

## CHAPTER 9

### THE GREAT COMMISSION AND THE GENERATION GAP

But from everlasting to everlasting,  
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children's children--  
with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts.

-Psalm 103:17-18

#### **Barth and the Intergenerational Principle**

Without a doubt the Arminian error, with its emphasis on the freedom of the will, has contributed to the modern evangelical rejection of infant baptism. But so has the influence of Karl Barth. T. M. De Ferrari wrote,

In recent times it has been the writing of the Protestant theologian Karl Barth against the practice that has stirred up controversy (1967, 67).

Cullman went further,

Barth's study of Baptism arouses attention and alas! threatens to precipitate schism; and this is not to be ascribed only to the authority which as a theological teacher he rightly enjoys. His study is in fact the most serious challenge to infant Baptism which has ever been offered (1950, 7-8).

Karl Barth's pamphlet, *The Teaching of the Church on Baptism*, cited only one Old Testament Scripture (Isa. 55:10f. in reference to the Word); accordingly, he established "an absolute cleavage between the Old Testament and New Testament"

discarding the intergenerational principle of Scripture (Marcel 1953, 16). On the basis of John 1:12 and Romans 6:2, Barth claimed that "the relationship between parents and children can no longer have the doctrinal significance which it had for pre-messianic Israel" (Marcel 1953, 114).

In one sense Karl Barth's had a point. The Scriptures have reached their grand focus and fulfillment in Christ. Accordingly, the New Testament genealogies which trace Christ's human ancestry to David, Abraham, and Adam (Matt. 1:1-2, 6, 17; Luke 3:23, 37; Rom. 1:3), signify the *retrospective* rather than the *prospective*; that is, they look backward not forward. Even the Jews who did not accept Jesus as their Messiah, however, have tended to look backward, regarding the fathers as the spiritual giants to be emulated. Jewish medieval scholar Maimonides expressed his own admiration for Abraham: "Behold he is the father of all the world, which are gathered under the wings of the Divine Majesty" (Henry 1706, on Rom. 4:17).

From the standpoint of Messiah's spiritual fruit or offspring, however, the opposite is true (Isa. 53:10). The New Testament saints have a forward look anticipating the "many sons" being brought to glory (Heb. 2:10). This shift in perspective was anticipated by the Psalmist who announced God's prophetic words addressed to the Messiah himself:

Your sons will take the place of your fathers;  
you will make them princes throughout the land.  
I will perpetuate your memory through all generations,  
therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever  
(Ps. 45:16-17).

God had further shared a vision of Messiah's spiritual "offspring" with the prophet Isaiah (53:10; 54:1-3).

Indeed, it is the spiritual nature of the "sons" (Gal. 3:26) or the "seed" (Gal. 3:29) that has come into special prominence in the New Testament (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:14). Isaiah announced that even those who were not blessed with natural offspring would know the blessing of spiritual offspring under the Messiah (Isa. 54:1; 56:3-5; 66:7). This does not establish Barth's case, however,

for Malachi's prophecy concerning the forerunner of the Messiah indicates even greater doctrinal significance for the parent-child relationship in the New Testament than was the case in the Old Testament:

He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse (4:6).

Applying as it did to the ministry of John the Baptist, the above passage may fairly be said to support a covenant engagement in the form of infant baptism by which God restores the intergenerational connection ruptured by Israel's parental unfaithfulness (Ps. 78:1-8). How much more is it needed today! Richard Weaver characterized the modern era as follows:

Burke saw the point when he said that those who have no concern for their ancestors will, by simple application of the same rule, have none for their descendants . . . . As man becomes more and more immersed in time and material gratifications, belief in the continuum of race fades, and not all the tinkering of sociologists can put homes together again (Weaver 1948, 30).

The Pharisaic cry "We have Abraham as our father" was based on self-deception (Matt. 3:9-10; John 8:39-44). The practice of the "Corban" principle, neglecting duty to parents under a perverted kind of religious dedication (Mark 7:9-12), provided evidence of this. Jesus made it clear that the Pharisees were hypocrites. All their pretended loyalty to their forefathers was only a religious front. Had they lived in the day of their forefathers, they would have had a hand in their persecution and martyrdom (Matt. 23:29-32). Their attitude toward the institution of marriage was callous (Matt. 19:3; John 8:7-10). Over against such Jewish leadership, it is no wonder that Jesus had to give his disciples special instruction concerning the place of infants and children in the Kingdom (Luke 18:15-17; Matt. 18:1-14).

The intergenerational principle strikes at the heart of the New Testament in a most graphic way. Part of the divine recompense that was to be visited upon Jesus' betrayer was prophetically announced by David in this imprecatory prayer:

May no one extend kindness to him  
or take pity on his fatherless children.  
May his descendants be cut off,  
their names blotted out from the  
next generation (Ps. 109:12-13).

Luke's quotation of verse 8 from this same Psalm in Acts 1:20 establishes that the apostles viewed the above description as a prophecy concerning Judas.

