

**The Antiquity
of
INFANT BAPTISM
and
HOUSEHOLD BAPTISMS.
BEING AN ANTHOLOGY OF EXTRACTS FROM:
WALL'S "HISTORY OF INFANT BAPTISM"
AND:
PROF. WILSON OF BELFAST:
"INFANT BAPTISM:
A SCRIPTURAL SERVICE"**

"We also who by Him have had access to God, have not received this carnal circumcision, but the spiritual circumcision, which Enoch, and those like him observed. **And we have received it by baptism**, by the mercy of God, because we were sinners: and it is enjoined to all persons to receive it by the same way."

(**Justin Martyr**: writing in approx. 135-140 AD. *Dialogue with Trypho* p. 59 Edit. Stephens 1551) (Cf. *Wall Op.cit. Vol. 1 ch. 2: sect. 2*).

It is plain that this most ancient Father does not here speak of baptism being to Christians in the stead of circumcision: and the analogy between these two is one of the arguments used by the paedobaptists to prove that one (baptism) ought to be given to infants, as well as the other (circumcision) was. It is to the same sense, as is that saying of St Paul, where he calls baptism, with the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, which attends it, *the circumcision of Christ* (or as it would be more intelligibly rendered, *the Christian circumcision*), in these words: "In whom also ye are circumcised with circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him by baptism." For by those words, *the circumcision of Christ*, must be understood either that action by which Christ Himself in His infancy was circumcised: and it is no sense to say, that the Colossians were circumcised with that: or else, that circumcision which Christ has appointed, *the Christian circumcision*: and with that He says they were circumcised, being buried with Him by baptism. Only He, as well as Justin, refers both to the inward and outward part of baptism; whereof the inward part is done without hands: and accordingly the ancients were wont to call baptism,

“the circumcision done without hands” (Greek: περιτομήν ἀχειροποίητον) as will appear by some following quotations. So that it seems hard for the antipaedobaptists to maintain, as some of them do, that the Scripture and ancient Christians do not make any resemblance between these two sacraments.

The paraphrase given of this text of St Paul in the *Quest. ad Orthodox.*, ascribed to Justin Martyr, q.102, is this. The question there is, "Why, if circumcision were a good thing, do we not use it as well as the Jews did?" The answer is, "We are circumcised by baptism with Christ's circumcision," &c. And he brings this text for his proof.

Justin Martyr /Apol. i. (vulgo 2da) prope ab initio.

"Several persons among us of sixty and seventy years old, of both sexes, who **were disciplined** [or made disciples] to Christ in their childhood, do continue uncorrupted " [or virgins]. (*Wall: Vol.1 ch.2 sect. 6*).

St Justin's word, "were disciplined", or, "made disciples", (Greek: ἐμαθητεύθησαν) is the very same word that had been used by St Matthew in expressing our Saviour's command, (Greek: μαθητεύσατε) "disciple [or, make disciples] *all the nations*". And it was done to these persons, Justin says, in their childhood. So that whereas the antipaedobaptists do say, that when our Saviour bids the Apostles disciple the nations, baptising them, he cannot mean infants; because He must be understood to bid them baptise only such among the nations as could be made disciples: and infants, they say cannot be made disciples. They may perceive that in the sense in which Justin understood the word, they may be made disciples. And Justin wrote but ninety years after St Matthew, who wrote about fifteen years after Christ's ascension. And they that were seventy years old at this time must have been made disciples to Christ in their childhood (as he says they were) about thirty-six years after the ascension: that is, in the midst of the Apostles' times, and within twenty years after St Matthew's writing.

Irenaeus : AGAINST HERESIES I. ii. c. xxxix. Speaking of Christ.

Lived approx. 115-190 or possibly 202 AD. A native of Asia Minor, he knew men who had known St. John. See also Dodwell's notes herein.....

"Therefore as He was a Master, He had also the age of a Master. Not disdaining nor going in a way above human nature; nor breaking in His own person by the likeness that it has to Him. For He came to save all persons by Himself: all, I mean, who by Him are regenerated [or baptised] unto God; infants, and little ones, and children, and youths, and elder persons. Therefore He went through the several ages: for infants being made an infant, sanctifying infants: to little ones He was made a little one, sanctifying those of that

age; and also giving them an example of godliness, justice, and dutifulness: to youths He was a youth, &c." (Wall: Vol. 1 ch.3, sect.2).

