

February 14th, 2021

# Children of the Covenant

1 Corinthians 7:14

## Expositional preaching

If you are joining us for the first time this morning, we are going through the book of 1 Corinthians chapter by chapter, verse by verse. We believe that expository preaching is the best method of going through the Scripture. Thus far in chapter seven we have seen Paul speak about marriage and singleness. Now he turns toward children. Specifically the relationship between parents and their children.

## The atmosphere of Paul's letter is covenantal

The atmosphere of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is *covenantal*. Though the word "covenant" only appears once in this letter, in **1 Corinthians 11:25**, when Paul repeats the Lord Jesus Christ "This cup is the new *covenant* in my blood," every argument that Paul makes is a covenantal argument. Consider just three places.

**First**, please look at **5:13**. Paul tells the congregation to "Purge the evil person from among you"<sup>1</sup>—meaning, excommunicate the incestuous man. But what was Paul's justification? Notice this verse has quotations around it. Paul is quoting from OT, specifically Deuteronomy where Moses told Israel to expel those people who breached the *covenant*.<sup>2</sup> Paul's vice list in **5:9-11** matches Moses's vice list in Deuteronomy. Paul excluded this man—just like Moses commanded Israel to do the same—because he breached the *covenant*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> cf Deuteronomy 17:7

<sup>2</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 5:11 with Deuteronomy 22:21-22, 30; 13:1-5; 17:2-7; 19:16-19; 21:18-21; 24:7

<sup>3</sup> "If God's people in Israel expelled certain sinners, then God's people in Christ should do no less." *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, Ed. G. K. Beale & D. A. Carson, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2007), pg. 710

**Second**, look at **10:1**. Consider how Paul talks about the relationship between Ancient Israel and the Gentile Christians in Corinth. He says “For I want you to know, brothers, that *our fathers* were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea.” He’s talking about the Exodus. Ask yourself: why did Paul call Israel “*our fathers*?” Because he wants “...Gentile [Christians]...to think of the Israelites...as [our] adopted “fathers’ through [our] inclusion in the *covenant*...”<sup>4</sup>

**Thirdly**, look at **15:22** “For as *in Adam* all die, so also *in Christ* shall all be made alive.” What is Paul saying? “The sin of Adam resulted in death for human beings, while the resurrection of Christ secured life for his people. Adam and Christ are therefore representative men.”<sup>5</sup> That is to say “Adam and Jesus are the representative heads of two distinct *covenants*.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Covenant Theology is the story of the Bible**

Every time Paul quotes from the OT, every time he makes an ethical argument, or appeals to some grand principle, he is rooting his argument in *covenant*. Why? Because “...covenant theology is the Bible’s story from the first page to the last.”<sup>7</sup> And this is not *merely* a Presbyterian argument. The great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon once said: “The doctrine of divine covenant

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 723

<sup>5</sup> *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological and Historical Perspectives*, Ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, & John R. Muether, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2020), pg. 228

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 229

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 595

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 “It is by no means an exaggeration to say that God’s covenant is the key to the interpretation of the whole of God’s Word. It is a truth written large on every page of Holy Writ. It is a truth in the light of which the whole of the Scriptures must be interpreted. It is the central teaching of all that God has said in His infallible Word.” Herman Hanko, *God’s Everlasting Covenant of Grace*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2006), pg. 229

lies at the root of all true theology.”<sup>8</sup> Covenant is the explanation for everything that happens in Scripture.

Why did sin come into the world? Because Adam broke covenant. **Hosea 6:7** “But like Adam they transgressed the *covenant*.”

How can men be saved? **Hebrews 13:20** Because “...the God of peace... brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus...by the blood of the eternal *covenant*.”

Why are unbelievers in such a miserable state? Because, **Ephesians 2:12** they are “...separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the *covenants* of promise.”

How can we know that a true Christian can never be lost? **Jeremiah 32:40** “I will make with them an everlasting *covenant*, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.”<sup>9</sup>

Covenant. If Jesus Christ is the beating heart of Scripture that gives oxygen and nutrients to all it’s parts, then covenant is the skeleton system that holds everything together.