The *new birth* which both Jesus and the apostles preached was not a matter of bloodlines or family pedigree (John 1:13; 3:5-6)--of course, it never had been (Rom. 9:8). The church was comprised "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9b) in fulfillment of God's promises concerning Abraham and David (Acts 15:14-18; Rom. 4:11, 17).

Paul's words "now that faith has come" (Gal. 3:25) do not imply that faith was absent in the Old Testament, or that men were ever justified before God on the basis of their genetic history (Rom. 9:8). Rather with the coming of Christ faith came into new prominence because the law was fulfilled through His atoning death (Acts 13:39; Gal. 3:13; 4:4; 2 Pet. 1:19).

A comparison of Psalm 103 with Romans 4 shows that Paul's doctrine of justification by faith does not contradict David's doctrine of the righteousness that extends to "children's children" (Ps. 103:17). David who insisted that God's righteousness extended to "children's children," also characterized the essence of that righteousness as the removal of transgressions "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12). This parallels Paul's view in Romans 4 where he cited David's words from Psalm 32:1-2 to illustrate the righteousness that comes by faith:

Blessed are they  
whose transgressions are forgiven  
whose sins are covered.  
Blessed is the man  
whose sin the Lord will never  
count against him (Rom. 4:7-8).

In both cases the cancellation of sin represents the essence of righteousness. If the Psalmist David saw no contradiction between the righteousness that comes by faith and the righteousness that extends to “children’s children,” how then can Paul’s agreement on the Psalmist’s first point be said to contradict the Psalmist’s second point? Or how can Paul’s silence on the second point, were indeed that the case, be interpreted as disagreement? There can be no ground for contradiction, therefore, between the righteousness that extends to "children's children" of Psalm 103:17 and "the righteousness that comes by faith" of Romans 4:13. They are one and the same.

This agrees perfectly with some clear inferences that may be drawn from Paul’s argument in the same chapter. The promise "that [Abraham] would be heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13; Gen. 17:4-6) was given not only to Abraham, but "also to those who are of the faith of Abraham" (Rom. 4:16). Yet the everlasting covenant embracing that promise embraced the believer's offspring as well (Gen. 17:4-6, 7; Isa. 59:20-21), and marked them in infancy with the covenant sign (Gen. 17:12). Since Paul regarded Abraham as "our father in the sight of God" (Rom. 4:17), Paul’s gospel exhibited both a *retrospective* and the *prospective* generational outlook.

This righteousness that extends to “children's children” received further Pauline corroboration in Acts 16:31 and 1 Corinthians 7:14. But it is especially noteworthy that Paul's teaching on justification by faith defined the sign of circumcision as "the seal of the righteousness that [Abraham] had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (Rom. 4:11). The very fact that Paul buttressed his doctrine of justification by faith with an appeal to the law of circumcision demonstrated that the covenant of circumcision, as originally instituted, represented no contradiction

to that doctrine. As Cullman observed, "The Apostle knows very well that circumcision was practiced on infants, who only *afterwards* were capable of belief" (1950, 55). It was this salient point that had impressed the English Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter, as well:

If Infants then usually were entered and engaged Church-members by that Circumcision which was a seal of the righteousness of Faith, and was not given on Legal grounds; then that Church-membership of Infants is not repealed (1651, 58).

Cullman, noting that Barth's argument was based on the idea that circumcision meant admission to a mere racial succession, appealed to Romans 4:17-18 to show that the original ordinance of circumcision (mentioned in verse 11) was compatible with the promise that Abraham would be the "father of many nations" (1950, 57-58).

Another salient factor not to be overlooked is that ethnic Israel, however rejected, remains a factor in God's plan of election "on account of the patriarchs" (Acts 3:25; Rom. 11:15, 28). And this is to be regarded as consistent with the fact that their promised salvation will never come about in any other way than *by faith* (Rom. 11:1-4, 26). Why then must it be regarded as contrary to the doctrine of justification by faith that the children of professing Christian believers are called "holy" (1 Cor. 7:14)? And why should it appear so strange that their holy status should be based not on mere biological inheritance, but on God's covenant (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39)?

Henry Alford pointed out that Romans 11:28b does not state that the Jews are beloved "for the *merits* of their fathers" but "for the sake of their fathers," i.e., "because of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so often referred to by God as a cause for His favourable remembrance of Israel." This is the point of Baptist confusion. The Baptist fails to distinguish the covenant of grace from the presumption of family righteousness apart from grace. If infants should not be baptized, then it could equally be argued that there is no advantage in being a Jew. Accordingly

Jesus should not have been sent to the lost sheep of Israel; neither should he have blessed their children. The gospel should not have been ordered to the Jew first, and Israel should have no hope of restoration. God deals graciously with the children of believers for the sake of the faithful fathers. This was the basis of circumcision of Israel's eight-day-old sons and is the ground of infant baptism. To deny infant baptism is to put everything on a strictly egalitarian basis--the very thing Scripture does not do.

Barth could not challenge the intergenerational principle consistently, for he referred to "the Church as *a manifestation of the covenant of grace* [italics mine] in the time between the Resurrection and Parousia of Jesus Christ" (Marcel 1953, 116). And if the covenant of grace is still in tact, so is the household covenant expressed in Genesis 17:7.

