

- I. AS NOTED PREVIOUSLY IN THE WRITINGS OF NORMAN SHEPHERD AND JAMES JORDAN, THE FEDERAL VISION PROMOTES A FORM OF BAPTISMAL EFFICACY WHICH SERVES TO UNDERCUT A BIBLICAL AND CONFESSIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF REGENERATION, PERSEVERANCE, AND ASSURANCE. (Quotes from R. Lusk in *The Federal Vision*)<sup>1</sup>
- A. “Thus, the Westminster standards teach that in baptism, the thing signified—which is nothing less than union with Christ, regeneration, and forgiveness—is truly sealed (WCF 28.1), conferred (WCF 28.5), applied (WSC 92) and communicated (WSC 88)... It is also inadequate to suggest baptism is merely a strengthening and assuring ordinance, rather than a saving ordinance.” (FV, 98)<sup>2</sup>
  - B. “Biblically, if we turn to Exodus and John we find that signs are powerful, transformative, saving actions of God.” (FV, 102)
  - C. “We might say the unbaptized child of the covenant is betrothed to the Lord from conception onwards. But the marriage—that is, the actual covenant bonding—takes place at baptism. Or, to put it in more theological terms, God is already in the process of drawing the child to himself from the moment of conception... But this work isn’t complete until the child receives the sign of initiation... The threshold into union with Christ, new life in the Spirit, and covenant membership in the family of God is actually crossed when the child is baptized.” (FV, 109)
  - D. “I know of no theologian in history, Roman Catholic or otherwise, who has taught baptism *automatically guarantees* final salvation, come what may. By contrast, at the same time, the Reformed confessions do bind us to believe in a certain limited version of *ex opera operato*... It’s efficacy is inherent and objective, yet conditional.” (FV, 103)
  - E. “We are not to try to convert our baptized children, as though their spiritual experience had to fit the revivalistic paradigm; rather, we teach them to persevere in the faith and grace that they have already received in baptism.” (FV, 111)
  - F. “A baptized person is a Christian until and unless he apostatizes... Counting and treating our baptized children as Christians is not a matter of pretending or presuming. It is more than a ‘judgment of charity.’ When we tell our children that God is their Father and that Jesus is their Savior, we are telling them something true and helping them to internalize their covenant identity. ... True, baptized children can renounce their Father and become prodigals... Covenant members who fall from grace can only expect God’s harshest judgment.” (FV 112)
- II. IN SOME OF DOUG WILSON’S EARLIER WRITINGS ON INFANT BAPTISM — *TO A THOUSAND GENERATIONS* (1996) & *STANDING ON THE PROMISES* (1997) — HE OPENLY REPUDIATES BAPTISMAL REGENERATION AND EXPRESSES A HEALTHY MEASURE OF CAUTION REGARDING THE *PRESUMPTIVE REGENERATION OF ALL BAPTIZED INFANTS*.
- A. “On the basis of what has been established already, we can say that water baptism is not sacred in itself; it *signifies* a holy Christ. It is not an automatic means of imparting grace, it is a sign of grace that has been proclaimed and displayed in the covenant of grace. It is not a means of removing sins, but shows that the Spirit can wash cleaner than the purest water. In other words, water baptism is *not* a part of the gospel. It accompanies the gospel as a sign... Peter makes a plain statement [1 Pet. 3:21] that it is not the physical water which has the saving effect (“*not* the removal of the filth of the flesh”). Salvation is accomplished by the resurrection of Jesus and our union with Him. As we saw earlier, this union is brought about by another baptism, the baptism of the Spirit... Christian baptism, says Peter, is typified in the Old Testament, but it is not to be considered as something magical or automatic... The Lord is sovereign in salvation.” (TATG, 56-57)
  - B. “To be explicit, all teaching that grace is somehow imparted to an infant *ex opere operato* (automatically, by some kind of ecclesiastical magic) is rejected here as sub-Christian (indeed, as will be seen, it is sub-Jewish), and detrimental to a faithful preaching of the gospel. Water baptism does not regenerate, it does not save, and it does not cleanse.” (TATG, 12)
  - C. “...we need to get to the point where no one would dream of accusing an evangelical paedobaptist of holding to the false and destructive doctrine of baptismal regeneration.” (TATG, 9)
  - D. “Does [the Abrahamic Covenant] automatically include [our children] then? Certainly not. If parents are not covenantally faithful in how they bring up their children, and if their children do not embrace the faith of Abraham their father, the genetic relationship alone does no good at all.” (SOTP 26).
  - E. “Do these promises mean that the children of believers are automatically going to heaven? Are the children of elect parents automatically elect themselves? A thoughtful reading of Scripture indicates otherwise—not to mention a brief glance at the experience of some of our Christian friends.” (SOTP, 35)