### Children of the Covenant

Here’s the question this morning: where do our children—the children of believers—fit into all this talk of covenant? Paul argues in our passage that the children of believers are *holy*. What does that mean? Are the children of believers holy in *the same sense* that the children of Jewish parents in the OT

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<sup>8</sup> Covenant Theology, pg 25

<sup>9</sup> What did Jesus leave the Church as a continual token of His love while we await His return? A covenant sign. **1 Corinthians 11:25** “This cup is the new *covenant* in my blood.”

were holy? Meaning, do our children also belong to the covenant? If not, what has changed that would now exclude children?

### **Beware of your own prejudices**

Before we begin, I would plead with you to allow yourself to be away of your own prejudices. Every one of us has particular prejudices, particular beliefs that are often a product of our time, or how we were raised, or what doctrines we have been exposed to and which ones we have not. Don't you realize that if you lived as a Christian in a different era you would have different prejudices? Had you lived in the 16th century, you prejudice would be more towards a Presbyterian view. In our day, the prejudice is more towards a Baptist view. Paul tells us in us **1 Thessalonians 5:21** "...test everything; hold fast to what is good." That means that you should test what I'm saying against Scripture but that you should also test your prejudices and your pre-conceived notions against Scripture. Just cause you were raised a certain way to believe certain things, doesn't mean they are true. The Reformed principle of interpretation is that we must compare Scripture to Scripture. We must interpret the more difficult verses by those verses that are more clear.

### *The Big Idea...*

From the beginning the Lord has covenanted with His visible people (the Church in the Old and New Testaments) and their children

- ☆ What Is Covenant Theology?
- ☆ Does the Covenant of Grace Include Children?
- ☆ What Does This Mean For the Church Today?

## I. What Is Covenant Theology?

### What is covenant?

When Paul calls the children of believers “holy” in **v.14**, he is making a covenantal argument. So we must begin by asking: what is a covenant? “A covenant is a commitment that establishes a relationship between two or more persons.”<sup>10</sup> That’s why marriage is called a covenant, because it establishes a relationship between husband and wife. There are three primary covenants in which God has sought to establish a relationship with mankind: **1) The Covenant of Works; 2) The Covenant of Redemption and 3) The Covenant of Grace.**

### 1. The Covenant of Works

Please turn with me to **Genesis 2:15-17**. We admit that the word *covenant* is not in this passage, but the prophet Hosea in **Hosea 6:7**. Furthermore it is called a Covenant of *Works* because it clearly operates on the “do this and live” principle.<sup>11</sup> Look at **v.15** “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Theologians recognize this as a covenant because it has all the ingredients of a covenant. **First**, it established commands: **v.16** “...the LORD God *commanded* the man.” **Second**, it guaranteed blessings: halfway through **v. 16** “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden.” **Third**, it threatened curses. **v.17** “...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” God blessed Adam with lordship (lower-case l) over everything on the earth for his enjoyment and use. But God was still the Lord (capital L). That tree represented His Lordship over Adam.

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<sup>10</sup> *Covenant Theology*, pg. 589

<sup>11</sup> Romans 10:5 “For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.”

To eat of it was to reject not only relationship with God but it was to reject His Lordship. **Fourth**, it made promises. The implied promise is that if Adam passed this probationary test, if he kept the covenant, then he would be rewarded with eternal life with God Himself. That is the most delightful thing about covenant. Adam and Eve would have been given three inexpressible gifts: they would have been God's covenant *people*, dwelling in *paradise*, forever in His *presence*. That's what covenant secures: that we would be God's people, in paradise, in His presence forever.

Now Adam didn't represent himself only. In places like Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 we see that Adam represented the whole human race. He was called a federal head. "This is sometimes called federal theology or federalism, *foedus* being the Latin word for "covenant."<sup>12</sup> Our government is called a federal government, because our politicians represent us. Adam represented the whole human race. Therefore when he sinned, he plunged the entire human race into the curse that God threatened—death. "Adam is a covenant breaker—and all of us with him."<sup>13</sup> All mankind lost the right to be called God's *people*, got kicked out of *paradise*, and was banished from His *presence*. How could mankind be restored? Could there be another covenant, another Federal Head to represent us? That brings us to our second covenant.

