

KOINONIA KONNECTION

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THE PROMISE IS TO YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN...

"...Although young children do not understand the faith, they are nevertheless to be baptized...for the promise is made to believers and their children, as God declared to Abraham: And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your descendants after you."

So says our church order. But is the order biblical, or are we simply following the teaching of men? Critics of infant baptism think so. They contend that the practice is neither reflective of the early Church, nor is it grounded in biblical Christianity, and as far as Acts 2:38-39 goes, well we're just mistaken.

In view of this question I have developed a two-part essay, which justifies the practice of infant-baptism not from a traditional basis, but a biblical one. In this brief I will outline the defence of infant-baptism based upon the historic and contextual understanding of Acts 2:38-39. In the second brief, I will examine the greater context of the New Testament (hereafter N.T.) and argue convincingly, (I hope), that the practice of infant-inclusion was never abolished.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

Under the Old administration, children were included in the covenant of grace. This practice was established with Abraham (Gen. 17:4-8). For nearly 2000 years, from the time of Abraham to Christ, children of the covenant com-

munity were included as members of the covenant. This practice was unquestioned.

It is this particular view that was held by the men to whom Peter was preaching on the day of Pentecost. In fact, one might say the practice was an "entrenched" belief. They were Jews-to whom the covenant through Abraham was made-Peter was preaching to Jewish men. Obvious isn't it?

Unfortunately those who reject infant baptism can't seem to make this connection. For some reason they have a hard time acknowledging the "redemptive-historic" context of Peter's sermon. For example, one critic recently wrote: "Yes, the promise was to them and would be for their children as well, as soon as their children were old enough to be "cut to the heart" as their parents had been on that day, and repent as their parents had, and be baptized as their parents did for the remission of sins."

Not only does this critic read into the text, (things that are not there), but he also grossly overlooks the redemptive-historic context. His statement assumes that the Jewish men rightly perceived that a change had occurred. That is, he would have us believe that they clearly recognised a paradigm shift; that in hearing Peter's admonition to "repent" and "believe," they walked away understanding that the covenant no longer applied to families, but only to individuals who chose Jesus. This would have been a radical change-a paradigm shift.

Reading modern individualistic ideas into the Bible is no substitute for historic grammatical

interpretation. Peter had just finished rehearsing the history of redemption-Jewish history (Acts 2:14-36). He then ends the sermon by quoting Genesis 17:4-8. This choice of text is very significant. For in doing so, Peter knew that his audience would have understood the historic import of that promise to Abraham.

Let's briefly rehearse Genesis 17:4-8. In this text God comes to Abraham and claims ownership over him and his entire posterity. All Jews understood that the covenant with Abraham involved total submission to the Lord God. God signified his universal dominion over Abraham by saying, "I am Almighty God." He then adds, "And I will establish my covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant." Every Jew understood that this covenant involved God's ownership of the children of Abraham-this included all male descendants as young as eight days of age, regardless of whether they were "cut to the heart."

In fact, under the old administration to withhold one's posterity was an act of treason and covenant defiance. God claimed total authority and dominion over covenant children. No one or anything could be withheld (God claimed their possessions as well). This is why God lies in wait to kill Moses for withholding his children (Ex. 4:24-25). The children of covenant parents belong to God, to withhold them from the covenant simply because they have not been personally "cut to the heart" was (and still is) treason. To ignore this historic understanding is no slight oversight.

It is important to realise that if the N.T. has revoked covenant admission to infants that such a change would constitute a huge paradigm shift. Therefore, it is no slight oversight on the part of Peter to quote from Genesis 17:4-8 and not amend it, or at least correct his audience's "traditional" understanding. At the risk of sounding redundant, I will repeat myself: Pe-

ter's audience would have understood his words in the historic sense, therefore, a paradigm shift as radical as the exclusion of children from the covenant would have necessitated a different instruction; at the very least Peter would have corrected their traditional assumptions of Genesis 17:4-8. But notice Peter doesn't do that. He simply quotes the passage without changing anything about it and thereby he reinforces historic (and biblical) views about the corporate nature of the covenant.

