

“Raising Christians”

Or, Investing in an Inheritance of Faith

Proverbs 13:22, Ephesians 6:4

Series: Rarefied Heirs - Leaving an Inheritance for Our Children’s Children - Session 4

Introduction

The last time I talked about parenting my title was “Raising Parents.” We’re raising kids, yes, but we don’t want them to stay kids. We can, or should, see far enough ahead to realize that how we train them today will affect how they train their kids some future day. It’s still by God’s grace; thank God He fixes many of our failures. And yet we also know that God’s grace can work through our good works. We want our kids to grow up and be fruitful, joyful, #blessed.

Toward that end we parents talk up the glories of parenting and we try to live the way God says to. If we get to see our children’s children, and if we get to hear our children talking to and playing with their children, we’d want to see our grandkids being loved in truth. So we love our kids in truth. That’s not less than an example, but it’s also an investment that matures. If we sow hypocrisy, then we’ll reap generational hypocrisy. But if we demonstrate the good of parental responsibility, it won’t be a surprise that our kids want to have kids. We are raising parents, and we’re leaving an inheritance of prizing parenting.

My emphasis for today is that *we are raising Christians*. It depends who you hang out with, but there are more Christian parents who are waiting to see if they have Christian kids than raising kids to be Christian, as if it were a spiritual lottery. Maybe the difference sounds subtle, but I hope to show that the mindset matters. How you view your kids has a lot to do with what they grow up to be.

We want them to be Christians in a family of Christians who are part of a church of Christians. A Christian is an individual believer, who has personally repented from his sin, who learns the ways of obedience as a disciple of Christ, and who worships and serves as part of the Body of Christ, expressed in the assembly of a local church. A Christian loves God and fears the

Lord and walks in the Spirit for sake of fruit. A group of Christians living together have a kind of *culture*, a way that they do things, a shared vocabulary, a common set of values.

Toward that end we Christians talk up the glories of Christ and we seek to live according to all that He's commanded (Matthew 28:20). Part of what it means to be a disciple is to *make disciples*; there should be no fruitless/barren disciples. Each Christian is gifted by God in different ways to serve the body, and every different part is necessary. But giftedness relates to the analogy of being a church member, not to whether or not you are a disciple-maker. Disciples reproduce. Disciples who don't reproduce are *disobedient*. You ought not be a single-generation disciple of Christ. Speaking figuratively, you ought to see your *spiritual* children's children. We are raising Christians, and we're leaving an inheritance of prizing Christ.

This is all the life of **faith**. Salvation is for all who believe (Romans 1:16). We live from faith to faith. "The righteous shall live by faith," from justification through sanctification. We are born again in faith, we are guarded by faith (1 Peter 1:5), and "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

What I'm about to say is fundamental, vital, urgent, consequential, pressing, high-priority, essential, of utmost importance, and so kind of a big deal. Believe in your heart that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and you will be saved (Romans 10:9). Believe in your heart that God will work through you as you raise your kids to believe in Jesus Christ. Have faith in God to be a Christian, have faith in God that He will bless you to raise blessed Christians.

Some parents might object, "But they're not Christians!" It depends on what age your kids are, but think with me about what "ideal" looks like for our children's children. If your kids are still really young, this message should be like a softball right across the plate. If your kids are older, or even grown up, fine, but think about what we want our church *culture* to be. This is just as much about for all our children's children.

What does *damage* is when mom starts getting more and more anxious about her kids' salvation, and/or when dad buries his apathetic head in the sand. Maybe even worse is when both

parents go all major prophet toward the Assyrians about it. “Woe to you, little pagans, who call evil good and refuse to eat your vegetables. How long until you clean your room, and your hearts?!” And professing Christian parents can raise pagans. Parents who think about their kids as enemies often find that they’ve raised enemies.

