

Infant Baptism as a Means of Grace

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Every subject that we think about, every topic that we discuss or every theme that we examine must be carried out with reference to God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God the Father is the fountain of all knowledge and understanding. In Jesus Christ ‘are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col. 2: 3) and it is God the Holy Spirit who guides ‘into all truth’ (John 16: 13) through the Scriptures which he has given. This means that we will consider the topic assigned to me, ‘Infant Baptism as a means of Grace’ with reference to God and particularly through the Word of God.

Baptism is one of the two sacraments that Christ instituted for his Church; the other one being the Lord's Supper. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 27:1, defines sacraments as follows: ‘Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him; as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his word.’

Sacraments are signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace. That begets the question: What is the Covenant of Grace?

As it was determined in the counsels of eternity between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, it is usually designated the Covenant of Redemption. On the other hand, as it applies to the elect, those whom God has purposed to save from all eternity, it is known as the Covenant of Grace. The comment by W. G. T. Shedd in relation to this differentiation is helpful. ‘The Covenant of Grace and that of Redemption are two modes or phases of the one evangelical covenant of mercy’ (*Dogmatic Theology*, 2.360). This eternal Covenant of Grace entered time when God addressed the serpent (Satan) after the rebellion of Adam and Eve: ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel’ (Gen. 3: 15). The blessings of the Covenant would come through a Mediator, the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ.

The remainder of Scripture is the unveiling of this Covenant, the first part of the Bible (Old Testament) being the administration of the Covenant prior to the Incarnation, prior to the coming of Christ; the second part of the Bible (New Testament) being the administration of the same Covenant after Christ's coming.

God very specifically established the Covenant with Abraham. The details are recorded in Genesis 12: 1-9. Genesis 17: 1-14 informs us that the Covenant was established, not with Abraham alone, but also with his offspring, in descending lines of generations. ‘And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you’ (Gen. 17: 7).

With respect to this gracious Covenant that God established with undeserving Abraham and his offspring, he decided to give to him a sign. This sign would be a visible pledge of his covenant faithfulness. That visible sign was circumcision. ‘You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised’ (Gen. 17: 11, 12a).

God gave to his people another sign of his covenant faithfulness, prior to the coming of Christ. It was the Passover. To His people, about to leave Egypt, God said through Moses: 'You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service' (Exod. 12: 24, 25).

Down through the centuries these signs of God's covenant faithfulness were observed by the Jews. Therefore, when we come to the 'Incarnation' we are simply informed about the child born to Mary and Joseph, 'at the end of eight days he was circumcised' (Luke 2: 21).

And the annual Passover feast was something that still was being observed in the first century. Jesus experienced this for himself at twelve years of age. 'Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom' (Luke 2: 41, 42).

Both of these Old Testament signs of God's covenant faithfulness involved the shedding of blood. When Christ's blood was shed, once for all, to redeem his people, to procure their salvation, the bloody signs needed to be changed into bloodless equivalents for the New Covenant era. The Passover was replaced by the Lord's Supper on the evening of the crucifixion by Jesus in the Upper Room (Luke 22: 14-23). Circumcision was replaced by baptism, prior to our Lord's Ascension, when he commissioned his disciples: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matt. 28: 19, 20).

The disciples responded to that commission. Their mission began on the day of Pentecost, with Peter preaching the gospel, concluding with the challenge: 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself' (Acts 2: 38, 39). Those devout Jews, assembled in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost from all over Asia Minor and the Eastern Mediterranean, would have recognized immediately the covenant formula that Peter used in his concluding remarks. It was essentially the same as was given by God to their ancestor Abraham, 2000 years earlier.

To Abraham God had said: 'And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you.' Through Peter, God the Holy Spirit said: 'For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.'

The Lord's Supper, as the New Covenant equivalent of the Passover, is beyond dispute. It is something that finds universal acceptance in the Christian church. That baptism is the New Covenant equivalent of circumcision is disputed by some. However, when we recognize that there is one God, and one eternal Covenant of Grace, with one way of salvation throughout history, through faith in Jesus Christ, then the evidence is compelling that baptism is the fulfilment of circumcision. Colossians 2: 12, 13 places the matter beyond dispute when Paul used the two terms interchangeably. 'In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.'

I have taken time to lay this foundation because I want us to see that there are parallels between baptism as a means of grace and circumcision as a means of grace.

It is also important that we understand the terms of the subject before us. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* defines baptism as follows: 'Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized 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 newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his church until the end of the world.'

