

CHILDREN WITH THE DIVINE NATURE

David Baker, prepared for the Presbytery fellowship word, 21 November 2021

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Introduction

Hello, everyone, we will continue from last week, where we considered the blessing of Abraham inherited by believing families in the community of the church as the bride of Christ.

One of our key points was that if a believing couple, or a married couple, have received, and continue to receive a remnant of the Spirit, as those who belong to the church as the bride of Christ, then their children will receive the blessing of Abraham while still in the mother's womb. Immediately after they are conceived and become a new identity in their mother's womb, they will be adopted by the Father, regenerated by the Son, and receive from the Son the Holy Spirit, so that they are born of God.

Having been born of God, they are immediately caught up to God and His throne, to become a member of the Father's household, which is the body of Christ.

This is an amazing inheritance. It means that their citizenship is in heaven before they are born into this world and receive their birth certificate as a child who has been born into this world.

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul noted that the Lord has extended, in His mercy, this blessing to children with only one believing parent. Paul said, 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy [meaning, that they receive the blessing of Abraham].' 1Co 7:14.

Waypoints in the development of children

In this session we will continue with this consideration. We will identify some of the major waypoints for a child who has been born of God, caught up to God, to become a member of His household while still in their mother's womb. We will begin by considering some of the major waypoints in their life as they grow up in a Christian family that is part of the community of the church.

Dedication of children by their parents

The first major waypoint for a child who has been born into a believing family is their dedication to the Lord, by their parents.

Dedication is an expression of the faith of the parents. A child will often be dedicated by their parents around one month old or in the first two months of their life. Christian parents will dedicate their child to the Lord because they recognise that the child already belongs to Him. They know that the child has been adopted by the Father, regenerated by the Son, and has received the Holy Spirit. They were born as sons of God while still in the mother's womb. This means that God is their Father.

Under the Old Covenant, a child was adopted in the womb if the parents were committed to walking in the faith of their father, Abraham.

The cry of 'Abba! Father!' within the womb

Under the New Covenant, a child is born of God; receives the Holy Spirit and cried, 'Abba! Father!'; while still in the womb. Well before the first cry in the delivery ward, they cry, 'Abba! Father!' in the womb. God is their Father.

In this regard, dedication is not some form of 'covering' for a baby so that they are saved, because they are already saved. They belong to God the Father. If a child dies in the womb, then their citizenship is already in heaven.

This means that dedication is not some form of covering for a baby so that they are saved. As we considered in our last session, any ritual, be it infant baptism or dedication, that is performed for the purpose of covering a child until they can make their own personal response to the gospel, is a rejection of the blessing of Abraham. It is a violation of the sanctification of a believing household.

Dedication is the faith of parents

Rather, dedication is the expression of the *faith* of the parents, recognising that their child is a son of God because of the blessing of Abraham in their family.

When we consider the significance of dedication, it is also important to recognise that dedication is

not the New Covenant replacement for physical circumcision, under the Old Covenant.

For the nation of Israel, physical circumcision was the sign in the flesh that the child was connected to the covenant that God had made with the flesh of Abraham. It had validity providing the parents continued to walk in the faith of their father, Abraham.

Physical circumcision was replaced by the offering of Christ and the seven wounding events that Jesus Christ experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross.

Dedication does not replace physical circumcision from the Old Covenant.

Dedication is not circumcision

Dedication does not connect a child to the circumcision of Christ; that is, His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. A child in a Christian home needs to be connected to the circumcision of Christ through the discipline and instruction of their Christian parents.

Just as a son was circumcised by their father within their household under the Old Covenant, so the discipline and instruction of a child under the New Covenant, must occur within the context of each family.

Circumcision of children begins in the family

The discipline of children does not belong to the church community as a house to house fellowship. It belongs to the sanctification of each believing household.

Regarding discipline and instruction, it is important for Christian parents to recognise that a child who has been born of God, and caught up to God in the womb, still has the other law in their heart. This is common to us all. The other law is common to every descendant of Adam and Eve. It has been fathered by Satan in the heart of every human being.

It would be a mistake, and quite a grave mistake, for believing parents to assume that because their children have already been born of God, they do not need parental discipline and instruction to address the other law in their heart. For a young child, the discipline and instruction that they receive from their parents is their primary connection to the fellowship of Christ's offering

and sufferings. This is their connection to the circumcising work of God the Father, in Jesus Christ, which removes the other law from their heart. It also teaches them the obedience of Christ.

The book of Proverbs emphasises the importance of discipline and instruction by parents of their children. It also highlights the implications if this is neglected.

