically how Judaism and the early Church did in fact baptize both converts and their infants and small children based on the biblical principle of the family solidarity. It should also be noted here, that while a great deal of theological argument can be made for baptism and inclusion of the infants of Christian parents, we have by and large sidestepped that here for the sake of time. The reason is that theological arguments can be quite subjective, but historical, sociological and textual documentation provide an objective window into what the Church did, rather than mere conjecture.

PART I. BAPTISM IN SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

One thing that we should consider at the outset is the plurality of meanings and usages for baptism in New Testament times and how those converge upon Christian baptism. The reason this is important is because it is typical of many interpreters to emphasize a particular idea as “the meaning” of Christian baptism, to the dismissal of others. We need to allow that while certain meanings may become prominent, that there still are a diversity of meanings that may and should be allowed to exist side by side together.

By the phrase “Second Temple Judaism” I refer to the culture and practice of Judaism during the time of the second Jewish temple, Herod’s Temple in Jerusalem that existed before and for some time after Christ. Biblical scholarship recognizes this as the social and cultural world from which the New Testament comes. The New Testament and Christian spirituality was not created in a vacuum, or as Paul himself says to Herod Agrippa “for this has not been done in a corner” (Acts 26:26). This being the case, it behooves us to try understanding this social and cultural context from which Christian practice, and especially baptism arose.

Closely connected with this social context is the general perception of the apostolic and early Christian faith in its Jewish cultural milieu. In other words, as it is generally agreed by historians and sociologists of New Testament Christianity, the early Christians thought of themselves as devout Jews who were practicing the same faith that had been handed down for generations, namely Judaism. They neither saw themselves as heretics, much less inventing a whole new mystery religion in reaction to Judaism. In Jerusalem especially, they continued to keep the sabbath and even gather for worship within the Temple. When Paul set out on his missionary journey’s, his usual first target of contact within a city was the local synagogue (Acts 13:14), and if that was not available, then any groups of “God fearers” (Acts 16:13). Paul’s message was not a repudiation of the faith handed down to them, but the proclamation of the arrival of the long awaited Messiah and fulfillment of those ancient promises (Acts 13:16-43). This self perception is extremely important in how the early church practiced its faith,

especially in the adoption of the Church's standard practices like baptism that grew out of the Second Temple milieu. The New Testament does not ever lay down a single definitive statement on the meaning of baptism, mainly because much of it was already understood within the culture and therefore taken for granted. One complexity that we must also consider in this regard is that since there were various forms of baptism, the ideas that church adopted concerning baptism was an amalgam of not only new reflection and teaching on the person of Jesus, but also ideas from the broader Palestinian and Hellenistic Jewish cultures. Most importantly, how the early Christians understood themselves to be Jews experiencing the long awaited promises naturally would have great impact on their adoption and use of standard ideas and practices within their thought world.

To the surprise of many Christians then, baptism is not unique or original to Christianity. Christian baptism comes from the standard practices of Second Temple Judaism where there was widespread and various usages of the rite. It has its root in the Old Testament laws of handling ritual uncleanness, for example Lev 15:10-11. Baptism, or *mikveh*, as it was known in the Hebrew culture, was a regular part of devout, and even nominal daily Jewish religious life. One could not even enter the Temple without submitting to the waters of *mikveh*.

One practice that was particularly influential upon early Christian practice was Judaism's process of adapting gentile converts or "proselytes" into the ranks of the covenant people. The normal process for taking in the regular male convert was through the practice of three separate rites, namely circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice.¹ The practice had two main ideas associated with it. First was a removal of the sins of the former life. The second, according to the Mishnah, was the entry into a "new birth".² As Christians, we can easily see the thematic similarity of both these major ideas which come up within the New Testament theology of baptism. In Rom. 6:4 Paul

