

KOINONIA KONNECTION

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THE PROMISE IS TO YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN...

PART TWO

Even though there are as many arguments against infant-baptism as there are denominations that represent them, all of them are fundamentally united under one core assumption. The one ultimate criticism, the Achilles heel of infant-baptism, is that propositionally speaking, the New Testament is silent about the practice. The New Testament does not actually state anywhere that we should baptize children of believers.

ASK THE WRONG QUESTION GET THE WRONG ANSWER!

The interesting thing about this line of reasoning is that it misses a very dramatic point. The New Testament's silence is in fact a rather loud, almost eerie silence, when you consider the broader issue of ceremonial changes. When critics of infant-baptism argue that infants are not to be baptized in the NT, we need to understand that they are arguing for a dramatic shift in ceremonial practice.

Consider the words of the critic, "If God intended to have infants baptized, why didn't He state it more clearly in the pages of the New Testament?" He then challenges would-be defenders of infant-inclusion to find, "just one New Testament passage that clearly proves infant-baptism-and it can't be those passages which deal with 'family-baptism' because that assumes something not clearly indicated in the text."

It is true that many defenders of infant-baptism

find this challenge unraveling, but that's only because they haven't consider the merits of the question. In truth, the question belies a fundamental problem. It's the wrong question. And we all know that if you ask the wrong question, you'll get the wrong answer. Rather than ask the question, "Why didn't God clearly stipulate infant-baptism?" the question we should be asking is, "Why didn't God clearly annul the practice?" In fact, show us "just one" NT passage that clearly annuls the practice.

GOD ALWAYS SAYS WHAT HE MEANS, AND MEANS WHAT HE SAYS:

What makes the latter question more appropriate than the former? Its appropriateness is based on the issue of continuity versus discontinuity between the testaments. That is, it is based upon the assumption that the Old Testament's standards continue in the New Testament unless they are clearly annulled. This assumption is not picked out of thin air, it's based squarely upon the evidence grounded in the NT itself. Therein one discovers that every change or annulment of an OT practice was a change with "clear" and "unequivocal" revelation. Not one "jot or tittle" of the old administration was jettisoned as *passe* in a happenstance fashion (Matt. 5:18). God went to great lengths to leave us a "revelation" in the form of "propositions" (i.e. epistles), which instructed the church about continuity and discontinuity between the testaments. Therefore, the biblical assumption is that unless God has clearly "revealed" a change with an OT practice, it is still binding.

Take the apostle Peter as an example. Peter held strictly to the dietary laws of the OT. So

much so that he continued to practice them long after Christ had ascended. Although Peter understood that Christ had changed the old administration, he didn't have a comprehensive appreciation of the changes Christ instituted. Thus, he continued to practice dietary restrictions until God, by divine revelation, spoke to him in a dream. Even then Peter argued with God: "But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean'" (Acts 10:14). Eventually God's point was made clear to Peter and he renounced the dietary laws, but it took divine revelation to drive that point home.

You see, nothing was assumed. The apostles didn't presume to have comprehensive understanding about the changes. They relied upon God to send the "Helper" who would instruct them in all things. Therefore, as far as the Apostles were concerned changes to the OT economy were instituted by God, and that by divine revelation, and secured in the inscripturated Word. They were never instituted by man, or by his judgment.

GOD INSTITUTED CHANGES BY REVELATION:

Obviously changes have been made between the covenants. Animal sacrifices, clean and unclean foods or dietary laws, ceremonial festivals, and the eventual cessation of apostolic/charismatic gifts, even the sign of the covenant, circumcision, has been annulled. However, all of these changes were accompanied by revelation and spelled out, as it were, on the pages of the New Testament. In other words, none of these changes were based upon the apostles' autonomous logic (independent human reason), social conditioning (cultural changes), or their personal feelings. Nothing was assumed! Nothing was presumed!

The fact that change wasn't assumed is emphasized by the enormity of NT evidence. In the case of circumcision an entire book (Galatians) was written championing, among other things, that circumcision is no longer "the" sign of the

covenant. The apostolic Christians who, for the most part were Jewish converts, didn't automatically assume that Christ had abolished the practice of circumcision. Many believed that it was still a necessary sign. This is why Paul laboured at driving home the liberty we have in Christ and the cessation of circumcision.

Moreover, in the case of "sacrifices" the epistle of Hebrews was written to clearly communicate that the shadowy substance of the O. T. the Aaronic priesthood, the sacrifices, the blood of bulls and goats, have ceased in Christ and that therefore sacrifices are no longer necessary. In Colossians Paul makes this peculiar statement: "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:16-17). Why did he write this? Once again first generation converts, being largely Jewish, assumed continuity with the OT and were prone to judging each other's observance of these Jewish ceremonies. By revelation, Paul had to teach them otherwise.

