

for them as they were under the protection of the Mosaic covenant).

The covenant structure is repeated and expanded from the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 11:18-20) in Eph. 6:1-3. Children of believing parents in the church are regarded as holy, set apart (I Cor. 7:14). Baptism is either a blessing or curse as Jesus is either the cornerstone or the stumbling stone. As in Israel, growth takes place in the context of the covenant community, Eph.4:11-16. Children are a part of this community and always spoken of as such, Eph. 6:1-4, etc. and should receive the covenant sign. The New Testament never speaks of children as being outside of the church and needing to come into it. However, as in the case of adults, water baptism is the external sign pointing to the internal reality (Spirit baptism). Church discipline is still necessary. Children who grow up in the church community and who do not follow the ways of God are to be put out of the church. Note, this is exactly the same as for an adult who will not respond to church discipline. The adult is to be put out of the church in this circumstance. Just as for the child, the covenant sign, water baptism, is either a blessing or a curse.

Significance to the Parent

The reason that the great majority of child-rearing passages in the Bible are found in the Old Testament (specifically, Deuteronomy, Psalms and Proverbs) is that the emphasis on children is a covenantal one. Children are to be viewed in terms of the Covenant of God. They are to be taught the covenant terms and obligations. The path of blessing and of cursing is to be clearly delineated to them. These passages still hold significance for covenant children today.

God expects you to take seriously the obligations of His covenant. (Eph. 6:4) Child rearing is not something that you may treat indifferently or eclectically. God wants you to instruct the children that He has given you in His ways. Your children will be blessed or cursed depending on how they respond to your instruction (Eph. 6:3). Such instruction is a weighty responsibility, one for which you must turn to the Word of God for guidance.

Significance to Children

Life and death is set before children (Deut. 30:16-20). Jesus will be either a cornerstone or a stumbling stone

to children raised in Christian homes. The baptism that a child receives as an infant makes a claim upon his life to follow God. If he responds in faith he will know God's blessings (like Isaac and Timothy). If he does not follow God he will know the curse of God (as Esau did and those children called "disobedient" in Romans 1:30). The teaching of parents is meant to adorn children (Prov. 1:8-9). Therefore, children should regard godly instruction as adornment. A child should be taught that the entire flow of Biblical revelation from Genesis forward has included children in the called out people of God. The issue is one of life and death. The curses for turning away from God's covenant are severe and eternal. However, the blessings of the covenant keeper are fuller and richer than anything that the human mind can begin to imagine. The holy covenant child, set apart by his baptism, has set before him the path of blessing or curse, life or death. Call upon this covenant child to choose life, so that he may know life everlasting.

What to do

Now that you have seen what the Bible says about this matter of baptism and children, what difference will this make in your life? Perhaps you already practice infant baptism but have not been diligent in challenging your children with the blessings and cursings of the covenant. If this is so, encourage your little ones (and your big ones) with the wonderful mercy extended to them by being in a home where God's ways are taught and lived. Warn them not to take this teaching lightly or to throw it off. The warnings in the Bible for covenant breakers are fearful (c.f. Heb. 6:4-6). Call passionately and compassionately upon your children to live in the light of the baptism they have received. Adorn these children with the truth of God's Word covenantally given to them.

Or perhaps you do not practice infant baptism because you have misunderstood what the Bible has to say about baptism and children. If so, then carefully consider the Biblical arguments set forth in this pamphlet. Do not keep from your child the God-given promises provided for his good (Eph. 6:3). God has taught that your children are to be included with you in His church and His covenant. I urge you not to withhold from your children the rich provision He has made to guide them into His kingdom. They belong under the care and discipline of the Church He provided for this purpose.

What the Bible

Says About

Baptism and Children

JOHN A. YOUNTS

Covenant of Faith with Abraham

Genesis 17 • Genesis 18:19 • Romans 4:11 • Hebrews 11:8-10

In order to study baptism you must first understand that water baptism is the sign of the covenant established by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:19-20. What is startling is that there is no introductory or explanatory material about water baptism in the Gospels. It is assumed that the reader already understands its meaning and purpose. Where would this understanding come from? The obvious answer is from what was written before the New Testament, the Old Testament. Therefore, you must look at the what the covenant sign of faith was in the Old Testament as well as the other references to baptism in the Old Testament. The purpose of this short study is not to answer every possible question about baptism, but to show that the whole canvas of the Bible paints a clear, consistent, vivid picture of what water baptism is — the sign of covenant membership given to the visible church.

