

Weekly Newsletter: 19th March 2024

Reflection: Five Reasons to Reconsider Infant Baptism

By Joe Barnard

I'm going to be completely honest: there is something about believer's baptism that just seems to make sense to modern Christians. Whereas we have to work hard to get our heads around the concept of infant baptism, believer's baptism requires no proof. After having worked for over ten years in Scottish Presbyterian churches, I've noticed a fascinating phenomenon: even Presbyterians are a bit uncomfortable about infant baptism. They tend to practice it because it's an inherited form, not because they have convictions to justify it.

Now, all of this may sound like clear evidence that the Baptist position is in fact the only Biblical one. However, there is another possibility. It just might be true that a lot of the intuitions that seem to support the Baptist position are strangely aligned with modern sensibilities. In other words, it may just be that the cultural values of independence, of autonomy, of self-expression, and of experience influence our theology more than we realise.

It's vital to say that no member of Holyrood is required to believe in infant baptism. Undoubtedly, there are - and will always be - mixed views in the congregation. Nonetheless, it is helpful for all of us to at least appreciate the Biblical arguments for infant baptism so that, when a child is baptised in the church, we all can see the practice as something grounded in Scripture, not mere tradition.

The arguments below have not been chosen because they are the only arguments for infant baptism or even the best ones. Rather, I've selected them because they rub against modern self-identity. My hope is that, by thinking about them, we can detect some of the ways in which culture tints our reading of the Bible.

Reason 1: the Children of Believers Are "Holy"

Biblical writers never use the word 'holy' haphazardly. It is always used purposefully in order to indicate special things that belong to God and are welcome in His presence. This makes Paul's use of the word in I Corinthians 7:14 particularly noteworthy. His argument in this verse seems to be that, if one parent is a Christian, the children in the family are *holy*. In other words, they are set apart for God and belong to Him. They are *His* children, not our children. We need to ponder the significance of this.

Reason 2: God Never Says “Stop”

A lot of Christians think that the burden of proof is on paedobaptists to demonstrate that the New Testament permits baptising infants. Actually, the opposite is true. The Old Testament is very clear that children were a part of God’s covenant family. After all, circumcision, the sign and seal of the old covenant, was given to infant boys who were only 8 days old. The same pattern is evident in the gospels as Jesus teaches his disciples to allow children to come to him. This in mind, as we read the New Testament our assumption should be that, unless the apostles teach otherwise, the basic form of God’s covenant family remains intact.

A helpful exercise for modern Christians is to imagine that they are first century Jews reading the New Testament for the first time. A first century Jew would start Matthew’s gospel and finish Revelation with the presupposition that his or her children were members of God’s family. It’s hard to find any explicit New Testament evidence to contradict this belief. Instead, the multiple examples of household baptisms in the book of Acts would seem to corroborate the idea that Christians and their children ought to receive the initial sign of church membership, which is baptism.

Reason 3: Baptism Is Less of a Sign of My Commitment to God than God’s Commitment to Us

When I got married, during the ceremony I placed a ring on Anna’s hand. How strange it would have been if Anna had interpreted that ring as a sign of her commitment to me rather than of my commitment to her. I was the one placing the ring on her finger. Now, it’s worth asking the question, when someone is baptised, who is the primary agent? A lot of Christians have unconsciously accepted the view that, at baptism, the most important action is that of the person being baptised who publicly professes his or her faith. However, this assumption misses the covenantal thrust of the ceremony. The primary actor during baptism is not the person being baptised, but the God who is affirming past promises. Baptism is less of a sign of ‘my’ commitment to God than of God’s commitment to ‘us’. What the water of baptism symbolizes is that God will indeed do all that He has promised on behalf of His people. He will take us from death to life, cleanse us of sin, and fill us with His Mighty Spirit.

Reason 4: Expressive Individualism Is Not in the New Testament

As we read the New Testament, we need to work hard to keep in mind that the early Christians did not value individuality or freedom in the same way that we do. Instead, they prioritised solidarity, communal identity, family, and responsibility. For them, baptism was less of a sign of my free decision to follow Jesus and more of a sign of shared identity, of covenant obligations, and of membership to the household of God. The corporate dimension took precedence over the individual dimension. The closest modern analogy might be citizenship. When a person becomes a citizen of a new country, the primary feeling is not one of having made an independent choice, but of having assumed a new identity with new responsibilities. Such would have been the case for early Christians. The “us” took priority over the “me” – without, of course, altogether effacing the latter (c.f. Gal. 2:20).