¹ *Mekilta* on Exod. 12:48; Pat. E Harrell, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," *Restoration Quarterly*, vol. 1:4 (1957) 160. The major contents of the Mishnah are from collections of Sages' opinions between the fall of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. through the end of the second century, and so it has been attempted by some to suggest that proselyte baptism postdates the New Testament era, but these are mostly for apologetic reasons rather than good historical scholarship, for discrediting connections to early church practice of infant baptism. While we recognize that compiling of this material postdates the fall of the temple, as "oral law" which was understood to be passed down for some time, it still concerns itself with many subjects that were only relevant when the Temple was still standing and the center of Hebrew worship and culture. In regard to proselyte baptism, among the requirements listed above, sacrifice was only relevant while the temple was standing and therefore indicates a tradition no earlier than its destruction in 70 A.D., but realistically well before considering the conservative nature of Judaism at the time of Christ. H. H. Rowley also observes in the Mishnah tractate *Pesachim* (law concerning the observance of Passover) that there was a debate between the schools of Hillel and Shammai of whether or not a proselyte could partake of the Passover sacrifice based upon how long he would remain unclean after his baptism, which also implies a problem that originated prior to the destruction of the Temple though Hillel and Shammai both postdate it. H. H. Rowley, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John," *Hebrew Union Annual*, vol. 15 (1940), 316.

² The Mishnah is the standard religious instruction regarding regular practice of the Jewish religious customs preserved from Second Temple Judaism and is still the central authoritative body of tradition in Judaism next to the Hebrew Bible. Pat. E Harrell, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," *Restoration Quarterly*, vol. 1:4 (1957) 162; Mishnah tractate *Yebamoth* 48b

speaks of the same removal of sins, but through the work of Christ, and 1 Pet. 3:21 speaks of the similar idea of “new birth.”

Another important idea in proselyte baptism was the new identity of becoming a Jew through the process. This is very important for a couple of reasons. First it implies that the ritual was not merely symbolic, but efficacious. This means that not only does it symbolize, but it also is an event that brings about a new state of being and identity. It did not merely observe that the person was a Jew but in a very sacramental and legally declarative way, it made that person a Jew.³ Secondly, this efficacious act then made the gentile a participating member of the covenant community, Israel.⁴ In other words, they were placed within the people of God. Not surprisingly we see a very similar idea used in Galatians by Paul, who had the best Jewish theological education one could have in Second Temple Judaism.

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

What is important here, similar to standard Judaism's proselyte baptismal practice, is the waters of baptism are an entryway into a new identity. The Christian rite is of course infused with new meaning to connected to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and the theology of the new covenant. But just like proselyte baptism, as Paul says here in Gal. 3:29 “you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.” Put simply, through baptism they have become children of Abraham. This must be taken for what it is, a strong similarity, which represents a shared common theological stock, and not exact equivalents however.⁵ Our purposes here is just to take note of the common cultural and theological collateral between forms of baptism in both Second Temple Judaism and New Testament Christianity. Most importantly also, is that while appropriated and infused with new meaning in light of the cross and the resurrection, the functional use is fundamentally the same. This is to say that both conferred a new

³ This observation was made by Oscar Cullman of Karl Barth's misunderstanding of Christian baptism. Barth is often overzealously quoted by Baptists because of his denial of infant baptism as a Reformed Theologian. However Barth weakly argues in his work on the subject that baptism only had “cognitive significance” toward the recipient and then somewhat embarrassingly uses the granting of citizenship by a state as his example. Understandingly, Cullman seizes on this exegetically exposed position and shows how citizenship is an actual act that confers real responsibilities and privileges and is not a mere title. He then shows throughout the rest of the chapter how Christian baptism works in the same way so that a man may be “really set within the body of Christ by God” through this act. Oscar Cullman, Baptism in the New Testament, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), 23-46.

⁴ Harrell, “Jewish Proselyte Baptism,” 163.

⁵ It is important to understand comparative method, that there are both similarities and differences that both must be taken into account. So while we recognize on the one hand there is a similar idea of baptism connecting the person with the Jewish people (i.e. becoming Abraham's seed) in Galatians, Paul is combatting the Judaizing element at Galatia that is requiring circumcision and practice of the Old Covenant law. So while there is some shared cultural practice and theology, there is even a more radical reinterpretation and appropriation of baptism through the eyes of the New Covenant.

identity, especially the identity of becoming a Son of Abraham, though Christian baptism's operative reason was the Gospel of Christ. Both proselyte baptism and Christian baptism conferred a new identity and membership within the covenant people of God, Abraham's offspring.

