

## Three Extra Eggs in the Pudding

**Topic:** Auburn Avenue Stuff

After nine days on the road, occupied with this and that, I have just now had opportunity on the plane back to Idaho to comment on Guy Waters' next chapter, the chapter on "covenant and election."

In order to work through this, we should begin by taking note of what it really means to read election through the lens of the covenant, as opposed to reading the covenant through the lens of election. It appears to me that a great deal of the confusion in this debate is confusion at just this point. For example, after lengthy analysis, Waters chides John Barach for his quasi-Arminianism. "It is in this sense, notwithstanding his profession of the Reformed doctrine of (decretal) election, that we may say that Barach's overall doctrine of election is Arminian or at least semi-Arminian" (p. 120).

And this, *after* Waters *quoted* Barach saying this: "God has eternally predestined an unchanging number of people out of the whole world to eternal glory with Christ" (p. 112).

To see election through a covenant lens does not mean to define decretal election as though it were identical with covenant election. The *fact* of decretal election is affirmed by every FV spokesman that I know of, as indicated by the quote from Barach above. But we do not drag the decrees down into our understanding of history -- we let God unfold His unchangeable decrees throughout the process of all history. The content of the ultimate decrees is none of our current business, although we cheerfully acknowledge that the decrees are really there and that they *have* an unchanging content. Our connection point to these decrees is the covenant, given to us to use in this way. Because of the promises of the covenant, we may deal with election on our end, which is covenant election. The decrees are on God's end. It is important for us to know that God does what He does on His end, but we only know *that* He is doing it, not *what* He is doing. What He is doing will only be fully manifest on the Last Day. Until that Day, we walk by faith, not by sight.

Now Waters says of the FV that "we find a reticence in grounding the marks or evidences of election in anything inward or subjective" (p. 111). He says this despite the fact that I devoted a full chapter to the subjective marks of assurance in "*Reformed*" *Is Not Enough* (pp. 125-130). Not only that, but the next chapter of Waters' book indicates that he actually read that chapter, and comments on it. But here in this chapter, where my chapter on assurance contradicts his summary of my position, he goes on to describe my position *this* way.

"In this sense, that which in part the doctrine of the invisible church is concerned to guard -- the existence of a body of sincere believers who are discernible to God and to themselves by certain infallible marks (marks that hypocrites do not and cannot possess) -- is functionally neglected in Wilson's ecclesiology . . . the practical distinction between the sincere believer and the hypocrite is not ontological (they possess different types of grace) but historical in nature. It is the sincere believer's perseverance that Wilson will stress to be what identifies him as a genuine believer . . . It is simply not the case that Wilson is offering us the same doctrine but new terminology" (p. 123).

But, clean contrary to Waters' assertions, I have taught in multiple places that there is an ontological difference between what the sincere believer experiences and what the hypocrite experiences. When the grace of God effectually converts one covenant member, enabling him to persevere in holiness subjectively experienced, and does not convert another in the same way, what else can you call it?

To pummel the point (if I may), I have taught (in very clear and divers ways) that the grace given to the decretally elect at the point of the effectual call is grace that is *qualitatively* different than the common operations of the Spirit enjoyed (for a season) by the unregenerate covenant member. I have heaped this point up in a rumpiled pile and have danced around it, gesticulating with enthusiasm. I have made a big building out of this point, and put a blinking neon sign on top of it. If this point were an overpass, I have spray-painted my agreement with it in bright green letters at least eighteen inches high. With my white chef's hat on, I have wheeled this point out of the kitchen on a cart, poured brandy all over it, and set it on fire. If the point were a pudding, I would have added three eggs beyond what the recipe called for. To summarize briefly, this is not something I have somehow neglected to say.

What Waters has done here is a real travesty of scholarship. He is free to argue that what I have written on this is not consistent with what some of the other FV fellows might say. But this would require far more argument than he is presenting thus far. And if all I had to go on for my understanding of the other guys' positions was Waters' take on what *I* have written, I frankly have no confidence that he is representing them fairly at all. He is not free to mangle my position this way, to pretend that I have not qualified what I have in fact qualified, to invert my meaning as he has. This really is a disgrace -- does P&R employ fact-checkers?

*Posted by Douglas Wilson - 7/26/2006 11:43:30 AM* | [Print this post](#)

## **Federal Vision Assurance**

**Topic:** Auburn Avenue Stuff

The first half of chapter five in Waters' book addresses the question of assurance of salvation. After recognizing that I had dedicated a full chapter to this subject, and granting that I emphasized a number of subjective aspects to assurance, Waters goes on to doubt the whole deal. Because I concluded that chapter with a call to look away, to look to Christ, to ground assurance in objective certainties, Waters concluded that I was backing away from what I had said earlier. But this is simply a category confusion. Waters says this:

"We might recall that Wilson's ecclesiology, specifically his insistence upon covenantal objectivity and his questioning of the classical Reformed doctrine of the visible and invisible church, appears to render it practically impossible to frame the question of assurance in any traditional subjective sense" (pp. 142-3).

He says, at best, "Wilson has outlined in this chapter a doctrine of assurance containing two unreconciled components, namely, subjective and objective assurance" (p. 143).

So how is this a category confusion? By definition, *assurance* is not objective. It is a *subjective* response to an *objective* reality. Every pastor knows what it is to deal with introspective souls who struggle because they try to have faith in their faith, instead of faith in Christ. Faith in Christ works this way. Subjective faith rests in an objective (outside the self) Christ. Subjective faith looks in faith to objective (outside the self) means of grace, like Word and sacrament. Now when I tell someone to look away to Christ, there are two elements in this -- subjective and objective. There is the looking away (subjective) and there is Christ (objective).

Everyone understands this if we are talking about a Bible verse. "Don't torment yourself this way," the wise pastor says. "Look away from yourself. Look to Christ. Look to the text. See? All you have to do is look."

Now if I were listening to an evangelical say this, I would not catch at words, and tell him that he was teaching false doctrine because he said all that was necessary was *to look*. "Really? That's all? Just look at the ink on the paper?" Of course, we know that this means to look in true evangelical faith. But true evangelical faith does not have its origin in a hunt for true evangelical faith. The seed that germinates is the imperishable word -- objective. The life that springs up is subjective. These are not two alien principles that need to be reconciled -- not unless faith and the object of faith need to be reconciled.

