

Chapter 15

Infant Baptism and Faith Transmission

I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

-2 Timothy 1:5-

Conviction and the Covenant

Christian parents must continually examine themselves before God to guard against any intrusion of evil within their own hearts that would ultimately undermine their covenant with their God were they to allow it to continue unchecked (Psalm 19:12-14; 139:23-24). Constant watchfulness and a readiness to repent are called for to assure open communication, honesty, and integrity before God and all members in the family.

Children who never see their parents come into compliance with the terms of the covenant find a ready excuse to turn from it themselves. Parents who do not see their children come into compliance with the terms of the covenant, or whose children turn away from the covenant having once outwardly confessed to it, have great occasion for prayerful searching of their hearts before God. While they need not assume that God is withholding his blessing because of some sin that they have committed, that is a possibility they ought to consider. It may simply be that God is testing their obedience, humiliating as the experience may be.

Yet even when they appear to have lost the battle, with God they will surely win the war. Though they are faithless, God cannot deny himself and remains faithful. Beyond a due examination of their own hearts as parents, repentance as appropriate, and efforts toward reconciliation or restoration

(which could involve a great deal), they must let the matter rest in God's almighty hands and surrender their children to God's sovereign good pleasure. The very act of surrender could prove to be the one expression that will finally result in the moving of the mountain (Mark 11:22-23).

Children who blame the consequences of their own sins upon their parents as though they were somehow victimized by circumstances beyond their control, such as their heredity or upbringing, betray their own ignorance of God's ways. God does not hold godly parents responsible for children who reject their spiritual birthright. The prophet Ezekiel reminds us,

The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him (18:20).

The prophet was describing a scene, all too common, in which a righteous man has a son who openly rejects the faith, engages in immorality, and turns to a life of self-indulgence or crime--though the father is not guilty of any of these things:

"[The son] eats at the mountain shrines.
He defiles his neighbors wife.
He oppresses the poor and needy.
He commits robbery.
He does not return what he took in pledge.
He looks to the idols.
He does detestable things.
He lends at usury and takes excessive interest.

Will such a man live? He will not! Because he has done these detestable things, he will surely be put to death and his blood will be on his own head (18:10-13).

Christian parenting and the family covenant are serious matters and are not to be neglected, but so is being a son or daughter of the covenant a serious matter and not to be presumed upon.

Recognizing that promises regarding children pertain only to the children of parents who are professing believers, and that only those whom God has chosen are spiritually regenerated, there remains one relevant question. With what kind of certainty can Christian parents proceed so as to justify (in their own minds) the application of the outward sign? The scriptural answer is *the certainty of Jesus' example and spoken Word and the corroboration of many Scriptures which underscore the fact that promises made to the faithful are extended to their offspring as well* (Luke 18:15-17; Acts 2:28-39).

Faith is not merely an intellectual syllogism, an Aristotelian dialogue that takes place in the cranial cavity. On the other hand, faith is not a Kirkegaardian leap in the dark. It is to be distinguished from presumption. John Murray wrote, "Faith severed from obedience is presumption, just as formal obedience severed from faith is self-righteousness" (1980, 88).

Theologians speak of "presumptive regeneration" to describe the formalistic danger of relying upon an outward form, or the deception of relying on a promise that does not apply. It is not presumption, however, for God's chosen to believe God's promise concerning their children. In fact, the Scripture tells us that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). But what is the nature of biblical faith which Christian parents exercise, which pleases God, and which obtains the promise on behalf of their elect children?

The apostle tells us,

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for (Heb. 11:1-2).

It was the "motif" of this verse that was "clearly the foundation of Wesley's analysis of faith."

Wesley believed that every man possesses spiritual sense perceptions which symbolically parallel physical sense perceptions. . . . By the working of the Holy Spirit upon these spiritual sense perceptions, faith is created and bestowed as a gift from God. Faith therefore is "the demonstrative evidence of things unseen, the supernatural evidence of things invisible, not perceivable to the eyes of the flesh, or by any of our natural senses or faculties. Faith is that divine evidence whereby the spiritual man discerneth God, and the things of God" (Naglee 1987, 41).

