

May 6, 2007 (SS)

**BEARING THE DIVINE IMAGE IN THE HOME:
FRUITFUL MULTIPLICATION::
CHILD-REARING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVENANT (PART 2)
GENESIS 17:1-14**

2. COVENANT AND ITS PRIVILEGES

Our parenting will be shaped by what we believe God says about our children. Our children will be shaped by what they believe God says about them. Both parent and child, then, must understand (and continue to grow in understanding) of what it means to live in covenant with God.

A. PARENTS

Understanding that your children are in covenant with God and are, therefore, beneficiaries of the privileges of that covenant gives us as parents tremendous comfort and incentive in our task.

1. The status of our children before God

What is the status of our children before God? How are we to think of them? Well, the Scriptural evidence all points to the fact that our children enjoy the same status in the covenant as do we parents.

We turn first to God's pronouncement to Abraham concerning his covenant through which the world would be redeemed. **Ge 17:7** "And I will establish *my covenant* between me and you *and your offspring after you* throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, *to be God to you and to your offspring after you.*"

For some odd reason, the relationship that God establishes with Abraham is seen by some as fundamentally different from that which God establishes with Abraham's children. That is, some might say it this way, "Abraham had a 'real' relationship with God while his children only had a 'covenant' relationship with God."

That thinking is biblically untenable and muddled. To be in covenant with God is to be in a real relationship with God. God makes this clear by making *no* distinction between Abraham and his children.

It is not for us at this point to try to figure out all the secret, divine nuances to this relationship. It is for us to believe God's word and allow that word to shape our lives. God is the God of your children as much as he is your God.

Ezekiel 16:20-21 "And you took your sons and your daughters, *whom you had borne to me*, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter²¹ that you slaughtered *my children* and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?"

These children are declared to belong to God. They are his children. The covenant is greater than the immediate family. The children belong to the family *only because* God has given them back to the parents to be good stewards of them. But ultimately children in covenant belong to God.

Mature adults enjoy no greater fundamental status than to be called "children of God." And this is exactly what the babies who were sacrificed to pagan gods were called.

NC: Children are not second-class covenant members. They are considered "holy." **1Co 7:14** "For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, *they are holy.*"

"Unclean" and "holiness" - roots in the OC. To be unclean was to be excluded from the worship of God. Our children are "holy." They are not unclean. They are not little pagans in our households who simply have the "external" benefits of growing up in a Christian home. They are worshipers of God, able to stand in the presence of God because they are "holy."

Cf. also where Paul calls the children in the church "holy" when he refers to them as "saints"—i.e., "holy ones"—in **Eph 1:1** and then addresses the children in **6:1**. Children are to obey their parents "in the Lord." What does this mean but that our children are "in the Lord" with us and have covenant obligations.

What does this mean for our parenting? (1) They are not to be treated as second-class members of the family until they make a

“profession of faith.” Certainly we want them to profess their faith in Christ throughout their lives. But the “profession of faith” that we have grown accustomed to has more affinities with Charles Finney and the mourners’ bench than it does with the Scripture. We are to lead them to trust God’s promises concerning them throughout the time that we have them. God promises that he is their God. They are to be led to believe that, not doubt it.

(2) We don’t have reservations about teaching our children to worship God as their Father. We can teach them to call upon God in faith as their Father because he has declared himself to be their Father.

(3) We train them on the basis of who God has declared them to be as his children. “This is who you are.” We tell them their identity and train them according to it.

(4) You are the steward of God’s children. Even though they do belong to you, they belong to God in a more fundamental way. They are *his* children remember. We bear them and rear them *for* God. Understanding their covenant status helps you to remember this.

2. The promises of God for our children.

As we employ the means that God has given us, the goals we have discussed concerning child-rearing—which can be summed up with your child properly bearing the image of God—are not only attainable but promised.

5th commandment: **Exod 20:12** - primarily directed toward the children in the covenant. Annexed to this commandment is the promise of inheritance. This is Paul’s commentary on this commandment in **Eph 6:1-3**.

The land is a promise of the covenant. From the OC to the NC that promise has been transformed to encompass the whole world (which was always intended; cf. **Rom 4:13**). This promise is nothing less than sharing in the glory of Christ, for it is his glory to have dominion over the whole world as its true Lord. To participate in that glory is to reign with Christ.

We must train our children with the promise of God ever before us that our children stand to inherit final salvation. And we must understand a major ordinary means of God’s bringing them to that state is faithful parenting.

Understanding God’s covenant and the promises of it drives us to a future orientation in our outlook. We don’t live for the moment without regard for the everlasting consequences of our actions. We keep the final goal in mind and that informs and shapes our present actions.

God says that those who keep his covenant—which in this case would be faithfulness in rearing children—will have mercy shown upon their family to a thousand generations. **Psa 103:17-18** (Cf. also **102:25-28; Exo 20:4-6//Deut 5:9-10; 7:9; Ezek 37:24-26; Isa 65:22-23; 59:21**).

Why can we believe this? Because, as Peter says in summary fashion on the day of Pentecost, “the promise is to you and to your children” (cf. **Act 2:37-39**).

B. CHILDREN

1. The status of our children before God.: Our children must be taught who they are; i.e., what God has declared about them. This encompasses many things.

Sinfulness: Understanding our covenant status demands that we understand our sinfulness. God has established his covenant of salvation in order to save us from sin. We must understand sin.

The grace of God: God makes provision for their sin within this context of the covenant. Cf. **Deut 7:6ff**.

Some might wonder at this point, “But what if the children don’t persevere in the faith? What if they don’t inherit the promises? Was I wrong to teach them to believe this about themselves?” Absolutely not! To teach our children what God has plainly declared about them (as well as all other covenant members) is not wrong. In fact, THAT IS WHAT WE ARE CALLED TO DO! AND THAT IS ALL WE ARE CALLED TO DO! What else can we do? We become concerned about the secret workings of God in the lives of individuals, and we begin to equate that with the validity or invalidity of God’s promises. But this is not at all the way that it is to be viewed. Cf. **Rom 2:17-3:4**

2. The promises of God for our children

Cf. **Eph 6:1-3**. Train them with future orientation. Don’t live for the moment.