

Reformed Infant Baptismal Regeneration

The Roman Catholic Church, Lutherans¹ and the Church of England hold that a minister sprinkling babies and using the right formula regenerates those infants. But what about the Reformed who baptise infants? What do they believe? What follows is self-evident. The statements – which are just a sample of what might be gathered – are riddled with Christendom-speak, brought about by the mixing of the two covenants, the old and the new. I refer to such things as talk of Israel and the *ekklēsia* as two aspects of one church, talk of the visible church, sacraments, with baptism – sprinkling – as a seal. And, it must be borne in mind, the use of ‘seal’ means guarantee, assurance. What is more, the double-speaking metaphysics of the theologians must not divert attention from reality: it is not what the ivory-towered Reformed theologians and the officiating minister pronounce but what the people standing at the font believe, what they instinctively feel and what they hope for. About that there is no question. Most of them believe, feel, hope that the baby is now safe; something has been done to him or her. Phew, that’s a relief! Whatever happens from now on, the child is in the covenant, whatever that may mean. And the growing child is constantly reminded that he or she is in the covenant. That’s the stark reality.

The business is a diabolical delusion from start to finish, based on confusion of the two covenants old and new.

So to business. Judge for yourself. I will not comment or correct the mistaken theology in what follows, having already fully dealt with all the issues.²

¹ See my *Luther on Baptism: Sacramentalism in the Raw*.

² See my *Infant Baptism Tested*.

The Heidelberg Catechism

69. Q. How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?

A. In this way: Christ instituted this outward washing and with it gave the promise that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly his blood and Spirit wash away the impurity of my soul, that is, all my sins.

70. Q. What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?

A. To be washed with Christ's blood means to receive forgiveness of sins from God, through grace, because of Christ's blood, poured out for us in his sacrifice on the cross. To be washed with his Spirit means to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ, so that more and more we become dead to sin and lead a holy and blameless life... Scripture calls baptism the washing of rebirth and the washing away of sins...

72. Q. Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins?

A. No, only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins.

73. Q. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins?

A. God speaks in this way for a good reason. He wants to teach us that the blood and Spirit of Christ remove our sins just as water takes away dirt from the body. But, even more important, he wants to assure us by this divine pledge and sign that we are as truly cleansed from our sins spiritually as we are bodily washed with water.

74. Q. Should infants, too, be baptised?

A. Yes. Infants as well as adults belong to God's covenant and congregation. Through Christ's blood the redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit, who works faith, are promised to them no less than to adults. Therefore, by baptism, as the sign of the covenant, they must be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the old covenant by circumcision, in place of which baptism was instituted in the new covenant...

John Calvin:

Just as circumcision, which was a kind of badge to the Jews, assuring them that they were adopted as the people and family of God... while they, in their turn, professed their allegiance to God, so now we are initiated by baptism, so as to be enrolled among his people, and at the same time swear unto his name. Hence it is incontrovertible that baptism has been substituted for circumcision, and performs the same office. Now, if we are to investigate whether or not baptism is justly given to infants, will we not say that the man trifles, or rather is delirious, who would stop short at the element of water, and the external observance, and not allow his mind to rise to the spiritual mystery? If reason is listened to, it will undoubtedly appear that baptism is properly administered to infants as a thing due to them. The Lord did not anciently bestow circumcision upon them without making them partakers of all the things signified by circumcision. He would have deluded his people with mere imposture, had he quieted them with fallacious symbols: the very idea is shocking. He distinctly declares that the circumcision of the infant will be instead of a seal of the promise of the covenant. But if the covenant remains firm and fixed, it is no less applicable to the children of Christians in the present day, than to the children of the Jews under the Old Testament. Now, if they are partakers of the thing signified, how can they be denied the sign? If they obtain the reality, how can they be refused the figure? The external sign is so united in the sacrament with the word, that it cannot be separated from it.³

Baptism... is given as a pledge of our adoption; for by it we are grafted into the body of Christ, so as to be washed and cleansed by his blood, and then renewed in purity of life by his Holy Spirit... As God receives little children into the Church with their fathers, we say, upon the authority of Jesus Christ, that the children of believing parents should be baptised.⁴

³ John Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.16.4-5.

⁴ John Calvin: *The French Confession of Faith, 1559, XXXV.*

The Belgic Confession:

We believe that every man who is earnestly studious of obtaining life eternal ought to be but once baptised with this only baptism, without ever repeating the same, since we cannot be born twice. Neither doth this baptism only avail us at the time when the water is poured upon us and received by us, but also through the whole course of our life. Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who... condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, whom we believe ought to be baptised and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as the children in Israel formerly were circumcised upon the same promises which are made unto our children. And indeed, Christ shed his blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful than for adult persons; and therefore, they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that which Christ has done for them; as the Lord commanded in the law, that they should be made partakers of the sacrament of Christ's suffering and death shortly after they were born, by offering for them a lamb, which was a sacrament of Jesus Christ. Moreover, what circumcision was to the Jews, that baptism is to our children.⁵

The Scots Confession:

We utterly condemn the vanity of those who affirm the sacraments to be nothing else than naked and bare signs. No, we assuredly believe that by baptism we are engrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his righteousness, by which our sins are covered and remitted.⁶

Canons of the Synod of Dort:

The children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended; godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleases God to call out of this life in their infancy.⁷

⁵ Article 34.

⁶ Chapter 21.

⁷ Of Divine Predestination, Article 17.