Alexander Carson had challenged the intergenerational principle a century earlier than Barth.

There might have been such a connexion in the case of Abraham and his seed, without involving the necessity of a similar connexion between other believers and their seed. . . . To prove such a connexion, then, between Abraham and his seed by this covenant, is not proof that such a connexion exists between other believers and their seed. . . ([1853] 1981, 218).

Carson failed to realize that the intergenerational principle (i.e., that the covenant applied to the believer *and his seed*) did not originate with Abraham, but was in effect from Adam to Abraham as well [Gen.3:15; 5:1-32; 6:1-3; 9:9; 11:10-32] (Hoeksema 1977, 84-97). This fact is well illustrated in Isaiah 54 where promises associated with the new covenant are compared with the Noahic covenant (vs. 9)--including the intergenerational principle: "All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace" (vs.13; cf. Gen. 9:9).

Carson further overlooked the nature of the covenant and the obligations associated with it when he said,

Our opponents found the right of the child on the faith of the immediate ancestor. But if the law of circumcision is to regulate baptism, the posterity of a believer have a right to baptism, to the remotest generations, if all their intermediate progenitors were atheists ([1853] 1981, 230).

Jewett expressed the same idea, as if to ridicule or undercut any paedobaptist reliance upon a promise such as Exodus 20:6.

If God has children (believers) and grandchildren (believers' children), why may he not have great grandchildren (believers' childrens' children)? (1978, 116).

Richard Baxter answered that argument in the seventeenth century. Commenting on Exodus 20:6 in which God promised to show his love "to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments," Baxter pointed out that the promised blessing applied only to the *immediate* children of believers. Though the principle remained valid for a thousand generations, each of those generations would in turn be expected to affirm its covenant with God (1651, 65). In view of Israel's history and the pattern of God's blessing and judgment, Baxter certainly grasped the point of Exodus 20:6 that was apparently overlooked by both Carson and Jewett. Baxter argued further that the principle of Exodus 20:6 must be just as valid for the New Testament church as are the Ten Commandments; for they represent the context in which the principle is found (1651, 63).

Samuel Hopkins similarly explained the meaning of the intergenerational aspect of the covenant of grace.

Unless the covenant be broken by unfaithfulness and disobedience, mercy will go down, from one to another, even to a thousand generations; that is, to all generations; and the course can never be interrupted; and in this respect it is an everlasting covenant (1811, 2:266-67).

The argument raised by Carson and Jewett, as it applied to the institution of circumcision, was unfounded; for it supposed that there were no moral obligation associated with the covenant sign. But this never had been the case:

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised (Rom. 2:25).

Baptism, like circumcision, carries with it a moral/spiritual obligation--whether the baptized be a professing adult believer or covenant child.

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Rom. 6:1-4).

By God's design, therefore, the intergenerational principle of the covenant did not provide sanctuary for unrepentant atheists and lawbreakers, as Carson and Jewett suggested by their caricature of the covenant. Those who lived under the illusion that it did were to be cut off from the covenant community. When that disciplinary action was not enforced, eventually God's judgment was visited upon the entire covenant community (2 Kings 17:7-23). The same is true in the case of the New Testament church (1 Cor. 5:1-5; Rev. 2:5, 22-23; 3:3, 16).

It is certainly a commendable thing for a child to appropriate the spiritual values of the Christian parent, i.e., to make the same assessment of the worthiness of Jesus Christ to be the Lord of his life, and of the beauty of holiness as surpassing all earthly beauty. If the Bible is to be our standard, and not the *Humanist Manifesto*, the church will honor children who "clarify"

their values by honoring the Christian values of their parents (1 Sam. 2:30). This was certainly one of the outstanding qualities of Jonathan Edwards. During his days as an undergraduate at Yale (he entered Yale at age 13), he recorded the following: "Resolved never to allow the least measure of fretting or uneasiness at my father or mother . . . so much as in the least alternation of my speech or motion of my eye" (Dodds [1971] 1976, 44).

Conversely, the church should honor parents who take the spiritual initiative with their children in the matter of infant baptism, and all that it signifies in terms of Christian commitment.

In God's eyes parents and their children are *one*. By divine right parents are the authorized representatives of their children; they act for them; they engage in spiritual obligations because of them and for them, and also in their name. Such is the order of God. It is for this reason that in every case when parents enter into the covenant in the capacity of proselytes they do so together with their minor children (Marcel 1953, 117).

Certainly, Paul commended the intergenerational commitment of Lois and Eunice on behalf of Timothy's spiritual well-being.

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 Tim. 1:5).

### **Infant Baptism and the Discipleship Pattern**

After his resurrection Jesus issued to the eleven disciples what has come to be known as the Great Commission:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey

everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

The discipleship pattern that Jesus established in the Great Commission was for baptism to precede systematic Christian instruction. Graves disputed this.

