

## An Evaluation of Infant Baptism

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**Abstract:** Baptism is a very important doctrine in Christianity and it has been held in high esteem by all Christian denominations. The importance of the doctrine of baptism has made it one of the mostly debated topics among scholars. Various aspects of the doctrine of baptism have received different views from scholars. The subjects of baptism is not an exception. Those who believe baptism as an expression of faith advocates that only believed ones should be baptized. On the other hand, some believe that infants of believers can also be baptized. Is infant baptism biblical? What are the arguments for infant baptism? In other words, what are the bases for the practice infant baptism? The paper aimed to answer these questions. The paper, also, provided an evaluation of infant baptism in the light of the Bible. The paper focused on the arguments for infant baptism. It sought to evaluate the views aired in defense of infant baptism from biblical point of view. The paper which sought to refute infant baptism in the light of the Bible will go a long way to contribute greatly to the already existing knowledge on the Christian doctrine of baptism. After evaluation of infant baptism in the light of the Bible, two concludes were made: 1) The Bible clearly and loudly advocates for believer's baptism, and 2) Infant baptizers strongly hold to the silence of the Bible and sources outside the Bible (writings of the church fathers) as the key bases for the practice. Infant baptism is not biblical. It was, therefore, recommended that those who were baptized as infants are to reconsider their decision. A more conscious personal decision to accept Christ should be the guide. Moreover, it was added that believed parents should desist from offering their infants for baptism; rather they should desire to train them in the Lord.

**Keywords:** *Baptism, Basis, Biblical, Evaluation, Infant.*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Baptism comes from a Greek word which basically means to dip repeatedly, to immerge, or submerge.<sup>1</sup> Baptism from its root word signifies a burial of a person in water to declare publicly his or her faith in Christ Jesus. It is a spiritual exercise. Similarly, Grenz understands baptism as "a public affirmation of a person's conscious decision to place himself or herself under the lordship of Jesus."<sup>2</sup> For Packer, baptism is the "union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection."<sup>3</sup> Baptism is a very important doctrine in Christianity and it has been held in high esteem by all Christian denominations. The reason has been that Christ commissioned the disciples to baptize those who accept the gospel (Matthew 28:19). History unfolds that baptism has been administered by the church at all times. The importance of the doctrine of baptism has made it one of the mostly debated topics among scholars.<sup>4</sup> Various aspects of the doctrine of baptism have received different views from scholars. The subjects of baptism is not an exception. Those who believe baptism as an expression of faith advocates that only believed ones should be baptized. On the other hand, some believe that infants of believers can also be baptized.<sup>5</sup> John Murray, an advocator of infant baptism, makes clear that infants of parents who are intelligent and make credible confession can be baptized "simply because God has instituted"<sup>6</sup> the rite.

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (1889), s.v. "baptizoo."

<sup>2</sup>Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 684.

<sup>3</sup>J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 212

<sup>4</sup>J. Mark Beach, "Original Sin, Infant Salvation, and the Baptism of Infants," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 12 (2001): 47.

<sup>5</sup>John W. Jack Carter, "The Subjects of Baptism: A History of Controversy," accessed 25 May 2017, <http://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/CarterJ11.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup>John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 55.

Infant baptism “is the practice of baptising infants or young children.”<sup>7</sup> “The New Testament Church shows no apparent concern for infant baptism.”<sup>8</sup> Though, some argue from the household baptism, there is no clear evidence in the New Testament to the fact that infants were baptized. There is no consensus on the existence of infant baptism in the early church, but for Didier, it is hard to deny its positive probability.<sup>9</sup> But specific evidence for the practice of infant baptism was shown in the second and third centuries. In the fourth century, Basil, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, and others deferred baptism for a latter age due to a misguided prudence. For their time, baptism was understood as sacrament of pardon other than as means of being incorporated into the church.<sup>10</sup> For some time, the church related baptism to actual sin until the controversy between Augustine and Pelagians arose.<sup>11</sup> “There after original sin explained the necessity of infant baptism.”<sup>12</sup> Neo-Manicheans rejected infant baptism in the thirteenth century on the basis that infants cannot believe. They insisted on Mark 16:16 which is a call for believers’ baptism.<sup>13</sup> The Anabaptist, also, during the Reformation renewed the rejection of infant baptism together with the Protestants. In spite of this, “the Catholic Church has continued to defend the practice of infant baptism”<sup>14</sup> since her official acceptance in 1349 AD. Also, there exist denominations today that engage in the practice of infant baptism. “Denominational families that practice infant baptism include Catholics, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians and other Reformed denominations, Methodists and some Nazarenes, and the Moravian Church.”<sup>15</sup> Is infant baptism biblical? What are the arguments for infant baptism? In other words, what are the bases for the practice infant baptism? The paper aims to answer these questions. The paper, also, provides an evaluation of infant baptism in the light of the Bible.

