

## AND THY HOUSE

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All Christians have certain beliefs in common. These beliefs are stated in the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon. Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant all affirm these. Protestants have certain beliefs in common, which they do not share with the others. These may be summarized as Scripture alone, faith alone, and grace alone. In other words, Scripture over tradition, faith over works, and grace over merit. Protestant sects are distinguished by their views of church government: Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational. All of these—Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant—have in common the doctrine of infant baptism. It is the denial of infant baptism, and the affirmation of believer's baptism, that distinguish baptists from all the rest. The basic Baptist argument is that there is no example in Scripture of the baptism of an infant. This argument is a poor one, and cuts against the Baptist view, for there is no example in Scripture of a person, born to Christian parents, being baptized in his adolescence. There is no verse in Scripture commanding women to partake of the Lord's Supper, but Baptists rightly infer this from other verses. There may be no verse in Scripture that explicitly commands that infants be baptized, but neither is there any forbidding their being baptized. In fact, the baptism of infants is clear enough in Scripture, and is seen in household baptism.

When God called Abraham, He promised to make him the father of many nations. He said, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Genesis 12:2, 3) This was the Gospel. As Saint Paul wrote to the Galatians, "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." (Galatians 3:8) Later, God repeated to Abraham His promise, and the Scriptures say, "He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:6) To reassure Abraham, God confirmed His promise with an oath. He made a covenant with Abraham in which He swore by Himself, their being nothing greater, to fulfill what He had promised. The Scriptures say, "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." (Genesis 15:1-21; Hebrews 6:13-17) God promised to make Abraham the father of many nations, and He promised a land in which they might dwell. Sometime after this, God gave Abraham a sign of His covenant with him, namely, the sign of circumcision. He told Abraham that His covenant was not only with him, but also with his descendents. He said, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." (Genesis 17:7) Because His covenant was with Abraham and his descendents, not only Abraham, but also his descendents would receive the sign. God said to Abraham:

Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he

that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant. (Genesis 17:9-14)

All the males of Abraham's household were to receive the sign, whether they were physical descendents or not. So, everyone born into his household, and everyone brought into his household, like those bought with money, were to receive the sign of circumcision. The members of Abraham's household were to receive the sign because they were heirs of the thing signified, namely, eternal life. Circumcision did not confer right standing with God, but rather was a sign that God had conferred it. It is not the physical descendents of Abraham who receive the gift, but his spiritual heirs, they who believe God. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also." (Romans 4:11) It was not only the physical descendents of Abraham that came under the covenant, but some who were not his physical descendents, some of the Gentiles, also came under it. When God instituted the Passover in Egypt, and commanded the people to observe it in perpetuity, He told them that they should allow no foreigner to partake. God told Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof." (Exodus 23:43-45). The ceremony was for the people of God, and if any foreigner wished to observe it, then he had to become one of them. Circumcision was the sign that he had joined to people of God, and would worship their God. God told Moses and Aaron, "And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof." (Exodus 12:48)

In the days of the divided kingdom, the children of Israel continually disobeyed God. They needed forgiveness of sins, and the power to obey God's commands. Through Joel the prophet God told the northern kingdom of Judah that He would punish them for their sins. He would send the Assyrians to conquer them. He promised afterward to restore them, but they would have to repent of their sins. Joel said:

Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. (Joel 2:12, 13)

God would restore them, and would give them His spirit. He said to them:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the

terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call. (Joel 2:28-32)

God also punished the people of the southern kingdom for their sins. He sent the Babylonians to conquer them. After Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, God through Ezekiel the prophet promised His people that one day He would give them forgiveness of sins, and the power to obey His law. He said:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. (Ezekiel 26:25-27)

