

## Why we do not practice Infant Baptism

In this article I explain why Focus Bible Church, and many others, do not practice infant baptism, or, as it's sometimes referred to, "christening." This is not intended as a personal criticism of parents who have decided to baptise their children. Those who practice this, do it because they love their children and want what's best for them. I am certainly not questioning their parenting and heart motivation. What I want to do is point out that infant baptism is not founded on Scripture, it is associated with some problematic theology, and it can be abandoned without fear or guilt.

Infant baptism, which I shall refer to as IB from now on, has been written about many times and generally is not itself a pivotal issue on which salvation depends. But, I am going to address the question of IB again because of some underlying fundamental issues that are bigger than IB itself.

The core problem underlying IB is how it is defended. The doctrinal foundations used in defense of IB are questionable, and it's fruit supports a practice that is nowhere commanded or described in Scriptures. What I am hoping, is that we get beyond a cursory argument about the fruit (IB) and take a hard look at the doctrinal roots that support it.

There are two main streams of defence used in support of IB. The first is an appeal to church history, the second is an argument of continuity from the practice of circumcision. There is one question that needs to be asked of both these streams of argument which will highlight their shortcomings. It is this: Is scripture *alone* sufficient to provide us with all that we need to know in regards to belief and practice? Or, to put it the opposite

way: Is there anything we need to add to the Bible in order to arrive at correct belief and practice?

As we will see, both of the two streams of argument add things which are external to Scripture and they can not survive on Scripture alone. This will not be seen as a problem if you happen to be Roman Catholic. In contradiction to what Jesus told the Pharisees (Matt. 15:1-9, Mark 7:1-13), Roman Catholicism has enshrined its tradition as authoritative and rejects the sufficiency (2 Tim. 3:14-17) and sole authority of the Bible, and in real-world practice holds its dogma over scripture (quote CCC).

I am not going refute that here because that is a separate issue, I am going to approach this with the assumption that those reading this believe the Bible to be the complete and definitive written Word of God, and that we may not add to it or contradict it. Do we really believe that Scripture alone, with the enlightenment of the indwelling Holy Spirit, is our sole and final authority? Are we duty bound to observe anything that it does not explicitly prescribe? Should we dogmatically insist on anything that is not plainly taught in Scripture? This is the bigger issue that has bearing on all our belief and practice, and it needs to be at the centre of our thinking when we consider whether infant baptism is legitimate or not.

## **1. The New Testament Pattern of Adult Baptism**

Before I look at arguments in favour of IB, I want to begin by laying a foundation through a New Testament survey of the act of baptism. We are going to look at the narrative descriptions of baptisms in the New Testament and see if there is a pattern. So here we go in consecutive order:

- **John the Baptist baptising;** Matt. 3:1-17, Mark 1:4-11, Luke 3:3-21, John 1:19-28.

Matthew states that the people of Jerusalem and Judea came out to John at the Jordan. John's message was "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." The people confessed their sins as part of baptism. The Pharisees and Sadducees were denounced because they were coming for baptism and did not display "fruit in keeping with repentance".

Mark says John the Baptist proclaimed "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins". The people who came to be baptised by him "confessed their sins".

Luke says John proclaimed "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins". The crowds who came to him were rebuked about bearing fruits in keeping with repentance.

John the Apostle doesn't mention who came to John the Baptist for baptism. The reason given here for John's baptism is that Jesus would be revealed to Israel v.31.

The message of repentance in preparation for the Messiah was the fundamental message of John the Baptist's ministry and baptism. People confessed their sins in association with baptism, and it was demanded of them that they show the fruit of their repentance.

- **The Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist;** Matt. 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34.

Jesus was baptised as an adult.

- **Baptism by the disciples of Jesus;** John 3:26, 4:1-2.

The 12 Disciples baptised other people who became disciples of Jesus. These people were baptised as they became disciples, Their baptism was volitional (of their own will) and predicated on them submitting themselves to Jesus as His disciple.

- **Baptism at Pentecost; Acts 2:38,41**

Peter instructs the crowd to “repent and be baptised” for the forgiveness of sins. Repentance and forgiveness of sins is here again associated with baptism. In verse 41 “those who received his word were baptised”, so understanding and acceptance of Peter’s message preceded baptism.