The paper does not trace the historical development of infant baptism or its debate. Well, they are issues that can to be discussed at another time. The paper focuses only on the arguments for infant baptism. It seeks to evaluate the views aired in defense of infant baptism from biblical point of view. The paper as it seeks to refute infant baptism in the light of the Bible will go a long way to contribute greatly to the already existing knowledge on the Christian doctrine of baptism. The paper has five sections. The first section introduces the paper. The arguments for the practice of infant baptism is presented in section two. Section three presents what the Bible teaches on the doctrine of baptism. An evaluation of the doctrine of infant baptism in the light of the Bible is done in section fourth. Section five concludes the paper.

## II. VIEWS ON INFANT BAPTISM

This section seeks to put across the justification for infant baptism. It seems that the argument for infant baptism can be classified into three bases: theological, biblical and historical.<sup>16</sup> We will first look at the theological justification for the practice of infant baptism then the biblical basis and finally the historical basis.

### Theological Basis

According to Reichelderfer, for one to understand infant baptism “the nature of the church, along with baptism in terms of it being a sign and seal of the covenant”<sup>17</sup> must be understood.<sup>18</sup> For John Calvin, the church is a mixture of adults, infants and children, and it contains both elect and non-elect individuals.<sup>19</sup> “The visible church is the ‘mother of believers’ through which one is conceived, given birth, nourished and kept until death.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “Infant Baptism,” Wikipedia, accessed 26 May 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org>.

<sup>8</sup> Richard X. Redmond, “Infant Baptism: History and Pastoral Problems,” accessed 25 May 2017, <http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/30/30.1/30.1.4.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Richard X. Redmond, “Infant baptism: History and pastoral problems.”

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Richard X. Redmond, “Infant baptism: History and pastoral problems.”

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “Infant Baptism,” Wikipedia.

<sup>16</sup> David L. Reichelderfer, “Understanding Infant Baptism in the Covenant Community of God’s People,” (MA Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, North Carolina, October 2014), iii, accessed 25 May 2017, <https://www.rts.edu>. See also page 75.

<sup>17</sup> Reichelderfer, “Understanding Infant Baptism in the Covenant Community of God’s People,” 18.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 4.16.21.

<sup>20</sup> Reichelderfer, “Understanding Infant Baptism in the Covenant Community of God’s People,” 18.

Charles Hodge identifies the visible church as a divine institution that is a mixture of regenerate and unregenerate individuals. According to Hodge, the church that is described in the New Testament is a continuation of the church of the Old Testament. The Lord of the Old Testament is our covenant God and Father, and our savior, Jesus Christ, was the savior of those who lived before he came in the flesh.<sup>21</sup>