## 2. The Covenant of Redemption

The fall of Adam was *always* God's plan, because the Lord desired to magnify His grace in a second Adam—the Lord Jesus Christ—in what's called the Covenant of Redemption. The Covenant of Redemption is an agreement between the Divine Persons of the Trinity to redeem a people to themselves. As Louis Berkhof says, it is an "agreement between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father had given him."<sup>14</sup> Now this covenant

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<sup>12</sup> Covenant Theology, pg. 590

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 591

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 592

took place before the foundations of the world. Please turn with me to **Ephesians 1:3-4**. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” Notice two things here. This choosing was *before the foundation of the world*. Meaning, between the members of the Trinity, a decision, an agreement, a covenant was made to determine redeem a people. No one else was there. Just the three Divine Persons. Secondly, notice that God is securing those three things that Adam would lose. We will gain *paradise*—end of **v.3** “[He] has blessed us in Christ...*in the heavenly places*. We will be His covenant people—**v.4** “...even as *he chose us* in him.” And we will be in His *presence* forever—end of **v.4** “...that we should be holy and blameless *before Him*.”<sup>15</sup> Now this happened in eternity. Adam wasn’t aware of this covenant when he sinned. How was God going to make known? That brings us to our last covenant.

### 3. The Covenant of Grace

The most inexpressible thing happened when the Lord confronted Adam and Eve about their sin: He didn’t destroy them. He spared them. Yes He banished them from the garden and cursed the ground and childbirth and relationships and labor. But He made a promise that He would send a Man—a seed of the woman—who would crush the seed of the serpent (**Genesis 3:15**). He would succeed where the first Adam failed. And He would be our representative in this covenant. Meaning, everything He accomplished would be accomplished for us, in our stead.

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<sup>15</sup> Some have pushed back on the idea of a Covenant of Redemption because there isn’t a place where we can read of explicit agreement between Father, Son and Spirit to redeem a people. But that’s not true. Consider just a couple places that reveal this eternal covenant. Jesus said in **John 6:36** “For I have come down from heaven...” Why Jesus, why did you come down? He answers: to do “...*the will of him who sent me*.” The Father’s desire was to send the Son and the Son *agreed* to come. What did He come for? Listen to Jesus’ prayer in **John 17:6** “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me.” Jesus came to receive a people that the Father was giving Him. That was decided in eternity. How is that not a covenant? Jesus told the Pharisees that his very actions demonstrated that the Father sent Him to accomplish this work. **John 5:36** “... the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me *that the Father has sent me*.”

Now the way that the Covenant of Grace unfolds in Scripture is progressively. Imagine history as a dark room—dark to the blackness of sin. But God through his Covenant of Grace light a candle of promise and it brings light and hope. That's **Genesis 3:15**—the promise of a Savior. Now each successive covenant that God makes, He lights another candle bringing more light into the room. None of these covenants that God makes in the OT are competing covenants, rather they are all part of the one Covenant of Grace working towards one end. So let's quickly walk through them.<sup>16</sup>

When God gave His covenant to Noah (**Genesis 9**), He promised that He would preserve and sustain the earth so that the Redeemer could come.

When God gave His covenant to Abraham (**Genesis 15 & 17**), He promised to would create a nation for the Redeemer to come through.

When God gave His covenant to Moses (**Exodus 19-20ff**), He established that very nation, gave them His good laws so that they would know how to live for the Redeemer.

When God gave His covenant to David (**2 Samuel 7**), He established the very family line that the Redeemer would come through and promised He would forever sit on the throne.

Finally, when God gave the New Covenant (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**) the Redeemer Jesus Christ appears and fulfills every previous promise.

These are not competing covenants. Every one of these covenants is a different unfolding of the one Covenant of Grace. For a wonderful unpacking of this covenant, read the **WCF 7**, it is six brief paragraphs complete with Scriptural

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<sup>16</sup> cf. Gerald R. Procee, *Holy Baptism: The Scriptural Setting, Significance and Scope of Infant Baptism*, (Ontario, Canada, : The Free Reformed Church of Hamilton, 1998), pg. 104. Also see *Covenant Theology*, pg. 592



footnotes so you can search these things out for yourself. That's our **first point**. God established the Covenant of Grace so that He could gain a people, bring them to paradise, and reward them with His presence forever.