Circumcision was a sign of faith (Romans 4:11-16). It was given to those who had faith (Abraham), who would have faith (Isaac) and to those who would not have faith (Ishmael). It is important to remember that according to Romans 4:11 circumcision was, first and foremost, a sign of faith. The nation of Israel was established four hundred years after circumcision was given as a sign of faith. Therefore, to argue that circumcision signifies things that primarily had to do with physical and national Israel, is not accurate.

A covenant is initiated by one party Who is dominant over another. The dominant party sets all the terms and conditions of the covenant. The lesser party accepts these terms. There is an obligation by both parties to follow the terms of the covenant. This is the point of Genesis 15:7-21. The fire pot passing between the animals signified the presence of God Who invoked a curse upon Himself if he should not keep the covenant.

Covenant terms therefore include both blessing and cursing. (Genesis 17:9)

Included in the church are the called out people of God who have become members:

- ✦ by profession
- ✦ together with their children

The physical sign of the Covenant marks the beginning of the visible church. This covenant sign is the way to distin-

guish the church from the world. Those who had the sign could and were to be cut off from the covenant community if they broke the covenant. Those who did not have the sign could not be cut off and, therefore, were not a part of the covenant community.

Mosaic Covenant

Deuteronomy 10:12 & 30:6 • Jeremiah 9:25-26 • Deuteronomy 28-30 • Galatians 3:17 • Hebrews 8:9

In this covenant the concept of Covenant is expanded. The true goal of the covenant is more clearly proclaimed — a circumcised heart. (Deut. 10:12 & 30:6; Jer. 9:25-26.)

Blessings and Cursings are expanded. (Deut. 28-30.)

Note Galatians 3:17 and Hebrews 8:9. This Mosaic Covenant (made in the desert) became obsolete, but not the Abrahamic covenant (the covenant of faith).

In both of these covenants children are included as a part of the called out people of God, to be instructed in the ways of God along with the rest of the covenant community. How do we know this? Nowhere are children excluded. Everywhere are children said to have been included in the promises given to Abraham (Romans 4:16; 3:9, 26, 29). One could be born into the covenant community or one could come in by way of profession. (Ex. 12:48-49). The goal of the outward sign of the covenant, circumcision of the flesh given symbolically to all, was to lead to the internal reality, circumcision of the heart given to those who had been given faith by God. Church discipline (cutting off from the covenant people) was to be practiced by the covenant community. Children who grew up and did make profession of faith were to be cut off from the community.

During the Mosaic covenant, baptisms were practiced by the Israelites (Hebrews. 9:10; the washings referred to here is literally *baptismois*, Ezek. 36, etc.)

The case of Ruth demonstrates that profession of faith was a way into the visible covenant community. She was regarded as a part of the Community, that is, she was no longer regarded as a Moabite. Her profession made her a part of the community.

The covenant community, the church, in the Mosaic covenant is composed of those

- ✦ who were born into the community: e.g., Samuel, David;

- ✦ who came in by profession: e.g., Ruth, Rahab and those obeying Exodus 12:48-49;

- ✦ who were circumcised of flesh, not of heart: e.g., Nadab, Abihu.

The Hebrew word for “community” in the Mosaic covenant means the same as the Greek word for “church” in the New Covenant. The covenant community today includes those who were also included in the Mosaic Covenant and the Abrahamic covenant.

- ✦ those who were born in: your children—who are holy (I Cor. 7:14);

- ✦ those who came by profession: perhaps yourself; e.g., the Philippian jailer;

- ✦ those who are baptized of water but will one day be disciplined out of the church: e.g., the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:30)

New Covenant

That the promise to Abraham (Genesis 17:3-8; Heb. 11:8-10; Acts 2:38-39) is fulfilled is shown in Matthew 28:19-20. The term disciple (learner) used here does not require that the disciple be regenerate (c.f. esp. John 6:66). Stay with me on this one, I know that this may come as a shock to some. The word for disciple is the same word that we get our word for discipline. The word simply means a learner, one who learns. Any teacher can have disciples. Regeneration is not required by use of the term disciple. As John 6:66 points out many of Jesus disciples, or followers or learners, turned away from Him. Judas, who was an apostle and often referred to as a disciple was not regenerate. Rather, a disciple is made by baptizing (receiving the covenant sign) and teaching. This is precisely what happened to those who were in Israel, they received the covenant sign and entered into a life of learning about how to love God with all that was in them (Deut. 10).

Christ in Matthew 28:20, expands the boundaries of the Covenant:

- ✦ to all nations

and now includes females in the covenant sign of the visible church. (One reason it was necessary for women to be included in the covenant sign was because they no longer had the protection of a culture that honored and cared