The covenant is objective. Means of grace are objective. Grace itself is subjectively experienced, of necessity. Faithfulness to the covenant is *not* objective. But covenantal faithfulness is only possible if there is an objective covenant *there*. Marriage is objective. Fidelity is personal and subjective. Trying to reconcile these two things is like trying to reconcile ham and eggs.

And so this assessment by Waters radically misrepresents my views on this. My understanding of assurance is in no way at variance with the classical Reformed understanding of this. Not only so, but I wrote a chapter explaining this in detail. Why on earth would Waters think there was a contradiction between the subjective experience of faith and the objective ground of faith -- and not understand the perfectly uncontroversial idea, advanced in that chapter, that faith flourishes when it looks, not at itself, but rather at the Faithful One, who has promised to meet us in His means of grace? What *is* the problem?

*Posted by Douglas Wilson - 7/28/2006 1:04:13 AM |*

## **You Betcher**

**Topic:** Auburn Avenue Stuff

In the second part of chapter five, Waters goes on to misrepresent me on some other issues, particularly on the subject of the perseverance and apostasy.

While Wilson admits the existence and presence of hypocrites within the covenant community and stresses the necessity of the inward operations of the Holy Spirit for an individual's salvation, his ecclesiology is weighted toward defining the Christian in an undifferentiated way" (p. 147).

Actually, I argue for defining Christian in two different ways. I define quarter as a coin in my pocket, and I define quarter as a fourth of something. I don't "weight" my definition of quarter one way or the other. Why is this so difficult? I hold that a Christian is someone who is born again of the Spirit of God -- "Paul's statement is blunt -- he is *not* a Christian who has only the externals" (RINE, p. 18). And then, *in a completely distinct sense*, a Christian is anyone who is baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: "they were baptized in infancy or when they were ten in a Baptist church, they sang in the choir and went through catechism class, and they are not Buddhists" (RINE, p. 17).

When it comes to sorting out the sheep and goats before the eschaton, Waters tries to argue that I make no distinctions within the church, and make no distinctions within the Word.

In preaching and pastoring, Wilson counsels against attempting to raise explicitly the question of hypocrisy. 'Pastorally, you don't need to flush these people out by probing and doing private detective work of a pastoral nature. What you need to do is just back God's truck up to the pulpit and unload it.' This is not, Wilson stresses, defaulting on one's pastoral duties. Ministers preach the Scriptures, Wilson argues, which 'have all these severe warnings in the New Testament.' He seems fairly confident that hypocrites, under such preaching, will generally choose to leave rather than 'to slug it out.' And undifferentiated word (at least in terms of its application to various groups within the church delineated according to the doctrine of regeneration) is therefore to be preached to an undifferentiated church" (pp. 147-8).

I don't know where he gets this idea, but I do not hold to it. In fact, I deny it *in the quotations* that Waters produces to prove that I do too hold to it. Look at the citation just past. After I say that the New Testament contains many warnings for the hypocrites (making the point that the Bible differentiates between hypocrites and non-hypocrites), Waters cites this as proof positive that I do not believe the Bible differentiates between covenant members. And so why did I have two separate chapters on sons of Belial and false brothers (chapters 17 and 18)? If the Bible differentiates between faithful covenant members and faithless covenant members, *then so must we*. But Waters has got this idea in his head and it will not be dislodged. He says again that I do not believe in doing this. "First, Wilson's pattern of preaching (preach an undifferentiated Word to an undifferentiated church) is not in keeping with Scripture" (p. 152). I agree. It isn't. That is why I don't believe in doing it. I had just said, with Waters quoting me on it, that the Word differentiates, and that if you preach the whole counsel of God (the biblical expression behind my phrase about backing God's truck up to the pulpit and unloading it), hypocrites will scam. If we unload it, we unload it. The Word differentiates. The Word winnows. The Word is a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. And why Waters would say that my confidence that the Scripture preached will establish this differentiation within the church (causing hypocrites to flee) is actually proof that I hold there is no such differentiation to be made, is a matter quite beyond my capacity to explain.

He says:

"The pattern of biblical teaching and preaching in both the Old and New Testaments, then, respects and addresses the distinguishing heart conditions found within the visible church" (pp. 152-3).

To which I reply:

You betcher.

But wait, there's more, on a different subject. Waters maintains that I *deny* a qualitative difference between regeneration as experienced by the faithful covenant member and the faithless covenant member.

"Wilson, then, refrains here from defining apostasy in qualitative terms -- that, apart from considerations of the grace of perseverance, the grace given to the elect is qualitatively different from that given to the reprobate. Rather, apostasy is defined temporally: the apostate is one who simply does not persevere" (p. 151)

Having said this, he then quotes me saying precisely the *opposite*. "The grace experienced by the apostate and the persevering grace experienced by the elect *differ* . . . regeneration extends (or not) to every covenant member" (p. 152, my emphasis in the original). In that quote, Waters cites my *agreement* on this point with Carl Robbins, a FV critic in the Knox colloquium book. Then he says this:

Wilson's comments, however, do not substantially alter our analysis above. His affirmations regarding the necessity of individual regeneration are appreciated, but do not resolve the issue at hand . . . The question at hand is whether apostate members of the covenant were ever at all properly said to be regenerate" (p. 152).

If Waters is objecting because he thinks I might believe regeneration to be reversible, then he has radically misread my position. Regeneration (in the effectual call sense) is not reversible. And if he is objecting because he thinks I might use the word regenerate of the apostate covenant member in *any* sense, however distinct from effectual call regeneration, then he has radically muddled my position. When talking about apostates, and talking about effectual call regeneration, I *deny* that said apostates can be properly said to have ever been regenerate.

As I said in "*Reformed*" *Is Not Enough*, "This might be called regeneration, theologically considered. A man is either regenerate or he is not. When the word *regeneration* is being used in this sense, we are talking about an invisible operation performed by the Spirit of God, who does what He does when and how it please Him. And when we are talking about what might be called this 'effectual-call regeneration,' we have to repudiate every form of baptismal or decisional regeneration" (RINE, p. 19).

In addition, I have written an extensive series of posts on this blog in order "to offer a defense of the historic evangelical understanding of regeneration" (6/16/04). Here is a small sampling from that series.