<sup>1</sup> Steve Wilkins (*Christian Renewal*, August 2003): Romans 6 says that we’ve been baptized into Christ and his death, burial and resurrection and raised to newness of life. That’s objectively true of everyone who receives baptism. That does not mean that they are saved no matter how they live or respond to the grace of God. Indeed, Paul warns them about the possibility of being cut off because of arrogance & unbelief in Romans 11. [CRM: *Can we be in the church but not united to Christ?*] “That’s a distinction the Bible doesn’t make.... the distinction is not biblical. The visible, historic church is the body of Christ, and thus to be joined to it by baptism is to be united to Christ. [CRM: *Can you be baptized by water and not baptized by the Spirit?*] “I would say no. We may distinguish the work of the Spirit from baptism, but we should never separate the two.”

<sup>2</sup> WSC 91: “The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.” WLC 162: “A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his church, to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces...” [Cf. WCF 28.5-6]

- F. “We have already established that our children are by nature indistinguishable from all other human children. Paul is not teaching us here [1 Cor. 7:14] that our newborn infants are all regenerate and personally holy. He is teaching us their covenantal status. They are holy by virtue of their placement in a covenanted family... Because we cannot talk to infants in order to find out their thoughts and convictions, we do not know what their actual status is. Some of them may indeed be regenerate. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit from the womb (Lk. 1:15)... At the same time, because we cannot see the heart, it is impossible for us to assume anything about an infant’s personal standing before God... Wise parents will therefore not assume that their child is automatically regenerate. Neither will they assume the opposite. They will evaluate their child’s life and profession in the light of Scripture... True covenant children can and do fall away. Birth into a covenant home is by no means an automatic ticket to heaven. For this reason, godly parents want to see their children grow up to a faithful and consistent profession.” (SOTP, 74-75)<sup>3</sup>

**III. HOWEVER, IN SOME OF THESE VERY SAME BOOKS, WILSON PROMOTES AN ALTERNATE FORM OF PRESUMPTIVE REGENERATION: NAMELY, THAT GOD PROMISES TO SAVE THE CHILDREN OF “COVENANTALLY FAITHFUL” PARENTS.**

- A. “Nevertheless, we may believe God’s Word when He tells us that our children have been set apart for Him. We must therefore hold to this covenantal promise until we see clear scriptural evidence to the contrary. The wonderful thing is, if we hold to the covenantal promise scripturally, we will not find scriptural evidence to the contrary.” (SOTP, 74)
- B. “Now many children of believing parents do not become believers themselves. At the same time, children of obedient believers will become believers.” (SOTP, 85)
- C. “The biblical facts are plain. The Bible is full of promises to parents. But the promises are for those parents who are in the covenant, keep the covenant, and who remember His commandments to do them... For covenantally faithful parents, because the promise of Scripture cannot be broken, the Lord’s gracious calling of our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren is something in which we can rest.” (SOTP, 19-21)
- D. “Now these glorious promises have... been distorted and misapplied to and by nominalistic Christians. But we must not measure covenantal truth by those who are faithless to the covenant.” (SOTP, 32)
- E. “Another possible objection comes from the record of biblical parents. What about Jacob and Esau, for example? ...First, the sovereign God is free to make exceptions... If God wanted to teach the sovereignty of election through giving an Esau to obedient parents, He is the Lord. Having established this principle, we may still say that we have no examples from Scripture of parents who submitted to the will of God *for their children*, only to see their children fall away from the grace of God. Isaac provides a good example of this... [due to his] “disobedience with regard to his children.” (SOTP, 81)

**IV. IN HIS LATER WRITINGS — REFORMED IS NOT ENOUGH (2002) & THE AUBURN AVENUE THEOLOGY (2003) — WILSON PROMOTES SOMETHING AKIN TO A ‘WORD OF FAITH’ APPROACH TO PRESUMPTIVE REGENERATION: THAT IS, IF YOU “BY FAITH” PRESUME YOUR CHILD’S SALVATION, HE/SHE CANNOT POSSIBLY BE LOST (AND VICE VERSA).**