## II. Does the Covenant of Grace Include Children?

### Paul's backward argument

Or we could ask, who exactly are the covenant people of God? Who does God consider to be His covenant people? Let's turn back to **1 Corinthians 7**. My argument is that Paul believes that the children of believers belonged to God's covenant people. Remember that last week, Paul was discussing the issue of mixed marriages—those which had a believing spouse and an unbelieving spouse. Recall that some of the believers were concerned that they would become unclean if they remained married to their unbelieving spouses. Paul tells them to remain married, “For” **7:14** “...the unbelieving husband is *made holy* because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is *made holy* because of her husband.” In other words, the unbelieving spouse has come under the powerful influence of the gospel, they have been *set-apart*—“made holy”—because they are married to a believer. So the believing spouse doesn't need to worry about becoming unclean. That's where I left it last week.

But look at the rest of Paul's argument in **v.14**, he says: “Otherwise your children would be unclean, *but as it is*, they are holy.”<sup>17</sup> Notice Paul uses an adversative phrase: he says “...*but* as it is.” Meaning “...*but* the reality is...” We could paraphrase: ‘if your marriage were unclean, then your children would be unclean, *but the reality is* your children are holy, therefore your marriage is holy.’ Paul is arguing backwards *from* the child *to* the unbelieving spouse. In other

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<sup>17</sup> *Otherwise*, meaning—‘if the circumstances were different’—‘if your marriage were [unclean], then [your] children...would be impure; *but* they are holy; [therefore] the marriage also is holy.’ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 242

words, ‘Because your children *are in reality already holy*, then you can know that your marriage is holy.’<sup>18</sup> Listen to how J.B. Phillips paraphrases v.14:

“For the unbelieving husband is, in a sense, consecrated by being joined to the person of his wife; the unbelieving wife is similarly “consecrated” by the Christian brother she has married. If this were not so then your children would bear the stains of paganism, *whereas they are actually consecrated to God.*”

Our children are consecrated—set apart to God—from the other children in this world by covenant. When Paul says the unbelieving spouse is *made holy*, he meant they are under the **influence** of the covenant. But when Paul says our children *are holy*, he means they are **included** in the covenant.<sup>19</sup> Is that so strange, given that Paul is arguing covenantally throughout this letter? Is that so strange, given the Covenant of Grace has always included God’s people and *their children*?

### **The Covenant of Grace has always included children<sup>20</sup>**

When God gave the covenant to Noah, He included Noah’s children. **Genesis 9:8-9** “Then God said to Noah *and to his sons* with him, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you *and your offspring after you.*”

When God gave the covenant to Abraham, He included Abraham’s children. **Genesis 17:7** “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and *your*

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<sup>18</sup> It seems that Paul *assumes* the Corinthians *already* know that the children of believers have a special status.

<sup>19</sup> Paul is using the word holy in two different ways in this verse. I do believe this is reflected in the Greek. He says that the unbelieving spouse is “made holy” (a verb)—that is they are influenced; whereas the child is simply called “holy” (an adjective modifying a noun)—that is they have a particular status.

<sup>20</sup> When God gave the Covenant of Works to Adam, he included all of Adam’s posterity—Romans 5:12-21

*offspring* after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and *to your offspring after you.*”

When God gave the covenant to Moses, he included all the children of Israel. **Deuteronomy 29:10-12** “You are standing today, all of you, before the Lord your God...all the men of Israel, *your little ones*, your wives...so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the Lord your God, which the Lord your God is making with you today”

When God gave the covenant to David, he included all David’s children. **Psalms 89:3-4** “I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: ‘I will establish *your offspring forever*, and build your throne for all generations.’”

Is it any surprise that when Peter preached at Pentecost unfolding the New Covenant, that he also clearly included our children? **Acts 2:39** “For the promise is for you *and for your children* and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”<sup>21</sup> Francis Schaeffer said on this verse:

“If Peter did not mean what the Jews understood him to mean in the Old Testament context, namely, that God establishes His covenant not just with believers but with our children also, there would have been a riot on that day. Or, if it had been a polite crowd there would at least have been hands going up saying, “Excuse me, Peter; what do you mean by that? Could you please clarify yourself?” It was such a serious thing for the Jew to be told that God is changing a fundamental way in which He deals with his people.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> What remarkable symmetry! When God gave the covenant to Abraham—the father of the OT Church—what did He tell him? ‘My covenant is with you, your offspring, and those nations beyond you.’ (Genesis 17:4, 7) Peter at the beginning of the NT Church repeated those same three things to those who heard his word: “...the promise is for you *and for your children* and for all who are far off.”