This point may seem too subtle for the critic of infant-baptism, but I assure you it is anything but subtle. God is not the author of confusion or of misunderstanding (1 Cor. 14:33 & James 1:17). If a paradigm shift of covenant proportions were in view in the Acts 2:38-39 text (changing the corporate nature of the covenant which included children, to one which is exclusively individualistic and for adults, is a monumental shift), God by superintending providence would have clearly revealed this change. However, nothing whatsoever of a modification is suggested. Peter's silence (God's silence) in this regard is stunningly loud.

Just to emphasise this point, I want you to notice how closely Peter's words resemble Genesis 17:4-8. Peter says, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, to you and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." Genesis 17:4-8 says, "I am Almighty God; walk before me and be blameless...As for Me behold, Me covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations...And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendant after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant." (Gen. 17:4-8) -continued inside back cover



MISSION SPOTLIGHT

"THERE THEY PREACHED THE GOSPEL"

Paul and Barnabas were obliged to flee from Antioch in Pisidia (in the western part of today's Turkey) where they had been proclaiming the truth concerning Jesus. They arrived in Iconium, where they made known the same truths. But again they had to flee - to Lystra and Derbe. "And there", we are told, "they preached the gospel." It was the same wherever Paul went, whether alone, or with Barnabas or Silas or Timothy or anyone else - whatever the circumstances, through "honour and dishonour", through "evil report and good report" - he must always preach the gospel.

But why? Why was he so anxious to preach the gospel? Why did he, and Barnabas too, preach the gospel so consistently in all these cities? Let us briefly consider three reasons.

1. Because of the need of the people. Wherever Paul and Barnabas went, those they came in contact with were sinners. Without the gospel, the end of these people would be a lost eternity. They were the creatures of a righteous God; they had rebelled against Him. The solemn truth is that "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps 7:11); He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and [cannot] look on iniquity" (Hab 1:13). All unbelievers therefore are under condemnation; they are on their way to eternal destruction. They desperately need to hear the gospel - the good news about Christ, who came to give His life a ransom for many.

Paul and Barnabas were also conscious that the people of Lystra and Derbe were in a state of spiritual death. They were all under obligation to love God, to turn from their sins and do the will of God from the heart, but were completely unable to do any of these things. Paul and Barnabas knew that only the Holy Spirit could deliver the people of these cities from this

state of spiritual death "in trespasses and sins". They knew too that the Holy Spirit does His work of regeneration in connection with the proclamation of the gospel, for sinners are "born again . . . by the Word of God" (1 Pet 1:23). They therefore felt the necessity and urgency of proclaiming the gospel.

2. Because the gospel has divine authority. It was Christ Himself, the Son of God, who sent out the first preachers. After His resurrection, He reminded His disciples of the great significance of the work He had just accomplished: "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day" (Luke 24:46). What was more, it was His will "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things" (vv 47,48). Those disciples who witnessed the death and resurrection of their Master, must bear testimony to His saving work. They must bring their hearers the good news of repentance and forgiveness of sins on the ground of this perfect work of redemption.

Paul had the same divine authority to preach the gospel - as had Barnabas and Silas also, and every other preacher whom the Lord has sent out since then. They have all gone out as His ambassadors, to proclaim in His name repentance and remission of sins in all parts of the world. So, wherever they went, in Lystra and Derbe and every other city they reached, Paul and Barnabas had authority to preach this gospel. They had the spirit of Micaiah, the prophet who told King Ahab's messenger: "As the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak" (1 Kings 22:14). Micaiah had a message from heaven, and he must deliver it. Paul and Barnabas likewise had a message

from heaven - the good news of salvation through a crucified Saviour. It was the only gospel they had authority to preach. Peter was perfectly clear on that point. "Neither is there salvation in any other," he declared, "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Every other message is false.