- A. “Often a great hue and cry is lifted up against presumptive regeneration, but it is not often noticed what happens in the other direction, which is presumptive unregeneration.” (RINE, 187)<sup>4</sup>
- B. “We trust God for the salvation of our children, as opposed to the children of the atheist across the street, because we have promises concerning our children... As we believe this promise, we receive the fruit of the promise by faith... But some are troubled because we speak so freely of our little ones as Christians, as saints, as heirs of salvation... we speak this way because the *covenant* requires us. We believe, therefore we have spoken... Doubting over your children is an excellent way to teach them to doubt. Believing over them enables them to grow up in an environment of believing.” (AAT, 3)
- C. “In faith, we want to say that children of believers are saved. But we are not making a categorical statement of the ‘All P are Q’ kind. We are saying that we believe God’s statements and promises concerning covenant children, and we think others should believe them, too... we baptize on the basis of the parents’ willingness to profess this faith.” (AAT, 7)
- D. “God makes no promise whatever to our ‘theological system’ that would enable us to say that ‘all children of duly baptized parents will necessarily go to heaven’... So promises are given to the parents... they are graciously invited to exercise this faith (faith that is warranted from the promises of Scripture) concerning their children... But imagine a [baptismal] service like this: MINISTER: ‘Do you believe that God has given believing parents covenant promises concerning the salvation of their children?’ FATHER: ‘Well, I don’t know exactly. Who’s to say if my kid is elect?’ MINISTER: ‘Just say yes.’ FATHER: Yes.” (AAT, 7)

<sup>3</sup> “The psalmist said that God made him to trust in God from his mother’s breast. This is not because little children are by nature innocent. They are not; they are all children of Adam and have inherited his sin. This is clearly seen in the children of unbelievers; they are expressly identified as *unclean* (1 Cor. 7:14). It is a strong word, commonly used to refer to demonic spirits; it means *foul*. This is what we all are by nature. But what has been given to us in the covenant of grace? The children of at least one believer are described as *holy ones*, or *saints* (1 Cor. 7:14).” (TATG, 20)

<sup>4</sup> “Because we cannot talk to infants in order to find out their thoughts and convictions, we do not know what their actual status is. Some of them may indeed be regenerate. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit from the womb (Lk. 1:15)... At the same time, because we cannot see the heart, it is impossible for us to assume anything about an infant’s personal standing before God... Wise parents will therefore not assume that their child is automatically regenerate. Neither will they assume the opposite. They will evaluate their child’s life and profession in the light of Scripture.” (SOTP, 74)

- E. “A baptismal service is personal. No one is being asked to affirm general propositions about the eternal destiny of all children of the covenant. The parent is being asked to appropriate the promises of God for *one* child. ‘Do you, Mr. Smith, believe what God has said about this child, Billy Smith?’ If Mr. Smith does not, but goes through the motions anyway, then let God be true and every man a liar. But if he really believes, the last thing I would want to accuse him of is denying *sola fide*. Just as we believe the promises, we teach our children to believe the promises. But we cannot teach them to believe by teaching them to doubt.” (AAT, 7-8)
- F. “Can we fulfill our covenant responsibilities (by believing) and yet have God fail to fulfill his promise? It is not possible. This is the historic Presbyterian view of children in the covenant.” (RINE, 190-191)
- G. “If we believe God when He says that He made us one with our wives so that He could have godly offspring, then we should act as though we believe it. This means that we should teach our children to believe it. And this means, in its turn, that they should never know a time when they did not love and honor Jesus Christ, love His gospel, and love His Church. If we do anything else with our children, we are teaching them to doubt, not to believe.” (RINE, 192)
- H. “Baptism is always to be taken by the one baptized as a sign and seal of his ingrafting into Christ. If the person is reprobate, he will refuse to do so, and will be cut out of the vine. If he is elect, he cannot be cut out. An unbelieving covenant member incurs all the curses of the covenant, while the believer appropriates all its blessings by faith alone.” (AAT, 242)

**V. WILSON FREQUENTLY MAKES IRRESPONSIBLE & MISLEADING STATEMENTS ABOUT THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS.**

- A. “Raise your hand if you knew that the Westminster Confession taught baptismal regeneration.” (RINE, 105)<sup>5</sup>
- B. “I do not believe [WCF 29.8]<sup>6</sup> excludes child communion. It seems clear that the ignorance addressed (at least here) is a culpable, stiff-necked ignorance & not the ignorance which every worthy partaker of the Supper confesses daily.” (RINE, 117)

**VI. WILSON EXPLICITLY CONDEMNNS BOTH THE AMERICAN PURITANS AND THE PREACHERS OF THE GREAT AWAKENING FOR STRESSING THE NEED FOR PERSONAL CONVERSION AMONG COVENANT CHILDREN, AND FOR REQUIRING A CREDIBLE PROFESSION OF FAITH PRIOR TO RECEIVING COMMUNION.<sup>7</sup>**

