

DOES INFANT BAPTISM REPLACE CIRCUMCISION? ROMANS 2:25–29

INTRODUCTION

This past Sunday we considered **the Jewish practice of physical circumcision** as a **false hope and empty ritual**.

As Paul explained, the Jews **misunderstood both obedience and circumcision** to be external matters, not understanding that circumcision is primarily internal in the form of **a new heart that produces the obedience of faith**.

Paul's confrontation of their **misplaced confidence in religious rituals** raised **important applications for us** as Gentile Christians.

It is very easy for us to **misplace our confidence** in the external practices of Christianity, especially the rituals of **baptism and the Lord's Supper**.

While we noted the application to both rituals, or **'ordinances'** as we refer to them most often, **the application to baptism** is of critical importance to us because of the religious context in which we find ourselves.

In both the past and present, **the Reformed tradition and its Covenant theology framework** has been one of the most significant influences on both **the churches and cultures** of South Africa.

This is particularly the case with the **'Three Sister Churches'** of the **Dutch Reformed movement** in South Africa.

The Covenant theology framework of the Reformed tradition emphasises **the practice of infant baptism** as a direct **replacement of circumcision**.

This is represented in the **Belgic Confession** which states in **Article 34** that—

“We believe our children ought to be baptised and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as little children were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises made to our children.

And truly, Christ has shed his blood no less for washing the little children of believers than he did for adults.

Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of what Christ has done for them....

Furthermore, baptism does for our children what circumcision did for the Jewish people.”¹

It is also clearly taught in the **Heidelberg Catechism**, which asks and answers in **Question 74**—

“Should infants also be baptised?

Yes. Infants as well as adults are included in God's covenant and people, and they, no less than adults, are promised deliverance from sin through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who works faith.

Therefore, by baptism, the sign of the covenant, they too should be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers.

This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.”²

¹ Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., *Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader's Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 105–106.

² Ibid., 312.

So then, since this is a **significant influence** upon what many Christians **believe and practice**, it is essential that we consider the practice of infant baptism/ paedobaptism in light of Scripture.

As a way of **carefully and thoughtfully applying** what we learnt from Paul about **the false hope and empty ritual** of circumcision, we must consider the **danger of practicing infant baptism** as a similar false hope and empty ritual.

In order to do that, however, we need to first ask the more **fundamental question** of whether infant baptism **is even a biblical practice?**

Are paedobaptists right when they insist that **infant baptism has replaced circumcision?**

At the outset, we must acknowledge that the question must be **answered by Scripture as God's authoritative Word**, not by **creeds, confessions, or catechisms**.

In evaluating this practice of the Reformed tradition, we join with our Reformed brothers and sisters in acknowledging the **Reformation principle** of **Sola Scriptura**.

By **Sola Scriptura** the Reformers meant that *“only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church.”*³

³ Matthew Barrett, “Sola Scriptura in the Strange Land of Evangelicalism: The Peculiar but Necessary Responsibility of Defending Sola Scriptura against Our Own Kind,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 19, no. 4 (2015): 18.

PROPOSITION

So then, as we take the time to **carefully and thoughtfully develop the application** of **Romans 2:25–29** and its warning against **the false hope and empty ritual of circumcision**, we will consider the Reformed, Covenantal practice of infant baptism.

In order to **answer the key question** of whether infant baptism has replaced circumcision, we will **firstly** consider the **command in the book of Acts** and **secondly** consider the **examples in the book of Acts**.

With that, **turn to Acts 2** as we seek the answer to the question—**Does infant baptism replace circumcision?**

1. THE COMMAND IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

As you know, **the practice of baptism** is **first commanded** by Christ Himself in what we call the Great Commission.

In **Matthew 28:18-20**, Christ issues **His authoritative instruction** that **all of His followers must be baptised**—

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to keep all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

To put it simply, one of the **distinctive marks of a faithful follower** of Christ is that they have been baptised.

While Christ commanded the practice, it was the apostles, as the authoritative representatives of Christ, who **further developed** the church's **understanding and application of baptism**.

Therefore, as we study the command of baptism in the book of Acts, we find a **clearer and more comprehensive idea** of the **biblical practice of baptism**.

By way of context, remember that in **Acts 2** we find Peter preaching his **first sermon after the resurrection** of Christ as one of **His Spirit-empowered representatives**.