This testimony, which reckons infants among those that are regenerated, is plain and full; provided the reader be one that is satisfied that the word *regeneration* does, in the usual phrase of those times, signify *Baptism*: and this cannot be doubted by any that are at all acquainted with the books of those ages. As for those that are not, I have already had occasion to refer them to the use of the Jews before and in Christ's time, and to some places of Scripture: and it may be worth the while to turn back to the passage of Justin Martyr last quoted (He lived but thirty or forty years before Irenaeus), and to observe how he uses the word. The reader will also see in almost all the passages that I shall have occasion to produce, the same use of the word constantly observed: that to say *regenerated* is with them as much as to say *baptised*.

At present, take these three evidences of it.

(1) Irenaeus himself uses it so in all other places of his book that I have ever observed: as for instance, 1. iii. c. xix. where he is producing testimonies of Scripture concerning the Holy Spirit, he has this, " Et iterum, potestatem *regenerationis* in Deum demandans discipulis, dicebat eis," &c., (which when translated gives:) "And again, when He gave His disciples the commission of *regenerating* unto God, He said unto them, " Go and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Where the *commission of regenerating* plainly means the *commission of baptising*.

(2) There are several sayings both of the Latin and Greek Fathers, which do plainly show, that they not only used that word (*regenerate*) for baptism, but also that they so appropriated it to baptism, as to exclude any other conversion or repentance that is not accompanied with baptism, from being signified by it.

(3) When Irenaeus does here speak of *infants regenerated*, it is plain enough of itself, that they are not capable of regeneration in any other sense of the word, than as it signifies baptism: I mean the outward act of baptism accompanied with that grace or mercy of God whereby He admits them into covenant, though without any sense of theirs.

I shall in the places that I must cite henceforward, where we meet with the words *regeneratus*, *renatus*, &c., translate it *regenerated*, without any further explication; but the reader will find that he must understand by it *baptised*, or else that he will make no sense at all of the place.

Since this is the first express mention that we have met with of infants baptised, it is worth the while to look back, and consider how near this man was to the

Apostles' time. - Mr Dodwell, who has with the greatest care and skill computed his age, makes him to be born in the Apostolic Age, viz., the year after Christ's birth 97, four years before St John died; and that he was chosen Bishop of Lyons A.D. 167, which is after the Apostles sixty-seven. His proofs are too long to repeat here. So much is plain, that he wrote the book I here quote within eighty years after the Apostles, and that he was then a very old man. For he wrote the two first of his five books against heresies first, and published them; in which these words are: and he published his third book in the time of Eleutherius, Bishop of Rome, for he mentions him as then bishop.

In an age so nigh the Apostles, and in a place where one of them so lately lived, the Christians could not be ignorant what had been done in their time in a matter so public and notorious as is the baptising or not baptising of infants.

From the opposite end of the Mediterranean area, Alexandria in Egypt, the practice of Paedobaptism is attested by :

Origen: 185-254 AD. Homilia 8 in Levit. c. xii

"Hear David speaking: I was, says he, conceived in iniquity, and in sin did my mother bring me forth: showing that every soul that is born in the flesh is polluted with the filth of sin and iniquity: and that therefore that was said which we mentioned before; that none is clean from pollution, though his life be but of the length of one day."

" Besides all this, let it be considered, what is the reason that whereas the baptism of the Church is given for forgiveness of sins, infants also are by the usage of the Church baptised: when if there were nothing in infants that wanted forgiveness and mercy, the grace of baptism would be needless to them."

(Wall: Vol.1 ch.5 sect.1)

Again: *Origen: Homil. in Lucam 14*

"Having occasion given in this place, I will mention a thing that causes frequent inquiries among the brethren. Infants are baptised for the forgiveness of sins. Of what sins ? Or when have they sinned ? Or how can any reason of the laver in their case hold good, but according to that sense that we mentioned even now: none is free from pollution, though his life be but of the length of one day upon the earth ? And it is for that reason because by the sacrament of baptism the pollution of our birth is taken away, that infants are baptised."

(Wall: Vol.1 ch.5 sect.2).

And again: *Origen: Comment. Epist. ad Romanos lib. v.*

"For this also it was, that the Church had from the Apostles a tradition [or order] to give baptism even to infants. For they, to whom the divine mysteries were committed, knew that there is in all persons the natural pollution of sin, which must be done away by water and the Spirit: by reason of which the body itself is also called the body of sin." (Wall: Vol.1 ch.5, sect. 3).

And from North Africa, the testimony of St. Cyprian and the Council of Carthage, AD 253.