Hodge in his commentary on the Confession (pages 338-9) reduces this definition to three propositions.

- 1 Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, instituted immediately by Christ, and by his authority to continue in the Church until the end of the world.
- 2 As to the action which constitutes Baptism, it is a washing of the subject with water (the manner of the washing not being essential), in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a lawfully ordained minister.
- 3 It is done with the design and effect of signifying and sealing our ingrafting into Christ, our partaking of the benefits of his covenant, and our engagement to be his.'

As we are principally considering in this lecture 'Infant Baptism as a means of Grace' what do we understand by 'means of grace'?

The eternal God we know, love, and worship is the God who uses means to accomplish his eternal purpose. He is not limited to means but often for his own glory this is how he operates. For example, when an elderly person becomes partially sighted through cataracts, God will use a simple operation by an eye surgeon to restore perfect vision. In the same way God often chooses to use means to communicate his grace to those who are dead in trespasses and sins.

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* helpfully addresses the subject of means. Question 88 asks: 'What are the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?' The Answer is: 'The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances; especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.'

Roderick Lawson comments: 'In order that we may be saved, God demands of us not only faith and repentance, but the diligent use of the outward means of grace as well. These outward means are here called ordinances, or things which God has ordained. They consist mainly in – 1. The study of the Bible; 2. The observance of the Sacraments; 3. The use of Prayer.'

Baptism is one of the two sacraments. How or in what way does it become a means of grace?

First of all, we eliminate the view held by Roman Catholicism (*ex opere operato*) that the sacrament of baptism in and of itself always communicates grace at the time of being administered. Rome teaches and believes that at the moment a child is baptized, it is then and there regenerate. The child is then and there born again. This is known as 'Sacerdotalism'.

G. I. Williamson helpfully compares the sacerdotal view of the sacraments with the Reformed view. 'The sacerdotal view is that the saving grace of God is contained in the sacraments and conveyed by their administration. The Reformed view is that God the Holy Ghost works when, where, and how he will in conferring saving grace, and that the sacraments are dependent upon and subordinate to his sovereign operation. It is because he is pleased to use the sacraments to

exhibit and to confer grace that they become efficacious' (*The Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, p.203). I emphasize Williamson's statement 'that the sacraments are dependent upon and subordinate to his sovereign operation'. Everything that I say in this paper recognizes this as a foundational principle. God is sovereign in whatever means he determines to use and when he makes that means effective.

1. Baptism itself as a means of grace

Can we say that the sacrament of baptism is a means of grace at the moment of baptism for the child baptized? The answer to that question is 'no', if we are thinking that the baptism of a child automatically or magically communicates the blessing that it signifies – regeneration and union with Christ.

Edmund P. Clowney, writing on this subject, comments: 'The sacraments are not sacred magic, the elements themselves containing the blessing, as if the Holy Spirit could be dispensed from a font, or Christ contained in a cup. God does not surrender His work of grace to external symbols, controlled by the manipulation of men' (*The Church*, pp.274-5). I agree entirely with Clowney. But does this mean that the sacrament of baptism, at the time of being administered, is *not* a means of grace to the child being baptized in any sense? It would be wrong, I believe, to come to that conclusion.

Christ has appointed the sacrament of baptism for believers and their children. It would be unreasonable therefore to conclude that there was no blessing, of any description, on the child at the baptismal service. While the child will have no conscious awareness of his baptism, yet I do believe that Christ, in the exercise of his sovereignty, will communicate a blessing upon the child.

Such a conclusion is not based on sentiment. The sacraments, as the Reformed Confessions teach us, are a means of grace to all who participate in them. The infant child of Christian parents being baptized should not be considered an exception.

But is faith not essential to the receiving of such blessing? John Calvin, in a comment made on Isaiah 58, has written: 'We maintain, therefore that there is a direct relationship between faith and the sacraments; they become effective through faith' (*365 Days with Calvin*, ed. J. Beeke, 10 May). Although it is impossible for the infant being baptized to exercise faith, the parents are expressing their faith in presenting their child for Christian baptism. They are in effect saying: 'in the Covenant, God has promised to be God to us and he is, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; but he has also promised to be God to our children after us. We therefore present our child for baptism and in so doing, by faith, lay claim to that covenant promise.'

Some will maintain that a little child, a few weeks old, is incapable of receiving blessing. The answer to such an objection is found in Mark 10: 13-16. Parents were bringing their infants to Jesus so that 'he might lay his hands on them and pray.' The disciples of Jesus thought that such a thing was ridiculous and rebuked these parents. Jesus was indignant with His disciples. To the parents he gave the following words of encouragement. "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.'