Baptism is a “testimony of divine grace”<sup>22</sup> towards Gods people and it is done publicly. “It is the sign of initiation that represents that the individual has been received into the community of the church, engrafted in Christ, and can be considered among God’s people.”<sup>23</sup> Baptism is a sign of the covenant initiated with Abraham that was primarily spiritual in nature and is essentially identical with the new covenant. God appointed infants to be included in the benefits of the covenant and declared infants to receive circumcision as a sign and seal. They were considered to be an integral part of the people of Israel. The sign served to remind Abraham and the Israelites of the covenant that was made with God, as well as the promises and obligations contained within the covenant. The sign adds nothing to the covenant, and God is not obligated to fulfill his promise because of the sign associated with it. God appointed baptism to take the place of circumcision as the initial sign and seal of the covenant of grace in the New Testament era. Since children received the covenantal sign in the Old Testament era, it is presumed that they have a right to receive it in the New Testament era.<sup>24</sup> “Circumcision, a mark applied to believers and to their male infant offspring, carried the import of inclusion in the covenant community of God’s gracious favor and blessing, as well as the need for cleansing and the actual removal of defilement.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, “in Reformed thinking the covenant of grace forms the basis for the practice of infant baptism.”<sup>26</sup> Joel James added to this with these words: “In the Old Testament, male infants were circumcised shortly after birth to testify that they were part of the covenant community of Israel. Infant baptisers argue that infants born to church members today should, in turn, be baptised to show their entrance into the new covenant community, the church.”<sup>27</sup>

#### Biblical Basis

Though, there is no direct reference to infant baptism in the Bible, deduction has been made from some biblical quotations and passages. Circumcision in the Old Testament is one of the strongest bases for those who practice infant baptism. Wayne Vogt wrote “perhaps the strongest support of infant baptism, in my estimation, is the fact that Baptism replaced Old Testament circumcision.”<sup>28</sup> In the Old Testament, God called Abraham to circumcise all males in his house as a sign of the covenant God made with him.<sup>29</sup> Genesis 17:10-12 reads, This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring (NIV).

“And we see that ceremony was followed right up to the time of Christ, because Christ Himself was circumcised on the eighth day.”<sup>30</sup> Luke 2:21 records the circumcision of baby Jesus on the eighth day. In the Bible, circumcision was performed when the child was only eight days old. “Circumcision was the sign that marked the community of God’s people who had been claimed by God as his own, and who now responded in obedience to his claim. Circumcision was the rite by which those in the covenant community pledged to live under the authority and rule of God.”<sup>31</sup> Reichelderfer pointed out that “those who practice the rite upon children

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>22</sup> Calvin, 4.14.1, 4.15.1.

<sup>23</sup> Reichelderfer, “Understanding Infant Baptism in the Covenant Community of God’s People,” 22.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>25</sup> J. Mark Beach, “Original Sin, Infant Salvation, and the Baptism of Infants,” 76.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>27</sup> Joel James, *Infant Baptism or Believer's Baptism?* (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 2003), 16.

<sup>28</sup> Wayne Vogt, “The Biblical Substantiation for Infant Baptism,” accessed 26 May 2015, <http://www.wlssays.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1501/VogtInfant.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

<sup>29</sup> Gregg Strawbridge, ed., *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Philipsburg, New Jersey: P and R Publishing, 2003), 12.

<sup>30</sup> Wayne Vogt, “The Biblical Substantiation for Infant Baptism.”

<sup>31</sup> Reichelderfer, “Understanding Infant Baptism in the Covenant Community of God’s People,” 45.

find the roots of their practice in the rite of circumcision within the context of covenant relationship with God.”<sup>32</sup>

In reference to these New Testament passages (Gal. 2:3, 5:6, I Cor. 7:18-19), Wayne Vogt argued that “Jesus replaced circumcision with baptism”<sup>33</sup> and since infants were circumcised they are now to be baptized.<sup>34</sup>

Another biblical justification for infant baptism is that “Jesus has commanded us to baptize ‘all nations.’”<sup>35</sup> This reason is derived from the great commission. Matthew 28:18 reads, “therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (NIV).” The argument from this text is that “children are certainly a part of ‘all nations.’ And when Jesus commanded us to teach and baptize all nations, He didn't make any exceptions. He didn't exclude the children. Nor are we told of any exceptions that He made in the account recorded by St. Mark, ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved’ (Mk. 16:16).”<sup>36</sup> In fact, for Wayne Vogt Jesus baptism is crucial to the extent that He placed it at par with faith. He continued to argue that Christ did not prohibit infants from baptism. “In fact, nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to exclude children from Baptism. Those who say we dare not baptize children can't point to anyplace that the Bible forbids it.”<sup>37</sup>

