

Book Review

W. Gary Crampton, *From Paedobaptism to Credobaptism: A Study of the Westminster Standards and Infant Baptism* (RBAP, 2010): 126 pp.

Dr. Gary Crampton has written a book that will make Reformed Baptists smile and paedobaptists squirm. Dr. Crampton is uniquely qualified to address this topic having served for a number of years as a respected Presbyterian pastor and theologian. Now, however, he has changed his belief on the doctrine of baptism and come to the conclusion that believer's baptism (he prefers the term "confessor" baptism, see p. 12, n. 4) is the Biblical position. He currently serves as an elder at the Reformed Baptist Church of Richmond.

Content Overview

The book is well written and tightly reasoned. It consists of ten brief chapters and a conclusion. Dr. Crampton begins by affirming the Westminster Confession's proposition that Scripture is "The Supreme Judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined." He proceeds to say that it was while studying the Biblical teaching on the sacraments that he encountered a threefold problem with the doctrine of infant baptism: "first, there are no examples of infant baptism in the Bible; second, baptism and the Lord's Supper go together; and third, there are multiple differences among paedobaptists as to why infants should be baptized" (p. 4). While affirming the Westminster definition of baptism as thoroughly Biblical, Crampton contends that the confession then contradicts itself by advocating infant baptism. Thus, "Sections 28:1 and 28:4 of the Confession do not comport" (p. 13). That the Westminster's definition of baptism "does not permit infant baptism" is "the argument of this monograph" (p. 15).

After affirming the propriety of referring to baptism as a "sacrament," the author proceeds to analyze the paedobaptist argument that baptism is the New Covenant parallel to Old Testament circumcision. He points out that there is no place in the New Testament where it is stated that circumcision "has been replaced by water baptism" (p. 24). According to Crampton, "there is an analogy between circumcision and baptism, but not an exact identity. Baptism supersedes circumcision; it does not take the place of circumcision in every aspect" (p. 35). In the Old Covenant, circumcision was for the physical seed of Abraham. In the New Covenant, baptism is for the spiritual seed of Abraham.

Dr. Crampton next offers an overview of baptism in the New Testament. He again gives emphasis to the fact that "there is not a single example of infant baptism found in the entire New Testament" (p. 47). After surveying the canonical Gospels, Crampton concludes that both John the Baptist and Jesus and his disciples practiced "confessor" baptism. Turning to Acts, the author points out that Luke might easily have made reference to infants being baptized if this was, indeed, the apostolic practice, but he does not (cf. Acts 8:12 with 21:4-5, pp. 61-62). With regard to the references to "household baptisms" in both Acts and the New Testament epistles, Crampton explains that only those capable of hearing and believing the gospel were, in fact, baptized.

He also examines several texts in the New Testament which paedobaptists claim as foundational for the doctrine of infant baptism. These include Paul's mention of the believer "sanctifying" his unbelieving spouse and children in 1 Corinthians 7:14. Crampton responds that "the verse has nothing to do with baptism" (p. 74). "The sanctification that the apostle is addressing is a marital sanctification" (p. 75). As for the references to children in the Pauline household codes (Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20), he concludes that it is most likely "that Paul is speaking to converted children who are indeed members of the church" (p. 76). The gospel account of Jesus blessing children is irrelevant for this discussion since Jesus blessed them but did not baptize them. Dr. Crampton once again hammers home the point: "The Scriptures do not contain any precept for or example of infant baptism" (p. 79). Paedobaptism rests its case "on the logical fallacy of an argument from silence" (p. 79).

The author next turns to discuss the relationship between baptism and ecclesiology and soteriology. He stresses that there is not only continuity but also discontinuity between the Old and New Testament church. In the Old Testament covenant status was granted to persons "irrespective of their spiritual state" but in the New Testament, "this is not the case" (p. 86). "Nowhere in the New Testament is it taught that infants are members of the visible church" (p. 89). Paedobaptists must "alter the teachings of the Word of God" to make the doctrine of infant baptism "fit" (p. 89).

In the closing chapters, Crampton refutes "presumptive election or regeneration" as "an errant doctrine" (p. 93). He notes that the widespread adoption of the practice of infant baptism in the fifth century coincided with the rise in belief in "baptismal regeneration" (pp. 109-110). Why did the early church depart from apostolic practice? "The appropriate answer would be: Sin" (p. 113). Crampton suggests that one can only affirm infant baptism if he also accepts presumptive regeneration, and this is the case with many Reformed theologians (Hodge, Murray, Warfield). Dr. Crampton is even bold to criticize Calvin's views on this subject which he says is "stranger still" (p. 116). He describes Calvin's view of the seed of future repentance and faith in the infants of children from believing parents as "little more than semi-Pelagianism" (p. 116)! Crampton rejects presumptive regeneration as "a doctrine that is foreign to the Word of God" and "an insult to His sovereignty and an egregious error" (p. 119). He further points out that the Westminster Standards are inconsistent in that they affirm paedobaptism but reject paedocommunion. The consistent practitioner of infant baptism must affirm presumptive regeneration (an unbiblical doctrine) and infant communion! The adoption of infant baptism leads to other unbiblical practices like the division between "communicant" and "non-communicant" members (creating a "two-tier" membership) and "confirmation" rituals (see pp. 120-121).

Analysis

On the pastoral level, this book will prove to be an especially helpful work for Reformed Baptist churches to share with persons drawn to their congregations from paedobaptist backgrounds. Dr. Crampton addresses many common paedobaptist objections and questions about credobaptism. An important example is his frequent comments about the role of the children of believers within the congregation. Crampton rejects the paedobaptist notion of "covenant children" (see pp. 92-96). This includes the "argument for expanded blessings" and "covenant family" argument (see pp. 97-99). "They may 'tug at

one's heart,' but they do not have biblical substance to them" (p. 99). On the positive side of this topic, Crampton offers a winsome view of the place of the infants and children of believers within the church. They are "part of the 'covenant community,' in that they come to worship services with their parents, are taught the Bible by their parents and church officers, etc." (p. 88, n. 10; see also p. 96). Thus, "Reformed Baptists do have a view of children which is covenantal in nature. They believe that the children of professing parents have a status within the visible church, not as members of the church, but as members of their respective families" (p. 122).

Indeed, this work will prove very helpful in the pastoral ministry of Reformed Baptist churches.

Dr. Crampton has thrown down the gauntlet to in the Reformed community with regard to the Biblical practice of baptism. He has constructed a considerable engine to assault and tear down the defensive walls that have been constructed around the doctrine of infant baptism. He has boldly pointed out a serious flaw in the otherwise venerable Westminster Standards. The burden rests with the supporters of paedobaptism who must now answer the many objections that the author has raised.

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