Another element that was peculiar to proselyte baptism is its orientation to the family. You can never overemphasize the importance of family solidarity at any point in the History of Israel, and the same holds true for Second Temple Judaism and apostolic Christianity. For this very reason Peter stands up on Pentecost and says regarding the Gospel promised to Abraham: "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself," (Acts 2:39). In commenting on this, Pat Harrell remarks, "because of the intimate family relations, it was expedient that the entire family be Jewish."⁶ It was for this reason, that when a married couple converted, the infants and children were baptized alongside their parents, and based upon the commitments of their parents.⁷

Baptism seemed to have in some ways eclipsed circumcision for practical necessity for inducting a family into the covenant community because of the limitations of the other two requirements of circumcision and sacrifice. Obviously only males could be circumcised, so that left something to be desired in regard to women, and on the other hand, only adults could offer sacrifice, which left out the children.⁸ Baptism provided the perfect universal rite through which a gentile convert was brought into the people of Israel, and so it is no wonder that it was likewise the rite of choice to adopt by John the baptizer, Jesus, and the Apostolic church to bring people into the new covenant community that now was to be made up of not only families of Jews, but families of all nations.

In summary of this section we may observe several key ideas: (1) Christian baptism has its historical, cultural, and even some critical theological roots in the general baptismal practices of *mikveh* in Second Temple Judaism. (2) There is especially important connections between Christian baptism and proselyte baptism of gentile converts to Judaism. (3) Proselyte baptism shared implications such as (a) remission of sins, (b) new birth, and (c) formal induction into the covenant community of Israel and the new identity that comes with it. Finally (4) Judaism set a high premium on the solidarity of the family and therefore baptized the entire converting family, children included along with the converting parents. So to state it simply, while Christian baptism and the various forms of baptism in Judaism are not "exactly" the same in all meaning, what is clear is that they share common stock and pedigree, especially in the handling of proselyte converts and the formation of community. We will leave this sociological discussion for now and move to some theological considerations before returning to it later.

⁶ Harrell, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," 163.

⁷ Harrell "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," 163; Rowley, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John, 321; Mishnah tractate *Kethuboth* 11a.

⁸ Rowley, "Baptism," 317-19.

PART II. FAMILY VALUES - THE SACRAMENTS AND THE FAMILY

It is not uncommon today to hear bible believing Christians talk about “family values” and a biblical “world view.” In the Bible and the world of Second Temple Judaism from which the Gospel message comes, the centrality of the family, most often referred to as the “household,” was inseparable from world view. This did not merely mean the nuclear family, though that was the fundamental unit, but this terminology even extended to the larger clan. The Bible begins with the story of God creating man and woman and charging them to go make a family and multiply in the earth. When one reads through the Bible closely, one will quickly see it is full of metaphors of the family and marital images to describe Israel and the Church’s relationship to God. God himself is cast in the roles of head of household, husband, father, kinsman and redeemer. Israel is likened to a son, daughter, wife, bride, and rescued orphan. The church is also portrayed as Christ’s bride and the household of faith. As Hebrew Bible scholar Leo G. Perdue puts it:

“Indeed, the household not only grounded Old Testament Theology in Israel’s social reality but also became the primary lens through which to view the character and activity of God...”

A “biblical world view” is incomplete without the centrality of the family or what the biblical world called the “household.” But our culture is an individualistic culture that places its emphasis on the autonomy of the individual. Modern secular man celebrates his individualism, his ability to make “a decision” for himself without the influence of another. He wants his freedom to go where he pleases, do as he chooses, because it’s his right to. Most of modern secular ethics are based upon a false assumption that what I do in private does not affect anyone else. Popular modern spirituality is focused upon the individual and “my personal faith” or “my personal beliefs.” Unfortunately, a great deal of Evangelicalism has also been affected with semi-pelagian theology that it is up to the individual to “choose Christ,” or make a “personal decision.” This is nothing less than the philosophy of Enlightenment humanism permeating and corrupting the theological membrane of the Church’s theology. But as Perdue also notes, “*the modern concept of individualism was not known to Israel and early Judaism.*”