For Wesley, leader in England's Evangelical Awakening, faith was "not . . . a speculative, rational thing, a cold lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head" (Naglee 1987, 41). But then, neither was it for Jonathan Edwards, leader in America's Great Awakening.

As on the one hand, there must be light in the understanding, as well as an *affected* fervent heart; or where there is heat without light, there can be nothing divine or heavenly in the heart: so, on the other hand, where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored up with notions and speculations with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light, that knowledge is no true knowledge of divine things. If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart (1879, 1:243).

In this regard Edwards was a Calvinist and Calvin had said,

The Word of God is not received by faith if it flits about in the top of the brain, but when it takes root in the depth of the heart that it may be an invincible defense to withstand and drive off all the stratagems of temptation. . . . the heart's distrust is greater than the mind's blindness. It is harder for the heart to be furnished with assurance than for the mind

to be endowed with thought. The Spirit accordingly serves as a seal, to seal up in our hearts those very promises the certainty of which it has previously impressed upon our minds; and to take the place of a guarantee to confirm and establish them. After "you believed" (the apostle declares), "you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance" [Eph. 1:13-14, Comm.]. Do you see how Paul teaches that the heart of believers have, so to speak, been sealed with the Spirit; how for this reason, Paul calls him the "Spirit of promise," because he makes firm the gospel among us?" (1960, 1:583-584).

Christian parents who are assured of their child's salvation know on the same basis that the Roman centurion knew that his servant would be healed from paralysis.

Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him."

The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it" (Matt. 8:7-9).

Jesus, upon hearing the centurion's affirmation of faith, was "astonished" and remarked that he had not seen such faith in all of Israel.

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom (Matt. 8:11).

A similar account was related by the apostle John concerning a certain royal official who had gone to Cana from his home in Capernaum. Hearing that Jesus had returned from Judea, the official begged him to come to Capernaum and heal

his son who was critically ill. "Sir, come down before my child dies," he said. Jesus answered, "You may go. Your son will live." The man "took Jesus at his word" and left for home. Upon his arrival he discovered that his son had been healed at "the exact time" at which Jesus had told him that his son would live. John related what followed in the words, "So he and all his household believed" (John 2:46-53).

Jesus, the incarnate God of Abraham, is honored by the faith of Christian parents just as he was by the faith of the centurion and the royal official who simply took him at his word. Believing parents experience the eschatological kingdom of God in the *here* and *now*--within the context of the baptism of their children. Surely that is clearly implied in the above two examples of faith and is reinforced by Jesus' words:

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. For the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear let him hear (Matt. 11:12-15).

The Syro-Phoenician woman did not allow her ethnic identity to deprive her of the blessings of Israel's Messiah. She refused to be put off by Jesus' testing of her faith when he insisted that it was not proper to toss "the children's bread" to the "dogs" (the Jewish derogation of Gentiles).

"Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Mark 7:29).

How happy she must have been when she returned home and "found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone" (Mark 7:30)! Parents may need to face squarely their own unbelief. When it is one's own son or daughter who stands in need, like a certain teacher of the law, the parent may have to cry out, "Lord, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:23-24).

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

The father or mother who has known the blessing of the Lord associated with appropriating his promises on behalf of his child is blessed indeed.

The "All-Comprehensive" Promise

Abraham Kuyper conceded that the church could not know with absolute certainty that a baptized adult or child was regenerated, but that it was "merely presupposed" (Hoeksema 1977, 43-45). While recognizing the possibility of the *habitus fidei* of children from earliest age, Louis Berkhof held that the "all-comprehensive promise of God in the covenant, including the promise of regeneration," represented more of an "objective ground" for the baptism of infants than a kind of "presumptive regeneration."

But whatever may be assumed respecting the spiritual condition of children before baptism, it is certain that no presumptive grace in the heart can be the objective ground on which a child is baptized (Berkov 1932, 2:248).

As Marcel stated it, "The *consequences* of infant baptism can never become its foundation"(1953, 199).