I got a timely email just two days ago from a friend. He wrote,

*“My wife and I are two (sometimes seemingly lonely) kuyperian dispensationalists.... We're surrounded by many baptists we love, but sometimes they're a little too **glum**. Particularly when it comes to how we raise our children. Something I can't seem to wrap my head around is the promise of the Spirit given to our children. It's a generational promise of God to Israel, and since we're grafted in, to us too. Right? (Right? is my question to you). This is something I've been wrestling in prayer with God about. I want to raise my children as part of God's family - not as "little sinners" who can only obey truly if they're saved. Do you have any idea what I'm talking about? No, I'm not convinced of the presby baby baptisms. Yes, I'm convinced I want to raise my children as those receiving God's promise. I don't want to teach them all that He has commanded while always sowing doubt in their hearts and minds.”*

How should you view your kids? At birth? While little? When should your kids be baptized? What does their baptism mean? How do you treat them after baptism? How can you, as a good man, leave an *inheritance of faith* to your children’s children?

Baby Baptism Is Not the Cure for Raising Christians

This is something I’ve been thinking about for a long time, and have had multiple conversations about in recent years. It does not require baptizing infants (or having a “dry baptism” public parent dedications) to believe that God is gracious and to make disciples of your kids, to raise them as Christians. The proof is in the Presbyterians, or rather, the negative proof is

there. Some of my favorite people, the people who I depend on most for edification and sharpening, are Presbyterians who don't seem very self-aware of their own history. The Cross-Politic guys are a good example (they have some helpful things to say, and many of you listen to them), they've basically turned baby baptism into a brand. They talk like baptizing your babies is the answer without acknowledging the generations of the baptized-as-babies that have gone after all kinds of false gospels and woke versions of Jesus; Presbyterianism has a lot to learn from, but it doesn't guarantee anything. There are by God's grace a remnant of Presbies making great parents, not necessarily because of their Presbyterian theology but because of their faith.

It doesn't take too long to look back in history or look around in our generation to see that baptizing a baby "into the covenant" doesn't guarantee generations of faithful Christians. There is often high presumption that comes (which, ironically fits with many who maintain a kind of Jewish-replacement theology) from being "in the covenant" (while many of them aren't sure which covenant that is anyway). Their kid is baptized, done deal.

Many Baptists have a *worse* approach. Typical Baptist parents, apart from a remnant, often refuse to accept an immature profession of faith and question seeds of faith any time they sense sin in their kid. They withhold the spiritual food until their kid can prove that he can live without food; they treat their kids like the dogs who only get the crumbs that fall off the table (Matthew 15:27).

Baptism isn't really my primary subject, but it applies to the subject of how parents think about their kids. Some baptize too early, and tend to leave an inheritance of presumption. Some hold baptism off too long, and tend to leave an inheritance of doubt. The problem is the same: a lack of faith and discipleship to faith. They are not raising Christians. One isn't worried about the "raising" part, they think they already have a Christian. The other thinks that there's nothing they can do to "raise" a Christian.

Covenant Language Is Not the Cure for Raising Christians

While they sometimes go together, the talk of our kids being “in the covenant” has some of the same problems as infant baptism. Covenant language sounds great, regularly to those who grew up in Baptist circles where kids were seen more as on the outside than inside. I’m not picking on anyone, I’m interested in understanding the best way to leave an inheritance for my grandkids. The trouble with using covenant language about our kids is multi-headed. It starts with, which covenant?

One option is the "covenant of grace," which in Reformed theology is an extra-biblical name for "all of the saved of all time" (Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, Loc. 704). In much capital "R" Reformed theology the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants are seen as different administrations of this one covenant of grace. The Jews were born into those covenants though non-ethnic peoples could convert (to Judaism).

In order to say that kids of Christian parents are *born* into the covenant of grace, one must make a distinction between being in the covenant "naturally" (by birth) and "spiritually" (by belief). Covenantalists typically don't think their infant is a believer (though this is common among Lutherans), but has obligations to believe because of being in the covenant. Put another way, to use this language we would need to make a distinction between the administration of the covenant (which Presbyterians initiate at infant baptism) and the substance of the covenant (which is salvation accomplished by Christ for all the elect, and which becomes visible when the elect are regenerated and profess faith).

But this changes the definition of "covenant of grace" if you can be “in the covenant” it but not actually be saved.

Birth guarantees nothing, which ironically is the part of the Jewish problem with the other covenants, Isaac and Ishmael were both sons of Abraham; Jacob and Esau were both sons of Isaac (Romans 9).