Reason 5: A Lot of Kids Never Reach an Age to Profess

One of the blessings of living in the Western world is that, due to modern hygiene and medicine, parents are able to assume that their children will live long and relatively healthy lives. The assumption would have been different in the early church. Infant mortality was distressingly high in the ancient world, and those children who survived infancy often died before adulthood or even teenage years. In fact, some studies show that only about 50% of children survived to what we would consider to be an appropriate age to make a decision of faith.

Sadly, such conditions are not confined to antiquity. There are still places in the world where children are born into settings with a disturbingly high risk of sickness and death. Now imagine being a Christian in such a place. How comforting would it be to believe that God's covenant promises extend not just to parents but to their children? Admittedly, this is an emotional argument. Nonetheless, it does shed light on the pastoral relevance of Peter's proclamation that "the promise is for you and for your children" (Acts 2:39). Some parents need such hope.

Easter Plans

On Easter weekend we will have three events. First, we will have a **Good Friday service at 7pm**. This will be an opportunity to meditate on the significance of Jesus' death on the cross. **Sunday morning at 10.30am** will be a joyful celebration of the resurrection. Finally, **Sunday evening at 6pm**, we will conclude the evangelistic course that has been run by the Missional Home Group (the 321 Course by Speak Life). Everyone is invited to all three events.

Easter is a great opportunity to invite people to church. Let's not allow the weekend to pass without inviting someone to hear the good news that Christ is risen.

Prayer Meetings

By Joe Barnard

The elders have decided to shift the prayer meeting to being in-person every week as of **April 17th**. We came to this decision after having spent time reflecting on the advantages and disadvantages of in-person versus online meetings. Although the zoom option is very convenient, it was agreed that we lose something of the fellowship aspect and the worshipful aspect of the meeting by hosting it digitally. We want to acknowledge that the online option has been appreciated by a number of members in the congregation who cannot attend the in-person meetings for various reasons. In view of such needs, we plan to keep a "low tech", hybrid model whereby a simple online option will run simultaneously with the in-person meeting. The details of this will be explained in coming weeks. Please speak to one of the elders if you have any questions.

Men's and Women's Discipleship Groups

The men's and the women's groups meet for the last time this week and then we'll take a break over Easter. The women are meeting online tonight (Tuesday) at 7pm and the men are meeting in person on Thursday at 11am. Contact liz@holyroodevangelical.org for more details about either of these.

Warm Space

A team of youth from the US will be volunteering at our final Warm Space on 25th March. They are coming to work with Take Hold Church in Edinburgh, but are looking for additional service opportunities. It would be great to see them mix with members of HEC. Therefore, if you are able, please consider coming to visit the Warm Space on 25th March.

Baby and Toddler Group

The Baby and Toddler Group will be on this Monday (25th) but will then take a break for two weeks. We'll be back at 10am on Monday 15th April.

Fatherhood Conference – Saturday 23rd March

There is still time to sign up and come along! A day for men to be equipped, challenged, and encouraged in the God-given calling of fatherhood. This Saturday from 9.30am – 3.30pm in the church building. For more details, go [here](#).

Christian Fellowship Walking Group – Saturday 23rd March

This Saturday (23rd March) a walk has been planned around the [Glen Devon Reservoirs](#) (8.5km / 5.25 miles easy walk but sometimes uphill). Meet at 10am at Ingleston Park and Ride (Newbridge EH28 8LS) or meet at 11am in car park at the [start of the hydro-road Glen Devon](#). Everyone is welcome, please bring a packed lunch and let Calum cmackellar@yahoo.com know if you are coming.

Prayer Meeting – Christians Against Poverty

On Wednesday 27th March, Mairi Giles from Christians Against Poverty (CAP) is coming along to the prayer meeting on Zoom to talk about the work they do and how we can pray and get involved. Please contact Liz@holyroodevangelical.org if you don't already receive the Zoom codes.

Church Calendar

- Tuesday:
 - Pickleball and Table Tennis at 7pm in the church
 - Women's Bible Study at 7pm on Zoom
- Wednesday: Prayer meeting at 7pm on Zoom
- Thursday: Men's Discipleship at 11am in person
- Saturday: Fatherhood Conference from 9.30am to 3.30pm
- Sunday:
 - Worship Service at 10.30am (and live streamed). Joe Barnard preaching.
 - Home Groups
- Monday:
 - Baby and Toddler Group from 10am – 11.30am
 - Warm Space from 12noon - 3pm



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