Presumptive regeneration cannot be regarded naturally as the legal ground of infant baptism, for *this cannot be anything other than the promises of God contained in the covenant* (Marcel 1953, 200).

John Murray further qualified the terms insisting that God's institution, rather than the promises in themselves,

represented the ground for infant baptism:

It is true that in administering this ordinance we plead the promises which God has attached to faith and obedience. But our faith in God's promises does not appear to be placed in its proper relationship to infant baptism if it were conceived of as the *ground* for baptizing infants. The ground is rather the institution which God has established and revealed, namely, that to the infant seed of believers the sign and seal of the covenant of grace is to be administered (1980, 54).

Murray's point was well taken. For even though the promise of Genesis 17:7 was not to be efficacious in the case of Ishmael, and this fact was revealed to Abraham in advance, the covenant sign was nevertheless to be applied to Ishmael (Gen. 17:23). Even God's election did not overthrow the institution. In the case of Ishmael, God's electing grace was magnified exposing human connivance (Gal. 4:23, 30). Yet Berkov did not contradict Murray, for he similarly viewed God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:7, "I will be thy God," as an "all-comprehensive summary" of the covenant of grace in which the institution of baptism is rooted.

It is the expression of the essential content of the covenant with Abraham, Gen. 17:7, of the Sinaitic covenant, Ex. 19:5; 20:1, of the covenant on the plains of Moab, Deut. 29:13; of the Davidic covenant, II Sam. 7:14, and of the new covenant, Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10 (1932, 1:264).

The "all-comprehensive promise" extended to the offspring of the believer according to the words "and your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:7). This promissory application to the offspring could be traced throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament in a kind of prophetic unfolding and expansion of the original promise of Genesis 17:7 (Deut. 30:6; Isa. 44:3; 49:25; 59:20-21; Jer. 32:38-40; Acts 2:39; & 16:31).

Since the ground of infant baptism is at once *institutional* and *promissory* rather than *presumptive*, and given the fact that biblical faith of which Christ is the Author, is a *living* faith, a particular parent's faith that God will regenerate his or her children need not necessarily be judged *presumptuous*.

The prophet Habakkuk first coined those words later quoted by the apostle Paul, "The righteous shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:7). Describing the manner in which a "revelation" which "awaits an appointed time" should be regarded by a believer, Habakkuk wrote, "Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly not delay" (Hab. 2:3).

Baptism as a covenant transaction is a *sacramentum*—a mystery, and especially so in the case of infants whose regeneration will come to pass according to the heavenly Father's good pleasure, and not necessarily the parents' good pleasure.

John Calvin, commenting on Matthew 19:13f, expressed the mystery of a child's regeneration in terms of a gradual awakening of faith:

...children are renewed by the Spirit of God, according to the measure and capacity of their age, so that this divine virtue hidden within them gradually grows and in due time manifests itself plainly (Marcel 1953, 221).

Such faith involves patience, endurance, a surrender of the heart, and a willingness to obey the Lord in all things.

The author of Hebrews wrote,

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what he has promised.

When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised (Heb. 6:12-15).

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised (Heb.10:36).

Christian parenting is a life-long commitment. It is not for the faint-hearted. Paul wrote concerning Abraham that

without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised (Rom. 4:19-21).

Often, as with Abraham, there is very little outward evidence to warrant faith--at times, the exterior circumstances seem to argue against it. Abraham's faith, however, did not focus upon the external circumstances. Commenting on Romans 4:20, John Murray wrote, "While he did not close his eyes to the facts of his own age and Sarah's, yet he was so absorbed with the promise of God that faith did not waver." "Doubt of the promise has no affinity with faith and the apostle accords it no credit" (1959, 1:149, 150). The author of Hebrews said of Moses, "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27).

It is this emphasis upon faith in the promise that appeared to be lacking in Gerstner's approach when he insisted that the progeny of believers "cannot be believed to be elect until there is evidence of it via regeneration" (1991-, 2:119). While it is true that Christian parents cannot manipulate the elective decrees of God, it is also true that God, *in keeping with his elective decrees*, can and does give to Christian parents faith in the promises to sustain them in the face of adversity. And "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). The faithful God "calls things that are not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17c). The faith born of God's promise

is a faith exercised in anticipation of fulfillment, not on the basis of outward evidence, but often in spite of outward evidence which might suggest otherwise.