<sup>22</sup> Joel Beeke, *Parenting By God’s Promises: How To Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust, 2011), pg. 44

Prior to Peter's sermon, there was a 2,000 year history of children being included in the covenant. There is a total silence in the NT as to any change that would exclude them. Don't you think if God was going to begin to exclude them from the covenant that He would make it abundantly clear? But the opposite is true, the words that Peter speaks are unmistakable: "...the promise is for you *and for your children.*"

### **The representative principle**

Why do our children belong to the covenant? Three answers. 1) Because God is a gracious God. Who should our children belong to? The world? No the Lord is not so cruel as to make no distinction between the children of His people and the children of the world. 2) Because as NT believers we are still part of the Abrahamic covenant *which included children*. **Galatians 3:29** "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." 3) Our children belong to the covenant because of the same representative principle that we saw with Adam and Jesus. Just as Adam represented all his posterity in the Covenant of Works, and Jesus represented His in the Covenant of Grace, so parents represent their children in the covenant. That's precisely why Paul calls the children of believers "holy." As Charles Hodge says

the word *holy* does not "...express any subjective or inward change. [In the OT] a lamb consecrated as a sacrifice, and therefore *holy*, did not differ in its nature from any other lamb. The priests or people, [were] *holy* in the sense of [being] set apart to the service of God, [but] were in their inward state the same as other men...The children of believers are *holy* in the same sense in which the Jews were *holy*. They are included in the Church, and have a right to be so regarded...**so long as [they] are represented by [their] parents;** that is, until they arrive at the period of life when [they] are entitled and

bound to act for [themselves]. **Then** [their] relationship to the [covenant] depends upon [their] own act.”<sup>23</sup>

### **The internal/external aspects of the covenant**

What Hodge is getting at here, is what there is an internal and external aspect of the covenant. Is that strange idea to you? It’s all over Scripture. **Romans 2:25-29** speaks of Jews who have an external circumcision of the flesh, but were not really circumcised in the heart. **Romans 9:6-8** says that not all the children of Israel (externally) are true Israel (internally). “There has always been (and still are) two ways of existing in the one covenant of grace.”<sup>24</sup> Please turn with me to **Romans 11**. This was the text more than any other that helped me see the internal/external aspect of God’s covenant. Paul is wrestling with the thought of God rejecting His people. Look at v.1 “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!” He then goes on to explain in v.2-6 that God has people that belong to His internal covenant—His elect and that He hasn’t rejected those people, however those belong to His external covenant only, who haven’t been inwardly regenerated, He has rejected. Now fast forward to the end v.16. “...if the root is holy, so are the branches.” So at first this seems confusing, but Paul is actually illustrating the representative principle that we’ve been talking about. The root and the branches are people. Who are the branches? The context is clear, the branches are the Jewish people. Who is the root? Ask yourself: who is the root of the Jewish nation? Abraham. That’s why in v.1 Paul traces his genealogy back to Abraham “For I myself am an Israelite, *a descendant of Abraham.*” So look at the end of v.16 again: “...if the root (Abraham) is holy, so are the branches (the Jewish people).” That’s the representative principle we’ve been looking at. Abraham’s offspring are holy—set apart for God—in the covenant. But look what happens in v.17. “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 115-117

<sup>24</sup> Covenant Theology, pg. 597

(meaning a Gentile convert), were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree.” Stop. Here’s the question: what were they broken off *from*?

### What were they broken off from?<sup>25</sup>

If we deny that the covenant has an internal and external aspect then we must say that people can lose their salvation. If there is only aspect of the covenant—namely the *internal saving aspect*, then those broken off are saved people. But theologically this is absurd. How can born again person, become unborn again? An elect person become un-elect? Paul makes sure we won’t make this conclusion. He says in v.2 says “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” No what Paul means, is that those Jews were broken off from the *external aspect* of the covenant. And he shows that this internal/external aspect of the covenant applies down to this day. Look at v.20 “They were broken off because of their unbelief, *but you* stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches [because of their unbelief], neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.” Who does God threaten to cut off from the covenant? Those who do not believe.

