
Letters to the Editor

We were pleased to receive several letters commenting on articles in the last issue. This letter from Mike Plant responds to the subject of INFANT SALVATION and is representative of other letters received. As the author of the original article, Gary Brady is also given an opportunity to reply.

Dear Gary,

Thank you for your very helpful article about Infant Salvation. I greatly appreciated the trouble and thought that had gone into writing it. Can I make three points for your consideration:

1. A minor quibble from page 8 - not all paedo-baptists are Presbyterians - some of us are Congregationalists!

2. Also from page 8. You point there to a contrast between David's reaction to the death of Bathsheba's son and to the death of Absalom. This is objecting to the Presbyterian view that, "David himself was a believer and so he believed his son would be saved too." As your article is on *Infant Salvation* it is not entirely logical to use Absalom in this way. Absalom is not another infant child of David's but some-one who, on coming to adulthood, has thrown off the claims of God's covenant by rejecting the Lord's anointed one. I would have thought there were few paedo-baptists who would use the same comfort that a dead infant is a covenant child to cover the case of the adult child of a believer who is an open apostate.

Then the logic of your contrast between Absalom and the child of Bathsheba would also suggest that David has no confidence about Absalom because he has not prayed for him. That must be so if "the secret of David's confidence springs rather from the fact that he had committed that little one to the Lord in prayer." Yet during Absalom's lifetime David was in a far healthier state spiritually than he was during the brief life span of Bathsheba's child. Would you intend to argue from the silences of scripture that he didn't do so? It would be a somewhat arbitrary conclusion to draw.

3. I am not sure that your pastoral comfort, that you have prayed for your child and committed him/her to the Lord, is strong enough. Especially when, for example in the case of a cot death, the parents may already be lacerated with a sense of guilt and failure. The fact that your child is a, "holy child" from 1 Corinthians 7 v 14 seems a lot stronger and more full of comfort.

Thank you for the help and stimulus of the article. I hope there is some worthwhile comeback to it.

Yours in the Lord,

Mike Plant

Cannon Park Congregational Church

Middlesborough

Dear Mike,

It's a great thing to get a response to an article, even if it is to disagree! Thank you for taking the time and the trouble to write. You may not wish to spend the rest of your life arguing the case with me but by way of response:

1. Sorry I failed to mention the Congregationalists. I only referred to Presbyterians because it is chiefly from such sources that I have gleaned my ideas of what paedobaptists believe. Are there any major Congregationalist works I should consult?

2. I recognise that there is a clear difference between an apostate Absalom and David's baby by Bathsheba. I recognise the fact that no paedobaptist would take comfort from a covenant view faced with the death of an adult child openly hostile to the gospel. I would contend that neither should he take his chief comfort from the covenant view before the child has come to maturity. This view simply fuels the idea that it is better if my children die as infants. If they do come to maturity they may not believe. It also raises the impossible question of how long 'covenant protection' lasts. At what age is cover removed and you are out on your own?

The reason why David had no confidence about Absalom is that despite whatever prayers had been offered on his behalf he clearly had not put his faith in the Lord. As for Bathsheba's son, there was no such contrary evidence. I was not at all suggesting that we can manipulate God in some way by our prayers, rather that having committed a matter to him, if we find no evidence to the contrary, we assume that our prayers have been answered as we wished. Any other view denies that we can have any assurance of answers to prayer.

3. In what way does 1 Corinthians 7:14, as you understand it, give more comfort than I am offering? Are you going to say to Christians who have prayed for a child who then dies, "You've wasted your time really. This is a child of Christian parents so the child will go to heaven anyway, whether you pray or not?" Or even, "The parents weren't Christians so it was pointless anyone praying"? Surely one of the ways by which a child is made 'holy' is that one or both of the parents are praying for it. Far from weakening pastoral comfort, my view puts some flesh on what it means to say that the child of a believer is holy. This is not some unseen talisman but the privilege of being brought up by someone who knows and loves the Lord.

Convinced? Don't feel obliged to respond in writing but I would be happy to debate further. Thank you once again for taking the time to respond.

Yours in Christ
Gary Brady
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