- **Samaritans baptised; Acts 8:12**

*“But when they believed Phillip as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised.”* Belief then baptism.

- **Ethiopian eunuch baptised; Acts 8:36**

Obviously an adult. Baptised after hearing and understanding Phillip’s explanation of the gospel.

- **Cornelius and friends and relatives baptised; Acts 10:47-48**

Those who were baptised, were baptised after hearing Peter’s explanation of the gospel, receiving the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. Descriptive of adult believers not infants.

- **Lydia and her household baptised; Acts 16:15**

Lydia and those of her household were baptised after “the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (v.14). Lydia’s understanding happened before baptism. ( I know there is a “baptism of households” argument made from this, I will address that in detail later).

- **Philippian jailer and household baptised; Acts 16:33**

The jailer was first told to believe v.31, the word of the Lord was spoken to all who were in his house v.32, then they were baptised. Belief and understanding of the word of the Lord preceded baptism.

- **Crispus and other Corinthians baptised; Acts 18:8**

*“Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptised.”* Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:15 that he baptised Crispus, which was likely at this time but not stated. Belief before baptism.

- **Disciples of John the Baptist baptised; Acts 19:5**

After Paul told these people about Jesus and instructed them to believe in Jesus, they were baptised, again, in the name of Jesus. Understanding baptism was important.

- **Paul baptised Crispus, Gaius and the household of Stephanas; 1 Cor. 1:14, 16**

We know from Acts 18:8, that Crispus and his household believed. No details are mentioned about Gaius or the household of Stephanas. Paul’s purpose here is only to state

that he baptised them, not to discuss how or why it happened.

So, these are all the verses in Scripture that talk of people who were baptised. All of them are about adults, children are not mentioned. All but 2 of the narrative descriptions comment on repentance or belief or understanding before the baptism happened. The first is in John's account of the ministry of John the Baptist, but we know from the other gospel writers that repentance was a core part of what John the Baptist required of people. The other case where repentance, belief, and understanding is not explicitly mentioned before baptism, is in the example of the Ethiopian eunuch, but I think we can safely assume that he understood and believed what Phillip was telling him.

When we lay out all the examples of baptism in Scripture, there is a definite pattern, which is that repentance, belief, and understanding comes before baptism, and it is the conscious choice of those adults being baptised to do so. If we are meant to practice infant baptism, a biblical template in the form of: **a)** an example, or **b)** a command, or **c)** a clearly explained theological reason would be provided. Yet all of these are curiously absent from Scripture.

## **2. The “baptism of households” argument**

There are no explicit commands or examples of IB in the Bible. We can all agree on that because it is a plain fact. So if we believe in Sola Scriptura, and we want scriptural support for IB, then we must find commands or examples *implied* somewhere. The “households” argument uses the examples of the baptism of households in the New Testament to persuade us that there are

examples of infant baptism implied in these verses. Let's have a closer look.

The word translated "household" is the Greek word is *oikos*. Depending on the context it can literally mean "a house", or it can figuratively refer to the property and all it contains, including the people who live there. That's why it is translated "household" not "family." It is used in both these senses in Acts 16:15, where it is used of Lydia's house and also her household. It can include the family in the figurative sense, as in Acts 16:31-34. There are three examples in the New Testament where the household is said to have been baptised. They are the household of Lydia in Acts 16:13-15, the household of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30-34, and the household of Stephanas in 1 Cor. 1:16. There is a fourth, if we choose to include those who were present at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10.

The argument goes: "the household were baptised and young children must have been present as part of the household, therefore, these must be examples of infant baptism in the Bible". But because there are no infants specifically mentioned in the text, this argument must rely on two assumptions: 1. Children were definitely present in the "household." 2. Luke and Paul automatically counted them among the number baptised. This is of course an argument from silence, but are these two assumptions reasonable to the point of being compelling? And are they compelling enough that we are forced to interject exceptions in the scriptural pattern of believing adults being baptised? Let's look at these four texts in chronological order.