Commenting on Romans 4:18, Matthew Henry stated,

There was a hope against him [Abraham], a natural hope. All the arguments of sense, and reason, and experience, which in such cases usually beget and support hope, were against him; no second causes smiled upon him, nor in the least favored his hope. But against all the inducements to the contrary, he believed (1706).

And again in reference to verse 19, he wrote,

When God intends some special blessing, some child of promise, for his people, he commonly puts a sentence of death upon the blessing itself, and upon all the ways that lead to it.

Christian parents are called to walk by faith, not by sight; and the faith that they so desire to see inculcated within their children is God's work and, neither dependent on the parents themselves, nor contingent upon the outward appearance of things (John 6:29).

Gerstner's demand for *evidence* does apply, of course, to the congregation's judgment of rational charity regarding the qualifications of covenant children for admission to the Lord's Table. Indeed the congregation should require visible evidence of God's saving grace in all those who are to be admitted to the Lord's Table, but that is a different matter than Christian parents believing the promise of God concerning the salvation of their offspring.

Believing parents must take the long-range view.

Train a child in the way he should go,
and when he is old he will not turn from it (Prov. 22:6).

Monica, the mother of Augustine, prayed thirty-two years for the conversion of her son. The fact that Augustine was denied the sign of baptism as an infant (much to his own later regret) in no way diminishes the relevance of his mother's example. Quite

likely an unbelieving father prevented his baptism at that early age, for certainly Augustine's mother's heart was covenantally engaged in his behalf from his infancy. Had the decision been hers she no doubt would have seen to her infant son's baptism. Even so, Augustine spoke of a kind of covenant *sealing* which he related to his mother's faith.

...and even from the womb of my mother, who greatly hoped in Thee, I was sealed with the mark of His cross and salted with His salt (Augustine n.d., 13-14).

The burden of an unequal yoke (2 Cor. 6:14) may prevent a Christian mother from administering the covenant sign of baptism to her infant child while her heart desires otherwise. But that is a far different matter than when such an omission arises from negligence or indifference.

Augustine explored many options before his restless heart found settlement in God.

But I wretched, most wretched, in the very commencement of my early youth, had begged chastity of Thee, and said, 'Give me chastity and continency, only not yet.' For I feared lest Thou shouldst hear me soon, and soon cure me of the disease of concupiscence, which I wished to have satisfied, rather than extinguished (n. d., 176).

Monica's faith was severely tested. While Augustine was ensnared by the heretical teaching of the Manicheans, Monica prayed and agonized. Augustine later described it.

For almost nine years passed, in which I wallowed in the mire of that deep pit, and the darkness of falsehood, often assaying to rise, but dashed down the more grievously. All which time that chaste, godly, and sober widow, (such as thou lovest,) now more cheered with hope, yet no whit relaxing in her weeping and mourning, ceased not at all hours of her

devotions to bewail my case unto Thee. And her prayers entered into Thy presence (n.d., 55).

As the Lord looked upon the tears of the widow of Nain during the funeral procession of her son (Luke 7:11-15) and with authority raised him from death, so he would have special regard for Monica's tears and raise her son from the spiritual death of his trespasses and sins.

Later Augustine wrote,

So I was confounded, and converted: and I joyed, O my God, that the One Only Church, the body of Thine Only Son, (wherein the name of Christ had been put upon me as an infant,) had no taste for infantine conceits nor in her sound doctrine, maintained any tenet which should confine Thee, the Creator of all, in Space, however great and large, yet bounded everywhere by the limits of a human form (Augustine n.d. 110).

Monica proved to be a daughter of Abraham. God honored her faithful thirty-two years of parental pilgrimage. In a striking tribute to Monica's faith, Augustine cited among her deeds the winning of her husband to Christ and her final devoted service to her son and his Christian associates.

