

# Covenant Children

Scott Moonen, December 2006

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## ***Prolegomena***

This paper seeks to understand God's dealings with his people's children. It is important to understand God's disposition toward our children; their relation to him; the promises he gives us to exercise faith in as we parent; and how we ought to teach our children to live in God's world and relate to him as Creator, Savior, Father, and Lord.

There are many gospel truths that we should take care to affirm here. Salvation belongs to the Lord.<sup>1</sup> We are all conceived as sinners.<sup>2</sup> God sovereignly elects sinners unto salvation<sup>3</sup> for his glory,<sup>4</sup> through no deserving on our part.<sup>5</sup> God accomplished our salvation by Jesus's death on the cross; Jesus our savior and mediator bore our sin particularly and endured the wrath of God in our place.<sup>6</sup> In fact, in our salvation we are actually united to Jesus.<sup>7</sup> In mysterious harmony with God's sovereignty, we are nonetheless individually responsible to repent of our sin and entrust ourselves to Christ through God's promises.<sup>8</sup> And while God is perfectly faithful to keep and preserve his people to the end, and we are saved and kept by no work of our own, we must still persevere and grow in Spirit-empowered repentance, faith, love, and obedience.<sup>9</sup> Finally, one of God's main purposes in saving us is to create a people for himself, his church.<sup>10</sup>

Concerning our children's salvation, biblical theology provides key insights for us on the unity of God's revelation and his redemptive plan; Hebrews is one of the main places we find this. We plainly see that the means of salvation has been the same through all of history: entrusting oneself to Jesus Christ the promised redeemer.<sup>11</sup> Individuals in the Old Testament were saved by just the same kind of faith that saves us today:<sup>12</sup> regeneration, repentance and faith are not innovations in the new covenant. As a result, the commands that God gives even to Old Testament parents must largely be applied to ourselves, since they are God's wisely ordained ordinary means of nurturing faith in his people's children. Biblical theology also reveals a clear pattern of God's ever-expanding redemptive work, always giving greater promises and greater means of grace to his people.<sup>13</sup> As a result, we can mainly expect the promises that God gives to Old Testament parents to apply to ourselves in even greater ways.

## ***God's character and purpose***

In scripture we see that God's generational faithfulness to parents and children is not just a feature of his covenants, but is part of his eternal character.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this arises in part from God's Trinitarian nature, especially as Father and Son, conforming God's people to his image. We also see that he is a God of generational judgment.<sup>15</sup>

God intended, before the fall, for there to be faithfulness throughout generations in serving him.<sup>16</sup> After the fall, this is something we anticipate God will increasingly recover as he redeems creation and creates a people for himself.<sup>17</sup> In fact, we see that one of God's explicit purposes in the institution of marriage is to produce Godly offspring for himself.<sup>18</sup>

## ***God's covenantal promises***

“We need to be filling our souls with the truth of God’s character and promises. We need to be . . . promise-hunters, [and] we need to be God-hunters. The greatest inspiration and encouragement for our faith is . . . [the] God who backs up every promise. . . . Fill [your] soul with knowledge of what God is like and his character; . . . fill [your] soul with the promises of God.” – Mickey Connolly<sup>19</sup>

Throughout God’s covenantal dealings with his people, God has always included his people’s children in his promises. This holds true in God’s dealings with Adam,<sup>20</sup> Noah,<sup>21</sup> Abraham,<sup>22</sup> Moses,<sup>23</sup> and David.<sup>24</sup> This is attested elsewhere,<sup>25</sup> and similar promises are made to specific individuals.<sup>26</sup> God continues such promises in the new covenant.<sup>27</sup> We see this generational blessing further pictured in other ways, as follows.

Old Testament sacrifices were very often corporate and generational in nature.<sup>28</sup> This similarly applies to Christ’s giving himself for his church.<sup>29</sup> This is perhaps not saying much, since Christ’s death is evidently the source of common grace for all men,<sup>30</sup> and must be appropriated by faith for salvation,<sup>31</sup> but it does display God’s merciful disposition toward our children.

Both the old and new covenants address children with the same frankness as parents.<sup>32</sup> Children are clearly and unapologetically within the scope of the covenants’ commands and exhortations,<sup>33</sup> are to participate in family worship,<sup>34</sup> and are considered to belong to God.<sup>35</sup> Jesus himself makes very open invitations for children to come to him,<sup>36</sup> and children are said to partake of holiness through their Christian parents.<sup>37</sup>

We also see hints of God’s generational mercies in his compassion for children. Not only does God take great care to instruct parents in raising children, but he expressly communicates his heart of compassion for children,<sup>38</sup> especially orphans.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, children are described as good gifts from God.<sup>40</sup> While our Savior is to be cherished far above our children,<sup>41</sup> part of God’s goodness in giving children is his normally giving faithful children.<sup>42</sup>

## ***Caveats***

We have already maintained that God’s promises of salvation require us to individually respond in ongoing repentance, faith, and perseverance. It is abundantly clear that this is true both for us and our children.<sup>43</sup> In our own experience and from repeated Scriptural example, we know that many Christian children apostatize. Such children are individually responsible for their own unbelief.<sup>44</sup> It is true their parents may bear some responsibility for stifling the Spirit’s work,<sup>45</sup> but it is false to interpret God’s promises to say that right parenting guarantees a child’s salvation.<sup>46</sup> Scripture attests that not all children of believers are saved; whatever human responsibility there is, ultimately God has sovereignly ordained this and he remains faithful.<sup>47</sup> The language of Scripture’s warnings suggests that these children tasted some benefits of the gospel through their parents;<sup>48</sup> because of this they are held to even greater account for their unbelief.<sup>49</sup>

It is right to humbly and prayerfully trust in God’s promises of mercy and grace. But we must be careful to distinguish between humble trust and prideful presumption. Either as parents or children, we cannot presume upon any of God’s promises, no less his promise of generational mercies. This is the same fatal mistake the Pharisees made.<sup>50</sup>

## ***Our response to God's promises***

Keeping in mind that children in the Old Testament are saved only by faith in a coming Redeemer, we remember that God's commands to parents in the Old Testament are equally applicable to us today. Earlier we saw that God addressed children in the same way as their parents. But as we review both Old Testament and New Testament commands, we see that God also requires parents to treat their own children as Christian believers. Without hesitation or apology, children are to be taught that they belong to God;<sup>51</sup> reminded to trust in God's promises to them;<sup>52</sup> and exhorted to walk in persevering repentance, faith, love, and obedience.<sup>53</sup> Parents are to pray prayers for their children rooted in God's promises.<sup>54</sup> This is just the same way that adult believers are to exhort and admonish and pray for one another. Despite the possibility of apostasy, parents are to exercise full faith in God and his promises and to treat their children as fellow Christians.