It is therefore beyond the pattern of the NT to assume that a shift in covenant admission, one as significant as the exclusion of infants would have occurred without written evidence. Yet this is precisely what critics of infant-baptism are telling us: assume the practice of infant-inclusion ceased even though the NT does not clearly reveal it. In doing so, they are the ones breaking with the NT pattern, not us.

IT'S JUST AS MUCH ABOUT HERMENEUTICS AS IT IS ABOUT BAPTISM:

However, the critic may insist that, "the problem with first generation Christians was that they identified too closely with the OT. Their constant return to OT practices was precisely why the apostle had to correct them. Therefore, one should assume that discontinuity is the preferred apostolic position."

-continued inside back cover

FAMILIES IN FOCUS

MAN AND GOD IN RELATIONSHIP



In our last article we noted that God is seeking a godly seed. The institution of marriage has as one of its functions the mandate to reproduce image bearers of God our Creator. Through sin, man has been unable to accomplish this goal, achieving rather a generation of rebels against God. He produced children, but they were ungodly children. But God, never hindered by our sin, is bringing to completion His eternal purposes of having a 'seed to serve Him'. Through the Lord Jesus Christ, His dear, only begotten Son, He has brought salvation to the world. Through redeeming love and grace a multitude of sinners are born into the family of God and adopted as His sons and daughters.

It is interesting to note that the language that the scriptures primarily use concerning Gods chosen ones is a language of corporate identity. The Bible uses terms such as children, church, sheep, people, flock, the elect, and the bride, the body and so on. They are a community of people. Scripture does speak clearly of personal election and particular redemption. "Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated." Mal.1:2,3 "Then the word of the LORD came unto me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." Jer.1: 4,5. It must never the less be remembered that God does not deal with persons directly and individually. There is one mediator between God and man and a saving relationship between any sinner and God must be through the mediator of the covenant community, Jesus Christ. Every individual that God deals with is dealt with through his union to the Saviour. Hence Christ is the representative of all His people. He is their head and they are His body.

The Children of God are His by virtue of their union to Christ. Christ is their representative

and that is the basis of their saving relationship with God. Apart from Christ they are not then without relationship to God. They are simply in a non-saving relationship with God. This is our next point, that we all have a relationship with God whether we care to own it or not. We are either in Christ as our federal head or we are not but we still have a relationship to God. By virtue of our creaturely existence we have a relationship to God. We are not coequal, self-existent, autonomous beings. That is, we are not equal with God, we are not independent of God for our continued existence and we are not self-determining sovereign beings. Our existence is derived from God's creative word of power. Our sustenance is by the providence of God and the reason for our existence lies in God's eternal purposes. It is this God that Paul proclaimed to the Athenians in Acts 17:24-28. 'God, Who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He made with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own prophets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'" All men have a relationship with God; the question that remains is, "How is mans relationship to God defined?"

Mans relationship to God is defined by covenant. God always deals covenantally with man. There is a huge segment of the Church

that has lost a biblical understanding of covenant. There is much superstition and many mystical notions attached to the idea of covenant. Often people see covenant in scripture as nothing more than an agreement between two parties, God and man. So what is covenant? Covenant is simply a 'defined relationship.' Man, from the moment he was created, had a relationship with God, one of creature towards its Creator. But God defined the terms by which that relationship was constituted. In Genesis 1 and 2 we do not read of Adam bargaining with God as to how they would relate to each other, after all, he had no ground to stand on but that which was given him by God. We read only of God's communications to Adam by using imperatives or words of command and declarative statements. This is because God is the sovereign Creator and man is a wholly, dependant creature, even his purpose is given him by God. God verbally and orally gave Adam the terms of covenant relationship and they are recorded for us in scripture. They also have never been rescinded.

We must also take into account that God deals with man covenantally federally. That is, He not only defines the terms of relationship but He has sovereignly, unilaterally determined to relate to man, not by individual covenants with individuals, but by one covenant through a covenant representative. He did not make one covenant with Adam, one covenant with Eve, and one covenant with Cain, one with Abel, one with Seth and so down the human race. No, He made one covenant with Adam as representative of the whole human race. Adam is our federal head by nature. Those who have a restored relationship with God have it by the terms of the covenant of grace represented by the covenant head, Jesus Christ. Now, both our children and we have a relationship with God. The question that remains to be answered in another article is how does God deal with us? With our children?

The above has been written to demonstrate that all people, adults and youngsters, do have a relationship to God. Do you know the nature of your relationship with God? If you have children do you know how God relates to them? The dominant thought of our western culture is that we are our own and that we determine what we want to do. We see ourselves as individuals with self as our highest goal. We no longer see that we were created to live for God, to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. We don't know what it is to serve Him above all and to serve our fellow creatures before ourselves. But God in Christ has established a new relationship with His people. Are you one of those? What are the terms that define your relationship with God? What about your children?