If teaching, so as to secure repentance and faith, is required by Christ *before* baptism--as the most learned and candid of Pedobaptists themselves admit, then to baptize before teaching repentance and faith is to alter and pervert the Word of God, which is to incur the displeasure of God and endanger the salvation of men (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 702).

Carson failed to distinguish between preaching [kerygma] (1 Cor. 1:21), and teaching [didache] (Matt. 28:20). Preaching precedes baptism; teaching follows it. Preaching is the announcement of Good News (1 Cor. 15:1-8), the proclamation of the Gospel. It is the evangelistic task and represents spiritual obstetrics. Teaching is the follow-up task and represents spiritual pediatrics. Baptism should always be preceded by preaching (Mark 1:4) and followed by teaching (Matt. 28:18-20). And infants should be present for the preaching for they benefit by it--when the Word falls on the ears of their parents and when it falls on their own.

If baptism is to be withheld from infants and small children on the grounds that repentance and faith are lacking, or at least empirically unverifiable, why does Scripture set forth teaching specifically designed for them? The apostles did not ignore the children in their instructions for the churches, as the Ephesian and Colossian letters make clear (Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 4:20). That such instruction presupposes their baptism is clear for the letters themselves imply that these children are part of the church and included among the "saints" (Eph. 1:1) or "the holy and faithful brothers in Christ" (Col. 1:2). If it were otherwise, how could the children be expected to be held accountable to the Christian standard of obedience?

Jewett had no quarrel with those who viewed the children addressed by the apostle as included among the saints and faithful brethren, but presumably regarded them simply as believers still young enough to be subject to their parents. For Jewett, therefore, Paul's instruction for children had nothing to do with infant baptism (1978, 54).

Carson argued along different lines not willing to concede that these children were included among the saints. "The duty of obedience to parents is not a new duty, that results from a connexion with a church, or with receiving the gospel" ([1853] 1981, 188). Yet even the Ten Commandments were originally given within the context of a church "connexion." The Old Testament parallel to, and basis for, Paul's apostolic instructions for children is the fifth commandment:

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you (Exod. 20:12).

There are two significant factors concerning this commandment: (1) The LORD professes to be the children's "God" consistent with his promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:7; and (2) the fifth commandment, like the rest of the Ten Commandments, was given to a *saved* people, as the prologue makes clear: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exod. 20:2).

Hanko observed that the deliverance from Egypt typified New Testament salvation. In fact, the children addressed in the fifth commandment had been baptized (1 Cor. 10:1-2).

The conclusion is that the introduction to the law is inseparably related to the law as a part of it. That there is one commandment specifically referring to children proves that the introduction also refers to children of believers. And if God is their God, if they too are redeemed, then they must bear the sign of such redemption as well (1981, 52).

Graves objected to the application of Matthew 28:18-20 to infants claiming that such an application postulated "two conditions" for baptism--"one of faith, and one without faith." To do so was "knowingly to alter and pervert, by adding to, the plain law of Christ, and can be said to be impiety and sin in the sight of God" (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 703). Alexander Carson argued that even if infants had been present in the instances of the New Testament household baptisms, "THE KNOWN LIMITATIONS OF THE COMMISSION WOULD EXCEPT THEM."

Til infants are believers, they can never be baptized according to a commission that enjoins the baptism of believers. If there is a commission to enlist recruits six feet high, when we afterwards read that a family were enlisted without specifying their height, we know that none of them were under that standard. Were it not for the strength of the prejudice, this form of expression could not for a moment embarrass the weakest of the children of God (Carson [1853] 1981, 191).

J. Rodman Williams noted that, according to Mark 16:16, belief preceded baptism: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Williams 1988-, 3:234). But if we are going to exclude infants from baptism on the basis of Mark 16:16, we must also exclude those who die in infancy from salvation on the basis of Mark 16:16. For the second half of the verse reads, "but whoever does not believe will be condemned." The antipaedobaptist simply cannot have it both ways. He cannot use this verse to deny infant baptism, because faith as he defines it is lacking, while granting salvation to the infants when the same faith remains absent.

If the antipaedobaptist can allow that the logic of Mark 16:16b does not directly pertain to infants because of (what he considers) the age-of-accountability factor (Williams 1988-, 3:235), why does he think it strange that the paedobaptist should not press the order of Mark 16:16a in the case of infants because of the covenant factor?

When a commission is given in such short words, and there is no express direction what they shall do, . . . the natural and obvious interpretation is, that they must do in that manner as they and the Church in which they have lived always used to do (Naglee 1987, 86).

Jacob Ditzler similarly affirmed,

The commission was given to a people accustomed thus to disciple. Hence the commission (Matt. xxviii: 19, 20) could be understood in no other way than as embracing infants. A special command to baptize infants was wholly unnecessary under the circumstances (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 661).

That the Great Commission did not specifically mention infants was of no more consequence than that it did not mention water.

It does not say a word about water--with water. Again--what are you going to teach them? Teach them all things whatsoever I have commanded you? Did he command to organize a new church, legislate infants out; and regard this as what he meant by receiving little ones in my name? Clearly enough the commission has to be interpreted in the light of existing facts--practices. Always among the Jews infant children were taken in with their parents. This none will deny. In discipling adults from Gentiles, in all cases, their infants came in with them. They knew nothing else (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 710).