We draw similar conclusions from observing the warnings and prophetic appeals that God gives to his people. The very same pattern holds: the hearers are considered to be God's people. Instead of admonishing the hearers to come to God in the first place, God admonishes them to persevere, to remain faithful, and to return to their God and their first love.<sup>55</sup>

We know that God doesn't answer all our prayers just as we wish, but we trust his sovereign wisdom and are responsible to approach him no less boldly in prayer as our loving Father.<sup>56</sup> In the same way, we know that God doesn't save every single Christian child, but we are responsible to trust his sovereign wisdom and boldly and confidently equip our children to persevere as Christians. The children of Christians are to be regarded as Christians.<sup>57</sup> This is in keeping with the general principle that we are not given to know the hidden things of God, including whether anyone is elect unto salvation.<sup>58</sup> We take adult professions of faith at face value and exhort and admonish one another as fellow believers. Likewise, God would have us take his promises at face value, consider our children to be Christians, train them wholeheartedly "in the way,"<sup>59</sup> and exhort and admonish them to persevere as Christians. We must take advantage of *all* of the means of grace that God gives to his people for their salvation and perseverance.

## ***A child's faith***

While God requires us to treat our children as fellow Christians, we also enjoy the hope that they may be regenerated at an early age. Scripture provides examples of the Spirit's work in a young child, an infant, or even in the womb:<sup>60</sup> Samuel,<sup>61</sup> David,<sup>62</sup> David's child,<sup>63</sup> Jeremiah,<sup>64</sup> Obadiah,<sup>65</sup> John the Baptist,<sup>66</sup> and our Savior himself.<sup>67</sup> David's example is particularly interesting, since the Psalms would have been sung and confessed by all Israel. Remembering that saving faith looks the same then and now, Christian children who come to a mature faith should normally be able to look back and see God's gracious work in their hearts from even their earliest memory. In faith they may confess that, not only did God choose them before the foundation of the world,<sup>68</sup> and fashion them and plan their days;<sup>69</sup> but he was in fact working in their hearts before they were born.

We have already seen that God instructs children to obey him. This presupposes that children may experience the saving and empowering work of the Spirit to produce obedient hearts; in some cases this connection is even explicitly made.<sup>70</sup>

Scripture also specifically commends a child's implicit trusting faith.<sup>71</sup> Not only does this encourage us to hope that our children may have faith, but it also suggests how it might be that infants may come to have a growing faith in God: in just the same way that God gives an infant a disposition to unassuming trust in its parents and their care. The possibility of an infant having this seed of faith is no more incredible than the possibility of having indwelling original sin.<sup>72</sup>

None of this diminishes the necessity of persevering faith for our children's salvation, but it does motivate us to look for and encourage evidences of God's grace in our children's lives from the earliest age.<sup>73</sup> We exercise the judgment of charity toward them according to God's promises and commands, and seek to fan into flame the seed of faith that God has given them.

## ***Covenant signs***

At this point we are nearly ruined for classic credobaptism. If our children are to be regarded as Christians, if we have hope from God's promises that they possess a seed of faith, if we are making disciples of them from the earliest age, then it is perfectly natural for us to baptize infants as disciples and even admit those who eat solid foods to the Lord's Supper. Baptism is associated with the start of discipleship,<sup>74</sup> and is always an immediate response to God's promises that never demands perseverance or maturity.<sup>75</sup> Connected with Jesus's exhortations to childlike faith and his related sober warnings, this strongly cautions us not to be suspicious of a child's faith approaching either baptism or communion.<sup>76</sup> Again we have here the judgment of charity that takes God's promises and the evidences of faith at face value.

Even in the Old Testament the covenant signs of circumcision and Passover had an obvious spiritual nature.<sup>77</sup> Since Old Testament believers were saved by a repentance and faith no different than ours, it is instructive that their infants were included in both of these spiritual Old Testament signs,<sup>78</sup> and were to be exhorted by means of these signs to persevere in trusting God.<sup>79</sup> Such children are often regarded as being incapable of any sort of faith, but we have already shown this is not likely the case, even if they are greatly lacking in knowledge. Regardless, the inclusion of infants in these covenant signs is at least suggestive that they should participate in and be held to account by the New Testament's signs of baptism and communion, especially as there are explicit parallels drawn between circumcision and baptism,<sup>80</sup> and between Passover and the Lord's Supper.<sup>81</sup>

There are further hints of infants' inclusion in both baptism and communion. The New Testament never explicitly addresses whether the children of believers are to receive covenant signs, but if this had changed since the Old Testament one would expect that Jewish parents would require careful pastoral instruction; this silence is suggestive but inconclusive.<sup>82</sup> Regarding communion, there are hints that it was practiced as a community meal, from which it would be unusual to exclude children.<sup>83</sup> This also suggests early baptism, since the church has normally preceded participation in communion with baptism, just as circumcision necessarily preceded Passover participation.<sup>84</sup> The New Testament's references to household baptisms<sup>85</sup> are much less conclusive, since we have no way of knowing the ages and dispositions of household members. Yet even if young children aren't in view, it is suggestive that the New Testament writers are comfortable in freely referring to baptism with the same sort of corporate and familial language that is used for circumcision.<sup>86</sup>

While baptism and the Lord's Supper are certainly matters of Christian obedience, this is the least important subject treated here. There are better, worse, and even disobedient ways to

practice them, but Scripture gives us some degree of freedom here. These are secondary matters compared to seizing all of God's means of grace to regularly preach the gospel to ourselves and our children, and compared to more central commands such as the need to live under authority and to live in unity with one another. Daniel Baker, my pastor, writes:

Sometimes if you focus on the ordinances in the abstract like this you miss also that while these are important means of grace, they are much less significant than a parent's example, a parent's counsel over the years, the word of God properly taught, the community of believers we find in a Biblical church, the power of praying parents and friends, the opportunity to take part in the church's worship, serving others in a variety of ways, etc. All of these are very available to the growing child in our homes. Thus [credobaptists] do limit them from the ordinances, but not to the extent that they are fundamentally deprived of God's means of grace in their lives.<sup>87</sup>

Douglas Wilson writes:

As Scripture teaches from first to last, keeping the *covenant* is more important than externally keeping the *sign* of the covenant. Of course, as Christians we should always seek faithfully to do both, but on this subject especially we must remember what is the most important. Remembering this will enable baptists and paedobaptists to maintain a spirit of unity as they work through, debate, and discuss these issues.<sup>88</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Diligence alone will never make a good parent. Faith will. Faith in God's promises. When we see what he's promised about our children, it will shape how we think, what we expect, and therefore how we act. The only way to pray by faith for our children is to begin with a focused belief in God's will for them. . . . Is there any greater comfort and hope than to hear and believe the promises of the one who spoke and worlds came into being? So pray the promises about your children. And see God work, in them and in you. – John Loftness<sup>89</sup>

We have concluded from both God's promises and commands that Christian parents are to consider even their youngest children as Christians belonging to God. The unity of God's redemptive plan and of the form of saving faith throughout history allow us to draw direct instruction from the Old Testament, but we see this pattern repeated in the New Testament as well. It is God's intention that his people, through all of redemptive history, should extend the judgment of charity to their children, and encourage them by means of God's ordinances, promises and warnings to persevere in Christ by the Holy Spirit. This certainly determines how we practically disciple our children in relating to their Savior and his world, which can make a great difference in how well they are equipped by God's grace to persevere in faith. But even more importantly this should cause us to humbly and prayerfully trust in God and his promises, since our children are saved by God's sovereign mercy and grace rather than our efforts.

## **Appendix: Anticipating objections**

1. *Baptidzo* signifies immersion only; therefore sprinkling infants is unacceptable.

One of the senses of the word is ceremonial washing, which might involve sprinkling or bathing. According to most readings, when we speak of baptism in

the Holy Spirit, immersion is not in view. Also, immersion is not as direct a picture of Jesus's burial as many maintain, since Jesus was buried in a cave.

2. We are either in Adam or in Christ;<sup>90</sup> by baptizing children when we are unsure of their status, we are severely compromising the sharp distinction between the old man and the new man. Moreover, Jeremiah 31 makes it clear that the new covenant is unbreakable.<sup>91</sup> By baptizing children who may not be regenerate we are compromising the new covenant's exclusivity.

We are likewise uncertain of the sincerity of adult professions, yet Scripture has us extend the judgment of charity, not waiting for evidence of perseverance before baptizing. We are not given to know God's secret decrees as to who is elect, and so we must concern ourselves with the Biblical instruction and commands and external evidences that are available to us.

Regarding Jeremiah 31, while its rich and wonderful promises are ultimately fulfilled in the new covenant,<sup>92</sup> it is clear from the context that this is referring to the renewal of the covenant upon the return of the exiles.<sup>93</sup> Regardless, it is perfectly compatible with the understanding that there are true covenant members who persevere and yet there are superficial covenant members who are thereby subject to God's warnings and held to greater account for their unbelief; this is in fact a significant theme that Hebrews develops alongside Jeremiah 31.<sup>94</sup>

3. By assuming that Christian children are Christians, we downplay or deny the doctrine of conversion.

We may not know whether, when or how any particular child is converted,<sup>95</sup> but we must affirm that a Spirit-wrought second birth is necessary.<sup>96</sup> Yet we must give priority to Biblical instruction and commands in the way we train our children, and this would have us emphasize their need to walk in *daily* repentance and faith, just as we encourage fellow Christians.

4. Infant baptism results in a flawed "halfway covenant" where the unbelieving grandchildren of believers are baptized even though their baptized parents have apostatized.

The halfway covenant is indeed flawed; such parents should instead be subject to church discipline for their unbelief.

5. Treating Christian children in this way may give them false assurance.

We should not be mainly concerned with deduced fears, but with simple faithfulness to Biblical instruction and command, trusting in God's wisdom for what will best serve our children. When we consider the way that Scripture exhorts and warns God's people, we see that it is precisely the precious promises and warnings of the gospel that are God's protection against false assurance. We are never instructed to be hesitant or tentative – quite the opposite, in fact, as we consider Jesus's invitations and warnings relating to our children – but simply to faithfully preach both the promises and warnings so that our children may be held accountable to walk in a growing and persevering faith. Mark Lutherbach counsels us to let both "the hard edges and glorious beauty of the Gospel be clear"

so that even though “sometimes [children] do not believe . . . at least they reject, for a time at least, a red-blooded version of the faith and not a caricature.”<sup>97</sup>

6. Young children are incapable of discerning Christ’s body in the bread, so they must not partake of communion.<sup>98</sup>

We have already shown that young children may have a degree of real trust in God appropriate to their age. Also, when read in its context, the phrase “discerning the body” in fact relates to Paul’s larger concern with the Corinthian practice of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>99</sup> Paul wants the church members to discern the *church* body, that is, to ensure that they are walking in gospel love toward one another. As such, this phrase is in part a warning against the church’s *excluding* individuals from the Lord’s Supper.<sup>100</sup>

7. Jesus was baptized as an adult;<sup>101</sup> why should we do any differently?

John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance for covenant renewal, not covenant initiation. Also, it is suggested that Jesus’s baptism served primarily as his introduction to priestly ministry according to Levitical law,<sup>102</sup> and is not a model or Christian baptism.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 3:8; Jonah 2:9; Revelation 7:10.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 51:5 – David declares that "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Proverbs 22:15 – "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child."

Romans 5:12-21 – "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned . . . one trespass led to condemnation for all men . . . by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners."