- **Acts 10:24-48, Peter at the house of Cornelius.**

The people mentioned here, who were baptised, were not described as members of the household of Cornelius but were relatives and close friends that he had invited. But Peter does tell us in Acts 11:14 that the household of Cornelius were saved at this time, so it makes sense to include his household as part of the overall group. After Peter had preached the good news about Jesus to these people, the Holy Spirit fell on *all* who heard the word. These people then spoke in tongues. Then Peter declared “can anyone withhold water for baptising these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” *All* those who were baptised *heard* the word, *spoke* in tongues and *received the Holy Spirit*. I think it is safe to assume in this case that those baptised either didn’t include young children among their number, or, if they did happen to be present, Luke wasn’t counting them among the “all”.

- **Acts 16:13-15, Lydia and her household baptised.**

Lydia was a merchant trading in purple dyed items. She was living away from her home town of Thyatira, possibly for business reasons. There is no mention of a husband or other family members. Her household may have consisted of servants, slaves, business associates or guests. There could have been a shop with staff. And there may have been family, adult or otherwise. We don’t know. The word “household” certainly doesn’t automatically imply infants in this case.

- **Acts 16:30-34, The Philippian jailer and his household baptised.**

Luke says that the jailer along with “those who were his” (*hoi autou*) were baptised, that is, his family seem to be the



principle members of his household. Paul told the jailer “*Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household*”. Obviously, his family weren’t going to literally be saved vicariously through the jailers belief, they needed to have individual belief of their own for salvation. Before they were baptised, Paul “*spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house*”. Either the members of his household were all old enough to understand what Paul was telling them, or, if infants did happen to be present, Luke isn’t counting them among those who were given the word preliminary to baptism. It goes without saying that giving the word to babies would be pointless because they couldn't understand what was being said. Again, there is no need to insert the presence of young children into these verses, and the pattern of scripture would argue against the idea of infants being baptised here. It fits the pattern of repentance, belief, and understanding before baptism.

- **1 Cor. 1:16, The household of Stephanas baptised.**

In this part of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians Paul is addressing divisions in the church and mentions those few members of their church that he personally baptised. Verse 16 says, “*I did also baptise the household of Stephanas. Beyond that I do not know whether I baptised anyone else*”. This is the sum total of all we know about Stephanas and his household. He may have had small children living in his house, or adolescent children, or adult children. He may have been a 45 year old man living with his wife, three servants, an unemployed nephew and a bunch of cats. We just don’t know. Insisting that there must have been young children baptised here is an attempt to

build fact out of pure speculation and would run counter to the pattern.

There is another verse from Acts which mentions a household that is pertinent to this argument. Acts 18:8 tells us, “*Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, with his entire household*”. If the IB line of argument is going to be logically consistent, then we must say “a entire household means there must have been infants present and counted among the number participating”. So then we are faced with, “an entire household means infants were present and must be counted among those who...believed?”. Which doesn’t make sense, because babies are incapable of cognitively believing Paul’s preaching.

So what do we do with that? We can say “well, maybe there weren’t infants in that household... or, maybe there were and Luke didn’t count them because they weren’t capable of believing”. So then, what’s to stop us questioning the presence of infants among those baptised when other households are mentioned? We can’t make a special exception for this verse alone on the basis that it won’t fit a pre-conceived dogma.

In summary, the “baptism of households” argument tries to insert a pre-determined idea into the silence of the text. I think the overall pattern of Scripture and some of the details in the text suggest that only believing adults were baptised on these occasions.

### **3. Argument from Church History**

The use of IB in church history is often the first argument given in favour of its practice. It involves the use of early Christian writing in particular, and goes something like this: “Infant

baptism was a widespread and accepted practice in the early church, and therefore we can assume it must have been the practice of the church from the time of its establishment under the Apostles”.

We look at the early centuries of the church and imagine that because they were much closer to the beginning that their teaching and practices were untainted by the passage of time. And we might reason that because early Christian authors lived so long ago they must represent uncorrupted Apostolic truth in what they wrote. It is certainly important for us to understand what the church believed and practiced in its first few centuries, but should we look upon everything they wrote and did as being correct? We often treat them as being an indicator of the beliefs of the first century church because they were closer in time than we are, but does that mean everything they wrote is exempt from scriptural critique?