- A. “Contrary to the assumptions of many, the Half-Way Covenant was not the result of covenantal lethargy, but just the reverse — covenantal rigorism. Everyone had to be ‘born again’ in a highly visible, demonstrable way, but there were a number among the settlers who were not regenerate, along with a number of others who were regenerate but who were unable or unwilling to gin up a credible testimony. But these people believed in Christ, held to the truth of the Christian religion, and wanted their children baptized. They lacked a revivalistic tremens, but they wanted their children baptized. The Half-Way Covenant allowed for this, but maintained a high fence around the Table of the Lord. This was zeal run amok, not lethargy. Unfortunately, it was a zeal without knowledge.” (RINE, 188)<sup>8</sup>
- B. “A century later, the Great Awakening reinforced this doctrinal assumption in the American mentality. As a result of the Great Awakening, a new assumption spread throughout Presbyterian churches: ‘The presumption of regeneration in the case of children of the covenant, based upon the covenant promises, was largely displaced, by the Church’s practice of recognizing as Christians only those who gave ‘credible evidence,’ satisfactory to themselves, of regeneration.’ The shift was marked. We stopped believing God’s Word, and started believing converts. Before we would take any sacramental action, we had to hear from man. Having heard from God’s promises was insufficient.” (RINE, 188-189)
- C. “Just a short time ago, another grandchild came to his first observance of the Lord’s Supper. I know this is troublesome to some readers, but please bear with me for a moment. He is a year and a half old, and doesn’t really talk yet. But he worships with his family throughout our worship service, and he has a basic sign language catechism down. ‘Where is

<sup>5</sup> “...we need to get to the point where no one would dream of accusing an evangelical paedobaptist of holding to the false and destructive doctrine of baptismal regeneration.” (TATG, 9) Cf. WCF 28:5-6; WSC 91; WLC 161-162, 165, 176.

<sup>6</sup> WCF 29.8: “...Wherefore, all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they unworthy of the Lord’s table; and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted there.”

<sup>7</sup> Schlissel (AAPC, 2002): “Western Christendom was not built up by the method of individual conversion; it was a way of life which the people accepted as a whole, often by the decision of their rulers; and which, when accepted, affected the whole life of society by the change of their institutions and laws... If you want to know how it could have been that a nation that was once pretty much uniformly Christian in its self-understanding has become Anti-Christian, you need look no further than this individualized conception of God’s dealing, so that it became every man for himself... Children of believers, on their scheme, are brought near to Christ, but must not be regarded as truly in Christ until they give evidence of some kind. Some go so far as to say that elect children who do not die in infancy must be sustained until they can have a faith moment (or a beginning of faith), marked by assent to a set of understood propositions about themselves and Jesus. Until then they are not justified. After all, one can only be justified by faith, and faith alone. Thus, for these men, the covenant status of the children of believers is a halfway sort of thing.”

<sup>8</sup> “In a biblical paedobaptist church, if a baptized child grows up and refuses to profess his faith in the Lord Jesus, that child must be removed from the church. Why? Because it is gross sin for the elders of a church to tolerate members who are known to be in rebellion against God. But how do we know someone to be unregenerate? The Bible gives us only one criterion — *fruit*.” (TATG, 19-20) 1996

Jesus?’ He pats his heart. ‘Where is God?’ He points to heaven. ‘Are you baptized?’ He pats his head. At the conclusion of our worship service, we all sing the *Gloria Patri* with hands upraised, which he used to do also. But as he began to notice the communion tray going by and he didn’t get any, it began to distress him. About a month before he came to the Table, he stopped raising his hands in the *Gloria Patri*, and just watched. He was starting to learn how to observe as a detached outsider. When it was decided he should come to the Table, he was carefully instructed in the meaning of the Supper as he held the bread.<sup>9</sup> When he partook, together with his family, one of the first things he did was pat the heads of everyone around him — mother, father, grandmother. We are all baptized, he said, discerning the body. At the *Gloria Patri*, his hands shot up in the air. Glory to God indeed. So we believe the terms of the covenant, and we believe that God has promised us our children. We talk like we believe it because we do.” (AAT, 4)

**VII. WILSON, LIKE MANY OTHER FEDERAL VISIONISTS,<sup>10</sup> SEEKS TO LABEL CONFSSIONAL PAEDOBAPTISTS AS BAPTISTS, DESPITE THE FACT THAT (1) HIS OWN CONGREGATION DOES NOT EVEN REQUIRE INFANT BAPTISM, AND (2) HIS EARLIER PAEDOBAPTIST WRITINGS FEATURE MANY ASSERTIONS WHICH HE NOW LABELS ‘BAPTISTIC’.<sup>11</sup>**

