

## **Why I Changed My Mind About Baptizing Infants** **SEAN MICHAEL LUCAS**

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When I was 10 or so, my parents came to Christ. Up to that time, we were unchurched. Although I had been baptized in the Lutheran Church in which my mother had grown up, we had gone to church only three or four times until my parents were converted. However, with their conversion, we suddenly began going to church and found ourselves at a Plymouth Brethren assembly in Fanwood, New Jersey. There, during an evangelistic crusade, I first professed faith in Christ, was baptized by immersion, and had my first spiritual formation.

Prior to high school, we moved to northern Virginia where we went to a Bible church, and I eventually ended up in an independent Baptist school. During a chapel service I felt called to preach, a calling that eventually led me to attend Liberty University for a year before transferring to Bob Jones University.

### **Baptized, Again**

As part of my undergraduate training as a pastoral studies major, I had to do an internship, which I did at my independent Baptist church back in northern Virginia. During my internship, our pastor convinced me that I had not been scripturally baptized. He certainly wouldn't have counted my Lutheran baptism, but even my Plymouth Brethren baptism was suspect. Because I had not been baptized by a Baptist, I was not part of the unbroken spiritual baptism chain going back to John the Baptist (for those who recognize this, it is the Landmark Baptist view). So I was baptized again. But during that internship year I read Lorraine Boettner's *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. And that book scattered seeds in my mind that came to fruition when I was working on my Master of Arts degree at Bob Jones University. I was taking a class in Colonial American Church History and reading a lot of Jonathan Edwards. After reading Edwards's sermon "God Glorified in Man's Dependence," I realized that I was a five-point Calvinist. Or better, I realized that the doctrines of grace that emphasized the divine priority in all our spiritual good—from election to redemption to calling to perseverance—were biblical and had to be embraced.

### **Not Pagan Babies**

In 1994, my wife and I moved to Philadelphia so that I could attend Westminster Seminary and pursue a doctoral program where I could continue studying Jonathan Edwards. Though I had come to Philadelphia hoping that we might join a Presbyterian church, that transition was too much for my GARBC (General Association of Regular Baptist Churches) wife. So we ended up at a little Baptist church that was going through the process of reformation. The pastor was a Bob Jones graduate, which made it acceptable to her; the doctrine was staunchly Calvinistic, which made it acceptable to me. And in our four years there, together we came to embrace confessionalism, catechesis, covenant theology, and the importance of Presbyterian polity. In fact, we were Presbyterian in everything—except baptism. But God brought something into our lives that caused us to wrestle with the whole issue of baptism:

babies. As our children were born every other year from 1997 to 2003, we began to wonder about their spiritual status. They weren't really pagan children. Because they were born to us as believing parents, they would be raised in the context of the church and the Christian faith. Yet there wasn't a biblical basis for "baby dedication" (where is that in the New Testament?) so that wasn't an option.

As a result, with our first child's birth in 1997, we began to wrestle with how the Westminster Confession of Faith could say both that "baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament" (28.1) and that "not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized" (28.4). If baptism is a New Testament sacrament and if babies are to be baptized, then I needed to have some reason to believe *from the New Testament*. Arguments from the Old Testament that relied or admitted the silence of the New Testament on the issue weren't persuasive to me. I needed to see it in the New Testament.

### **Significance of Households**

Fast forward four years. Our third child was born, and I was writing my dissertation, not on Jonathan Edwards as I had planned, but on Robert Lewis Dabney, the 19th-century southern Presbyterian theologian. I was focusing on Dabney's public theology and was struck by the significance of households. Whether dealing with slavery and race, gender relations, education, church and state, Dabney repeatedly fell back to the significance of households in God's purpose and plans.

I began to notice a pattern. In [Genesis 17](#), God made promises to Abraham, the believing household head, and then signed and sealed those promises through household circumcision. And in [Acts 16](#), God dealt with Lydia and the Philippian jailer (believing household heads), and then signed and sealed those promises through household baptism. The pattern was not babies per se; I was looking for the wrong thing. God's pattern was to deal with households and to grant those households the sign of circumcision or baptism.

Other texts came into play at that point. According to [1 Corinthians 7:14](#) God views our children as "holy"—separated to his work and his purposes, "clean" and not "unclean" or pagan—as a result of their relationship with us as believing household heads. [Acts 2:38-39](#) says that the promise of the Holy Spirit was not to discrete individuals who believed, but to households who believed: "the promise is to you and your children." This language echoed through the Old Testament indicating God's promise to households, but here it was in the New Testament. And [Colossians 2:11-12](#) seemed to equate circumcision and baptism in such a way that the succession of the New Testament sign was established.

Here was a fairly strong New Testament rationale. It changed my mind and led us into the Presbyterian Church in America. And it is an argument that I have taught now repeatedly over ten years and through my book, *On Being Presbyterian*. But it is all of a piece of the grace of God at work in my life, showing me his grace in every part of my life, even to my children after me. It is, after all, all of grace.

**Sean Michael Lucas** (PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary) is senior pastor at Independent Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Memphis, Tennessee, and chancellor's professor of church history at Reformed Theological Seminary. He's author of several books, including *For a Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* (P&R, 2015). He recently contributed an essay on Lutheran theology after Martin Luther to *The Legacy of Luther* (Reformation Trust, 2016). You can hear his sermons [here](#).

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