We might also be tempted to say that our kids are born into New Covenant. Many Reformed theologians, when they do give attention to the New Covenant (first named in Jeremiah 31:31-37, see also Ezekiel 36:22-38), understand the New Covenant simply as the summary of the others, as a new administration but not different in substance (Denault, Loc. 2229). But beyond the explicit reference to “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” there are at least two problems. First, the revelation of the New Covenant clarifies that the Lord saw it not as the summary of the others but as something *different* from the others.

*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, **not like the covenant** that I made with their fathers...my covenant that they broke.... (Jeremiah 31:31–32 ESV)*

Second, the great difference is that New Covenant promised/guaranteed new/spiritual/believing hearts, “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” (Jeremiah 31:33). Or as stated in Ezekiel:

I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:26–27 ESV)

The Lord effects effectually, and it will not be broken. If the New Covenant has a distinction between administration and substance than it is *no different from the others*, covenants that included salvation blessings only for some. There were elect within the covenant nation (Romans 9:6), but there cannot be non-elect within the New Covenant. The glory of the New Covenant is that no one “walks away” from the New Covenant.

Henry Lawrence wrote, "Now we pretending to be Abraham's children by faith, not by carnal generation, cannot pretend to ordinances by carnal generation as the others did." The paedobaptists did not purport to be in the covenant of grace as the natural descendants of Abraham, but as his spiritual descendants; however they practiced a spiritual ordinance (baptism) on the basis of natural generation. (Denault, Loc. 1423)

To use the word *covenant* as a reference to external and temporary privileges for our kids is to gut the word of its power and what's worse, it denies the actual New Covenant terms. That does not mean that there are no external and temporary privileges for our kids. It means they are *providential* blessings, for which we are accountable to God, but not the same as being guaranteed salvation blessings.

You don't need covenant language to believe that God will help you to raise Christians. And again, the covenants given by God were an advantage to the Jews, and yet we know it didn't guarantee that every one of their kids would believe. The Jewish "covenantalists" presumed on the sign of circumcision and tried to establish righteousness apart from faith in Jesus (Romans 9:31).

We are sons of Abraham by faith, but not even all Abraham's sons were in the covenant? We and our kids benefit from the Noaic covenant, because we'll never see a global flood again, but that's not the same as faith. The Davidic covenant is about a Messiah ruling from Jerusalem. And again the New Covenant affects faith, it doesn't obligate faith.

It is ironic, especially for those with covenantal leanings, for them to depend on the *covenant*, when *that is what messed up the Jews*.

An Inheritance of Anxiety Is Not Better

If there is a kind of over-presumption by some, there is also a catastrophic and treasonous over-scrupulous, burdensome-pessimism by others. We want to be precise with our language, but

we should also have high standards for our attitude. Too many professing Christian parents are the “glum.”

There are multiple ways to raise kids to doubt. The most obvious way is to disciple them in doubt. “They’re too young.” “They don’t know everything about what they’re saying.” “They keep sinning, struggling with the same sins over and over.” And a lot of us have been *discipled* to question our salvation in exactly the same way. For as much as I love the Puritans, they were preaching to a culture of presumers, most of whom had been baptized as babies, and trying to get men and women to actually examine their souls. The Puritan preachers took sin seriously, and that is good. But not all of them *discipled* how to believe, to then water faith and weed and water some more.

Other parents say things like, “I don’t want my kids to have my faith. I want it to be their own.” And we are living in a culture where our kids really took that to heart; they are spending the inheritance we gave them. They don’t have our faith, and they’ve made self-discovery and self-affirmation/self-transformation and unbelief their fown.

We’re trying to give our kids a culture, of feasting and gratitude, of worship and Kuyerian-sized interests in all the things Jesus is interested in. But that’s all in faith.

We confess our sins as Christians. We understand baptism as obedience not by the parents but by the one professing faith, and we understand that baptism as a weapon in the battle against sin (Romans 6:2-5). Why withhold it until they prove their sanctification?

I came across [this statement of the Capital Hill Baptist Church elders about the baptism of children](#) again recently.

We believe that the normal age of baptism should be when the credibility of one’s conversion becomes naturally evident to the church community. This would normally be when the child has matured, and is beginning to live more self-consciously as an individual, making their own choices, having left the God-given, intended child-like

dependence on their parents for the God-given, intended mature wisdom which marks one who has felt the tug of the world, the flesh and the devil, but has decided, despite these allurements, to follow Christ.