How does this connect to our children? Yes our children belong to the covenant *externally*—if the root is holy, so are the branches—but that doesn’t mean they belong to the covenant *internally*. They must believe the gospel, and

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<sup>25</sup> The dangers of getting this wrong

If we deny these two aspects of the covenant, two negative possibilities follow. **Possibility #1:** We will adopt a form of Roman Catholic theology and presume our children are saved simply because they are in the covenant. This is so dangerous because children will not be taught that they need to be born again—they simply belong to God’s eternal family from the beginning. Furthermore, for any child who leaves the faith, it teaches that salvation can be lost. **Possibility #2:** We deny that our children have any part in the covenant at all. They are just like the children of the world, even though Paul calls them “holy.” They have zero benefits in the covenant, even though “...the earliest churches of the New Testament included the children of believing parents in the fellowship of their assemblies (**Ephesians 6:1-4**)” just like how the OT Church included their children. For a very helpful diagram and unpacking of this, cf. Beeke, pg.

own Jesus Christ for themselves. As Kevin DeYoung put it: “We belong to the covenant community *externally by family* but belong *internally by faith*.”<sup>26</sup>

So that’s our **second point**: Yes our children belong to the covenant.<sup>27</sup> In both the OT and NT, God has always included the children of believers in His Church.

### III. What Does This Mean For the Church Today?

#### The Church’s responsibility

We are going to answer that in two ways. Next week, God willing we are going to see the parent’s responsibility. This week we see the Church’s responsibility. What is the the Church’s responsibility for covenant children? Baptize and receive them into the covenant community. This is the view known as *paedo baptism* - (paedo the Greek word for infant or child) which states that believers *and their children should be baptized*. Here’s the logic: if our children belong to the Church, then it follows that they (like the children under the OT) ought to receive the sign and seal of belonging to the covenant. As John Calvin asks: “If the Lord admits them into the Church by His word, why would we refuse them the sign?”<sup>28</sup> Or as Charles Hodge puts it: “The Jewish child was circumcised because he was a Jew, and not to make him one...So Christian children are not made holy by baptism, but they are baptized because they are holy.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Covenant Theology, pg. 598

<sup>27</sup> Our children cannot be excluded unless there is a different Covenant of Grace in the the New Testament. The **WCF** says in **7.6** “There are not...two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations [administrations].”

<sup>28</sup> Calvin, pg. 245

<sup>29</sup> Hodge, pg. 117-118

## Circumcision = Baptism

Hodge was right to connect circumcision and baptism, because Scripture connects them. Consider **first** of all that circumcision and baptism publicly mark and define the membership of the God's people. In the OT the admission sacrament or ordinance into Israel was circumcision. In the NT Church, it is baptism. **Secondly**, they both teach the same spiritual truths. They both dramatize the death of Christ *and* the renewal of the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup> **Thirdly**, Baptism has now replaced circumcision. The bloody sign has been replaced with a bloodless sign because Jesus was the final sacrifice. No more blood is needed.

## Answering objections<sup>31</sup>

Now because the prejudice of our day is against this view of covenant children and the baptizing of them, many of our credo baptist brothers will object. A *credo baptist* believes that only professing believers ought to be baptized and admitted into the church. So they may say: "But the only people we see in the NT, especially in the book of Acts, are those who first repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no record of infant baptism." How do we answer this? Well we admit that those outside of the covenant must repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ before baptism. The Larger Catechism asks in: **Q. 166.** Who should be baptized? **A.** Those who are *not* members of the visible church and *so are not included in the covenant of promise should not be baptized* until they profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him.

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<sup>30</sup> That's why Paul places them side by side in **Colossians 2:11-12** "In him also you were *circumcised* with a *circumcision* made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the *circumcision* of Christ, having been buried with him in *baptism*, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."

