

The Reformed and Baptismal Regeneration

Baptismal regeneration, one of the most diabolical of all falsehoods ever to be imposed on the church of Jesus Christ, has been responsible for the delusion of millions leading to their eternal damnation. Rome teaches it. *But so do many of the Reformed.* All the statements I now quote come from men who have exemplary Reformed credentials. All advocates – and would-be advocates – of the Westminster Confession, and the like, particularly over infant baptism, need to take full account of these testimonies.¹

Reformed Confessions teach baptismal regeneration

Who says? The Confessions themselves! Take, for instance, the Westminster Confession:

Baptism... is for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible church...² 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 baptised... The grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto.³

¹ For this article, I have lightly edited my *Infant Baptism Tested* pp38-39,48-65.

² A visible church is a church knowingly containing both the regenerate and unregenerate, invented by infant baptisers to try to cope with the fall out of infant baptism. See my *Infant* pp237-276. The Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV, puts it this way: ‘The visible church... consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children’ (*The Confession of Faith* and other documents of the Westminster Assembly, The Publication Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1967, p107).

³ Westminster pp114-116.

The Independent or Congregational Savoy Declaration of 1658 repeated this terrifying assertion. Note the word *conferred*: ‘The grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and *conferred*, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto’. Conferred! What a word! Do those who hold to these statements today really believe that grace is actually *conferred* to elect infants in their baptism? Where do infant baptisers find any scriptural justification for this? Are infant baptisers prepared to assert, categorically, that every one of the elect who is baptised as an infant is regenerated at the time of their baptism? Those who hold to the Westminster Confession say it is so.⁴

What is more, it is easy to ignore the final caveat: ‘to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto’. History shows that many reared under the Westminster Confession really do hold to the baptismal regeneration of *their* children in the performance of the sacramental rite.

Many covenant theologians past and present confirm the point. Take David F. Wright:

The divines who laboured so long and hard on the Westminster Assembly benches clearly held to regeneration as God’s normal baptismal gift. The erosion of such full-bodied teaching about infant baptism among Protestant evangelicals in modern times distances them from the Reformers more markedly than on almost any other topic... The Westminster Confession teaches baptismal regeneration of infants and older persons. Just as [the usual] qualifications are commonplace among the Reformers,⁵ so also the generality of their baptismal theology

⁴ What about the elect who are *not* baptised as infants? And what about the *non*-elect who *are* baptised as infants? And notice the ‘whether of age or infants’. Does this mean that baptism confers saving grace on all the elect irrespective of their age when baptised? But if the adult was a believer when baptised, didn’t he have saving grace before his baptism?

⁵ See my *Infant* pp109-110 and *passim* for repeated examples of Reformed double-speak.

conveys a decisively realist message: baptism is God's normal channel for imparting his gifts... to his children.⁶

Rich Lusk, using the abominable word 'sacrament',⁷ speaking of baptism in particular, declared:

The Reformed Confessions clearly teach that a sacrament includes *both* the sign *and* the thing signified. Sacraments are not merely signs; they are signs *conjoined* with the gracious work of Christ and the Spirit.

In this, said Lusk, the Reformed Confessions were following 'Calvin [who] repeatedly claimed the sacraments perform what they picture; that in them, God accomplishes what he signifies'.⁸

And that takes us neatly to the Reformers and subsequent writers, down to the present day.

⁶ David F. Wright: *What has Infant Baptism done to Baptism? An enquiry at the end of Christendom*, Paternoster Press, Milton Keynes, 2005, pp24,99.

⁷ By a 'sacrament', I mean the idea that grace is conferred by performance of a rite. I will have to use the word; it is in the literature, and many Reformed writers and others more-than-like it. John Calvin had a high view of the word (John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, James Clarke and Co., Limited, London, 1957, Vol.2 pp491-511). D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones was not so keen: 'It is unfortunate that this word should ever have been used... Personally, I try not to use this term' (D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *The Church and the Last Things*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1998, pp26-27). It is, to me, an abomination. See Benjamin Wills Newton: *The Doctrine of Scripture Respecting Baptism Briefly Considered*, Lucas Collins, London, 1907, pp74-81. To anticipate an objection: No, I am not confusing sacramentalism and sacerdotalism. But they are connected. Both are unbiblical, and the former leads to the latter – whatever the Reformed might say. See my *No Sacerdotalism: A critique of the laying on of hands in ordination; Baptist Sacramentalism: A Warning to Baptists*.