Two things to note about these words of Jesus. First, he blessed these infants. So infant children are capable of receiving blessing from the God of all grace and mercy. Second, he revealed that

children of such a tender age can be regenerate. He said, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for *to such* belongs the kingdom of God.'

With respect to this incident and the prayer offered for these children Calvin writes: 'what other prayer did he utter for them than that they should be received into the number of the children of God. It follows then that they were regenerated by the Spirit in the hope of salvation ... they were partakers of the spiritual gifts represented by baptism' (*Harmony of the Gospels*, vol. 2, p.171).

Matthew Henry makes a similar comment: 'The strongest believer lives not so much by apprehending Christ as by being apprehended by Christ and this the least child is incapable of doing. If they cannot stretch out their hands to him; yet he can lay His hands on them and so make them his own and own them for his own' (*Commentary on Matthew 19: 13-15*).

Recently when preaching at a baptismal service from Mark 10: 13-16, I drew particular attention to those words at the end of verse 14, 'to such belongs the kingdom of God.' From this statement I made the point that there are no limits on the work of the Spirit in regeneration. God is sovereign. A child may be born again (regenerate) in his mother's womb as we believe Jeremiah was (Jeremiah 1: 5), as we believe John the Baptist was (Luke 1: 44), every bit as much as a boy of 16, or a woman of 70. The Holy Spirit is sovereign in his operations, as we read in John 3: 8.

In relation to the baptism of a child of believing parents, we can draw the conclusion that what is signified in baptism, regeneration, and union with Christ, can take place before baptism, at baptism, or after baptism.

2. Baptism as a means of grace to covenant children through the faithfulness of parents to their vows

Prior to the baptism of a child, parents in most Reformed denominations take vows. I will illustrate from the vows taken by parents in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

There is a vow that calls on the parents to be faithful to their parental obligations. It is four-fold in nature. The first obligation relates to prayer.

Parents make a commitment to pray for their child

They promise: 'to pray that your child may be renewed and brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as signified in this sacrament.'

While parents will take this promise at the baptismal service, they will already have prayed this prayer from the moment they knew a child was conceived in the womb. They will have prayed this prayer in the days leading up to the baptismal service. And they will pray it many days after the service, maybe for years, until they see evidences of grace in the life of their child.

They will pray on the basis of the Covenant of Grace. Their prayer will be worded something like this: 'Lord, you are our God. Be a God to our little boy; save him by your grace, for you have promised not only to be a God to us but to our children after us.' An essential aspect of prayer is laying claim to the promises of God.

We have an example of such persistent prayers being offered by the father of the famous missionary to the New Hebrides, John G Paton. He writes in his autobiography about a little room

in his family home: 'Thither daily, and oftentimes a day... we saw our father retire, and shut the door; and we children got to understand by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to be talked about) that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil in the Most Holy Place' (*Missionary to the New Hebrides*, p.8). Parents make a commitment to pray.

Parents make a commitment to teach God's Word to their child

They promise: 'to seek that your child may come to know the Holy Scriptures and to know the duty of committing himself/herself to God.'

Covenant children will be taught God's Word at church services and through children and youth ministries in the church. Their most effective teachers, however, will be their parents. By taking a solemn vow at the baptism of their infant children, to teach them God's Word, they are placed under a sacred obligation to fulfil that vow. (Deut. 6: 4-9; Eph. 6: 4). 'A religious vow or covenant does not bind us to anything additional to God's Word but it additionally binds us to that which is already our duty to do' (William Symington).

Children are to be taught by their parents in both formal and informal situations. Deuteronomy 6: 6, 7 commands parents that they are to seize every opportunity, through the day, to teach their children about God and his wonderful works. 'And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.'

This command is reinforced by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6: 4. Parents will delegate some of this responsibility to the church through the teaching ministry of the congregation to which they belong. This will be of immense benefit and support. Children, however, who are taught God's Word primarily from their parents enjoy an immense privilege. With God's blessing it will bring forth much fruit.

Paul writing to the Christians in Rome states: 'So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ' (Rom. 10: 17).

Parents make a commitment to be faithful in their Christian life and worship

They promise: 'to rule well your household, exercising parental authority with firmness and love, setting the example of a holy and consistent life, and attending with regularity to personal, family and public worship.'

