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'Doctrines That Will Change Your Life' Series  
#8

## "Children and the Covenant" Romans 4

### Introduction

What is the place of children among the people of God? Where do they fit into the church? How are we to view them? I know we love our children and we view them as precious. But beyond our feelings for our children, beyond our commitment to them, how are we to *think* about them? Or maybe a better question is *how does God view our children? What does He think about them?*

It's become a strange thing in the modern evangelical church scene to baptize infants. For most of history, it has not been misunderstood or strange. Many today assume that infant baptism is either a slide into liberalism or a declaration that baptism in some ways brings salvation. The beautiful understanding of covenant baptism has been lost. In our fall series called *Doctrines that Will Change Your Life*, we come this morning to a study of baptism, particularly as it relates to our sons and daughters. What we are going to see is that through baptism our children are received and set apart by God Himself. Our children are not like the children of the world. They are different. They are marked with the sign of God and given special privileges and special responsibilities and special obligations.

[Romans 4]

God knows that we need signs of significant events. They remind us of His goodness and grace. All through the Bible we see the people of God's people erecting monuments to remind themselves of God's special work. And we see God giving the people particular events and feasts and festivals – again to remind them of His grace.

In the New Testament there are two signs that God has given us to remind us of the greatest thing He has done for us – the giving of our salvation. The signs are still used today to mark the significance of this mighty work. They are the Lord's Supper and baptism.

The Lord's Supper reminds us of the death and resurrection of Christ. And baptism reminds us of the application of that sacrifice to our lives by the washing away of our sins.

I. The Covenant of Salvation is received by faith alone.

This shouldn't be a new thought to you, although some would want to claim that people in the OT were saved by works while people in the NT are saved by grace through faith. That's pretty easy to disprove with passages like the one before us. Look at verse 2 & 3. (Read) When God first appeared to Abraham He promised that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. What is that but a message of good news, a promise of salvation? In fact, Paul's not shy about identifying it at all. In Galatians 3:8 he outright calls it the gospel. *“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached **the gospel** beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations shall be bless in you.”* God told him the means of this salvation would be children born to him and Sarah.

I still remember the night the McCullough family took Pastor Metzger and myself to a western city in Yemen – a little place called Makweete. I went for a walk that evening and to this day have never seen stars in the sky like I did that night. Now imagine God taking you to that spot and telling you that this covenant promise of salvation, this gospel message He's given you, will result in so many other people descending from you that they will be like the stars you're staring at! Then add to the incredible promise the fact that you are already 75 years old and have not yet been able to have a single child. You have no earthly right to such a promise and absolutely no ability to fulfill it. What would your response be to such a gospel? It's a promise of salvation that you can't control. The power to have children is already beyond your reach, let alone the power to multiply like the stars above. To this message the Scripture states clearly, Abraham believed God.

Would you believe such an incredible message? If you are here today as a disciple of Christ then I can say to you with certainty that you would have believed, because in fact, when you believed in Christ you did believe that message. You received it in fuller fashion, but still you believed. One in which you have no earthly claim and no earthly ability to fulfill. Much of the world sees the gospel as no less incredible. God became a man. This man never sinned. This man God willing sacrificed His life on a cross. That death somehow paid a penalty owed to God for sin. And to receive blessing all one has to do is believe it.

The mistake many make today is thinking that the covenant with Abraham was just dealing with the nation of Israel. That is was just a physical covenant. But the covenant with him is primarily

spiritual not physical. Galatians 3:29 says, "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

You see, God is still doing today, what He promised to Abraham. He is fulfilling the covenant through Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ.

So what does all of that have to do with baptism? It's here, after establishing the truth of the gospel in every age, that we can consider the sign of this covenant.

## II. The Covenant of Salvation is marked with a sign.

The sign of this covenant in the OT was circumcision. Converts to Judaism as well as the children of Israel were circumcised. But again, it's important to see that this was not primarily a physical act, but a spiritual one. Paul goes to great lengths to establish the fact that Abraham's salvation was not dependent upon circumcision. (Read verse 9b & 10, 11) The sign of the covenant acted just like signs do today. They point to something else. When you see a bumper sticker that says "McCain" or "Obama", you're not seeing the men themselves. Those signs are pointing you to them. They are designed to remind you of those men and what they represent. That's what signs do - they point to something else.