⁸ Rich Lusk: 'Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy: Historic Trends and Current Controversies', in Wilkins, Steve and Garner, Duane (eds.): *The Federal Vision*, Athanasius Press, Monroe, 2004, pp96-102, emphasis his; see also Wilkins: 'Introduction' in the same volume pp12-13.

Dangerous statements by infant baptisers

I say dangerous. I could say unbiblical and therefore dangerous.

Martin Luther, for example, commenting on: 'For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ' (Gal. 3:27):

Putting on of Christ... consists... in a new birth and a new creation... which is done in baptism... They which are baptised, are regenerated and renewed by the Holy Ghost... There rises in them... new and holy affections, [such] as the fear of God, true faith and assured hope... There begins in them also a new will.

He attacked the Anabaptists, saying they were:

Fond and fantastical spirits, which go about to deface the majesty of baptism, and speak wickedly of it. Paul contrariwise commends and sets it forth with honourable titles, calling it 'the washing of the new birth, the renewing of the Holy Ghost' (Tit. 3:5). And here also he says, that all they which are baptised, have put on Christ. As if he said: You have not received through baptism a mere token whereby you are enrolled in the number of the Christians, as in our time many fantastical heads have supposed, which have made of baptism a token only, that is to say, a bare and empty sign. But as many (says he) as have been baptised, have put on Christ: that is, you have been carried out of the law into a new birth, which is wrought in baptism... Paul therefore teaches that baptism is not a sign, but the garment of Christ... Wherefore baptism is a thing of great force and efficacy.⁹

Paul, of course, did not say what Luther tried to make him say. Luther confused water baptism with spiritual baptism. Paul was not speaking of water baptism at all in Galatians 3:27. It was spiritual baptism he was writing about. Luther's comments are highly dangerous and wrong; they boil down to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. He clearly stated that the 'new birth... is

⁹ Martin Luther: *A Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, James Clarke and Co., Ltd., London, reprinted 1961, pp340-341. 'If any man... denies (as the fantastical spirits [Anabaptists] do) that righteousness and salvation is given unto an infant when first it is baptised... such a one utterly takes away salvation from baptism' (Luther pp234-235).

done in baptism’, the ‘new birth... is wrought in baptism’, and he meant water baptism. This is Popery! It is an entirely false assertion.¹⁰ What the verse actually teaches is that all who are baptised by the Spirit into Christ – that is, all who are spiritually baptised – that is, all who are regenerated – that they, and only they – are true Christians, having put on Christ. Water baptism is *not* the washing of regeneration. Spiritual baptism is. Water baptism, following faith, symbolises it, yes. But water baptism is not in view in the verse at all.¹¹ Even though Luther derided them, the Anabaptists in 1525 saw this distinction clearly. Luther did not. He did not understand Galatians 3:27. He did not understand baptism. What he said was wrong; and it was dangerous.

As another example of dangerous statements made by infant baptisers, listen to John Calvin. He, like Luther, also confused spiritual and water baptism, and thus certainly gave the impression that he believed in baptismal regeneration. He made this plain enough when rightly arguing that the regenerate are not entirely free of sin:

By regeneration, the children of God are delivered from the bondage of sin, but not as if they had already obtained full possession of freedom, and no longer felt any annoyance from the flesh... When it is said that God purifies his church so as to be ‘holy and without blemish’ (Eph. 5:26-27), that he promises this cleansing... and performs it in his elect, I understand that reference is made to the guilt rather than to the matter of sin. In regenerating his people, God indeed accomplishes this much for them; he destroys the dominion of sin, by supplying the agency of the Spirit, which enables them to come off victorious from the contest. Sin, however, though it ceases to reign, does not cease to dwell in them... The remains of sin survive, not to have dominion, but to humble them under a consciousness of their infirmity.

¹⁰ The New Testament demands baptism *after* the Spirit has given repentance and faith (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:12-13,36-37; 16:30-33), whereas Luther spoke of the gift of the Spirit, and his work in repentance and faith, *being produced by* baptism.

¹¹ See my *Baptist*.