- A. “We are in the midst of a truly *odd* controversy. In some respects I feel as disoriented as if I left a native home in Ohio to join the Army of Northern Virginia because of my copperhead convictions. But then when I got there I was quickly confused because I discovered that a large part of General Lee’s staff had taken to wearing blue. I grew up in a baptistic home... And when I finally arrived in Presbyterian and Reformed circles, one of the things I was surprised to find was: *Baptists*.” (AAT, 233)
- B. “Moreover, those who have charged us in the name of the *Confession* are themselves *out of conformity* with the teachings of the *Confession* on this point... I do not believe them to be heretics for doing this — just Zwinglians or wet-dedication Baptists. Neither do I believe them to be dishonest men — just honest Christian men steeped in the traditions of American revivalism.” (AAT, 235)
- C. “I currently subscribe to the *Reformed Evangelical Confession* [which] is a group of confessions pieced together when we founded the CREC. Part of it is a short creed based on the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, but there are other aspects of it [such as] our church’s statement of faith from 15-20 years ago, which I had a hand in writing, and so on... So I’m currently under the *Reformed Evangelical Confession*, which I helped to write.” (*White Horse Inn*, 6-19-15)

**Michael Horton, *White Horse Inn* “Interview w/ Douglas Wilson” (6/19/05)**

**HORTON:** “It all seems so quirky: not only the positions, but the way it all operates. You draw up your own confession. You start your own church, then your own denomination, then your own publishing house. Is there a theme running throughout here that basically this is a movement that moves back and forth, a little too closely tethered to you and a small group of people who are going through different phases of thought and constantly revising positions, and saying, ‘Well, I don’t really mean *that*,’ or ‘*that* was perhaps not said the best way,’ or ‘Our critics don’t really understand us.’ At some point, are critics fair when they say, ‘We have checks and balances on what we do and what we say, to a much larger extent, and that’s healthy?’”

**WILSON:** “I begin with a *mea culpa*. So, for example, if someone says, ‘This just seems really quirky.’ I would say, ‘You’re right; it really is.’ If you saw what our worship service looked like in 1977, you’d say [minced oath]! What’s going on? What’s with these people?’ So yeah, it is quirky. God called us out of a quirky background. It was the 70s; it was weird; it was dark; they were big. So there’s one level where I don’t have any problem admitting the justice of the perception. So that’s the first thing. The second thing is that we sort of scrambled out of this hole that we were in: this ‘Jesus people’ thing. And we came into the Reformed faith looking like someone had pulled us backward through the hedge; and that’s admitted. But God has blessed [us] and a number of things have happened, and we’ve daughtered churches around the country. And while we subscribe to the Reformed Evangelical Confession, almost all of our daughter churches that we have planted subscribe to the *Westminster Confession*. And the CREC is now all over the country. Actually, there’s a CREC church in Japan, and one being planted in Bulgaria, and there’s thirty congregations or so across the United States. All this is building up to saying that it’s decreasing[ly] connected to us and to me... God, in His sovereignty, called us out of a weird situation... and we wanted to be as faithful as we could be with that. And if anybody looks out and says, ‘That’s just plain bizarre’, we would confess it with them. It embarrasses me to think about some of the things we used to do [including] when we were feeling our way in our first years in the Reformed faith: *Absolutely; guilty as charged*, basically. But we do want to be connected with the broader Reformed body, and we’re not wanting to be standoffish, and we do admit that we’ve got some quirks.”

<sup>9</sup> Christ Church (Moscow, Idaho) Constitution: “Any baptized child may partake of the Lord’s Table, provided the parents instruct the child at each observation of the Supper, and the child can heed the instruction.”

<sup>10</sup> Schlissel (AAPC, 2002): “Southern Presbyterians... are essentially Baptists who don’t refrain from sprinkling their babies. They think like Baptists. They address their children as Baptists who don’t refrain from sprinkling their babies. They think like Baptists They address their children as Baptists. They don’t believe their children are saved by the grace of God. They believe they are waiting for a decision, some sort of cogent, confessable experience of personal regeneration and transition from death to life because they believe their children are born in death. They have bought into the Baptistic way of thinking and it is just an abomination.”

<sup>11</sup> Christ Church (Moscow, Idaho) Elder Protocols: “When a child in a baptistic home comes to a personal profession of faith in the Lord, the parents should notify the elders, and confirm to them their child’s profession of faith. The elders will arrange for the baptism of the child, and he will then come to the Lord’s Table.” (Halfway Covenant!)