Cyprian: born approx. 200 AD, martyred 257 AD. Was baptized as an adult in approx. 245. His testimony in favour of Infant Baptism is therefore all the more significant, especially as it is part herewith of an Ecclesiastical Letter from the Council of Carthage: (Cf. Wall: Vol.1 ch.6, sect. 1).

“This therefore, dear brother, was our opinion in the assembly; that it is not for us to hinder any person from baptism and the grace of God who is merciful and kind and affectionate to all. Which rule, as it holds for all; so we think it more especially to be observed in reference to infants and persons newly born: to whom our help and the divine mercy is rather to be granted, because by their weeping and wailing at their first entrance into the world, they do intimate nothing so much as that they implore compassion.”

Referring to St. Cyprian, **St. Augustine** says:(Cf. Wall: Vol.1 ch. 6 sect.2).

In his *Ep. 28 ad Hieronymous*, he, speaking of some that taught that the body only, and not the soul, must suffer for original sin, says among other things this: " Blessed Cyprian, not making any new decree, but expressing the firm faith of the Church, in refuting those that thought a child must not be baptised before the eighth day, said (not that no flesh, but) that no soul must be lost."

HOUSEHOLD BAPTISMS

Extracted from pages 517 - 523 in

“Infant Baptism: A Scriptural Service” by Prof. Wilson of Belfast (1848).

BAPTISM OF HOUSEHOLDS. Acts xvi. 15, "She was baptized, *and her household.*" Acts. xvi. vv. 31, 33, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and *thy house.*" - "He was baptized, he and *all his* straightway." 1 Cor. i. 16, "I baptized also *the household* of Stephanus." Many a strong hand has been put forth to break the connection between household baptism, and infant baptism;-but that connection still remains in its strength, to bid defiance to fresh efforts, and guard the privileges of the helpless through coming generations. Let us briefly estimate the force of this important branch of the argument.

1. We do not build mainly on the fact of the households mentioned, but on the *common practice*, which is thereby clearly indicated. No one will assert that the New Testament contains a record of all the baptisms administered in the apostolic age. Its writers did not profess to make out a census of them. In instances unnumbered, individuals and families doubtless submitted to the ordinance, though no entry on the sacred page attests their dedication to a Saviour whom they loved. That this is true of households, the manner of the Scripture narrative evinces to the satisfaction of every candid mind. When the Philippian Jailer and *all his* were baptized, the writer

does not present it as an uncommon occurrence. When the ordinance was administered to Lydia and *her household*, we find no note of admiration. Nor is the baptism of *the household* of Stephanas referred to as a world's wonder. Baptists have attempted and failed to prove that in these families there were no infants. But had they even succeeded to their heart's wish, the broad and solid foundation of the argument would still have remained unshaken. They cannot, they will not, deny that the instances narrated form no more than a specimen of the households baptized before the close of apostolic labour.

To imagine then that in a very considerable number of families there were no infants is to trample upon the strongest probabilities, and to set experience and history at defiance. Dr. Carson admits "that there might have been infants" in the house of the jailer; and none, we presume, will affirm that there were no infants in any of the households baptized by the apostles and their fellow labourers. Whether such infants were admitted to baptism, or not, is matter for farther inquiry; but that they formed part of some of the baptized families is the dictate of experience and the necessary admission of candour.

2. The exclusion of infants from *household* baptisms is opposed to the current practice and language of the ancient economy. Dr. Carson can produce instances of the use of the term household, in which we must understand some members to be excepted. But he has not touched the analogy on which our present observation is founded. Through the entire history of the Old Testament church, *the accession of a HOUSEHOLD to the Lord's people necessarily included THE INFANTS of that household*. Infants were not excepted, when the initiatory rite of Judaism was administered to a household. Infants in common with their fathers were circumcised, and by the same observance incorporated with the great congregation. **Thus was established a current and well defined application of the term household.** Let a household be spoken of as connecting themselves with the church of God, and all who understood the language, would instantly learn that the step thus taken applied to the infant of eight days as imperatively as to him who had attained manhood's prime. Now the *baptism* of a household is an analogous case. It embraces the formation of the first link of connection with God's heritage, by means of the initiatory rite of Christianity, and the analogy pleads strongly against the exclusion of infants. Nay it is plain from the sense of the term, combined with prior usage, that they must be included, unless the author of our religion has interfered by way of prohibition. The baptism of households necessarily involves the baptism of infants, and secures their admission to the Christian church; and their claim cannot be righteously barred, except by the direct authority of the King of Zion.

