

VII. CONCLUSION: CHRISTIANITY'S BABY BELIEF BEFORE BAPTISM

663. Infant Faith in Covenanters from Scripture and down through Church History

In this dissertation, we looked at the subject of baby belief before baptism. We explained and expounded every single text in Holy Writ remotely concerned with the faithfulness or faithlessness of babies. We also investigated whether faith is generated, or alternatively just confirmed, by infant circumcision -- and also by the infant baptism which now replaces it.

From the infallible Scriptures, we saw it is quite apparent that all early-dying infants of godly parents are certainly justified. This occurs by God's grace, and through their own God-given infant faith. Second Samuel 12:14-23; Matthew 18:1-14; Romans 11:16; First Corinthians 7:14; Hebrews 11:6,9-13,23*f*.

Having dealt with the testimony of the inspired Holy Bible, we next investigated the bearing upon this subject of other extant yet uninspired documents of importance. Here, we looked at the testimony: of intertestamental Hebrew religion; of Pre- and Post-Christian Ancient Paganism; and especially at the verdict of Church History.

From such documentary evidence, we learned that the Early Church Fathers asserted the prior sanctification of all early-dying infants of Christians. Only from about 250 and especially from around 350 A.D. onward, was the Church somewhat paganized by progressive baptismal regenerationism. This occurred when it borrowed a new and an unbiblical sacramentology -- from Paganism.

Thus the Mediaeval Church became enslaved to mechanical magic -- for a moribund millennium, from around 350 till about 1350 A.D. Yet even during those dark ages, there were always faithful witnesses -- like the Waldensians, Wycliffe, Huss and the Bohemians -- who decisively rejected Rome's *ex opere operato* while yet maintaining Biblical paedobaptism against all antipaedobaptist heresies.

With the Protestant Reformation, Luther generally asserted the prebaptismal infant faith of covenant children. So did Zwingli, while further intimating the salvation of all early-dying babies. Calvin maintained the paedobaptism of tiny covenanters -- whose infant faith and election he rebuttably presumed.

Against Protestantism, only the Anabaptists then rejected infant baptism -- and rebaptized their converts. Wrongly, they asserted either the damnation -- or alternatively the salvation -- of all early-dying infants. To the Anabaptists, faith within babies seemed to be impossible.

Most of the Protestant and all of the Reformed *Confessions of Faith* agreed with Calvin. Thus the *Second Helvetic*, the *Scots*, the *Belgic* and the *Heidelberg*. So too all the earliest Calvinian liturgies and catechisms -- from those of John Calvin, right down to the *Westminster Standards*.

Even since the latter, by far the majority of Reformed and even many Lutheran theologians have continued to assert: baby belief before baptism.

664. Baptism to be administered to tiny Covenanters as those already deemed believers

In every case, we clearly saw -- against Romanism and all other varieties of baptismal regenerationism -- that baptism does not cleanse. Ever since the fall, all sons of Adam are sinners from their very conception onward. They cannot even see and still less enter into the Kingdom of God, until they have been born again. Jeremiah 1:5 & John 3:3-8.

There is a difference between believers and unbelievers, including the tiny ones. Exodus 11:7 to 13:5. The elect necessarily get regenerated and receive 'the seed of faith' before their death -- even if they die unbaptized before their birth, or during their early infancy. Psalm 22:9f & Luke 1:15-45.

Hence, regeneration generally precedes baptism. Genesis 15:5; 17:7f; Mark 16:15f; Acts 2:38f; Romans 4:11f; Colossians 2:11f. Thus, all covenant children who die before their possible infant baptism -- are made holy in the sight of God at, or since, their conception. Second Samuel 12:15-23; Romans 11:16; First Corinthians 7:14.

Baptism itself never regenerates. At most, it only seals already holy children -- as members of the Visible Church. Genesis 17:7-14 & Romans 4:10-12. It is not for the dead, nor for the dying. It is only for the viable. Indeed, it is to be administered solely with a view to life-long obedience and fruitfulness and ever-increasing faith thereafter -- while yet here on earth. Romans 6:1-11 & Colossians 2:11-13.

Thus baptism is only for those (whether adults or infants) who seem to be believers already -- and who seem to possess at least 'the seed of faith' within their hearts. Matthew 18:1-6 & Acts 8:36-37.