Peter preached a sermon that **focussed on the resurrection** as proof that **Jesus is God's Messianic Saviour of Israel**.

In light of that, **Peter confronts the Jews** on **their rejection of Christ**, as we see in **verse 36**—

Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.

With that context in mind, we can look at the section that will be our primary focus, **verses 37–41**—

³⁷ **Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men, brothers, what should we do?”**

³⁸ **And Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

³⁹ **For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”**

⁴⁰ **And with many other words he solemnly bore witness and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this crooked generation!”**

⁴¹ **So then, those who had received his word were baptised; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.**

As you see in **verse 37**, many in the crowd **responded to Peter’s sermon** with **grief, remorse, and intense spiritual conviction of their guilt** in killing their Messiah.

Being **“pierced to the heart,”** they asked what they should do.

It is clear that the question **should be understood** as, **“What should we do to be forgiven for killing the Messiah?”**

In other words, those who were **convicted of their guilt** asked how they should respond **in order to be saved** by the crucified and resurrected Christ.

Peter answered their question with **two actions, one purpose, and one promise**, as we see in **verse 38**—

And Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The first action that Peter tells the crowd they need to do is **“repent.”**

Repentance is **changing one's mind and life** by **turning from sin to God**.

It is **one of two essential components** of a genuine conversion—the other essential component being **faith**.⁴

The concept of repentance is wonderfully **illustrated by the Thessalonian church**, as Paul recounts the news that had spread about their conversions in **1 Thessalonians 1:9**—

They themselves report about us what kind of an entrance we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.

As **John MacArthur** rightly argues—

*“True repentance hates sin for what it is—an affront to God. Knowing that sin is evil and that God hates it motivates the truly repentant person to forsake it. Genuine repentance thus forsakes sin and turns in total commitment to Jesus Christ.”*⁵

That is **exactly what Peter called for** as the **first action** from those who sought to **respond appropriately** to his preaching.

The second action that Peter tells the crowd they each need to do is **“be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ.”**

The **Greek word βαπτίζω** means *“to immerse, dip, submerge.”*⁶

⁴ Gregg R. Allison, “Repentance,” in *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 182.

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 73.

⁶ Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, ed. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), βαπτίζω.

It was what we **South Africans do with a rusk**—we dunk it **IN our coffee** instead of **SPRINKLING** it with our coffee.

I'm sure if they had rusks then the NT authors would have used that illustration!

Peter was telling them to do **exactly what Christ had commanded** in **Matthew 28:19**.

It's worth noting that this is **the first time** the apostles **publicly commanded** people to be baptised.

Peter urged the people who **repented and turned to the Lord** Christ for salvation to **publicly identify with His death, burial, and resurrection** through the waters of baptism.

As a response to the gospel, **baptism is then inseparable from repentance**.

It is an **expression of repentance** and a demonstration of **submission to the authority of Christ**, which is what Peter is calling for as the **second action** from those who sought to respond appropriately to his preaching.

Peter answered the the Jews that they needed to do the **two actions** of **repentance and baptism**, but added a **purpose** to both as he says—

“Repent, and each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins....”

This purpose clause, “for the forgiveness of your sins,” can be **challenging to understand**, but the full context of the New Testament teaching means there is simply **NO REASON** to understand it to mean that **baptism produces salvation**.

That is a **heretical misinterpretation** known as “**baptismal regeneration**.”

If you examine the **context of the New Testament**, it will be clear that **Peter did NOT MEAN** that baptism produces forgiveness or salvation.⁷

That said, there are **three primary ways** that this phrase has been **reasonably interpreted**.⁸

The first possible interpretation is that the preposition “**for**” indicates a **cause**, and should be translated as “**because of**.”

In other words, Peter was calling for water baptism to be performed “**because of**” **the forgiveness of sins**, not in order to produce it.⁹

⁷ “Despite the claims of some, Acts 2:38 does not teach baptismal regeneration. Instead it supports the message throughout the gospels and Acts that repentance is the basis for salvation. Therefore, instead of being shaken by the concept of baptismal regeneration believers must remain confident that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Baptism is an important and necessary step of obedience, but it is not the foundation of salvation and our hope for eternal life.” Robert E. Green, “Acts 2:38 and the Question of Baptismal Regeneration,” ed. Kevin M. Backus, *The Journal of Modern Ministry* 4, no. 1 (2007): 172.