The Westminster Confession:

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible Church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life... 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... Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it; or, that all that are baptised are undoubtedly regenerated... The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, 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, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.⁸

The Westminster Larger Catechism:

Q. 165. What is baptism?

A. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ has ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into himself, of remission of sins by his blood, and regeneration by his Spirit; of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptised are solemnly admitted into the visible church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.

Q. 166. Unto whom is baptism to be administered?

A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptised.

Q. 167. How is our baptism to be improved by us?

⁸ Chapter XXVIII. 1,4,5,6.

A. ...by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby... by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptised...

The Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q. 94. What is baptism?

A. Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, signifies and seals our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace...

Q. 95. To whom is baptism to be administered?

A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out 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 baptised.

The Westminster Directory of Public Worship:

The Lord Jesus Christ instituted baptism as a covenant sign and seal for his church. He uses it not only for the solemn admission of the person who is baptised into the visible church, but also to depict and to confirm his ingrafting of that person into himself and his including that person in the covenant of grace.

The Lord uses baptism to portray to us that we and our children are conceived and born in sin and need to be cleansed.

He uses it to witness and seal to us the remission of sins and the bestowal of all the gifts of salvation through union with Christ. Baptism with water signifies and seals cleansing from sin by the blood and the Spirit of Christ, together with our death unto sin and our resurrection unto newness of life by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ. The time of the outward application of the sign does not necessarily coincide with the inward work of the Holy Spirit which the sign represents and seals to us. Because these gifts of salvation are the gracious provision of the triune God, who is pleased to claim us as his very own, we are baptised into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

In our baptism, the Lord puts his name on us, claims us as his own, and summons us to assume the obligations of the covenant.

He calls us to believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and to walk humbly with our God in devotion to his commandments...

Although our young children do not yet understand these things, they are nevertheless to be baptised. For God commands that all who are under his covenant of grace be given the sign of the covenant.

God made the promise of the covenant to believers and to their offspring. In the Old Testament, he declared to Abraham: 'And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto you, and to your seed after you' (Gen. 17:7). For this reason, in the Old Testament, God commanded that covenant infants be given the sign of circumcision.

The covenant is the same in essence in both the Old and the New Testaments. Indeed, the grace of God for the consolation of believers is even more fully manifested in the New Testament. Thus, rather than rescinding the covenant promise to believers and to their offspring in the New Testament, God reaffirms it. He declares that 'the promise is unto you, and to your children' (Acts 2:39). He promises: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, and your house' (Acts 16:31). He affirms that if even one parent is a believer, the children are 'holy' (1 Cor. 7:14). Moreover, our Saviour admitted little children into his presence, embracing and blessing them, and saying: 'Of such is the kingdom of God' (Mark 10:14).

And so, in the New Testament no less than in the Old, the children of believers have an interest in the covenant and a right to the covenant sign and to the outward privileges of the covenant people, the church. In the New Testament, baptism has replaced circumcision as the covenant sign. Therefore, by the covenant sign of baptism the children of believers are to be distinguished from the world and solemnly admitted into the visible church...

The minister shall then pray for the presence and blessing of the triune God, that the grace signified and sealed by baptism may be abundantly realised...

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In our baptism, the Lord puts his name on us, claims us as his own, and summons us to assume the obligations of the covenant. He calls us to believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and to walk humbly with our God in devotion to his commandments.

The Second Helvetic Confession:

...by baptism we are ingrafted into the body of Christ... But now since Christ the true Messiah is exhibited unto us, and the abundance of grace is poured forth upon the people of the New Testament, the sacraments of the old people are surely abrogated and have ceased; and in their stead the symbols of the New Testament are placed – baptism in the place of circumcision, the Lord's Supper in place of the Paschal Lamb and sacrifices... In baptism the sign is the element of water, and that visible washing which is done by the minister; but the thing signified is regeneration and the cleansing from sins... Baptism once received continues for all of life, and is a perpetual sealing of our adoption... To be baptised in the name of Christ is to be enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance of the sons of God; yes, and in this life to be called after the name of God; that is to say, to be called a son of God; to be cleansed also from the filthiness of sins, and to be granted the manifold grace of God, in order to lead a new and innocent life. Baptism, therefore, calls to mind and renews the great favour God has shown to the race of mortal men. For we are all born in the pollution of sin and are the children of wrath. But God, who is rich in mercy, freely cleanses us from our sins by the blood of his Son, and in him adopts us to be his sons, and by a holy covenant joins us to himself, and enriches us with various gifts, that we might live a new life. All these things are

assured by baptism. For inwardly we are regenerated, purified, and renewed by God through the Holy Spirit and outwardly we receive the assurance of the greatest gifts in the water, by which also those great benefits are represented, and, as it were, set before our eyes to be beheld... And therefore we are baptised, that is, washed or sprinkled with visible water. For the water washes dirt away, and cools and refreshes hot and tired bodies. And the grace of God performs these things for souls, and does so invisibly or spiritually... We condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that newborn infants of the faithful are to be baptised. For according to evangelical teaching, of such is the kingdom of God, and they are in the covenant of God. Why, then, should the sign of God's covenant not be given to them? Why should those who belong to God and are in his Church not be initiated by holy baptism? We condemn also the Anabaptists in the rest of their peculiar doctrines which they hold contrary to the word of God. We therefore are not Anabaptists and have nothing in common with them.⁹

I make no comment on all that except to repeat what I said; namely, that I have answered all these claims elsewhere. I urge all my readers to cultivate the Berean spirit (Acts 17:11).

⁹ Chapters X, XIX, XX.