In any case, there is no need for any other gospel; this gospel is suitable for all. Christ di-

rected the disciples and, through them, all preachers in all future ages: "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes . . . will be saved" (Mk 16:15,16). In the gospel, sinners are presented with a divinely-authorized message which meets their needs as individuals. It is as suitable for today's hearers as for those Paul and Barnabas spoke to. It always has divine authority.

-(to be continued) Author unknown

FAMILIES IN FOCUS

MARRIAGE - ITS CHALLENGES AND ITS REDEMPTION



Having spent some time dealing in an overall fashion on the topic of marriage, we now want to cover the issue of the family as a complete unit, that is, as a basic societal unit consisting of father, mother and children. We want to define scripturally, the nature and purpose of the family. We also want to examine the assaults made against this institution of God, assaults from within as well as from without. We want to learn from scripture how our families may be God-glorifying. We want to see what practical steps may be taken to protect and promote the well being of the family. All this we hope to do with time and the help of God.

In a previous article we saw that one of the purposes for the marriage institution was that a godly seed might be raised up for God's glory. This is established on the basis of Malachi 2:15b "He seeks a godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth." This mandate was given to man already before the fall as a creation mandate. In the first chapter of the bible we read, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it..."

Genesis 1:27,28. This state of affairs God saw to be very good. Genesis 1:31a. Adam, created in the image of God was commanded to reproduce, to beget a whole family of image bearers of God.

After the fall of mankind in Adam, God never rescinded the mandate given to man. What changed was man's being plunged into the state of sin and misery and death. Now the family institution, created very good, by God Himself, would experience the devastating effects and corruption that comes by sin. Man became guilty before God by the imputed guilt of Adam; he was our federal head. Man lost the original righteousness in which he was created. Man's very nature became corrupt. Theologians call this condition, original sin. Every member of the human race receives this consequence of sin by natural generation. Thus scripture gives us a very sobering analysis of our family inheritance. Genesis 5:1 reads, "This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God." Since Adam did not have any posterity until after the fall, what kind of children did he get? Genesis 5:3 reads, "And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness,

after his image, and named him Seth." Adam created in the image of God, now having fallen begot his posterity in his own image and likeness, a fallen image-bearer of God.

This is a tremendous spiritual truth that is self-evident to any that would see it. The whole human race, every single member, gives proof of man's radical fallen condition. No one has gendered another human being that was without sin. This is testified by scripture and by human experience. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23 Perhaps some would object that our Lord was a true member of the human race, yet without sin. This is true, yet we must be careful how we articulate His entrance into the human race. The first thing that must be said is that the second Person of the Trinity took to Himself a human nature so that He remained what He was (God) and became what he was not eternally (human). Second, the formulation of the 'Apostles Creed' is accurate. He was born of a virgin, but was conceived or gendered by the Holy Spirit. In the bible the inheritance is passed on through the male. Not because of Eve's transgression, but because Adam sinned the whole human race was plunged into sin. In the old covenant administration it was through the male line that the future blessing would come. Therefore Jesus did not inherit a sinful nature from His mother Mary, but a sinless nature from the power of the Highest. This is a sobering reflection for men but it is true and it must be if the concept of head-ship means anything.

God destroyed the first world with the flood because of the sin and corruption of man. It was the grace of God that preserved the human race. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. It was through the grace of God that when the creation mandate was reiterated to Noah that the raising of families for the glory of God was possible. "So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and

fill the earth." Genesis 9:1. In the fullness of time, the Word would become flesh and in Him all the families of the earth would be blessed. God would use families to bring in the One who is the hope, not just for individuals, but for families.

In light of the sin of the human race, what sets apart a family as godly from those that are ungodly? What is the difference between a Christian home versus a worldly home? Jay E. Adams makes a brilliant statement about the Christian home and family in his book, "Christian Living in the Home". He says, "What does a truly Christian home look like? Is it an idyllic place where peace and quiet, tranquillity and joy continuously reign? Definitely not! The first and most important fact to remember about a truly Christian home is that sinners live there." He goes on to show how Christians continue to sin, and reap the consequences of sin, even after being saved. He states that it is at death that Christians are glorified and made perfect but that in this life their relationships are also affected. He says, "A truly Christian home is a place where sinners live; but it is also a place where the members of that home admit the fact and understand the problem, know what to do about it, and as a result grow by grace."