In order to take all baptized covenant members as participants in Christ in the "strong sense," we would have to distinguish what is objectively given in Christ, and not what is subjectively done with those objective benefits. Perseverance would, on this reading, be what was subjectively done with what God has objectively given. In this view, the person who did not

persevere was not given less of Christ. But this necessarily means that persevering grace is not an objective gift or grace. God's willingness to continue "the wrestling" would depend upon what kind of fight we put up, or cooperation we provide, and because no one's fundamental nature has been changed, those natures remain at "enmity with God." In this view, whatever total depravity means, it is not ontologically changed, just knocked down and sat upon. The Spirit pins one snarling dog, but not another. But this in turn leads to another thought—eventually at some time in the process we stop snarling and start cooperating (if we are bound to heaven), and what do we call this change or transformation. The historic name for this change has been regeneration, and I see no reason to change it (7/24/04).

Affirming the absolute need for personal regeneration is the *sine qua non* of historic evangelicalism. Affirming that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church is the *sine qua non* of historic catholicity. Deny the former only, and the end result is the deadly nominalism found in many quarters of the institutional Church. Such saintlings need to be told that God can make sons of Abraham out of rocks. Deny the latter only, and you have the endless splintering sectarianism that has come to characterize American pop evangelicalism. This comes about when Christians cease affirming the need for an invisible work of the Spirit of God, and presume to be able to see exactly how and when that regeneration happens.

But the moment of regeneration is never visible to us. Lack of regeneration, however, is visible over time because the works of the flesh, Paul tells us, are manifest. And the fruit of the Spirit manifest themselves publicly as well, and Jesus tells us to make our judgments on the basis of fruit. But it must be noted that biblical judgments of this sort are mature, and are based on the mature outcome of a person's way of life. All this to say that genuine discernment is based on the video, not on the snapshot (8/5/04).

Not to put too fine a point on it, Waters represents me as holding a view that is 180 degrees out from what I actually hold. Not only do I not hold the views he attributes to me, I have argued energetically against them in print. There must be a *qualitative* difference between unregenerate baptized hypocrite and the faithful covenant member.

From overt misrepresentations of my position, we may now move to disagreements and interactions of an ordinary kind.

"Second, Wilson's doctrine of new covenant curses raises certain questions. How then may we affirm Paul's declaration that Christ has borne the curse of the law for believers (Gal. 3:13)? How may we say, with Paul, that believers no longer fall under condemnation (Rom. 8:1)? (p. 153).

Well, the point would be that *believers* within the covenant know that Christ has bore the curse for them. But covenant members who do *not* believe this are thereby identified as *unbelievers*. Because they are unbelievers, and all the promises of Christ are apprehended by faith alone, and because there is a fundamental differentiation within the covenant during the course of history, *unbelievers* within the covenant receive the curses of the covenant, and not the blessings of the covenant.

"One may agree in principle with Wilson that 'covenant members in the new covenant were judged more severely than the covenant members in the old were,' but Wilson's explanation of Hebrews 10:26f. in terms of specifically covenantal curses is a dubious one. When we consider its likely connection to Wilson's doctrine of covenant election, we are further inclined to be skeptical of its merit" (p. 153).

This quotation above may serve as a sampling of how Waters undertakes to refute something. Note that this is under a section labeled "Critique." One may agree with me in principle about how curses in the New Covenant are more severe than those of the Old, but he says my explanation of Heb. 10:26 is a "dubious one." Furthermore, my explanation has a "likely" connection to my doctrine of "covenantal election" and so Waters is further inclined to be "skeptical of its merit." Oh? Might there be any reasons? This is just academic handwaving. He says nothing more than that he doesn't buy it, which is fine, but ought not to be confused with offering reasons for not buying it.

We now come to the last point, which is the problem of sap in John 15.

"Third, it is gratuitous, that is, baseless to say that Jesus' analogy in John 15:1-6 teaches that the broken branches partook of the sap of the vine. Jesus does not use the term sap in this parable. That metaphor is an inference that Wilson has drawn. As Beisner has rightly commented, 'It is dangerous enough to draw doctrines from parables; it is more dangerous to draw doctrines from details within parables; it is exegetically fatal to draw doctrines from details that are even there!' There is no hint in this parable that the broken branches ever existed in any vital, living relationship with Christ. Far less is it clear that the broken branches sustained the same relationship to Christ as those who prove to be decretally elect. Wilson's argument fails to overturn conventional Reformed readings of this passage, which see branches that are outwardly and inwardly related to Christ" (pp. 153-4).

Excuse me if I have just a little bit of fun with this one.

First, the point of the sap illustration was not to turn John 15 into a complex allegory, with the sap representing the internal motions of grace or something. The point of mentioning the sap was to emphasize something that Christ's metaphor says explicitly, and which Reformed exegetes consistently run away from (in the best tradition of an Arminian in Romans 9), which is to say, the *branchness* of the branches that were broken off. Christ says nothing of sap, or bark, or leaves. But He does say *that branches in Him were cut out of Him, and were then taken away and burned*. He does say *that*. So, Mr. Reformed, what does it mean? What is taken away from the Vine which is Christ? They are branches, which had a *branchy* connection to Him. All I mean by sap in the branches is to say that they are true branches. A branch can be fruitless and still be a true branch -- a branch that needs to be pruned. A branch cannot be sapless and still be a true branch. That was my only point in talking about sap, which leads to this next point.

Waters chides me for mentioning sap in my discussion of this (although every branch I have ever seen has had sap), and then moves blithely on to talk about branches that are "outwardly related" to the Vine and branches that are "inwardly related." Now I have never in all my born days seen a branch that is merely outwardly related

to a vine or tree. We have never seen it in nature, and Christ makes no mention of it. But it is responsible Reformed exegesis to have *outwardly* related branches and *inwardly* related branches, but exegetically fatal to have branches with sap in them, that is to say, branchy branches.

And third, Waters says, "Far less is it clear that the broken branches sustained the same relationship to Christ as those who prove to be decretally elect." Well, of course not. They were cut out because they did not have the same relationship; one was fruitful and the other not. But in some sense, at some level (not in every sense, not on every level), they did have the same relationship to Christ. How's that? They were both BRANCHES.