Parents who are consistent in responding faithfully to this vow will be the means of much blessing to their children. Parents promise in this vow to set 'the example of a holy and consistent life'. As ministers must practice what they preach, if they are to have an effective ministry, so parents must conscientiously model the truth of God before their children. Parents who habitually disregard God's clear, specific commands are not keeping their covenant with God. Such parents cannot expect their children to respond in faith to the promises of God offered to them at baptism. Psalm 103 emphasizes to parents the importance of keeping the Covenant: 'But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments' (Ps. 103: 17, 18).

Daily family worship will train covenant children from infancy to reach out to God in faith. In that daily context they will be brought face to face with the reality of God and the gospel of his grace. Not only that but the faith of their parents will be a challenge, and a stimulus to faith, as covenant children grow up in a world of unbelief. By being included in all aspects of family worship they will experience what it means to be part of God's covenant community in the context of the family.

Children who experience daily family worship will also integrate better and benefit more quickly from public worship than children devoid of this experience. Each day covenant children experience 'little church'. Then once a week there will be a degree of excitement in meeting with other families in 'big church'. Baptism is therefore a means of grace through the faithfulness of parents to their vows taken at the baptism of their children.

The initial promises with respect to children in the Covenant of Grace were given to Abraham. And God knew that Abraham as a conscientious parent would be faithful to his parental obligations. 'For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised' (Gen. 18: 19). The sign of God's covenant promise had been revealed to Abraham. God would use Abraham as the means by which that promise would be fulfilled.

It is important that parents bring up their children believing that God will use the means he has chosen to bring covenant children to himself in saving faith. Rev. William Still, a Scottish minister, in a sermon he preached to his Aberdeen congregation in 1968, challenged the parents: 'I have said this before: too many Christian parents bring up their children in fear lest they will go astray, rather than in faith that they will not. That fear, expressed in the course of their first few years in a thousand ways, soon communicates itself to their sensitive souls and they become like you, preoccupied with thoughts of going astray. It is like the horrible, drawing power of a precipice. The likeliest thing in the world is that children brought up in a home where it is feared they will go astray, will go astray. They are predisposed and preconditioned to that possibility for fear comes from Satan, and by fearing where you ought to trust and quietly implement that trust by the works of faith you are bringing Satan into your home. Whenever fear tends to grip you as it may (Satan is always up to his tricks), turn at once to God and away from Satan and say, "God, you have said and you have commanded me to say back to You what You have said to me; that these children are Yours. I will not fear, but will believe and act accordingly."'

Some Christians can be heard to say: 'It's an awful world in which to bring up children.' Such Christians need to be reminded that it has *always* been an awful world. It is a *fallen* world. But God's people have the assurance that their children are separated unto God – because they are the children of God's children. That truth is recognized in their baptism. Parents should rear their children in faith, rather than in fear; in the faith that God will early in life fulfil what was signified in their child's baptism; that God will regenerate them and unite them to Jesus Christ. In practice, Christian parents should communicate that they trust their children when they are outside their direct supervision. For example, when a six year old is going to a birthday party of some of her school friends, the parent as the child leaves the home should say, 'enjoy yourself' rather than 'behave yourself'. This indicates trust rather than suspicion. This attitude should continue through childhood and adolescence.

Because baptism carries with it such significance children need to be reminded often of their baptism. In many homes, displayed in a prominent position, will be certificates for swimming or for piano or singing. Among all these the baptismal certificate should be displayed.

In the Christian home birthdays are celebrated each year. As well as this celebration it would be excellent practice if parents reminded each child of their baptism on its anniversary. Family worship is a good context in which to do this. As the children reach years of understanding the meaning of their baptism should be explained in simple terms. They will keep the event of baptism alive in the child's experience and underline its significance. Children in a covenant home will then grow up aware of having been baptized, in the same way as boys in an Israelite home would have been aware of their covenant status.

In Israel the Passover was to be observed annually. God knew children would be curious about that sacrament. 'And when your children say to you, "What do you mean by this service?" You shall say, "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses"' (Exod. 12: 26, 27). And no doubt inquisitive boys in Israel would have enquired as to why they had been circumcised. Likewise today children, brought up in such a way as to be aware of their baptism, will want to know from their parents its covenant significance. Such questions will be a golden opportunity to speak of the promises offered to them in the Covenant, at their baptism, and how they must by faith lay claim to these promises.