Dedication belongs to the *agape* fellowship

In contrast to the discipline and instruction of a child, which happens in the family, the dedication of a child belongs to the fellowship of the *agape* meal in the community of the church.

That is quite a big distinction. In contrast to the discipline and instruction of a child which happens in the context of the family, the dedication of a child belongs to the fellowship of the *agape* meal in the community of the church. It belongs to the fellowship of the *agape* meal because the parents recognise that the only reason that their child has received *the blessing of Abraham* is because their family belongs to the community of the church, as the bride of Christ.

The blessing of Abraham is not inherited in isolation. The apostle Paul was very clear on that point. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul said that the promise to Abraham was not to many seeds; but the promise was to one Seed, that is Christ.

The promise, or that blessing, is *multiplied* to all the families of the earth, through the church as the bride of Christ, and the helper comparable to Him. Christian parents recognise that their child has already been enrolled in heaven as belonging to the church of the Firstborn.

Parents recognise that their child has only received the blessing of Abraham because the family belongs to the community of the church, as the bride of Christ. Because the child has received the blessing of Abraham, that child also then belongs to the community of the church, the church of the Firstborn.

Our children belong to the Lord

Believing parents also recognise that the Lord has *entrusted* the child to them. They understand that the child belongs to the Lord, but they also recognise that the Lord has entrusted the child to them. They are the child's parents.

We are reminded of the words of the psalmist when he said that children are the Lord's inheritance, and the fruit of the womb is His reward. That emphasises the fact that the child belongs to the Lord.

Our children are gifted to us

The other way of translating that psalm is helpful. Solomon said that children are a *gift* from the Lord. Psa 127:3. Our children belong to Him; they are His inheritance, while, at the same time, we understand that He has given them to us.

It is our responsibility and accountability, as parents, to raise them in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord.

Recognising our complete inadequacy for this task, from a natural perspective, when we dedicate our children, we also confess our total reliance upon the word of faith proclaimed by the presbytery in the right hand of Christ.

We also confess our complete reliance upon the grace that we receive in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. That is where our adequacy is found to raise our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and to nurture the life that they have received from Him.

Although caught up to God in the womb, children have the other law in their heart

We have made the point that a child who has been born of God in the womb still has the other law in their heart. Hence, they need parental discipline and instruction.

Taking this point a step further. Just because a child has been born of God in the womb and caught up to God to become a member of His household, it does not mean that they have no need of all the major waypoints of salvation that belong to the phase of the prevenient grace of God. For example, the phase that belongs to wayside ground.

God's prevenient grace

This is a key point. Even though the life of God has germinated in their heart within the womb, all the waypoints that belong to the phase of God's prevenient grace need to be laid as foundations for their salvation.

This does not mean that a child who is born with the divine nature will regress to wayside ground, as if the life of God had not germinated in their

heart. We know the life has germinated in their heart.

Rather, all the waypoints that belong to wayside ground, that are included in the phase of God's prevenient grace, must be laid as foundations in the child's life. This is part of each child developing 'a root in themselves'. A child that is born into a believing family has received the divine nature, because of the faith of their parents.

From the faith of parents to their own faith

However, this must become their own faith as they grow and mature in the household of God, because the faith of their parents will not sustain them once they have come of age. They need a root in themselves.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus explained that having a root in ourselves, which is our faith to embrace our unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and His sufferings, is necessary for us to overcome the crises of stony ground.

Jesus explained the parable of the sower and the seed to the disciples. Concerning stony ground He said, 'But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but endures only for a while.' Matt 13:20-21.

We do not want our children to only be temporary citizens in the house of God while they live under our roof. 'Yet he has no root in himself but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.'

The foundations of salvation

In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul highlighted 'the foundations of salvation' that are necessary for every child to grow to maturity as sons of God. He called these foundations of salvation 'the first principles of the oracles of God'.

'First principles' means 'the elements of the beginning', and 'the oracles of God' simply means 'the words of God'. These are included within that first phase of prevenient grace, when the word of God is proclaimed to a person. All the elements that belong to that phase need to be laid as foundations in the life of our children.

The milk of the word

Interestingly, Paul also likened these foundations to 'the milk of the word'. He said, 'For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness [which is the word of sonship], for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age [or those who have come of age], that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.' Heb 5:12-14.

Paul addressed adults, who should have been serving as priests in the Father's house, the temple, the body of Christ. But Paul was not able to speak to them about their priestly service, because the foundations of their sonship had not been properly laid in their life.

In this regard, we note that this admonition had a negative connotation. Paul spoke to adults, saying, 'You should already be serving. And, more than this, you should also be teaching and instructing others concerning their priestly service.'