Is really this the path of wisdom? Does this promote a culture of faith?

Yes, some seed falls on bad soil (Matthew 13). But, parents, this illustration is different for you. *Keep tending the soil.* It's not one seed sowing and done. And it's not baptism as end, but as beginning of their life of discipleship, and you are making disciples.

We will leave an inheritance of anxiety to our children's children, or an inheritance of fearing the Lord (Proverbs 14:26, Psalm 103:17). We ought to be investing today in an inheritance of faith. Faith is a gift of God, faith is powerful, faith is fruitful. Faith begets faith.

What Instead?

The Bible does not start the call to faith with a call to examine one's covenantal responsibilities, among Gentiles or even among Jews. "Brothers, what shall we do? And Peter said, to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:38 ESV) The call is to Christ.

And Peter continued: "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (Acts 2:39 ESV) This promise is the gospel of Jesus Christ, *for all who believe.*

That said, there is something special about Christian homes. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians many marriages were *newly* unequally yoked, meaning that they got married when both were pagans and then one got saved. He gave instructions for spouses living with an unbeliever, whether as a husband or as a wife.

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. (1 Corinthians 7:14 ESV)

The phrase “made holy” doesn’t mean that you only need one parent with faith in the house and everyone is guaranteed to go to heaven; kids don’t get to ride on mom or dad’s ticket, so to speak. But it does mean that there are practical *and spiritual privileges*. Paul summarizes it as a kind of holiness, a setting that is not common but set apart. These relationships have someone with light living in the home.

In addition, there is an imperative for Christian homes.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4 ESV)

ἐν παιδείᾳ, training or even *culture* of the Lord. One way to provoke them is to barrage them with doubt. Instead parents, and fathers in particular, are commanded to bring kids up to know and believe and love and obey the Lord.

as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14–15 ESV)

The Word should dwell in you and in your home. The Word is living and abiding and causes people, and young people, to be born again (1 Peter 1:23). How kind that you don’t need blessed feet to cross the mountains to bring good news (Isaiah 52:7, Romans 10:15). There you are! You have it! Share it! Show it!

*Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it.
(Proverbs 22:6 ESV)*

The way of righteousness, yes, but in the fear of the Lord. The way of wisdom, yes, in faith.

*In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence,
and his children will have a refuge.
(Proverbs 14:26 ESV)*

Conclusion

We are saved by faith alone, thank the Lord. This is good news when you realize how many ways you've been a ridiculous parent. Have faith that Jesus forgives and cleanses, and have faith that He will continue to transform you, your parenting, and generations.

So in summary, what is the spiritual status of our kids? I am trying to work toward clarity, not being combative. While this presents a tension (for a time), it prevents other inventions and confusions. We serve our kids, and one another, better by building a culture of faith (paideia of the Lord) than by telling them they are in the covenant by birth. (Note: We could say that by birth our kids live in a *covenant household*, as fruit of the marriage covenant between the husband and wife. We could also say they live in a *covenant community*, being brought up among Christians who receive many of the fruits of the New Covenant. I would still want to make a distinction about whether they are “in the covenant” prior to faith.) Here’s a first-pass toward answering the question about how Christian parents should think about their kids in order to raise Christians.

Kids born to (one or more) Christian parents are holy, which includes spiritual blessings of protection/refuge and opportunity. Kids are to be disciplined **in faith to faith**, then affirmed by

the church as members upon their public profession of faith in baptism and received into communion with the assembly.

Prior to their profession of faith they have temporal and spiritual blessings/privileges, and so therefore they also have greater accountability. They not only have no excuse before God as their Creator but also no excuse for repenting from their sin/rebellion and confessing **faith** in Jesus Christ as Lord.

As with all Christians, their **faith** is what identifies them as participants in the New Covenant and that identity is renewed at the Lord's Table (not baptism, per Luke 22:20). Their **faith** only needs to be as big as a mustard seed.

Living faith is *rare*, Matthew 17:20, and we want rare heirs of faith. Faith moves mountains *and generations*.