

TO THE GROUP LEADER: This resource is designed to help you lead others to better understand one of the “Basics of the Faith” booklets published by P&R. The numbers in brackets indicate the page number in the booklet. Below each question is an answer based on what the author presents, or advice on how to discuss the question. You have the freedom to adapt the questions to best fit your group.

A good teaching technique is to distribute the questions to the group and have them write down how they would answer BEFORE reading the booklet. After reading, members can refine their answers based on their reading. As a group, members can discuss their views to affirm or modify what they wrote.

1. Why do you think Presbyterians baptize children? [5]
It is not because we believe it saves them or keeps them from hell. “We baptize children because we believe the Bible teaches us to do so.” [5]
2. Read Genesis 17:1-14. How do you define a covenant? [6]
Read the Genesis passage again to the class. [Remember, Abraham was not born an Israelite. God saved and called him out of an idolatrous background in Genesis 12.] A covenant is a sacred bond (agreement or contract) made between two parties.
3. Were the promises made to Abraham given *only* to Israel? [7]
Read Genesis 12:3 and Galatians 3:8. God told Abram many nations would come from him. The covenant was never intended only for Israel. They were to be His light to reach the rest of the world.
4. What did the sign of this covenant represent? [8-9]
It was a visual picture of the removal of spiritual uncleanness from God’s people.
5. Read Genesis 17:11-13. Who all was to receive this sign? [9]
Abraham, all male children eight days old, and all males in Abraham’s house, whether relatives or foreigners (non-Israelites – the nations mentioned in Gen.12:3).
6. Does the receiving of this sign guarantee eternal salvation? [9-10]
No! Explain to them the example of Jacob and Essau. Both received the sign, but only one came to faith – Jacob was renamed *Israel* at conversion (Gen.32:28).
7. What is required for there to be covenant relationship in a family? [9]
Read 1 Cor.7:14 to the class. At least one parent must be a believer. (Note the context here.)
8. Since only males receive the sign, are women excluded? [10]
No, not at all. The males represent the household. But, when it comes to salvation, all are saved equally. This is made clear in Gal.3:26-27.
9. Why place this sign on someone who has not yet come to faith? [10-11]
Read Rom.4:11 to the class. Explain: Circumcision was a “sign” of the righteousness provided through God’s covenant. The “seal” was God’s pledge to provide all the blessings of His covenant *when* the conditions of faith are met.
10. Does the covenant continue in the New Testament? [12-13]
Read Acts 2:38-39. Emphasize the extent of the promise reaches even generations yet to come. Ask them: “If you were a Jewish parent, listening to Peter on the day of Pentecost, how would you have reacted if Peter told you your children were no longer covered under God’s covenant?”

11. Where in Scripture do you find the change in the sign of the covenant? [13-16]
 Read Col.2:11-12. The Apostle Paul clearly indicated that circumcision is no longer required of every person in the New Testament church (Gal. 2:3-5), and Peter also says, "Repent and be baptized, **every one** of you" (Acts 2:38). Circumcision is not required of everyone in the church; baptism is.
12. Can you think of any place in the New Testament where it specifically says infants were baptized? [15-20]
 Those who oppose infant baptism ask "Where in the NT does it say we should baptize infants?" Our answer: "You are asking the wrong question. Where does it say in the NT we should **stop** placing the sign of God's covenant on our children?" Note the emphasis in the OT that the head of the household determined who received the sign. Then note how Acts shows that whole households were baptized when the head became a believer.
13. If baptism is by immersion, doesn't that mean we should *not* baptize infants? [20-24]
 Read Acts 8:26-39. Ask the class: "Where were Philip and the Eunuch?" [the desert] In verse 38-39, who went "**down into** the water," and who came "**up out** of the water?" They both did! There is no indication here which mode of baptism was used. The text is silent on either side of this argument. No word(s) in the original language of this (or any other NT account) indicates that both or either person went *under* the water.
14. Does baptizing our children guarantee God will *later* bring them to saving faith? [24-26]
 Unfortunately we have no such guarantee. Paul tells us there has always been two Israels. Read Rom.2:28-29. There was national Israel, but there was also the group referred to as "the remnant" - those who believed and kept God's covenant. This is how we, as believers, are the *true Israel* God spoke of in Gen.12:3 as the nations that would come from Abraham.
15. If the child doesn't automatically get saved at baptism, and there is no guarantee the child will come to faith later, then what benefit is there in baptizing them? [26-29]
- They have the benefit of godly parents living out the covenant in their sight.
 - They have the privilege of hearing and understanding the truths of the gospel.
 - They get to be eyewitnesses of answered prayers.
 - They have the opportunity of being nurtured not only by loving parents but also a loving community - the church - who vowed at the baptism to be part of the upbringing of this child in the ways of the Lord. Being part of the church enables the child to observe the culture of those living out their covenant blessing in a world opposed to the God they love.

After going through these questions, read the text and fill in the answers in preparation for class, noting other questions you might have. [By the way, if you do have any other questions about what you read, write them down here so you remember them at class time.]

APPLICATION

1. Do you still have children at home? Are they baptized? If not, does this study help you understand the importance of obeying God in this practice? If so, talk with your pastor right away.
2. If your children are already baptized, are you following the vows you took at that time? Are you raising your child in the ways of the Lord? If not, what needs to change in your life and practice? And, when will you start to implement these changes? Don't put it off. If you do, you know Satan will do everything he can to keep you from keeping this promise.

For Further Study

Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism, Robert R. Booth. P&R, 1995.
The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism, Gregg Strawbridge. P&R, 2003.
Baptism, Francis A. Schaeffer. CEP, 2004.

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