Unfortunately, for all our Christian rhetoric about family values, the modern church, especially the those of us within evangelicalism, actually do not practice a biblical world view in this respect. In fact, we have bought the cultural line of individualism in our practice of the church. This shows primarily in how casual our modern church relationships are. But one of those glaring ways in which it has pervaded modern Christian culture is in our baptismal practices. Baptism has become several things, but none of them biblical. When asked, the average evangelical Christian will tell you things like “It represents my decision” or it is “my public confession,” rather than the act of the Church and Christ to transfer both individuals and households into the household of God, the Church. With this has come also the emphasis on the will and intention of the individual, to the exclusion of the family. This

is to say, within the church, the will of the individual to be able to make a “decision for himself” has been raised to such a level that children who are not yet mature enough to make a decision on their own, are excluded from the covenant community until they can make one. This even includes people with mental challenges who may never be able to make “a decision” on their own! But this is just not how it was understood in biblical times.

So unlike a biblical world view, modern evangelical christendom, for all of its talk about family values, has discounted the biblical principle of the “household” when comes to making disciples of our children. We have chosen an amalgam of Al Bundy’s family in “Married with Children” blended with a mix of biblical ideas. By and large those who claim to “focus on the family” deny the biblical principle of the “household” as having meaning for making whole families part of the church. Because it has accepted the idolatry of the individual, evangelicals by and large cannot conceive of taking children of converting parents into the church with it.

But the history of God’s saving work with man teaches us differently. When God created mankind, he made them male and female and the first command was to go multiply in the earth which was to make families. When God delivered Noah, it was with him and his posterity (Gen. 9:9-17) that God made a covenant to never destroy the world again by water (one which all mankind still benefits from). When God made the covenant with Abraham, it was with him and his offspring after him (Gen. 15:8; 17:1-21). When God redeemed Israel out of Egypt, it was not because of anything virtuous they had done, but because of his covenant loyalty to their fathers, to care for their children after them. When God made a covenant with King David, to build “a house” for him, it meant a promise to build his family as a dynasty of rulers (2 Sam. 7). In all these examples we recognize a major principle: ***The family is the primary vehicle for salvation of individuals.*** This is to say that being a part of a family does not in and of itself save us any more than lets say baptism, or attending Church does. However, being a part of the Christian family is a semi-sacramental context for the experience of grace, both common and special. This is why even the Church is patterned after the family and constantly encouraged to function as one. The Church is not paradigm setting for the family, but rather the family is paradigm setting for the Church.

Now here is a major point. While the Gospel is meant to be preached to all mankind, as noticed above both in Jewish proselyte baptism and New Testament Christian baptism, the rite was used to introduce a person into the covenant community of God’s family. As we also saw, the principle for doing this was through the lens of the family. In other words, when a husband and wife moved to convert to Judaism or Christianity, their family was always included. Another way to say this is that in a biblical world view, the ancient Jews and Christians could not conceive of expanding God’s family by dividing their own. Of course some will quip about Jesus coming to divide families and that family members would betray family members. But lets not be foolish, this is talking about family who are old enough to reject the Gospel of Christ. It is not referring to small compliant children who naturally follow the instruction of their parents for better or worse.

However many baptists feel that excluding our children from participation in the church is a virtue. Notice the disturbing opinions offered by the following authors.

“Moreover, baptism and communion are inseparable from active membership and participation in the local church. *So, children should be excluded from church membership as well.*”⁹

I honestly cannot fathom the theological reasoning behind the statement “So children should be excluded from church membership as well.” Their logic is sound in so far as if you exclude children from baptism they are not part of the local church, and therefore pagans. Ironically enough, most baptists I know equivocate on this point though. They try to talk about how their children are members of the local church “in some sense” but not a “believer” and a full member. As we observed above, nothing can be any more anti-biblical than the “exclusion” of our children from the covenant community. In every epoch of God’s dealings with mankind, the children of covenant members have been included in the covenant community and their salvation looked at positively. Their personal salvation is never taken for granted, nor are they looked at suspiciously as in the Baptist views. Rather they are allowed membership in the covenant community as the primary context of salvation. The Church is not what saves us, but the Gospel is. On the other hand, the church is the earthly steward of the Gospel, and it is within the life of the local church that salvation is most effectively experienced. To put it in theological language, baptism and membership is not efficacious for salvation, but rather membership within the church is the most effective in salvation. It is those who are raised within the Church who are most likely to respond to the message of the Gospel, at least if it is preached faithfully, because that is where we find the preached word and sacraments.