*Posted by Douglas Wilson - 7/28/2006 5:49:51 PM*

## **Salty Dogs and Crusty Lutherans**

**Topic:** Auburn Avenue Stuff

The first part of chapter seven in Waters' book is dedicated to my views of sacramental efficacy and baptism. And so, here we are.

He begins by saying that I misread B.B. Warfield definition of sacerdotalism, and seeks to establish that I misread it by simply stating *why* Warfield said what he did (p. 199). But this does not change the fact that Warfield defined sacerdotalism as the notion that God uses *any means* to accomplish his saving purposes (as I said he did). Warfield holds that the evangelical position is that God's saving action is never mediated. So Waters' response here is simply beside the point. Suppose I say that Smith believes that we ought not to be fighting in Iraq. Waters says that I have misread Smith because he holds this position because the war is too expensive. How would I be misreading Smith's position?

Waters notes that I quote the WCF (28.5) and that I draw a certain inference from the way they talk about baptism there.

"Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it; or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated."

Waters says (accurately) that I argue from this expression that grace and salvation are *ordinarily* annexed to water baptism, although not inseparably annexed. Waters responds by saying that the "paragraph says nothing about *who* among the baptized will be saved." This is quite true, but it is also not the point of my argument. Let's just consider the structure of this sentence from the WCF, changing the topic completely.

"Although it be parental neglect not to enroll your kid in a good Christian school, yet a good education is not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be educated well without it; or, that all who are enrolled are undoubtedly educated well."

Now what is this speaker claiming about Christian education? He is saying that not enrolling your kid in a good Christian school is a big negative deal. He is saying, however, that it is *possible* to get a good education without doing so, and he grants that to claim that all who are so enrolled are educated well would be an overstatement. It would be fair to say, however, that the speaker is saying that a good education is the ordinary result of enrolling your kid in such a school. It would be nothing to the point for Waters to say that the speaker was making no claim about *who* among the students would receive a good education. This is quite true, but it is also not the subject under discussion. A man can be convinced that a school is ordinarily good for the kids without making any particular claims about who will be educated well. But this is structurally the same argument the Westminster divines advance concerning baptism.

Waters then says that I believe that baptism seals what it signifies, and that it is not a "front operation." Good enough. He then says of me that "Wilson does not qualify here the objects of the redemptive sealing of the sacrament as those who have saving faith. It may be that he understands the redemptive sealing operation of the Spirit in the sacraments to transpire, at least sometimes, *in the absence of faith*. This suspicion is heightened . . ." (p. 200). Thus far Waters on my view of baptism, emphasis mine.

Here is my take on my view of baptism, the first of which is just a few pages after the citation Waters quoted.

"Of course this baptism does not automatically save the one baptized; there is no magical cleaning power in the water" (RINE, 99).

"The blessings are appropriated *by faith*, not by water, and the curses are brought down upon the head *by unbelief*, against which curses the water provides no protection whatever" Credo on Baptism, emphasis added).

"An *unbelieving* covenant member incurs all the curses of the covenant, while the *believer* appropriates all its blessings *by faith alone*" (Credo on Baptism, by faith alone)

Now I ask you . . .

The next section of Waters' chapter is worth quoting in some detail. He says this:

"Fifth, Wilson conflates Westminster Larger Catechism 161 and WCF 27.3 to read as follows: 'Worthy receivers of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are effectually saved by these sacramental means through the working of the Holy Spirit and the blessing of Christ.' This, however, is what neither statement affirms. The Standards are careful to say that the sacraments are 'effectual means of salvation,' but this is a far cry from saying that 'worthy receivers . . . are effectually saved by these sacramental means.'

Wilson's latter statement places a far greater emphasis on the necessity and importance of the sacraments to one's salvation than the Standard's statements do" (p. 201).

This is simply unbelievable. The difference between Waters' summary ("The sacraments are effectual means of salvation for worthy receivers" and mine ("Worthy receivers are effectually saved by these sacramental means") really amounts to a difference of voice. But "The ball hits John" is apparently a "far cry" from "John is hit by the ball." Bill, a worthy receiver, is effectually saved by these sacramental means is a "far cry" from these sacramental means save Bill, a worthy receiver. Sometimes I really am at a loss for words. How are you supposed to debate people like this? Waters says that my summary "places a far greater emphasis on the necessity and importance of the sacraments." Why? How? In what way? What on earth is he talking about?

Waters then reproduces another argument I advanced from the Westminster Confession.

"Sixth, Wilson takes Westminster Shorter Catechism 92 ('wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers') to mean that 'the benefits of the new covenant) are *applied* to a man *through the sacraments* when that man has faith.' Wilson certainly intends to be provocative by this statement . . . Is he saying that baptism and the Lord's Supper are instruments of justification? If so, they he most certainly would be out of accord with the Standards. Is he saying that a believer's sense of his justification may be built up by improvement of his baptism and by a right use of the Supper? If so, Wilson is saying nothing new" (p. 202)

This is the same kind of thing as an earlier point made about persevering grace, a question that is sometimes legitimately directed against some FV expressions. If a baptized individual receives all of Christ's benefits, then how can we account for such a person not having persevering grace? Isn't that part of Christ's benefits, and doesn't he have them all? A reasonable kind of question, I think, and so now I present it back to Waters.

The Shorter Catechism teaches that Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are *applied* to worthy receivers by means of sensible signs. Waters wants to see this as the relatively uncontroversial notion that a man's *sense* of his justification can be built up by improvement of his baptism and through a right use of the Supper. But no, that can't be it. The Shorter Catechism says "Christ and the benefits of the new covenant" are applied by sensible signs, not my "sense of Christ, and my sense of the benefits of the new covenant." And so my question for Waters is whether he believes this. If so, what is his beef with what I have been saying? If not, has he taken an exception to the WCF at this point? Spelling it out, justification is one of the benefits of the new covenant, is it not? Just like persevering grace is.

Put this another way. If *I* were to be so foolish as to say that Christ and the benefits of the new covenant were applied to a man (a worthy receiver guy) by means of the sensible signs given in the sacraments, would Waters interpret *me* as saying this meant nothing more than a man's *sense* of these benefits being strengthened as he rolls these propositions around in his brain? Not a chance. He would interpret me as

a roaring sacerdotalist, as he has done. How about if Wilkins said it? No, wait . . . what if *Lusk* said it?