⁸ For a detailed discussion, see Matthew Waymeyer, *A Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2008), 96–102.

⁹ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 786; A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 2:38; H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1927), 104.

This view correctly upholds **water baptism as merely an external demonstration** of what has already happened in the heart through the **regenerating power of the Holy Spirit**.

This work of the Holy Spirit to **produce a new heart of repentance and faith** is what is called the **baptism of the Holy Spirit, or simply Spirit baptism**.

We find **Spirit baptism** in **1 Corinthians 12:13** as Paul writes:

By one Spirit we were all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Much like circumcision, the **external ritual** is intended to demonstrate an **internal reality**.

However, despite the **popularity of this view**, it is based on a **doubtful understanding of Greek grammar**.¹⁰

The second possible interpretation is that the phrase, “**for the forgiveness of your sins**,” is only modifying **the command to repent** and not the command to be baptised.

While this view is feasible, the **grammar it relies on is just as suspect** so that, in the words of **one author**—

*“its subtlety and awkwardness make it highly unlikely.”*¹¹

¹⁰ Waymeyer, *Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism*, 96.

¹¹ Ibid., 98.

The view is “clumsy and strained, and therefore doubtful,” A. B. Caneday, “Baptism in the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 285–328. For an overview of the various views, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 369–371.

The third possible interpretation, and **the one that seems most natural**, is to simply take **Peter's words at face value** that if the Jews were to be forgiven, they needed to both repent and be baptised.

In other words, the purpose, **“for the forgiveness of your sins,”** **modifies both the repentance and the baptism** that Peter commands.

As author **Matt Waymeyer** explains—

“The key is to understand this: To be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ was to publicly declare one's allegiance to Christ and one's desire to follow Him as a disciple.”¹²

[ILLUSTRATION OF THREE MEN IN QUEUE TO BE BAPTISED?]

With that in mind, you can see that Peter commanded those who heard his sermon to **demonstrate their allegiance to Christ and submission to His authority**—an allegiance and submission which are **indeed necessary for salvation**.

To say that another way, the command to be baptised included both the **external ritual** of being submerged in water and the **internal reality** of **wholehearted commitment** to Christ.

In the context of the book of Acts, someone who **refused to be baptised** was understood to have **rejected the gospel**.

An unwillingness to be baptised was understood by the apostles and the church as an **unwillingness to follow Christ**.

¹² Waymeyer, *Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism*, 99.

As **one author** says, **the early church**—

“...could not conceive of a true Christian who was not willing to express commitment to our Lord [in baptism].

That was not one of the options given to the person being evangelised.

He either trusted Christ and was baptised, knowing the implications in terms of commitment and lifestyle, or he rejected the truth.”¹³

So for Peter and the other apostles, **repentance and faith without baptism was unthinkable.**

To this **purpose of forgiveness**, Peter then added **one promise** that was **intended to motivate** the Jews to respond appropriately to his preaching.

At the end of **verse 38**, we see that Peter says those who respond with repentance demonstrated in baptism will be forgiven—

and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The **permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit** in all believers is a **key promise in the New Covenant.**¹⁴

We see that, for example, in the promise of **Ezekiel 36:27**—

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to do My judgments.

¹³ Richard E. Averbeck, “The Focus of Baptism in the New Testament,” *Grace Theological Journal* 2, no. 2 (1981): 288.

¹⁴ Larry D. Pettegrew, “The New Covenant and New Covenant Theology,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 18, no. 2 (2007): 185.

In other words, Peter answered the question of the convicted crowds with the **assurance that if they responded with repentance**, as **demonstrated publicly by the ritual of baptism**, then they would receive not only forgiveness for their sins but the full inheritance of the New Covenant that included the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

So far, as we've examined the **command of baptism** in the book of Acts, it seems to clearly support the practice of **baptising professing believers instead of infants**.

However, **verse 39** is where the **Reformed paedobaptists** argue that infant baptism is **given by apostolic command**.

Look at the verse as we read—

For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.

Reformed theologians emphasise that the promise of forgiveness and the indwelling Holy Spirit is **given to the children of those who were baptised**.

However, **that is not really what the text says!**

Peter actually **encouraged the Jews** that there **wasn't a limit** to the good news he was preaching to them.

