

Preface

My visitor questioned why I would want to write on infant baptism. To turn one's attention from Jonathan Edwards's beatific focus to infant baptism seemed to step from the grandiose into the "peripheral." Richard Baxter responded to such an objection in the seventeenth-century:

Though the point of Infant Baptism be comparatively of less moment than many judge; Yet the grounds on which it standeth, and which usually are denied by those that deny it, are of very great moment. And therefore though the bare denying of water to Infants be no great or dangerous Error in itself considered, yet as it consisteth of all its parts, it is very great (1651, 12).

A nineteenth-century American Presbyterian pastor stated,

I fear very much that the records of Eternity will reveal the fact, that "for the talents invested" and the "time occupied," the anti-pedo-Baptists have done more to people the territory of Satan than even Rome herself (Gallagher 1878, 183).

Compared to the intense concern of previous centuries, the present generation of the church has remained notably reticent on infant baptism. This silent surrender may reflect a weariness of controversy, or simply an inability on the part of pastors and church leaders to articulate this ancient practice scripturally. Granted, some prefer that it not be articulated.

Challenges to infant baptism came from several distinct quarters in the twentieth century: (1) The democratization of theology through the modern intrusion of egalitarianism with its emphasis on individual rights; (2) the triumph of Arminianism in evangelical churches; (3) the prevalence of Dispensationalism in American Bible colleges and Fundamentalist churches; and (4) the influence of Karl Barth.

Reflecting on so many in the post-Barthian era who continue to baptize infants, the late Paul King Jewett stated, "Their practice is a practice in search of a theology" (1978, 209). If the modern church has so strayed from its theological moorings that Jewett's words are an accurate assessment, it is my prayer that this book will assist those engaged in such a search.