

October 22, 2006 AM

**GOD'S COVENANT: ITS PARTICIPANTS
GENESIS 17**

Standard line of reasoning: "Circumcision was a sign of the covenant given to the children of believers in the OT, indicating that they were members of God's people. The sign of inclusion among God's people in the NC is baptism. Since there is no NT evidence that children should be excluded, we should give the sign of inclusion to our children in the NC; i.e., we should baptize our children."

Not a bad argument, but there are underlying reasons as to why children are included among the people of God.

1. "I WILL ESTABLISH MY COVENANT ..." - THE NATURE OF THE COVENANT

What is "covenant"?: the word *covenant* does not appear until Gen 6.18 (Noah), but elements of it appear in original creation.

A covenant is a relationship. Biblical covenants between God and man involve loving union and communion. This covenant is structured and has rewards or blessings for keeping it and has punishments or curses for violating it.

- *union* - the parties are joined to one another in a formal bond.
- *communion* - there is an ongoing relationship of love in which the parties interact with one another.
- *structured* - emphasizes authority and has stipulations of what is acceptable and not acceptable in the relationship.

If both parties live faithfully within this covenant they will experience the blessings of this covenant. If either party refuses to live faithfully within this covenant, he has broken the covenant and will suffer the penalties stipulated for that unfaithfulness.

When any or all of the aspects of the covenant are present, there is the covenant. E.g., "marriage covenant" is redundant. Marriage = covenant.

"I will be *your God*" - every time we hear phrases like "your God" and "our God" we are hearing covenant language. God does not have to say, "I am your covenant God." "Your God" takes care of that.

Cf. Jer 33.19-20 - covenant with creation; Hosea 6.7 - a covenant is made with *'adam*.

Covenant is the atmosphere of the Scriptures; i.e., it is always there even though it may not be explicitly stated all of the time.

God is a covenant God. This is rooted in his nature as a Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God eternally exists in covenant.

See John 17. Jesus prays for the disciples would be one with one another as the Father and the Son are one; and he prays that the disciples may be one with the Father and the Son just as the Father and Son are one.

God unites us to himself and unites us to his people in terms of covenant. If this is a reflection of the relationship between Father and Son in the Trinity, then we must understand that there is a covenant between the members of the Godhead.

From the prayer of Jesus we understand God's original intention in his creation covenant that God created in order to "expand" his family; i.e., to include others within the love and fellowship of the divine family. [Man is not of the same essence as God. There is always a distinction between the Creator and the creature. But neither does it mean that we cannot enter into his family.]

God is acting in the way that he then expects his image-bearers to act. Remember, one of the initial blessings and commands to the man and the woman is to "expand" the family; i.e., be fruitful and multiply.

Those created—or procreated—will be members of the family of Adam and Eve. They will be joined to them covenantally; i.e., there is a structured union and communion of love between parents and children with blessings and curses.

God's intention (though simplified here greatly) is for fruitful man to live in union and communion with him. God would be their God and Father, and they would be his people. Created in God's image as fruitful (or as a procreator), the children born would simply be a part of this ever-expanding family whose God was YHWH.

God's covenant had stipulations. Obedience to his word was demanded. If that covenant stipulation was violated, then the curse of

death—the severing of the relationship—would occur. And this is exactly what happened as we have already studied in Genesis.

The Covenant and Redemption: God promises redemption after the fall; i.e., the freedom from sin (which must include its defeat).

Does this redemption from sin mean that God comes to deliverance from the creation? Does he scrap his original intentions for man as his image-bearer to be a fruitful member of the divine community? God does not abandon his original plan. He, in fact, will restore, transform, and complete his original plan through the defeat of sin.

He promises in Gen 3 (1) the defeat of the serpent and his seed through the seed of the woman; (2) the restoration of the fruitfulness of the woman (which necessarily includes the man); and (3) the fruitfulness of labor in the earth. The promises amidst the punishments meted out are all about God's original intentions for creation being fulfilled while dealing with sin.

Man, as God's image-bearer, will enjoy union and communion with the Triune God with all the implications of what that means. What sin has destroyed grace will restore.

Establishing the covenant: The phrase used here—"I will establish my covenant"—like it was with Noah, indicates a pre-existing covenant that will become, in some sense, the possession, privilege, and responsibility of Abraham.

This covenant is the promise of new creation. Indications: (1) Name changes: Abram to Abraham/Sarai to Sarah; rooted in Gen 1 & 2. After God creates everything, he begins to separate, shape, establish proper relationships, and gives names to things.

(2) new blessing: fruitfulness and dominion (i.e., kings will come from them). Cf. Gen 12, 15

(3) Sign of the covenant: administered on the 8th day and involves a "cutting off" of the old creation.

2. "... BETWEEN ME AND YOU AND YOUR SEED" - THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE COVENANT

If God is restoring his original creation intentions for man (and the world), and if children were included in those plans from the beginning, then we would expect that the children born to people within this new creation covenant would be included. Redemption is not laying a completely new set of tracks that run along side creation. Sin knocked us off the tracks, and God is putting us back on the tracks.

Abraham is declared to be in union and communion with God. But his children (indeed, his entire household) are declared to be in union and communion with God. How can this be if all the children are born in sin (and they are)? Remember, the covenant is about remedying the effects of sin. What sin has separated, God brings back into proper relationship.

They must go through the (ritual) death and resurrection—i.e., circumcision in the old creation, the various baptism that will come, and baptism in the new creation—but God has declared that they are a part of this new creation.

Note covenant standing assumed in 5th Word/Commandment; cf. also "saints" in Eph 1.1; 6.1; Col 1.2; 3.20; cf. also Ac 2.38-39.

In this new creation God includes our children because his intention is the same as it was from the beginning. Sin has broken those first ties, but God in his grace restores them so that we may be fruitful in the fullest sense of what that means.

Objection #1: Does not including your children like this "force" religion on your children? Should they not be free to choose for themselves?

Assumes a division between "nature" and "grace/religion." But if we are God's image-bearers, then we are inherently worshipers (even though we distort that worship). We are not a blank religious slate ready to make a neutral choice. Whatever we teach them or refuse to teach them will shape their view of God. Thus we "force" them into some view of God.

Objection #2: They don't understand.

Assumes that children can't understand in the womb. Not so. Cp. John the Baptizer recognizing Jesus in the womb. Note also the Psalms.

Do you talk to your babies? Why? They don't understand. The fact is we talk to them *in order that* they might understand. They will grow up into a culture (which includes a language). Speak Christian-ese to them. Inculturate them with the Christian faith. That is what we are commanded to do; cf. Deut 6.4-9; Eph 6.4