The household or oikos formula is another basis for the practice of infant baptism. For Wayne Vogt, “they provide strong supporting evidence.”<sup>38</sup> There are several New Testament references to the baptism of the “whole households” (Acts 16:15, Acts 16:33, 1 Corinthians 1:16). This household baptism is assumed “would include infants and children.”<sup>39</sup>

In the Old Testament, if the head of a household converted to Judaism, all the males in the house, even the infants, were circumcised. Some paedobaptists argue this pattern continues into the New Testament. Reference is made, for example, to baptising a person and their whole household—the households of Lydia, Crispus, and Stephanas are mentioned by name Acts 16:14–15, 18:8; 1 Cor 1:16<sup>40</sup>

So the argument from household baptism as a basis for the practice of infant baptism is based on assumption. It is presumed that it includes infants who were incapable of personal belief.<sup>41</sup> The reason is that “infants are in a state of sin and need to be regenerated.”<sup>42</sup> This argument comes from the stand point that “all persons—including infants and children—are born with a corrupted nature and reckoned guilty in being sinners with Adam.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, “infants and children find themselves under the curse of sin as Adam's children—the curse of eternal death”<sup>44</sup> therefore they need redemption through baptism. To make this point more solid, those who practice infant baptism add that “as for children who die in infancy or an early age, despite their participation in Adam's sin, ‘they are somehow accepted and saved.’”<sup>45</sup>

#### Historical Basis

Those who practice infant baptism make references its occurrences in the history of the church. Wayne Vogt supports this by saying that evidence from church history reveals that infant baptism was common in the early Christian church.<sup>46</sup> He continued his arguments with these words: “It is a firmly documented fact, questioned by almost no one, that infant baptism has been widely practiced since at least 250 A.D. And there are several historical sources which are prior to that date which establish quite clearly that infant baptism was common throughout the first and second centuries also.”<sup>47</sup> Defenders of infant baptism defend the practice from the historical point of view by making references to the writings of the early church fathers like Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen and Bishop Fidus.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Wayne Vogt, “The Biblical Substantiation for Infant Baptism.”

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Wayne Vogt, “The Biblical Substantiation for Infant Baptism.”

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Wayne Vogt, “The Biblical Substantiation for Infant Baptism.”

<sup>39</sup> Karen Bates Olson, “Why infant baptism?” accessed 26 Many 2017, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2017/01/why-infant-baptism/>.

<sup>40</sup> “Infant Baptism,” Wikipedia.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> J. Mark Beach, “Original Sin, Infant Salvation, and the Baptism of Infants,” 62.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>46</sup> Wayne Vogt, “The Biblical Substantiation for Infant Baptism.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Baptism of infants has been identified in a statement Tertullian made and this is basically accepted by many scholars.<sup>48</sup> This is the earliest reference to infant baptism in the history of the church.<sup>49</sup> “The very treatment that Tertullian gives to infant baptism indicates that it was commonly practiced in his day.”<sup>50</sup> Infant baptism is also spoken of in the Apostolic Tradition (215 A.D.) of Hippolytus. He wrote that the infants baptized were made up of “some who could speak and others who are not yet able to speak.”<sup>51</sup> For Wayne Vogt, this “statement (from Hippolytus) makes it rather obvious that infant baptism was something which was commonly practiced at that time.”<sup>52</sup> “Origen, who died about 250 A.D., wrote this, ‘The church received from the apostles the tradition to give even little children to baptism.’”<sup>53</sup> Commenting on this Wayne Vogt wrote, “notice from this that Origen simply assumes that infant baptism is a common thing. He doesn’t go to any long discussion of the subject to defend it. He simply declares that it was a common practice which went back to the time of the Apostles.”<sup>54</sup> “Bishop Fidus asked the question of the Council of Carthage whether baptism ought to wait until the eighth day. The council agreed that it should not arbitrarily be delayed until then (Epistle 64, 2-6).”<sup>55</sup> Wayne Vogt elaborated on this statement with these words: That tells us beyond all doubt that infant baptism was widely practiced at that time. There was no heated debate whether infants should be baptized. It was universally accepted. It was merely a question of whether they should wait unto the eighth day as God had prescribed for O.T. circumcision. After that Council meeting, there is much more documented evidence that infants were commonly being baptized...so much evidence that even those opposed to infant baptism don’t dispute that it was widely practiced after 250 A.D.<sup>56</sup>