Therefore leaving our children outside of the Church through refusing baptism to them is the passive excommunication of them. As Moses quickly learned in Exodus 4:24-26, God frowns upon alienating children out. It is for the reason of failing to circumcise his son, God met Moses with the intent to kill him, that is kill Moses! But all throughout the Old Testament children took part in the signs and the seals of the covenants be that circumcision, the sabbath (Exod. 31:12-18), or the Passover (Exod 12:1-12). In fact the passover was particularly instructive because the blood on the door posts covered the entire household (family), especially the first born, regardless of age and ability to “make a decision.”

In summary of this section, the biblical faith has always included our children in the covenant community because God demanded it. The exclusion of our children is a rejection of them, and a rejection of God’s will for the family. God made the family with an integrity that is affirmed and not threatened by the Gospel. And Jesus’ statements about how the Gospel divides families has to do with those who embrace and those who outrightly reject it as volitional adults. It does not apply to the question of how to relate our small and minor children who are still under the subjection of their parents. Christian parents are required by the Gospel to raise their children as covenant members as best they can, because they are holy and meant to be set apart to the Lord

⁹ Holman and Kennedy, Childhood Baptism and Church Membership, pg. 6. It is interesting in this very original paper on baptism, that while they make baptism and communion inseparable from “active membership and participation in the church” they still somehow do not allow full membership for young people, who need to be 18 to be a full voting member of their congregational democratic government.

(1 Cor. 7:14), and because they are members of a family that is under the subjection of the local church.

Household Baptism

Since we have now established the household principle in relationship to the Gospel, it now requires us to take a look at the Household baptisms in Scripture. I will say at the outset, that the Household baptisms in Acts 16 are not a prescription for infant baptism, as some in Reformed circles suggest. To begin with, the texts are not prescriptive (like commandments) but rather descriptive (telling what happened) and so in this case they need to be looked at sociologically to be able to discern their contextual implications.

Baptists often push back on these texts and say that there is no “proof” there were infants there. This is true. It does not say that and we are ok with that. On the other hand, this response by Baptists is still pseudo critical special pleading. This is because it is a desperate attempt to drag the discussion to the useless place of begging questions rather than profitable exposition. It is both reactionary and logically unsound. This is an argument from silence. As an example I might point to how someone could say “me and my kids went to the beach.” However, the word kid, as typically used does not include infants and so someone suggest that I only took my older five boys and left the infant at home. Or one could say “my family and I went to the beach,” but because the person did not specifically state “infants” with the collective idea of “family” that we must infer that I did not take any infants to the beach. In fact, one will look in vain to the New Testament to find any documentation that women actually took the Lord’s Supper. We do have contexts where the disciples as a collective idea take it (Acts 2:46). Would any competent interpreter infer women did not take the Lord’s Supper from that silence? The foolishness of these arguments are self evident. All this accomplishes is as I said, question begging (“it might not be”) in regard to baptizing our infants, and so actually does not disprove anything. It just casts a pseudo-critical doubt, and that is it.

What is far more important is the understanding of the idea of the “household” in its New Testament context. Lets look at a few verses together.

(2Tim. 1:16) May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains

The term that is normally translated household in the Greek New Testament is the word *oikos* which is the normal equivalent of the Hebrew word *bayit*, meaning the same. There is no need for fancy word studies here. Both terms are used from everything from an actual building, a family, clan, or even a dynasty. It is context which determines the meaning. Looking at the above example, it is clear that Paul is not speaking of a building people live in, or a royal dynasty. So the only way it can be taken is “family” or “clan.” What is important, is that when someone like Paul pronounces a blessing of “mercy to the household of Onesiphorus,” Nobody would realistically beg the question “well it does not say there were infants and small children there, so we should not assume that they were intended. Every reasonable interpreter would see a typical

Hebrew cultural blessing upon the entire family of the named (and that would probably even include generations not born yet). Here is another.

1Tim. 3:4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

This is a very important text for understanding the use of the word in reference to families. 1 Tim. 3:4 is the qualifications of an elder which requires him to be able to "manage his household well." This could possibly mean the economics of his home, but the following statement clarifies this; "with all dignity keeping his children submissive." To begin with, it makes clear, that for Paul and the New Testament writers, "household" includes all the children born to that man and still at home under his authority. There is no weaseling out here, because the children are mentioned specifically. This verse makes clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that when the NT term *oikos* is used to refer to the family and its members, it always assumes all the children as well. Look also at 1 Tim 5:4 & 8.