However, from the positive perspective, there is nothing wrong with the milk of the word as it relates to the phase of God's prevenient grace. It pertains to the foundations of salvation that must be laid in a believer's life, during the phase of God's prevenient grace. This applies to adults, or equally, as we are considering here, to the lives of our children as they grow and mature as sons of God.

Paul used the analogy of 'milk' because it highlighted an infant's dependency upon their mother for their provision, nourishment, and sustenance. In the same way, a child born into a believing family has received the promise of the Spirit, but they are completely dependent upon the faith of their parents.

Of course, a child is dependent upon their parents, both naturally and spiritually, long after they are weaned from natural milk as an infant.

From a natural perspective, we know that parents put food on the table, and it is the parents who put a roof over their head. It is the parents who

drive them to and from school, and all these various things.

The milk of the word is not enough

This is also true from a spiritual perspective. As the child grows and matures, they are dependent upon their parents' faith. Paul highlighted a whole phase of growth and maturity until a child comes of age and is able to sustain their own life because they have 'a root in themselves'.

Six major foundations

Paul summarised the elementary principles of Christ, as six major foundations that we want to lay in the lives of our children, as Christian parents. He said, 'Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary want principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection [or on to maturity], not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgement.' Heb 6:1-2.

Hopefully, we are laying these foundations in the lives of our children so that they remain for the whole of their life, and do not need to lay them again. This is a helpful passage, because these are the foundations that Christian parents must lay in the lives of their children, as they raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Foundations one and two

The first two foundations are 'repentance from dead works' and 'faith toward God'.

These foundations describe what our response needs to be every time the word of the Lord is proclaimed to us. The faith that we receive when the word is proclaimed enables us to turn from our own way.

Dead works are the things that we do which are motivated and sourced in ourselves.

As the word is proclaimed, it brings faith, enabling us to turn from our own way and believe what God has said to us.

In the first case, we lay this foundation in the lives of our children by exemplifying a culture where we, as parents, turn from our own way and believe what God is saying to us. We testify concerning our response to the word in the fellowship of the *agape* meal.

This will be demonstrated by our participation in the fellowship of the *agape* meal where we testify of our response to the word. We will then be able to encourage our children toward their response and testimony in relation to the word, and hence their participation in the fellowship of the *agape* meal.

The third foundation

The third foundation is ‘the doctrine of baptisms’. This includes the importance of baptism into Christ and baptism with, and into, the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of baptisms is far more than teaching our children the theology of baptism. It teaches them the practical implications of their baptism for every day of their lives as they journey with Christ in the fellowship of His offering.

For example, Paul said to the Romans, (and he spoke to adults who should have known this), ‘Do you not know that when we were baptised into Christ Jesus, we were baptised into His death?’ Rom 6:3. We were joined to the fellowship of His wounding events that He experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross.

When we instruct our children concerning baptism, and the meaning of their baptism, we talk about the significance of their personal participation in each of those wounding events that Christ experienced. We help them to understand the implications for each day of their lives.

In the same way, concerning baptism of the Holy Spirit, we also talk about the importance of praying in the Holy Spirit, so that they are joined to the prayer meeting of the Holy Spirit, the Son, and the Father, each day of their lives.

The fourth foundation

The fourth foundation is ‘the laying on of hands’. This has often been misinterpreted to be a form of empowerment. We may think of itinerant preachers laying hands on people and sending them to be missionaries, or these kinds of things.

However, in the first case, the laying on of hands refers to the fulfilment of what it means for a person to be a whole burnt offering. Under the Old Covenant, when a person brought a whole burnt offering, they laid their hands upon its head, signifying that they were fully identified

with the offering that they had brought. The offering represented them.

We lay this foundation in the lives of our children by teaching them what it means to present themselves as a living sacrifice in the fellowship of the body of Christ, so that, as they continue to grow, they prove ‘the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God’.

Of course, this begins from the youngest years when we teach our children and exhort and encourage them to sing and participate in worship and to participate in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. We teach them to present themselves as ‘a living sacrifice’.

As our children grow older, and they begin to participate in service teams in the church and maybe playing in the orchestra, we also teach them about what it means to have hands laid upon them. This requires that they understand the need to be submitted to the order of authority, and the deaconing administrations that Christ has established in His church. These priestly functions order our offering as we present ourselves to the Lord. This has many practical implications for us.

The fifth foundation

The fifth foundation is ‘the resurrection of the dead’. The apostle Paul taught that the physical resurrection of Christ was the guarantee that He had learned our obedience and fulfilled the works of our sonship on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul taught that Christ was delivered up because of our transgressions, or our offences. He was then raised ‘because of’ our justification.