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8 - 9, Ephesians 1, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 11:36: -- "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

1 Peter 2:9 – "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 9:1-12 – "Do not say in your heart . . . 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land.' . . . Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people. Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD."

Psalm 143:2 – "No one living is righteous before [the LORD]."

Proverbs 20:9 – "Who can say, 'I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin'?"

Ecclesiastes 7:20 – "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins."

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 53, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, 1 Timothy 2:5, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 6.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 16:30-31 – "Then he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'"

Romans 10:9-10 – "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

Ephesians 2:8 – "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 3:8, Luke 3:8 – "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance."

John 3:36 – "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

Hebrews 5:9-10 – Jesus our high priest "became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him."

2 Peter 1:5-11 – "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. . . . Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

1 John 2:3-6 – "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. . . ."

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 3-4, etc.



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<sup>11</sup> Genesis 3:15 – The first prophecy of Jesus’s coming and victory.

Job 19:25 – “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.”

Isaiah 53:5-6 – “But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 – “I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers . . . drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”

Hebrews – Throughout this book it is made clear from Old Testament shadows, prophecy, and heroes of faith that God always intended to foreshadow Christ’s work, and that the means of salvation was never in these shadows, but was always anticipated in Christ’s work. Old Testament believers “did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” (11:39-40)

<sup>12</sup> Hosea 6:6 – “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”

Habakkuk 2:4 – “The righteous shall live by his faith.”

Romans 4 argues powerfully that the foundation of Abraham’s salvation was faith in God’s promises.

<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah 31:31-34 – “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 on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Hebrews 7-10 – We enjoy a “better hope,” a “better covenant,” having “better sacrifices,” offered by a better mediator and priest, and with hope of a “better country, that is, a heavenly one.” At the same time, there is a “worse punishment.”

<sup>14</sup> Exodus 20:4-6 – The LORD is “a jealous God, . . . showing steadfast love to thousands [of generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

Exodus 34:6-7 – God is “the LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands [of generations], forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”

Deuteronomy 7:6-16 – “The LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.”

2 Chronicles 5:13, 7:3-6, 20:21 – Israel gives thanks to the LORD, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.”

Psalms 100:3-5 – “Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. . . . For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.”

Psalms 103:17-18 – “But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.”

Isaiah 51:8 – “My righteousness will be forever, and my salvation to all generations.”

Jeremiah 32:18 – “You show steadfast love to thousands [of generations], . . . O great and mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts.”

Luke 1:50 – God’s “mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.”

<sup>15</sup> Exodus 20:4-6 – The LORD is “a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me.”

Exodus 34:6-7 – God is “the LORD, the LORD, . . . who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

Jeremiah 32:18 – “You repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them, O great and mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts.”

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There are numerous similar prophecies and warnings. We find many prayers for the destruction of the children of Israel's enemies. There are also many examples, such as the destruction of Achan's family and possessions, the destruction of Korah's family, and the destruction of all of Canaan.

In his mercy, God often graciously limits his generational judgment, such as Deuteronomy 24:16 and Ezekiel 18, or upon the return from exile in Jeremiah 31:29-30.

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 1:28 – God commands man to “be fruitful and multiply,” with the expectation that mankind, across generations, will fulfill the mandate to subdue and rule over creation.

<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 11:1-6 – “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. . . . The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.”

Malachi 4:5-6 – God promises that “I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

<sup>18</sup> Malachi 2:13-16 – . . . “And what was the one God seeking [in making “you and the wife of your youth . . . one”]? Godly offspring. . . .”

<sup>19</sup> From a sermon on unbelief given at Sovereign Grace Church in Apex, NC on November 20, 2005. See <http://www.sovgracenc.org/page445.html>

<sup>20</sup> As before, we see this in the initial command in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and to subdue creation. We also see it suggested in the Messianic promise in Genesis 3:15 in the shift from general offspring to Jesus himself.

<sup>21</sup> The LORD saves Noah “and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.” (Genesis 7:1) The LORD covenants with Noah never again to “strike down every living creature.” (Genesis 8:20-22).

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 12:13, 15, 17 – The LORD promises offspring to Abraham, that he will give them the land of Canaan, and promises of Abraham's offspring that “I will be their God.” (17:8) God further promises that “in [Abraham] all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (12:3)

<sup>23</sup> Deuteronomy 4:37-40 – “And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt . . . Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you.”

Deuteronomy 12:28 – “Be careful to obey all these words that I command you, that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.”

Deuteronomy 28:1-14 – “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, . . . Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb . . . And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb . . .”

Deuteronomy 29:10-14 – “You are standing today all of you before the LORD your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, . . . so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is making with you today, that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the LORD our God, and with whoever is not here with us today.”

Deuteronomy 30:1-6 – If Israel turns from the LORD, but repents, then “the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 – “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days.”

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Chronicles 17 – God promises he will “appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more.” He will also give David a son whose “throne shall be established forever” (see also 2 Samuel 7).

Psalms 89:28-37 – God promises to David that “My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens. . . . His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.”

Psalms 132:11-12 – “The LORD swore to David a sure oath . . . ‘If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.’”

<sup>25</sup> Psalm 8:2 – God establishes strength “out of the mouth of babes and infants.”

Psalms 25:12-13 – David attests that the offspring of the man who fears the LORD “shall inherit the land.”

Psalms 37:27-29 – David knows that God’s people “are preserved forever,” in contrast with the children of the wicked. “The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever.”

Psalms 102:28 – The Psalmist writes that “the children of your servants shall dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you.”

Psalms 105 – The Psalmist recounts God’s goodness to the “offspring of Abraham, his servant.” The LORD “remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations.”

Psalms 112:1-2 – “Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments! His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.”

Proverbs 11:21,30 – “The offspring of the righteous will be delivered. . . . The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise.”

Proverbs 14:26 – “In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.”

Proverbs 20:7 – “The righteous who walks in his integrity – blessed are his children after him!”

Proverbs 22:6 – “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Proverbs 29:14 – “If a king faithfully judges the poor, his throne will be established forever.”

Isaiah 44:3-5 – In restoring Israel, God “will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. . . . This one will say, ‘I am the LORD’s,’ . . . and another will write on his hand, ‘The LORD’s.’”