So when verse 11 says he received the sign of circumcision, we know it is pointing to something else. What does it point to? It points to the righteousness he received by faith. It illustrated the cutting away of his sin and guilt. God is always most interested in the thing being pointed to. That's why in places like Deut. 10:16 He says, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more

stiff-necked.” God is ultimately looking upon our hearts.

Now, given that historical context for Abraham, isn't it interesting that God proceeded then to command Abraham to circumcise the male infants? Here is a sign that points to the salvation promised in the covenant that is to be placed upon infants. Why? The answer can only be that the whole covenant *promise* was given to Abraham and his descendants. Look at verse 13 . . . and verse 16. The sign of the covenant was not placed upon the children to save them, or because they could already believe, but because God's promise was to bless them. He was saying that the gospel would go forth by way of the covenant children. So God was the one including them in the covenant community.

Nothing has changed in the New Testament except the fullness of the covenant.

- Men and women are still saved by grace through faith.
- The covenant to Abraham is still in effect. Now we see fully the seed of Abraham was Jesus Christ. That's why Paul writes in Galatians that we are the true sons of Abraham.
- And the sign is still applied. Now the sign has been changed, as were many signs in the New Testament.
  - \*Passover – Lord's supper
  - \*Sabbath – Lord's Day
  - \*Temple – church
  - \*Circumcision – baptism

But the gospel has never changed.

We baptize our covenant children, that is, the children of believers, because of God's sovereign

plan of placing them in a Christian home. We know that they must one day embrace the gospel by faith. But we believe that we ought to expect that very thing. Surely some were circumcised in the OT who never came to faith. Ishmael is one example. But the norm is Isaac, Jacob, the twelve sons, and on and on.

So the question is, what difference does it make if we baptize our children or not? Consider these three things.

1. It gives our children identity.

When we baptize our children they are brought into the church. They become members of the body of Christ. The church becomes their home. Through baptism the Lord is claiming our children as His own. His mark, His sign is placed upon them.

And I want to say to you boys and girls today, when you were baptized, something very wonderful happened to you. You became part of a big family. In your church family you are loved and accepted. You belong here. In your church family you will learn much about Jesus Christ and His love for you. You are special to God. He chose to give you Christian parents who love Jesus. I want you to know that not everyone has the privilege of growing up in a family and church where they can learn about our heavenly Father.

2. It gives our children responsibility.

Because God chose to put you in a Christian family and because you have been baptized, you have very important responsibilities. God expects you to believe in Jesus and to obey Him. You have that obligation. Because of your identity with Christ, you have are to live for Him.

Now some of you older kids may say, *that's not fair. I didn't choose this for myself. These decisions were made by others.* While that is true, it

doesn't free you from its reality. You also didn't choose what family you would be born in; what school you would attend; or what country you would be a citizen of. And yet you are still obligated to obey the laws of your family, school and nation.

If you embrace your God, and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation and determined to walk in obedience to Jesus, you will enjoy peace with God and all the fruits of the covenant.

If you reject Christ, you will be a covenant breaker, and you will have to answer to God for why you turned away from Him when He gave you so much favor.

### 3. It gives us hope.

As parents who bring our children for baptism, we have a great hope and confidence in the promises of God. In Genesis 17:7 God spoke these words to Abraham. *I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings . . . for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."*

Certainly we have responsibilities as parents: to instruct them in the ways of the covenant: in the Word; to hold before them the gospel and their need to repent and believe; to bring them into the full life of the church; to teach them to fear God through discipline; and to set an example for them of what it means to have a love and heart for God.

But with these responsibilities we live by faith. We trust God for the life of our sons and daughters. We remember that God said the promise of the gospel is *for you and your children*. We thank God for our children. We commit them to God as we bring them to His covenant of grace. May we be faithful.