Consequently, it should be administered only in the congregation of the saints -- and only after profession of faith by the baptizee or, if still tiny, by at least one of his or her parents. First Corinthians 1:2,16; 3:1-7; 6:11; 7:14; 10:1-2; 12:13; 16:15.

Relevantly does the Calvinistic *Heidelberg Catechism* ask:¹ "Is then the external baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?" And it rightly answers: "Not at all! For only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost cleanse us from all sin. Matthew 3:11; First Peter 3:21; First John 1:7; First Corinthians 6:11."

665. Summary re the who and the by whom and the where and the why of Infant Baptism

Summarizing, according to our Supreme Standard (the *Holy Bible*) as well as our Subordinate Standard (the *Westminster Confession*), we reach the following clear conclusions as to the Calvinistic doctrine of saving grace in unbaptized covenant infants and in Christ-professing adults. For they are all to be regarded as believers -- and therefore as holy before baptism.

All sons of Adam are sinners from their very conception onward. Since Adam and Eve, Calvinists regard all persons (except Jesus) as having been conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity, even before their birth. Ever since the fall, all are by nature therefore subject to the wrath of God. They cannot enter into or even see the Kingdom of God -- unless they are regenerated at some time before they die.²

There is a difference between unborn believers and unbelievers. Calvinists assert that, even before their birth, God puts a difference between the tiny children of believers -- and the tiny children of unbelievers.

God thus differentiates between elect children and reprobate children. The elect necessarily get regenerated and receive 'the seed of faith' before their death -- even if they die unbaptized.³

Regeneration generally precedes regular baptism. Calvinists presume that at least all believers' children dying in infancy, get regenerated and receive the 'seed of faith' before they die.

Because all unborn babies can die any second, Calvinists also presuppose that all 'covenant children' that die before baptism, are made holy in the sight of God at or since their conception and long before their birth. Calvinists further presuppose (rebuttably) that all conceived in the covenant, are to be regarded as already holy -- until and unless their behaviour ever evidences the contrary during their later lives.⁴

Baptism itself never regenerates. Because Calvinists regard covenant children as already holy before birth, they deny that baptizing them after their birth can make them holy. Such baptisms can at the most only seal already-holy children as members of the Visible Church.⁵

Baptism is not for the dead nor for the dying. Because Calvinists see baptism as a sign pointing to life, they rightly oppose giving baptism to the dying and to the dead -- and to those dead in sin. Even covenant children, if they seem likely soon to die, are not to be baptized. For baptism is only for those likely to live, and likely to serve Christ in His Visible Church here on earth. Indeed, baptism is to be followed by life-long obedience; by fruitfulness; and by ever-increasing faith.⁶

Baptism is only for believers (whether infants or adults). Because baptism is intended for believers alone, Calvinists oppose baptizing anyone who does not seem to believe in Christ already.

For this reason, they urge the baptism of only those adults who profess faith in Christ, together with the children of such adults alone. For only such children would seem to possess 'the seed of faith' in their hearts. Thus, Calvinists refuse to administer baptism to those adults who do not rightly profess Christ. They also refuse to baptize the infant children of such adults.⁷

Baptism should take place only in a church setting. Calvinists say baptisms should occur only under Biblical conditions. This means baptisms are to be administered only: a) after catechizing the baptizee or his or her parent or parents, to the satisfaction of the Ruling Elders; b) before the entire congregation; c) during public worship; d) after the reading of God's Holy Word; e) with

exclusively Reformed godparents, if any at all are used; and f) solely by an ordained Minister of the Word and Sacraments, or his acknowledged equivalent.⁸

666. Summary of the Calvinistic view of Infant Baptism

The above is what Presbyterians and other Calvinists should teach also their own covenant children. For not only Christ-professing adults are to be regarded as believers. So too are their infant children. Thus, also the latter are to be viewed as Christians --and baptized accordingly.

Calvin's own views can be summed up in his *229th Letter*. There, he states⁹ that a child's salvation does not depend upon he or she being baptized. Baptism does not confer upon infants the power of becoming sons and heirs of God. But because they are in that position and degree in relation to God, the grace of adoption is sealed by baptism. Otherwise, the Anabaptists would be right in denying infants this sacrament --as they wrongly do.