Christ will save everyone who **responds with repentance and faith**, even those in the coming generations and those who are **“far off.”**

To Peter, those who were “**far off**” would primarily have been **the Diaspora Jews** scattered in other nations, but Luke shows in the narrative of Acts that it **includes all the Gentiles too**.¹⁵

That is, the gospel promise of **God’s forgiveness in Christ extends to all generations and nations**, allowing everyone who responds appropriately to receive the promised New Covenant salvation.

So then, Peter was **NOT promising** that the **children would be included** in the covenant blessing by means of baptism.

That is made even clearer by **the next verses**, as Luke records:

⁴⁰ **And with many other words he solemnly bore witness and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this crooked generation!”**

⁴¹ **So then, those who had received his word were baptised; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.**

Baptism was **restricted to those who professed faith** in Christ and therefore **demonstrated their repentance** in the public ritual.

That is clear from Peter’s command, but also from Luke’s record that it was only “**those who had received his word were baptised.**”

¹⁵ Cf. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 145.

To state the obvious, infants are not able to receive the word of the gospel in repentance, and therefore they are not eligible for baptism.¹⁶

So when we consider **the command in the book of Acts**, it is clear that the apostles' authoritative instruction was for **every repentant follower of Christ to be baptised**.

Neither here in **Acts 2** **nor** anywhere else in the remainder of the book is there **a single command to baptise infants**.

Moreover, **nowhere in the New Testament do we find an explicit command to baptise babies**.

As we evaluate whether infant baptism is a biblical practice, there is one critical point that **even the most committed paedobaptists concede**—there is **NO clearly stated command** to baptise newborn children.

In a book arguing for infant baptism, **one Covenantal theologian** concedes that, “*Parents are not disobeying any clearcut command if they withhold baptism from their children.*”

He also acknowledges that, “*no direct mandate of infant baptism exists.*”¹⁷

¹⁶ Waymeyer, *Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism*, 96.

¹⁷ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Children of Promise: The Case for Baptizing Infants*, cited in Waymeyer, *Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism*, 11..

So in seeking to answer the question of whether infant baptism replaces circumcision, **the first critical point** we have established is that there is **no command in Acts** or anywhere in the New Testament to baptise infants.

Rather, **the command in the book of Acts** is for repentant believers to **publicly demonstrate** the work of the Spirit in their hearts, bringing them to faith in Christ.

The command is for believers to publicly **demonstrate their allegiance and submission** to Christ.

2. THE EXAMPLES IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Though the **command in the book of Acts supports the doctrine of believer baptism**, not infant baptism, it is nevertheless necessary to examine the examples of Acts.

While those who practice infant baptism concede that there is **no explicit command in the New Testament**, they argue that we find paedobaptism in the **example of the early church**.

As we work through **the examples we find** in the book of Acts, then, we can begin by considering **the very next mention** of baptism in the book of Acts.

Luke records in **Acts 8:12**—

But when they believed Philip proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptised, both men and women.

As you see, Luke records that those who “**believed**” were baptised.

Here we find that **faith, instead of repentance, is mentioned** as **one of the two essential components** of a genuine conversion.

However, in both Acts and the rest of the New Testament, **the one implies the other** since there is **no genuine faith without repentance** and no genuine repentance without faith.

On this occasion, Luke is careful to report that **those who were converted and baptised** were “**both men and women.**”

Now if infant baptism was the example of the early church, why did Luke not take the opportunity to **explicitly state** that men, women, and infants were baptised?

From that simple example, turn to **Acts 15** as we consider the **significant example** of the **Jerusalem council** next.

By way of context, you’ll note that this council included both **the apostles and the elders of the church** in Jerusalem.

This meeting of all the church leaders was to **consider whether or not Gentile converts** were compelled to accept physical circumcision.

You can see that in **Acts 15:1**—

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Now, what is **interesting to note** is that infant baptism would have **easily ended the debate** on the matter.

Just think, if the early church practiced infant baptism as a replacement for circumcision, and there was now a major controversy over circumcision, why did Peter or Paul or James not **simply stand up and announce**,

“Baptism has replaced circumcision as the covenant sign, so it is not necessary to circumcise Gentiles.”

That would have been simple.

They could have ended the argument and gone home—**easiest church council ever.**

But they never made that argument because **it was simply NOT true.**

While these are **admittedly arguments from silence**, they do **already cast doubt** on the idea that we find infant baptism or paedobaptism in the examples of Acts.