We have a duty from scripture to test what any human being teaches (1 Tim. 4:1). No teaching or church practice is exempt from being held up to the light of scripture and examined to see whether it is correct, and the writings of early Christian authors are no exception. If we give them a free pass at the scriptural checkpoint and let them go without any examination, then by default, we are giving them a level of unquestionability that should only belong to scripture.

Also, it must be remembered that the church from the time of the Apostles was under constant attack from false teaching. We see in the New Testament that there was quite a variety of false teaching and false teachers that had found their way into the church and were gaining acceptance in various congregations. For example: 2<sup>nd</sup> Thess. 2:2, deceptive teaching that the day of

the Lord had come (circa 51 A.D.). Acts 15:1, false teaching that circumcision was necessary for salvation (circa 48-50 A.D.). 1 Cor. 15:1, church members saying that there is no resurrection of the dead (A.D. 55) et cetera. This is a small sample of some of the wrong teaching that found its way into the church less than 30 years after the Ascension of the Lord. At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the Apostle John was still in serious combat with new waves of doctrinal error (1 John 2:18-26 etc.).

Presuming the post-Apostolic church of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries would be entirely pristine in their doctrine and practice is unrealistic. I doubt that the devil gave them a break. My purpose here is not to discard all early extra-biblical writing. There is much we can learn from it. The point I am getting at here is that was certainly not infallible and all of it must be held to account by comparing it with the Bible, which is always our final source of authority.

With that in mind, here are some quotes from the earliest authors who mention the practice of infant baptism:

**Hippolytus:** “Baptize first the children, and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them” (*The Apostolic Tradition* 21:16 circa A.D. 215).

**Origen:** “Every soul that is born into flesh is soiled by the filth of wickedness and sin. . . . In the church, baptism is given for the remission of sins, and, according to the usage of the church, baptism is given even to infants. If there were nothing in infants which required the remission of sins and nothing in them pertinent to forgiveness, the grace of baptism would seem superfluous” (*Homilies on Leviticus* 8:3 circa A.D. 248).

**Cyprian of Carthage:** “If, in the case of the worst sinners and those who formerly sinned much against God, when afterwards they believe, the remission of their sins is granted and no one is held back from baptism and grace, how much more, then, should an infant not be held back, who, having but recently been born, has done no sin, except that, born of the flesh according to Adam, he has contracted the contagion of that old death from his first being born. For this very reason does he [an infant] approach more easily to receive the remission of sins: because the sins forgiven him are not his own but those of another” (*Letters* 64:2 A.D. 253).

So, from this we see that IB was known at an early date (early, that is, from our perspective now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century). The earliest of the quotes above was written around 215, about 120 years after the death of the Apostle John, and about 150 years after the death of Paul. Considering the assault of false teaching we know was coming on the church even from 50 A.D. it’s certainly possible that IB could be a corrupt early teaching that had gained some currency by the time this was written in the 3rd century. Note that there are also many quotes from an early stage that can be used to support the doctrine of baptismal regeneration (that is, the teaching that the act of baptism will save us). Scripture in its full self-referencing context (*analogia scriptura*) doesn’t support baptismal regeneration, many Protestants reject baptismal regeneration including many who believe in IB. Yet we don’t feel compelled to accept the doctrine of baptismal regeneration just because there were a number of early Christians that appear to have taught it. The writings of the early church age had a variety of orthodox and unorthodox ideas just as the writings of any age of church history have had.

The idea of IB appears not to have been universally and unconditionally accepted in the early church. Tertullian, writing in his treatise *On Baptism*, circa 200 A.D., resists the practice: “And so, according to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each individual, the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children. For why is it necessary — if (baptism itself) is not so necessary — that the sponsors likewise should be thrust into danger? Who both themselves, by reason of mortality, may fail to fulfil their promises, and may be disappointed by the development of an evil disposition, in those for whom they stood? The Lord does indeed say, forbid them not to come unto me. Let them come, then, while they are growing up; let them come while they are learning, while they are learning where to come; let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ”. This is from the first extant document that is dedicated to the subject of baptism, and it advocates withholding baptism until the recipient is able to cognitively become a Christian and know Christ.