<sup>31</sup> There are more objections I would to handle in the future. **1)** The presupposition that Dispensationalists have, namely that nothing should be carried over in the next 'dispensation' unless decreed by God (Procee, 101). **2)** The presupposition that Reformed Baptists have, namely because the Covenant of Grace is fully revealed in Christ, then the final form of the covenant community is established which excludes children (Procee, pg. 105). These first two objections deal with the continuity/discontinuity between the OT and the NT (cf WCF 7.5-6). **3)** The view that the New Covenant is wrongly contrasted against the Abrahamic Covenant versus the national covenant under Moses in Jeremiah 31:31-24 (Covenant Theology, pg. 595-596)



**However**, the infants of one or both parents who do profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him *are by that relationship included in the covenant and should be baptized*. In other words, those people who were baptized in the book of Acts were outside of the covenant. All of them. Pointing to them and saying “Look they repented first” is not an argument against our position.

On the contrary there are two difficulties that our baptist brothers have in the book of Acts. The first is all the household baptisms. Cornelius’ whole household was baptized in **Acts 10:24-48**; as well as Lydia’s (**16:15**); the Philippian jailor’s (**16:33**); and the household of Stephanas’ (**1 Corinthians 1:16**). Do you see? These whole family were welcomed into the covenant at the same time. The baptism of their children was a foregone conclusion because they understood Peter’s words “The promise is for you *and for your children* (**Acts 2:39**)” or Paul’s words “Your children are holy” (**1 Cor. 7:14**).<sup>32</sup> The second difficulty is that there is not a single instance among all the baptisms recorded in Scripture in which we find a person, who had grown up in a Christian home, who wasn’t baptized as a child, who then later received baptism as an adult. “We have many examples of adult baptism in Scripture, but none of adults who for years had been Christians before they received [baptism].”<sup>33</sup>

Someone else may object: “If we baptize children because they are holy, shouldn’t we baptize the unbelieving spouse who Paul also calls holy?” No. The unbelieving adult spouse is bound to act for themselves, and are therefore not part of the covenant precisely because they don’t believe. The child is

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<sup>32</sup> What is the likelihood that there were children, and even small children in these households? What must our baptist brothers assume? That everyone in these households believed the gospel at the same time. That’s possible. But is that the normative way the families operate today, that a whole family believes the gospel on the same day? What must we assume? That when a parent believed, they represented their children, just like the 2,000 years of church history before them.

<sup>33</sup> James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2016), pg. 603

represented by his believing parent and is part of the covenant until that time when he/she can act for themselves.<sup>34</sup>

Someone may object against infant baptism on the grounds that the Covenant of Grace in the NT is built on better promises (**Hebrews 8:6-7**)<sup>35</sup> than it was in the OT. The OT Church was impure and corrupted, but the NT is more pure and therefore children are excluded. How do we answer? Yes the expression of the covenant is better and superior in the NT. Whereas in the OT very few Gentiles were converted, in the NT the “dividing wall of hostility” (**Ephesians 2:14**) was broken down by Christ so now millions of Gentiles have flooded into the Church. Whereas in the OT only males received the sign of the covenant, that sexual distinction has given way and now males and females receive the sign — “...there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (**Galatians 3:28**). Whereas in the OT the ministry of the Holy Spirit was very limited, in the NT He is poured out on all flesh (**Acts 2:17**). Truly the Covenant of Grace is better and more expansive since Christ has come. But don't you see? It would be a diminishing of the covenant if our children were now excluded. As Derek Thomas said, if our children are now

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<sup>34</sup> It seems that there is a small equivocation with the word holy ("made holy" as a verb and "are holy" as an adjective). In the former case, the being "made holy" doesn't make one part of the Visible Church; while in the latter, being holy ("they *are* holy") does. In other words, the unbelieving spouse is 'holy' in the same sense as the child. The Larger Catechism makes this distinction at least implicitly. Q. 62. What is the visible church? A. The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world **do profess the true religion, and of their children**. Notice this definition includes the believing spouse, and the dependent child, but it *excludes* the unbelieving spouse. By definition the unbelieving spouse does not belong to the category of those who "profess the true religion." Therefore the unbelieving spouse is not part of the visible church. On this ground they should not be baptized. Think about this illustration: If two pagan grandparents are called to the Lord Jesus Christ late in life and become baptized believers, it doesn't follow that their adult children are also "holy." Though their adult children are still their children, they are not their dependent children. They are no longer stewards of their spiritual interests. The adult children are independent of their parents in this sense. Nobody would argue that they are part of the Visible Church and should therefore be baptized. Their relation to the church depends upon their own act. Likewise the unbelieving spouse's relation to the church depends upon his/her own act.