The question is not how modern American Christians understand Matthew 28:18-20--but rather how eleven Jewish disciples would have understood it in reference to infants and small children.

Carson and Graves started with the Great Commission set forth in Mark 16 and Matthew 28 and viewed the Commission in isolation from the total scope of Jesus' ministry and teaching, as well as from the rest of the New Testament and the entire Old

Testament. With that as their starting point, they proceeded to make assumptions concerning infant baptism which destroyed the covenantal reference of the family. Consequently, they misapplied the Great Commission--as though there were no difference between the covenantal status of the children of believers and that of the children of heathen adults. It was their consideration of the Great Commission texts in isolation from the context of Scripture that tainted their exegesis and conclusions. In short, they overlooked the fact that Jesus and the disciples were Jews!

If the idea of "discipling" infants was to be ridiculed, Ditzler reminded his Baptist opponent that, according to Numbers 3:27 and 28, among the 8600 enrolled "keepers of the sanctuary" were males, one month old and upwards, to be taught their religious duties. Here infants were "enrolled as learners, disciples, and though not teachable for several years yet they are disciplined at a month old" (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 661-62).

Richard Baxter noted that an Israelite man "and his children" were to be released to return to the land of his forefathers during the year of Jubilee "because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt" (Leviticus 25:41, 42). Accordingly Israelite infants were included among the *servants of the LORD*, and, if Hebrews 11:26 be considered, as *servants of Christ* (1651, 19, 22).

Baxter insisted that the infants and minority children of New Testament believers were regarded as "disciples." He cited Peter's words in Acts 15:10: "Why do you test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?" Baxter noted that the issue of controversy, according to Acts 15:1, was the Jewish insistence that "unless you are circumcised, *according to the custom taught by Moses*, you cannot be saved" (emphasis mine). Of course, the custom of Moses was that infant and minority sons be circumcised along with the males who had come of age. Clearly the disciples upon whom the Jews wished to impose the "yoke" included the infants and minority sons of the New Testament believers (Baxter 1651, 15-18).

Baxter went even further proceeding to prove that infants and minority offspring of New Testament believers were regarded as "Christians." For if infants were *disciples* according to Acts 15:10, they must also be called *Christians* according to Acts 11:26: "The *disciples* were called *Christians* first at Antioch" (1651, 21, emphasis mine). This does not mean that all the infant and minority offspring of believers were automatically or instantly saved upon their parents believing, but that they were regarded as properly included in the church and among the saints rather than among the heathen. Salvation had come to their household and they were embraced by the covenant of grace.

Bridge and Phipps argued that for children of Christians to be regarded as Christians until they demonstrate otherwise by rejecting the gospel, rather than as unbelievers until they confess Christ, "raises intriguing questions concerning the place of conversion in the Christian home, and about the unity of the Gospel. Is there one gospel, for all, or are there two, one for the children of Christians and one for the children on non-Christians?" (1977, 51). Horace Bushnell addressed that issue in his classic *Christian Nurture*, "If we speak of conversion, family government should be a converting ordinance, as truly as preaching" ([1888] 1903, 319). In his final sermon to the Northampton congregation Jonathan Edwards had stated,

Every family ought to be . . . a little church, consecrated to Christ and wholly influenced and governed by His rules. And family education and order are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, all other means are like to prove ineffectual (Dodds [1971] 1976, 54).

Inasmuch as infant baptism is a sacrament representing the spiritual reality of the Christian home, it may be said to be a converting ordinance! In infant baptism God turns "the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" lest the LORD "come and strike the land with a curse" (Mal. 4:6). Anyone who takes seriously the ministry of John the Baptist ought to welcome that (Luke 1:17)! If the hearts of the

children were turned to the father in the Edwards home, they would encounter one whose heart was consumed by the reality of the beatific. Edwards wrote in his personal narrative,

It has often appeared to me delightful, to be united to Christ; to have him for my Head, and to be a member of his body; also to have Christ for my Teacher and Prophet. I very often think with sweetness, and longings, and pantings of soul, of being a little child, taking hold of Christ, to be led by him through the wilderness of this world. That text, Matt. xviii. 3. has often been sweet to me, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children," &c. I love to think of coming to Christ, to receive salvation of him, poor in spirit, and quite empty of self, humbly exalting in him alone; cut off entirely from my own root, in order to grow into and out of Christ: to have God in Christ to be all in all; and to live, by faith on the Son of God, a life of humble, unfeigned confidence in him. That scripture has often been sweet to me, Ps. cxv. 1. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for they truth's sake." And these words of Christ, Luke x. 21. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." That sovereignty of God, which Christ rejoiced in, seemed to me worthy of such joy; and that rejoicing seemed to show the excellency of Christ, and of what spirit he was (1879, vol. 1, p. xxxix).