We lay this foundation in the lives of our children by teaching them that Christ has authored each day of their lives and completed the works of their sonship on the cross. This means that they can believe for the grace of resurrection life each day to be obedient to God and to fulfil the works of their sonship which are the works that He has prepared for them to do. Christ has already completed these works for them. We can see that all these foundations have very real and practical implications for us, and for our children concerning their daily lives.

The sixth foundation

The sixth foundation is 'eternal judgement'. This means that we teach our children what it means to 'fear the Lord'. This is an important foundation for every Christian, as we have considered.

We lay this foundation in the lives of our children by teaching them why it is so important to continually draw near to the Lord in response to His word, and when we are confronted by Him. And as part of this instruction, we also teach them about the implications of drawing back from the Lord.

It is important for our children to appreciate and understand the great privilege that has been bestowed upon them, as those who have been born of the Spirit and caught up into the fellowship of the body of Christ, since the womb.

The temptations of the world

If our children become ambivalent or presumptuous concerning their inheritance, then they will be at risk of trading it for the passing pleasures of the world. This was the issue for Esau. He despised the birthright that he had received, and he traded that birthright for 'one morsel of food', or for a very fleeting or passing pleasure.

It is important for our children to appreciate that the world, and everything that is in it, has already been taken out into eternal judgement in 'the sea of God's forgetfulness', by the offering of Christ.

Earlier, in his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul admonished all believers by saying, 'Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest we drift away.' Heb 2:1.

We are mixing the metaphors here, but it means, 'lest we have no firm root in ourselves', or 'lest we have no foundations'. 'For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape [and we are talking about 'escape eternal judgement'] if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.' Heb 2:2-3.

The word of presbytery

The 'word of this so great salvation' is now proclaimed to us by the messengers of Christ. The apostle John spoke as someone who had heard

Christ, and then proclaimed the word as part of a presbytery in the right hand of Christ. He said, 'That which we have seen and heard we declare to you [or we proclaim to you], that you may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and the Son.' 1Joh 1:1.

He proclaimed this word to us so that our joy may be full. But at the same time, we need to understand the implications if we draw back from receiving the word. If we neglect so great a salvation, we draw back to perdition.

We have briefly considered the significance of dedication as a major waypoint in the life of a child who is born into a Christian family.

Baptism of children

Another major waypoint is when a child chooses to be 'baptised into Christ'. A child who has grown up in a Christian family will often express their desire to be baptised into Christ somewhere from the age of six to eleven; and often it is around the age of seven years old.

In contrast to dedication, which is the expression of the faith of the parents, baptism is one of the first expressions of the emerging faith of the child while they are still sustained by the faith of their parents and being trained and admonished by them in the home.

In this regard, the faith of a child to be baptised does not undo or replace the faith of their parents. It is the emerging expression of their own faith, within the context of the faith of their parents, or building upon the foundation of the faith of their parents. Baptism for a child is the expression of their emerging faith and obedience because they have begun to hear the word of the Lord for themselves.

In this regard, we recall that Samuel had been serving as a young child in the temple for several years. But there was a definitive point in time when he began to hear the Lord calling his name and speaking to him directly. The Scripture tells us that up until that time, Samuel did not know the Lord; nor was the word of the Lord revealed to him.

We know the story well. He heard a voice calling his name, and he assumed that it was Eli. Each time, he went to Eli, asking, 'Did you call me?'. Eli sent him back to bed, but the third time, Eli said

to him, 'The next time you hear the voice say, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening".'

There is a definite time for children which should be embraced

There is a definitive time for children. They have come to church with their parents since their youngest years and participated in family devotions. There does come a time when they know that the Lord is specifically calling their name and He wants to speak to them.

They become aware, through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, that their heavenly Father is asking them to be baptised.

A response to the call of the Father

In the first case, baptism is their response of faith and obedience to the Father's call on their lives. Remember, we explained in a previous session that it is God the Father who gives us to Christ, to become a member of His body and the community of the church.

Jesus explained to His disciples, 'It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.' Joh 6:45.

Jesus quoted the book of Isaiah where it is written, 'And they shall all be taught by God'. Isaiah spoke specifically about the children who were born in families who belonged to the bride city. 'Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.'

We know that a child who has been born of God and caught up to God to become part of His household, while still in the womb, is included in the fellowship of the word. They are included in the fellowship of Christ's offering. They are included in the fellowship of the body of Christ. They are included in the community of the church.