For misrepresentations, Waters is setting a record in this chapter. He then says this:

"Wilson's doctrine of sacramental efficacy is intriguing in that it conceives of redemptive sacramental efficacy in the case of an unconverted recipient (the 'nominal Presbyterian, baptized in infancy'). As SC 92 and many other passages state, however, the Westminster Standards conceive of redemptive sacramental efficacy in the presence of a faith that embraces what the sacrament holds forth to it" (p. 204).

Well, of *course*. That was the whole *point* of my illustration. The Westminster Standards clearly teach that the grace conferred by means of baptism is not anchored to the moment of baptismal administration. Someone is baptized in infancy, grows up a hellion, lives in unbelief for a time, and is then converted. When he is converted, he comes to "a faith that embraces what the sacrament holds forth to it."

I say, "By means of baptism, this efficacious grace is *conferred* on the elect at the appropriate time, the time of conversion, and it is the *applied grace of their baptism*." And yes, I said that, because that is what the Westminster Standards teach. Waters summarizes this as saying the exact opposite of what I said. "We may speak, then, of redemptive baptismal efficacy quite apart from the subjective condition of the recipient" (p. 208). Okay. So I say that the applied grace of baptism is conferred on someone at the time of their *conversion* (e.g. when they are brought by God to a subjective condition of repentance and faith), and Waters represents this as me saying that this baptismal efficacy occurs quite apart from "the subjective condition of the recipient" (p. 208). Now I am no salty dog, or crusty Lutheran, or anything like that, but this really is a "what the hell?" moment. Maybe I should start typing words like CONVERSION or REPENTANCE or FAITH in all caps so that scholars can find them.

Waters ends his section dealing with me by saying that "Wilson's understanding of precisely what is conveyed to the recipient in baptism is not at all clear" (p. 210). Well, not at all clear to some people's children.

*Posted by Douglas Wilson - 7/30/2006 8:46:38 PM*

## **Confessional Laxity Over At Mississippi Valley**

**Topic:** Auburn Avenue Stuff

In my previous Auburn Avenue post, in the comments section Mark Horne supplied the following quotation from Turretin. The emphases are Mark's, and Turretin was da bomb.

"The question is not whether faith alone justifies to the exclusion either of the grace of God or the righteousness of Christ or the word AND SACRAMENTS (BY WHICH THE BLESSING OF JUSTIFICATION IS PRESENTED AND SEALED

TO US ON THE PART OF GOD), which we maintain ARE NECESSARILY REQUIRED HERE; but only to the exclusion of every other virtue and habit on our part.... For all these as they are mutually subordinated in a different class of cause, CONSIST WITH EACH OTHER IN THE HIGHEST DEGREE" [16.8.5].

I bring this up because I just finished chapter seven of Waters' book-length material. I don't have much to say here because in the second part of that chapter, Waters was taking other fellows to task. As I said at the beginning of this series of posts, I will let my compadres answer as the fit takes them, and their wives are unable to restrain them. But a few things in this were too delicious to pass up, and the Turretin quote provides a good springboard for just a few comments. Waters says:

"By way of preface, we may note that Lusk's argument is filled with quotations from Calvin, other sixteenth-century Reformers, and certain seventeenth-century divines. He points to these quotations as evidence that his position has some pedigree and precedent in the Reformed tradition. To engage each of these quotes *seriatim* would distract us from our primary concern . . ." (p. 211).

I dare say it would. Nevertheless, Waters does give a general hand-waving response to the quotes, though it is nothing quite so magisterial as a *seriatim* response.

First, he wonders aloud what the context of those pesky quotations might be. Of course, this is reasonable as a general point (context always matters), but the substance of these sorts of quotations would only be seriously affected if the context of the above quote (say) had an intro like this from Turretin: "Here I summarize the position of my opponent, that hardy blasphemer Sergius Smith. He maintains, and we deny, that . . ." It is not really an appropriate response to muse thoughtfully that it is *possible* that some contextual clues in the original setting might possibly "bail my position out. Let us prayerfully hope that it is so."

Second, he grants that it sometimes sure *looks* like Calvin and all those other home boys of ours were saying the same thing that Lusk is. But were they advancing "that statement in service of of the same theological ends for which Lusk as adduced it"? (p. 211). Hmmm? Maybe not, and so there we rest our case.

Third, Waters wonders if certain qualifying or balancing statements have been left out. Oh? Sort of like how Waters has left out all *my* qualifying or balancing statements? When talking about the same things? I have to grant that this argument from Waters is the most persuasive. This sort of thing *does* happen.

And last, Waters and his readers have "bypassed these quotations and have restricted ourselves to a single argument, the argument from the Westminster Standards" (p. 212). But to do this is to miss one of the central historical and theological arguments that the FV guys are advancing. And for a critic, to miss it is fortunate because if you miss it, you don't have to answer it. To read the Westminster Standards in the light of Dabney, Hodge, Miller, and Thornwell is to read the document in the light of theologians (to whom all praise!) who, despite all their signal strengths and virtues, cannot be said to have had an impact on the theological climate that *led* to the writing of the Standards. This is because they all lived a long time later. This is not the case with Calvin, Beza, Knox, Turretin, et al, men who lived, wrote, and reshaped the continent of Europe *prior* to the writing of

the Standards. The Westminster Standards are not a confessional standard that fell from the sky. It was composed by men who were self-consciously doing theology in the Reformed tradition, and a battery of quotations from the fathers of that tradition would seem to be to the point. A battery of quotations from those men from whom the Westminster divines *learned their theology* would seem to be pertinent. The issue is not what can be read back into the Standards in the light of subsequent developments in anabaptist America. *That* is anachronism. The issue is what the Standards meant to the generation that first adopted them. And in order to understand *that*, a grasp of 16th and 17th century Reformed thought would be, shall we say, screamingly relevant. Waters cannot simply say that to study the context of the Confession would take him far afield, far away from his attempts to interpret a pristine Confession of faith that mysteriously showed up (in a place of honor) on his bookshelf.