<sup>35</sup> I'm making the assumption the author of Hebrews is comparing to the Covenant of Grace to the National Covenant under Moses, not the the Abrahamic Covenant since the Abrahamic Covenant is the Covenant of Grace.

excluded "...Pentecost would have become the greatest day of excommunication the church has ever witnessed."<sup>36</sup>

### Experiencing the covenant

Alright then, how can we apply this? Why does *all* this matter? Three takeaways. **First**, perhaps one of the most troubling questions in all of theology is this: What happens to babies when they die? The Bible doesn't give us as clear an answer as we would like. But ask yourself: what's underneath this question? It's this: What does the Lord think about children? Specifically our children. Does He love them? Yes, more than us. How do we know? Because He graciously includes them in the covenant with us. The Lord unequivocally says: "Yes I love your children. They belong to my covenant. Mark them with the token of my love. Give them the **sign** of baptism so that the world knows they belong to me. Give them the **seal** of baptism so that they know that I will most certainly uphold my covenant with them, that I will forgive their sins, they will be my people, I will take them to paradise, and they will forever be in my presence *if* they receive and trust in my Son.' Dear congregation, does God love our children. Yes.<sup>37</sup>

**Secondly** this matters, because the transmission of the faith matters. In **Romans 3:1**, after Paul showed that the Jews were just as guilty as the Gentiles, he asks this all-important question: "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?" In other words, if the Jews are just as guilty, what's the point? What's their advantage? How is circumcision—the admission sacrament to Israel—any help? That question can be changed for us: "What advantage has the child who belongs to the Church? Or what is the value of baptism?" How does Paul answer? **v.2** "Much in every way. To begin with, the

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<sup>36</sup> *Covenant Theology*, pg. 576

<sup>37</sup> When all the disciples were rebuking others for clogging up Jesus' important schedule with these dirty little kids, how did Jesus respond? **Mark 10:14** "But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God." cf. Bannerman, pg. 589-590 for an unpacking of the second part of this verse.

Jews (or the Church) were entrusted with the oracles of God.” Covenant children are brought up in the most privilege environment on earth—they are under the oracle of God—they are under the Word of God. If the Lord tarries, this current generation will be gone in 40 years. But our covenant children, by the grace of God, will declare the gospel to the next generation because they were raised under the Word of God.

Finally, why does this idea of covenant children matter? Because it shows us what grace means. What did our children do to be included in the covenant? What personal act of theirs did they perform in order for God to call them “holy” and given them the unspeakable privileges of belonging to the covenant community? They did nothing. Beloved do you see? Our children being included in external covenant, is a gospel picture of how we were included in the everlasting covenant. What did you do that God would include you in His covenant? What personal act did you perform? You say “Well I believed the promises of Jesus Christ.” True you did. But beloved, the Scripture says even those things are gifts of grace. **Philippians 1:29** “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should...*believe in him.*” God gave you the gift of faith. “But I repented of my sins” you say. **2 Timothy 2:25** says it is “God [who] grants...repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.” But I loved God. You loved God only because He loved you first. **1 John 4:10** “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” You did nothing. You initiated nothing. You performed nothing that God didn’t first perform. You are who you are by the pure grace of God. So if you are seeing this baptism today and you’re saying “But these little baby hasn’t done anything. How can God have favor on someone who has no interest in God?” Exactly. **Romans 10:20** “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.” Beloved this baptism is a picture of you before you came to Christ. You were helpless, hopeless, and wanted nothing to do with God. Great is the faithfulness of our God who loved us while we were still yet enemies. Great is the faithfulness of God who sent Christ to die for the ungodly.

I have no merit to woo or delight Thee,  
I have no wisdom or pow'rs to employ;  
Yet in thy mercy, how pleasing thou find'st me,  
This is Thy pleasure: that Thou art my joy.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me  
Great is Thy faithfulness<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> New lyrics by John Piper