1Tim. 5:4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.

1Tim. 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

In this case, this implies a much broader family solidarity, that grown up children and grand children have the responsibility and obligation for caring for their widowed mother/grandmother. But it again demonstrates the all encompassing breadth of the use of the term household to that of the broader clan too. This small sampling substantially demonstrates the typical usage of the Greek term *oikos* as a term for family or extended clan, and what is also important is, that in each of these examples, the suggestion of an arbitrary limitation to the membership would be absurd. In none of these cases would any reasonably trained interpreter, much less Jewish or Christian reader in the New Testament period, ever read "household" as anything less than the entire family. You would have to be working with unbiblical modern presuppositions about the family from the start, as Baptists do, to even consider it. This is critical when we come to the "household" baptisms in Acts 16 and 1 Corinthians 1:16.

(Acts 16:15) And after ***she was baptized, and her household as well***, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

(Acts 16:31) And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, *you and your household*. 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all

who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, **he and all his family.**

(1Cor. 1:16) (I did baptize also the **household** of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)

In each of the following cases, Acts 16:15, 16:31-33 and also 1 Cor. 1:16 the whole household is baptized. Here again, it is clear that the usage means “family.” Further, there is no reasonable basis for special pleading that children are not present. We have already observed that the term as used elsewhere in the New Testament meant the entire living family. The pseudo critical pleading that infants are not specifically stated holds no value. The *oikos* was the entire family. However we need to dig in a bit more. Look at Acts 16: 33. There is a critical statement made by Luke here that clarifies *oikos* as the family even further.

(Acts 16:33) And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

First I would like to take notice of how the Philippian jailer is not put through a time of probation, nor is baptism used as the “guardian” of the church. Rather it is used as a wide open welcoming front door! Luke says that he and his family were baptized “immediately” or “at once” without hesitation. There is no probation or observation as some of the Baptists we quoted above. But also take primary notice of the ESV translation here of “he and all his family.” Here Luke actually does not use the word *oikos* but rather the following greek statement: “αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ αὐτοῦ ἅπαντες παρὰχρῆμα.” In other words the translation “family” is a dynamic equivalent and a good translation, but it also loses some of the force of the actual text. Very literally rendered it says, “he and everything of him, immediately.” Another way to smooth it out would be to say “he and everyone of his own.” So the use of the adjective *apentes* denotes *every person in his home*. So this not only further solidifies our previous observation of the idea of “household” as meaning the entire family, but it unquestionably establishes that **the operative principle of New Testament baptism is every single member of the family**. So it does not matter if there were infants or not. The principle functioning here is that if the head of household converts and is baptized, then all members under that authority normally would do as well. Of course small children, like typical Second Temple proselyte baptism always comply with their parents religious wishes as everything else.

So here we see at work the principle of household baptism. This is to say, when the individual or couple had extended family, children, and even servants and slaves, they would be baptized too. The household baptisms in Acts 16 demonstrate this functional principle in action. Here is the point: Even though there are no infants and small children identified, and even, if for the sake of argument they were not present, what the New Testament use of the term *oikos*, and especially its use in Acts 16 demonstrates, is that the New Testament principle for the conversion of the family and relating them to the church, was the baptism of the entire family clan.

Having established a firm position within the New Testament itself, we will return to our sociological considerations of the Baptismal practices of gentile proselytes to Judaism during the Second Temple and Rabbinic period that we began with. There we established, according to historical record, that it was normative at the time prior to and during the Apostolic era for the entire family converting to Judaism to be baptized along with sacrifice by all adults, and circumcision of all males. We also observed how since baptism was the only thing that all parties would do to be identified with Israel, that for some, it became the primary means of adopting gentile proselytes and their families into the family of Israel. We also noticed some similar overlap in theology, though differences as well.