In the world the family is under attack on many fronts. It desperately needs to see the redeeming grace of God manifested both to and in the midst of families. The church ought to be deeply concerned for the strengthening of its family relationships. It ought to be in earnest, seeking the grace of God for its families that they may conform to God's standards. It is in the pages of scripture that we have our only rule for faith and life. It was the standard of the past and it is the only standard for the future. It is time for the heads of families to take up their calling with renewed vigour and lead their families in the truths of God's word. See Genesis 18:19. -Bill Kroesbergen

YOUTH'S CORNER

THIRD DAY EVENTS

Match each individual with the correct third day event.

- | | | | | |
|------------|----------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| a. Abraham | b. David | c. Esther | d. Hezekiah | e. Jonah |
| f. Joseph | g. Laban | h. Moses | i. Paul | j. Pharaoh |

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. ___ When he learned on the third day that his son-in-law had fled. He went in pursuit.</p> <p>2. ___ Looking for a place to sacrifice his on the third day he lifted his eyes and saw the place a far off.</p> <p>3. ___ He led the Israelites to meet God on the morning of the third day.</p> <p>4. ___ He planned to hide himself in the field unto the third day at even.</p> <p>5. ___ He was three days without sight.</p> <p>6. ___ While dangerously ill he received God's word that on the third day he should go up to the house of the Lord.</p> <p>7. ___ He was inside a great fish for three days and three nights.</p> | <p>8. ___ On the third day after fasting, this person went for a forbidden interview with the king.</p> <p>9. ___ He put his relatives in prison for three days.</p> <p>10. ___ Three days after dreams concerning him had been interpreted, he had a baker hung and a butler restored to this butlership.</p> |
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ANSWERS

1. Gen 31:20-23 2. Gen 22:2-4 3. Exod 19:16,17 4. 1 Sam 20:5 5. Act 9:8,9 6. 2 Kings 20:1,5 7. Jonah 1:17 8. Esther 4:15 9. 1,2 9. Gen 42:8,13,17 10. Gen 40:1-22

BOOKS IN REVIEW

According to the Promise
by C.H. Spurgeon

C. H. Spurgeon was known as the 'Prince of Preachers'. His Sermons drew thousands and, when printed, sold in their millions. In this book "According to Promise", Spurgeon helps us to appreciate that all God's promises are the birthright of each Christian. Many believers however, will admit to not fully experiencing what is promised. He shows that it is not presumptuous or unreal to expect to enjoy what God has promised. We are to measure what God can do by his generous promises, not by our level of expectation.

When a believer understands God's convenantal promises, he will develop the faith to obtain answers for all his needs. As Charles Spurgeon explains the Scriptures about God's desired relationship with all believers, he discusses such issues as: The Two Seeds; Differing Hopes; Whose are the Promises; The Promise as a Free Gift; The Promise of God a Reality; Taking Possession of the Promise; How to be motivated to learn and understand the Bible; What it really means to trust God; The deep relationship God wants with us; The distinction between a Christian in the world and a Christian of the world; and Why and how to withstand persecution, etc. Reading this book will help the believer discover that as God's child, he is an heir of His blessings, according to Promise.

-submitted by Cope Jonkman

THE PROMISE IS TO YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN

CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER

Given the translation from Hebrew to Greek, Peter's quote is almost verbatim. The Jewish converts are lead to believe what they've always understood - that the covenant promise is still for them and their children. To ignore this fact, and the historical correlation between Peter's Pentecost sermon and God's covenant oath to Abraham is a huge, interpretive blunder.

CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION, NOT EISEGESIS:

Immediate context is also important. Often much is made of the word repent. Certainly there is much ado about this word. It means a change of mind. And it is often argued that infants cannot change their minds. The same critic, quoted above, states, "The word REPENT means "a change in mind or purpose; "always in the N.T involving a change for the better" (Vines Expository). Can an infant be "cut to the heart," or convicted so that he will want to change his purpose in life entirely? No! It wasn't a bunch of preschool toddlers who said "men and brethren, what shall we do" (2:37), and so Peter wasn't responding to infants when he said, "let everyone of you be baptized"."

A point of fact is this is one of the weakest arguments presented by the critics of infant baptism. Certainly infants aren't as intellectually developed as adults, but children can and do "change" their minds about many things, sin not excluded. Only someone grossly ignorant of child development would argue that little children couldn't be convicted of sin. Moreover, critics who use this line of argumentation have yet to produce a single bible passage that proves this argument. Is it truly beyond God to convict children, even toddlers, of sin?

However, this is beside the point. The real issue is that Peter is calling men to repentance, not

children. Repentance is the necessary pre-condition for inclusion into the covenant for ADULTS who convert. In fact, repentance, or "walking blameless" was the necessary condition of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God called Abram to leave his idolatry behind and walk before Him and be blameless. (Gen. 12:1) Abraham had to "repent" of the old ways (idolatry) and trust in God (Romans chapter four states that for this reason Abraham was justified). But notice God did not require "repentance" of Abraham's male child-Isaac. Why is this?

Repentance is not a pre-condition for infant admission-although repentance is required of them as they grew up. This is precisely why God commands the Israelites to instruct their children in the Law of God. He commands them to teach the children never to forget and forsake God who has saved "them" from Egypt (Deut. 6:4-14). Infants however, were not barred from the covenant because they couldn't make a positive decision in their infancy.

Moreover, God instructed His people to take the covenant oath-sign of circumcision very seriously. Circumcision in the Old Testament (hereafter O.T.) was never an immovable grace. Men who had been circumcised as children, but later broke covenant with God where commanded to be cut off from the covenant community. Therefore, although circumcision was required of young Jewish males (as young as eight days old) nevertheless repentance, faith and obedience were perpetually required to maintain the covenant relationship with God.

Therefore, it is textually pointless to stretch words beyond the intended context. Peter was preaching to Jewish men. Obviously as adults these men had to REPENT and give their entire lives, private and public, individual, and yes, familial to the Lord Jesus Christ in order to

enter into the New Covenant. Since the covenant was changing from one administration to another new one, the official sign was changed also. Consequently, those men who desired covenant union with God were to repent and be baptized. The sign of circumcision was no longer valid.

However, Peter was not (I repeat: NOT!) preaching to children. And to argue, "how can children be cut to the heart?" belies this fact. Peter is not ignorant about the audience he is preaching to. He preaches to them what they need to hear in order for them to enter into covenant union. The "repent and believe" formula, so oft quoted by critics of infant baptism, proves nothing other than they are ignorant of the immediate context. Again, repentance is not the pre-condition required of infants to enter into the covenant. It is however required of them as they grow up and mature. Incidentally, repentance is a life long endeavour and even adults who repent initially and are baptized, must still continue to repent-or be cut off.

CONCLUSION:

Thus far we've analyzed the redemptive-historic understanding of Genesis 17:4-8 and we've looked closely at the immediate context of Acts 2:38-39. If anything has been made clear it is this: historic and grammatical context is profoundly important for understanding the Bible. When we interpret the Bible in light of modern views we do great damage to ourselves, and the Bible message.

As it stands we've seen that infant inclusion was a common and entrenched practice; so common a practice that if it had changed, the Acts account would have made that clear. Moreover, we've seen that the "repent and believe" formula is invalid when applied outside of the intended context. Repentance is a "pre-condition" of adults (or older children) who convert to Christ, it is not however a "pre-condition" of infants of believers.

In the next brief I will look at the broader New Testament outlook on the practice of infant-baptism. -by Tristan Emmanuel

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