The practice of baptizing infants seemed not to have been an issue before the Reformation. It was a normal practice. “Infant baptism was never really widely questioned until about the time of the Reformation.”<sup>57</sup> To make this view more solid, Wayne Vogt added that “perhaps this would also tell us why the Bible never specifically mentions the baptism of infants.”<sup>58</sup>

### III. BIBLICAL VIEW ON BAPTISM

This section discusses baptism in the light of the Bible. It answers the question, what does the Bible teach on baptism? Meaning of baptism, importance of baptism and qualification for baptism will serve as the outline for discussing baptism in the Bible.

#### Meaning of Baptism

Baptism carries the idea of Immersion: The biblical references to John’s baptism in river Jordan and Aenon (Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5; John 3:23) makes clear that baptism was understood to be done by being immersed in the water. This is because only immersion demands much or enough water and John baptism in Aenon because there was “much water there.” Jesus went to John at Jordan River to be baptized and after the baptism, the Bible records that Jesus “came up out of the water” (Mark 1:9, 10; Matthew 3:16). The Greek word used signifies that Jesus was immersed (dipped into) in the water. Baptism by immersion was also administered by the apostolic church. Philip’s baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch was by immersion. The Bible records that they both went “into the water” and “came up out of the water” (Acts 8:38, 39). Clearly, the Bible supports baptism by immersion. To this Alfred Plummer wrote, “it is only when baptism is administered by immersion that its full significance is seen.”<sup>59</sup>

Baptism symbolizes the death and resurrection of Christ: The Bible makes clear that Jesus died and resurrected on the third day (Luke 23:50-24:1-3). Baptism signifies sharing in the death of Christ and coming up

<sup>48</sup> Reichelderfer, “Understanding Infant Baptism in the Covenant Community of God’s People,” 3, quoted from Joachim Jeremias, *The Origins of Infant Baptism: A Further Study in Reply to Kurt Aland* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 9.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Wayne Vogt, “The Biblical Substantiation for Infant Baptism.”

<sup>51</sup> Reichelderfer, “Understanding Infant Baptism in the Covenant Community of God’s People,” 4.

<sup>52</sup> Wayne Vogt, “The Biblical Substantiation for Infant Baptism.”

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Wayne Vogt, “The Biblical Substantiation for Infant Baptism.”

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke, The International Critical Commentary*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981 reprint), 88.

into a newness of life (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50; Romans 6:3-5). By sharing in the death of Christ through baptism, the one who is being baptized renounces his or her former ways of life. The person dies to his or her sins and validates that "old things have passed away" (2 Cor. 5:17). As one is being immersed in water, one is "buried with Him (Christ) in baptism" (Col. 2:12) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Now, as one comes up out of the water, the person shares in the resurrection of Christ. One becomes "alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:11). The Holy Spirit is poured on the person (Acts 2:38; Matt. 3:13-17; Acts 10:38), and he or she becomes empowered to live a life that produces the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25; Col. 3:1, 2).

#### Importance of Baptism

The Example and Command of Jesus: Jesus being baptized and He commanding it attest to the importance and the need for baptism. Jesus never sinned (1 Peter 2:22), but He went through baptism to give us an example. When John tried to prevent Him, "permit it to be so now," Jesus answered, "for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:13-15). Jesus went through baptism to call us to do the same (Matt. 21:25). If the Sinless one went through baptism, then we who are sinners need it the most. The great commission (Matthew 28:18-20) records Jesus commanding the disciples to baptize. Christ demands baptism of those who believe in Him as a testimony that they had entered into a personal relationship with Him.