In order for a father's heart truly to be turned his children, and their hearts to his, the father himself must become as a little child and be converted. This reality was clearly reflected in Edwards's description of his own Christian experience. The reciprocal response of the children to their father could hardly be less than spiritual encounter with their father's God, for Edwards went on to relate how he had

sometimes had a sense of the excellent fulness of Christ, and his meetness and suitableness as a Saviour; whereby he has appeared to me, far above all, the chief of ten thousands. His blood and atonement have appeared sweet, and his righteousness sweet; which was always accompanied with ardency of spirit; and inward struggling and breathings, and groanings that cannot be uttered, to be emptied of myself, and swallowed up in Christ (1879, vol. 1, p. xxxix).

If there was a connection between Edwards's beatific contemplations and his role as husband and father, the household could hardly escape the spiritual blessings associated with Christ's threefold mediatorial offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. No wonder Edwards could refer to family teaching and order as "some of the chief means of grace"! In the Christian home where parents have such a fervent love for God, the Gospel is lived and breathed. Surely this was God's plan revealed in his instruction to the children of Israel on the plains of Moab.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deut. 6:4-9).

Justin Martyr, as early as 150 A.D., had spoken of men and women between the ages of 60 and 70 who had been discipled in the faith since childhood (Hastings 1919, 136). This must surely have taken place for the most part in the Christian home. In a striking way the Christian home was a microcosm of the church. Indeed, churches in the New Testament were frequently identified with particular homes or households.

Give my greetings to the brothers of Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house (Col. 4:15).

Greet Priscilla and Aquila...Greet also the church that meets in their house (Rom. 16:3-4).

Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus (Rom. 16:10).

God's pattern for discipleship in the family, was established during the patriarchal period and especially in his covenant with Abraham--"the father of all who believe" (Rom. 4:11).

At it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were (Rom. 4:17).

Hanko pointed out that since God made Abraham "the father of all who believe"--circumcised and uncircumcised, the parental commission of Genesis 18:17-19 is applicable to all generations of the church (1981, 53-54).

The Abrahamic pattern for discipleship in the home was consistent with the Great Commission--the outward sign of the covenant was to be applied to the infant males prior to their spiritual instruction. Accordingly, those men and women, of whom Justin Martyr spoke, and who had been "discipled" since childhood, must have been baptized as infants or small children. This was Zwingli's argument.

It has been promised by the testimonies of almost all the prophets that the Church is to be gathered from the heathen into the Church of the people of God. Christ himself said: "They shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" [Matth. 8:11], and, "Go ye into all the world," etc. [Matth. 28:19]. But to the

Church of the Jews their infants belonged as much as the Jews themselves. No less, therefore, belong our infants to the Church of Christ than did, in former times, those of the Jews; for if it were otherwise the promise would not be valid, as then we would not sit down with God on the same terms as Abraham (Zwingli 1922, 43).

### **Child Education and the Covenant of Works**

And if Israel's training under the law was appropriate for her minority or childhood status, should there not be a certain simulation of that pedagogy for the children of God's people under the New Testament (Gal. 4:1-7) "upon whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11). If the children of Israel needed line upon line and precept upon precept (Isa. 28:9-10), so may the children of Christian believers until they attain to full assurance of grace and openly confess Christ?

In terms of the covenant of grace, such a minority stage of spiritual preparation might even be described as a *covenant of works*. Jonathan Edwards had so regarded the moral law embodied in the Ten Commandments as functioning in terms of a covenant of works useful, not only for the nation of Israel, but for "God's church throughout all ages of the world." Its purpose was "to make men sensible of the necessity of Christ as Savior" (1879, 547). Furthermore, Edwards clearly indicated that the covenant child who had not yet attained to grace is "in the covenant" only in the sense of being "under the obligation of it" (1879, 1:524). Edwards stated,

It is *supposed*, that those who have *externally* (*i. e.* by oral profession and promise) entered into God's covenant, are thereby obliged to no more than the external duties of that covenant: which is not proved, and I humbly conceive, is certainly not the true state of the case. They who have *externally* entered into God's covenant, are by external profession and engagements entered into that one only *covenant of grace*, which the

Scripture informs us of; and therefore are obliged to fulfill the duties of *that* covenant, which are chiefly *internal*. The children of Israel, when they *externally* entered into covenant with God at Mount Sinai, promised to perform all the duties of the covenant, to obey all the *ten commandments* spoken by God in their hearing, and written in tables of stone, which were therefore called *The Tables of the Covenant*; the sum of which ten commands was, *to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and to love their neighbor as themselves*; which principally at least are *internal* duties (1879, 1:473).

Edwards insisted that with respect to a covenant child's obligation to repent or be converted, "their moral *inability* was no excuse" (1879, 1:473). Though Edwards indeed designates the covenant which these persons enter as the covenant of *grace*, it is clear that God's covenant of grace embraced the covenant of *works* in a subsidiary relationship for the accomplishments of its gracious ends. The obligation of covenant children to fulfil the *internal* duty of the law of God, while being in a state of moral *inability*, is certainly analogous to the covenant of *works* as described by the *Westminster Confession* to which Edwards clearly subscribed (Murray 1987, 346). While "true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works" (WCF 1946, XIX, vi), "God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works" (1946, XIX,i) and "this law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai" (1946, XIX, ii).