3. Baptism a means of grace to covenant children through the faithfulness of church members to their vow

At a baptism, in many reformed churches, the members of the congregation into which the child is being baptized also take a vow. The vow in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland is framed as follows: 'Do you promise to pray for this covenant child and to seek by example and precept to encourage him/her to walk in the ways of the Lord?'

People who do not believe in paedobaptism will find it impossible to participate in the sacrament of infant baptism and therefore will not wish to take this vow. It is because of this and other reasons that I believe such believers cannot be in the membership of a Reformed paedobaptist church.

Covenant children have the support, encouragement, example, and prayers of the members of their congregation. This is a means of grace that is an invaluable support to parents and to children growing up in such a context. There are many practical ways of expressing this.

4. Baptism is a means of grace to covenant children through their reception into the church

The minister administering the sacrament of baptism to a covenant child will say: 'I baptize you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' Not only does this formula picture union with God and thereby symbolize all the blessings of the Covenant of Grace. It also indicates reception into the body of Christ, the Church. Edmund Clowney speaks of baptism as the 'initiating sacrament that marks the candidate as belonging to the people of God' (*The Church*). Or as James Bannerman succinctly writes: 'Baptism is the door of formal admission into the church' (*The Church of Christ*, vol. 2, p. 80).

Baptized children in the congregation need to be recognized as belonging to the covenant community. These children must grow up believing that they are a valued part of the family of God. This will give them a sense of belonging, which has, in the past, often been neglected through lack of thought. Congregations ought to rejoice in the gift of children and seek with the parents to 'bring them up in the nurture and admission of the Lord' (Eph. 6: 4).

The Westminster Assembly of Divines in its directory for public worship addressed the subject of covenant children: 'The seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and a right to the seal of it and to the outward privileges of the church, under the gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament: ... That children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers'.

The covenant status of baptized children will influence the minister in his attitude towards them and in his approach to these little ones. As he speaks to them in public worship his remarks will be governed by the fact that they have been received into the covenant community. He will on occasion speak to them about the significance of their baptism. A baptismal service is a good context in which to do this. He will inform them about what was prayerfully anticipated on that occasion, that the outward washing with water would be accompanied, early in life, with the inward washing of regeneration. He will say to these covenant children that the members of the church, their parents included, are looking forward to the time when they will make a public profession of faith before the congregation, and in so doing be added to the communicant membership of the church.

Such an occasion is sometimes called 'confirmation'. Their profession of faith is a confirmation that what was anticipated at their baptism, has become a reality in their lives; that they have by the gracious work of God come to know and love Jesus Christ as their Saviour and King.

When such young people are before the congregation, taking their vows of communicant membership, the minister should refer back to their baptism. It may have been fifteen or sixteen years previously. As a sacrament, a means of grace, its primary goal has been realized as the young people testify through their vows that they have been regenerated by the Spirit and united to Christ in all his saving work. It becomes a matter of great thanksgiving to God. Almighty God has blessed all the 'means' associated with their infant baptism to the salvation of their immortal souls.

Conclusion

'Infant baptism as a means of grace.'

When Christian parents truly understand the significant of this sacrament and faithfully respond to the obligations it places on them, rich and abundant blessing is enjoyed in family life.

One glorious blessing is that many of the children growing up in such homes will experience the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the tender years of childhood. Of course, there will seldom be a conscious awareness of this experience, and they will simply confess their faith in Christ by saying that they never remember a time when they did not love the Lord. Of course, such professions are tested when children from covenant homes become more and more exposed to the temptations and allurements of this godless age. If their profession is in fact based on the regenerating grace of the Spirit then they will stand firm when tempted, but if not, then the true state of their heart will soon become apparent.

John Murray writes about childhood regeneration: 'where regeneration takes place in the case of an infant there is the immediate transition from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God, and even though intelligent faith cannot be exercised, nevertheless there is that which we may and must call the germ of faith. The regenerate infant is not under the dominion of sin, is not a

child of wrath, but a child of God and a member of his kingdom. He grows up in the nurture of the Lord in the highest sense of that term. It will take years, of course, for the infant concerned to arrive at explicit consciousness of the implications of that generation and of the salvation it involves' (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 199-200).

The experience of salvation does not always occur in childhood or youth. Parents are sometimes tested. They may never live to see their children coming to faith. And in the mystery of the Divine will there will be those children like Esau, who despise their birthright become breakers of the Covenant. For them the fury of God's righteous judgement will be reserved. Such exceptions ought never to cause parents to lose sight of what all parents should earnestly pray for: the regeneration of their offspring in the tender, formative years of life through the means of grace divinely appointed.