

Take-Home

Baptism

Abide

Module Four

What We Found

We collected the verbs. Born of water and the Spirit. Saved by the washing of regeneration. Wash away your sins. Baptism now saves you. Buried with him and raised with him. Every one is active. To hold that baptism only signifies, you would have to read all of them as figures of speech at once.

And Paul identifies baptism with the circumcision of Christ. Circumcision was given at eight days, to a child who had decided nothing. If the covenant sign was for infants before and is refused to them now, the new covenant would be narrower than the old.

We also conceded the honest fact: no New Testament passage names an infant being baptised. What we have is the household formula, the promise made to you and to your children, and a third-century writer arguing that infant baptism should be delayed, which proves it was already happening.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

Tertullian

On Baptism (summary)

Around the turn of the third century he argues that baptism of small children should be delayed. We cite him against ourselves on purpose: he is arguing against a practice, which shows the practice existed.

Voice of the Church

St. Cyprian of Carthage

Letter 64, to Fidus, on the baptism of infants (summary)

Asked whether infants should wait until the eighth day in analogy with circumcision, he answers with a council of bishops that none should be delayed. Notice the question: not whether, but whether to wait a week.

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants, Book One; and On Baptism, Against the Donatists, Book Four (summary)

In the anti-Pelagian treatise on the baptism of infants, Augustine argues that it would make no sense for the Church to baptise infants for the forgiveness of sins if there were no sin in them to forgive. In *On Baptism, Against the Donatists* he treats the Church's custom of baptising infants as received tradition rather than an innovation, something not to be scorned and not to be believed at all unless it came down from the apostles.

Ready Response

“Baptism is a symbol of a decision.” Do not argue the point; do what the group did. Read the verses out loud together and underline the verb each time: John 3:5, Titus 3:5, Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21, Romans 6:3-4. Then ask your friend what they make of the verbs. They are not wrong about what baptism expresses. The question you are putting to them is what these sentences say it does.

“Acts always shows belief first.” Grant it, and mean it. Those accounts are of grown converts, and the Church still asks the same order of adults today. What you are asking is a smaller question than your friend expects. Missionary preaching tells you how adults came in; it does not tell you what happened to their children, and Acts 2:39 is where the two of you can take that.

“No infant is ever named.” Concede it plainly; it is the honest fact the group had to sit with too. Then say what the silence does and does not carry. No child of Christian parents is ever told to wait, and no surviving early source records a controversy over the practice being introduced or abandoned, in a Church that argued about everything. Tertullian argues about when to baptise, not about whether infants may be.

Live It This Week

- Find out the date of your baptism and mark it as an anniversary.
- Bless yourself with holy water deliberately, thinking about what it recalls.
- Read Romans 6:1-11 slowly.

Memory Verse

“Baptism... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” **1 Peter 3:21**

In the Catechism

CCC 1213-1216, 1250-1252, 1257, 1261.