So far, so good. But how does God regenerate his elect? According to Calvin, in this way:

When it is said that God purifies his church so as to be ‘holy and without blemish’ (Eph. 5:26-27)... he promises this cleansing *by means of baptism*.¹²

And he was speaking of water baptism. In other words, Calvin held to baptismal regeneration.

In his *Commentaries*, I admit, Calvin rowed back – employing the usual qualifiers – double-speak, I call it – but before I quote him there, we must not forget his own stated position; namely, that his *Institutes* represent his definitive position:

I have endeavoured [here in the *Institutes*] to give such a summary of religion in all its parts... Having thus... paved the way, I shall not feel it necessary, in any *Commentaries* on Scripture which I may afterwards publish, to enter into long discussions of doctrine... In this way, the pious reader will be saved much trouble and weariness, provided he comes furnished with a knowledge of the [*Institutes*] as an essential prerequisite... seeing that I have in a manner deduced at length all the articles which pertain to Christianity.¹³

Now for what Calvin said on ‘washing of water’ (Eph. 5:26) in his *Commentaries*:

Having mentioned the inward and hidden sanctification, [the apostle] now adds the outward symbol, by which it is visibly confirmed; as if he had said that a pledge of that sanctification is held out to us by baptism.

I pause. Note the glosses. Who said anything about baptism? who said anything about symbol? who said anything about adding the symbol? Baptism is not even mentioned in Eph. 5:26. Note also Calvin’s subtle watering down of his *Institutes*. In the latter, baptism wrought regeneration; in the *Commentaries*, sanctification is held out to us by baptism. Which is it?

¹² Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp516-517, emphasis mine.

¹³ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp21,23, in his prefixed explanations for the work dated 1539 and 1545.

To let Calvin go on:

Here it is necessary to guard against unsound interpretation [quite – DG], lest the wicked superstition of men, as has frequently happened, change a sacrament into an idol. When Paul says that we are washed by baptism [he doesn't – DG], his meaning is that God employs it for declaring to us that we are washed, and at the same time performs what it represents [in other words, baptismal regeneration – DG]. If the truth – or, which is the same thing, the exhibition of the truth – were not connected with baptism, it would be improper to say that baptism is the washing of the soul [which it is not – DG]. At the same time, we must beware of ascribing to the sign, or to the minister, what belongs to God alone. We must not imagine that washing is performed by the minister [but it is; he baptises the infant, does he not, and Calvin said baptism is the washing – DG], or that water cleanses the pollution of the soul, which nothing but the blood of Christ can accomplish [quite – DG]. In short, we must beware of giving any portion of our confidence to the element or to man; for the true and proper use of the sacrament is to lead us directly to Christ, and to place all our dependence upon him. Others again suppose that too much importance is given to the sign, by saying [that is, when we – Calvin – say] that baptism is the washing of the soul. Under the influence of this fear, they labour exceedingly to lessen the force of the eulogium [high praise] which is here pronounced on baptism [by Calvin – not Paul – DG]. But they are manifestly wrong; for, in the first place, the apostle does not say that it is the sign which washes, but declares it to be exclusively the work of God. It is God who washes, and the honour of performing it cannot lawfully be taken from its Author and given to the sign. But there is no absurdity in saying that God employs a sign as the outward means. Not that the power of God is limited by the sign, but this assistance is accommodated to the weakness of our capacity. Some are offended at this view, imagining that it takes from the Holy Spirit a work which is peculiarly his own, and which is everywhere ascribed to him in Scripture. But they are mistaken; for God acts by the sign in such a manner, that its whole efficacy depends upon his Spirit. Nothing more is attributed to the sign than to be an inferior organ, utterly useless in itself, except so far as it derives its power from another source. Equally groundless is their fear, that by this interpretation the freedom of God will be restrained. The grace

of God is not confined to the sign; so that God may not, if he pleases, bestow it without the aid of the sign. Besides, many receive the sign who are not made partakers of grace; for the sign is common to all [infants who are baptised under Calvin's system – DG], to the good and the bad alike; but the Spirit is bestowed on none but the elect, and the sign, as we have said, has no efficacy without the Spirit.¹⁴

As I say, this is full of the double-speak so beloved of the Reformed. By this, Calvin certainly has given me the impression that he was only too well aware of the weakness of his position, and tried to stifle nagging doubt (in himself and others) by sheer weight of words. Methinks he protested too much. He certainly professed too much for baptism.

