



Covenant Children

As a young child, I loved hearing my grandmother tell stories about her Scottish grandparents and the early days of their “new life” as settlers in Christchurch, New Zealand. Through these stories I developed an interest in genealogy and was fascinated to learn that I came from a long line of “Presbyterians” on several sides of the family.

I have actually seen baptismal records for many of my forbears and have family photos of several of them on the wall above the piano in our living room. When I look at these photos I smile and sometimes chuckle as I recall the stories that my grandmother told. I wonder how many of these people were true believers and if they prayed for future generations, of whom I am one, to know Christ. More importantly, these photos remind me that God places us in families and works through families in His redemptive plan. One of His purposes for marriage is the raising of godly offspring (Malachi 2:15) who will in turn establish new households for His glory. In that way — along with the preaching of the gospel to those who do not believe — He gathers His people from generation to generation.

What is a covenant?

The Scriptures clearly reveal that as believers, we raise our children in the context of a covenant that God has made with all who love Him and follow in His ways. At heart that covenant is a promise to be our God and to take us as His people, to deliver us from sin and bondage, and to have us live in His presence. But it is also a covenant that has a generational aspect (Genesis 17:7). God promises not simply to be our God but the God of our children in their generations (Acts 2:37-39). *“The children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you”* (Psalm 102:28).

The Scriptures teach us to view our children as a gift from God (Psalm 127:3) and command us to instruct them in His ways. (Proverbs 22:6). They also teach that the promises, privileges and obligations of the covenant are to be passed from generation to generation.

“I will utter hidden things, things from of old — what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.”

Psalm 78:2-6

How do we respond to God’s promises?

Firstly, we acknowledge that our children belong to Him. He is not only their Creator but He desires that they are set apart to belong to His covenant people. In view of that, and in obedience to His command, we bring our children before Him in baptism. We do so recognizing that baptism, like circumcision, is essentially a spiritual sign and seal that marks us out as God’s people. It also *“signifies the need for, and God’s gracious provision of, a renewed and cleansed heart. It points to the necessity of spiritual regeneration. Baptism unites believers and their children with God’s promised Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and secures their position as his people. Baptism must also be responded to by faith before covenant blessings may be appropriated. Failure to faithfully respond*

to one's baptism brings covenant curses rather than blessings."¹ Our children belong to Him, we are but stewards.

The sign of baptism is also a reminder to us that as parents we are called to raise our children as God has directed. We are to shepherd their hearts, teaching by word and example that they are called to love and serve God in holiness of heart and life. Raising children in the *"nurture and admonition of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4) means training them in all aspects of life — spiritually, morally, socially, emotionally and physically — according to His Word.

It also means we must teach them that being outwardly good and obedient falls short of what it means to live in covenant with God. Like us, our children need to understand their sinfulness and their need of the gospel every day. We are always to point them to Christ, and urge them to repent of their sin and to follow Christ as their only hope for salvation.

As we prayerfully depend on the Lord to bless our imperfect parenting, we also recognize that it is only God who can regenerate the hearts of our children and give them saving faith. As parents we need to avoid two extremes with regard to the covenant status and baptism of our children. We are not to presume upon the grace of God and view baptism as an insurance policy that guarantees their salvation; but neither are we to go to the opposite extreme and fail to recognize the importance of the covenantal relationship of children with God. The Gospels make clear that Jesus loves little children and welcomes them into his Kingdom (Luke 18:16-17).

The fact that God gives wonderful promises regarding our children, doesn't mean that that parenting will be all plain sailing. Nor does it mean that our children will never go through difficulties or even times of turning away and rebellion. The Scriptures are very realistic about the struggle that parents and children have with the sinfulness of their own hearts and we need to be realistic as well.

Where does our hope lie?

"As parents we begin with trust in God's promises. All through our lives our primary hope is in His love for our children and His work in their hearts as He draws them to Himself, prays that their faith will fail not (even when they deny Him) and welcomes them back when they wander away. As finite people created for humble dependence on our heavenly Father, and as sinners who are in desperate need of the Lord's help, we need to commit ourselves to pray for our children as the most important work that we can do".²

We also look to the help and support of the community of people who serve God. The New Testament describes the church as the family and household of God. Both parents and children need the support, help and encouragement of others in living in faithful obedience to Christ. Children need believing friends as they think through what it means to live for Christ and they need older Christians who can encourage them in their faith and help provide answers to their doubts and questions. The church is also the place where they learn to serve others and how to reach out in love to those who do not yet know Christ.

As we point our children to Christ as the only hope for their salvation, call them to heartfelt love and obedience to God, and instruct them in His Word, let us pray that God would be pleased to bring them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and make them a blessing as they serve others. As we struggle with our own sinfulness and times of discouragement and weariness, let us remind ourselves to rest in the promises of God with their assurance that it is His delight to raise up a godly seed who tells of His marvellous deeds from one generation to another.

"The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments".

Psalm 103:17-18

Anne Camp

©2018

www.christianstudylibrary.org

Endnotes:

¹ Booth, Robert R. (1995) *Children of the Promise* p.107 P&R

² Barrs, Jerram *Perfect Parenting: Dream on, Parents!* www.covenantseminary.edu/resource