Isaiah 45:25 – “In the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory.”

Isaiah 49:25 – Despite Israel’s unfaithfulness, when the LORD restores his favor he “will save your children.”

Isaiah 59:21 – “‘And as for me, this is my covenant with them,’ says the LORD: ‘My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,’ says the LORD, ‘from this time forth and forevermore.’”

Isaiah 60:21 – “Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified.”

Isaiah 61:8-9 – “I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed.”

Isaiah 65:23 – “They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them.”

Isaiah 66:22 – When God brings in people from every nation, he promises that just as “the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain.”

Jeremiah 29:33 – God promises that on the return of the exiles, “the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – the LORD of hosts is his name: ‘If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.’ Thus says the LORD: ‘If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD.’ . . . David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever.”

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Joel 2:28-32 – “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. . . . And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

<sup>26</sup> Exodus 28-30, 40 -- The priesthood of Aaron will continue through his offspring forever. Elsewhere Aaron and his sons are charged with the responsibility to “keep their priesthood” (Numbers 3:10). Yet God later declares to Eli that he will discipline the house of Aaron by revoking his promise that they would serve him forever (1 Samuel 2 - 4, fulfilled in 1 Kings 2).

Also interesting is the fact that God not only required generational faithfulness of the Levites, but he also gave very specific generational vocations (Numbers 3:25-26,31-32,36-37).

Numbers 25:10-13 – God covenants with Phinehas the priest, who stopped God’s plague by killing a disobedient Israelite, that he and his descendants will have “perpetual priesthood.”

1 Kings 9:1-9 – God promises that Solomon will “not lack a man on the throne of Israel” if he remains faithful.

Jeremiah 35:18-19 – God speaks to the sons of Jonadab: “Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father and kept all his precepts and done all that he commanded you, therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall never lack a man to stand before me.”

<sup>27</sup> Isaiah 54:13 – “All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children.”

Acts 2:38-39 – Referencing Joel 2, “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. 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 11:1-18 – “. . . he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.”

Acts 16:30-31 – “Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”

1 Corinthians 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.”

2 Corinthians 1:20 – “For all the promises of God find their Yes in [Jesus Christ].”

Ephesians 3:21 – “To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

<sup>28</sup> Throughout the Pentateuch and elsewhere, including: Exodus 12:3,13; Exodus 24:7-8; Leviticus 16:6,11,21; Numbers 7; Numbers 8:12; Job 1:5.

<sup>29</sup> Ephesians 5:25 – “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

Titus 2:13-14 – “Jesus Christ . . . gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession.”

Hebrews 7:27 – “He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.”

<sup>30</sup> John 1:29; Titus 2:11; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:14.

<sup>31</sup> *E.g.*, 1 Timothy 4:10, Hebrews 11.

<sup>32</sup> Exodus 20:10 – “The seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter. . . .”

Exodus 20:12, 21:15,17 – “Honor your father and your mother. . . . Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death. . . . Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.”

Deuteronomy 30:1-6 – “You and your children” are instructed to recall God’s promises and warnings, and are promised that when they “return to the LORD your God” he will show mercy.

Proverbs 1:4 – Proverbs is intended to give “knowledge and discretion to the youth.”

Ephesians 6:1-3 – “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’”

Colossians 3:20 – “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.”

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<sup>33</sup> Throughout Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, God repeatedly enacts “statute[s] forever throughout your generations.”

Deuteronomy 31:9-13 – Every seven years, the law was to be read publicly, to “all Israel . . . men, women, and little ones, . . . that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land.”

Joshua 8:34-35 – Joshua read “all the words of the law . . . before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones.”

Psalms 34:11ff – “Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. . . .”

Psalms 148:12-13 – “Young men and maidens together, old men and children! Let them praise the name of the LORD.”

Throughout Proverbs, children are counseled to hear “your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching.” (1:8) Children are instructed not to walk in the way with the wicked (1:15), and are warned against various specific sins, against following the wicked, against forsaking wisdom, instruction and discipline. They are exhorted to seek wisdom, instruction, understanding, the fear of the LORD, God’s word and law, integrity, holiness, faith, humility, and compassion. They are encouraged that God is a sure source of wisdom, righteousness, deliverance, discipline, peace, joy, life, health, provision, and grace and mercy. See also Ecclesiastes 4:13, Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:8, etc.

<sup>34</sup> Deuteronomy 16:9-15 – For the feasts of weeks and booths, “you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter.”

Esther 9:26-28 – The Jews “firmly obligated themselves and their offspring” to keep the feast of Purim.

Psalms 96 – “Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!”

<sup>35</sup> Genesis 17:8 – “And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

Exodus 29:42-46 – “I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. . . . I am the LORD their God.”

Psalms 33:12 – “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!”

Ezekiel 11:14-21 – Speaking to “the whole house of Israel,” God declares “I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

Ezekiel 37:15-28 – God promises to gather his people, “and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. . . . They and their children and their children’s children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. . . . My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Hosea 1-2 – God promises to show mercy upon the children of Israel and Judah, that they will be called “children of the living God.”

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 19:13-15 – “Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.’ And he laid his hands on them and went away.”

Mark 10:13-16 – “And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.”

Luke 9:47-48 – “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”

Luke 18:15-17 – “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 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.”

<sup>38</sup> Leviticus 20:1-5 -- Parents who offered their children to the idol Molech were to be punished by death.

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Psalm 36:7-9 – “How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.”

Jeremiah 7:31, 19:5, 32:35 – God detests child sacrifice.

Jonah 3:5-10, 4:11 – All of Ninevah, “from the greatest of them to the least of them,” repented, and “when God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.” God has pity on Ninevah’s children: “And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

Micah 2:9 – God is displeased with Israel and Samaria, for “from their young children you take away my splendor forever.”

Matthew 10:42 – Jesus praises those who serve children: “And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

Matthew 18:10-14 – “See that you do not despise one of these little ones.” The subsequent story of the shepherd seeking after the lost sheep may be connected to God’s love for “these little ones.”

Luke 13:34 – Jesus laments over Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”

<sup>39</sup> Psalm 10:17-18, 68:5, 146:9; Isaiah 1:17,23, 10:2; Jeremiah 5:28-29, 22:3; Malachi 3:5.