Calvin again:

Our children, before they are born, God declares that he adopts for his own when he promises that he will be a God to us, and to our seed after us... As soon as infants are born among them, the Lord signs them with the sacred symbol of baptism; they are therefore, in some sense, the people of God... The offspring of believers are born holy... included in the covenant of eternal life... admitted into the church by baptism... they belonged to the body of Christ before they were born... The children of the godly are born the children of the church and... they are accounted members of Christ from the womb... Children derive some benefit from their baptism... being ingrafted into the body of the church.¹⁵

This is confused. Infants, by baptism are 'ingrafted into the body of the church', even though 'they belonged to the body of Christ before they were born'. Which is it?¹⁶ Even so, according

¹⁴ John Calvin: *Commentaries*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, reprinted 1979, Vol.21 Part 1 pp319-320.

¹⁵ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp525,535. See Graham Miller: *Calvin's Wisdom*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1992, p16; David Boorman: 'The Halfway Covenant', being a paper given at The Westminster Conference 1976: *The Puritan Experiment in the New World*, p77.

¹⁶ 'The children of believers are not baptised in order that though formerly aliens from the church they may then, for the first time, become children of God, but rather are received into the church by a

to Calvin, infants born to Christians are in some sense the people of God and holy. They belong to the body of Christ, are accounted members of Christ, and by their baptism are ingrafted into the church. This is a dreadful statement. This is Popery! While it is readily granted that infant baptism may make infants into members of the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Church of England, or whatever, it will never – never – make them members of the church of Christ.¹⁷ When Calvin said that baptised infants are ‘in some sense the people of God’, in what sense, exactly, did he mean? No child is born holy, in the sense Calvin implied. All are born in sin and are the children of wrath (Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Eph. 2:1-3).

Listen to Calvin again: ‘Children are baptised for future repentance and faith. Though these are not yet formed in them, yet the seed of both lies hid in them by the secret operation of the Spirit... Paul... terms it the “washing of regeneration and renewing” (Tit. 3:5)’.¹⁸ Calvin was mistaken. Paul did not call water baptism the washing of regeneration. Do infant baptisers

formal sign, because, in virtue of the promise, they previously belonged to the body of Christ’. Those who disagreed with him, Calvin dismissed as ‘frenzied spirits’, ‘furious madmen’ (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp526,529,535). Well, I for one, ‘madman’ or not, disagree with him! I find *his* contradictions quite ‘mad’ enough. Why *did* Calvin baptise infants? Does anybody *know*? According to Wright, Calvin baptised infants because he thought ‘they were already regenerate’ (Wright p100). But, according to Lusk: ‘For Calvin, regeneration began at the font’ (Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism’ p89). For more on Calvin’s and other Reformers’ view of baptism, see Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism’ pp89-102. As Lusk showed, Bucer developed an even stronger sacramentalism than Calvin (who was influenced by Bucer – Wendel pp324,326); nor were John Knox and Cornelius Burges laggards.

¹⁷ Wright ironically pointed out the opposite in Scottish *Book of Common Order* (1994). The baptised baby is received ‘as a member of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church’, but ‘oddly enough’, said Wright, ‘the service is not so explicit about the child’s becoming a member of the Church of Scotland! The lesser does not seem to follow from the greater – or is it encompassed within the greater?’ he asked (Wright p84).

¹⁸ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 p543.

really believe that God's Spirit works in infants, producing the seed of repentance and faith within them by sprinkling? What is the justification for this astounding assertion? And what is 'the seed of repentance and faith'? I do not deny that God can regenerate a sinner when he will, but that is very different to what Calvin said.¹⁹ What is more, a literal understanding of his statement leads to only one end – the indiscriminate baptism of all children.²⁰ All of them – apparently – will have the secret work of the Spirit within them. I realise Calvin did not actually believe this, but that is why I say that the assertions I have quoted are so very dangerous. They tend to baptismal regeneration. Indeed on the plain reading of the words they tend to nothing else. To put it bluntly, they assert it!