To this point in his book, Waters has quoted (a number of times) that portion of the Westminster Confession (28.6) that says that the efficacy of baptism is such that, by a right use of it, the grace promised in it is not only offered, *but really exhibited and conferred*. He has done this, and yet he himself cannot bring himself to say that baptism confers the grace promised in it. He objects to Lusk's argument from this portion of the Confession. "He does this by isolating such terms as *confer, sign, seal, and exhibit* from their confessional qualifications" (p. 231). Okay, let's not do that. Let us not fall into the Error of Lusk (just because Lusk didn't doesn't mean that we *should*). Let's qualify it like Zeus distributing thunder, lightning and blue ruin. Worthy receiver, repentance as deep as David Brainerd on steroids, evangelical faith sloshing out the ears. Dr. Waters, has there ever been a Christian in the history of the Church to whom you believe this sentence applies? One who used his baptism rightly, and who, as a consequence, had the grace of salvation promised in that baptism, not only offered to him, but also exhibited to him and *conferred* upon him? Has this *ever* happened? If you think it has, then lay off us already. If you think it has not, then when will you notify your presbytery that you have to take exception to this portion of the Confession? I don't think you need to worry because Mississippi Valley is kind of lax when it comes to this kind of thing. They overlook this particular discrepancy *all the time*.

*Posted by Douglas Wilson - 8/1/2006 10:42:09 PM*

## **A Tulip From Calvin's Garden**

**Topic:** Auburn Avenue Stuff

The last chapter of Waters' book gives him an opportunity to wrap up. But although I will interact with some elements of this chapter, I am not going to wrap up, not just yet anyhow. Nossir. I am going to go through the *footnotes* too.

First, Waters charges me with a "misuse of logic." Were it true, t'would be serious, for it might affect **sales**. He quotes me arguing the following: "Branches can lose their position on the tree. You can be on the tree, someone can be on the tree right next to you and he is as much on the tree as you, he's as much a partaker of Christ as you are, he is as much a member of Christ as you are." After saying this, I then respond to a criticism that says this cannot be reconciled with election. I say, "Well, first it is reconcilable, that is the first thing. Secondly, if you can't reconcile it, it's not your problem. What does the Bible say?" (pp. 268-269).

Waters then says, "In fairness to Wilson, he believes that his doctrines of election and apostasy *can* be reconciled. He argues, however, that there is no burden on the interpreter to reconcile what he perceives the Bible to teach. We are 'just [to] take the Bible at face value.' Logical reconciliation is not necessary for the student of the Bible." (p. 269).

Once again, is not accurate at all. *No* burden on the interpreter to reconcile disparate elements in the text? No. God gave us minds for a reason. I believe we should use them to harmonize various passages of Scripture, whenever possible. *The temptation that comes with this*, and the one I was addressing, was the temptation to do violence to the text for the sake of a "harmonized system." Don't be like the fellow who got the wrong box top on the wrong jig saw puzzle, and who wound up having to put some pieces in with a mallet. It is all consistent in the mind of God, and if we submit to the plain teaching of Scripture, at the end of the day we will have a much fuller (and harmonized) sense of what God has revealed to us. The alternative is to be like the guy who has a sailboat that was supposed to be a lighthouse.

Later he says that I have contributed with a vote of "no confidence" with regard to logic as a means of "assessing and attaining to the truth." (p. 272). This is simply not true. But it is true that I *would* register a vote of no confidence in slipshod reasoning and dogmatic bluster masquerading as tough-minded orthodoxy. But the problem I have with it is that it is unreasonable . . . illogical. One of my complaints against Waters is that he is unwilling to follow certain arguments that proceed by good and necessary consequence. If baptism exhibits and confers a certain grace on those who use the sacrament rightly, it follows, by good and necessary consequence that baptism exhibits and confers a certain grace on those who use the sacrament rightly. I am using a straightforward example here. He who says A must say A.

A second criticism that Waters offers concerns the matter of curses in the new covenant. Water says of my handling of 1 Cor. 10:1-14 that I have a certain interpretive assumption, which is true enough.

"Observe now the interpretive assumption behind Wilson's argument. It is that the national blessings and curses that pertained to Israel under the old covenant now pertain to the church under the new covenant. This speaks a much stronger conception of covenantal continuity than most nontheonomic Reformers interpreters have allowed" (p. 286).

Two problems here. Have *allowed*? Is St. Paul not allowed to say certain things? This leads to the second problem. Where did my interpretive assumption come from? How did I get the idea that the national blessings and curses pertaining to Israel under the old now pertain to the Church under the new? Who comes up with this stuff? Well, maybe it was because of what the apostle Paul expressly *said*. "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (1 Cor. 10:6). I think it is plain enough on the surface, but I have also argued for this position in some detail. Some interaction with the arguments would be nice, and then Waters would not have to resort to saying that I have come up with a stronger covenant continuity than I was allowed to.

A third criticism in this last chapter returns to the question of differentiation in preaching to the covenant people.

"We have also seen Wilson's concern that we not preached in a differentiated manner to the covenant community. We are to preach the promises and the warnings of the covenant and presume that most hypocrites, not tolerating such preaching, will leave the church" (p. 293).

I have a hard time figuring out what Waters means by undifferentiated preaching. If I preach that the covenant tree contains fruitful branches and fruitless branches, and I also preach the promises and warnings that apply to each, what else does he want? Egg in his beer? Is it undifferentiated preaching unless and until (from the pulpit) I nail Smith, three rows back, for being a shoddy tither, intermittent sabbath-breaker, and grumbler, all the result of his unconverted heart? "Yes, *you*, Smith! Don't act surprised, you whitewashed tomb!"

Waters also returns to the question of what happens to the nominal Presbyterian, baptized as an infant, but who lived in a wild and unconverted way until his conversion. When he is converted, Waters describes my position this way:

"It is, we may note, to this man's baptism that Wilson will ultimately attribute the man's conversion, whatever proximate causes and means may have intervened between his baptism and his conversion" (pp. 293-4)

According to Waters, the "doctrine of saving faith" is already being "outshone by baptism" (p. 294). Now the Westminster Confession says that the efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment of its administration. That means, good and necessary consequence again, that the efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment of its administration. *That* means, in its turn, that when a baptized person is converted later in life, he is coming into true evangelical faith. He is becoming a worthy receiver, to use the description of the Standards. That being the case, what happens as a result of his newly-given "right use" of the sacrament later in life? The grace promised in it is not only offered (as it has been throughout his whole unconverted life), it is *now* exhibited and conferred. It can be conferred later in his life because the efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment of its administration. This really is a tight argument, and I would be interested if someone like Waters interacted with it. I am not a doctrinal imperialist. All kinds of wonderful Christians don't subscribe to the Westminster Confession, and that is fine. But I do subscribe to it, and I take my vows seriously. And at this point, like it or not, Waters is out of conformity with the Standards and I am not. This is not a cute debating ploy. I have advanced a serious argument here. There is a difference between believing that the efficacy of baptism is not limited to the time of administration and believing the impotence of baptism is not tied to the moment of its administration.