It is easy to get into a battle of early church quotes and counter-quotes. We can support all kinds of ideas and attempt to give them a veneer of ancient orthodoxy by trawling through the writings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century. What often gets lost in “the Church Fathers said this” arguments is we forget the earliest and only infallible, apostolic, authoritative and sufficient writing that we have. That is the New Testament. Does the New Testament command or describe infant baptism? No.

In the same vein, the Reformers don’t get a free pass at the Scriptural check-point either. They were brilliant theologians who did a critically important work that is not to be lightly

dismissed. But I'm sure they would have told us that anybody's teaching, including their own, is only valid insofar as it conforms to Scripture. They insisted on the authority of Scripture alone rather than the church being subject to traditions. If we refuse to subject *their* teaching to analysis by Scripture *alone*, then we are falling into the same ditch that they were trying to extract themselves and others from.

That includes analysis of the belief in IB that most of them brought with them when they left Catholicism. If we refuse to give their writing any critical scrutiny and hold their teachings to be unquestionable and immutable then we are putting them by default on the same level of authority as the Bible. The doctrinal chaff can never be identified and removed from the good wheat, and becomes enshrined as sacred untouchable tradition. We have left Roman Catholicism with its enshrined traditions, and if we begin enshrining our own traditions as being beyond biblical scrutiny we are hypocrites.

#### **4. The Continuity Argument**

The Continuity argument is the major foundation of IB teaching. It is the main attempt at giving IB scriptural respectability. At its center, it is the idea that baptism is to the church what circumcision was to those who lived before Christ. And because male babies were circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after their birth, we are now theoretically obliged to baptise babies from Christian homes. Once again, there is no explicit command in scripture to baptise infants, so again the argument must be an implicit one. But is the implied directive so far beyond question in the text of scripture that we are morally compelled to submit ourselves to it? Particularly in light of the facts of the pattern of

baptism in the New Testament and the absence of any specific command to baptise infants.

Is this a case of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*? That is to say, why are we logically compelled to assume that because circumcision of infants came before the introduction of baptism. Are we therefore bound to baptise infants? To build a series of supports around the idea of continuity with circumcision and IB, a particular doctrinal framework of continuity in other areas of theology is brought in to give an impression of overall continuity in redemptive history. Infant baptism is entirely embedded in this particular supporting doctrinal matrix and stands or falls with it, so we are also obliged to look at the doctrinal pre-suppositions that come as part of the continuity package. I will note here again, that I am making the assumption that those reading this believe in *Sola Scriptura*.

R.C. Sproul, who was a staunch believer in IB, once said before delivering the continuity argument: “This is going to get complicated”. Unfortunately, this *is* going to get complicated, because the continuity argument is inherently complicated. And that in itself is a red flag. Baptism of adult converts is typically and universally taught by Christians everywhere, except for a few rare exceptions, including those who also believe in IB. That is because it is a teaching that naturally and easily falls out of a plain reading of the text of scripture.

It is unarguably right there on the pages of the Bible and we don't need to place any kind of pre-determined theological template on to the text in order to find it. This is not the case with IB. IB is not on the surface of the text and a compelling directive to practice it does not easily fall out of a natural unbiased reading of the text. Those who advocate IB need to



shore it up with a complicated argument that involves imposing their special theological template onto the text. Again, the problem stems from not adhering to scripture *alone* as sufficient for what we teach and do.

### **Covenantalism**

Covenantalism is the theological basis of the Protestant IB argument. Covenantal theology began in the Reformation. It is a theological template which posits the existence of three covenants as an explanation of God's work of redemption through history. The three that are generally agreed on are: the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace, and the Covenant of Redemption. Those that believe in these covenants use them as a theological lens through which scripture is interpreted.

Although it is said that the Bible implies the existence of these covenants, they are not named at any point, and there is no narrative description of them being implemented. They are a purely hypothetical construct. They are not to be confused with the actual historical covenants found in scripture that are named as covenants and have narrative descriptions of implementation. Historical, biblical covenants include God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 6:18), Abraham (Gen.15:18), with Israel through Moses (Ex. 19:4-6), with the Aaronic priesthood (Num. 25:11-13), with David (2 Sam. 23:5, Ps. 89:3-4), and the New Covenant through Jesus (Jer. 31:31-34, 1 Cor. 11:25). These are covenants we know for certain exist and are fully sufficient to explain the unfolding of God's redemptive plan through history. Subordinating the historical covenants to hypothetical ones formed outside of the text of scripture leads to interpretations that don't come from a plain literal reading of the text.