François Wendel's testimony concerning Calvin, the prince of Reformed teachers, should not be forgotten:

Throughout [his] reasoning [on infant baptism in his *Institutes*], Calvin is following Bucer's line of argument... Most probably... it was in reliance upon the patristic evidences adduced by Bucer... Since it was not possible for him [Calvin] to adduce a single New Testament passage containing a clear allusion to infant baptism, he had to be content with indirect inferences and analogies drawn from circumcision and Christ's blessing of the children. Calvin has been much reproached for the weakness of this reasoning... and he himself seems to have been aware of the defects of his exegesis upon this point. He was debarred, however, from using any other, from the moment when he undertook to defend, on scriptural grounds, an institution of later date than the New Testament writings, and to [try to] justify an ecclesiastical tradition after having proclaimed that all tradition, to be valid, must be based upon certain scriptural proof... [If he had taken his own medicine, it] would have enabled him to come to the [right] conclusion...

¹⁹ The question of whether or not infants can be regenerated is a red herring – of course they can – but when such a statement is made in connection with baptism (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 p541), it is loaded beyond description.

²⁰ As history verifies. See my 'Glass Eyes and Wooden Legs in 17th Century New England'.

frankly acknowledging that one cannot find an acceptable basis for it [infant baptism] in the Scriptures.²¹

Another infant baptiser, Archibald Alexander, said:

How solicitous should parents be for their children, that God would bestow his grace upon them, even before they know their right hand from their left; and, when about to dedicate them to God in holy baptism, how earnestly should they pray that they might be baptised with the Holy Ghost – that while their bodies are washed in the emblematical laver of regeneration, their souls may experience the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. If the sentiments expressed above be correct, then there may be such a thing as baptismal regeneration; not that the mere external application of water can have any effect to purify the soul; nor that internal grace uniformly or generally accompanies this external washing, but that God, who works when and by what means he pleases, may regenerate by his Spirit the soul of the infant, while in his sacred name, water is applied to the body. And what time in infancy is more likely to be the period of spiritual quickening, than the moment when that sacred rite is performed which is strikingly emblematical of this change? Whether it be proper to say that baptism may be the *means* of regeneration depends on the sense in which the word *means* is used.²²

I wonder, however much Alexander tried to guard his assertions, is there any danger that some parents baptising their infant according to this system, might really believe that their child is actually regenerate in and through their baptism? Have any parents actually believed Alexander's words that 'there may be such a thing as baptismal regeneration'? Whether or not they understand the ins-and-outs of baptismal regeneration, and all the theological niceties surrounding the word 'means', I suggest that some parents might, in practical terms, take their child away

²¹ François Wendel: *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, Collins, London, 1973, pp326,328-329. For more on some of these themes, see my *Infant* pp44-48,51.

²² Archibald Alexander: *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, reprinted 1978, pp12-13, emphasis his.

from ‘the emblematical laver of regeneration’, as Alexander put it, with their heads and hearts filled with the diabolical and Papist notion of baptismal regeneration. They might well think that their baby is now regenerate, their baby ‘is now all right if anything should happen’. I say it is a very real possibility and danger, and one which arises out of Alexander’s words. If I am right, or if there is any chance that I might be right, all infant baptisers ought to think about it very seriously. Those who teach this kind of thing carry an enormous weight of responsibility – the full extent of which will not be known until the day of judgement.

Listen to the words of Charles Hodge who pleaded with parents to baptise their infants, saying: ‘Do let the little ones have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life, even if they afterwards choose to erase them; being thus enrolled may be the means of their salvation’.²³ Did Hodge really believe this? Can an infant’s name be written in the book of God’s decrees by baptism? Can the growing infant then choose to erase it? Was Hodge an Arminian or a Calvinist at this point? It seems that some infant baptisers, when they speak of baptism, can forget the doctrines of grace. How do Hodge’s words square with election? On what do infant baptisers base these opinions?

Consider the words of J.W.Alexander, who encouraged infant baptisers to think of their children as Christians, even to say to them: ‘You are Christian children – you are Christ’s – you ought to think and feel and act as such!’²⁴ What an alarming statement. Where do infant baptisers find this parental attitude in the New Testament? Is this the way preachers ought to speak to unregenerate children (and, eventually, unregenerate adults)

²³ David Kingdon: *Children of Abraham*, Henry E.Walter Ltd., Worthing, 1973, p65. Some modern-day infant baptisers regard Charles Hodge as weak in this area. Commenting on Hodge’s ‘distress over the loss of infant baptism’ in America in the first half of the 19th century, according to Lusk, Hodge himself ‘proved to be part of the problem’. And Lusk had no doubt as to the reason: ‘Hodge failed to develop a robust sacramental theology’ (Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism’ pp71,83).