For baptism is a sacrament, a holy oath. It is an oath sworn by believers, to serve their God. But even more so, it is an oath sworn by God Himself -- the Saviour of adult believers, and of their believing children.

In the famous words of the Calvinistic *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (92-95): "A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ." Therein, "by sensible signs -- Christ and the benefits of the New Covenant are represented, sealed and applied: to believers. Genesis 17:7,10....

"The sacraments of the New Testament are baptism and the Lord's supper.... Baptism is a sacrament wherein the washing with water in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace and our engagement to be the Lord's....

"Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out[side] of the Visible Church, till they profess their faith in Christ and obedience to Him. But the infants of such as are members of the Visible Church, are to be baptized. Acts 2:38-39; Genesis 17:10; Colossians 2:11-12; First Corinthians 7:14."

667. The Baptist Alexander Carson's inadequate knowledge of Scripture and History

Rev. Dr. Alexander Carson -- not Th.D. (but only LL.D.) -- was an Ex-Presbyterian who later became a famous Baptist. Carson once challenged: "If it can fairly be made out that the circumstance of being born of Christian parents is evidence that infants have faith from the womb -- I have no objection to baptize them."¹⁰

We ourselves believe that, in our above pages, we have fulfilled Carson's challenge. For we believe we have indeed "fairly made out" from Scripture alone that -- at least till possible later apostasy, "being born of Christian parents is evidence that infants have faith from the womb."

For we have shown this very thing, from the womb to the tomb, in the lives of: Abel, Enoch,

Noah, Shem, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samson, Samuel, David, Solomon, Obadiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel and Malachi. Also from the New Testament -- we have shown the same thing from the lives of John the baptizer, the unique Jesus, the apostle Paul, and the evangelist Timothy.

We have also shown the same from the Jewish proselyte baptism of infants -- and even from the *Targums*, the *Talmud*, the Old Testament *Apocrypha* and *Pseudepigrapha*, Philo and Josephus. We have further seen a few traces of corruptions hereof in Ancient Paganism -- possibly borrowed from the true Old Testament religion, from Judaism, or even from Christianity.

Next, looking specifically at the Early Church, we found the confirmatory testimony of the New Testament -- and also of paganistic writers like Pliny and of ancient inscriptions in places like the catacombs. There is also the solid testimony of the many patristic writings extant -- from Clement of Rome to Chrysostom of Constantinople, and especially in the *Epistle of Barnabas* and in Augustine of Hippo-Regius.

We then demonstrated the same from all the Protestant Reformers. From Luther and Zwingli to Junius and the *Synopsis* -- and especially from the many writings of John Calvin himself -- we have shown that there was always a rebuttable presumption that covenant infants were themselves all deemed to possess saving faith in Christ.

Indeed, from Post-Reformational Calvinism, we further demonstrated exactly the same truth in manifold writings -- from Dordt, through the *Westminster Standards*. Indeed, it is re-echoed in many Reformed theologians (such as Kuyper and Warfield) -- and right down to the modern historian Rev. Dr. Rousas John Rushdoony in 1990.

668. Ex-Baptist Alexander Carson now a Paedobaptist in glory

In the words of yesteryear's famous Baptist Alexander Carson (as noted above), we ourselves now conclude that infants of believers probably indeed do "have faith from the womb." From his present exalted vantage-point in heaven, we believe even Carson now knows this -- beyond all doubt.

For today, he is in glory. Carson now knows that those like Rev. Dr. Gary Roper, formerly of Memphis Baptist Tabernacle, were wrong in assuming the damnation of the babies of believers dying in their infancy. Nor is Carson (like the Baptist David Kingdon) any longer agnostic about the everlasting destination of the early-dying infants of believers.

Now, the glorified Carson too would "have no objection to baptize" the believing infants of believing adults. Indeed, baptizing the believing babies of believing parents is exactly what Carson too would do today -- were he still here on earth. It is also what his former associates, the Baptists, should also do -- right now!

For Carson, now in glory, is no longer a Baptist. Now, he properly understands the command of his Saviour in Mark 16:15*f*. Carson now sees that the 'Great Commission' is indeed a **great** commission. For it applies to every human creature -- great, **and small**.

"Go into all the world, and preach the good news to **every** creature! He who believes and is baptized, shall be saved; but he who does not believe, shall be damned."