The Call of the Apostles: Just like Christ, the apostles repeatedly preached the necessity of baptism for those who accepted Christ (Acts 2:38; 10:48; 22:16). The response was enormous, as many were baptized and the church increased in number (Acts 2:41, 47; 8:12). As a Requirement for Salvation: Repeatedly, baptism is linked with salvation in the New Testament. The New Testament calls for those who believe to be baptized in order to be saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 16:30-34; 1 Peter 3:20, 21). This speaks to the essentiality of baptism.

#### Qualification for baptism

One who qualifies to be baptized is not left in a vacuum. The Bible clearly outlines the requirements of baptism and makes clear the one who qualifies to be baptized. The New Testament calls for faith and repentance as the requirements for baptism. Faith: It seems clear that the first requirement for baptism in the Bible is faith in Jesus as the Savior of the world (John 3:16). Christ said, "he who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Likewise, the apostles baptized only those who believed the gospel that was preached to them (Acts 8:12, 36, 37; 18:8). Faith in Jesus is developed as people hear the "Word of God" being preached (Rom. 10:17) and this Christ commissioned the apostles to do (Matt. 28:19, 20). On who qualifies to be baptized, the Bible clearly supports believers' baptism. Those who can hear the gospel preached to them and believe. The Bible leaves no room for the practice of infant baptism. Repentance: The preaching of the "Word of God" does not only produces faith but repentance and conversion as well. "Repent," said Peter, "and let every one of you be baptized" (Acts 2:38). Those who seek baptism must have come to see their lost condition, confessed their sins, and be ready to turn away completely from them in order to receive Christ's atonement. Without being converted, one cannot enter into a personal relationship with Christ. This makes repentance a prerequisite for baptism. Commenting on the necessity repentance for baptism, Joel James wrote: John preached repentance and baptised those who confessed their sins and sought God's forgiveness. In fact, John rejected the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to him to be baptised (vv. 7-8) because he did not believe their repentance was genuine—evidenced by their lack of fruit. These religious leaders had the right family background—"We have Abraham for our father" (v. 10)—but John was unimpressed. Baptism was not based on who your parents were, but on personal repentance from sin.<sup>60</sup>

#### IV. AN EVALUATION OF INFANT BAPTISM IN LIGHT OF THE BIBLE

Each Christian doctrine or practice should be formed on the basis of the Scriptures. In fact, the Christian conviction should be sola scriptura (the Bible only) and tota scriptura (the totality of Scripture) in formulating all doctrines. This section seeks to evaluate the practice of infant baptism in the light of the Bible.

First and foremost, since Christian doctrines should be formed on the basis of Scripture, historical basis for infant baptism becomes nullified. The conviction of the Reformers, sola scriptura, stands sure in formulating all Christian doctrines. The Bible provides sufficient guide for the Christian life and practices. While it is good to trace how Christian doctrines have travel through history, history should not become the basis for formulating Christian doctrines. The infallible Word of God, the Bible, should be the only authoritative source for formulating Christian doctrines. Therefore, we cannot look to the teachings of the church fathers as an authority sources for formulating Christian doctrines. The circumcision of the Old Testament never replaced baptism in the New Testament. If it was so Christ would have been baptized as an infant, rather Christ was dedicated by the priest in the temple as a child (Luke 2:22-28). And at an old age, Christ went to Jordan River where He was baptized by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17). In fact, circumcision did not cease in the New Testament. Circumcision and baptism were both practiced in the New Testament times (Acts 15:5-6; Matthew 3:7). They

<sup>60</sup> Joel James, *Infant Baptism or Believer's Baptism*, 5.