Waters concludes his book of failed criticism with this hope:

"It is my sincere hope that FV proponents will recognize this discord and return to their first love. Barring that, may the souls of believers be spared, to borrow Samuel Miller's phrase, from the 'poisonous exotic' that the FV offers to the Reformed church" (p. 300).

In order to issue this kind of pastoral warning to the Church, there are a few prerequisites. One of them is that you have to do your homework. You have to know what you are talking about. The plant that Waters is pointing to is not a poisonous exotic at all. It is a tulip, right out of Calvin's garden.

Posted by Douglas Wilson - 8/2/2006 8:58:59 PM

## Making the Necessary Qualifications

**Topic:** Auburn Avenue Stuff

One of the things that became obvious throughout this review of Waters' book on the Federal Vision was the extraordinarily sloppy job done by Waters in representing my views fairly or accurately. Unfortunately, this pattern continues in the footnotes and bibliography.

An astonishing omission in the bibliography is the doctrinal examination I took before my presbytery in order to address these question. That examination can be found [here](#), under the heading of Ecclesiastical Issues.

Another striking example of sloppiness is the following summary of my contribution to the Knox Colloquium on sacramental efficacy. Waters says:

"Wilson charges the modern Reformed church with compromising the 'sacramental theology found in the Westminster Standards,' and proceeds to elaborate precisely what he understands that sacramental theology to mean. In so doing, he advances a doctrine of baptismal efficacy *that neglects needed confessional qualifications*. He thereby transgresses the very Confession that he professes to espouse" (p. 363, emphasis added).

My point here is not to dispute the doctrinal issue itself -- that is forthcoming in response to a footnote from Cal Beisner's Foreword. My point here is simply to illustrate Waters' critical methods. I want to simply quote from the article in question, in order to see if I in fact neglected "needed confessional qualification."

Remember, the issue is not our disagreement over what we believe baptism does. Later for that. The issue is whether I qualify what I believe it does in accordance with the Confession's qualifications. Waters says that I neglected this important task. Read the following, and see if you agree with this assessment.

"Let us grant that the *Catechism* here is *not* maintaining that all those who are baptized with water are automatically and inexorably saved. Let us grant that it is *not* saying that individuals are watertight jugs and that baptism pours an 'effectual call fluid' into each and every one of them. Let us grant that those who are baptized but who remain in unbelief are worse off for having been baptized, not better off. Of course the *Confession* is not teaching baptismal superstition (and, incidentally, neither are we). **The Confession is talking about worthy receivers**, who in the broader context of the *Confession* should be understood as the elect" (*The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros and Cons*, "Sacramental Efficacy in the Westminster Standards," p. 236, italics original, bold added).

"So positively, what *is* the *Confession* saying **about such worthy receivers?**" (p. 236).

"Spiritual blessings work the way they do because of the involvement of God in them. God is always the one who gives the increase -- **not water, not bread, and not wine**. He works through His instruments, but it is His involvement that gives the increase for blessing" (p. 237).

"Those who come to the sacraments **with true evangelical faith in God** are those on whom this blessing of salvation is bestowed" (p. 238).

"In the words of the *Confession*, a sacrament . . . is a holy ordinance that uses sensible signs to represent, seal and *apply* the benefits of the new covenant **to worthy receivers. Who are worthy receivers? The elect**" (p. 240). [Note -- I am aware that an elect individual who is foreordained to be converted next year is not *yet* a worthy receiver. I am telescoping here.]

In my quotation of the Shorter Catechism 91, I italicized the phrase from the answer that says "in them that by faith receive them." (p. 238). I did this in order to jump up and down on it.

"Now faith is **the only instrument** *that occupies this place*. We cannot intrude works, or good looks, or willing, or running *here*. But there are multitudes of *other* instruments, used by God, that occupy *other* places in the process of salvation" (p. 244).

So then, the Standards limit the efficacy of the sacraments (for blessing) to worthy receivers, to those who use the sacraments rightly. Do I agree with this? Did I say so? Why would Waters say that I had not made these qualifications? Beats me. The whole thing is beyond weird.

*Posted by Douglas Wilson - 8/3/2006 8:46:39 PM* | [Link to this post](#) | [Print this post](#) | **9 Responses**

## **Talmudic Layers of Revivalism**

**Topic:** Auburn Avenue Stuff

In the footnotes of Waters' book, Cal Beisner makes this statement. "The Westminster Standards present the sacraments solely as means of *sanctifying* grace, not as means of *converting* grace" (p. 302). In his response to my essay on sacramental efficacy in the Westminster Standards, Rick Phillips makes a similar point.

"In reading Wilson's paper I find that a single issue or question determines the whole, namely, 'What is the nature of the grace conveyed via the sacrament?' Is the grace of the sacraments limited to edifying or sanctificational issues, or do the sacraments regenerate or enter the recipient into a new relationship with God, conveying a grace not previously received through faith alone?" (*Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros and Cons*, p. 245).

I have already argued on behalf of the sacramental teaching of Westminster in several places -- in "*Reformed*" *Is Not Enough* (pp. 103-107) and "Sacramental Efficacy in the Westminster Standards" in *Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros and Cons* (pp. 233-244). My purpose here is not to rehash all of this, multiplying words unnecessarily, but rather to provide a simple summary of the argument. There are

additional questions or qualifications that I would want to make beyond this, but at the heart of *this* issue, I subscribe to what the Westminster divines taught in the following:

1. The grace that we are talking about here is limited to what Westminster calls "worthy receivers," those who have been graciously given (by God) a "right use" of the sacrament. I take this to mean evangelical faith as evidenced in the one being converted at the moment of his or her effectual call. And that evangelical faith is a gift of God, lest any should boast.

2. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are both sacraments, but they signify different aspects of the overall process of salvation. Baptism is about *entry* and the Lord's Supper is about nurture.

3. There is a *sacramental union* between the sign and the thing signified in baptism (WCF 27.2) Baptism in water is therefore *united* in this sacramental way to what it represents.

4. So what does Christian baptism represent? Baptism represents solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; it is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, it represents the baptized individual's ingrafting into Christ, it represents regeneration, it means remission of sins, as well as surrender to God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life. There is therefore a sacramental union between water baptism and all these things. Note that baptism means or represents a number of things on this list which we would normally associate with *conversion*, and not with sanctification -- things like ingrafting into Christ, regeneration, remission of sins, and so on. This is the language of conversion, not surprisingly, because baptism is the sacrament of initiation.

5. The sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified is not tied to the moment of time when it is administered (WCF 28.6). The union is a sacramental union, not a temporal union.

6. If this converting grace promised in baptism (and sacramentally united to it) belongs to someone (one of the elect), then by a right use of the sacrament (remember what right use means), then the promised grace is, by the power of the Holy Spirit, not only offered to this individual, but exhibited to him, and *conferred* upon him (WCF 28.6). What is conferred? Remission of sins, regeneration, ingrafting into Christ, etc.

7. This baptismal grace is not limited to those who are "of age," but can also belong to infants. This means that the Holy Spirit can offer, exhibit, and confer this baptismal grace upon infants. Notice what this does to Rick Phillip's alternative, where baptism only conveys a grace *previously* received through faith alone. If someone restricts faith only to those who can knowingly give their assent to propositions, then they are out of conformity with the Standards. If baptismal grace is possible for infants (who die in infancy, say), and evangelical faith is the only way to have a "right use" of the sacrament to receive this blessing, then the Confession teaches that infants can have evangelical faith. Right? Great -- glad that's settled.

Such is the teaching of the Confession. I subscribe to it *and* agree with it. Guy Waters does not. Cal Beisner does not. If the Confession gives a detailed description

of a sacramental union between water baptism and converting graces (which it plainly and unambiguously does), then what do you call it when guardians of the Confession just wave their hands over it, and pronounce (*ex cathedra*) that it doesn't mean what it says? When this kind of inversion happens, then only one thing can follow it -- accusations must be brought against those who still hold to the original meaning of the Confession at this point. And that is what is happening. The rabbis are cracking down lest the original sacramental Calvinism of the Confession break free from the talmudic layers of revivalism that have been imposed upon it.

It is like the Second Amendment to the Constitution. If you maintain, with a straight face, that the right to keep and bear arms means that you don't have the right to keep and bear arms (as many solons and political chin-scratchers do), then what is to be done with those raving lunatics in Idaho who think that they somehow have the right to keep and bear arms? When you twist the original intent of words like this, then only one thing can be done with those who remain faithful to the original intent of those words. *Attack them as innovators*, which is exactly what Beisner and Waters have done in this book.

Incidentally, just for the record, I don't put Phillips in the same category. He shares the same paradigm with the other anti-FV'ers, but has in a number of instances shown a fair-minded willingness to hear his opponents out in a judicious and non-political way. I differ with him as much as I ever did, but it is (as far as I can tell) a straight-up doctrinal difference. I can't say the same thing about some of the high-octane weirdness elsewhere. And I hope this doesn't get Rick into trouble with any of his friends, but there it is.

*Posted by Douglas Wilson - 8/4/2006 8:45:38 PM | [Link to this post](#) | [Print this post](#) | 6 Responses*

## **Last Post on Waters**

**Topic:** Auburn Avenue Stuff

Okay, one last comment, and I am done reviewing Waters' book. In the bibliography, Waters says this about my lecture on heretics and the covenant at the 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastors' Conference.

"Wilson calls for a 'covenantal approach to heresy,' one that recognizes the 'objective . . . covenantal obligations' of the heretic, who, if 'lawfully baptized,' must be 'received[d] . . . as a fellow Christian.' Such an individual must then be treated as a covenant breaker. This lecture well illustrates the overwhelmingly external cast of Wilson's ecclesiology" (p. 361).

I won't take long with this. Jesus teaches us that it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. The good man brings forth good things, and the evil man brings forth evil things. We must deal with it when it gets to the outside because we are not competent to address it at the root. I cannot convict someone of *incipient* heart-heresy -- that is the way to ecclesiastical tyrannies. Only God can deal with the heart directly. I am called to deal with the person in accordance with what I can deal with -- and that means what Waters calls the "externals." But there is a difference between my practice, which of necessity deals with externals, and my ecclesiology, which does not. My ecclesiology takes full account of the heart -- the

fact that covenant members have them, the fact that they must be transformed by the Holy Spirit, and the need for the Church to deal with external corruptions that follow when hearts are corrupt.

So it is false to say that my ecclesiology is external. If there is anyone who has gone out of his way to emphasize the absolute necessity of heart regeneration, true conversion to God, the needed for true closure with Christ, I would be that guy. In addition, I have emphasized that while the hidden things of the heart (as such) are out of our reach, the Bible teaches that the works of the flesh are *manifest*. You identify the tree by the *fruit*. And when you see the heretical manifestation of fruit that unregenerate hearts always bring forth -- you deal with it.

Although Waters' clear departures from Westminster sacramentalism are not (in my view) heresy, this whole thing does provide us with a good example of this principle. I do not have any idea of Guy Waters' motivations. I have no way of ascertaining what his heart's intent was in writing this book. All I have to go on is the external product -- the slipshod book he actually wrote. This does not mean that I think that there is nothing more to Guy Waters than the book he wrote. This does not mean that I have an "externalist" view of Waters. I just have an externalist view of what I am competent to deal with. I can answer the book he wrote; I cannot answer for why he wrote it.

To summarize this series of posts, I would conclude by urging the anti-FV forces to reconsider their choice of a champion. Guy Waters is clearly more than capable of reading mountains of material. He can assemble evidence in print that he has read it by using the usual scholarly apparatus. As I have shown repeatedly in this series of posts, what he cannot do is represent that material fairly, or refute it with theological integrity.

*Posted by Douglas*