Accordingly, we ourselves now call upon all Baptists -- such as Carson once was -- to obey all the counsel of God. Acts 20:27 *cf.* 7:29-30. Let them all bring their babies forward, to receive Christian baptism! Luke 18:15-17 and Acts 2:38*f etc.* We call upon all Baptists (whether Arminian or 'Calvinistic') -- and also upon all Ex-Baptists -- to repent of their **sins of omission** regarding infant baptism.

We now call upon all Baptists like Carson, to bring their babies forward to receive Christian baptism. Certainly their Presbyterian brethren would be quick to help them!

We call upon our Baptist brethren, and also upon all other misled Christians everywhere, (rebuttably) to presume that their own tiny babies have been regenerated already -- through the grace of God. We call upon these misguided adult believers to recognize that God has, apparently, therefore already given the 'seed of faith' also to their own babies.

The latter are therefore to be baptized, as those who themselves certainly seem to be little believers. In this regard, knowledgeable Presbyterians are eager to instruct these babies' parents -- and to help the latter rectify their breach of the covenant of grace. Genesis 6:8-18 & 17:7-14 -- and Colossians 2:11-13 & 3:20-21.

For, in the words of Isaiah (59:21) -- "'This is My covenant with them,' says the Lord. 'My Spirit Who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed,' says the Lord, 'from henceforth, and for ever.'"

Endnotes

- 1) *Heid. Cat.*, Q. & A. 72.
- 2) Gen. 3:6-19; 5:3; 6:5; 8:21; Eccl. 6:29; Job 14:4; 15:14-16; 25:4-6; Ps. 51:5; Jh. 3:3-8; Rom. 3:23; 5:12-19; I Cor. 15:21-22; Eph. 2:1-3; *W.C.F.* 6:2-3; and *W.L.C.* 25-26.
- 3) Gen. 3:15; 17:7; 34:14; Ex. 11:7 - 13:5; Ps. 22:9-10; Esra 9:2; Neh. 9:2; Ezk. 16:20-21; Mal. 2:15; Lk. 1:15-45; Acts 2:38-39; 8:36-37; Rom. 9:11-13; 11:16; I Cor. 7:14; Col. 2:11-13; II Tim. 1:5-6; *W.C.F.* 24:2; 25:2; 27:1; 28:4; and *W.L.C.* 166 & 177.
- 4) II Sam. 12:15-23; Ps. 22:9-10; Jer. 1:5; Mt. 3:11; 19:14; Mk. 16:16; Lk. 1:15; 18:15-16; Jh. 3:3-8; Acts 2:38-39; 10:47; 16:15; 22:16; Rom. 4:10-12; 8:9; I Cor. 7:14; Heb. 6:2; I Jh. 5:12; *W.C.F.* 10:3 & 28:1; and *W.L.C.* 165 & 167 & 177.
- 5) Gen. 17:7-14; Rom. 4:10-12; I Cor. 1:17; 12:13; Gal. 5:3; Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 6:2; *W.C.F.* 10:3 & 28:3 and *W.L.C.* 161 & 165.
- 6) Dt. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25f; Rom. 2:25-29; 6:1-11; I Cor. 10:1-6; 15:29; Col. 2:11-13; *W.C.F.* 28:5 & 29:4; and *W.L.C.* 165 & 167.
- 7) Gen. 17:7f; Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 2:38-39; 8:12-16; 8:36-37; Rom. 4:10-12; Col. 2:11-13; *W.C.F.* 28:4-5; and *W.L.C.* 166.
- 8) Ex. 4:22-26; Mt. 19:13f; 28:19f; Mk. 10:14; 16:15f; Lk. 18:15f; Acts 2:38-42; Rom. 11:16; I Cor. 1:2,14-16; 3:6; 4:1; 6:11-20; 7:14; 10:1-11; 12:13; Heb. 5:4; Knox's (& Others') *First Book of Discipline* Ch. II 2nd Head 1-3; Ch. IV 4th Head (1) 1-3; Ch. XI 9th Head (1) 4; *W.C.F.* 28:5 & 29:4.
- 9) See Schenck's *op. cit.* p. 15.
- 10) A. Carson's *Baptism: Its Mode and Its Subjects*, Sovereign Grace Publishers, Evansville Ind., n.d., p. 176.