

I'd Rather Err With the Baptists

By David Murray (reprinted by permission from the author)

Obviously I'd rather not err at all.

But if I had the choice, I'd prefer to be among mistaken Baptists than mistaken paedo-Baptists.

Although Baptists do not see their children as members of the "covenant community," most of my Baptist friends do at least as good a job at "covenantal parenting" as paedo-Baptists!

They don't call it that, of course, but they do it, and usually do it very well. They may not apprehend all the promises, blessings, and privileges of covenantal parenting, but at least their children know that they are "dead in trespasses and sins" and that they need to be born again and converted to Christ. Their parents teach, train, and discipline them accordingly, reminding them of their privileges under the Gospel and warning them of their greater responsibility as a result.

Baptists ducks

That looks like covenantal parenting to me – if it looks like a duck, and quacks like a duck...

The Baptist "error" is perhaps more in the area of spiritual psychology – the parents don't have as much confidence, hope, and optimism (notice I'm not talking of cast-iron-guarantee) that God will bless these appointed means for the conversion of their children.

The children don't suffer loss. But the parents sometimes do – in that they do not enjoy so much peace from God's covenant assurances.

Presumption errors

If Baptists sometimes suffer from a lack of confidence, paedo-Baptists can suffer from over-confidence, or more accurately, false confidence. They often presume their children are already Christians and raise them as such.

This can take the form of baptismal presumption, recently articulated by [Gene Veith](#), a Lutheran I highly respect:

The faith that begins with baptism then grows and matures, fed by the "milk" of God's Word, as the child grows into adulthood, and continuing thereafter. (That faith can also die if it is not nourished, which is why someone can have been baptized as an infant but then reject the faith and become an unbeliever in need of conversion.)

Parenting Presumption

While most Reformed believers will shudder at the thought of saving faith being imparted at baptism, an increasing number seem to believe that *Baptism + Christian parenting* will

automatically do the same thing. As long as children are baptized, raised by Christian parents, taught by Christian teachers, trained in Christian behavior, and don't reject Christianity, it is presumed that they are Christians.

I don't see too much difference between baptismal presumption and parenting presumption. Both presume that the baptized children of Christian parents are born again. They only differ in *when*. In the former it's identified with a point in time; in the latter, it's usually more vague. In the former it's associated with water; in the latter it's associated with parenting.

Huge Difference

This presumption makes a huge difference to our parenting. Instead of repeatedly telling children that they are born dead in trespasses and sins and need to be converted to Christ (my own childhood experience of Presbyterianism), they are told, "You are a Christian...act like one."

Increasing amounts of external discipline and rules are then used to conform the children to Christian norms, and as long as they match up externally, they are told and assured that they are believers. Sounds a lot like the Judaism of Christ's day doesn't it! And we know what He preached to the presumptuous then, don't we (John 3: 1-16; John 8:33-45)!

But what if these baptized children are still "in the flesh" and "of their father the devil?" The parents have great confidence (though it's often more in their parenting skills than in the grace and power of Christ), but the children are unregenerate and going to hell. They may look and act like true Christians, but they've never been told that they need new hearts, that they must be born again, and that they must be converted. That's for those unbaptized heathen outside the church.

Lower confidence better than false confidence

That's why I'd rather err with the Baptists. During my parenting years, I may not enjoy the same degree of confidence in God's promises, but at least my children don't suffer eternal torments through my false confidence in my parenting skills giving them false confidence that they are saved.