This inclusion is all on account of their parents' faith.

The desire to be baptised is an expression of an individual faith

However, as we have said, baptism is the expression of their own emerging faith, in obedience to move beyond inclusion, to become an active participant in each of these elements of fellowship. Their inclusion is not 'up for grabs'.

What we observe is the emergence of their own faith to become an active participant in all these elements of fellowship that they are already included in, because of the faith of their parents.

Baptism is their obedient response to the command of the Father to fully immerse themselves in each of these elements of fellowship in an age-appropriate manner, as they continue to grow and mature as sons of God. We note that this is the meaning of baptism. It means 'full immersion'.

We have previously considered the significance of baptism, including the significance of baptism for children, in quite some detail. It is not possible for us to revisit all that detail in this session. We will not consider the meaning of baptism for a child in an exhaustive manner here.

Baptism requires full immersion

However, as we end, we will highlight one point regarding baptism as full immersion into water. We have often considered this point in relation to the waters of God's judgement.

Jesus Christ has already taken the entire world, with all it contains, out into eternal judgement in the sea of God's forgetfulness.

In the same way that Noah and his household were saved from the waters of God's judgement in his day because they were in the ark, the only way for us to be delivered from the judgement of God on the whole world, is in the fellowship of Christ's offering, as part of the new creation.

Baptism signifies the death of the old

Baptism into water signifies that the old creation has passed away in the offering of Christ while, at the same time, we have been raised with Him to walk in newness of life.

It is in relation to this 'newness of life' that baptism into water has its most profound significance. We remember that after the seven wounding events that Christ experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross were complete (the last wounding event was His broken heart when He cried, 'My God, My God; why have You forsaken Me?'), He declared that His offering was finished. He then committed His Spirit into the hands of the heavenly Father.

When the soldier pierced His side with a spear, John recorded that blood, water, and a spirit of

grace and supplication flowed from His physical body as the fruit of His finished offering. This was 'the fountain for sin and uncleanness' that flowed from the throne of grace, where Christ had taken His seat, through His physical body on the cross.

Baptism also is into the river of the water of life!

The apostle John described this same fountain in the book of Revelation as 'the river of the water of life', 'And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God [that is the throne of grace] and of the Lamb.' Rev 22:1.

This fountain proceeded from the throne of God, through the physical body of Christ while it still hung on the cross. This is the 'fruit' of His finished offering as the Lamb of God.

'He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb [from the offering of Christ]. In the middle of its street [or in the middle of the broad place of the river], and on either side of the river, was the tree of life.'

The river of the water of life and the tree of life

We notice here that 'the river of the water of life' and 'the tree of life' are used interchangeably. 'In the middle of its broad place, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.'

The key point is that when a child is baptised into water, they are fully immersed in the river of the water of life. The river of the water of life contains the water, the blood, and the Spirit that flows from the throne of God, through the finished offering of Christ.

The river and the tree signify the fellowship of the word

The river is *the fellowship of the word*. It is the *agape* fellowship of Yahweh, which will grow and increase and multiply for eternity.

We note that this is a major upgrade on baptism in the river Jordan. There is no need for a person to travel to Israel to be baptised in the river Jordan.

When we are baptised into Christ, we are immersed in the river of the water of life. It does not matter what baptismal tank it happens to be, or what swimming pool or what dam or what ocean. We are baptised into the river of the water of life.

In this regard, one of the major elements of baptism for a child, is their faith and commitment to become an active participant in the fellowship of the word in the *agape* meal.

Jesus as a child, and our children

As we conclude. When Jesus was twelve years old, or eleven years old according to Jewish reckoning, He stayed behind after the Feast of Passover. Passover was the forerunner to the *agape* meal. Jesus stayed behind after the Feast of Passover because He wanted to continue in the fellowship of the word with the elders and leaders in Jerusalem.

The Scriptures record that His parents left Jerusalem without Him and did not realise until they had travelled for about a day that Jesus was not part of what must have been quite a sizeable company of people. So, they immediately headed back to Jerusalem to look for Him.

They found Him in the temple, both listening and asking questions. All who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and His answers or His responses. We know that Joseph and Mary were surprised to find Him in the temple.

The joy of Christian parents

However, as Christian parents, it should be our greatest joy to witness our children growing in their desire and capacity to participate in the fellowship of the *agape* meal themselves. Their participation will include listening and asking questions. But it will also include, particularly as they continue to grow and mature, their beginning to express the understanding that they have received from the word concerning its application to their lives. They will also testify of their own response to the word and to the things that they have heard.

Thanks, everyone. We'll leave it there for today.