<sup>40</sup> Genesis 48:9 – Joseph affirmed that his sons Manasseh and Ephraim “are my sons, whom God has given me.”

Exodus 1:21 – “And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.”

Deuteronomy 7:13 – If Israel remained faithful, God would “also bless the fruit of your womb.”

Deuteronomy 25:5-10 – It was a disgrace for a man not to produce offspring for his dead brother.

1 Samuel 2:1-10,18-21 – Hannah praised God for opening her womb; God blessed her with more children.

2 Kings 4:8-37 – God provided a son for the Shunammite woman, and later raised him from the dead.

Psalm 37:25-26 – The children of the righteous “become a blessing.”

Psalm 107:38,41 – “By his blessing they multiply greatly. . . . He raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks.”

Psalm 113:9 – “He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!”

Psalm 127:3-5 – “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.”

Proverbs 17:6 – “Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their fathers.”

Isaiah 9:3 – God will “multiply the nation” as part of his blessing.

Isaiah 27:6 – As a result of God’s future blessing, “Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit.”

Isaiah 29:23 – Israel’s children are “the work of [God’s] hands.”

Isaiah 48:19, 54:1-3 – Innumerable descendants are a sign of God’s covenant blessing. As God renews his covenant the barren will be blessed with children.

Ezekiel 36:8-15 – Children are promised to Israel when God restores them after the exile.

<sup>41</sup> Psalm 17:14-15 – The wicked enjoy children as a gift, but David’s satisfaction is in God more than his children.

Ecclesiastes 6:3 – Children alone are of no good unless they are enjoyed as a gift from God.

Isaiah 56:3-5 – There is a blessing promised to eunuchs, “a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.”

Matthew 10:35-38, Mark 13:9-13 – “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

Luke 14:26 – “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

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Luke 18:29-30 – “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

<sup>42</sup> Proverbs 10:1, 15:20 – “A wise son makes a glad father.”

Proverbs 17:21-25 – “He who sires a fool gets himself sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy. . . . A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him.”

Proverbs 19:13 – “A foolish son is ruin to his father.”

Proverbs 23:24 – “The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him.”

Proverbs 29:3 – “He who loves wisdom makes his father glad.”

3 John 1:4 – “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

<sup>43</sup> 1 Kings 2:1-4 – David admonishes Solomon to fear the LORD, and recounts God’s *conditional* promise that “If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.”

1 Kings 9:1-9 – God promises that Solomon will “not lack a man on the throne of Israel” if he remains faithful. But each successive generation is clearly individually responsible to remain faithful: “But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them.”

Psalms 132:11-12 – As with Solomon, God’s generational promise to David still makes each successive generation individually responsible to remain faithful: “The LORD swore to David a sure oath . . . ‘If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.’”

Ezekiel 14:12-23 – God’s judgment on Israel is so severe that he will save righteous individuals only, not their children.

Galatians 3:7-9,29 – “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. . . . And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

<sup>44</sup> Ezekiel 18 – God holds individuals accountable for their own sin, and blesses individuals with salvation for their own righteousness. God is just in doing so. “The soul who sins shall die. . . . The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”

<sup>45</sup> God frequently promises judgment upon both individuals’ children and his people’s children for their rebellion; the same principle of generational judgment holds true for God’s enemies as well. Also, as follows.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 – “Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.”

Ezekiel 3:16-21, 33:7-9 – Ezekiel would be held responsible for the death of the wicked and the righteous if he did not warn them. But he would not be responsible if he did warn them. If he warned the righteous and the righteous turned from sin, Ezekiel will have “delivered [his] soul.”

2 Kings 17:41; Jeremiah 7:18, 9:14 – Children follow their parents into idolatry.

Matthew 18:5-6,10; Mark 9:36-37,42 – After commending childlike faith and humility, Jesus warns the disciples that “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. . . . See that you do not despise one of these little ones.”

Luke 17:1-4 – “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.”

Ephesians 6:1-4 – “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.”

Colossians 3:20-21 – “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”

1 Thessalonians 5:19 – “Do not quench the Spirit.”

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<sup>46</sup> Certainly we must all despair of perfection. But even the relative righteousness of God's faithful servants cannot save their children. Jeffrey Meyers argues this point in his essay "Covenant Succession" (<http://tinyurl.com/y4oltp>). He cites multiple scriptural examples to demonstrate this: God's faithful parenting toward Adam and Israel, who rebelled; the law's allowance for the stoning of rebellious children of faithful parents in Deuteronomy 21:18-21; and Jesus's training of his disciples, of whom one fell away. Rev. Meyers concludes that "A more balanced view would hold the child himself accountable for his response to faithful parenting."

<sup>47</sup> Romans 9 – "But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring. . . . This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. . . . What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. . . . So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills."

<sup>48</sup> Romans 11 – "If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off . . ."

Hebrews 6:4-6 – "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt."

<sup>49</sup> Hebrews 6:4-6 – see above.

Hebrews 10:26-31 – "For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

<sup>50</sup> Matthew 3:8-10, Luke 3:8-10 – John the Baptist warns the Pharisees and Sadducees, "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

John 8:39-41 – "They answered him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing what your father did.'"

Romans 2 – Paul is criticizing his fellow Jews for their boasting in circumcision. He points out that their blatant and faithless failure to obey the law means that circumcision is all they are left with – and their circumcision thereby judges them more severely.

Romans 11 – Paul speaks of unbelieving Israel as natural branches broken off of an olive tree.

<sup>51</sup> Exodus 10:1-2 – God intended children and grandchildren to be told the story of His delivering Israel.

Exodus 12:14-20,24-27 – Passover was a memorial day to be celebrated "throughout your generations." It was a statute for "you and your sons forever," and was to be a deliberate means of teaching children of God's sparing Israel.

Deuteronomy 6 – Israel was to fear and obey God. Blessings would follow if they obeyed; otherwise God's anger would follow. They were to "teach [God's commands] diligently to your children" and to speak of them all the time. They were to remember God and serve him only. They were to teach their children of God's goodness in salvation, and that they belong to him.

Joshua 24:15 – "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."