The *covenant of works* corresponded to John Calvin's first use of the law. "*The law shows the righteousness of God, and as a mirror discloses our sinfulness, leading us to implore divine help*" (Calvin 1960, 1:354).

If the God of all grace, the Father from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name, subjected his chosen nation to such a pedagogy in their youth, why should Christian parents retreat from such a program for their own covenant children (1 Pet.5:10; Eph. 3:14-15)? In their case, the covenant of works surely represents an improved or advanced state of operation when

compared to its function under the Law of Moses, just as its function under the Law of Moses had represented an advancement over its function in the original covenant with Adam. For God has given to Christian parents the advantage of understanding the law in its true perspective through Jesus the Master Teacher and his holy apostles! Grace and mercy may now be seen to triumph over judgment to a far greater degree than was possible under the law.

The eminent New England pastor, John Cotton, insisted,

God doth not call any into fellowship with himself in a covenant of grace, but ordinarily he first bringeth them into a Covenant of Works, and casteth them out of doors by a spirit of bondage and of burning, and then bringeth them in by the true door, and Jesus Christ is that door, Joh. 10:9 (1654, 49-50).

It was precisely because the covenant of works was an instrumental part of God's process for one to come to Christ that Cotton admonished others not to censure those who were still laboring under it (1654, 51).

Thus he dealt with the Children of *Israel* and called them to be a singular people unto himselfe, and yet but in a Covenant of works, Deut. 7.6,7,8. Thus doth the Lord deale with all those whom he receiveth to be a people unto himself; and by this spirit of bondage he draweth them from all their sinful lusts and passions, so as that they can find no hope or mercy in anything; and this is properly a Seal of the covenant of works, as the spirit of Adoption is a Seale of the Covenant of Grace. *Rom.* 8.15 (Cotton 1654, 20).

Inasmuch as the law is described by Paul as "a yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1), Cotton's words, as applied to the preparation of covenant children, recall the words of Jeremiah. In the midst of his grief concerning the destruction of his beloved Jerusalem he affirmed,

The LORD is good to those whose  
hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;  
It is good to wait quietly  
for the salvation of the LORD.  
It is good for a man to bear the yoke  
while he is young,  
Let him sit in silence,  
for the LORD has laid it on him (Lam. 3:25-28).

This is not at all to suggest that parents are to be harsh or oppressive with their children, but simply to recognize a fact of youth even under the new covenant. By treating covenant children as part of God's family, teaching them God's Word, modeling the truth for them, while holding them to God's requirements, we set the stage whereby these covenant children "through the law" "die to the law" (Gal. 2:19) enroute to grace, and by means of it. This is spiritual parenting based upon the paradigm set forth by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians:

What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive full rights as sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "*Abba*, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since a son, God has made you also an heir (Gal. 4:1-7).

Cotton described the role of the "School-master" appointed by the Father as a guardian for his children during the minority period of his development:

As a School-master driveth his Scholar through fear, unto this or that duty: so the Law of God driveth the soul through fear unto *Jesus Christ*; not that it doth reveal *Christ* a Savior and Redeemer of Free Grace, but the soul being once brought down under the sense of sin by the terrors of the *Law*, will readily and diligently hearken unto the news of *Christ* a Savior: for being once sensible of his own inability to redeem himself, and unworthiness to be redeemed from the wrath of God, now is the soul fitted to hear the voice of the Gospell, now is the news of *Jesus Christ* beautiful, and glad tidings: and of this use is the *Law* unto the *Elect* of God, before they come under the Covenant of the Grace of God (Cotton 1671, 69).

When the mothers and fathers of Israel instructed their children in God's laws, inevitably the question would arise: "Why?" God instructed these parents beforehand concerning their proper response to that question.

In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand" (Deut. 6:20).

Surely there is a New Testament application of Moses' words to the Christian home and the true Christian parent will recognize it. In effect, the children, by asking the question "Why?," are providing the Christian parent the opportunity to speak of God's grace.

To be sure, the God of Abraham wanted the children of his people to be instructed from the earliest years, as the inspired Psalmist attested:

O my people, hear my teaching;  
listen to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth in parables,

I will utter hidden things, things from of old--  
what we have heard and known,  
what our fathers have told us.  
We will not hide them from our children;  
we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,  
his power, and the wonders he has done.  
He decreed statues for Jacob  
and established the law in Israel,  
which he commanded our forefathers  
to teach their children,  
so the next generation would know them,  
even the children yet to be born,  
and they in turn would tell their children.  
Then they would put their trust in God  
and would not forget his deeds  
but would keep his commands.  
They would not be like their forefathers--  
a stubborn and rebellious generation,  
whose hearts were not loyal to God,  
whose spirits were not faithful to him (Ps. 78:1-8).

Hanko took Kingdon to task for dismissing the intergenerational principle set forth in Psalm 78:1-8.