²⁴ Kingdon p63.

simply because they were baptised as infants? Where do infant baptisers find the scriptural justification for it? Immense dangers attend the notion.

As another example of a dangerous statement by an infant baptiser, take the words of A.A.Hodge: 'In the baptism of every infant there are four parties present and concerned in the transaction – God, the church, the parents, and the child. The first three are conscious and active, the fourth is for the time unconscious and passive'.²⁵ I ask: What – precisely – is God doing in 'the baptism of every infant'? In particular: What is he doing in the baptism of a child who will never be regenerate?

As a further example of statements made by infant baptisers which are perilous, not to say downright wrong, consider the words of David J.Engelsma:

The children of believers are included in the covenant *as children*, that is, already at conception and birth. They receive forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus, the Holy Spirit of sanctification, and church membership – as children. For they have God as their God, and are his people – as children. Therefore, they have full right to baptism... God does not merely put the children of believers in a more advantageous position [than the children of unbelievers], so as to make it likelier that they will be saved; but he establishes his covenant with them, so as to be their God. God gives to the children the promise of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. Accordingly... the Reformed Church regards them, and must regard them, as those 'sanctified in Christ'... God... gathers his church from age to age from the children of believers... Covenant children are... Jehovah's children (Ezek. 16:20,21). They are not sinful flesh, spiritually like the devil; but they are holy (1 Cor. 7:14). Quite unlike the children of disobedience, who are ruled by the prince of the power of the air so that they have their conversation in the lusts of their flesh (Eph. 2:1-3), the baptised children of believers are in the Lord Jesus.

Engelsma said that he witnessed boldly to God's covenant because, among other things, God, 'looked upon me in my

²⁵ A. A. Hodge: *Evangelical Theology*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1976, p336.

infancy in grace, incorporated me as a baby by his Spirit into his Son, Jesus'.²⁶ He meant, of course, by infant baptism.

I must be brief in my comments, but these words cannot go unchallenged. First, observe Engelsma's emphasis; God blesses the children of believers *as children*, even from 'conception and birth', he said. He claimed that they receive the forgiveness of their sins as children. But the Scriptures say that we receive the forgiveness of sins through and by faith (Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; Rom. 4:1-13). We are saved through faith (Eph. 2:8). Sinners have to be converted to receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 26:16-18). Sinners have to confess their sins before they are forgiven (1 John 1:9). Do the children of believers stand outside all this? Do the children of believers receive forgiveness of their sins as children, because they are the children of believers? Most definitely not! Does this need to be said? Apparently it does. A man, a woman, a child, can only receive the benefits of salvation through faith – their own personal, saving faith (Rom. 3:21-31; Gal. 3:14,22; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 3:9). They are not saved by proxy. Infant baptisers agree that no infant can exercise saving faith – how then can he receive the benefits of Christ's redemption? To be saved, a sinner has to believe. No infant can savingly believe.

Reader, please do not allow yourself to be side-tracked at this stage on to the vexed and sad question of infants who die. This red herring is often raised by infant baptisers, but the spiritual condition and fate of such infants is another issue altogether, totally unconnected with the main argument. In the tragic case of infant death, let us rest in the assertion: 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' (Gen. 18:25).²⁷ He is the

²⁶ David J.Engelsma: *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*, Protestant Reformed Church, South Holland, Illinois, third printing, 1993, pp9,12-13,17-18,23.

²⁷ And, it must be remembered, Abraham used this argument with God to prevent 'the righteous' minority being caught up in the judgement of 'the wicked' majority. Of course, each of us – every infant born (except Christ) – is a sinner, and God's judgement is just, but, to my mind, Abraham's argument is very powerful. If he felt it would carry

gracious God who is ‘abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression’ (Num. 14:18). We may safely leave such infants, along with all those who never develop a sufficient sense of reason to be responsible before God, in the merciful hands of the LORD. But, as I said, none of this is relevant to the debate about infant baptism.²⁸

To return to the main point: the plain biblical fact is, no one is saved because his parents are believers. Every sinner must come to Christ by faith in order to be saved, and until he does so come, he is under the wrath of God (Eph. 2:3). We do not become the children of God by being the children of believers, as Engelsma asserted – no! we become the children of God ‘through faith in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:26).