While the **Jerusalem council is significant**, we cannot examine the examples of Acts without considering the so-called **‘household baptisms.’**

While **most Reformed paedobaptists acknowledge** that there is no explicit mention in the New Testament of infant baptism, they nevertheless rely heavily on the **alleged example of household baptisms.**¹⁸

¹⁸ Cf. Peter Goeman, *The Baptism Debate: Understanding and Evaluating Reformed Infant Baptism* (Raleigh, NC: Sojourner Press, 2023), 137.

There are **five household baptisms** recorded in Scripture, and four of them are in the book of Acts.

For the paedobaptists to find infant baptism in these household baptisms, they have to make **two assumptions**.

The first assumption is that the **word “household”** must have meant **every individual in the household without exception**.

However, when Scripture refers to an entire household, it **does NOT always** include every single individual.

For example, in **1 Samuel 1:21** we read—

Then the man Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to Yahweh the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow.

However, as the **very next verse** clarifies—

But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, “I will not go up until the young boy is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before Yahweh and stay there forever.”

So then, even though the author clearly stated that Elkanah’s **whole household went with him**, it did **not include his wife Hannah or son Samuel**.

In other words, the **first assumption** that the word “household” must have meant every individual in the household without exception is then **false**.

The second assumption is that **infants were indeed present** in these households **and were baptised** along with the others.

By carefully **examining the four examples** of household baptisms in Acts we'll see that **this assumption too is false.**

In fact, we'll find that the examples of household baptisms convincingly demonstrate the **practice of believer baptism.**

The Household of Cornelius (Acts 10:1–48)

As we turn to **Acts 10**, we find there the conversion of Cornelius and his household.

This is a **significant conversion** since it marks the first time in Acts that **a Gentile was converted.**

Some paedobaptists claim that the baptism of Cornelius's household is an **example of infant baptism.**

However, as we pay close attention to the details we find the **exact opposite.**

As Peter preached the gospel, we read in **verse 44**—

While Peter was still speaking these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the word.

We then read in **verses 47–48**—

⁴⁷ “Can anyone refuse water for these to be baptised who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?”

⁴⁸ And he ordered them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for a few days.

So the sequence is perfectly clear—Peter preaches, those who hear respond in faith and repentance, as a result they receive the promised indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and finally they are baptised as a public declaration of their allegiance to Christ and desire to follow Him as disciples.

It was those who **received the Holy Spirit who were baptised, NOT them and their infant children.**

The household of Cornelius is a simple example of the command of **Acts 2**—believer baptism not infant baptism.

The Household of Lydia (Acts 16:14–15)

Turn next to **Acts 16** where we find the conversion of Lydia and her household.

We read in **verse 14–15**—

¹⁴ And a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening, whose heart the Lord opened to pay attention to the things spoken by Paul.

¹⁵ And when she and her household had been baptised, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

Once again, paedobaptists argue that this is a **clear and compelling example** of infant baptism.

As **one author** writes—

“It cannot be argued reasonably that there were no children in this ‘household.’”

Another [author] goes even further in his case as he argues—
“*Luke specifically indicates that Lydia responded to Paul. He tells us nothing about her family until he says that ‘she and her household’ were baptised. The only conclusion we can draw about the baptism of the other members of Lydia’s household is that they were baptised because they were members of the household of the believer Lydia.*”¹⁹

Despite their forceful arguments, nothing can be further from **the plain meaning of the text** as we read it.

There is simply **NO evidence** in Luke’s record that Lydia had an infant child in her household.

In fact, the record seems to suggest that **Lydia may not even have been married.**

The way in which Luke introduced Lydia suggests she was **either single, widowed, or divorced.**

There is no mention of a husband, nor any account of a husband’s approval when she invited the men to stay in her home.

Furthermore, her freedom to travel and conduct business suggests that she was an unmarried with her own business.

If that was true, then her **household would have included extended family members and servants**—but there is certainly **NO evidence** of an infant child.

¹⁹ Both quotes cited in Cited in Waymeyer, *Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism*, 17.

While we cannot be certain, that very uncertainty **undermines the paedobaptist argument.**

To argue that this is an example of infant baptism, you have to **speculate regarding Lydia's marital status.**

You have to speculate that she and her assumed husband had an infant child in the home.

And you have to assume that the child was baptised by Paul.