Finally, her own husband, towards the very end of his earthly life, did she gain unto Thee; nor had she to complain of that in him as a believer, which before he was a believer she had borne from him (n.d., 206).

Lastly, of all of us Thy servants, O Lord, (whom on occasion of Thy own gift Thou sufferest to speak,) us, who before her sleeping in Thee lived united together, having received the grace of Thy baptism, did she so take care of us all; so she served us, as though she had been child to us all (n.d., 207).

Concluding a conversation with her son that can only be described as holy, as they spoke openly about the glories of heaven, Monica expressed the following words to Augustine:

Son, for mine own part I have no further delight in any thing in this life. What I do here any longer, and to what end I am here, I know not, now that my hopes in this world are accomplished. One thing there was, for which I desired to linger for a while in this life, that I might see thee a Catholic Christian before I died. My God hath done this for me more abundantly, that I should now see thee withal, despising earthly happiness, become His servant: what do I here (n.d., 210)?

Monica died approximately two weeks later (n.d., 210-11). She could thus sing with the Church Triumphant as they sing who have travailed over the promises of God on behalf of their children.

Sing to the LORD, you saints of his;
praise his holy name.
For his anger lasts only a moment,
but his favor lasts a lifetime;
weeping may remain for a night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning
(Ps. 30:4-5).

An understanding of God's covenant with Christian parents, according to 1 Corinthians 7:14, will not remove all inter-generational conflict and grief, as Augustine's testimony concerning Monica attests. But it will certainly fortify the Christian parent in the face of the pain (2 Tim. 2:10). Jesus warned his disciples about domestic strife brought on by the Gospel, but the truth of 1 Corinthians 7:14 withstands a certain measure of conflict produced by one party's spiritual regeneration (Matt. 10:34-39; Gen. 3:15).

Blessed are those whose strength is
in you,
who have set their hearts on
pilgrimage.
As they pass through the Valley of
Baca,
they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion
(Ps.84:5-7).

From strength to strength, from faith to faith, and from glory to glory--that is the pilgrimage of the Christian parent. The Christian parents' reward for thankless years and labors of love in behalf of the elect children will be to hear the King say,

I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. . . . whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me (Matt. 25:35, 40).

The baptism of the believer's offspring is a fitting landmark to signal the beginning of this spiritual journey. For in keeping with Genesis 17:7, the new covenant declares that "they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Heb. 8:11). Christian parents must not forget that the original Baptist's mission was "to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous" (Luke 1:17). Those words suggest that the forerunner of the Messiah was a covenant Baptist, i.e., that he baptized on the basis of the covenant rather than employing Tetullians' "Let them wait" approach. Let us not remove the landmark of this blessed heart transaction (Prov. 22:28; 23:10-11; Hos. 5:10).

Faith: Vicarious or Victorious?

The Gospel of Mark records an incident that illustrates a kind of intercessory faith on the part of four men who opened a hole in the roof of a Jewish home and lowered their friend on a cot into the standing-room-only crowd to whom Jesus had been preaching. The Scripture records that "when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven'" (Mark 2:5). Mark's use of the possessive pronoun "their" in reference to faith revealed Jesus' willingness to save the soul of a person in response to the faithful intercession of others.

Pierre Marcel, following Oscar Cullman, issued a word of caution concerning the notion of vicarious faith.

Let us be careful! It is not a matter of faith "by substitution." Children are not baptized *by reason of* the confession of faith of the Church or of parents or of their sponsors. It is the covenant that is the sole basis of baptism (Marcel 1953, 220).

The faith of the parent referenced in 1 Corinthians 7:14 is indeed a faith rooted in the covenant; yet, it is undeniable that the covenant as it applied to the children was related to the faith of the parent. The vicarious or representative aspect of the parent's faith can hardly be denied, so long as the parent remembers that the covenant, or rather Christ the Mediator, is the foundation of that faith and not vice versa.