Nor may Kingdon simply say that this refers to the Old Testament for in so doing he cuts the heart out of the Old Testament. He must leave this as an abiding principle of the scriptures to be followed by all believing parents of all time or he must refer this only to the Jews and adopt some sort of dispensationalism not only, but take away from believing parents the responsibility of the spiritual education of their children (1981, 53).

Matthew cited Jesus' teaching as a fulfillment of Psalm 78:2: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world" (Matt. 13:35). This fulfillment corroborates the intergenerational principle, for the verses that immediately follow in the Psalm are so explicit:

. . . what we have heard and known,  
what our fathers have told us.  
We will not hide them from their children;  
we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD. . . (Ps. 78:3-4b).

Psalm 78 attests to Israel's covenant unfaithfulness. Though God had "commanded our forefathers to teach their children" (vs. 5), the "forefathers" are designated "a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God" (vs. 8).

Their hearts were not loyal to him,  
they were not faithful to his covenant (vs. 37).

Because of Israel's covenant unfaithfulness, God

rejected the tents of Joseph,  
he did not chose the tribe of Ephraim,  
but he chose the tribe of Judah,  
Mount Zion, which he loved.  
He built his sanctuary like the heights,  
like the earth that he established forever.  
He chose David his servant . . .  
to be the shepherd of his people Jacob,  
of Israel his inheritance (vss. 67-70a, 71b).

David's Greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be the one to "gather the lambs in his arms and carry them "close to his heart" (Isa. 40: 11; Mark 10:16). He would be the Mediator of a new covenant (Heb. 7:22).

Further, Psalm 79:13, considered in context, could only be fulfilled through Israel's redemption under the terms of the New Testament. In fact, there are many Psalms that affirm the intergenerational principle: 33:11; 45:17; 72:5; 79:13; 89:1; 100:5; 102:12; 119:90; 135:13; 146:10. Herman Hanko noted the intergenerational principle in the following Scriptures: Psalm 48:13; 145:4; Isaiah 51:8; Lamentations 5:19 and Deuteronomy 7:9 (1981, 58-59). It is hardly conceivable that the Psalms, constantly quoted by the Savior, and commended by the apostle

for singing in the church (Col. 3:16), could be regarded as obsolete with respect to a principle so woven into their fabric. The intergenerational truths that pervades the Psalms surely apply to the New Testament church. Though written in the Old Testament, they are rooted in the New Testament, because Christ is the Root and the Offspring of David their author (Rev. 22:16). Being the Root, he upholds what they declare.

God's pattern for the family in every age is for the children of professing believers to bear the covenantal sign and to be disciplined and instructed in the home. Only in this way can the church bridge the generation gap. Reformer John Calvin warned of Satan's subtle attempts to erode the foundation of Christian homes through the neglect of the sacrament of infant baptism.

It is precisely this which Satan is attempting in assailing infant baptism with such an army: that, once this testimony of God's grace is taken away from us, the promise which, through it, is put before our eyes may eventually vanish little by little. From this would grow up not only an impious ungratefulness toward God's mercy but a certain negligence about instructing our children in piety. For when we consider that immediately from birth God takes and acknowledges them as his children, we feel a strong stimulus to instruct them in earnest fear of God and observance of the law. Accordingly, unless we wish spitefully to obscure God's goodness, let us offer our infants to him, for he gives them a place among those of his family and household, that is, the members of the church (1960, 2:1359).

Paul calls the children of the believing parent "holy" (1 Cor. 7:14). If they are holy according to the apostolic standard, should not their spiritual instruction and discipleship be preceded by baptism? If the kingdom of God, which Jesus said belonged to these infant children, consists of nothing less than "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17), what valid scriptural reason can be given to withhold the covenant sign of baptism from them? Infant baptism is consistent both with the

order set forth in the Great Commission of our Lord, and with the pattern for spiritual parenting given to Abraham "our father."

It is axiomatic that the church of Jesus Christ is never more than one generation away from extinction. Newlyweds can never realize God's purpose until they mature beyond their mutual infatuation to the point of seeing themselves "as a link in the chain of generations which God causes to come and to pass away to His glory, and which He calls into His kingdom" (Christensen 1973, 21). Spirit-baptized Christians are called to a sanctified appreciation of history. Infant baptism is a powerful token of historical interchange.

Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations (Isa. 58:12).

The gospel of Jesus Christ alone stems the tide of futile family patterns inherited from previous generations, and enables the saints to rebuild for future generations in a godly way. Peter underscored this truth for the church.

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake (1 Pet. 1:17-20).

The baptism of her infant children, in keeping with Christ's redemption, is a fitting, scriptural way for the Church of Jesus Christ to focus and attest her commitment to future generations.

...I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of their fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments (Exod. 20:5b-6).

*Great Commission & Generation Gap*

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One generation will commend your works to another;  
they will tell of your mighty acts...

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,  
and your dominion endures through all generations  
(Ps. 145:4,13).

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great  
and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the  
hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of  
the children to the fathers; or else I will come and  
strike the land with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6).

*The Ancient Landmark*

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