are two separate practices which were all administered by the Jews. Commenting on Colossians 2:11-12 which those who practice infant baptism cite to support their argument, Joel James wrote “Infant baptisers appeal to Colossians 2:11-12 because it is the only text in the New Testament in which the words baptism and circumcision appear in the same verse. However, the verse does not teach replacement as their view requires.”<sup>61</sup> He continued that “the Apostles did not teach that baptism had replaced circumcision.”<sup>62</sup> To be part of God’s covenant people in the New Testament, one must turn away from his or her sins, believe in Christ and be baptized. Commenting on how those who administer infant baptism understand the new covenant, Joel James said “unfortunately, this (their) view of infants and the covenant is based on a seriously deficient understanding of the new covenant. In the Old Testament, entrance into national Israel (and, thus, the covenant) was through physical birth. This is not true of the new covenant. The requirement for inclusion in the new covenant is not physical birth, but spiritual rebirth”<sup>63</sup> James outlining the requirement for the new covenant said they are internal transformation, personal knowledge of God and personal forgiveness of sins.<sup>64</sup> These infants cannot go through.

The idea that infants are part of “all nations” that are to be evangelized is perfect. In fact, the great commission is to all tongues, tribes and people on earth including the old and the infants. But, the fact that infants are part of “all nations” does not necessarily mean they are to be baptized. “The widely respected commentator William Hendriksen (himself a practitioner of infant baptism) accurately summarised the teaching of Matthew 28:19-20 when he wrote, ‘the context makes very clear that Jesus is here speaking about those who are old enough to be considered the objects of preaching. He is not here speaking about infants.’”<sup>65</sup> Rather, the Bible calls believed parents to “bring them (infants) up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4, KJV).” And when this is rightly done, when they (infants) grow, they will not depart from the Lord (Proverbs 22:8). While it is true that infants are part of “all nations”, they are to be trained in the Lord at that stage so that when they are of age, they can personally make a conscious personal decision to follow Christ through baptism. The reason is that baptism demands faith. And faith consists of “emotion, intellect, and choice.”<sup>66</sup> These infants cannot express. Joel James shared a similar view with these words: “By any normal, biblical definition of faith, it is impossible for an infant to have faith at his baptism.”<sup>67</sup> He continued that “personal repentance from sin had to precede water baptism. The Apostles’ practice was the same as John the Baptist’s had been. Repentance, not who your parents were, was the prerequisite for being baptised.”<sup>68</sup> Those who practice infant baptism make references to household baptisms recorded in the Scriptures. The reason has always been based on silence since no clear references are made as to whether infants were baptized or not with regards to the passages they refer to. But as has been presented in section three, the Bible strongly calls for faith and repentance as a prerequisite for baptism; therefore, these nullify infant baptism. Infants can neither believe nor repent. Joel James responding to household baptism as a basis for the practice of infant baptism said, “traditionally the ‘household baptisms’ of the book of Acts and 1 Corinthians have been considered a stronghold by many who practice infant baptism. However, a closer inspection shows that those accounts don’t support the practice of infant baptism.”<sup>69</sup> He continued that “each of these texts contains statements which exclude the possibility that infants were present and baptised.”<sup>70</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

Those who practice infant baptism present logical bases for their stand. Whilst their bases sound logical theologically, they lack solid biblical support. Though the writings of the early church fathers record the practice of infant baptism, there are no such records in the Bible. Infant baptism lacks unequivocal reference in the Bible. Louis Berkhof shared the same idea “it must be said at the outset that there is no explicit command in the Bible to baptise children, and that there is not a single instance in which we are plainly told that children were baptised.”<sup>71</sup> After evaluation of infant baptism in the light of the Bible, two concludes can be made: 1) The

<sup>61</sup> Joel James, *Infant Baptism or Believer's Baptism*, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Joel James, *Infant Baptism or Believer's Baptism*, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>65</sup> Joel James, *Infant Baptism or Believer's Baptism*, 6, quoted from William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, in the New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 1000.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>69</sup> Joel James, *Infant Baptism or Believer's Baptism*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>71</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, 41, reprinted 1991), 632.

Bible clearly and loudly advocates for believer's baptism, and 2) Infant baptizers strongly hold to the silence of the Bible and sources outside the Bible (writings of the church fathers) as the key bases for the practice. I, therefore, recommend to all who were baptized as infants to reconsider their decision. A more conscious personal decision to accept Christ should be the guide. Moreover, believed parents should desist from offering their infants for baptism, rather they should desire to train them in the Lord.

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