Faith lies at the heart of infant baptism properly administered. Baptism cannot be considered apart from faith (Mark 16:16)--infant baptism, from the actual faith of a Christian parent and the anticipated faith of the elect covenant child. The powerful effect of the Holy Spirit working through the Christian's faith upon the other members of one's family cannot be denied (2 Tim. 1:5). But neither can the foundational role of the regular reading of the Holy Scriptures in the home be overlooked in the formation of that faith (2 Ti. 3:14-16).

For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy (1 Cor. 7:14).

Richard Baxter had it right when he stated,

We do not therefore say, that the Faith of the Parent is the *cause* either of his own, or his Child's privilege of Church membership, no more than of their Justification, or salvation, but only the *condition* (1651, 15 italics mine).

Baxter added that "God's gift" was the cause.

It is Christ our Prophet who has spoken the promise, and in whom the word of the prophets is made more certain (2 Pet. 1:19). "In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb.1:2). He is the cause of the fulfillment of the promise, the "Author and Finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2 KJV). For the Word was made flesh and dwelled among us!

And the Word of Christ may now dwell in our hearts joyfully and triumphantly (John 1:14; Col. 3:16; 1 John 5:4-5). While the Scriptures reveal the Christ, they do not embalm him! He is the living and abiding Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23). "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God (2 Cor. 1:20). Faith, or taking him at his word, is only the condition, not the cause.

It is God's Representative Man, the Second Adam and the great High Priest of our confession, who is the cause of the promise being fulfilled in our children. The high-priestly prayers of the Son are forever petitioning the Father on behalf of his elect. As Charles Wesley affirmed in his beloved hymn, "Arise my Soul, Arise,"

Five bleeding wounds He bears,
Received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers,

They strongly plead for me:
"Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
"Nor let the ransomed sinner die,"
"Nor let the ransomed sinner die."

The Father hears Him pray,
His dear Anointed One;
He cannot turn away
The presence of His Son:
His Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God,
And tells me I am born of God (Beckwith 1952, 109).

Faith looks not to itself but to its Author, Jesus, "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession" who urges us to "approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need" (Heb. 3:1; 4:16; 12:2). This high-priestly ministry of Jesus cannot be overestimated as the foundation for the household covenant. It is his heavenly intercession, not professional clamor or mere human sentiment, that parents must rely upon if their children are to be brought from death to life (Mark 5:35-42).

Jesus' high-priestly intercession enables Christians to affirm with Charles Wesley,

With confidence I now draw nigh,
And "Father, Abba Father," cry,
And "Father, Abba, Father," cry
(Beckwith 1952, 109).

Parents who pray with confidence also recognize Christ's royal office. The kingdom of God is the glorious consummation of all things marking the end of the ages. Yet this glorious consummation both transcends and has graciously invaded this present evil age of human history in the person of Jesus Christ whose title is even now King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Acts 2:32-36; Rev. 17:14). Revelation 3:7 assures us that he holds "the key of David" and that "what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open."

In the days of his flesh on earth, he demonstrated the power of the kingdom of God on men's behalf, entered "the strong man's house" (Matt.12:28-29), and bound the strong man in order that the eschatological Kingdom (Rev.20:2-3) might penetrate the spiritual darkness of this present evil age for the blessing of believers and their offspring. Jesus demonstrated that "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" by restoring men's physical health as well (Mark 2:10-12).

The Scriptures state that he descended into the lower regions and that, when he ascended, he led "captives in his train" (Eph. 4:8). His propitiatory death accomplished the overthrow and conquest of Satan, the prince of this world. Just before his crucifixion he exclaimed,

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself (John 12:31-32).

When Jesus cried from the cross, "It is finished," (John 19:30), Satan's defeat was accomplished (Heb. 2:14-14). The "spoils" of Christ's victory are said to be distributed "among the strong" (Isa. 53:12). Certainly, "the strong" represent believers, such as the Syro-Phoenician woman and the royal official from Capernaum, who share the faith of Abraham and David. From these and their kind the "kingdom of God suffers violence," and they "take it by force."