As **one author** put it, "*This is imagination not Bible interpretation, and proves nothing.*"²⁰

The Household of the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:30–34)

Next we find the household of the Philippian jailer in the same chapter, but **verses 30–34**—

30 and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your house."

32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his household.

33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptised, he and all his household.

34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly with his whole household, because he had believed in God.

²⁰ Joel James, *Infant Baptism or Believer's Baptism?* (Pretoria, South Africa: Word of the Cross, 2003), 11.

Once again, the paedobaptists argue that this is an **obvious example of infant baptism**, compelling us to conclude that it **replaces circumcision** and must be practiced in the church today.

However, this **ignores the explicit statements** of the text.

As you look at **verse 32**, you see that Luke tells us that Paul and Silas were **teaching the entire household**.

How can we then conclude that there was an infant in the family?

Are we supposed to believe that Paul and Silas were preaching the gospel to a baby?

Further, **verse 34** tells us that the entire household was **involved in rejoicing**.

Here there is actually a **significant translation issue**, and we could even understand Luke's words the way they are **translated by the NASB**—

And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

Whichever translation you accept, whether the whole household believed along with the jailer, or they simply joined in celebrating his conversion, **Luke is clearly indicating** that these are **actions taken by those capable of mature thought**—**NOT infants**.

The Household of Crispus (Acts 18:8)

Finally, as we turn to **Acts 18:8** we find the household of Crispus—

And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptised.

Of all the examples that a paedobaptist might point to in Acts, this **offers the weakest** support to their argument.

As you see, Luke explicitly states that **all three parties**—Crispus, his household, and the Corinthians—**exercised faith and “believed.”**

Despite the claims of Reformed theologians, it is clear that none of the examples in the book of Acts, including the household baptisms, support infant baptism.

In fact, the very opposite is true, which is why even some of the most renowned Reformed theologians concede—

John Murray: “[W]e do not have an overt and proven instance of infant baptism [recorded in the New Testament].”

Louis Berkhof: “[T]he New Testament contains no direct evidence for the practice of infant baptism in the days of the apostles.”

Charles Hodge: “In every case on record of [the apostles’] administering the rite, it was on condition of a profession of faith on the part of the recipient.”

B.B. Warfield: *“It is true that there is no express command to baptise infants in the New Testament, no express record of the baptism of infants, and no passages so stringently implying it that we must infer from them that infants were baptised.”*

ANSWER AND APPLICATION

So then, as we consider **both the command and the examples** of the book of Acts, **what is the answer to the question—**
Does infant baptism replace circumcision?

The answer is a **clear and compelling “NO.”**

The **preaching and the practice of the apostles** proves that they obeyed Christ’s command by **baptising only those who had made a profession** of faith in Him.

As such baptism was a way to **publicly declare one’s allegiance to Christ and one’s desire to follow Him as a disciple.**

Therefore, **infant baptism does not replace circumcision** as the sign of the covenant.

So we can then confidently state that infant baptism/paedobaptism is **an unbiblical practice that must be repented of** in order to **avoid the danger** of practicing infant baptism as a **false hope and empty ritual.**

Even though Paul addresses the **Jewish practice of circumcision** in **Romans 2:25–29**, and infant baptism doesn't replace circumcision as the sign of the covenant, what is evident is that it is **all too easy for paedobaptists to misplace their confidence in the ritual**.

That is because contrary to biblical evidence, Reformed theologians argue that paedobaptism **DOES replace circumcision**.

As **one Reformed theologian** explains—

“Those who subscribe to covenantal infant baptism maintain that baptism has now replaced circumcision as the mark of covenant membership....

Included with this is the idea that the children of covenant members today are members of the covenant, as in the Old Testament period.”²¹

So as we **carefully and thoughtfully apply** what we learnt from Paul's argument in **Romans 2:25–29**, we must recognise the danger that many face here in South African because of the **influence of Reformed Covenantal doctrine**.

Most especially within the context of the **‘Three Sisters Churches,’** countless people make the same errors that the Jews did, **misunderstanding both obedience and BAPTISM** to be external matters.

Many do not understand that **BAPTISM** is primarily internal in the form of **Spirit baptism**, the work of the Holy Spirit to **produce a new heart of repentance and faith**.

²¹ Cited in Waymeyer, *Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism*, 10.