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1 Chronicles 16:15; Psalm 45:17; Psalm 89:1 – David and others teach Israel to “remember [God’s] covenant forever.” They declare that “I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations” and that “I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.”

Psalm 48:12-13 – “Tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever.”

<sup>52</sup> Deuteronomy 11:18-32 – With the promise of God’s blessing and the threat of God’s anger and curse, Israel was to teach God’s words to their children, with God’s word always on their lips.

Numbers 4:9-10 – Parents are charged to keep their souls and make known God’s word to their children, “lest you forget.”

Joshua 4:5-7,20-24 – Israel erected a pile of stones as a memorial of God’s bringing them across the Jordan. They were specifically to be used for reminding and instructing children of God’s strength, faithfulness and goodness.

Psalm 78 – Parents are to tell their children God’s praises so that future generations may know and trust in God. Warnings are given from Israel’s example, but God’s mercy and compassion are also exalted.

Psalm 145:4 – “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.”

Isaiah 38:19 – “the father makes known to the children [God’s] faithfulness.”

Ephesians 6:1-4 – “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

<sup>53</sup> Genesis 18:19 – “For I have chosen [Abraham], that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”

We saw that throughout Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers God repeatedly enacts “statute[s] forever throughout your generations.” Implied in this is the need for parents both to live as examples for their children and to explicitly train them to persevere in faith and obedience.

Deuteronomy 29:29 – “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Deuteronomy 32:46-47 – Moses challenges Israel to “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”

1 Kings 1:5-6 – David is criticized for having “never at any time displeased [his son Adonijah] by asking, ‘Why have you done thus and so?’”

Proverbs 4:3-4 – Parents are to tenderly and faithfully instruct their children in the way of wisdom and life.

Proverbs 10:1, 13:1, 15:5 – Parents are exhorted to teach their children to seek wisdom and flee foolishness, to instruct and reprove their children.

Proverbs 22:6 – “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Joel 1:3ff – Joel commands parents to pass on the story of God’s judgment from generation to generation.

1 Thessalonians 2:7,11-12 – “But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. . . . For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”

1 Timothy 3:4-5,12 – The overseer “must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” Likewise deacons must be found “managing their children and their own households well.”

2 Timothy 3:14 - 4:2 – Given the power of Scripture even for children seen in 3:14ff, Paul gives Timothy a pastoral command that is immediately applicable to parents: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

Titus 1:6 – It must be true of an elder that “his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.”

Throughout the Psalms (e.g., Psalm 31:23-24, 32:10-11, 33:18-22, 34, 62:5-8, 95 - 100, 115:9-11, 117, 145) we see examples of simple exhortations to love, trust, fear, obey, worship and enjoy God, and the blessing that comes in

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doing so. Throughout the Psalms exhortations like these are formulated in the language of covenant faithfulness, rather than conversion. Psalm 34 explicitly addresses itself to children, but all of these are appropriate for parents training children, and in fact would have been sung corporately by Israel and their children.

See also various passages on discipline, such as Proverbs 10:13, 13:24, 19:18, 23:13-14, 29:15-17.

<sup>54</sup> 2 Chronicles 6:14-17 – Solomon praises God for “keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart,” and appeals to God to keep his promise to David that “you shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk in my law as you have walked before me.”

Psalm 90:16 – Moses prays, “Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.”

In Moses’ prayers in Exodus, and in prayers made by some of the prophets, we find a consistent appeal to God to have mercy upon his wayward people for the sake of his name, because of his love, his faithfulness, and his covenant.

<sup>55</sup> We cite a few examples, but this is an overwhelmingly consistent pattern in the way God delivers warnings and prophetic appeals to his people.

2 Chronicles 7:14,19-20 – “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” But “if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will pluck you up from my land that I have given you.”

Isaiah, Jeremiah – Throughout there is a collective appeal to Israel to remain faithful to the covenant God made with their fathers. The appeal is not to pull themselves together and make themselves acceptable to God; rather, it is to repent, remain faithful to God, and to trust in God’s own righteousness and deliverance. God saved them and made a covenant with them, complete with sober warnings and glorious blessings; therefore they must be faithful and place their trust fully in him. Throughout, the analogy of God’s covenant to marriage faithfulness is made.

Joel 2:12-14 – Joel appeals to Israel to “rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.”

Romans 11:17-24 – “For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.”

Hebrews 3 – “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”

Hebrews 6 – “And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Hebrews 10 – “Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.”

1 Peter 3:9,15 – An exhortation to believers to continue in belief: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. . . . And count the patience of our Lord as salvation.”

Revelation 2-3 – “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. . . . Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.”

<sup>56</sup> Matthew 7:11, Luke 11:13 – “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things [Luke: “the Holy Spirit”] to those who ask him!”

<sup>57</sup> Mark Horne argues along the same lines in his essay “The Children of Christians Are Christians” ([http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/the\\_children\\_of\\_christians\\_are\\_christians.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/the_children_of_christians_are_christians.htm)).

<sup>58</sup> Deuteronomy 29:29 – “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Psalm 131 – “I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.”

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<sup>59</sup> Proverbs 22:6 – “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

<sup>60</sup> Deuteronomy 30:1-6 – “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

Ecclesiastes 11:5 – “As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.”

Jeremiah 31, Hebrews 8 – “they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.”

<sup>61</sup> 1 Samuel 1:21 - 2:11 – “When [Hannah] had weaned [Samuel],” she and Elkanah brought him to Eli. “And the child was young. . . . And he worshipped the LORD there. . . . And the boy ministered to the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest.”

<sup>62</sup> Psalm 22:9-10 – “Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother’s breasts. On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother’s womb you have been my God.”

Psalm 71:5-6,17 – “For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from before my birth; you are he who took me from my mother’s womb. . . . O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.”

<sup>63</sup> 2 Samuel 12:23 – David has confidence that he will “go to” his dead child after death.

<sup>64</sup> Jeremiah 1:4-8 – God declares to Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

<sup>65</sup> 1 Kings 18:12 – “I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth.”

<sup>66</sup> Luke 1:15 – John the Baptist “will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.”