Christ has fulfilled the terms of the Davidic covenant. Having suffered as the Davidic Messiah (Isa. 52:13-53:12), he has been given "authority" from the "Ancient of Days" (Matt. 28:18; Dan. 7:13-14). The Great Commission is founded on such authority; hence, the Gospel is designated "the gospel of the Kingdom" (Matt. 24:14; Mark 1:15; Acts 28:23, 31), and it is designed for the entire household (Acts 16:31) Christ first entered the strong man's house that he might rule in ours!

Those who base their parenting pilgrimage upon Jesus' kingdom authority, know they cannot be turned away when they pray, because in Christ they possess the "key of David" (Rev.

3:7). And if we have the key to David's house, we have the key to our own! The keys to the Kingdom given to the church assure that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:18-20).

Such parents are like the widow who persisted in her knocking on the door of the unjust judge, and who would not be turned away until the judge, bothered by her continual knocking, rose from bed in the middle of the night, answered the door, granted her request, and vindicated her against her adversary. After describing this persistent widow, Jesus stated, "Hear the parable of the unjust judge. And will not God vindicate his elect who cry to him day and night? I tell you he will vindicate them speedily." "Nevertheless," he said, "when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:6-8 RSV).

Just as Jesus addressed God as "Abba" (Mark 14:36) in the hour of deepest agony at Gethsemane, so the believing parent may cry out "Abba" by the enablement of the indwelling Spirit of the Son, and thereby express the inner longings of his heart in the highest form of faith and filial affection. The term "Abba" may approximate the English word "Daddy" or "Papa," and fittingly addresses the "Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. 3:14 RSV).

It is the grace of God's covenant operating through the parents' faith that closes the gap of unbelief within the hearts of the beloved sons and daughters--the gap between their "being under the obligation and bond of the covenant" and their "being conformed to the covenant and complying with its terms." The transition from *covenant* membership to full *communicant* membership in Christ's church, at God's appointed time, becomes the heart-felt choice of the believer's offspring. Covenant holiness becomes personal holiness visible in the life of the son or daughter.

Faith transmission between the believing parent and the covenant child represents the exchanging of the yoke of the law for the yoke of Christ (Matt. 11:28-30). It is a conversion from the *covenant of works* to a full embracing of Christ in the *covenant of grace*. The former is tied down to, and limited by,

the relationship with the earthly father. The latter gives way to a relationship with the Heavenly Father where Jesus Christ, as distinct from a list of rules, is the focus (Heb. 12:2, 10). The Paedobaptist knows that where the elect are concerned the Father is "over all and in all and through all" (Eph. 4:6). For he is "the Father of spirits" to whom the elect submit and live (Heb. 12:9). Indeed, no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him (John 6:44). The Paedobaptist is ever mindful that the same God who was pleased to reveal his Son in the life of the apostle during his adult years also *set him apart from birth* and called him by his grace (Gal. 1:15-16).

Louis Berkov wrote,

Experience teaches that, though by birth they enter into the covenant as a legal relationship, this does not necessarily mean that they are also at once in the covenant as a communion of life. . . . There must be a reasonable assurance that the covenant is not or will not remain a mere legal relationship, with external duties and privileges to that which ought to be, but is also or will in time become a living reality. This assurance is based on the promise of God, which is absolutely reliable, that He will work in the hearts of the covenant seed with his saving grace and transform them into living members of the covenant (1932, 1:277).

Paul underscored for the Christians at Rome the distinction between a saving relationship and a mere legal relationship to the covenant.

But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your

heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame" (Rom. 10:6-11).

Richard Baxter pointed out that Paul's argument in the above passage was based on a quotation from Deuteronomy 30:11-14 which concerned God's ratification of the covenant with the men, women, and *children* of Israel on the plains of Moab prior to their entry into the promised land (1651, 58; Deut. 29:10-14). On this occasion God affirmed that "the things revealed belong to us and to our children" (29:29b) and promised to "circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants [seed], so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul and live" (30:6). The Holy Spirit who inspired Paul's words in Romans 10 recognized no contradiction between faith in the heart joined to confession with the mouth and the covenant which embraced the believer's offspring.