3. We maintain that Christ's authority, put forth in the commission, does not exclude infants from the baptized households. According to Dr. Carson, the com-

mission exercises a limiting and controlling power over the households. The commission he regards as a "sure commentary on the households of Lydia, Stephanas, and the jailer." From this appeal to the modifying force of the commission, we may infer that the households, if permitted the exercise of their own native freedom, would inevitably declare in favour of the claim of infants to Christian baptism. **Leave the term households in possession of the application with which usage had invested it, and in vain will you attempt to exclude infants from its accredited extension.** Dr. Carson, as an enlightened exegete, felt this; and hence a continual reference to the commission for help against the households, pervades this part of his discussion. Indeed the only strong point which he has made, in combating the argument derived from household baptism, rests on the alleged fact that the commission *requires the baptized households to clear themselves of infants*. The commission, in his view, makes the exception, the commission authoritatively excludes infants, the commission cannot tolerate a little one as part of a baptized household. To this whole procedure we object as opposed to sound interpretation. The *practice* is uniformly regarded as a commentary on the *law*. Dr. Carson, reversing this order, makes the law a commentary on the practice. He finds the baptism of households by the apostles, and these households, he admits, may have contained infants; but the infants, he alleges, could not have been baptized, because the commission restricts the ordinance to believers. What is this, but to destroy the record of apostolic baptisms, as an independent testimony? Why summon this witness at all, if he must be compelled to sustain *Dr. Carson's view* of the commission?—For it manifestly comes to this-- The author asserts that the commission restricted the baptism of households to believers,—by which we are simply to understand, that *he so interprets* the commission as to exclude infants from all interest in its provisions.

Taking higher ground, however, we maintain that Dr. Carson's restriction is not in the commission. We have carefully examined that document, in the light of facts and testimonies on several of which he has not touched, and our deliberate finding is that "there is room for infants in the commission." If our judgment is sustained by the evidence, we have taken off the *high pressure* by which Dr. Carson sought to force the *escape* of infants from the baptized households. Our view of the commission secures for the *households* perfect liberty to bear their plain testimony without fear or favour; and in that spontaneous and unprejudiced testimony we discover triumphant support to the cause of infant baptism.

4. Household baptism, compared with apostolic baptisms in general, sustains the claims of infants. The Baptist cannot prove that there were no infants among the three thousand baptized in one day at Jerusalem. The Paedobaptist will admit that they were probably all adults, chiefly because the audience appears to have been composed entirely of adults, most of whom moreover were not citizens. Preceded by the preaching and the professed acceptance of the Gospel, baptism is adminis-

tered to adults in attendance on the public ministry of the apostles. The same Gospel enters the bosoms of families, and as the cheering result, whole households, comprehending infants and adults, are baptized. No exception is stated in regard to infants, and Dr. Carson has failed to force an exception by the power of the commission. The adults composing the public audience were baptized; the infants and adults of the household were baptized. Is not this state of the case in perfect keeping with the doctrine of infant baptism? The people who assemble on public occasions are adults, and on a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, they are baptized; and when the Gospel enters the domestic scene, instantly we are supplied with proof that Christianity does not yield to Patriarchism or Judaism in tender regard for the little ones. *Households* are baptized. The Gospel church, like its divine founder,—the mediator of the new covenant on which it is established,—affectionately receives infants into its arms and blesses them. It has room for the *infant* Isaiahs, and Jeremiahs, and John the baptists, and Timothys, whom the Baptist excludes from the congregation of the Lord, leaving them for years in the same ecclesiastical position with the masses of the heathen world.

Consider the meaning which an assembly of Jews would attach to the words: “*The promise is unto you, and to your children....*” ACTS 2:39. On a point of vital moment, these words identify the Gospel with the Abrahamic covenant. They echo the great federal promise, “*I will be a God unto thee, AND TO THY SEED.*” How would Jews understand, how MUST they have understood --such language? In all ages their children had been associated with themselves in covenant relation to God: and now when Christ’s apostles “*endowed with power from on high*” publish the salvation of the Gospel covenant, one of its first gracious utterances maintains the connection between parents and children. If this language were intended to exclude infants, it appears deceptive, and in the circumstances, must have conveyed an erroneous impression. WHEREAS, if the apostle designed to include infants, he could not easily have selected better terms for that purpose. “*The Promise is unto you and to your children*” the Jew could not understand it to the exclusion of infants, without the entire reversal of habits of thought and association, which had grown up with the covenanted people from the days of Abraham.

Prof. Wilson on Infant Baptism page 505.