-Bill Kroesbergen

Psalm 128

Blessed is everyone who fears the
LORD,

Who walks in His ways.

When you eat the labour of your
hands,

You shall be happy, and it shall be
well with you.

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
In the very heart of your house,

Your children like olive plants
All around your table.

Behold, thus shall the man be
blessed

Who fears the LORD.

The LORD bless you out of Zion,
And may you see the good of
Jerusalem

All the days of your life.

Yes, may you see your children's
children.

Peace be upon Israel!

YOUTH'S CORNER

PSALM 84:11,12

Find each of the words from Psalm 84:11,12 in the following crossword. Words occurring twice (ie AND) must be found twice in the puzzle. Search entries comprised of two words (ie IN THEE) are to be found without spaces between the words (ie INTHEE)

FOR
THE
LORD
GOD
IS A
SUN
AND
SHIELD:

THING
WILL HE
WITHHOLD
FROM
THEM
THAT
WALK
UPRIGHTLY.

THE
LORD
WILL
GIVE
GRACE
AND
GLORY:
NO GOOD

O LORD
OF HOSTS,
BLESSED
IS THE
MAN
THAT
TRUSTETH
IN THEE.

L	B	L	E	S	S	E	D	F	K	O
Y	T	H	I	N	G	L	B	R	L	F
E	L	E	T	L	O	R	D	O	G	H
H	O	T	C	H	T	K	R	M	T	O
L	R	E	H	A	E	D	T	H	H	S
L	D	T	H	G	R	M	H	T	A	T
I	I	T	E	V	I	G	E	E	T	S
W	W	N	A	M	S	R	I	T	D	G
A	I	U	T	R	T	F	P	S	N	L
L	L	S	Y	H	H	Q	O	U	A	O
K	L	S	H	I	E	L	D	R	N	R
N	O	G	O	O	D	E	H	T	D	Y

BOOKS IN REVIEW

This book is about evangelism, showing both the errors that are rampant in today's church, as well as showing the message and methods of Biblical evangelism. The book is easy to read, but it's contents arise out of many years of thought and deep exercise about the prevailing situation in evangelical circles regarding the subject of evangelism.

*Today's Evangelism
by Ernest Reisinger
Banner of Truth Trust*

Modern day evangelism is man-centred not God-centred, and its message lacks biblical balance. Many times the soul is put to sleep by the most unsuspected ways. He has four charges against the new message. 'It fails to produce (1) deep reverence for the God of the Bible; (2) deep repentance and humility; (3) a real spirit of worship; (4) a proper love and concern for the Church.'

This book will also stimulate those who believe the truths set out to effectively preach Christ to the sinners who are around them.

-submitted by Cope Jonkman



MISSION SPOTLIGHT

"THERE THEY PREACHED THE GOSPEL" (CONTINUED)

In the previous 2 points we see Paul's desire to preach the gospel. Why the intense desire? The people were creatures of a righteous God and were facing a lost eternity. They needed to hear the Gospel. Paul and Barnabas knew that only the Holy Spirit could deliver the people out of this state of spiritual death and that the Holy Spirit does His work of regeneration in connection with the proclamation of the gospel. It is the will of God that repentance and remission of sin should be preached in His name in all nations. Paul did his preaching with divine authority to bring the good news of salvation through a crucified Saviour. There was no other gospel to preach because there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

3. Because the gospel is effective. Paul and Barnabas had seen repeated evidence of the effectiveness of their preaching; they had seen many sinners believe the gospel and become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Even though they had to flee so soon from Iconium, "a great multitude" believed as a result of their preaching. They knew from their own spiritual experience that the gospel is powerful. Paul was referring to himself when he said: "I was formerly a blasphemer ... but I obtained mercy" (1 Tim 1:13). And he could add, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (v 15). This gospel which he had found powerful in his own soul was perfectly suited to others, whatever their circumstances. If he, the chief of sinners, had been saved, no one was beyond the reach of this salvation.

So it was to prove in Thessalonica; he told the believers there, "When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed

it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thess 2:13). There were people in Thessalonica who had been totally ignorant of the truth, whose hearts were firmly set in opposition against it, but they were made to bow before the preaching of the gospel because it was accompanied by the saving power of the Holy Spirit. It was no idle boast that Paul made to the Corinthians: "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds" (2Cor 10:4). The gospel message proved effective in all these various places because it was the instrument which God in His wisdom had provided for that purpose. Satan's kingdom is strongly fortified, but it cannot hold out against the preaching of the gospel when the Holy Spirit is pleased to apply it.