God's breathing into man's nostrils the breath of life constituted him a living being in the first creation (Gen. 2:7). By the same token, Jesus' breathing upon his disciples and saying to them "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22) represented their spiritual regeneration and new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Through the prophet Isaiah our gracious God has reminded us that this great New Testament blessing is not meant to begin and end with those who have turned to the living God, but is to extend to their offspring as well.

"The Redeemer will come to Zion,
to those in Jacob who repent of
their sins,"

declares the LORD.

"As for me, this is the covenant with them,"
says the LORD. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my
words that I have put in your mouth will not depart
from your mouth, or from the mouths of your

children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the LORD (Isa. 59:20-21).

In order that Christian parents and the congregation might keep this promise before them with all of the holy obligations attached to it, it is appropriate that those to whom the promise pertains receive the seal of baptism along with their parents in keeping with God's covenant of grace as instituted in Genesis 17. Without the Spirit of Christ, however, neither professing Christian parents nor their children have any part of Christ (Rom 8:9). For, strictly speaking, and in the final analysis, where there is no seal of the Holy Spirit, there is no baptism whereby a person can be incorporated into the body of Christ, whatever the outward appearances to the contrary (1 Cor. 12:13). It was for this reason that Jonathan Edwards, soberly wrote to his nine-year-old son, Jonathan, Jr., who had been baptized in infancy,

Remember what Christ said, that you must be born again, or you can never see the Kingdom of God. Never give yourself any rest unless you have good evidence that you are converted and become a new creature (Murray 1987, 395).

As the covenant child is instructed in the Word, the Holy Spirit applies that Word making it effectual in the heart. The Spirit works faith and repentance in the heart as the glory of Christ's finished work on the cross is impressed upon the heart convicting it of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

The gap between the Word present and the Word effectual must be closed in the life of the parent. Timothy's faith first dwelt in his mother Eunice, and before her, in his grandmother Lois (2 Tim. 1:5). There can be no faith transmission from parent to child unless there first be faith and confession in the life of the parent. Parents can never pass on to their children what they have not personally appropriated and publicly professed for themselves. David's faith as an infant first dwelt in his father Jesse (Ps. 22:9-10; Isa. 11:1).

The transmission of faith from parent to child represents for the child the transition from mere existence to meaningful life. It is one thing for the child to *exist* in the covenant; it is quite another thing for the child to *live* in the covenant.

This transition can be illustrated by observing the difference between the Hebrew verb for "exist" (היה) and the Hebrew verb for "live" (חיה). By simply closing the minuscule gap in the first letter of the Hebrew היה, the verb is gloriously transformed to mean "live." As this linguistic fact illustrates, it is a very small step of faith between merely *existing* in the covenant, in the sense of enjoying its external benefits, and being made a partaker of eternal *life* in the covenant. This infinitesimal step represents an infinite difference. For, ultimately, where there is no engagement of the heart on the part of those who are heirs of the covenant, there is no covenant at all.

If a covenant child is to appropriate his eternal inheritance he must "close" with Christ the Mediator of the covenant. Faith is coming to Christ--it is a uniting act whereby the soul ceases to be in a state of alienation from God. It is a spiritual settlement, an act of closure with Christ. It is not a reward for receiving Christ, nor is it the *instrument* for receiving Christ--it is *that very act of receiving* (Edwards 1879, 1:625-626).

The covenant child who refuses to close with Christ is like Esau who sold his birthright for a single meal. For him there can only be anguish of heart, eternal regret, and a "fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (Heb. 12:16-17, 29; 10:26-27). Covenant children, like all those who have been privileged to hear the Gospel, must ask themselves, "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (Heb. 2:3).

The covenant child who closes with Christ can glory in God's covenant,

The boundary lines have fallen for me
in pleasant places,
surely I have a delightful inheritance" (Ps. 16:6).

He rejoices in his hope of sharing the glory of God. He stands confident and complete in the righteousness that comes by faith and that extends to children's children. Let's not remove the ancient landmark that publicly witnesses to those boundary lines and seals such a glorious righteousness which links the generations of those that love God and are called according to his purpose.

The Ancient Landmark

394