Further, what of Engelsma’s assertion that the children of believers are not merely *more likely* to be saved than the children of unbelievers? What did he intend by that statement? After all, according to his own words, these children already have the Holy Spirit, already are the children of God and have already received the forgiveness of sins. What is left? But taking his words at face value – what, precisely, is the advantage Engelsma referred to? In comparison with the children of unbelievers, they are more than more likely to be saved, he said. How much more? Very likely? Almost certainly? In reality, as I have just said, if Engelsma’s words mean anything, these children are certain to be saved! They are already saved. If they are incorporated into Jesus in infancy by infant baptism, what remains to be done? If words mean anything at all, it amounts to an assertion that all the children of believers are saved because they are the children of believers and have been sprinkled. Indeed, Engelsma called them Jehovah’s children.

What is more, Engelsma declared that the children of believers are not born sinners like others, in that they are not born with the grim consequences of the fall as listed in

weight with God over Lot in Sodom, how much more for us over infants who die before they have reached the age of responsible action!

²⁸ As always, it is foolish to legislate on the basis of the exception. Hard cases make bad law.

Ephesians 2:1-3. They are ‘quite unlike the children of disobedience’, he declared, they do not conduct themselves in the lusts of the flesh, since ‘the baptised children of believers are in the Lord Jesus’. Did Engelsma mean to say this? If so, he contradicted himself. In another statement he said that ‘our children are by nature dead in sin’;²⁹ that is, of course, they are included in Ephesians 2:1-3, they are among the children of disobedience, and they do conduct themselves in the lusts of the flesh.

I am not interested in merely pointing out the inconsistency of Engelsma’s assertions; I am deeply concerned, passionately concerned, lest anyone should believe the totally unscriptural view that any child – any child – is born in a condition not covered by the fall. All the sons of Adam are ruined from conception (Ps. 51:5), contrary to Engelsma’s assertion that the children of believers are the children of God from that time. His alarming statement runs directly counter to Scripture. All children, including the children of believers, are born ‘dead in trespasses and sins... by nature children of wrath’ (Eph. 2:1-3). Paul stated that ‘we all’ were ruined in Adam – all of us, including the children of believers. Jesus is the only man to have avoided this corruption; are the children of believers free of it? Do they escape this ruin by being conceived of believing parents who sprinkle them in infancy? Is this what the gospel amounts to?

Finally, in contradiction of Engelsma’s claim, it is a relief to be able to state that God does not ‘gather his church... from the children of believers’.³⁰ Rather, he gathers his elect from out of the mass of fallen humanity, ‘the same lump’ (Rom. 9:21). He redeems, calls and saves the ungodly as sinners (Mark 2:17; Rom. 5:6-10; 1 Tim. 1:15). God delights to call sinners as sinners; he does not work among the children of believers as such, nor exclusively among them. Indeed, he glories in spreading his arms wide to embrace those who have no

²⁹ Engelsma p18.

³⁰ I am not saying, of course, that God does not call children of believers!

connection whatsoever with the covenant people (Rom. 9:24-26; 10:11-21). This is a vital point, a wonderful point. There is no distinction whatsoever in the gospel call, neither on the basis of race nor of family connection. God calls sinners *as sinners*.³¹ The Spirit is sent to convince men of sin (John 16:8); this is the warrant for faith, since Christ died for sinners. Am I a sinner? Then I am invited to Christ. If it is true that God gathers his elect out of the line and descent of believers, then the Spirit must convince men that their parents were truly the children of God! But we have no promise to say that he does so convince.³² Reader, do you not see that Engelsma's words are dangerous, as I claimed earlier? They are unscriptural. Their effect is devastating.