After Jesus ascended into heaven, God, on the day of Pentecost, fulfilled His promise and He poured out His Spirit. Saint Peter told a great crowd of Jews that in their time the promise was being fulfilled. They were, however, responsible for the death of Jesus. They asked the apostle what they should do, and he answered them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” (Acts 2:38, 39) If the people would receive forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Spirit who would empower them to obey, they needed to repent. They had rejected Jesus as Christ, and called upon the Roman authorities to execute Him. His blood was on their hands, and would remain there unless they repented. They had, therefore, to repent of their treatment of Jesus. They had denied Him, but they had to believe in Him. They had denied He was the Christ; they had to confess Him as the same. So, Saint Peter told them to repent. Repentance, however, although necessary, was not sufficient; they had also to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. They had not only to be baptized, a sign of the washing away of sins, but they had to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, indicating that they believed that Jesus is the Christ, and has the authority to forgive sins, as He claimed. If they repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, they would have the forgiveness of sins, and they would receive the Holy Spirit, who would enable them to obey God. Moreover, Saint Peter told them that every one of them should be baptized, because the promise was for them, and for their children. The principle of household covenant remained in effect, and was never revoked. The children, even the infant children of believers, are included in the covenant relation, and they must receive the sign of it. God is their God, and they are counted among His people. Saint Luke notes the application of this principle in several places in his narrative of the Acts of the Apostles.

After the Jerusalem Council, Saint Paul, along with Saint Silas, set out on his second missionary journey. When they reached the city of Troas in Asia, the Lord showed Saint Paul in a vision that they must go to Macedonia. They arrived at the Macedonian city of Philippi and there they remained a few days. On the Sabbath day, they went out of the city to find a place of prayer by a river there. There they encountered some women, and they spoke to them about the things of God. One of the women was Lydia, a Gentile convert to the religion of the Jews. She listened to the things that the apostles said, and the Lord opened her heart to give heed to them. That is to say, the Lord opened her heart to believe. Such a work of God was necessary, for Jesus said,

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) Saint Luke writes that “she was baptized, and her household.” Lydia, who was, it seems, the head of her household, was baptized, along with everyone in her household. Luke does not develop the point, but merely mentions it without commentary. He does, however, develop it somewhat more in the succeeding narrative.

After the baptism of Lydia and her household, Paul and Silas made their way to a place of prayer. On their way they were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination. For many days the girl followed them, and kept crying out, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.” Saint Paul finally became greatly annoyed, and said to the spirit, “I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her,” and it did leave her. She had with her greatpower brought great wealth to her masters, and, they, when they saw that their source of income was lost, seized the apostles and brought them to the authorities. They complained that Paul and Silas were Jews, and were making trouble in the city by teaching things contrary to Roman beliefs. The magistrates stripped the clothes from the apostles, and ordered that they be beaten. After they were beaten, they were turned over to the jailer, who cast them into the innermost part of the prison, and fastened their feet in stocks. At midnight, while Paul and Silas were praying and singing songs, there was a great earthquake, and all the prison doors came open, and all the bands of the prisoners came loose. The jailer entered the jail, and, seeing the prison doors open, drew his sword to kill himself. Saint Paul stopped him, telling him that no one had escaped. The jailer knew who they were, and why they were in prison. Perhaps also he had heard the hymns they sang. Without doubt, the earthquake put in him the fear of God. He brought the apostles out of the prison, and said to them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved.” They told him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” If he believed, not only would he come into covenant relation with God, but also his entire household. Saint Luke writes:

And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. (Acts 16:32-34)

Paul and Silas took the time to explain to him, and to all that were in his house with him, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The jailer believed the Gospel, and repented of the treatment of the apostles. Before, he had no care for them; now he kindly treated their wounds. He and his entire household were baptized. He then brought the apostles into his home, and gave them food. Saint Luke writes that the jailer rejoiced, and his household rejoiced with him, because he believed in God. God graciously operates by the household principle. When a head of household believes, then the entire household, including the children, come into the covenant relation, and they all have the right to water baptism, the sign of that relation. Of course, this guarantees the salvation of no one, because not all those in covenant relation with God persevere. However, all those who have been baptized, and are faithful, may be assured of their salvation. Not only that, but they may be sure of the salvation of their children. So, the Canons of Dort, First Head of Doctrine, Article 17, states:

Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they, together

with the parents, are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.

Christian parents must baptize their infants, and all should regard them as members of the covenant. The children have, therefore, both promises and obligations, as all in the covenant relation have. They must be faithful to God, and repent when they fail. When they do repent, God promises to forgive their sins. They have the Holy Spirit to help them. They may call God their Father, and He hears their prayers, and works all things for their good. He is their God, and they are His people.

Let us remember that we are in covenant relation with God, and, as God is faithful to us, we must be faithful to Him. Let us recognize that the children of believers are also in that same covenant relation, and let their parents “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4)

And now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.