<sup>67</sup> Psalm 22:9-10 – See above, for David; this is a Messianic Psalm that applies to Jesus as well.

Luke 1:35 – Gabriel declares to Mary that “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.”

Luke 2:40,52 – As a child, Jesus “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. . . . Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”

<sup>68</sup> Ephesians 1:3-4.

<sup>69</sup> Psalm 139:13-16.

<sup>70</sup> Ephesians 6:1-4 – “Children, obey your parents in the Lord.”

Colossians 3:20 – “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.”

<sup>71</sup> Psalm 131 – A childlike trust and hope in God is commended, “like a weaned child with its mother.”

Matthew 10:42 – “And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

Matthew 11:25-30 – “At that time Jesus declared, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.’”

Matthew 18:1-6 – “And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’ . . . whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin.”

Matthew 21:15-16 – “But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ they were indignant, and they said to him, ‘Do you hear what these are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes; have you never read, “Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?”’”

Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17 – “Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

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2 Timothy 3:14-17 – “But 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. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

<sup>72</sup> C.f., Horne, [http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/turretin\\_pictet\\_on\\_christian\\_infants.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/turretin_pictet_on_christian_infants.htm)

<sup>73</sup> Proverbs 20:11 – “Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright.”

<sup>74</sup> Matthew 28:18-20 – “make disciples, . . . baptizing them, . . . teaching them.”

John 4:1-2 – “Jesus was making and baptizing . . . disciples.”

<sup>75</sup> Mark 16:15-16 – “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. . .”

Acts 2:37-39 – “Repent and be baptized. . . For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off.”

Acts 8:12-17 – “When they believed Philip, . . . they were baptized.”

Acts 16 – Lydia was baptized after “the Lord opened her heart.” The jailer and his family were “baptized at once.”

Acts 18:8 – “believed and were baptized. . .”

Acts 19:1-6 – “On hearing this, they were baptized. . .”

Acts 22:14-16 – “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

<sup>76</sup> It has been argued that a suspicious disposition towards our children’s faith trains them in an unhealthy introspective self-doubt rather than in simple upward-looking trust in Christ.

<sup>77</sup> Exodus 6:30 – Moses speaks of having “uncircumcised lips.”

Deuteronomy 10:12-22 – God commands his people to “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart.”

Deuteronomy 30 – “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring. . .”

Jeremiah 4:4 – Israel is to repent of their rebellion and “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts.”

Jeremiah 9:25 – “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh – Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.”

Romans 2:25-29 – “a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.”

Romans 4:9-16 – “[Abraham] received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.”

1 Corinthians 5:7 – Christ is “our Passover lamb.”

Colossians 2:8-14 – Paul speaks of “a circumcision made without hands.”

<sup>78</sup> Genesis 17 – “Every male among you shall be circumcised. . . . He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations . . . shall surely be circumcised.” Interestingly, individuals are held accountable for circumcision rather than their parents: “Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

Exodus 12 – Entire households were to partake of the Passover meal. It was to be kept “throughout your generations . . . as a statute for you and your sons forever.”

<sup>79</sup> Genesis 17:10-12 – “Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.”

Exodus 12 – “And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’”

<sup>80</sup> Colossians 2:11-14 – “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were

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dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

<sup>81</sup> Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22 – The first Lord’s Supper was a Passover meal.

1 Corinthians 5:7 – Christ himself is “our Passover lamb.”

<sup>82</sup> Douglas Wilson argues this in chapter 6 of *To a Thousand Generations*, “Circumcision in the New Covenant.” He summarizes his argument in a brief article “Express Warrant for Paedobaptism” (<http://tinyurl.com/ymognz>).

<sup>83</sup> We see this immediately in the analogy between the Lord’s Supper and Passover. But 1 Corinthians 11 also describes the Corinthians as coming together corporately for a meal. Further, Paul’s rebuke to the Corinthians emphasizes the radically corporate nature of the Lord’s Supper, as do other passages such as Ephesians 4:5 for baptism.

<sup>84</sup> Exodus 12:43-49 – “But no uncircumcised person shall eat of [the Passover].”

<sup>85</sup> Acts 16:14-15 – “The Lord opened [Lydia’s] heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, . . .”

Acts 16:32-34 – “And they spoke the word of the Lord to [the jailer] and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. . . . And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.”

1 Corinthians 1:16 – “I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.”

<sup>86</sup> Genesis 17:10-14 – “This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. . . . He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.”

Genesis 17:23-27 – “Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. . . . And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.”

Exodus 12:48 – “If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised.”

Joshua 5:1-8 – “At that time the LORD said to Joshua, ‘Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time.’ . . . When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed.”

<sup>87</sup> Personal correspondence, September 27, 2005.

<sup>88</sup> Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations*, p. 60.

<sup>89</sup> In an article posted on December 22, 2005 at <http://grow.covlife.org/marriedlife/?p=81>

<sup>90</sup> Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15.

<sup>91</sup> Jeremiah 31:31ff – “not like the old covenant . . . that they broke.”

<sup>92</sup> Hebrews 8, 10.

<sup>93</sup> I am indebted to Mark Horne for this observation. The context begins in Jeremiah 29, where God promises to restore the captives: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.”

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<sup>94</sup> See the various warnings in Hebrews, especially Hebrews 6. Similarly Romans 11, where Paul indicates that Gentile branches that were in some way actually grafted in to the tree may be removed for unbelief.

<sup>95</sup> John 3:3-8 – “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

<sup>96</sup> John 3:3-8 – “Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’”

<sup>97</sup> Posted on October 30, 2006 at [http://mrlauterbach.typepad.com/gospeldrivenlife/2006/10/dr\\_mohlers\\_blog.html](http://mrlauterbach.typepad.com/gospeldrivenlife/2006/10/dr_mohlers_blog.html)

<sup>98</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 – . . . Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. . . . For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”

<sup>99</sup> 1 Corinthians 11 – “I hear that there are divisions among you. . . . Do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?”

<sup>100</sup> Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 997-998.

<sup>101</sup> Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 3.

<sup>102</sup> Numbers 4,8; [http://pressiechurch.org/Theol\\_2/why\\_baptize\\_infants.htm](http://pressiechurch.org/Theol_2/why_baptize_infants.htm)