So here is what is important. What we see in second Temple Judaism was “household” baptism. When they baptized a converting proselyte, they baptized his entire household. This standard customary practice of dealing with Gentile converts was assumed by the New Testament church and is represented in Acts 16 which we just observed above. What is also interesting is that Second Temple Judaism seemed to have only practiced this with gentiles, and not Jews since they were Jews by birth. In our example in Acts 16, it is not surprising that we are looking at the conversions of the households of gentiles only and not Jews. In fact we have no examples of household baptisms in Judean contexts, but they only appear in the context of Christian mission to the Gentiles. This then again implies the adoption of standard Jewish baptismal conversion practice by Jewish Christian Missionaries (Paul and friends). Further, since the Gospel quickly took root and proliferated in the Greco-Roman world during the first few centuries, and the Judean church waned due to poverty and flight from Jewish revolts against Rome, it is understandable why the baptism of “households” took root. It did not take long for Gentile Christianity to become the dominant Christian voice. The gentile proselyte context of mass gentile conversions in the first and following centuries reinforced this traditional Jewish practice that was normative in the conversion of Gentiles into Judaism. We must remember, the first generation of apostolic Christianity thought of themselves as Jews who were being faithful to the faith of their fathers, in spite of persecution from Jewish authorities.

This point is also particularly important on explaining the lack of attention given to “how to do baptism” in the New Testament. The church continued with existing missionary proselyte baptismal culture and practice of Second Temple Judaism. If there had been a radical departure in theology and practice, then the New Testament writers would likely have stated that in the same way Paul and Hebrews does in regard to keeping the Old Testament legal traditions. The silence indicates that everyone at that time knew how baptism was done, so it required no explanation. We may note this of the Lord’s Supper too, which was adopted and transformed from the Passover meal. So here again, we have some theological adjustment, but the basic practice of bread and wine is continued, just weekly, rather than annually. So, far from being a medieval Roman Catholic invention, household baptism which included the baptism of infants, small children, grown children, slaves and all family within a household had its roots in Palestinian Judaism. The reason for the inclusion of children is simply a matter of world view, one that is completely contrary to the modern individualist conception that drives western humanist thinking.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summary, Sacred Journey Church, as member of the Christian Reformed Church, continues in the historic practice of the early Church and ancient Judaism by the inclusion of our children in the discipling community through household baptism. We wish to be clear that the reasons that we do this is based upon biblical and historical precedent and especially a covenantal world view, and not at all for the same reasons that the Roman Catholic Church baptizes their infants. To be more clear, we do not believe that baptism inherently saves our children or regenerates them, but rather, it makes them a part of the visible church, which is the best place for them to be nurtured in and brought to saving faith in Christ.

Further, we see that the baptism of our small children is also infused with a commitment on the part of the parents to set a Godly example and raise their Children in a Gospel centered family that is a participating in the Gospel centered church. The baptism of our small children is a proclamation not only to the church and the Child, but especially to the parent of the child to persevere in repentance and faith in the gospel. A Gospel oriented life is practiced in community is incumbent on all parents who will bring their children and family members for baptism.

As stated in the abstract, this paper is designed to answer the questions of evangelicals who are joining Sacred Journey church, who do not understand why we would baptize infants and small children as well. However we would like to make also clear several other ideas. First, we still baptize adults in much the same way baptists do, because many people come to faith, not by being born into Christian families and brought up in a Gospel centered home, but through the missionary work of the Church. Also we want brothers and sisters who come to Sacred Journey, who may not yet be ready to fully embrace the biblical and historic practice household baptism, to not feel that they will be pressured to embrace the practice and baptize their small children as a condition of membership. We do not consider this an “essential” or “first order doctrine” and therefore it is a subject where Christians can disagree and remain in fellowship. If you are a Baptist or of a similar evangelical persuasion, you are welcome in the community of Sacred Journey and will not be pressured into adopting covenant baptism. Because of this, the view of baptism, though important to us, is not included in our local membership vows. We believe the unified pursuit of the mission of the Gospel is far more important than agreement on this issue.

The most important thing to remember in regard to our position espoused here, besides being the historic practice of the ancient church and Judaism, is that it is because we care deeply about your child’s spiritual health, nurture and ultimate salvation. The Church is the place where we are continually nurtured to faith or a deeper faith in Christ, and so it is for this reason that children are included in the company of God’s people. It is a practical outworking of our desire to support and help parents in the discipleship and conversion on their children.