One of the beliefs of Covenantalists that is most relevant to the continuity argument is the assertion that “the Church is Israel and Israel is the Church”. The concept of “the Church” is retrospectively applied to any of God’s people before the time of Christ. It also often results in some things particular to Israel being projected forward onto the New Testament church. The distinctive features of God’s people and historical covenants through the passage of history are ignored wholesale as the concept of church is seen as applying to every age under the theoretical Covenant of Grace. The continuity between circumcision in the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants leading into infant baptism in the New Covenant is based completely on this particular interpretative template.

I don’t want to get bogged down in arguing the details of how the Covenantalist approach is faulty. I will simply state here, that its fundamental problem is that it brings a man made set of traditions to scripture that often inhibit the text from speaking for itself in a plain, natural, literal way. The Covenantalist approach to scripture is the oxygen of the continuity argument and the theological respectability of IB can not survive without it. That is, the authority of the continuity argument withers if we use a plain, natural, perspicuous reading of scripture. IB baptism is not explicitly commanded anywhere, it is not described in narrative, and its only theological underpinnings are debatable at best.

## **5. The Problematic Fruit of Covenantalist Continuity**

No doctrinal teaching exists in isolation. Our doctrinal beliefs are inter-connected and when one doctrine is not in harmony with God’s Word, others related to it get pulled out of shape also. We are now going to look at some of the unscriptural

knock-on effects of adhering to a Covenantalist/continuity/IB approach.

## **6. Externalising the New Covenant.**

### **Proof texts**

There are a number of Bible verse that are commonly used in the defence of IB. They are often used in a way that ignores the context of the verses around them. Many scriptural texts that are used to support IB are actually primarily texts that are used to support its Covenantalist foundation, and then continuity and IB baptism are assumed to be part of the package following on from that.

### **Romans chapter 4.**

The argument from IB from Romans chapter 4 goes something like this. “Abraham is our spiritual father in the faith, and Abraham and his descendants circumcised their infant male children, and so therefore we are to baptise infants”. The continuity idea is projected on to these verses through Covenantalism. The Israelite community descended from Abraham used circumcision as a sign of being part of that community and they performed that sign on infants, baptism is a sign of being part of the church community, so therefore, we should perform baptism on infants. Is this something that we read in Romans chapter 4, or is it something that is brought to the text and pushed onto it?

If we are going to believe these things we must see them as being inferred somewhere in these verses because that is not what is being plainly stated. There is no mention of baptism or who should be baptised. So what is Paul’s purpose in chapter 4? In chapter 3, Paul has shown that we all are condemned under

the Law. Righteousness can not come through the Law, “*For by works of the Law no man shall be justified in His sight*” (3:20a). We are justified through faith in Jesus Christ (3:22), “*For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law*” (3:28). In chapter 4, Paul then moves on to an example that should have provided a striking realisation for any of the Jews reading this. Abraham was justified by faith exactly as Paul had just been teaching, and he was justified by faith *before* the external rite of circumcision (4:10).

The necessity of faith rather than external legal works or biological heritage is the point of using Abraham as example. This isn't a discussion about who should be baptised. If anything, this serves to highlight the externalism of IB, which is not in keeping with the faith character of the New Covenant but is reminiscent of the external works of the Law.

I am going to briefly digress here to ask a question. Paul writes to the Galatians, “*For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation*” (Gal. 6:15). This is part of summing up his argument against those who would burden New Covenant saints with the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Circumcision nor uncircumcision now count for nothing. But we are now meant to implement the rite of IB which is supposed to correspond with circumcision? Becoming a new creation counts for everything now. There is no returning to external legal works.