Because of that misunderstanding, many South Africans believe that they are **part of God's covenant people** simply because they were baptised as a baby.

Just like the Jews, they believe that **makes them right with God** and so they **harden their hearts towards the gospel**, rejecting the righteousness of God through faith.

As Paul warned, the only thing their **religious ritual** of paedobaptism accomplishes is a **false hope**.

Just like circumcision, the **external ritual** is meant to demonstrate an **internal reality**.

What Paul refers to in in **1 Corinthians 12:13** as the **baptism of the Holy Spirit**, he refers to in **Romans 2** as the **circumcision of the heart** done by the Holy Spirit.

In both cases, **the internal reality required** is what God **promised in the New Covenant**, according to **Jeremiah 31:33**

“But this is the covenant which I will cut with the house of Israel after those days,” declares Yahweh: “I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

CONCLUSION

As we conclude, we need to **remember Paul's pastoral concern** as he wrote the **first two chapters of Romans**.

As a former zealous Pharisee, Paul understood the **desire to find assurance of salvation** in ethnic identity, relative morality, and religious activity.

For those who practice infant baptism because they are **sincerely convinced it is the replacement of circumcision**, that is often their **motivating desire** too.

Even though it's **easy to misplace your confidence** in your baptism as an infant, or even as an adult, most paedobaptists baptise their babies because they are **looking for assurance that their children will be saved**.

That would have been something that **Paul would have had great sympathy for**, even though he would have **corrected the misunderstandings**.

You see, even though Paul had **once looked for assurance in religious ritual**, he knew it was a **false hope**.

Through his own conversion, he discovered that **true assurance, true confidence of salvation**, is found in the **saving power of God in the gospel**.

So if you are tempted to **misplace your confidence in baptism** for either **your own or your child's salvation**, remember that true assurance **comes from the gospel**.

The gospel is the good news of **God making people right with Him through faith**, a faith that is **produced by a new heart** that comes from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

When that same heart **produces the obedience of faith** which is the **necessary evidence of God's saving work**, then you can have **full assurance and true confidence** that will be vindicated in the final judgement.

So instead of baptising your babies, teach them the gospel with the enthusiasm of Paul and **pray that God will work** to circumcise their hearts and baptise them in the Holy Spirit, making them part of the **TRUE people of God**.

BENEDICTION

*Now the Father who chose you,
the Son who bought you,
and the Spirit who dwells in you,
go before you in your darkness,
stand beside you in your fears
and hold you up in your sorrows
until Jesus comes. Amen.²²*

²² Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 29.

2:25	For indeed circumcision is of value	← if you	practice	the Law,	Explains 23–24
b	but	↓ if you	are a transgressor	of the Law,	Condition of 25a
c	your circumcision has become uncircumcision :				Condition of 25d
d	So if the uncircumcised man	observes	the righteous requirements of the Law,	Contrast with 25a	
2:26	will not his uncircumcision	be counted as circumcision ?		Condition of 26b	
b	And he who is physically uncircumcised	← [...] will he not judge you	← if he fulfills the Law	Inferences of 25	
2:27	who [...] are a transgressor of the Law?	← through the letter of the Law	← and circumcision	Describes subject of 27a	
b	For he is not a Jew who is	outwardly ,		Describes object of 27a	
c	nor is circumcision that which is	outward in the flesh .		Attendant circumstances of 27c	
d	But he is a Jew who is	inwardly ;		Reason for 26–27	
e	and circumcision is that which is	of the heart,		Contrast to 28	
2:28	by	the Spirit,			
b	not by	the letter;			
c	and his praise is not	from men,		Describes 19a–d	
d	but	from God.		Contrast with 29e	

Sermon Notes

Introduction

As we take the time to carefully and thoughtfully develop the application of Romans 2:25–29 and its warning against the false hope and empty ritual of circumcision, we will consider the Reformed, Covenantal practice of infant baptism/ paedobaptism.

In order to answer the key question of whether infant baptism has replaced circumcision, we will firstly consider the command in the book of Acts and secondly consider the examples in the book of Acts.

1. The Command in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:37–41)

2. The Examples in the Book of Acts

- ❖ The Household of Cornelius (Acts 10:1–48)
- ❖ The Household of Lydia (Acts 16:14–15)
- ❖ The Household of the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:30–34)
- ❖ The Household of Crispus (Acts 18:8)

Conclusion