Herman Hanko, in his defence of infant baptism, said that 'believers and their seed are saved. And the seed of believers are saved as children'. He also declared that believers have 'the sure

³¹ 'Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honour, and another for dishonour?' (Rom. 9:21). It is 'from the same lump', from fallen humanity, that God chooses and forms elect or reprobate vessels. 'Paul is not now dealing with God's sovereign rights over men as men but over men *as sinners*' (John Murray: *The Epistle to the Romans*, Two Volumes in One, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1974, Vol.2 p32, emphasis mine). 'The mass of *fallen men* are in [God's] hands, and it is his right to dispose of them at pleasure' (Charles Hodge: *A Commentary on Romans*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1972, p319, emphasis mine). 'The potter does not create the clay; he starts with it, it is there in front of him on the bench... The apostle is not dealing here at all with God's purpose in the original creation of man, or with what God does with human nature as such. He is dealing with God's relationship to *fallen humanity*' (D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *An Exposition of Romans 9. God's Sovereign Purpose*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1991, pp199-200, emphasis mine). See also editor's notes in Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.19 Part 2 pp366-367. All humanity, elect and reprobate, are at birth, whether born of believers or not, 'by nature children of wrath' (Eph. 2:3), of 'the same lump'.

³² Compare the hyper-Calvinist's insistence on a sinner being made 'sensible' before he is invited to Christ (see my *The Gospel Offer is Free* (second edition), pp25-26, and my *Septimus Sears: A Victorian Injustice*).

knowledge that God's promise is to save them and their children. They instruct covenant children. And their instruction will be fruitful for it falls upon hearts which are regenerated by the Spirit of Christ'. Did Hanko really believe this? Are all the baptised children of believers regenerated? He said they were! If God has given his promise to all believers, as Hanko claimed, that both they and their children are to be saved, why is it sadly undeniable that some children of some believers are not saved? How sure is this 'sure knowledge' which Hanko spoke of? He also said: '[When] believers... instruct their children in the ways of the Lord, they have the sure word of God that they are instructing children of God, God's own elect people'.³³ Well, are the children of believers elect and regenerated by God because their parents are believers? What a breathtaking assertion! Is this the Christian religion? Is this the doctrine of the Bible? Even Papists do not go this far. Dangerous? Statements like these are diabolical.

Finally, as the last in this long catalogue of terrifying assertions by infant baptisers, listen to the horrific *Prayer of Thanksgiving* of the Reformed Church: 'Thou hast forgiven us, and our children, all our sins, through the blood of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through thy Holy Spirit as members of thine only begotten Son'.³⁴ If these words are true – if, and what an 'if' – what is left for the children of believers? They are saved because their parents are believers, is the claim! Those who believe these words ought to have as many children as possible in order to populate the world with Christians! But it is not enough for sinners to belong to believing parents. Listen to the words of Christ: 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... That which is born of flesh is flesh' (John 3:3-8). Yes! And that includes the children of believers – they are born of flesh, are they not? They must be born again. The fact that their parents are believers will never ensure their salvation.

³³ Herman Hanko: *We and Our Children*, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, 1981, pp55,56,89.

³⁴ Engelsma p11.

Reader, is my assertion not true? When infant baptisers argue for their practice, they say things which are highly dangerous; and worse.³⁵

³⁵ Reader, if you need further damning evidence, see Wright pp81-102. Let Lusk sum this up. In furthering his claim that ‘a truly Calvinistic soteriology requires a Calvinistic sacramentology and *vice-versa*’, his extracts from various writers showed what he meant. Hughes Oliphant Old: ‘The Reformers insisted that according to Scripture there was one baptism. To divide the sacrament into a baptism of water and a baptism of the Spirit... was misleading... Reformed churches should not in their liturgical practice give ground to a separation of the baptism with water and the baptism of the Spirit’. James White: ‘The traditional Catholic and [please note!] Reformation view [is] that God acts to accomplish God’s purposes through sacraments’. Cornelius Burges: ‘Sacred baptism, the laver of regeneration and of the renewing of the Holy Ghost... I do not deny future actual efficacy of baptism after the act of administration, but I only plead for some efficacy when it is administered’. Lusk added that ‘Burges claimed Calvin for support of this view’. Lusk also rightly argued that ‘the ordinary necessity of baptism for salvation is simply the teaching of the Westminster standards... The Confession teaches that there is no ordinary possibility of salvation outside the visible church and baptism is the mode of entrance into the visible church’ (Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism’ pp97,118,122,124,125; Westminster pp107-108,114).