If circumcision now counts for nothing, and IB baptism corresponds with circumcision, then IB would count for nothing also, for the same reason. This is because it is an external rite that is not connected to that individual having become a new creation. IB is not in keeping with the character of the New

Covenant, in which we become a new creation through personal faith. *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love”* (Gal. 5:6). This is why only believing adults are baptised in the New Covenant, because it is entirely about the individual being regenerated through the means of faith alone. The pattern of scripture shows us that baptism is representative of actual spiritual reality that has taken place within the individual.

**Mark 10:14, Matthew 19:13-15, Luke 18:15-17 “Let the children come to me”.**

These verses are often used by IB advocates. The argument is usually something like, “the kingdom of heaven belongs to children also, so we must not refuse them baptism”. That is of course an assumption, since no mention of baptism is made in verses 13-16, and there is no obviously implied teaching about baptism in these verses. There is also an assumption here about how and in what way the kingdom of God belongs to “such as these”. So what is happening in these verses?

People were bringing young children to Jesus for him to lay His hands on them in blessing and to pray for them. This is what Jesus was letting the little children come to Him for. As Tertullian noted in the quote above, we can let the little children come to Jesus without having to baptise them. The main teaching point in these verses is Jesus’ use of children as an object lesson about the simple trust and humility we need to have if we want to belong to the kingdom. *“Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it”* (Mark 10:15). This is precisely the same lesson the Lord had previously given them in Matthew 18:1-4 *“Truly I say*

*to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*". Jesus is not teaching here that we become members of the kingdom by virtue of having been born into it, like a person was a member of ethnic Israel by virtue of birth. Rather, what is being illustrated is our need for a right heart attitude if we want to become part of the kingdom.

**1 Corinthians 7:14b "Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy".**

Again, no mention of baptism of any kind, so an implied circumstantial argument has to be brought to the text. This argument goes "the children of a believing parent are declared to be holy/sanctified (depending on which translation you are using), so because they are holy/sanctified through reason of them having a Christian parent(s) we should baptise them". Again the underlying theme here is: Children in ethnic Israel were circumcised because they were born into that community, so likewise we baptise children who are born into our church community. Children are given a type of corporate/federal/familial sanctification through the believing parent(s) and so qualify for the sign of the covenant. Children are sanctified and are in the community of believers vicariously through their parent(s) and IB is meant to be part of that package, we are told.

What is the subject that Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians chapter 7? His purpose in chapter 7 is to clear up any misconceptions that new believers might have about marriage relationships, now that they are Christians. In verses 10-16, Paul speaks to those who have become believers and who are living with an unbelieving spouse. Should they leave the unbelieving spouse? Paul says, if the unbelieving spouse

consents to stay with you, you don't need to leave them. One of the reasons is the positive sanctifying effect the believing spouse has on the relationship. We are talking contextually about a broad familial sanctifying effect here, not the personal sanctification that a born-again believer experiences. It may hopefully even lead to the salvation of the unbelieving spouse one day. Also, the children of the relationship benefit from the familial sanctifying presence of a believer in the family which is extra reason to stay in the marriage.

So lets look at the IB argument from these verses in a logically consistent way. We are told that because of the general sanctifying effect of one of the marriage partners in the family that the children can be seen as part of "the church" and so be baptised. But the children of the relationship are mentioned in passing, the main focus here is on the marriage, and particularly a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. The unbelieving spouse experiences the same sanctifying effect as the children (v. 14). So to be consistent, the logic should apply to them also, and even more so because the marriage is the main focus of these verses.

This results in us having to say that the unbelieving spouse must also be part of the church because of the sanctifying effect of the believing spouse and therefore we must baptise them. Should we baptise the unbelieving spouse in the hope that one day they will become born again and live up to the baptism we performed on them before they were saved? That is not what these verses are suggesting we do to the unregenerate spouse or to the unregenerate children. Baptism is not at all the topic under discussion, marriage relationships are. Trying to pull an

IB argument out of this is contrived, and involves imposing a suspect ecclesiology.

These are three of the most commonly used scriptural texts used as a defence of IB, and are probably the best ones that can be summoned. I'm not going to address every verse that gets used because these are a representative sample of the type of argument that is used and credulity gets further stretched from this point on. Again, no command to perform IB is present and there is no description of it. The arguments depend entirely on seeing scripture through a special lens rather than letting it speak on its own.