

Baptism in the New City Church Family



New City Church has the privilege of being a community where many streams of the Christian faith flow together. One practice that has divided Christians for centuries is baptism and the question of *who* should be baptized.

Historically, the “major stream” of Christianity in history has seen baptism appropriately applied to both believing adults (who have not been baptized) and the children born to a believing adult. An important “smaller stream” has understood baptism to be reserved for people only after the profess faith. As a place where multiple streams converge, New City Church practices the “major stream” and deeply respects, embraces, and honors the other.

We recognize there have been godly and brilliant people on both sides of this issue for hundreds of years and each have arguments they think to be thoughtful and biblical. While it is necessary to practice *something*, we have chosen not to make baptism a point of contention within our community.

As a church in the Reformed tradition, New City will engage in the practice of baptizing children of a believing parent as well as adults/older children who have made a profession of faith but not yet been baptized. While New City engages in this practice for biblical reasons, we also understand that some may choose not to do so.

We believe the power of the gospel makes it possible for those in the body of Christ to disagree about this issue and for it not to affect our love and treasuring of one another or our children. The riches of grace make it possible to differ in perspective with mutual and genuine love.

Infant/child baptism: The Reformed position on baptism flows from reading the Bible as one book from Genesis to Revelation and understanding the unfolding plan to God to be one story with a God who does not change. We do not believe baptism “saves” anyone of any age. Rather, it is a sign of God’s gracious covenant promise and blessings extended in a particular way.

In the Old Testament: God called Abraham to trust him by faith, which the Bible calls a covenant relationship. Abraham did trust God and God declared that he was “righteous by faith.” As a sign of “righteousness by faith,” God had Abraham receive a sign of circumcision. Circumcision was an external sign representing a spiritual reality – namely, “righteousness by faith” and a changed / “circumcised” heart (Rom 4:11, Deut 10:12-22).

God then directed Abraham to apply this sign of righteousness by faith to the infant sons born in his household – before they could personally express faith in any way. This was a sign that these children were “in covenant” with God, were called to a life of righteousness by faith, and that God would pursue them with grace in a particular way through blessing them with the benefits of being in a covenant community. It is God’s intention to extend his righteousness to these children of parents who love and revere him. These children must also personally embrace their Lord in due time and receive the full benefits pictured in the sign (Ps 103:17-19).

A child could get older and resist this grace of God and, if he did, God declared him to be a covenant breaker and called him to repentance – very strong and sorrowful words (Ezek 16:59).

In the New Testament: The sign of circumcision was replaced by another sign representing the same thing, namely righteousness by faith. This new sign is baptism (c.f. Col 2:11-12). As the promises moved beyond a primarily Jewish context to the wider world, the sign of baptism is more comprehensive and accessible—pointing beyond Judaism and including women.

In our community: The Reformed Presbyterian understanding of baptism emphasizes the continuity of Scripture and the character of God. Since God does not change, unless He explicitly tells us he is relating differently to children of believers, we should trust that he does the same thing he has always done. If God now excluded children of believers, he would be less gracious in the new covenant than he was in the old! Early Christians, coming from a Jewish background, would have understood this and not have needed a command to do what they had always done.

New City leadership believes we should continue to apply the sign of the covenant to children of a believing parent - unless God tells us to stop. We do not need a second command from God to continue his prior command. Yet, we joyfully live in peace with those who are not yet convinced of this.