Almost 2000 years have passed since Paul and Barnabas wended their way from city to city in what is now part of modern Turkey. Many things have changed since then. But the need for the gospel is still as great as ever; the gospel still has the same divine authority; and it is still effective in turning sinners "from the power of Satan unto God". The Church must go on preaching this gospel to each succeeding generation of unbelieving sinners, every one of them - because of their rebellion against God - under His condemnation.

It is the same gospel that is to be preached today; it has never lost its God-given authority and it never will. It was designed by infinite wisdom to meet the needs of sinners of every kind - however primitive or sophisticated, however poor or wealthy, however religious or atheistic. It will never need revision. Nor will it ever lose its effectiveness. It is still "the power of God unto salvation to every one that be-

lieves”, and it always will be. True, the Holy Spirit does not in every generation work to the same extent. But, whenever He has a purpose to work, it is the same gospel that He uses - the same testimony about the finished work of Christ for sinners. The truth “that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” is still the

testimony that the Holy Spirit is pleased to apply to the souls of sinners today to bring them out of Satan’s dark kingdom into the glorious light of the kingdom of God. Let us be thankful for that gospel. Let us pray for God’s blessing to follow it to all parts of the world.

THE PROMISE IS TO YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN

CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER

There are two problems here. First, it is a sloppy hermeneutic. It generalizes where it has no warrant to do so. The problem with first generation Christians wasn’t that they identified too closely with the OT. Their problem was that they didn’t always understand the full implications of the changes Christ instituted.

Misunderstanding the full implications of the “changes” is a lot different than saying they had no idea that changes had occurred, or that they identified too “closely” with the OT. Peter understood that Christ instituted changes. The difference is that Peter didn’t assume to know what those changes were without being divinely told. In fact, one could say that Peter’s intuitive hermeneutic was: assume continuity unless God reveals otherwise. After all, Jesus had told him-”Don’t think I’ve come to abolish the law or the prophet” (Matt. 5:17).

Second, it imports a view of the early church that is inconsistent with NT evidence. The argument that the NT is silent about the practice of infant-baptism assumes that the early Church clearly recognized that with the coming of Christ, and the change of the covenant sign, that there was also a change of admission. It assumes that ALL early converts understood implicitly that only adults, or older children, who could make a positive decision for Christ could be baptized. But this assumption is absolutely unfounded.

The early church did not have a comprehensive understanding of the changes between the covenants. It should be clear from the errors within the early church that their errors were not of a progressive kind, but rather of a conservative nature. They tended to keep to tradition, even in the face of revelation (i.e. Peter initially refusing to break the dietary laws, or enter the house of a gentile, or many Jewish converts insisting on circumcision, etc). It is therefore, highly unlikely that the early Church understood that the NT had changed the parameters of admission from familial to individual.

Furthermore, it overlooks another staggering point. If it is true that Christ, for the sake of purity within the Church, restricted baptism only to adults and older children, how does one explain the overwhelming silence of the opposition in the NT? It is beyond belief to assume that the Judiazers wouldn’t have challenged this administrative change (as they challenged so many other changes)? In fact, based on the many errors the apostles had to address, most of which were the direct result of the Judiazers, it is certain that they would have challenged the apostles had children of believers been restricted from baptismal membership. However, instead of finding massive opposition one discovers nothing but absolute silence.

This is staggering, to say the least. Consider it this way. Christ equipped the church with pastor-teachers-the highest of which were the apostles (Eph. 4:9-11). They were provided to

defend the truth and to teach the church what was yet lacking. In all their instructions, both personal, and of course, in their epistles, not once did they condemn, or correct the practice of infant-inclusion-not once!

By itself, the apostles' silence is a massive hurdle for critics of infant-baptism, but when coupled with the silence of the opposition what we have, in fact, is the Achilles heel of Baptist thinking. If infant-inclusion was rejected by the early Church then our critics must begin to explain biblically, and cogently, how it is that Judiazers didn't contend with the apostles on this issue; and why the apostles never once dealt with the matter as soundly and intently as they did with every other change to the old administration.

CONCLUSION:

The silence of the NT is indeed deafeningly loud. It is a resounding blow to the Baptist interpretation. Critics of infant-baptism will have to fare much better than they have. They will

have to produce contextual explanations for the silence of the NT. They will need to explain why it is that the apostles corrected the early Church on all kinds of issues (dietary laws, the new moons, genealogies, and even circumcision), but never once mentioned the error of infant-baptism. As it has been demonstrated, it will simply not do to say, "The early church implicitly understood that the practice of infant-inclusion had be abrogated in Christ."

They will have to explain why it is that there was no opposition. They will have to explain why the early Church never assumed discontinuity over continuity. They will have to explain much, least of which how a paradigm shift, as significant as the exclusion of infants has never been plainly revealed in the NT. Baptists have yet to account for these issues. Which is why the silence argument actually works against them, and not for them.

-Tristan Emmanuel

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